



## TEXAS

### Upper Coast Migration & Hill Country Extension

**April 18-23, 2024**

**From Houston**

**Price: \$2370 per person**

**Based on double occupancy**

**\$360 single room supplement**

**Guide: TBD**

**Maximum 7 participants**

**Hill Country Extension: April 23-26**

**Ends in San Antonio**

**Price: \$1250 per person**

**\$190 single room supplement**

**Check out the trip website here: [redhillbirding.com/texascoast](http://redhillbirding.com/texascoast)**

**To register, fill out the booking form here: [redhillbirding.com/bookingform](http://redhillbirding.com/bookingform)**

The Upper Texas Coast in mid-April is legendary among birders. From the coastal wetlands with their salt-water specialists, to the coastal woodlands full of passerine migrants, fresh-water wetlands rife with migrant shorebirds, and the piney woods with its unique residents, the bird diversity is higher than just about anywhere else in the US and the trip bird list is constantly growing. We will bird some of Texas's fabled migrant traps like High Island and Sabine Woods for 20+ species of warblers, Painted Bunting, tanagers, orioles, thrushes, and other Neotropical migrants. The Bolivar Flats and Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge will allow us studies of a wide variety of waders, rails, shorebirds, terns, and gulls, along with wetland specialties like Seaside Sparrow. We will also spend some time inland searching for the piney wood specialists Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Brown-headed Nuthatch.

The Hill Country Extension will focus on those most special of Hill Country birds: Golden-cheeked Warbler & Black-capped Vireo. The Hill Country comes with beautiful scenery and generally excellent birding, including many western bird that we won't see on the coast tour. There will also be an option to visit an evening emergence of Mexican Free-tailed Bats.

## ITINERARY

### Day 1-5, Thu-Mon, April 18-22. Based in Winnie, Texas

We will be based for all five nights at a hotel in Winnie, Texas, giving us access to a wide variety of coastal hotspots and inland hotspots. Our daily itinerary will depend on the weather—a cold front will have us staking out coastal woodlands for grounded migrant songbirds; warm, clear weather will see us spending more time looking for waterbirds.

Much of our time will be spent birding places like **Boy Scout Woods** and **Smith Oaks, High Island's** main woodland hotspots, as well as **Sabine Woods**, just up the coast from High Island. Mid-April is the peak of migration, and we could find 25 or more species of warblers over the course of the trip, including Swainson's, Worm-eating, Kentucky, Hooded, Cerulean, and more. Grosbeaks, thrushes, vireos, flycatcher, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, and Painted and Indigo Buntings, will all be passing through. We might get lucky and bump into a roosting Chuck-wills-widow or Common Nighthawk. The heron rookery at Smith Oaks offers incredible looks at Roseate Spoonbill and other waders and their canopy walkway offers an interesting perspective for viewing migrants.

The **Bolivar Peninsula** offers some of the best coastal birding anywhere. The combination of coastal flats, saltwater wetlands, and shrubby roadsides provides endless birding opportunities. Flocks of Royal, Sandwich, Forster's, and other terns fill the beach, alongside Piping and Wilson's Plovers, American Oystercatcher, American Avocet, and other beach-going shorebirds. Dowitchers, Willets, yellowlegs, Marbled Godwits, and other shorebirds prowl the mudflats while Reddish Egret, Tri-colored Heron, and Gull-billed Terns search for fish. Seaside and Nelson's Sparrows and Clapper Rails lurk in the marsh vegetation. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Bobolinks sit on wires and we will keep our eyes peeled overhead for Magnificent Frigatebirds.

**Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge** encompasses a large freshwater wetland ecosystem. Black-bellied Whistling Duck and Mottled Duck join the lingering wintering shovelers, wigeon, and teal. King Rails and Purple Gallinule are sometimes seen stalking the marshes, and scanning the edges for rails will sometimes reveal Least or American Bittern. Cave Swallows sometimes join other swallows (and Black Terns) catching insects over the marshes. If we're lucky, a flock of Hudsonian Godwits will drop in and join the dowitchers and other shorebirds feeding on the mudflats.

We will devote one morning to birding inland, leaving early from Winnie to make the hour drive inland to the **Big Thicket National Preserve** in search of woodland birds and migrants. Swainson's Warblers breed in this area, and we will search for additional birds here that we are unlikely to find on the coast, like Prairie and Yellow-throated Warblers, Eastern Towhee, Carolina Chickadee, and possibly even Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites.

**Day 6, Tue, April 23: Departure or continue on to the extension**

The tour is not quite done yet: as we return to Houston for our departure, we will make a swing through the Houston suburb of Liberty, which is a reliable area to see the spectacular Swallow-tailed Kite (if we haven't seen it yet). We will make it to George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston by 10am for people to begin their travels home.

For those continuing on to the extension, we will make the long drive (about 4 hours) across the Edwards Plateau to Kerrville.

**Days 7-8, Wed-Thu April 24-25: Hill Country Extension**

Texas's Hill Country is famous among birders for two rare birds whose breeding ranges are almost entirely limited to this region: Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. With two full days, we stand a very good chance of finding both. The birding is generally very good, and there are many Western birds that we may find here that we won't find on the Texas Coast trip. This includes birds like Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Canyon Towhee, Black-crested Titmouse, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and many others. This area also has fantastic scenery, with rolling, forested hills bisected by beautiful creeks. We will also have the chance to visit an evening flight of Mexican Free-tailed Bats, a wildlife spectacle of incredible proportions.

**Day 9, Fri, April 26: Departure from San Antonio****IMPORTANT NOTES****Contact and registration information**

To sign up, each participant should complete the [booking form](#). Once we receive the form, we will send you information about paying the trip deposit. If you have any questions before registering, please contact the office at [info@redhillbirding.com](mailto:info@redhillbirding.com).

**Timing**

The trip will begin in Houston, Texas, at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (code IAH), on Thursday, April 18. Please plan on arriving no later than 2pm. The trip will end at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston by 10am on Tuesday, April 23. Please plan your departing flight for after 11:30am. If you are joining the extension, you will depart from San Antonio on Friday, April 26. Please plan your departure for after 11:30am; we will plan to arrive at the airport by 10am.

## Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically easy**. Much of the trip is birding along roads or walking short distances on good trails at a “birding pace.” At times, we will be on our feet for long periods. We will also be walking short distances on beaches in soft sand. There may be more walking on trails, some on uneven ground in hilly terrain, on the extension.

## Pace

The **pace** of the trip is **moderate**. A typical day will have us up early to catch the peak early morning bird activity. We will generally be eating breakfast at the hotel before our departure, but we may take breakfast with us. Likewise, we will sometimes be taking packed lunches into the field, other days we will eat in cafes or restaurants. Some days we will be in the field all day; other days will afford us the opportunity for an afternoon siesta. Our daily schedule will be dictated in part by weather, so that we can remain flexible to try to be in the best places when migrants are arriving. There is unlikely to be nighttime birding on this tour; if we do have some, it will be optional.

## Price

The price of the trip is **\$2370** per person and the single room supplement is **\$360**. The price for the extension is **\$1250** per person and the single room supplement is **\$190**. This price **includes** all meals (including soft drinks), from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 6 (Day 9 on the extension); all transportation and accommodation during that period; a Red Hill Birding guide; and all park entrance fees. It **does not include** alcoholic beverages, optional activities, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals), or other items of a personal nature.

A deposit of \$450 per person and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on the trip. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. Final payment is due by December 14, 2023. We accept payment by Zelle, check, and bank transfer. We also accept payment by credit card with an additional 3.1% processing fee.

## Hotels

We will be in one hotel for the duration of the trip (and one additional hotel if you are joining the extension). It will be a comfortable motel in Winnie (Kerrville for the extension), with wireless internet and a decent breakfast.

## Photography

The **photographic opportunities** are **very good**. Photography in the migrant traps can be excellent and the slow pace of birding in these locations means that there is ample time for photography. Photography in the coastal wetlands and beaches (and at the rookery at Smith Oaks Woods) is also outstanding. That said, this is primarily a birdwatching tour, so while there will be ample opportunities for photography along the way, we will not be making special considerations for photographers.

## Weather

The springtime weather in east Texas is generally comfortable. With typical temperatures ranging from 50°-80°F. Rain is possible and can even be helpful in creating conditions that are good for viewing migrants.

## Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear **comfortable clothing** that you don't mind getting a little dirty. The dress for the tour is entirely casual. **Light weight clothing, with layers**, and long pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended for protection from the sun and thorns and to be prepared for various weather conditions. Comfortable walking shoes are a must and it is helpful if they are waterproof in case we are out in rainy conditions. Rubber boots are not necessary. An umbrella and/or raincoat in case of rain as well as a mid-weight jacket or sweater for cold mornings are also useful. The hotel will have a swimming pool, so a bathing suit is recommended if you think you might take advantage of the pool after dinner.

In terms of gear, you will want the usual birding gear: binoculars, hat, field guide, etc. Most people appreciate having a camera along. Sunscreen is useful given the often sunny conditions and lack of shade in the wetlands. Insect repellent is also useful, as mosquitoes can be prevalent. Chiggers can also be present in thick grassy habitat. A reusable water bottle and travel coffee mug/thermos are also useful.

## Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity.

## Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for trips within the United States. However, we recommend purchasing it to help protect you against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, go to [www.travelexinsurance.com](http://www.travelexinsurance.com) or contact Travelex Insurance Services at 800-228-9792 and reference location number 13-0441.

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Note that to be eligible for some benefits, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.



*Painted Buntings can be found on both the Texas Coast and in the Hill Country*