



# BIRDING TEXAS & BEYOND

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ITINERARY, 2026

## Upper Texas Coast Spring Migration Spectacle



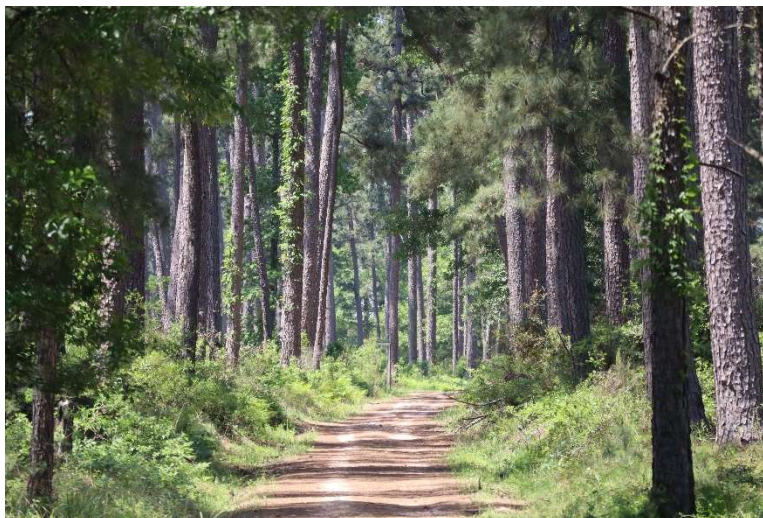
American Avocets © Greg Lasley

This tour focuses on spring migration on the Upper Texas Coast and includes two days of birding in the East Texas Pineywoods. The Upper Texas Coast extends from Beaumont south to Matagorda Island and is one of the best areas in the United States to visit in Spring when millions of birds are migrating from their winter home in Central and South America back to their breeding grounds in North America. This region is characterized by its Gulf beaches, tidal flats, coastal prairies, bays, barrier islands and wooded mottes. Its geographic location and varied habitats make it a prime destination for both birds and birders alike, especially during spring migration. During this time, late season cold fronts may move into the region bringing strong north winds and rain, causing these migratory birds to seek refuge in the various groves and prairies of the Upper Texas Coast. These “fallouts” allow birders to see

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thousands of migratory birds including several species of warblers, vireos, thrushes, orioles, buntings and more. The epicenter of this activity is the small town of High Island, where the Houston Audubon Society and the Texas Ornithological Society manage bird sanctuaries that serve as a refuge for these weary travelers. Fallouts only occur a few times during the season, but a large variety of species can be seen even if a cold front has not moved through. Our itinerary will remain flexible to changing conditions to maximize our opportunities to see as many species as possible.

The tour begins with a visit to WG Jones State Forest, located about an hour north of Houston. The forest is owned and managed by Texas A&M Forest Service and is one of the nation's largest working urban forests focused on wildlife management and habitat protection. The forest is home to the westernmost population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in the country. In addition to the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, we also have an opportunity to see Red-headed Woodpecker, White-



*WG Jones State Forest © Oscar Carmona*

breasted and Brown-headed Nuthatches, Pine Warbler, and other species typical of the southeastern pine forests. We depart the Houston area and head northeast into the Big Thicket. This region is rich in birdlife, and it is characterized by its extensive bottomland hardwoods, cypress-tupelo swamps, mixed pine-hardwood forests and Longleaf Pine flatwoods. We visit some of the forested areas to look for Swallow-tailed Kite, Bachman's Sparrow, and a variety of warblers including Swainson's, Prairie, Prothonotary, Kentucky, and Yellow-throated.

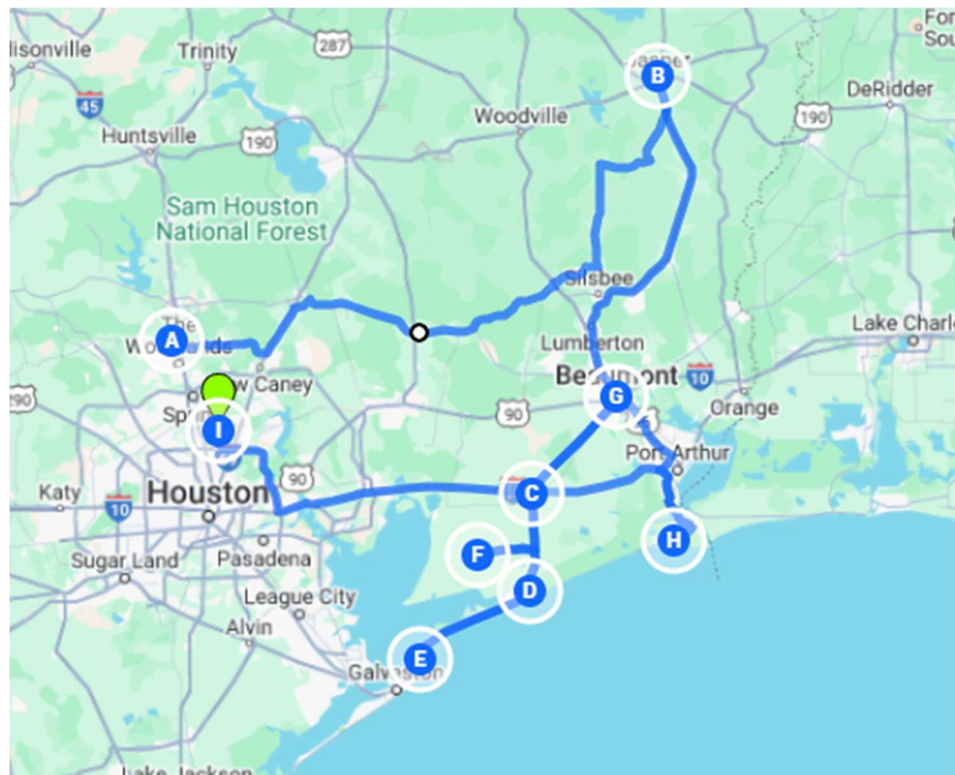
After spending a full day in the Big Thicket, we move on to the Upper Texas Coast. Here we visit the oak mottes, prairies, marshes, estuaries, and agricultural fields in search of migrant passerines and shorebirds. Some of the locations we visit in High Island include Boy Scout Woods, Hooks Woods, and Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuaries. In addition to being a great spot for migrant passerines, Smith Oaks is also home to a large rookery of colonial wading birds such as Roseate Spoonbills, Tricolored Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Herons and more. Moving south from High Island, we bird the Bolivar Peninsula. The Bolivar Peninsula forms a very narrow strip of land in Galveston County, separating Galveston Bay from the Gulf. The coastal shoreline, marshes, and estuaries along this strip of land harbor such species as Wilson's Plover, American Avocet, American Oystercatcher, Seaside Sparrow and raptor species including White-tailed Kite, Crested Caracara, White-tailed Hawk and others.

Outside of High Island, we visit the Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge, Sabine Woods Bird Sanctuary, and Sea Rim State Park to continue our search for migrating passerines, shorebirds, and marsh birds. The Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge contains over 37,000 acres of diverse coastal wetlands ranging from freshwater marsh to salt marsh habitats and is home to a variety of bird species. Similarly, Sabine Woods Bird Sanctuary and Sea Rim State Park located south of Port Arthur, offer different unique habitats that allow us to explore some of the most productive spring migration stops along the entire Upper Texas Coast.

### **TOUR HIGHLIGHTS**

- Look for Pineywood specialties such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Prairie Warbler, Bachman’s Sparrow and others at WG Jones State Forest and the Big Thicket.
- Marvel at the variety of breeding plumaged neotropical migrants including warblers, vireos, thrushes, buntings and orioles at High Island and Sabine Woods.
- Observe hundreds of breeding colonial wading birds including Roseate Spoonbills, Tricolored Herons, Snowy and Great Egrets at Smith Oaks.
- Visit one of the most important migratory shorebird resting and feeding spots in the country at Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary.
- Spot a variety of raptor and shorebird species at Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge and the Bolivar Peninsula.

## TOUR ROUTE



📍 **Start:** Houston, George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH)  
(Hotel-overnight stay in Houston, Night 1)

A – WG Jones State Forest

B – Jasper: Big Thicket (Hotel-overnight stay, Night 2)

C – Winnie: Hotel- overnight stay, Nights 3-6

D – High Island: Smith Oaks / Boy Scout Woods / Hooks Woods Bird Sanctuaries

E – Bolivar Peninsula: Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary

F – Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge

G – Beaumont: Tyrrell Park

H – Sabine Woods Bird Sanctuary & Sea Rim State Park

📍 I - **End:** Houston, George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH)

## DAILY ITINERARY

### **Day 1: Arrive at Houston at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) before 2 pm.**

Participants will transfer to the hotel where a room will be reserved in their name. The hotel offers a complimentary shuttle service from the airport. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:00 p.m. for a brief orientation and welcome dinner. Overnight: SpringHill Suites Houston Intercontinental Airport, Houston.

### **Day 2: WG Jones State Forest & Big Thicket.**

Depart early and head to the nearby WG Jones State Forest in search of Pineywood specialties including the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Pine Warbler and other species. Around mid-morning, we head east towards the Big Thicket region, stopping along the way for brief birding stops. We spend time birding along the road in the Big Thicket area looking for Prairie Warbler in the scrubby second growth forests. We may also encounter other warbler species as well as Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo and others. After an afternoon of Big Thicket birding, we drive to Jasper which will be our destination for overnight stay. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Jasper.



Red-cockaded Woodpecker © Greg Lasley

**Day 3: Big Thicket and High Island.** Today we drive north of Jasper to visit some locations along the shores of Sam Rayburn Reservoir to look for Bachman's Sparrow, which is a very localized species. We may even see Bald Eagle and Broad-winged Hawk while on our search for Bachman's Sparrow. Around mid-morning, we leave the Jasper area and continue our journey south towards the coast working our way through the coastal prairies and turf farms to look for migratory shorebirds including Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers.



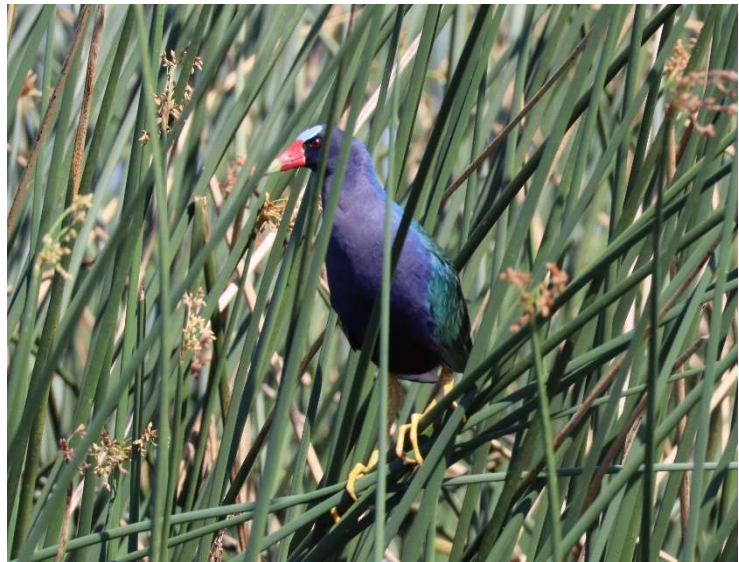
Magnolia Warbler © Greg Lasley

On the way to High Island, we pass by flooded fields and marshes which are brimming with bird life. We spend most of the afternoon birding Boy Scout Woods managed by the Houston Audubon Society. The boardwalks and viewing areas of the preserve allow for easy and relaxing opportunities to see many bird species without much effort. If we are lucky, and depending on weather conditions, we may see

20+ species of warblers. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Winnie.

**Day 4: Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge and High Island.** We visit the nearby Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge which provides an opportunity to see a variety of shorebirds in the agricultural fields and wading birds in the marshes. The Shoveler Pond Loop is a great driving loop offering opportunities to see species such as Fulvous Whistling-Duck,

Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern, several shorebirds and significant numbers of American Alligators. The nature trail near the headquarters is a great spot to look for migrant passerines feeding in the mulberry trees. In the afternoon we return to High Island to visit the Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary managed by the Houston Audubon Society. The rookery is a great place to see Roseate Spoonbill, Anhinga, Tricolored Heron and Cattle, Snowy and Great Egrets, among others. We



Purple Gallinule © Oscar Carmona

We walk the trails and canopy boardwalk in search of migrant passerines and also explore some of the nearby coastal prairies and beaches for gulls, terns, raptors and shorebirds. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Winnie.

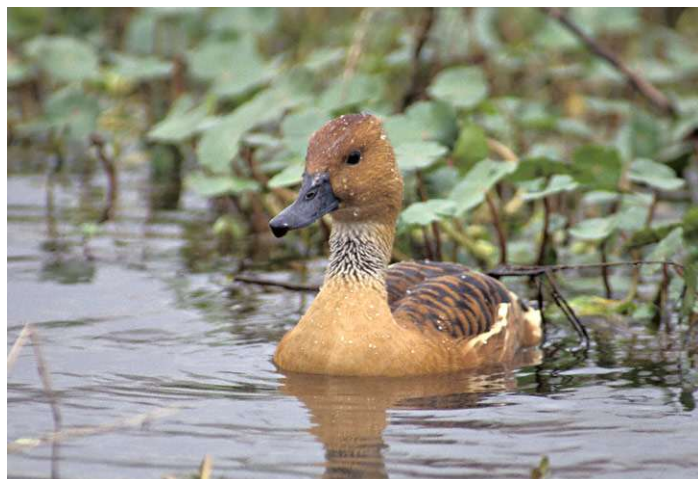
**Day 5: Bolivar Peninsula & High Island.**

We visit the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary which is a highly important sanctuary to view all the shorebirds and waders that congregate in this area, including Wilson's, Snowy, Semipalmated and Piping Plovers. It is possible to see thousands of American Avocets here which makes for a memorable experience. Stops at Yacht Basin Road and Tuna Road may yield



Roseate Spoonbill © Greg Lasley

Seaside and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows. In the afternoon we stop at Rollover Pass in search of terns, gulls, Black Skimmers, and Reddish Egrets. We spend the rest of the afternoon in High Island to see what new species may have shown up in the preserves, including a stop at Hooks Woods Bird Sanctuary. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Winnie.



Fulvous Whistling-Duck © Greg Lasley

**Day 6: Tyrrell Park, Sabine Woods, and Sea Rim State Park.**

We drive east toward Sabine Woods Bird Sanctuary and stop at Tyrrell Park in Beaumont to look for Fish Crow, Boat-tailed Grackle and a variety of marsh birds including Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Sora, Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern and King Rail. Our second stop is Sabine Woods Sanctuary, managed by the Texas Ornithological Society, where our focus will be to search for

neotropical migrants. The varied habitats of the sanctuary provide the opportunity to see many species of birds, especially if weather conditions are conducive to a fallout. We end the day at Sea Rim State Park, where we spend time birding the saltwater marshes and the gulf beach. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Winnie.

**Day 7: Tour Conclusion & Departures.** If time allows, we will stop at a few locations along the way back to Houston. Airport drop-off by no later than 11 am. Participants may arrange departing flights from Houston, George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) after 1 pm.

**DIFFICULTY LEVEL & PACE OF THE TOUR:** Moderate (2-3 miles of daily walking). Field time each day is typically between 7-10 hours (weather permitting). Most of the birding is done on trails, boardwalks, beaches and along the road as we drive to various birding locations. Walking on uneven, soggy terrain, or in the rain is possible. Days start with breakfast at the hotel and departure for the field between 6:30 to 7:00 am. We bird throughout the morning, take a break for lunch and resume birding until 5:00 pm followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

**FINANCIAL INFORMATION:** The tour price is \$2,870 per person (double occupancy). The single supplement for this tour is \$540. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single room accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot arrange one for you. The package includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7, ground transportation during the tour, entrance fees to parks/preserves, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, and guided services provided by the tour leader(s). It does not include travel expenses including but not limited to airfare to and from the tour destination, travel insurance, extended stays (before and/or after the tour), alcoholic beverages, gratuities, and items/expenses of personal nature.

**REGISTRATION & PAYMENTS:** To register for this tour you will need to complete an online reservation form. The non-refundable deposit for this tour is \$300 per person. All payments, including initial deposits and final balances, may be made by credit card through PayPal, check, money order, or bank/wire transfer (we will provide our bank information). Deposits are due 14 days from the date you submit your reservation form. Full payment is due as soon as the tour confirms or 60 days prior to the tour start date, whichever comes first. We will invoice you accordingly.

**Please read our Terms and Conditions for more information before booking any of our tours or services. Our Terms and Conditions include important information about how we operate our tours, including the cancellation policy, travel insurance, health and fitness requirements, and more.**