



BIRDING TEXAS & BEYOND

ITINERARY, 2026

Central Texas Coast Whooping Cranes & Wintering Waterfowl December 3 – 7, 2026



Whooping Crane © Greg Lasley

The Central Texas Coast includes the region extending from Kingsville and Corpus Christi to the coastal communities of Port Aransas, Rockport-Fulton, and Bay City. The Rockport-Fulton area of the Central Texas Coast is the winter home of the Whooping Crane. These birds migrate annually to the marshes of Aransas Bay from their breeding grounds in north-central Canada. In addition to the Whooping Crane, the Central Texas Coast is rich in bird life and offers the birder a mix of wintering waterfowl and several bird species that are typically found further south in the Rio Grande Valley like Great Kiskadee, Olive Sparrow, Green Jay,

and Long-billed Thrasher. The itinerary will remain flexible to changing conditions to ensure we have the opportunity to observe as many species as possible. We will enjoy comfortable lodging accommodations, great regional cuisine and moderate drives to various birding locations to enjoy the varied bird life in this exciting region.

This tour focuses on seeing the Whooping Cranes as well as visiting the various coastal preserves and inland birding sites to see a varied list of birds. We kick off the tour by taking a three-hour boat trip through the waterways in and around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to observe the Whooping Cranes and a large assortment of wintering ducks, shorebirds and waterbirds. The refuge's salt marshes, bay waters and mudflats provide a stable, protected habitat with abundant food sources for these wintering species. The itinerary also includes stops at Goose Island State Park, Rockport-Tule Creek Nature Preserve, and the various bird sanctuaries located in and around the Rockport area. The windswept live oak trees at Goose Island State Park provide habitat for a variety of wintering passerines while the mudflats, open bays, and marshes support a variety of ducks, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Some of the species that we may observe in this location include Brown Pelican, Mottled Duck, American Oystercatcher, Clapper Rail, Common Loon, and Roseate Spoonbills to name a few. At Rockport-Tule Creek Nature Preserve we may find other species, including Great Kiskadee, Inca Dove, Black-crested Titmouse, Olive Sparrow, and a variety of marsh birds.

Located west of Corpus Christi, we explore Hazel Bazemore County Park and Pollywog Pond, where numerous South Texas bird species can be found, including among others Green Jay, White-tipped Dove, and Olive Sparrow. Although this location offers great birding opportunities year-round, the park is best known as one of the top hawk watching sites in North America during fall migration. Pollywog Pond has wooded and wetland habitats where you can see Least Grebe, Green Kingfisher, Groove-billed Ani, and Couch's Kingbird. We head east and cross Corpus Christi Bay to continue to explore the coastal areas of Mustang Island. Our initial stop on the island is to search for the Aplomado Falcon, which has developed a small population after being introduced to this area several years ago. Moving north to Port Aransas, the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center has a boardwalk and observation platforms that extend over freshwater marshes; here we may find a variety of bird species including wintering ducks, rails and bitterns. We also spend time birding along the Gulf shoreline looking for shorebirds, gulls, terns, and pelagic species.

On the final day of the tour, we drive south to explore the Kingsville area. The region hosts a variety of habitats and bird species. The mesquite brushlands support many species of South Texas birds including Green Jay, Olive Sparrow, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and Curve-billed Thrasher. The grasslands and agricultural fields provide habitat for a variety of sparrows and shorebirds including Long-billed Curlew and Mountain Plover. The wooded oak mottes usually harbor a mix of wintering passerines and often a rare visitor such as Clay-colored Thrush and Tropical Parula. East of Kingsville, Baffin Bay's coastal areas provide a chance to spot wintering ducks like Redhead, Common Goldeneye, Northern Pintail, and Mottled Duck. In addition, we can find a variety of raptor species including White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, Harris's Hawk, and White-tailed Kite throughout the region.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy a 3-hour boat trip through the coastal waterways of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to get close views of Whooping Cranes.
- Marvel at a variety of wintering shorebirds and waterfowl in the bays and marshes of the Central Texas Coast.
- Observe several bird species of the Rio Grande Valley such as Green Jay, Great Kiskadee, Long-billed Thrasher and Olive Sparrow.
- Spot Aplomado Falcons on Mustang Island.
- Explore the Kingsville area and observe a variety of bird species including several raptors predominantly found in South Texas.

TOUR LEADER: Troy Hibbitts

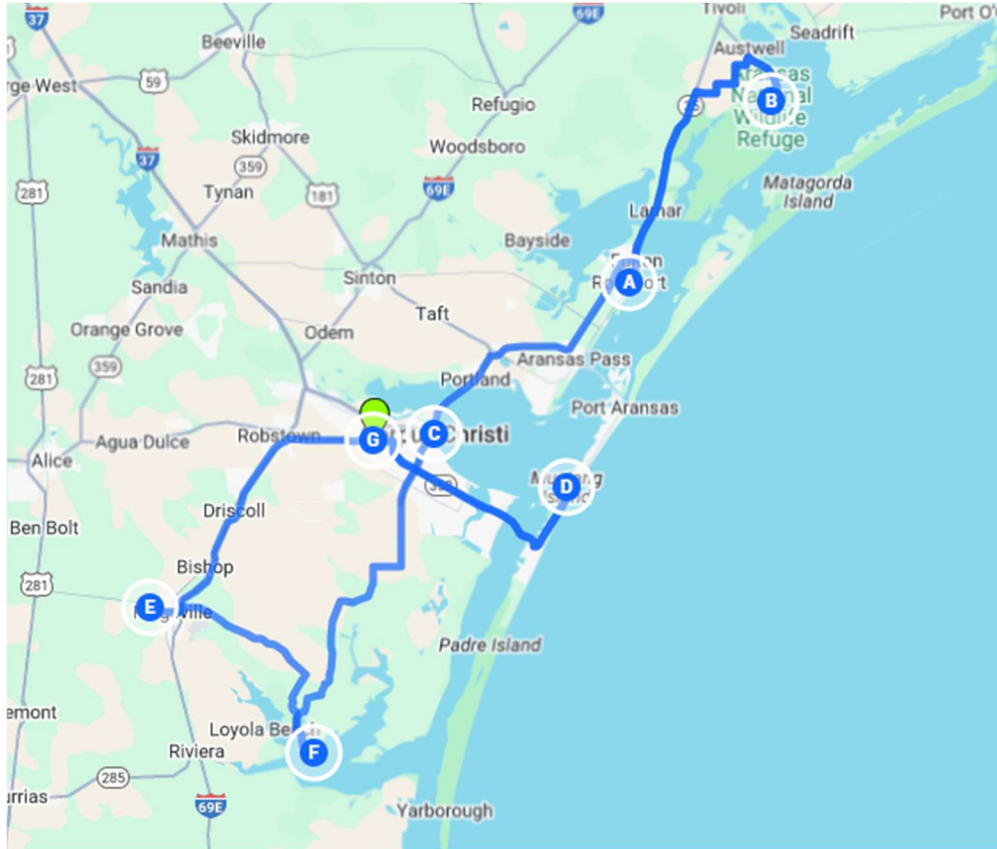


Troy grew up birding on family vacations across the mountain west. After earning his master's degree in evolutionary biology from the University of Texas at Arlington, Troy began a career as a High School Science teacher while filling his weekends and vacation time with birding and general wildlife observation and photography. In addition to birding, he is a leading expert on Reptiles and Amphibians in the southwest, having co-authored three field guides for the state of Texas. He also has somewhat of an eclectic expertise in areas such dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, scorpions, and mammals. Troy serves as an eBird reviewer for 5 counties in southwest Texas. He has birded in all of Texas's 254 counties and has many years of birding experience specifically in south and west Texas, as well as southeastern Arizona.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 8 participants

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.

TOUR ROUTE



Start: Corpus Christi International Airport (CRP)

A – Rockport-Fulton (Hotel-Overnight Stay, Nights 1-2) / Goose Island State Park / Rockport-Tule Creek Nature Preserve

B – Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (3-hour Boat Trip)

C – Corpus Christi (Hotel-Overnight Stay, Nights 3-4) / Hazel Bazemore County Park and Pollywog Pond

D – Mustang Island / Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center / Mustang Island State Park

E – Kingsville

F – Baffin Bay



G- End: Corpus Christi International Airport (CRP)

DAILY ITINERARY

Thursday, December 3 – Day 1: Arrive Corpus Christi International Airport (CRP) before 2 pm. After meeting everyone at the airport, we drive to Rockport to check in to our hotel. If time allows, we try to get in a few hours of birding at local sites before the evening orientation session and welcome dinner. Overnight: Hampton Inn and Suites, Rockport-Fulton.

Friday, December 4 – Day 2: Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and Rockport.

This morning, we take a 3-hour boat trip to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to see the Whooping Cranes and a variety of other wading, shore, and water birds. The boat trip give us an opportunity to get close looks at family groups of Whooping Cranes as we cruise through the marshes brimming with bird activity. We are likely to see a large variety of



American Oystercatcher © Greg Lasley



Aplomado Falcon © Greg Lasley

waterfowl including Brown and American White Pelicans, White Ibis, Tricolored Heron and a variety of wintering ducks. After the boat trip, we spend the remainder of the day birding in the Rockport area including Goose Island State Park, Rockport-Tule Creek Nature Preserve and several other nearby birding sites. These locations offer chances to observe various wintering passerines and waterfowl. Overnight: Hampton Inn and Suites, Rockport-Fulton.

Saturday, December 5 – Day 3: Corpus Christi and Mustang Island.

We drive south to the Corpus Christi area to explore the many birding spots in and around the city. Some of the sites on the western end of Corpus Christi, such as Hazel Bazemore County Park and Pollywog Pond, offer a sampling of bird species predominantly found in the Rio Grande Valley, including Least Grebe, White-tipped Dove, Green Jay, and Great Kiskadee. We also visit several coastal sanctuaries in search of wintering shorebirds and

waterfowl and head to Mustang Island to look for the Aplomado Falcon. We end the day on the northern end of Mustang Island at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center where we can observe Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret as well as a variety of wintering ducks, shorebirds and marsh species including Clapper Rail and American Bittern. We visit the beach front on the island to look for shorebirds, gulls, terns and scan the offshore waters for pelagic species such as Northern Gannet and Brown Booby. Overnight: Home2 Suites, Corpus Christi Southeast.

Sunday, December 6 – Day 4:

Kingsville and Baffin Bay. On our final full day, we drive south to the Kingsville area. There are numerous local birding spots to explore as this region is well known for its diverse habitats. The brushlands, agricultural fields and coastal areas host many raptor species such as Harris's Hawk, White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, White-



Brown Pelican © Greg Lasley

tailed Kite, Red-tailed Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk and various species of waterfowl and passerines. Some of the wooded live oak mottes may produce wintering warblers and species such as Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Clay-colored Thrush, Long-billed Thrasher, and Lesser Goldfinch. The grasslands and agricultural fields harbor several species of sparrows and shorebirds including the rare Mountain Plover. Overnight: Home2 Suites, Corpus Christi Southeast.



Long-billed Thrasher © Greg Lasley

Monday, December 7 – Day 5: Tour

Conclusion & Departures. If time allows, we explore a few local birding spots in Corpus Christi before we conclude the tour. We will arrive at the airport by no later than 11 am. Participants may arrange departure flights from Corpus Christi International Airport (CRP) after 1 pm.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION: The tour price is \$TBD* per person in double occupancy. The single supplement for this tour is \$TBD*. 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 5, 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.

** Please contact us if you are interested in reserving this tour. We can add you to a waitlist and inform you when pricing is available. No deposit is due until final pricing is confirmed.*