

Trip Report: Hill Country, Texas, USA

(11th – 12th July, 2015)



David M-K joined us for a birding blitz in search of two iconic and endangered spring/summer specialties that breed only in threatened habitats in the Hill Country west of Austin and San Antonio - namely the delightful Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. Each species has unique habitat requirements, with the Golden-cheeked Warbler making their nests exclusively out of bark stripped from mature ashe juniper (*Juniperus ashei*) trees and the Black-capped Vireo requiring low growing woody cover for nesting (with nests typically built 2-4 feet above the ground in shrubs such as shin oak (*Quercus havardii*) or sumac *Anacardiaceae* sp.). We successfully located both species during a morning of bush walking along the ridges at Lost Maples State Natural Area, before the temperature rose towards its summer peak of around 100°F.



Golden-cheeked Warbler (immature) [Lost Maples State Natural Area]



Black-Capped Vireo [Lost Maples State Natural Area]

Our afternoon and morning in the State Natural Area, along with a 'heat of the day' visit to the bird blinds at Pedernales Falls State Park, resulted in a personal trip list of 41 bird species (see the annotated list in this report). In addition to one lifer (Bell's Vireo), I was delighted to have secured my best ever views, and some photographs, of the two key species.



Golden-cheeked Warbler (immature) [Lost Maples State Natural Area]



Black-chinned Hummingbird (male & female) [Pedernales Falls State Park]

Fortunately the fly-in, fly-out trip also delivered a solid list of lifers for David M-K (some 29 lifer species, moving him within tantalising reach of the 3,000 life-list milestone!). With the charismatic Greater Roadrunner having eluded us on this occasion, there remains good reason for a return visit!



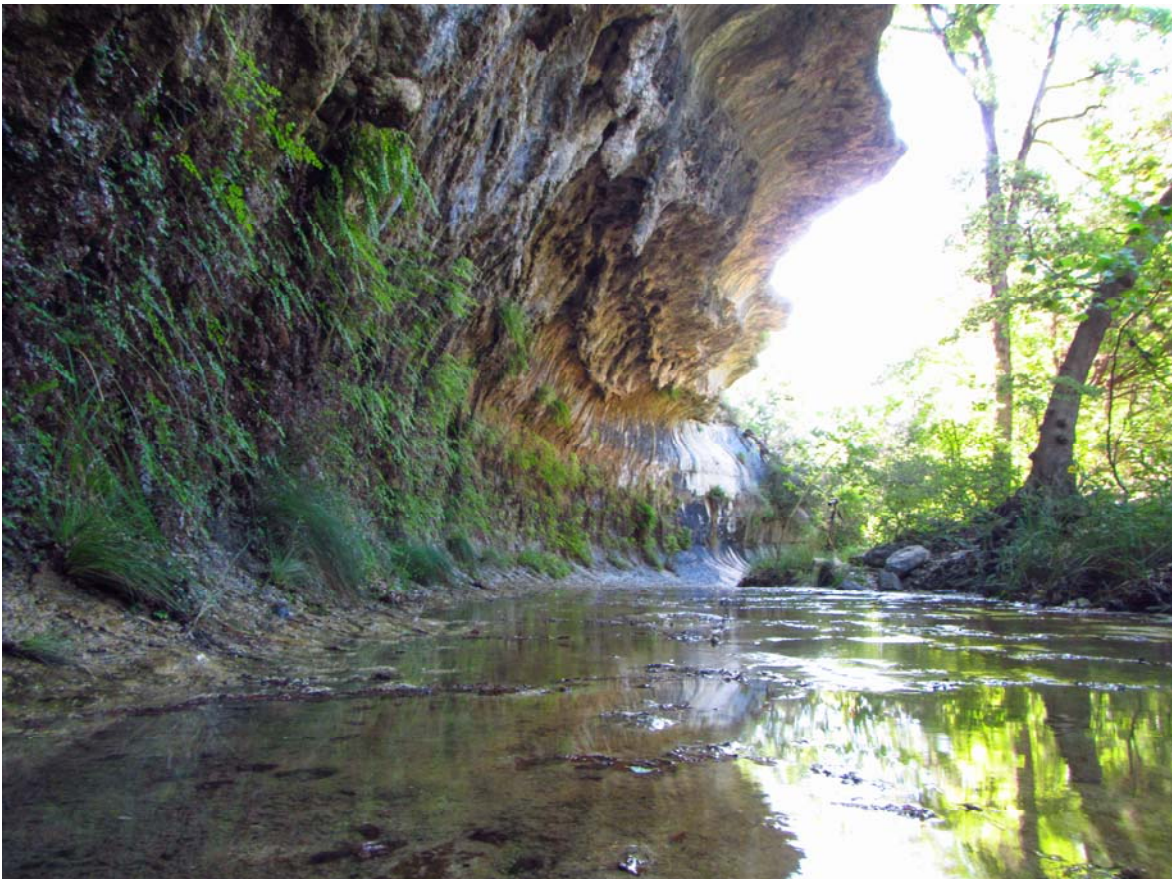
Queen Butterfly (Danaus gilippus) [Pedernales Falls State Park]



Pipevine Swallowtail (Battus philenor) [Lost Maples State Natural Area]



View descending from the ridge at Lost Maples State Natural Area after seeing the targeted warblers and vireos



A shallow creek and overhanging canyon wall at Lost Maples State Natural Area

1. Bird Trip List¹

Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated. As field guide I used *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. Birds in the trip list are identified as per ‘*The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*’, Cornell, 2007 with updates through December 2010 (online version 6.5).

Locations where species were seen, in order of travel:

PF = Pedernales Falls State Park, during a one hour mid-afternoon visit on July 11th to the two bird hides about 1km past the entrance.

TX = Incidental Texan birding around Austin and during the drive around the Hill Country between Austin, Pedernales Falls and Lost Maples.

LM = Lost Maples area, including: 1) Lost Maples State Natural Area, during a late-afternoon hike on July 11th from the bird hide to the main pond (~500m ASL) and a dawn to late-morning visit on July 12th during which we hiked up to and along the ridge (~600m ASL) above the main pond; and 2) the grounds of the Lodges at Lost Maples around lunchtime on July 12th.

ER = Enchanted Rock State Natural Area during the heat of the early afternoon on July 12th.

ACCIPITRIFORMES: Cathartidae

Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus* [**TX**; **LM**]: Regularly seen feeding on road kill and flying over the countryside.

Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura* [**TX**]: Several seen at one road kill.

FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius* [**TX**]: One seen perched in a tree alongside a country road.

COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae

White-winged Dove, *Zenaida asiatica* [**PF**; **LM**] *: Common. Good views at the hides.

Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura* [**PF**; **TX**; **LM**]: Common.

Inca Dove, *Columbina inca* [**PF**; **LM**]: A few seen.

APODIFORMES: Trochilidae

Black-chinned Hummingbird, *Archilochus alexandri* [**PF**; **LM**] *: Excellent views of males and females at feeders beside the hide at Pedernales Falls. Also seen in wooded areas at Lost Maples.

PICIFORMES: Picidae

Acorn Woodpecker, *Melanerpes formicivorus* [**LM**] *: One seen just before we left Lost Maples. Uncommon – not on the Lost Maples SNA list, but presence was consistent with the range map in David M-K’s field guide.

Ladder-backed Woodpecker, *Picoides scalaris* [**PF**; **LM**] *: Particularly good views at the Pedernales Falls hide.

PASSERIFORMES: Tyrannidae

Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens* [**PF**; **LM**]: Our first bird in trees on the approach to the Pedernales Falls hide.

Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax vireescens* [**LM**]: Several seen well in the mid-storey.

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe* [**LM**] *: An immature individual was the last bird seen before we left Lost Maples.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus* [**TX**]: Several seen along country roads.

PASSERIFORMES: Vireonidae

White-eyed Vireo, *Vireo griseus* [**LM**]: Several seen in the under-storey.

Bell’s Vireo, *Vireo bellii* [**ER**]: One drab individual seen in the heat of the day during our late picnic at the base of Enchanted Rock was deduced to be this lifer.

Black-capped Vireo, *Vireo atricapilla* [**LM**] *: At least a dozen (including males, females and immature individuals) of this species that is listed by the IUCN as Vulnerable were seen atop the ridge behind the large pond.

Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus* [**LM**]: A couple seen in distant trees.

¹ First sighting ever for DJS; **E** = USA endemic species; * = photo available

PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae

Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata* [LM]: Several seen.

Common Raven, *Corvus corax* [LM]: One seen flying over the ridge whilst we were searching for warblers and vireos.

PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae

Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* [LM]: A couple seen mid-morning as they flew past the ridge trail.

PASSERIFORMES: Paridae

Carolina Chickadee, *Poecile carolinensis* [LM]: Several pairs in the SNA and a few at the feeders beside our lodge.

Black-crested Titmouse, *Baeolophus atricristatus* [PF; LM]: Several pairs in the SNA, many at the feeders in both parks and beside our lodge.

PASSERIFORMES: Troglodytidae

Canyon Wren, *Catherpes mexicanus* [LM]: Several heard, one seen late in the day as it sang proudly from a perch over the creek.

Carolina Wren, *Thryothorus ludovicianus* [PF; LM]: Several seen in the under-storey.

Bewick's Wren, *Thryomanes bewickii* [PF; LM]: Several seen in the under-storey.

PASSERIFORMES: Polioptilidae

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, *Polioptila caerulea* [PF; LM; ER]: Common as they flitted around the trees.

PASSERIFORMES: Mimidae

Northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos* [TX]: Common around Texas. Likely the easiest lifer DMK has seen in a good while!

PASSERIFORMES: Parulidae

Golden-cheeked Warbler, *Dendroica chrysoparia* [LM] *: At least a dozen (including males, females and immature individuals) of this species that is listed by the IUCN as Endangered were seen atop the ridge behind the large pond. None were seen or heard along the creek where I had previously seen them.

Yellow-throated Warbler, *Dendroica dominica* [LM]: A surprising find -- well seen by all three of us - in trees beside the large pond.

PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae

Rufous-crowned Sparrow, *Aimophila ruficeps* [LM] *: Several seen on top of the ridge in habitat frequented by the Black-capped Vireos and Golden-cheeked Warblers.

Chipping Sparrow, *Spizella passerina* [LM]: Common at lower altitudes in the SNA.

Field Sparrow, *Spizella pusilla* [LM]: Several seen around the large pond and atop the ridge.

PASSERIFORMES: Cardinalidae

Summer Tanager, *Piranga rubra* [LM]: At least one pair seen.

Northern Cardinal, *Cardinalis cardinalis* [PF; LM; ER]: Common across Texas.

Blue Grosbeak, *Passerina caerulea* [PF; LM] *: Seen from the hides in both parks and also in trees along the creek in Lost Maples.

Indigo Bunting, *Passerina cyanea* [PF; LM]: Seen from the hides in both parks and also in trees along the creek in Lost Maples.

Painted Bunting, *Passerina ciris* [PF; LM]: Seen from the hide at Peredranles Falls also in trees along the creek in Lost Maples.

PASSERIFORMES: Icteridae

Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus* [LM]: Seen in reeds at the large pond.

Great-tailed Grackle, *Quiscalus mexicanus* [TX]: Several seen in Austin city and along Texan roadsides.

PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae

House Finch, *Carpodacus mexicanus* [PF; LM] *: Common at the hides in both parks and very common at the bird feeder behind our lodge.

Lesser Goldfinch, *Spinus psaltria* [LM] *: Small flock seen in thistles at the large pond.

Total 41 confirmed species for the trip (including no USA endemics - as per <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org>), of which one was a 'lifer' for DJS.