

Trip Report: Texas (Hill Country, Coast & Houston), USA

2007 (David Southall)

This report captures highlights from short trips that Emma and I made around Texas during 2007.

Our trips to the Hill Country, west of Austin and San Antonio, were typically one, two or three night weekends during which we combined mountain bike training/exploration sessions with general sight seeing. Bird watching was thrown in during the early mornings at the various B&Bs and lodges that we stayed in (notably the Lodges at Lost Maples) and during walks in various State Parks (especially Lost Maples State Park where we saw Golden-cheeked Warblers) or Wildlife Management Areas (notably Kerr WMA where we saw Black-capped Vireos).



Welcome to the Hill Country - Bandera, 'Cowboy Capital of Texas'



Our first Alligator at Brazos Bend State Park



Red-headed Woodpecker; Northern Cardinal; Golden-cheeked Warbler



Carolina Chickadee; Carolina Wren; Cedar Waxwing

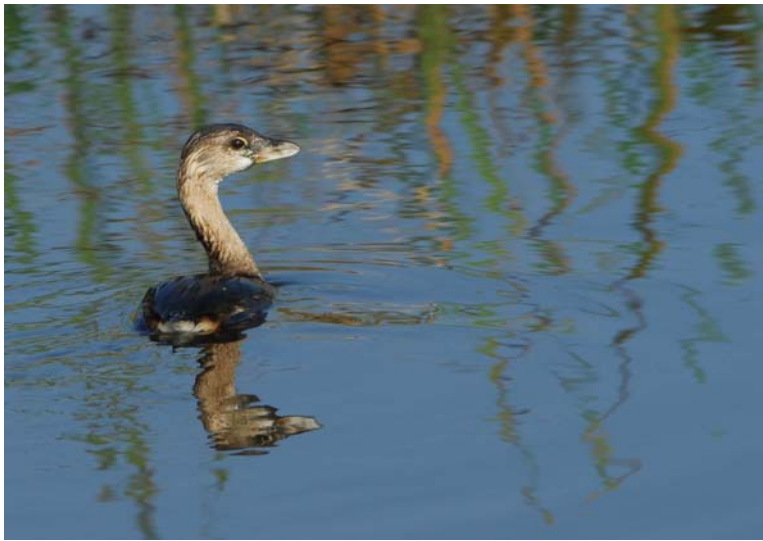


Springtime biking the 'Guadalupe River Loop'; Rocky Hill Ranch; Ready for a "Hog's Ass Sandwich"

Closer to Houston, we made day trips to several of the natural areas in the coastal zone to the south and east of the city, in particular to Anahuac WMA and Bolivar Flats. We did not visit the various High Island woodland pockets during the famous spring 'fall-outs' (when migrating birds on their return to North America take advantage of these coastal areas to recover from their heroic journeys) but 'out of season' we saw few birds in that area and suffered from serious mosquito attacks! Anahuac WMA was generally very productive and being less than an hour and a half from home gave ample opportunity for dawn photography of water birds in particular on the various ponds and open terrain. After the ducks started arriving from up north in the autumn and the duck hunting season opened, it was rather surreal to be spotting new lifers for myself on some ponds whilst over the horizon a distant volley of hunters guns could be heard in adjacent areas of the WMA that are designated for hunting rather than conservation. The ones I was "shooting" made a lucky choice when they selected that particular stretch of water! I would definitely recommend using a scope on visits to these coastal areas - with binoculars only it was often tough to differentiate accurately the various ducks and waders observed at long range in large flocks.



Tri-colored Herons searching for fish whilst using their wings to shade the water



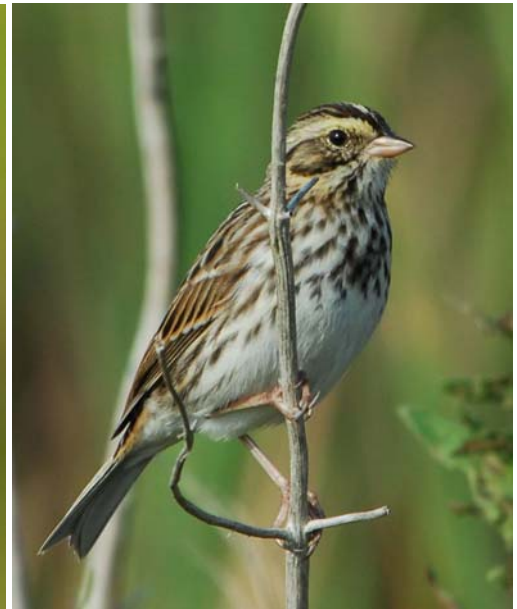
Pied-billed Grebe; Belted Kingfisher (f)



Crab; Ruddy Turnstone



Scenes at Anahuac WMA



Dragonfly; Savannah Sparrow



Northern Harrier; Clapper (or King?) Rail

Even closer to home in Houston, there are several areas with interesting wildlife. Addick's reservoir, only ½ a mile from home holds wild deer and many other mammals (judging by the not inconsiderable road-kill along Eldridge Parkway) and there is much birdlife around the nearby lakes.



Black-bellied Whistling-Duck; Red-winged Blackbird



Adult and juvenile Killdeers

1. Trip Bird List¹

(Confirmed personal sightings only for DJS – excludes birds heard only unless otherwise indicated;
in order of appearance on the plates of Alsop's Birds of Texas)

First location where species seen: A=Anahuac SNA; BB=Brazos Bend State Park; BF=Bolivar Flats;
BSW=Boy Scout Woods; H=Houston; K=Kerr WMA; LM = Lost Maples (Hill Country); SP=Smith Point

Brown Pelican (SP)
Neotropic Cormorant (A)
Anhinga (A)
Magnificent Frigatebird (SP)

American Bittern (A)
Great Blue Heron (SP) *
Great Egret (A) *
Snowy Egret (A) *
Little Blue Heron (A)
Tricolored Heron (A) *
Cattle Egret (H) *
Green Heron (A) *
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (H) *

White Ibis (H) *
White-faced Ibis (A) *
Roseate Spoonbill (A) *

Black Vulture (H)
Turkey Vulture (H)

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (H) *
Fulvous Whistling-Duck (A) *
Greater White-fronted Goose (A) *
Snow Goose (A) *
Mallard (A)
Mottled Duck (A) *
Blue-winged Teal (A) *
Northern Shoveler (A) *
Northern Pintail (A) *
Green-winged Teal (A) *

Osprey (A)
Mississippi Kite (SP)
Northern Harrier (SP) *
Sharp-shinned Hawk (SP)
Cooper's Hawk (SP) *
Broad-winged Hawk (SP) *
Red-tailed Hawk (H) *
American Kestrel (SP)
Merlin (SP)
Peregrine Falcon (SP)

Clapper Rail (A) *
Purple Gallinule (BB)
Common Moorhen (BB) *
American Coot (BB) *

Gray (Black-bellied) Plover (A) *
Killdeer (H) *
American Oystercatcher (SP) *
Black-necked Stilt (A)
Greater Yellowlegs (A)
Willet (SP) *
Marbled Godwit (BF) *
Ruddy Turnstone (BF) *
Wilson's Snipe (A) *

Bonaparte's Gull (SP) *

White-winged Dove (H)
Inca Dove (H)

Black-chinned Hummingbird (H)

Belted Kingfisher (A) *

Red-headed Woodpecker (H) *
Golden-fronted Woodpecker (LM)
Ladder-backer Woodpecker (LM) *
Downy Woodpecker (H)
Pileated Woodpecker (LM)

Eastern Phoebe (LM) *
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (H) *
Loggerhead Shrike (A) *

White-eyed Vireo (BSW)
Black-capped Vireo (K)

Blue Jay (H)
Western Scrub-Jay (LM)

Tree Swallow (SP)
Bank Swallow (SP)

Carolina Chickadee (LM) *
Black-crested Titmouse (LM)
Carolina Wren (LM) *
Bewick's Wren (LM) *
House Wren (LM)
Sedge Wren (A)
Marsh Wren (A) *

Golden-crowned Kinglet (A) *
Ruby-crowned Kinglet (A)
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (K) *

¹ First sighting ever for DJS; * = photo available from trip

American Robin (H)
Gray Catbird (A) *
Northern Mockingbird (H) *
European Starling (H)
Cedar Waxwing (H) *
Yellow-rumped Warbler (H) *
Golden-cheeked Warbler (LM) *
Yellow-throated Warbler (LM)
Common Yellowthroat (BSW)

Chipping Sparrow (LM) *
Lark Sparrow (LM)
Savannah Sparrow (A) *

Dark-eyed Junco (LM)
Northern Cardinal (H) *
Indigo Bunting (A) *
Blue Grosbeak (K)
Gray-cheeked Thrush (A)
Red-winged Blackbird (H) *
Eastern Meadowlark (A)
Common Grackle (H)
Great-tailed Grackle (H) *
Brown-headed Cowbird (A)
House Finch (LM) *
House Sparrow (H)

Combined total: 104, with 73 confirmed “first time ever” species for DJS ...



Tri-colored Heron; Great Blue Heron



Gray (Black-bellied) Plover; Northern Mockingbird