

Ameracan Trip Report 2007

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*Texas – Gulf Coast and Rio Grande Valley
April 21st – May 5th 2007*



The following tale of woe tells the story of our recent trip to the U.S.A. for a bird watching trip. I've written the tale as it happened – it's a bit long and boring (like it's writer) and covers most things that happened during our two week stay as we travelled between the Gulf coast at High Island, down to the Rio Grande then up onto the Edwards Plateau and back to the coast where we started off. We followed Franny's (one of the participants – real name Francis) expertly planned route, which allowed us to see most of what Texas had to offer in avian terms. The birding was fast and furious and for about the first week it seemed every time I got out of the car I was seeing new birds.

Itinerary: 4 nights in Winnie, prior to moving gradually south towards the Rio Grande valley, two nights at the Edwards Plateau then back to Winnie, which is ideally located to get to most of the spots around High Island and the rest of the Bolivar peninsula.

Participants: 3 birders from east Kent in England – namely Franny, Gadget and myself who, being thoroughly fed up with the lack of spring migration in our overdeveloped, people filled area, decided on a trip abroad just to get in a little stress free bird action. It was mine and Gadgets first trip across the pond though Franny had been numerous times in the past. This no doubt caused him loads of hassle with the pair of us constantly bombarding him with questions as to the identity of many of the birds we saw, what the strange sounding food on the menu was and every other thing under the sun. Poor bloke.

Expenditure: The flight and car hire cost 409 English pounds. The motel accommodation was cheap by English standards (between 50 and 60 dollars per night – at almost two Dollars to the pound exchange rate.) and food was dirt cheap too. I took 910 dollars (plus 150 pounds) and returned with all the English and over 200 dollars. Unlike the birding on offer we found the food a bit dull if we were honest. Nevertheless it proved sustenance enough to keep us with enough energy to keep on going. We ate a cooked breakfast most days (between 3 and 6 dollars per head) then an evening meal – mainly fast food though we did visit two Cajun places and found them to be both cheap and tasty. The Car we hired (A Chevrolet Malibu) was extremely adequate and spacious. It was white when we picked it up. We delivered it back in the Budget section of the airport hire car drop off a dirty brown. It had half the dust of Texas on it. The heat and humidity was a bit of a shock – especially around the Rio Grande. We're just not used to it in this country are we? Most annoying of all were the mosquitoes and on some days the Horse Flies. We were bit near to death, as it seemed to me our insect repellent just wasn't cutting the mustard. Perhaps we should have bought some Texas strength repellent? Alas we didn't and suffered for our mistake.

Anyway – on Saturday 21st April we all met up at the north terminal at Gatwick at 07.30 and booked in for the 10.00am flight to Houston with BA. The wait was uneventful though I did find a little bit of excitement in the shape of two cars inside the Gatwick terminal – a white Ford GT and a silver Lamborghini Gallardo, much to the amusement of the other two, who haven't yet reached any sort of appreciation of the mechanical wizardry, technical refinements and gorgeous flowing curves of these two brutes of the open road. Lucky it was then that they didn't travel up with me to the airport when a McLaren Mercedes SLR overtook us on the motorway (only my second ever sighting) which had me nearly blowing a gasket as I announced to my family in the car in a Murray Walker-esque tone, my feelings on seeing such a machine in the flesh. Ironic especially - as I can't even drive – but there you go. The flight was long and boring and extremely uncomfortable for someone of my immense height. That said it was nice to see some of the scenery from my plane window seat. Now I do realise that this is meant to be a bird trip report but as well as my comments on cars you will have to put up with my Barry Norman impression with regard to the 2 films we watched on the plane. Firstly the newest James Bond film 'Casino Royale' which in my opinion was awful, partly due to the new Bond being particularly humourless. The lack of many of the silly tongue in cheek-throw away gags and over the top silliness normally associated with these films and the only bits I actually sort of enjoy about Bond films ruined it for me. I'm nowhere near a Bond fan but I always watch the films if I'm honest. Then the second film (The Illusionist?) was a film I had heard good things about but in my view it was disappointing and only slightly more endurable than the Bond effort. Right that's done with! At least these two films took my mind off the boredom of a ten hour flight for four hours or so! Back at the flight - we took a curve from Gatwick heading north then s/west crossing southern Greenland, Newfoundland, Labrador (Barry Childs old kicking grounds), Canada, the great lakes and down through the northern United States. I even saw the Indianapolis race circuit, which was good to see even at 30,000 feet for a F1 nut as I am. We arrived in Houston on time and with a late afternoons birding ahead of us due to the

different time zone thingamy. After an arduous time getting through US customs and picking up the hire car from Budget we had less than an hour to try and get to Anahuac for the pre-planned Rail walk. This however went very wrong when we got lost getting onto the Beltway 8 and ran out of time. This would be our one and only chance of seeing Yellow Rail so already we had missed something without even getting on site. We headed east, spending the rest of the daylight hours muddling around the High Island area where there were lots of birds on offer to first time visitor like myself. At High Island (Boy Scout Wood) I had my first taste of some American Warblers with Prothonotary, Tennessee, Kentucky, Northern Waterthrush and Common Yellowthroat all proving delightful.



Other bits seen here included stunning Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Eastern Kingbirds, Eastern Wood Peewee, Catbirds, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, White-throated Sparrow etc – all common American birds but especially exciting for a hour or three in a new country. Our first Cardinals, Catbirds, Carolina Wren and Brown

Thrashers were seen here too. Lovely things but soon to be ignored of course! Loads of birds were seen off the roadside during the driving around. Turkey and Black Vultures, Broad-winged and Red-tailed Hawk, lots of Herons/Egrets and Ibis, Gull-billed Terns, Laughing Gulls, Grackles and thousands of mixed Hirundines of many species. There are birds everywhere in Texas. Later we booked in at our Motel in Winnie, which was very cheap and extremely shabby. The shower unit looked as if it had been fitted by a blind Gorilla with a 14 pound sledge hammer and the decor was straight out of a 60's horror film but it gave us shelter and had one essential item ... air conditioning! You would surely die without it? After eating at one of the local high quality 3 Michelin star restaurants (I think it was a McDonalds if memory serves correct?) we endured the most awful night imaginable at the Motel. Being a Saturday night many of the locals were enjoying themselves, which wasn't exactly conducive to an early night lets say!

Day 2: Sunday 22nd April.

Our first full day had arrived. Today's pre-planned itinerary was to start off at High Island for migrants then go off to Anahuac to look for the local (breeding?) pair of Swallow-tailed Kites, waders and water birds. The later afternoon was to be spent back at High Island to see what had dropped in on the migrant front. The weather wasn't looking too good for migrants as Francis had pre-warned us about prior to leaving. The forecast was for settled s/easterly airflow with clear skies and we were hoping for afternoon

showers or northerlies or both for the three days we'd planned to be in the area before moving off south. On the way down to Boy Scout Wood at High Island we stopped off at an old disused piece of road down near the big bridge over the river. Here we had fantastic views of Sora Rail, Least Bittern, Green Heron, Savannah Sparrow and the like whilst the local Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds serenaded us with a cacophony of weird and wonderful calls. Under the bridge a big breeding group of Cliff Swallows were actively going about their business whilst thousands of post roost birds were moving over the marsh in the background heading for their feeding grounds. There were lots of waders plus flocks of Herons and Egrets, lines of Ibis, Spoonbills, and Duck etc - far too much to take in if I'm honest.



There were new birds everywhere. Boy Scout Wood was fairly quiet, as Franny had predicted so we decided to go and get something to eat in a local Café. On the way we popped in at Rollover Pass where there were lots of birds on offer. Birds seen here included: Brown Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, Reddish and Snowy Egret, Great Blue,

Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, White-faced and White Ibis, Dowitchers, Willet, Semi-palmated and Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, American Avocet, 2 Ring-billed Gulls, Forsters, Royal and Least Terns and 100+ Black Skimmers amongst quite a few other bits and pieces. Not bad for a 15 minute stop off at the side of the road I thought. After devouring brekky we drove down to the reserve at Anahuac, picking up our first Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Eastern Meadowlarks of the trip. The Flycatchers were superb as had been expected and the Meadowlarks weren't too shabby either. Bizarre birds those Meadowlarks. We started off at the spot where the Swallow-tailed Kites had been reported and soon had two of



these awesomely graceful raptors flying around over an adjacent wooded area. Much of the wader habitat had dried up but we still managed a few things here. There were a few Herons and Ducks on what was left of the floods after a period of drought locally, plus 3 nice Upland Sandpiper showed up in one of the dried up fields. We drove round to the Anahuac reserve proper. I 'spotted' a Spotted Sandpiper

flying over the river from the car window.

It was becoming apparent just how much road kill there was on the roads. We passed a steady stream of dead Deer, Skunks, Opossums, Raccoons, Armadillos and birds plus the occasional dog and even the odd Alligator. Terrible when you think about it. No wonder there were so many Vultures knocking about! Anahuac was superb. Well superb by my standards anyway. Franny was disappointed with the lack of wader habitat but there were still lots of things to keep me and Gadget interested. On the first sections of shallow flood there were lots of freshwater waders, ducks and herons. The highlights were: Wilson's Phalaropes, Pectoral, Semi-palmated, White-rumped, Bairds and Least Sandpipers, Short & long-billed Dowitchers, Semi-palmated Plovers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black and Yellow-crowned Night Herons etc. There were also 3 Snow Geese still present with a single White-fronted Goose. I say 'still present' as we were unclear as to whether or not they were actually wild birds? The nearby Willow patch held a few migrants including: Black and White, Prothonotary and Black-throated Green Warbler plus Yellow-billed Cuckoo. The next move was to drive slowly past the dykes looking for skulking Herons, Rails plus reed bed Sparrows and Wrens. Franny was perplexed by the total lack of American Purple Gallinules on show but we did see Least Bitterns and a few Pied-billed Grebes here. After checking the boardwalk we drove back towards High Island. Anyway – by the early afternoon we were wandering around the big wood at High Island (Smith Oaks Wood) where we did a good job of feeding the myriads of blood sucking mutant Mosquitoes. How can something so small and seemingly insignificant cause a grown man so much anguish? And a half grown man come to that – as they were driving Gadget up the wall as well! A smallish drop of migrants appeared mid afternoon as we came across quite a few Thrushes and Warblers. 'Bits' here included: Veery, Swainson's and Wood Thrush and the Warblers included Tennessee, Hooded, Northern Parula, Blue-winged, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Kentucky, Blackpoll Black-throated Green, Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Common Yellowthro

at, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush and Ovenbirds. There were a few species of Vireo with Red-eyed, Warblingan Philadelphia showing up here Other things included quite a few Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Lincoln and White-crowned Sparrow, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, a few Eastern Wood Pewee and



Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Top things were the Grey-cheeked Thrush Franny spotted on one of the bird feeding areas and a male Cerulean Warbler late in the afternoon amongst the oaks. We also had a look around the rookery on the big lake where there were 100's of breeding herons and the like. Brilliant views were had here too, far better than I was expecting. The first Anhinga and Tree Swallows were seen here as well as quite a few Alligators. We ended off with a quick look in the small wood at Boy Scout Wood seeing much as we'd seen before if I'm right? We were seeing so many birds I

couldn't keep up with it. We eat a 16 piece Pizza in the evening washed down with lashings of Coca-cola. Not exactly gourmet night (my first and only Fawltysm* of the report) but it certainly hit the spot after a dawn to dusk session out in the field.

*to do with the 70's sitcom Fawltly Towers.

Day 3: Monday 23rd April. Yesterday had passed in a hazy blur. It seemed somewhat surreal to me – the surroundings, the culture, the birds, insects and other wildlife. By day three I was starting to get to grips with most of the common birds and started to settle in a bit more. I also seem to remember I slept a bit better the night before, as it was far quieter at the Motel? Anyway – up at 05.15 and off to Anahuac for a second try at a better time of the day for birds. On arrival there was no-one around and the air quality was a little better meaning we could see a bit more clearly through our telescopes. Much of the stuff we'd see the day before was still present and it was nice to get a better view of 2 Baird's Sandpipers, which was one of the birds I really wanted to see. I've always fancied seeing one on my local patch – mind you there are umpteen birds I've fancied seeing on my local patch I suppose! A few Raccoons were seen, which was nice. The first live ones of the trip and much better to see when compared with the squashed things in the middle of the road. There was a Caspian Tern present here too. We had a quick look at the Willow plantation where we saw Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Orange-crowned and Black and White Warbler plus a few Orioles, Shrikes and the like. The drive around the reedy edges was far more productive than it had been the day prior with plenty of American Purple Gallinules, Herons, a few Little Bitterns, 3 American Bitterns plus a few Marsh Wrens and the odd Swamp Sparrow. 2 more Wilson's Phalaropes flew over the boardwalk amongst a flock of White-rumped Sandpipers. We left at 09.15 and headed back towards the Bolivar peninsula seeing another American Bittern circling over a roadside reed bed plus a few other bits and pieces. We had a quick look at Rollover Pass on the way to Bolivar beach, where there were all the normal birds present plus a 1st summer Bonaparte's Gull sitting on the jetty and 2 more Piping Plovers. After breakfast we arrived at Bolivar beach driving past lots of shoreline waders, American Herring Gulls and Terns. After parking the car we walked down to the wader and Tern roost before wandering around the dry marshy bits. Birds present included 100's of American Avocet, c6 Wilson's Plover, 1 Piping Plover, a dozen Western Sandpiper, all 4 plumages of American Herring Gull and half a dozen Ring-billed Gulls all in 1st and 2nd summer plumage as well as many Royal, Least, Forsters and Common Terns alongside all the normal Herons and wading birds. There were also 2 nice Horned Larks amongst the saltmarsh showing down to about 30 feet and at distance offshore a single White Pelican amongst the hoards of Browns. We left and drove down to Fort Travis in search of the Burrowing Owl seeing a Solitary Sandpiper in a ditch off the side of the road, which was the first decent view we'd had of this specie. Anyway, it being mid-afternoon wasn't exactly the best time to see the owl and as we half expected we didn't see it. On the way to our next stop off point at Yacht Basin Road we spotted a nice White-tailed Kite sitting in the top of a bush just off the side of the road then at Yacht Basin Road we saw a Clapper Rail in a ditch 10 yards away from the car. A quick jaunt across the road to the

other side of the peninsula showed up a Lesser Scaup sitting offshore amongst a largish flock of Blue-winged Teal, a couple of Long-billed Curlew and c140 Black Tern. We ended off the day with a look around the big and little woods at High Island. A few migrants had turned up but nothing too exciting – a Northern Parula, White-eyed Vireo and a Black-billed Cuckoo at Smiths Wood and a Kentucky Warbler at Boy Scout wood being the pick of the bunch. Other bits seen before we went back to the digs and eat were 2 Solitary Sandpiper, 1 Spotted Sandpiper, Swamp Sparrow, 2+ Sora Rail plus the first Blue Grosbeak of the trip.

Day 4: Tuesday 24th April.

Up early (as usual) and left for the woods at (Big Thicket?) in search of a few woodland birds plus our one and only chance of seeing Prairie Warbler of the trip. It was cloudy and a little breezy. On arrival we stopped off at the first decent look at Prairie Warbler habitat and found a nice male quite quickly, which disappeared (again quite quickly) and we couldn't find it or any others the whole time we were there! It proved pretty hard work finding anything other than Pine Warblers and Carolina Chickadees but we did come across the odd Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue-grey Gnatcatchers, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo etc plus 2 Eastern Bluebirds, a flyover Mississippi Kite and a single Roadrunner. On the way to the next site we drove over to the nesting Bald Eagle spot near Orange. All we had, as info was the road they had nested in earlier on in the year and we wondered even if we did fluke the nesting site whether or not the young would have fledged? As it happened in mattered not one jot as we didn't see any signs of the birds whatsoever, which was a bit of a disappointment as Bald Eagle was very much at the top of my most wanted birds. I did see what I thought was a Red-shouldered Hawk sitting in a tree on the roadside. On the way to our next stop we dropped in to eat at a place called 'Crazy Joe's' a Mexican restaurant. Gadget's face was a picture especially when the chicken thing he ordered was covered in a thick white goeey sauce called 'Texas gravy' (whatever that is?) He's a bit of a traditionalist is our Gadget where food is involved. Gave me a laugh anyway as I munched through whatever it was I eat (indescribable) along with 2 portions of corn chips that had been placed on the table with our drinks. It was quite nice anyway but very filling. Our next planned stop was at Sabine Wood, an area where we were hoping to pick up a few migrants. It was by then migrant time (early afternoon) but the weather didn't look very good for any proper migration it being hot and clear after the early morning gloom had cleared. It turned out to be surprisingly good as there were quite a few Warblers, Orioles, and Thrushes etc present. Top billing went to the Eastern Towhee Franny spotted plus a nice Hermit Thrush. Other back up included – Black-throated Green, Magnolia, Tennessee, Black and White, Blue-winged, Kentucky, Chestnut-sided, Hooded, Orange-crowned and Yellow Warbler, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart, Painted Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, Acadian Flycatcher, Baltimore Oriole, Veery etc. There were also reports of Cape May and a female Cerulean Warbler here too but we didn't see either. Before popping back to Sabine Wood for an evening session we broke the afternoon up with short drives down to the reserve at McFaddins. Here we saw little but we did see Least Bittern, quite a few Savannah Sparrows and a belting Belted Kingfisher which we followed down a roadside dyke in the car for many hundreds of yards as it perched on

and off. After dropping in at Willow Pond then Sabine Wood for a second look (seeing Philadelphia Vireo and Hairy Woodpecker) we saw another cracking (notice not 'belting' on this occasion) Belted Kingfisher sitting on some telegraph wires off the side of the road. Fantastic creatures they are. Back at Winnie we dropped in at the local Whataburger for din dins* (another Fawltysism...sorry) where I fell in love with their strawberry Fanta drink. It's very nice and you should try it if you get the chance. We spent our last night at the Motel in Winnie and prepared for an early getaway for the gradual drive down to the lower Rio Grande Valley.

Day 5: Wednesday 25th April 2007.

The plan for the day was to head south, dropping in at a few sites on the way to get a bit of birding in and break the journey up a bit. Anyway we got up at 03.45am, which Francis (Franny) referred to as 'manically early'. We were heading down towards Brazos Bend, a wetland habitat surrounded by woodland, which held things like Pileated Woodpecker and Red-shouldered Hawks. On arrival the weather was cloudy and there were storms in the air. We dropped in at the nearby Buzzy Bees café for breakfast. There was an enormous Moose's head* on the wall (Fawltysism number three I'm afraid – can't see any more turning up soon?) which was the size of the table over which it shadowed. Breakfast was demolished and washed down with many coffees before we drove down onto the reserve. We had a quick walk around one of the lakes just before the heavens opened and we rushed back to the car where we got trapped for an hour or so as the weather raged all around. Luckily we'd seen 2 Pileated Woodpeckers also 2 Downy and 3 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Anhinga, a few American Purple Gallinule, 3 Eastern Bluebird, Northern Parula, Prothonotary Warbler plus lots of Herons and other water birds including good numbers of Yellow-crowned Night Herons. Unfortunately we hadn't had time to see any Red-shouldered Hawks or Wood Ducks here and after sitting in the car for what seemed like ages we decided to give up and move further south as the rain didn't look like relenting any time soon. We drove in the rain for quite a while before we got stuck in a traffic jam. Quarter of a mile or less ahead there was a huge plume of black smoke heading skywards; obviously there had been some sort of accident. After about an hour or more the traffic started moving as the police cars and ambulance vehicles moved off and we drove past what was obviously a fatal accident, which was a very sobering sight. The burnt out remains of a smaller car had hit a utility vehicle on the driver's side right where he/she must have been sitting. Whoever had been in the car must have died and I would presume the driver of the Utility vehicle would have been seriously injured at best. I only hope both vehicles had only a single occupant each. The next few miles were spent trying my best not to dwell on what I had seen. As we drove on the sky gradually cleared up eventually leading to proper blue skies and boiling stinkingly hot!! There were roadside raptors soaring here there and everywhere – mainly Hawks and Vultures but we did see a group of 4 migrating Swallow-tailed Kites heading north just off the roadside. Amongst the other bits were good views of White-tailed Hawk plus Swainson's and Red-tailed Hawk and Mississippi Kites. The roadside fences were strewn with all sorts of commoner birds including many more Eastern Kingbirds, Swallow-tailed Flycatchers, Mockingbirds, Loggerhead Shrikes and Eastern Meadowlarks. As we passed a seemingly insignificant patchwork of flat farm fields I

spotted a few Gulls from the passenger side window and they looked like Franklins – so after an emergency roadside stop we got out of the car to see thousands of them pouring through and they were indeed Franklins Gulls. Huge groups were passing by on both sides of the road whilst another group sat in a big puddle in the field. Beyond them there were many hundreds of funneling Broad-winged Hawks in uncountable numbers, far too much for my tiny brain to comprehend anyway. I had been trying to text my mate (Craig) to thank him for all the texts he was sending me about the football back home but rang him instead as there were so many birds at this spot my fingers wouldn't work properly. The sky was crawling with birds on the move – a flock of 30+ Double-crested Cormorants (plus another smaller group), the occasional Hawk and Mississippi Kite, a Common Nighthawk (we'd seen plenty in flight) was sitting 15 yards away on the muddy margin which was our first decked view of this specie plus half a dozen Horned Larks flew past us. I was gob-smacked. On arrival at our next destination (Aransas) it was very hot and we didn't see much other than the obvious stuff. A few more Double-crested Cormorants and Caspian Terns plus our first Northern Caracaras of the trip added a little variety. That evening was spent hunting through the oaks for migrants at the Goose Island recreational centre or near to this area. Lots of birds here included small flocks of recently arrived migrant Warblers etc plus new stuff for the trip such as 2 Bay-breasted and a single Wilson's Warbler, Tufted Titmouse and another Acadian Flycatcher. We stayed the night in a half reasonable Motel just off the main drag in Fulton just on the landward side of Aransas Bay. I received news that my beloved Liverpool FC had lost the first leg on the Champions League semi final (1 – 0 at Stamford Bridge) which was a gutter. It's funny how these things matter so much even when you're away on holiday!

Day 6: Thursday 26th April 2007.

We headed off towards a small wetland reserve at Aransas Pass taking the free ferry across the bay to the seaward island. The reserve was fantastic being packed with Yankee waders with views down to 20 feet or so on occasion so close that Gadget couldn't even focus his long-lens on them. The first Stilt Sandpipers were seen here also Wilson's Phalarope, Short-billed Dowitchers, Spotted, Pectoral, Least, Semi-palmated Sandpipers, Terns, Herons, half a dozen Green-winged Teal and a few Ruddy Duck etc. After a couple of stops where we saw a few Ring-billed Gulls, an Osprey, 2 Black-necked Grebe...oops...I mean Eared Grebe ... we arrived at Corpus Christie WR where there were quite a few migrants knocking around the small bushes and trees. We'd already seen the first Western Kingbird and Chipping Sparrow also Painted Bunting and Blue Grosbeak etc when a nice chap pulled up in his car and told us there were one or two Cape May Warblers in a flower festooned tree at the front of someone's garden a few hundred meters around the corner. We were off like a shot and soon found a small group of birders huddled around the aforementioned tree where we soon saw the Cape May Warbler also a nice bonus in the shape of a male Nashville Warbler as well as a few other bits and pieces that had been attracted to the tree. Also at the bottom of the road there were 2 Cedar Waxwing, which was nice, and just before we left we saw the second and last Yellow-rumped Warbler of the whole trip. By 10.15 we were walking into 'Floyd's' for breakfast. It said outside 'The best in southern Texas', which was quite a statement I thought. The table we sat at was so small that every time I went to put the fork anywhere

near my mouth my elbow would point out and nearly hit Gadget in the earlobe. Anyway the food and the people were very nice, so newly refreshed we shot off to our next destination which turned out to be a small pond in the middle of nowhere where a female Masked Duck had been living for quite a while. Francis warned me that Masked Ducks are notoriously skulking and with it being the middle of the day we might not get to see the little critter. It was worth a look as it was not far off the road we were travelling south on, so if nothing else it would give him a break from the tedious driving. On arrival the pond was so tiny I just couldn't imagine how we 'weren't' going to see the Duck. Franny said the bird would at that time of the day be sleeping and very probably in the thickish bits of floating weedy stuff no more than ten yards away from us. We walked around the edges as 50 small frogs plopped into the Dragonfly* (another Fawltysm!!) infested water. 2 Sora Rails showed down to virtually no distance, a Ring-necked Duck floated between the sticks and dead branches sticking out of the water but no Masked Duck. Don't ask me how?? It just seemed impossible that a bird could hide in such a tiny piece of water! We later met people who had waited for four hours to see the thing – I think Franny said even up to six hours! We didn't have this sort of time or inclination so we left after about half an hour. A magnificent Great Kiskadee flew in and the margins held Monarch Butterflies and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. Just down the road as we made our way back to the main road, we stopped adjacent to a couple of beautiful Bullock's Orioles. We next stopped at Sarita – a small stop off point alongside the main road where a small row of trees went down the middle of a grass verge. Here there were a few Hooded Orioles, Lesser Goldfinch, Green Jay, Bronzed Cowbirds etc plus the only Brewer's Blackbirds of the whole trip. An hour and a half later (3.00pm) we arrived at the Atascosa reserve. On the long slow drive down to the visitor centre to book in saw lots of birds off the dirt track either sides of us. Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbirds, a few Horned Larks, Osprey etc plus quite a few Harris Hawks and some big flocks of Dickcissel were flying here there and everywhere before perching atop the roadside crops. We booked into the visitor centre meeting one of the nicest blokes it was possible to come across. He'd been stationed somewhere in Cambridgeshire during his time in the forces and knew exactly how to treats us Brits. Anyway after selling us a couple of books he very kindly took us to a tree right alongside the footpath where an Eastern Screech Owl was roosting. It was an incredible little bird and virtually invisible as it sat alongside the trunk of the tree - it being almost the same colour. We wouldn't have had a chance of finding it without his help. There were lots of birds here but the one we really wanted to see was Aplomado Falcon. There were 10 scattered pairs around the vast expanse of the reserve and though we had been told areas where the birds had been seen recently it proved a very hard bird to find. Away from the visitor centre the habitat was quite different this far south being scrubby desert with lots of cactus and low herbage. Why I wrote herbage I just can't say? I'll leave it in as it makes me sound more intelligent than I actually am. Anyway the lush habitat around the centre turned up Long-billed Thrasher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Baltimore Oriole, Green Jays, White-tipped and Ground Doves, Warbling Vireo and quite a few Ospreys whilst the long drive around the more desert type areas turned up Northern Caracaras, Verdin, Roadrunners, Lark Sparrows, Curve-billed Thrashers, White-tailed Hawk and Peregrine amongst a few other things and there were a few more Caspian Terns around the edges of the lakes we passed on the way. We did see an Aplomado Falcon but it was about a quarter of a mile

away hunting before landing on a distant fence. A nice bird, but awful views at this range. We left at 7.30pm and headed towards Brownsville where we booked into the Palace Motel for the night. The room was huge and overall it was the best accommodation we stayed in on the whole trip. Cheap too – being only 60 dollars (30 quid) with a breakfast chucked in. The roost of Grackles was quite impressive here with all the trees in the motel area being full of them calling vociferously in their own weird and wonderful way.

Day 7: Friday 27th April 2007.

The day of the dreaded ‘fluffy pancakes’ incident. All will be explained in good time. Our day started off after a light breakfast in the motel lobby, by taking a drive out to a spot where we would have a chance of seeing Cassin’s and Botteri’s Sparrows. If they sound boring then it’s probably because they are. We headed for the directions taken from the ‘Birders guide to the birds of the Rio Grande valley’ eventually finding some of the grassland both these species inhabit. The Cassin’s Sparrows were easy enough to find as they sang from their perches but the Botteri’s proved impossible. As we drove backwards and forwards through the bird filled muddy road we came across White-tailed Hawk, Chihuahuan Raven, Bewick’s Wren, Lark Sparrows and a few pairs of scattered Bobwhites. Also two surprise things when Franny spotted a brilliant Aplomado Falcon sitting on the top of a small bush about 50 yards away before it flew right past the car and away. Then at the end of the track we came across a flock of 300+ migrating Franklin’s Gulls which eventually headed off into the distance. We did try another bit of Botteri’s habitat but the wind was blowing quite hard by then so we gave up. After a quick jaunt through border control we headed off for another semi-twitch down to a spot near Brownsville airport to try and find the breeding pair of Tamaulipas Crows (who names these corvids? Flippin’ Chihuahuan Raven and Tamaulipas Crow??) which, for the first time on our trip turned out to be successful mission with the birds found immediately sitting on the telegraph poles and wires directly overhead. There were at least 4 birds here too not just the one pair. After seeing the first Couch’s Kingbirds and White-winged Doves of the trip we headed back onto the road to find somewhere to get breakfast. We eventually found a Mexican Café proudly sporting a menu on the outside wall saying ‘2 pancakes, 2 eggs, 2 slices of beacon - \$3.99’ which should have read 2 slices of bacon. (the waitress didn’t speak any English – she wasn’t alone as neither do we!) Anyway their English was far better than our Spanish so I can’t complain? It was here that the ‘fluffy pancake incident’ occurred. Whilst tucking into my seemingly delicious eggs and ‘beacon’ I started to contemplate eating my rather delicious double pancake dish which I’d saved for last. It was then I glanced directly across the table and noticed that the evil little midget (Gadget) had the thickest pancake of the whole trip. In fact one of his pancakes was just about as thick as both of mine put together. Anyway – words were exchanged and Gadget knowing he could touch a nerve (even though his little legs wouldn’t allow his stunted feet to touch the ground!) went on about his ‘fluffy’ pancakes for the duration of the trip. He even started calling me fluffy!! Lucky he’s so old or else I would have trodden on him like you might a cockroach. A man must have some standards surely? With the fluffy pancake still ringing in my ears about once every five minutes, we left and drove down to the Sable Palms reserve – an amazing place. It looked

like a scene from a Tarzan movie. We had a good look around finding lots of White-tipped Doves, Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, Least Grebe, Brown-crested Flycatcher, lots of Kiskadees, (note not the Kiskadee who had the 1970's hit tune 'Don't go breaking my heart' with Elton John) Blue Grosbeak and amongst a few species of Warblers and Vireos – the rather smart Blue-headed Vireo. Good views of Black-capped Tufted Titmouse were had here as they visited a nest right next to us in the car park. We left at 12.45 in intense heat and pushed on for south Padre Island, heading for the infamous fantastic worlds best ever migrant bushes, which turned out to be about 4 bushes next to a building with a Killer Whale painted on it. I think it carried the rather pretentious title of 'World Birding Centre?' Slightly over the top in our opinion. The few bushes there did hold quite a few migrant Warblers, Vireos, Tanagers, Buntings and Orioles as it happened. We did get the first decent views of Blackpoll Warbler here also 2 more Wilson's Warblers. We had a walk out into the salt marsh and mudflats on the boardwalk where we saw a few Cave Swallows, a Clapper Rail, 2 Black Skimmers plus good views of Osprey etc plus out amongst the Royal and Caspian Terns and Laughing Gulls out on the shoreline a stunning pink summer plumaged Franklins Gull. There was a rather large celebrity Alligator here. After 'fluffy pancakes' the thought crossed my mind as to accidentally on purpose throw Gadget over the fence as a small 'Gator tidbit or aperitif before his evening meal! The only other good bird we saw here was 'Mallard!' – the only one of the trip bless him. It was like seeing a little bit of home! We left at 3.00pm and checked out a spot as we left the island where it's supposedly possible to see Tropical Kingbird but we dipped out. By 5.00pm we arrived at Estero Llano, which as I write is just a name written in my notepad?? I have no recollection of the place. We saw lots of Cave Swallows and 2 Lesser Goldfinch here apparently?* (yet another Fawltysm – I do apologise) but I can't remember it. No hang on its coming to me? I believe it was the new reserve where there were lots of Hummingbirds on the feeding station outside the reserve visitor centre? Yep – it must have been as I have 30 Stilt Sandpipers and 5 White Pelicans written in the next column of the notepad. There were some shallow scrapes here with waders, duck, ibis and spoonbill on them. The surrounding area was fairly quiet though the 5 White Pelicans that flew in during the evening were nice to see. Especially so as they were so hard to get off the Bolivar peninsula – they are normally plentiful there so Franny tells me. We booked into a Super 8 Motel in McAllen for two nights – wherever that is?? For anyone out there that doesn't know me – I don't drink I'm just stupid and have a very bad memory. What I do remember of that day is that we hit the local Whataburger where we went for the triple-cheeseburger meal. I was hungry when I started eating but felt stuffed and bloated by about three-quarters the way through the damned thing. It had half a cow in it I think?

Day 8: Saturday 25th April.

Half time had arrived at long last. We had a light breakfast and a coffee in the Motel before we headed off to Santa Ana National Wildlife Preserve. We arrived at dawn and I dashed into the toilets looking for the bugs Franny had previously told me reside in there. I wasn't disappointed as it was full of moths and a long awaited first Praying Mantis filled my heart with joy. I'm an entomologist at heart. After taking a few photos of many unidentifiable moths and the like we headed out onto the footpaths with the air full of the

calls of the very noisy Plain Chachalacas. Here we saw Lincoln's and Olive Sparrow, Altamira and Baltimore Orioles, viewed the previously invisible Chachalaca, Blue Grosbeak, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Couch's Kingbird, 20 migrating Mississippi Kites, quite a few Broad-winged Hawks, Coopers Hawk, a continual stream of migrating White-winged Doves in medium sized flocks, Least Grebe, another Blue-headed Vireo plus Francis and Gadget got a juvenile Grey Hawk which flew off whilst I was messing about with taking photos of some insect/arachnid or other dammit!! We did also see 4 Groove-billed Ani, which was a nice bonus. The Anis' can be tricky so I was particularly happy with seeing these weird things. We left and drove along the Rio Grande Valley to Bentsen reserve - a place I was particularly looking forward to visiting. On the way we picked up my first ever Subway sandwich, which proved delicious. I had Beef, cheese, red onion and green peppers plus a few lovely cookies washed down with strawberry Fanta. It really hit the spot and made a bit of a break from the cooked breakfasts we were eating most days. Bentsen was a lovely place. We arrived and got straight into the visitor centre to book in and find out what birds were being seen. Unfortunately the young lady at the desk didn't know too much about what was going on bird wise but she did show us a book where some of the recent sightings were listed. There were a few birds we really wanted to see here. Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Hook-billed Kite, Grey Hawk, Clay-colored Robin and Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet (yet another mouthful) were all Bentsen specialties. We also had Lesser Nighthawk and Pauraque penciled in too though the Nighthawks would be gettable at a few other sites along the Valley. It was extremely hot when we got there so with it being the warmest part of the day we had a quick and exhausting look around before Franny said it might be a good time of the day to find a shady spot near one of the lagoons and wait until the temperature dropped before having a proper go at it in the evening. This we did - and sat in the shade of a small tree on a bench near a lake in the hope of seeing one of the two Kingfishers we hadn't yet seen. We really should have done by then but obviously the drought had moved some of these birds on? Luckily I had taken my telescope, which I set up and gazed across the water watching some of the local raptors performing. Lots of Vultures plus the odd Hawk (Swainson's, Red-tailed and a probable Red-shouldered?) also a pair of White-tailed Kites were seen hunting across the way. On the water other than the obvious Coots, Pied-billed Grebes and Neotropic Cormorants, little showed until I noticed a huge Kingfisher sitting on the top of a small dead tree down the lagoon which turned out to be a Ringed Kingfisher. It took a fish eventually,* which was far too big for it to eat before disappearing out of view. A fantastic thing. As it cooled down (about 5.00pm) we went on a wander. Whilst we had been watching the Kingfisher a Clay-colored Robin had been seen right behind us. It turned out they were nesting nearby but we couldn't find any sign of them or the nest they were building. We were all feeling really tired (even Franny's batteries were running low methinks? Did I mention he's an android?) and although we saw lots of birds we didn't see anything too exciting. In the evening lots of Broad-winged Hawks started dropping out of the sky to roost somewhere in the woods alongside a few Mississippi Kites which were obviously travelling north with them. We went back to the car park - dropped off some gear as my telescope was feeling like it weighed half a ton, then waited till nearly dusk to go and have a look for the Pygmy Owl and the Pauraque. We left Gadget in the car as he was off his face with exhaustion and the heat and made our way back towards the wood when we

were overtaken by a speeding American sports car (a black Saleen) followed by a single police car in hot pursuit. Both cars got down to the metal barrier across the road before screeching to a halt and we saw the two criminals split up and head in separate directions into the forest beyond as two police officers offered a hasty but fruitless pursuit. We ended up standing on the roadside as three more police cars pulled up and joined in the action Starsky and Hutch style - and it soon dawned on us that our chances of getting into the wood might be in jeopardy which as it happened came to light soon after. An overweight, gun wielding, tough guy posturing police officer barred our entry and after about 20 minutes of standing around we gave up and had a walk around a lesser track just for something to do. As the sun started to go down we soon picked out at least 2 Lesser Nighthawks that were flying over the visitor centre and when the ear splitting police sirens eventually went off and the cops left we made our way into the wood in the darkness with a few other birders in hope of seeing the Pauraque, but though we heard them calling quite often we gave up before seeing any. There were cars still driving around looking for the 2 escapee criminals from earlier so presumably this made getting any Pauraque out and sat on the road even less likely? They were seen a little later after we left but we couldn't be bothered to put in the effort, especially as Gadget had been left sitting in the car for ages whilst all the fun and games went on earlier in the evening. We drove back to the digs in McAllen and stuffed our faces in the local Whataburger. By now we were getting thoroughly fed up with the fast food. Already we'd eaten over a years worth of burgers in one week and it was getting a bit boring. I got in and had a refreshing shower then whilst I was having a shave I noticed a small brown mark on my chiseled, muscled body just above the six pack (artistic license gone mad I'm afraid) and it turned out to be a tick. Now I'd already heard bad things about these things spreading very nasty diseases and over-reacted a little. The two other bods were engrossed in the rather rubbishy TV programmes they watched every night and I was surprised when I announced in a rather high register "It's a tick...I've got a tick!!" that no-one reacted. That hairy know all Franny quantified his earlier 'watch out for ticks' speech with the new version - namely that ticks were probably okay as long as they are removed before they fill up with your blood. Its then that they regurgitate their stomach contents apparently and this can contain the rather nasty gremlins he'd warned me about before. I looked down at this little critter and saw it wasn't full of blood, which was a bonus - so Franny said the best way of removing them was to gently pull them from side to side until they release their grip then pull them off without leaving the head stuck in your body. Okay I thought ... but this thing was in the most awkward spot imaginable. It being slightly under my right nipple (watch out girls if you're reading this - you'll never be the same again) made it hard to see properly. As it happened it turned out to be a job for SUPERGADGET!!! Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No it's supergadget and he's got a gadgety assignment in the offing!! In a flash - the case was open - a tool was removed from the case - the tool was being used to magnificent effect - and faster than a speeding bullet the tick was out!!! Gadget has a 'gadget' for any job imaginable, hence the name. The tick was inhumanely dispatched with the tweezers he'd so expertly removed the tick with on the nearby sink unit before its lifeless body was washed down the plughole. Gadget was in his element - he'd been moaning almost constantly the whole trip but now he was doing what he is good at - using Gadgets. A contented sigh left his lips as he returned to the tripe on the TV - content with a gadgety job well done. I too was over the moon to be

honest – let's face it things that suck your blood ain't too good are they. It turned out the following morning Gadget found another tick when he was having a shower and removed it himself. Lucky he hadn't made me return the favour and remove his tick. I'd have been tempted to remove him from the tick, wash Gadget down the plughole and spend the rest of the trip with the tick sitting in the back seat behind us. It would have been a whole lot less moany. Now there had been a problem developing here y'see and it was the car air conditioning. There's me stuck in the front passenger's seat - expertly navigating and entertaining Bill and Ben (my co-pilots) whilst trying my best to keep the peace at any costs, (I like keeping the peace – it's what I do best) Now Franny's in the driving seat wanting more heat than an ironmongers furnace and Gadgets (he's only 2 foot 7 inches high did I mention that?) in the back wanting the car to be as cool as Antarctica. Now I'm stuck in the middle here and it was driving me up the wall. The car's air conditioning had 4 settings and none of these would keep both of them sweet. Gadget would moan until I turned it up then Franny would sneakily turn it down when he thought Gadget wasn't looking and this went on pretty much for the whole 14 days. I wouldn't have minded but Gadget was giving my ear'ole a bashing every time Franny (we were calling him a Lizard by now) turned the darn thing down. Franny isn't a lizard of course ladies and gentlemen. He is 'sort of' human? I say sort of but he's not like you and me. He has the most amazing knowledge about everything to do with everything about birding and nothing. Silly things that do my head in as one of humanities stupid people? For instance – we're walking around somewhere and I come out with something along the lines of "I wonder with all this junk food we're eating if we'll put on any weight?" Franny – without thinking comes back at me with a usual clear and concise answer – not a single wasted word here 'we'll lose weight, we're using more calories than we're taking in.' Now I'm doubting this statement – we're pigging out on fast food for 2 solid weeks so how on earth can we lose weight? I had weighed myself before we had left so I knew how much my baggage weighed for the plane (17 stone 3 pounds – I am six foot five so please don't picture a fat bloke here.) and no sooner did I get in the house on arriving home, than I got out the old bathroom scales and guess what ... 16 stone 10 pounds... I'd lost half a stone as old computer brain had predicted. On another occasion a week plus into our trip, Franny was in the shower and Gadget had asked how many birds we'd seen. Not being into numbers but already trying to get one over on Franny I got out the field guide and was surprised when I counted up that we had only seen 269 species up to that point of the trip. One day alone we'd had over 130 birds and I was expecting somewhere nearer to 300. Anyway Franny gets out of the shower completely unaware of what's been going on and I say to him "Come on then Franny – how many birds have we seen so far?" I wanted to say you hairy lizard twit on the end of this last sentence but decided not to at the last moment. Franny sat there pensively for about 3 seconds then said "About 267?" only two out!!! I was flabbergasted!! He can't have cheated as he didn't have any access to a book – so why did he come out with 267?? Any normal bloke would have rounded it off to 260 or 270 as it was only meant to be an estimation. He's not normal. On another day I thought (hoped?) he might spontaneously combust before our eyes when he put his coat on during a morning walk around the woods. The nighttime temperatures were over 70% and he's wearing a flipping lined woolly coat in Texas during the day!! Perhaps his temperature chip had overloaded or something? One other thing whilst I'm on the subject. Now I've known Franny since our schooldays but it's only during the past few

years of my life that I've come to terms with how frightening he is. He scares the pants off me. When I phone him he makes me jump out of my skin and when I see him down at my local patch he makes me feel uncomfortable. Do you remember those old 1950's sci-fi's when the husband comes home from work but it's not the husband it's an alien and his family notice over tea that he's acting ever so slightly weird? That's how I feel when he's about. He's either (a) An Alien. (b) An Android. (c) one of the last two, take your pick? I'd already been aware he knows every bird, moth however microscopic and blade of grass in Thanet (the district in which we live unfortunately) but this further knowledge had started me thinking. We're on to you Solly – so watch it!!

Day 9: Sunday 29th April.

The game plan for the Sunday was to start off at Bentsen then head further into the Rio Grande to stay somewhere for the night whilst getting in an evening's birding at Salineno and the Falcon State Park. We stopped off at Dennys for breakfast prior to heading for Bentsen, which was a huge mistake as it took ages to get served and we arrived far too late at the reserve. On arrival the main target bird – the Ferruginous Pygmy Owl had stopped singing. The bird was most active in the mornings and if it wasn't singing we had little chance of locating the little blighter. Luck was in however as at the place where the Owl was (or should have been) I spotted a nice Clay-colored Robin hopping about in the short grass. So at least one of our target birds had been seen. We waited a bit longer hoping the owl would show but soon gave up. Just before we left a Grey Hawk flew past giving reasonable but very brief views as it shot down into the wood. Just along the path we wandered up to a spot where two American birders had information about an area where a pair of Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet were breeding. We stood around for about five minutes and it looked as if we were going to miss out again but just after the American birders walked off we heard the Tyrannulets distinctive call before it showed brilliantly right next to us. Once we got our ear in with the call we could hear them every now and then in other parts of the reserve as we wandered around. Quite a few Broad-winged Hawks and Mississippi Kites were started to get up into the thermals so our thoughts turned to getting on the hourly tram which would take us on the ten minute ride up to the raptor tower somewhere in the middle of the reserve. We got on the 9.30 tram seeing a Peccary during our ride into the park. Once the on-site park ranger whose job it was to count any migrating raptors got through his speech we started looking for soaring birds of prey. We wanted to see Hook-billed Kite but didn't really have too much hope as the Snails on which they feed have crashed in the reserve and the Kites are now very hard to see. But things were going well for us today and after about ten minutes I spotted two raptors and one of them was 'the' Hook-billed Kite. A massive result. We were later told the birds only been seen 6 times in the last month so we were indeed very fortunate. A few other common raptors were seen from here but nothing much to keep our interest so we got back on the next tram. We did hear another Tyrannulet and saw a Verdin just after here. As we sat on the tram we heard that the Pygmy Owl had been showing again so as we passed by where it was, we jumped off the tram and hastily shot across to a spot where the other birders were obviously on the bird and hey presto – there it was. A fantastic little thing, sitting about ten feet up a tree ten yards away. It called on a couple of occasions before we got itchy feet and left. Well there's no cure for itchy feet is there?

It's like the common cold? We also saw a third Tyrannulet here. Our next port of call was the visitor centre where we spent half an hour enjoying their air conditioning out of the scorching sun. After a coffee we left (12.40) got in the car and headed n/west along the Rio Grande towards Zapata where we were to spend the night. At 2.20pm we stopped off at Roma to have a look across the river into Mexico. There was a viewing ramp at a place called Roma Bluffs where we spent half an hour. Things seen here included 2 Lesser Goldfinch, Green Heron, Swainson's Hawk, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, lots of migrating Hirundines and a Short-legged moany midget. It was weird seeing everyone getting on with lives across the Rio in Mexico. We could hear their voices and typical Mexican type music. Later we booked in at a cheap motel in Zapata, which was ideally situated to check out some of the birding sites in the Falcon area. After dropping off our gear we went off to Salineno where there was the chance of a few local specialties. We had a quick look up and down a short length of the river seeing Audubon's Oriole, a drake and 2 f/juv Muscovy Ducks (Real ones and very smart too!) plus more Kiskadee, Kingbirds, Golden-fronted Woodpecker and another Groove-billed Ani. We did try and find a place where we had a remote chance of seeing the extremely rare Brown Jay. The sign pointing us to the spot was missing – and rather than risk driving along someone's driveway we gave up and headed off towards Falcon State Park where we spent the rest of the evening. We stopped on the way as we saw 2 Pyrrhuloxia. Falcon State Park was a very deserty place – cacti everywhere and red sandy soil. Quite a few birds were seen here. The top birds must have been the huge Cactus Wrens and superb Black-throated Sparrow, two of the best birds of the trip. The Wrens were brilliant things – we sat and watched a pair feeding young in a nest right where we had parked the car. Other 'bits' included lots of Northern Caracaras, Harris Hawks, more Pyrrhuloxia, Olive Sparrow, Verdin, Bobwhite, Curved and Long-billed Thrashers, Bullock's Orioles, Painted Bunting and Lesser Nighthawks. Roadrunners were common here and much easier to approach due them being in a more public area. We caught a medium-large Tortoise here, which proved quite amusing. We left and after getting some food in Zapata, retired for the night to our digs.

Day 10: Monday 30th April.

We were thinking of heading off north today up into the hill country around Concan up on the Edwards Plateau. We still had a bit of unfinished business, as we hadn't seen the other two local specialties namely White-collared Seedeater and Red-billed Pigeon. If we didn't see them here we were going to miss them altogether. So that morning we popped down to the riverside reserve at San Ygnacio – a tiny place 40 metres from Mexico in habitat resembling the jungle. To cut a long story short we did see a few of both species but we had to hang around for quite a while to do so. We had quite good views of the Seedeaters but only 3 or 4 flight views of the Pigeons. (Pigeon...not Pig!!*) We ignore Pigeons in Britain but abroad they are a rather smart family so I was a little disappointed we didn't get a decked Red-billed Pigeon if I'm honest. Other things we saw here included: Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Olive Sparrow, Bullocks, Hooded and a single Audubon's Oriole, Yellow Warbler, Western Kingbird, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Tufted Titmouse, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Spotted Sandpiper, Chihuahuan Ravens and a juv/female Muscovy Duck. We heard more Plain Chachalacas here but couldn't see them.

We decided rather than pottering about in the area we'd go north and headed off for the Edwards Plateau at 9.00am. The drive took us out of the desert, through lots of flat farmland and up into the rather plush and much cooler hills. There were people here with bits of straw between their teeth and everyone shouted "Yee-Har" as we drove past. We saw lots of roadside birds on the way including quite a few stunning Vermillion Flycatchers and a fluky Green Kingfisher that we saw sitting on the telegraph wires off the road in the middle of nowhere, where there didn't seem to be any type of water whatsoever? Whilst stopping for a look at an awesome male Vermillion Flycatcher I saw a Coyote crossing the road behind us. I panicked and shouted out "Look – a Jackal" although quite how I thought I'd seen an African mammal is anyone's guess?? I am and always have been a complete idiot. Another 'Mega meat lover plate' was posted for breakfast at Dennys (in Laredo) and on the way we saw things like Dickcissel, Lark Sparrows, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Bullock's Oriole, Caracaras etc. By 2.30 we were driving into Concan in thick mist and light muggy rain, and eventually booked in at a detached wooded shack at Neil's Lodge. The place we stayed in was a building in the style of that world-renowned architect Grizzly Adams. 100% rustic – all wood with a tin roof! A fantastic place though, cheaper than we were expecting too and right in the middle of a clearing in the woods. At the feeding station outside Neil's Lodge there were lots of Hummingbirds most of which were Black-chinned. There was also a Bewick's Wren nesting in a hanging leather cowboy boot, which seemed rather apt. We had a quick walk along the river soon picking up the first Yellow-throated Warblers of the trip and stunning things they were too. Other things seen here included: Carolina Wren, Nashville, Yellow and Tennessee Warblers, Great-crested Flycatcher, Ravens, Spotted Sandpiper, Chipping and Olive Sparrows and another pair of Vermillion Flycatchers. We could hear Canyon Wrens calling from the cliffs in the river valley but we couldn't see them unfortunately. After a quick cold drink in Neil's Lodge we tried the area behind the building where there was another feeding station. 100+ migrating Mississippi Kites flew over plus we saw quite a few House Finches, Lesser Goldfinches, Bells, Blue-headed, White-eyed and Red-eyed Vireos, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Orange-crowned and Tennessee Warbler, Blue and Rose-breasted Grosbeak etc. The first Clay-colored Sparrows showed up here too. During an unsuccessful mission at a site where a Black-capped Vireo was reported we also came across another Hermit Thrush. In the evening we drove around looking for Turkeys – finding 2 singles on the roadside a male and a female. It seemed very odd driving around looking for Turkeys but we enjoyed it all the same. On the way back to the lodge we saw a Black Phoebe along the river near Neil's Lodge. We drove towards Utopia in the evening looking for somewhere to eat. We ended up having yet another cheeseburger and chips in a deserted restaurant – The Eagles Nest, before returning back to the shack to check through the moths at the lights before a shower and a sleep.

Day 11: Tuesday May 1st.

I awoke before first light and after putting on my boots I had a look at the front of the lodge where there were lots of moths that had been attracted to the porch light which we'd purposely left on all night. I browsed through a good array of weird and wonderful species that were settled here. I had a wander around some of the other nearby lodges'

lights, which were peppered with moths including a big grey Hawk Moth (Sphinx) sitting on a telegraph pole. Best of all I noticed a few Raccoons milling around 50 yards away. I spooked them, but when I got close to the spot where they had been a Skunk wandered out into the light, completely oblivious to my presence and scampered around at Hedgehog range as it munched away on some of the moths and beetles attracted by the lights, as a Raccoon surveyed the danger area from a nearby dip – all I could see was its head! Really comical stuff. It was raining lightly in the early morning but by the time we had got to the Lost Maples reserve at 7.30am the weather was showing signs of clearing up, which it soon did. We were hoping to see Golden-cheeked Warblers here and after parking the car and walking along a likely looking path we soon located a pair low down next to the path. We had a good walk around one of the trails seeing Chipping, Lark, Clay-colored and Rufous-crowned Sparrow, White-eyed Vireos Carolina, Bewicks and 2 Canyon Wrens plus an array of other common stuff such as Ravens, Hawks, Warblers etc. The Canyon Wrens were the pick of the bunch for me. You could hear a call echoing from the sandstone canyon walls – similar to a loud Willow Warbler, but finding them was another matter even though they are a very large Wren. The first one showed at very long range and wasn't very viewable but the second bird showed much better - especially as it's such a challenging thing to find a smallish bird against a very large backdrop. Mid-morning we popped into Utopia for breakfast before returning to Lost Maples for another look. On returning the sun had broken through and we walked another path hoping for a few different species. During the afternoon we picked up a few new bits with a few Western Scrub Jays and 2 Bushtits eventually being found. Top of the bill went to the Black-capped Vireo Franny found amongst the small Cypress trees – an amazing little bird. Other things included a few species of Warbler and Vireo plus good views of Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, Sharp-shinned and Coopers Hawk, Peregrine, Raven, Eastern Wood Peewee, Hummingbirds, Painted and Indigo Bunting and Orchard Orioles. We left and headed back to Neil's Lodge where we had a walk around much of the bits we had checked earlier on during the visit plus a few new areas. The afternoon walk turned up much of the same – a few Yellow-throated Warblers, Nashville Warblers, Bells Vireo, a Verdin plus bonus Cassin's Sparrow and another Black Phoebe. Best bit of the day was when the text came through to say Liverpool had made the Champions League final by beating Chelsea 1 – 0 at Anfield then putting them out 4 – 1 on penalties after extra time. (thanks Craig!) I already knew we were 1 – 0 up but it seemed like an age before the final result came through. It was hot so we went back to the cabin for a light siesta.* Gadget didn't fancy another walk so in the late afternoon Franny, the wonder-android and my good self braved another energy sapping walk. We walked down towards the river and found a path alongside it where we saw two new birds for the trip – the scarce Scott's Oriole plus a fly-by Wood Duck. As we wandered back to see if we could find a path towards where the Scott's Oriole had flown (there wasn't a path as it happened) I could see a bloke at the bottom of the hill trying to say something to me. I couldn't hear him over the sound of the rushing water so I edged nearer and nearer until I came face to face with a bloke who smelt like a spent beer can left out in the sun for 2 days. To say he was drunk was an understatement. He was totally off his face. I should have just walked off but being the polite soul I am I decided to try and talk my way out of it in a reasonable and diplomatic manner. His first statement after trying to ascertain what I was taking photos of was "You Australian?" I assured him I was from England. To which he replied

“No your not you’re an Australian – I’ve been to your country – I’ve been to every country – I’m ex navy” etc. (or summit – his speech was slurred at times by the huge vat* of beer he’d no doubt consumed?) I tried to walk off but he started following me. One thing he did fit in sometime soon after I met him was ‘Crickey you’re a big-un!!’ He then went on to say quite aggressively “You’ve got a big nose” (which I don’t think I have? If I do have no-one else has ever mentioned it to me anyway?) leaving me to deduce this was drunkards talk for –lets have a ruck?” Other things he said between being over friendly and overly aggressive in a pendulum fashion was “Are you an Environmentalist??” I could tell by his tone he didn’t like environmentalists so I sidestepped the question. (I am however a mentalist so he got the last bit of the accusation correct even if he didn’t realise it at the time?) He asked me this question about four times and not once did I give him an answer. Another thing was when he pointed up to the wires overhead and said “How high do you think those wires are?” to which I replied fairly nervously trying to avoid an argument “Ooh... about 25 feet?” This made him a bit annoyed and he replied “25 feet!!! 25 feet ... it’s got to be at least 35 feet!! I nervously agreed. “You see those bits up there?” he said pointing up to some bits of algae/moss sort of stuff that was growing along the telegraph wires – “its bits of weed... weed from the flood!! It flooded recently and the whole valley was under 40 feet of water” etc. He went on and on swaying in the wind, stinking like a pub cellar and waffling on about ‘The Flood’ as if Texas had been hit with a flood of biblical proportions a few weeks hence. Somehow after what seemed like ages (probably only 2 - 3 minutes?) I actually got away from him and I wandered up to Franny and said “Move – move quick” before telling him about the ordeal I’d just been through. Trust me to get stuck with him. Typical.* Anyway – back at the evening birding walk we came across a Red-shouldered Hawk, 3 more Yellow-throated Warblers, Blue Grosbeak and after getting an ice-lolly from Neil’s Lodge a Canyon Towhee and 3 stunning White-crowned Sparrows around one of the feeding stations. I only glimpsed the Towhee, which was annoying as it flew round the corner never to be seen again. Drat!! And my ice-lolly melted and ruined my shirt whilst I was holding my binoculars to my eyes trying to see it. Have you ever tried to hold an ice-lolly as it was melting at a rate of knots due to the stifling heat whilst trying to keep your bins steady? We went back to the shack, picked up Gadget and went for an evening meal (yep cheeseburger and flipping chips again!) down the road at the Eagles Nest. In the restaurant we were warned about a violent storm that was on the way – it was 15 miles from us and could bring golf ball sized hail. Not good for a night’s kip when you’ve got a tin roofed shack! Imagine those babies bouncing off the tin all night? And I’m a light sleeper! Wouldn’t have woken Franny of course – no – he’s unwakable when he’s regenerating during the hours of darkness. Anyway that night, when it did arrive, we got away with one huge clap of thunder and some rain but that was about it.

*More Fawltyisms I’m afraid.

Day 12: Wednesday May 2nd.

We made plans overnight to do the long drive back towards Houston and have another go at trying to see some migration on the coast. At first light we checked the moths around

the lights where we were staying (fewer than the previous night) and had a quick dawn look around a couple of spots close to that location. We saw a few things – Blue-grey Gnatcatchers, Philadelphia and 2 Bell's Vireos, Lincoln Sparrow plus a new bird for the trip in the shape of a very showy Field Sparrow. We left at 8.00am. The 250+ mile drive east was broken up with a stop at Attwater – a wetland site where the Prairie Chickens breed. We had no intention of seeing the chickens (you need to go on a guided tour when they are lekking earlier on in the year) but we did hope we might fluke a few different wetland species. After stopping off for a cooked breakfast we arrived at Attwater by 1.00pm. No new birds were seen here though we did see lots of Bison (Buffalo) plus many Dickcissel, a Caracara, Savannah Sparrows, Purple Gallinule, Greater Yellowlegs etc. We only stayed for an hour then got on the Galveston Ferry at 4.30pm, which took us across to the Bolivar Peninsula. We saw a Dolphin and quite a few water birds during the 15 minute crossing. We immediately headed up towards High Island taking in a few quick stops on the way where we saw 2 more White-tailed Kites etc. Francis had a brainwave (Circuit connection?) and went straight towards Yacht Basin road where a large flock of passerines jumped out of the grassy, dock filled road margin. They turned out to be a flock of c60 Bobolinks in stunning summer plumage. Gadget took a few photos then we crossed to the other side of the peninsula where we could see quite a few dead fish in the dyke along the road. Another Clapper Rail showed here and right next to the car. A few hundred yards down the road Franny shouted "Frigatebird – right over the car!" We hurriedly un-strapped ourselves from our seatbelts and got out of the car where this Frigatebird was circling right above us at about 50 feet!! It sauntered around for a while, oblivious to our excited presence below it before moving off without flapping a wing, as slowly and as leisurely as you could imagine. One of 'the' highlights – if not 'the' highlight of the whole American experience for me. By 6.00pm we were at High Island. We had a quick look at Boy Scouts Wood but it was very quiet. A few Orioles, Warblers, Vireos were seen plus there was a Great-crested Flycatcher in the cathedral. On the way back to sort out the digs for the night in Winnie we stopped off to try and see if there were any singing Seaside Sparrows in an area of saltmarsh just off the main road. There was one singing but it was so far away as to be hardly worth seeing at all. A few Marsh Wrens were glimpsed plus we saw 2 more Soras, a Least Bittern and a flock of 18 flyover Hudsonian Godwits here. After booking in at 'stinkies' – where I made the huge mistake of opening the fridge which smelt like a dead Badger with BO – we popped off to Al-T's for a fun filled night of Cajun cuisine. The food was nice (a salad, steak and weird chips) and really hit the spot.

Day 13: Thursday 3rd May.

There had been heavy rain overnight. We went straight to Anahuac taking in a few wader fields on the way there. Anahuac – although full of birds didn't throw up too much of interest. 3 Upland Sandpiper, quite a few White-rumped Sandpipers, 8 Wilson's Phalarope, a few Least Bittern, 1 American Bittern, American Purple Gallinule, Gull-billed Terns and Marsh Wrens were picked out amongst the throngs of commoner stuff. We left at 9.00am; popped back to 'Coba's' for a cooked breakfast then went to Bolivar beach, arriving just before midday. The tide was still in so we checked through the big Gull, Tern, Wader and Heron roosts as flocks of Brown Pelicans flew back and forwards

along the shoreline. We had some spectacularly close views of all the birds here. Most of the American wader species were about as we expected, including a few Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, Wilson's Plovers, a Piping Plover, lots of Avocets, Dowitchers, Willets and 'peeps' plus American Herring and Ring-billed Gulls along with all the normal Terns and Herons. Also another pair of Horned Larks showed up on the beach as we made our way out of the area. We headed towards Rollover pass but it looked quiet, as the tide was still high here. Then Francis noticed a Magnificent Frigatebird heading towards us – we could hardly believe it! As it came within range Francis said he thought it looked different to the bird we'd seen the day before, which was correct as then he noticed two more heading towards us on the same line, then amazingly another six!! All nine birds, in varying plumages flew right past us – giving us yet another surreal moment. They then cut slightly inland before hanging around offshore down in the next bay to the north of us. During the next few stops as we drove around we came across a few more Bobolink in the normal spot plus 2 performing White-tailed Kites, 9 Hudsonian Godwits, 2 Caspian Terns and amazingly yet another Magnificent Frigatebird which Franny picked up at distance over the sea off the beach near the oilfields. By 2.30 we were heading for the big wood at High Island. (Smith Oaks) After dousing ourselves in insect repellent we wandered in by the back entrance and it was immediately obvious there were lots of migrant passerines that had turned up and were still turning up. In the end the weather turned stormy and it started to rain, meaning we had to retire to the car at one point - which was quite exciting knowing that the wood would soon be peppered with migrants held up by the poor weather. There had been a bit of banter flying around between us, as we had not yet seen any Blackburnian Warblers, which was one of the Warblers I had especially wanted to see. They are normally quite easy to see, but due to the lack of migrant Warblers in the clear s/easterlies there hadn't been any about. I still felt reasonably confident especially so as there were so many newly arrived things about on this afternoon. The wood had birds here there and everywhere with lots of new in Red-eyed Vireos, Orioles, Catbirds, Eastern Kingbirds, Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. We soon came across my bird – the stunning Blackburnian Warbler, one of a few we saw that afternoon. Warblers and Vireos were present in good numbers with us picking up Philadelphia, Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos plus the Warblers being – Yellow, Parula, Chestnut-sided, Northern Waterthrush, Ovenbird, Black and White, Nashville, Orange-crowned, Blue-winged, American Redstart, Bay-breasted, Tennessee, Magnolia and Common Yellowthroat. The two better quality Warblers were two stunning male Golden-winged Warblers plus a single male Mourning Warbler. Other migrants included quite a few Yellow-billed and 2 Black-billed Cuckoo, Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Great-crested Flycatcher plus the Thrushes - Veery, Swainson's and Wood. We popped over to Boy Scout's wood in the evening where there had been quite a few new arrivals. It had quietened down a bit whilst we were there, though Franny found a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in here. Other bits not seen at Smith Oak's earlier in the afternoon included Prothonotary, Worm Eating and Kentucky Warblers, Yellow-throated Vireo and Grey-cheeked Thrush plus we saw 2 more Golden-winged Warblers – a male and a female. We left a bit earlier and went back to Winnie for some grub before retiring for the night.

Day 14: Friday 4th May.

We popped in at Boy Scouts Wood early morning (07.30) but there had already been an almighty clear out. We were shattered and completely birded out (or I was – I wanted to go home!) and we didn't fancy walking around the woods if there were none of yesterday's birds still about and as the new migrants don't arrive until the afternoon we decided to drive inland to visit the Red-cockaded Woodpecker site at W.G. Jones State Forest. We could be back on the coast for the hoped for afternoon migrants. By 09.30 we were getting out of the car in the forest car park and after getting our bearings we headed off towards the nesting areas amongst the Pine trees. We soon saw 2 Pileated Woodpeckers and a few Red-headed Woodpeckers but after waiting near the nesting trees (the trees the Woodpeckers were using were marked) for ages we had no luck with the Red-cockaded. We did see Brown-headed Nuthatch, female Wood Duck, Eastern Wood Peewee, Summer Tanagers and quite a few Pine Warblers (whose song is similar to Western Bonelli's Warbler) but not the bird for which the area was famed. It was a typical Pine Wood – very few birds! I had seen a pair of vocal Woodpeckers flying around earlier on and assumed them to be Downy Woodpecker due to their small size. After being in the wood for two hours, Franny spotted a Red-cockaded Woodpecker, which was tiny and obviously the same species I'd seen well over an hour before. I could have saved us an awful lot of time standing around twiddling our thumbs. As we left we saw an Eastern Bluebird and much better views of Brown-headed Nuthatch. After a quick visit to Subway for a toasted steak and cheese sandwich (we all went for the 12 inch version this time) we drove back towards the coast, eventually arriving at Smith Oaks at 2.30pm. We stayed for two hours seeing Philadelphia Vireo, 3 Blackpoll, Bay-breasted, Magnolia and a Blackburnian Warbler, Great-crested Flycatcher, Veery, Hairy Woodpecker and on the lake where all the Herons breed there was a Double-crested Cormorant. The first decked (perched) one we had seen. I also had a close scrape with a fancy looking, decent sized snake, which I nearly trod on as my eyes were diverted into the tree tops looking for passerines. We left the wood and had a drive around the freshwater edges of one of the oilfields where we saw many species of close range waders (c6 Spotted Sandpiper etc) and best of all a Common Nighthawk, which we found kipping on the top of an exposed post. We drove alongside it at about 25 feet and took a few photos of it. We spent the evening seeing very little whilst we fed the mosquitoes at Boy Scout Wood. Very little of any note was seen anyway – we did see White-eyed, Philadelphia and Warbling Vireos here but nothing else worthy of special mention. We didn't care as we'd all had enough. We left quite early and went to the other Cajun restaurant in Winnie where we had a very cheap and quite nice evening meal. We ordered chicken – but the thing on our plates didn't look like chicken? It was half an inch thick and almost as big as the plate? I devoured it all the same and very tasty it was too. I even had a beer (Ooooooh!) one of about 4 bottles I drunk on the whole trip. Well I say 'beer' this stuff was Budweiser – not real beer of course.

Day 15: Saturday 5th May.

Our last day in Texas had arrived. Gadget – who had been moaning about the heat and mosquitoes for two weeks solid – didn't fancy taking on the Mosi's in the woods any more. The only real option for a bit of birding was to take the insects on again and go into

the woods but I didn't fancy it either, especially so as it was highly improbable that there would be any migrants to speak of. We stopped off first at Rollover pass – c50 Black Skimmers were sitting in the car park and about 150 Black Terns were loitering offshore. We did have a brief look at Smith Oaks wood, with Franny taking on the mosquitoes in the wood whilst I hung around the car park to keep away from them! Gadget didn't even get out of the car. It was here that gadget said something about some women covering herself in insect repellent. "That's not a woman" I said. Gadget in argumentative mood "replied yes it is" but I rather diplomatically let it go. If it was indeed a woman then she had a beard about as big as Gerry Garcia – the lead singer out of the Grateful Dead! Franny returned from the wood having seen little and we left. After breakfast we had a quick look at Yacht Basin road where we did see a few Bobolink but they were hard to see on this morning. Gadget took a few photos of the low flying Chimney Swifts as they twittered overhead before we had a drive around looking for some Sparrow habitat. We saw another Sora but little else we weren't seeing on a daily basis, so Franny had a brainwave about visiting an area further east, near Beaumont where there were Fish Crows and as this was the best idea going we went for it – planning to waste enough time here so we could go straight to Houston airport for our 7.00pm flight. It was about an hour's drive I believe and we headed towards the Fish Crow hotspot at a local rubbish tip/sewage farm, which was mapped out in the 'Birders Guide to the Texas Coast' book. We found it quite easily but the only corvid we saw was a long-range flight view as a single bird flew over the tip. There were lots of Yellow-crowned Night Herons here but not too much else. We also saw 2+ Red-headed Woodpeckers from the car window near here. Our last stop was to visit the nearby Cat-tail Marsh – a sort of Country Park set up with a golf course and a wetland/woodland nature reserve. A lovely place - even on a weekend. We had a slow drive round and parked near to the areas of water where we passed some very approachable Yellow-crowned Night Herons. On the lakes there were a few water birds – a handful of Ruddy Duck, a Ring-necked Duck and an Eared (black-necked) Grebe whilst a pair of Caspian Terns were sitting on an island on one of the lakes. There were a few waders in the margins but nothing we hadn't seen many times already during the visit. There were a few Red-shouldered Hawks flying around the edge of the wooded area and some of them showed reasonably well at times. Then two Fish Crows appeared and landed in the trees right next to us. They looked like a slightly smaller American Crow but they had a different call – that was about it! The grand finale was still to come and it proved the perfect send off. As we walked along the path I spotted a large raptor in the distance flying towards us. It wasn't a Vulture as the wings were held too flat – so what exactly was it? As it came closer I made out it had a white head – it was a Bald Eagle. It flew right past us and started fishing on one of the lakes – a really special moment especially so as we had to leave for the airport in less than an hour. It disappeared out of view but as we wandered back to the car it appeared again as if to give us a send off. A bit melodramatic of me perhaps but this was how it seemed? We watched it flying around for a minute or two. Absolutely fantastic. After a short walk where we tried to find a way into the trees (but couldn't!) we went back to the car where Gadget had his eye on a Downy Woodpecker in a tree twenty yards or so away. We packed up and drove back into Houston to pick up our flight. The flight home was an arduous affair. Ten hours stuck on a plane is no fun is it?

My memories of Texas will be of heat, mosquitoes, fast food, pancakes, strawberry Fanta, road kill and huge utility vehicles. The people were very friendly and extremely courteous and well behaved. Much better than I would expect back home in southern Britain anyway. We saw some great birds and some fantastic animals, reptiles, spiders and insects. I saw my first Tarantula and Praying Mantis but missed out on a Scorpion. I would have loved to find a Scorpion and a Black widow though? Perhaps next time?

Thanks go to Franny (he's such a great guy) for him organising the trip/itinerary and doing all the driving. Gadget was his normal astute self – helping me to get over my many mental hurdles. He's my midget minder. Also thanks to Chris Hindle for giving us lunatics his two Texas Bird Guides, which came in very handy - thank you very much. My mate Craig deserves a special mention as his many texts kept us up to date with all the Football news and the Cricket World Cup come to that. We missed both semis and the final while we were away. The End!

Phil M. Ramsgate, Kent. England. Europe?

Bird checklist: Texas - April 21st to May 5th 2007.

1. Eared Grebe. 2 offshore on the drive down south and 1 at Cat-tail Marsh.
2. Pied-billed Grebe. Common in small numbers.
3. Least Grebe. A few on day 7 at Sable Palms then a couple at Santa Ana on the following day.
- 4: American White Pelican: 1 off Bolivar beach and groups of 5 and 3 at Estero Llano.
- 5: Brown Pelican. 200+ daily around the Bolivar peninsula.
- 6: Magnificent Frigatebird. 1 on day 12 then another 10 on the following day.
- 7: Double-crested Cormorant. 40 in or around Aransas then 1 near the rookery at Smiths Wood.
- 8: Neotropic Cormorant. Common.
- 9: Anhinga: regular around High Island and also seen at Brazos Bend.
- 10: American Bittern. 3 at Anahuac on day 3 plus another on the drive back to High Island. 1 at Anahuac on day 13.
- 11: Least Bittern: seen in small numbers at most of the reedy wetland sites. 6+ daily at Anahuac.
- 12: Great Blue Heron: Common.
- 13: Great Egret: Common.
- 14: Snowy Egret. Common.
- 15: Reddish Egret. 1 – 6 at most of the saltwater marsh habitat. Easiest at Bolivar Beach.
- 16: Tricolored Heron. Common.
- 17: Little Blue Heron. Common.
- 18: Cattle Egret. Common.
- 19: Green Heron. Common.
- 20: Black-crowned Night Heron. A few were seen around the High Island area plus other sites I can't bring to mind as I write!
- 21: Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Common, especially at Brazos Bend and Cat-tail Marsh.
- 22: White Ibis. Common.
- 23: White-faced Ibis. Common.
- 24: Roseate Spoonbill. Locally common.
- 25: Greater White-fronted Goose. 1 at Anahuac on every visit.
- 26: Snow Goose. 3 at Anahuac (2 white and a blue form) on every visit.
- 27: Black-bellied Whistling Duck. Common.
- 28: Fulvous Whistling Duck. Locally common.

- 29: Muscovy Duck. A male and 2 female/juveniles at Salineno on day 9 then another female type at San Ygnacio on day 10.
- 30: Wood Duck. Singles at Neil's Lodge and W.G. Jones State Forest.
- 31: Mallard. 1 at South Padre Island.
- 32: Mottled Duck. Locally common.
- 33: Gadwall. A few were seen – too boring to make note of.
- 34: Northern Shoveler. Common at a few freshwater sites.
- 35: Blue-winged Teal. Common.
- 36: Green-winged Teal. 6 at Aransas pass and 4 at Estero Llano.
- 37: Ring-necked Duck. Singles at the Masked Duck site and Cat-tail Marsh.
- 38: Lesser Scaup. 1 offshore at Rollover Pass on day 3.
- 39: Red-breasted Merganser. 1 at Rollover Pass on day 2.
- 40: Ruddy Duck. A few at Aransas pass and half a dozen at Cat-tail Marsh.
- 41: Turkey Vulture. Common.
- 42: Black Vulture. Not as common as the Turkeys but still seen most days if not every day?
- 43: Northern Harrier. 1 – 3 seen most days.
- 44: Hook-billed Kite. 1 at Bentsen.
- 45: White-tailed Kite. 1 – 3 most days around the Bolivar Peninsula and a few at Bentsen on both visits.
- 46: Mississippi Kite. Migrants were seen on about half a dozen days – 100+ near Neil's Lodge being the biggest number.
- 47: Swallow-tailed Kite: The semi resident pair at Anahuac then a group of 4 migrants off the roadside on the drive down south.
- 48: Sharp-shinned Hawk. Only a handful were seen at scattered sites.
- 49: Cooper's Hawk. Again not plentiful though a few were seen notably at Bentsen and Santa Ana.
- 50: Harris's Hawk. Common down south.
- 51: Gray Hawk: singles at Santa Ana and Bentsen.
- 52: Red-shouldered Hawk. 1 – 2 on a few days.
- 53: Broad-winged Hawk. The only hawk we saw in large numbers with 1 – 50+ common on migration also 1500+ on day 5 and a few hundred on one other day.
- 54: Swainson's Hawk. 1 – 5+ were seen most days.
- 55: White-tailed Hawk. About 20 or so were seen during the trip.
- 56: Red-tailed Hawk. 1 – 3+ were seen most days.
- 57: Bald Eagle. An adult at Cat-tail Marsh on the last afternoon.
- 58: Osprey. 1 – 3 on about half a dozen days.
- 59: Northern Caracara. Fairly common down south with up to 20+ birds seen on the best days.
- 60: Aplomado Falcon. Singles at Atascosa and Old Port Isabel Road on day 7.
- 61: Peregrine. 2 singles.
- 62: Plain Chachalaca. Common at Santa Ana and heard at 2 other sites down south.
- 63: Northern Bobwhite. Quite a few on day 7 plus 2 at Falcon State Park on day 9.
- 64: Wild Turkey. 2 singles along the roadside near Concan, in the hill country.
- 65: Purple Gallinule. Common at Anahuac and Brazos bend. Seen at a couple of other sites too.
- 66: Common Moorhen. Common.
- 67: American Coot. Common.
- 68: Clapper Rail. 2 singles on the Bolivar Peninsula plus another at South Padre Island.
- 69: Sora. Easy to find around the Bolivar Peninsula area plus 2 at the Masked Duck site.
- 70: Black-bellied (Grey) Plover. Common.
- 71: Piping Plover. 1 – 2 at Bolivar and Rollover Pass.
- 72: Semi-palmated Plover. Common.
- 73: Wilson's Plover. 4 – 6 seen during visits to Bolivar Beach.

- 74: Killdeer. Common.
- 75: American Oystercatcher. 1 – 3 seen on 2 visits to Rollover Pass.
- 76: American Avocet. Common (into three figures) at Rollover Pass and up to 400+ during visits to Bolivar Beach.
- 77: Black-necked Stilt. Common.
- 78: Greater Yellowlegs. Common.
- 79: Lesser Yellowlegs. Common.
- 80: Solitary Sandpiper. 1 – 3 seen on about half a dozen dates.
- 81: Willet. Common.
- 82: Spotted Sandpiper. 1 – 6 seen on about half a dozen dates.
- 83: Upland Sandpiper. 3 on each visit to Anahuac and a single flyover on the Bolivar Peninsula.
- 84: Hudsonian Whimbrel. Common.
- 85: Long-billed Curlew. 1 – 10+ seen on about half a dozen dates.
- 86: Hudsonian Godwit: 2 at Anahuac, 1 at Bolivar plus flocks of 9 and 18 flyovers around the Bolivar Peninsula.
- 87: Marbled Godwit. 1 – 6 on about half a dozen+ dates.
- 88: Ruddy Turnstone. Common.
- 89: Sanderling. Common.
- 90: Dunlin. Common.
- 91: Pectoral Sandpiper. Easy enough to find in small numbers at the freshwater marshes.
- 92: White-rumped Sandpiper. 1 – 30+ daily in wader habitat.
- 93: Baird's Sandpiper. A few were seen on each visit to Anahuac during our first stint there.
- 94: Western Sandpiper. Common only at Bolivar Beach.
- 95: Semi-palmated Sandpiper. Common.
- 96: Least Sandpiper. Common.
- 97: Stilt Sandpiper. Common at Aransas Pass and Estero Llano.
- 98: Long-billed Dowitcher. Common.
- 99: Short-billed Dowitcher. Common.
- 100: Wilson's Phalarope. A Handful on two visits to Anahuac then 2 at Bolivar.
- 101: Bonaparte's Gull. A first summer at Rollover Pass.
- 102: Franklin's Gull. Many 1000's on day 5 on the way to Aransas, another 8 – 10 seen from the car window on another day, 300+ flew over the Old Port Isabel Road and 1 on the beach at South Padre Island.
- 103: Laughing Gull. Common.
- 104: Ring-billed Gull. 1 – 6 seen on a few dates – mainly at Rollover Pass and Bolivar Beach.
- 105: Herring Gull. 1 – 12 daily at Bolivar Beach.
- 106: Caspian Tern. 1 – 6+ on about half a dozen dates.
- 107: Royal Tern. Common.
- 108: Sandwich Tern. Common.
- 109: Common Tern. 1 then about a dozen plus on 2 visits to Bolivar.
- 110: Forster's Tern. Common.
- 111: Least Tern: Common.
- 112: Gull-billed Tern. Locally common.
- 113: Black Tern. Common off the Bolivar peninsula with 100 – 150+ birds on quite a few occasions.
- 114: Black Skimmer. Common at Rollover Pass (1 – 200) then 2 at South Padre Island.
- 115: Mourning Dove. Common.
- 116: White-winged Dove. Common around the Rio Grande.
- 117: Eurasian Collared Dove. Noticed here and there. We did try and ignore them honest?
- 118: White-tipped Dove. Common around some of the sites down south.
- 119: Inca Dove. Reasonably common.

- 120: Common Ground-Dove. Easy to see here and there.
- 121: Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon. Commonish.
- 122: Red-billed Pigeon. 3 – 4 flight only sightings at San Ygnacio.
- 123: Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Common.
- 124: Black-billed Cuckoo. 3 separate sightings all in Smith Oaks wood.
- 125: Groove-billed Ani. A group of 4 at Santa Ana and one at Salineno.
- 126: Greater Roadrunner. Occasional 1's and 2's then quite a few at Falcon State Park.
- 127: Eastern Screech-Owl. 1 at the Atascosa reserve.
- 128: Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. One at Bentsen.
- 129: Common Pauraque. Heard numerous times in the wood at Bentsen.
- 130: Common Nighthawk. Common.
- 131: Lesser Nighthawk. Easy down south with up to 6+ birds being seen on occasion.
- 132: Chimney Swift. Common.
- 133: Buff-bellied Hummingbird. A few were seen at Sable Palms and Estero Llano.
- 134: Black-chinned Hummingbird. Common in hill country especially at Neil's Lodge and Lost Maples reserves.
- 135: Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Common up north.
- 136: Belted Kingfisher. 2 near the coast on either side of Sabine Wood.
- 137: Ringed Kingfisher. A huge beast at Bentsen.
- 138: Green Kingfisher. Poor views of a perched bird in the middle of nowhere on our long drive up to hill country.
- 139: Red-headed Woodpecker. About half a dozen sightings between W.G. Jones State Forest and the Cat-tail Marsh region.
- 140: Golden-fronted Woodpecker. Common down south.
- 141: Red-bellied Woodpecker. Fairly common up north – mainly around High Island Woods and Brazos Bend.
- 142: Downy Woodpecker. Seen at Brazos Bend and near Cat-tail Marsh. Perhaps even at other places I can't remember?
- 143: Hairy Woodpecker. A few were seen during the trip. All up north I assume?
- 144: Red-cockaded Woodpecker. 2 or 3 were seen at W.G. Jones State Forest.
- 145: Ladder-backed Woodpecker. Easy to see down south but never plentiful.
- 146: Pileated Woodpecker. 3 at Brazos bend and a pair at W.G. Jones State Forest.
- 147: Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet. 3 sightings at Bentsen plus a few heard calling.
- 148: Eastern Wood Peewee. Common in small numbers.
- 149: Acadian Flycatcher. 4 singles.
- 150: Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. Franny had one at Boy Scout Wood near the end of the trip.
- 151: Black Phoebe. 2 singles both around the Neil's Lodge area in hill country.
- 152: Vermillion Flycatcher: 20 or so seen on the drive to Neil's Lodge where they were fairly easy to see as well.
- 153: Ash-throated Flycatcher. A few were seen on 4 or 5 dates.
- 154: Brown-crested Flycatcher. Easy to see down south.
- 155: Great Crested Flycatcher. Only 8–10 were seen during the whole trip.
- 156: Eastern Kingbird. Common.
- 157: Couch's Kingbird. Fairly common down south.
- 158: Western Kingbird. Fairly common in the west.
- 159: Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Common.
- 160: Great Kiskadee. Fairly common down south.
- 161: Loggerhead Shrike. Common.
- 162: Red-eyed Vireo. Common.
- 163: Warbling Vireo. 1 – 3 seen on about 6 dates.
- 164: Philadelphia Vireo. 1 – 3 seen on about 6 dates.

- 165: Bell's Vireo. 1 – 3 daily in the Neil's Lodge area.
- 166: Black-capped Vireo. 2 at Lost maples.
- 167: White-eyed Vireo. Quite a few were seen at scattered sites.
- 168: Yellow-throated Vireo. About 5 or 6 singles were seen.
- 169: Blue-headed Vireo. I think we saw 4 singles – all down south I believe?
- 170: Blue Jay: Fairly common in the woods at High Island.
- 171: Western Scrub-Jay. About half a dozen were seen all around Lost Maples.
- 172: Green Jay. Common down south.
- 173: Common Raven. Easy to see in the hill country.
- 174: Chihuahuan Raven. We did see a few – can't remember where?
- 175: American Crow. Never plentiful but we did see 30+ or so.
- 176: Fish Crow. 4+ at Cat-tail Marsh.
- 177: Tamaulipas Crown. 4 in Brownsville at the well documented spot.
- 178: Horned Lark. 1 – 6 on 4 dates. The best views were on the beach at Bolivar.
- 179: Purple Martin. Common.
- 180: Northern Rough-winged Swallow. Common.
- 181: Tree Swallow. Easy to see often in numbers on about half a dozen dates.
- 182: Cliff Swallow. Common up north.
- 183: Cave Swallow. Common down south at varying times during our stay.
- 184: Barn Swallow. Common.
- 185: Bank Swallow. (Or Sand Martin as we call it) Common.
- 186: Tufted Titmouse. Fairly common away from the coast especially around hill country.
- 187: Carolina Chickadee. Common in woodland.
- 188: Bushtit. Only 2 were seen - at Lost Maples.
- 189: Brown-headed Nuthatch. A few all around W.G. Jones State Forest.
- 190: House Wren. One at Smith's Oak Wood, High Island.
- 191: Carolina Wren. Common.
- 192: Bewick's Wren. Fairly easy to see down south and in the hill country on Edwards Plateau.
- 193: Marsh Wren. Common at Anahuac and scattered around the outskirts of High Island.
- 194: Cactus Wren. Easy to see at Falcon State Park.
- 195: Canyon Wren. Heard at Neil's Lodge and Lost maples where we had 2 sightings.
- 196: Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Never numerous but 12 – 15 were seen during our stay.
- 197: Blue-grey Gnatcatcher. Seen in the woods where the Prairie Warblers were seen (Big Thicket?) and a few on 2 – 3 other days at a few other sites.
- 198: Eastern Bluebird. 2 in the woods (at Big Thicket?), 2 at Brazos Bend then 1 in W.G. Jones State Forest.
- 199: Clay-colored Robin. 1 at Bentsen.
- 200: Wood Thrush. Fairly common in the coastal woods up north.
- 201: Veery. 1 – 3+ on about 6 dates.
- 202: Swainson's Thrush. Fairly common in the coastal woods up north.
- 203: Grey-cheeked Thrush: 1 or 2 on about half a dozen dates amongst the other Thrushes.
- 204: Hermit Thrush. Singles in Sabine Wood and near Neil's Lodge.
- 205: Grey Catbird. Common.
- 206: Northern Mockingbird. Common.
- 207: Brown Thrasher. Fairly common in the north.
- 208: Long-billed Thrasher. Fairly common in the south.
- 209: Curve-billed Thrasher. Fairly common in suitable habitat down south.
- 210: European Starling. Common.
- 211: Cedar Waxwing. 2 near Corpus Christie.
- 212: Northern Parula. About a dozen or so were seen at scattered locations up north.

- 213: Orange-crowned Warbler. Again about a dozen or so were seen – mainly around the coast up north and in the hill country.
- 214: Tennessee Warbler. Fairly common.
- 215: Blue-winged Warbler. About 6+ were seen all around the coastal woods if memory serves correct?
- 216: Golden-winged Warbler. 4 were seen on day 13 – 2 males in Smith Oaks and another male and a female at Boy Scots Wood.
- 217: Nashville Warbler. Quite a few were seen in the end – especially around the habitat in the hill country on Edwards Plateau.
- 218: Yellow Warbler. Reasonably common in small numbers.
- 219: Chestnut-sided Warbler. Reasonably common.
- 220: Magnolia Warbler. Seen on about 5 or 6 dates in small numbers.
- 221: Cape May Warbler. 1 near Corpus Christie.
- 222: Cerulean Warbler. 1 in the wood at Smith Oaks on day 2.
- 223: Blackburnian Warbler. A few on day 13, then a single on the following day.
- 224: Yellow-rumped Warbler. Singles at the Big Thicket and near Corpus Christie.
- 225: Black-throated Green Warbler. Fairly common.
- 226: Golden-cheeked Warbler. 2 at Lost Maples.
- 227: Prairie Warbler. Only 1 at the place I believe was the Big Thicket?
- 228: Pine Warbler. Common in the presumed Big Thicket and W.G. Jones State Forest.
- 229: Bay-breasted Warbler. 2 on one date down south then seen on 3 dates in Smith Oaks wood.
- 230: Blackpoll Warbler. 1 in Smith Oaks, 2 at South Padre Island then 3 on a later date in Smith Oaks, 1 in Boy Scout Wood and 1 in Sabine Wood.
- 231: Yellow-throated Warbler. Easy near the river at Neil's Lodge.
- 232: Worm-eating Warbler. Singles at Smith Oaks and Boy Scots wood.
- 233: Prothonotary Warbler. A total 8–10 birds were seen in Smith Oaks, Boy Scot Wood, Brazos Bend and at Anahuac.
- 234: Black and White Warbler. Fairly common in small numbers.
- 235: American Redstart. Fairly common.
- 236: Ovenbird. 1 – 12 birds seen on about 6 -8 dates in varying woodlands.
- 237: Northern Waterthrush: fairly common in small numbers.
- 238: Louisiana Waterthrush. Franny saw one on the boardwalk at Anahuac.
- 239: Kentucky Warbler. 10 – 12 were seen – all at coastal woodland.
- 240: Mourning Warbler. 1 at Smith Oaks on day 13.
- 241: Common Yellowthroat. Fairly common.
- 242: Wilson's Warbler. A male at Goose Island and a male and a female at South Padre Island.
- 243: Hooded Warbler. We did see a few – too boring to write down.
- 244: Yellow-breasted Chat. Fairly common in the presumed Big Thicket plus a few others at other locations.
- 245: Summer Tanager. Common.
- 246: Scarlet Tanager. Seen on most days there was some migration at High Island.
- 247: Pyrrhuloxia. 2 on the way to Falcon State Park where we also saw a few more.
- 248: Northern Cardinal. Common.
- 249: Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Common around the coastal watch points often in good numbers at High Island.
- 250: Blue Grosbeak. Never plentiful – perhaps 20+ seen during the whole trip?
- 251: Indigo Bunting. Locally common.
- 252: Painted Bunting. Locally common.
- 253: Dickcissel. Common in large numbers at Atascosa and Attwater especially.
- 254: White-collared Seedeater. 2 – 3 at San Ygnacio.
- 255: Eastern Towhee. 1 at Sabine Wood.

- 256: Canyon Towhee. 1 at one of the feeding stations at Neil's Lodge.
- 257: Olive Sparrow. Fairly common at some sites down south.
- 258: Rufous-crowned Sparrow. 4+ were seen somewhere in the hill country.
- 259: Cassin's Sparrow. Seen on 2 dates ... once in reasonable numbers then a single somewhere else. Can't be bothered to find out where.
- 260: Black-throated Sparrow: seen at Falcon State Park.
- 261: Field Sparrow. 1 in the woods behind Neil's Lodge.
- 262: Clay-colored Sparrow. Common around Neil's Lodge and Lost Maples.
- 263: Chipping Sparrow. A few were spotted here and there in the hill country and on the drive down there.
- 264: Seaside Sparrow. Seen on 2 dates in the saltmarsh just outside of High Island.
- 265: Savannah Sparrow. Fairly common.
- 266: Lark Sparrow. 1 – 6 were seen an about half a dozen dates.
- 267: White-throated Sparrow. 1 at High Island then 4 at Sabine Wood.
- 268: White-crowned Sparrow. Stunning things at the feeding station at Neil's Lodge.
- 269: Lincolns Sparrow: Widespread but never plentiful.
- 270: Swamp Sparrow. Definitely seen at Anahuac and perhaps at one other place?
- 271: House Sparrow. Common.
- 272: Eastern Meadowlark. Fairly common.
- 273: Bobolink. A flock of c60 at yacht basin road on day 12 then a few on each of the two following days in the same place.
- 274: Brown-headed Cowbird. Common up north.
- 275: Bronzed Cowbird. Common down south.
- 276: Red-winged Blackbird. Common.
- 277: Brewer's Blackbird. About half a dozen at Sarita during the longer drive south.
- 278: Common Grackle. Common.
- 279: Boat-tailed Grackle. Common around wetter areas on the upper coast.
- 280: Great-tailed Grackle. Common.
- 281: Bullock's Oriole. Easy down south.
- 282: Baltimore Oriole. Fairly common around High Island etc.
- 283: Hooded Oriole. Fairly regular down south.
- 284: Orchard Oriole. Common especially around High Island.
- 285: Altamira Oriole. Fairly common down south.
- 286: Scott's Oriole. 1 near the river at Neil's Lodge.
- 287: Audubon's Oriole. Singles at Salineno and San Ygnacio.
- 288: House Finch. Common around Neil's Lodge and Lost Maples.
- 289: Lesser Goldfinch. Common down south and especially around Neil's Lodge.

Phew – thank goodness that's over!!

