



*Shreveport Society for Nature Study*  
**BIRD STUDY GROUP**  
**NEWSLETTER**

Volume 29, Number 1  
September 9, 2014

*Next Meeting –September 9, 2014*

**NEW MEETING VENUE**

Our new meeting place is at the Red River Education and Research Park Lab Building. The park is located off of Kings Hwy. east of LSUS. There will be directional signs posted for your convenience.

Since this is our first time meeting at the park, the program will consist of a tour and get acquainted adventure. Be sure to bring you cameras and/or binoculars to fully enjoy the meeting.

**HAWK WATCH**

We will hold our annual Hawk Watch at Hubert Hervey's place in Desoto Parish Saturday, September 20, 2014. The official times are from 10 a.m. until 2 or 3 p.m. Hubert says we can arrive at 9 a.m. if we want. You need to bring your own lunch, but the BSG will provide drinks and ice and maybe chips. Be sure to bring a lawn chair. Contact Larry Raymond at 347-3134 for more information.

## A Bird Study Group Puzzler

This image is of one feather; A shows the top view, B shows the lower view. The feather is  $5 \frac{7}{8}$  inches long and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide. The feather was found on the LSU campus in June of 2014. What species of bird lost this feather? What part of the body produced this feather?

E-mail your answers (species and body part) to me at [lhardy@lsus.edu](mailto:lhardy@lsus.edu). For the part of the body, select from one of the following: auriculars, belly, breast, coverts, crown, mantle, nape, primaries, scapulars, **A Bird Study Group Puzzler**

This image is of one feather; A shows the top view, B shows the lower view. The feather is  $5 \frac{7}{8}$  inches long and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide. The feather was found on the LSU campus in June of 2014.



What species of bird lost this feather?  
What part of the body lost the feather?

E-mail your answers (species and body part) to me at [lhardy@lsus.edu](mailto:lhardy@lsus.edu). For the part of the body, select from one of the secondaries, tail, tertials, throat, or tibial. Grab your field guide and have fun.

The winning answers will be announced at the September 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Bird Study Group at the new meeting location in the Red River Watershed Institute Research Station. All of the winners will receive an Extra Cookie from the refreshment area and our heartfelt respect and admiration for having correctly solved our (first ?) BSG Puzzler.

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**PHOTOS FROM RIO GRANDE TRIP**



**Birding Trip to Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas 17-23 January 2014**

Jay V. Huner, 428 Hickory Hill Drive, Boyce, LA 71409

I took a Field Guides South Texas Rarities 2014 Tour 17-23 January 2014. Tour leader was Chris Benesh who has led tours to the region for many years. We started and ended the tour in Harlingen with McAllen and Zapata being bases during the tour. My trip list was 146 birds. The tour list was at least 150 birds but I missed Black Phoebe, Verdin, Lincoln’s Sparrow, and American Goldfinch. The trip brought my Texas Life List to 305 birds.

This was my fifth trip to The Valley with the first being made on my own in 2001. I had made only one other trip with a formal tour group in 2006. I had missed two target birds on my previous four trips – **Common Parakeet** and **White-collared Seedeater**. I pretty much figured that if I could not “twitch” these two birds on my fifth try with a very reputable tour group, they would have to remain life-long nemesis birds. We found two staked out, sleeping Common Parakeets at Estero Llano Grande State Park, but were concerned about finding Common Seedeater as they are always iffy during the winter in The Valley. Fortunately, we managed to find a single male in Laredo. More details follow.

There was much excitement in The Valley last fall when the second **Amazon Flycatcher** recorded in North America was found between Harlingen and Port Isabel. Well, we made an obligatory stop at the site and spent about an hour checking out the area but only managed Green and Belted kingfishers and found our first Green Jays and Great Kiskadees of the tour. The Amazon Kingfisher had not been reported for some weeks. Of course, I was excited when I first spotted the Belted Kingfisher at some distance with my old Swift binoculars having left my better pair at home! But, they worked well and it was dry during our tour so I had no problems with fogging.

**Specialty Birds Seen in Various Places**  
 Plain Chachalaca, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed woodpeckers, Green Jay, Chihuahuan Raven, Ringed and Green kingfishers, Tropical Kingbird, Black-crested Titmouse, Bewick’s Wren, Curve-billed and Long-billed thrashers, Bronzed

Cowbird, and Lesser Goldfinch. These specialty birds are pretty much found throughout the region and there is no need to go to specific places to find them. Green Jay is probably the most spectacular with its blue/black face and green/yellow body and “in your face” personalities. Plain Chachalacas are very large, gray, chicken-like birds and won’t be readily mistaken for anything else.

### **Highlight Birds**

**Port Isabel Area** – Aplomado Falcon and Harris’s and White-tailed hawks. Aplomado Falcon is a species that was extirpated from south Texas some years ago but has been re-introduced and there is natural reproduction taking place. Both Harris’s and White-tailed hawks are common in The Valley but were great to find, first on utility structures around the site where we found the pair of falcons.

**South Padre Island – Convention Center** – There was nothing “special” at this site for me but American Wigeon, Redhead, Red-breasted Merganser, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, and Roseate Spoonbill were welcome additions to the trip list and much appreciated by participants who rarely see these birds. A highlight was a log on a mud flat that turned out to be a photographer in full camouflage with a massive telephoto lens photographing shorebirds!

**McAllen** – Green Parakeet and Red-crowned Parrot. I had seen these two specialty birds on previous trips but not so close and in such numbers. Chris had information on the locations where these birds had been reported to be roosting. We found the Green Parakeets in good light. We found the Red-crowned Parrots in low light at dusk so photographs were a challenge. The cacophony of hundreds of clamoring parakeets is quite a phenomenon.

**Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge** – Gray Hawks, White-tipped Dove, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Clay-colored Thrush, and Altamira Oriole. Santa Ana NWR is quite a gem when it comes to birding. We arrived in early morning twice as volunteers were putting out peanut butter and other feeds at the refuge entrance. Plain Chachalacas, White-tipped Doves, Great Kiskadees, Green Jays, and Altamira Orioles showed up as soon as the volunteers left giving quite a show. Our target birds were Groove-billed Ani, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Clay-colored Thrush and Altamira Oriole. We made three separate visits to

the refuge looking for the anis but had no luck. We had good views of the tyrannulet, thrush and oriole. We saw at least two Gray Hawks, a raptor yet to be recorded in my home state of Louisiana. Although not especially rare in The Valley, we saw several drake Cinnamon Teal in impoundments at the refuge and were welcome sights.

**Estero Llano Grande State Park** – Common Parakeet and Least Grebe. This was a really interesting site that I had never previously visited. There are a number of impoundments managed for water birds and aquatic vertebrates. It was a real treat to find a pair slumbering Common Parakeets which were almost invisible even literally in front of our feet. We visited this park on successive days and had good views of Least Grebes on both days. We also saw a drake Cinnamon Teal and a pair of Green Kingfishers. Being from southern Louisiana, I was not especially impressed with a pair of 11-12 foot alligators but they really wowed my tour companions.

**Edinburg Scenic Wetland Trail** – Tropical Parula. The most striking thing about this site is the flock of several hundred noisy Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. Flocks flew about the park at low altitudes making quite a racket with their whistling calls. We had gone to the site to seek a reported Tropical Parula. We spent a good two hours trying to find the bird. We finally separated into two groups. One, not mine, found a parula and my group rushed to the site only to find that it had moved on. After about 15 minutes, we relocated the bird nearby but were disappointed to check photos that showed it to be a likely hybrid with Northern Parula. But, after a break, Chris heard another parula calling at the corner of a fence. We were within 10 feet of the bird which we concluded, based on good photos, to be a Tropical Parula.

**Donna Reservoir** – Ringed Kingfisher - There are two impoundments on either side of Donna Road In Hidalgo County. They cover about 400 acres and are classified by the U.S. Environmental Agency as a Super Fund site because of excessive levels of persistent pollutants. We went there because Groove-billed Ani had been reported in one of the cattail filled ditches along the Donna Road. Well, we did not find any anis on two visits. But, on our first visit, we had a striking Ringed Kingfisher. We also found the only Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup found on our tour! Interestingly, numerous

signs said it was illegal to fish in the reservoir units and it was dangerous to eat fish from the units. Yeah, there was plenty of evidence that people were fishing in the units and we actually saw one vehicle arrive and watched the occupants fishing!

**Anzadulus Park** – Couch's Kingbird. This park is on the Rio Grande River. We arrived around 4 PM and almost immediately saw a kingbird. But, it is almost impossible to distinguish Couch's Kingbird from the more common Tropical Kingbird unless the bird in question vocalizes. Fortunately, this bird did respond to playback with the typical Couch's Kingbird vocalization.

**Salineno** – Hooded and Audubon's orioles. Cactus Wren, Olive Sparrow, Pyrrhuloxia, etc. This is a legendary birding site on the Rio Grande River. It is the "go to" place for Hooded and Audubon's orioles. We visited in two successive afternoons and were able to find the two orioles along with Olive Sparrow. We found Cactus Wren and Pyrrhuloxia on a back road to the river. Each year, a family spends the winter at the site maintaining feeders. The log includes the names of all visitors listed by state. My name is recorded now at least 4 times.

**North-central Park, Laredo** – White-throated Seedeater and Black-throated Gray and Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) warblers. We went first to the Rio Grande River – Las Plamas Nature Trail – but a trip that should have taken a 10 minute drive took half an hour because the direct route was closed for repair. We scratched on the seedeater there. We then went to North-Central Park to look for a single male seedeater that Chris had found there in two preceding winters. We found an interesting mixed flock of songbirds that included a Black-throated Gray Warbler and several Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) Warblers. We had been playing the seedeater call when we found the songbird flock. We continued onward but failed to find the seedeater. On our way back past the place where we found the songbird flock, Chris heard the seedeater next to the trail and we were soon treated to a nice display of the White-collared Seedeater.

**Mission Nature Park** - Hook-billed Kite. Hook-billed Kites have been especially rare in The Valley in past years. I had seen one at Bensten-Rio Grande Valley State Park in 2001 so I wasn't all that excited to learn that several kites had been found there. We were having lunch at Zapata when Chris learned about the birds having been found that

morning. So, we rushed back, about 60 miles, to Mission. Needless to say, we did not find any kites that afternoon but were treated to a very active and accommodating Bewick's Wren.

Hook-billed Kites have been rare in The Valley because their food supply – terrestrial snails – have been in short supply as a consequence of drought conditions for several years. However, there were good numbers of snails in and around the park which apparently led to return of the kites. The kites clamor around in mesquite trees like parrots seeking out the snails and using their hooked-bills to extract the snails from their shells. So, the kites are hard to see unless they are observed flying in the area.

The kites had been reported from the park in mornings in the 9-10 AM period. So, on the last morning of our tour, we were in the parking lot at the park by 8:30 AM. There was quite a crowd of birders at the observation site on a levee around the park's perimeter. Hook-billed Kite specialist Mary Gustafson who had found the kites two days earlier arrived around 9 AM. One group of a dozen kite watchers left about 9:30 AM. Then, around 10 AM, Bob Keener of our group called out – kite. Sure enough, a rare black morph Hook-billed Kite flew toward the levee from the mesquite forest and passed giving everyone a really good view. But, as an aside, one of our tour group members had been about 200 yards away from us on the levee and spotted four Greater Roadrunners. When I asked him about the kite, he allowed as his LIFE roadrunners were a bit more meaningful to him than a rare kite that looked pretty much like a hawk with broad wings!

**Benston-Rio Grande Valley State Park** – This site is one of the most visited birding sites in The Valley. We did not, however, visit the park as there were no birds there that we could not find elsewhere and no rarities.

### **Illegal Aliens/Undocumented Immigrants**

Call them what you please, the presence of people crossing the Rio Grande without papers is a fact of life. The U.S. Border Patrol has a conspicuous presence in the Rio Grande Valley, first noticed about 60 miles from Harlingen with a massive border check point on US 77.

When arriving at Santa Ana NWR one morning, we found a number of Border Patrol vehicles and agents along the levee between headquarters and the Rio Grande. We had returned

to the refuge for the third time to make a last effort to locate Groove-billed Ani and, perhaps, Rose-breasted Grosbeak. When approaching an area of large dewatered impoundments, we watched a group of 20 young, slender Hispanics “jogging” on trails around the impoundments toward the river. At least four of the group were ladies who lagged behind the men. The group had clearly crossed the border during the night and were retreating in response to the presence of the Border Patrol. Their crossing had apparently been detected by sensors in the area.

Earlier in our tour, we visited Anzadulus Park on the Rio Grande. We found a Couch’s Kingbird, our target. While birding from a rest area on the river, an ominous gray patrol boat with a very powerful outboard engine passed both directions at high speed.

Later, the day before our tour ended, we traveled to Laredo to search for White-collared Seedeater along the Rio Grande at Las Palmas Nature Trail. We walked along a trail in high grass and Roseau cane and found quite a few items of clothing that had been discarded by people who had come across the river.

For those who aren’t very familiar with Mexico, there are waste baskets next to toilets for used tissue paper. The plumbing is easily stopped up. Throughout The Valley, there are signs in restrooms asking patrons to flush tissue but, to accommodate people from Mexico, most restrooms have waste baskets next to toilets. They are used.

### **Other Participants:**

Mahlon Hale, Madison, CT, Bob Keener, Shippensburg, PA, Ann Ruffer, Oakland, CA, Alex Sproul, Jr., Evanston, IL, and Claire Van der Linde, Highlands Ranch, CO.

### **Trip Bird List**

- Black-bellied Whistling Duck
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Mottled Duck
- Blue-winged Teal
- **Cinnamon Teal**
- Northern Shoveler
- Northern Pintail
- Green-winged Teal
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Lesser Scaup
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Ruddy Duck
- **Plain Chachalaca**
- Common Loon
- **Least Grebe**
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Neotropic Cormorant
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Anhinga
- American White Pelican
- Brown Pelican
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Snowy Egret
- Little Blue Heron
- Reddish Egret
- Black-crowned Night-Heron
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
- White Ibis
- Roseate Spoonbill
- Black Vulture
- Turkey Vulture
- Osprey
- White-tailed Kite
- **Hook-billed Kite**
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper’s Hawk
- **Harris’s Hawk**
- **White-tailed Hawk**
- **Gray Hawk**
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Clapper Rail
- Sora
- Common Gallinule
- American Coot
- Sandhill Crane
- Black-necked Stilt
- American Avocet
- Black-bellied Plover
- Killdeer
- Spotted Sandpiper

- Greater Yellowlegs
- Willet
- Lesser Yellowlegs
- Long-billed Curlew
- Ruddy Turnstone
- Stilt Sandpiper
- Dunlin
- Least Sandpiper
- Long-billed Dowitcher
- Bonaparte's Gull
- Laughing Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- Caspian Tern
- Forster's Tern
- Royal Tern
- Rock Pigeon
- Eurasian Collared-Dove
- White-winged Dove
- Mourning Dove
- Common Ground-Dove
- **White-tipped Dove**
- Greater Roadrunner
- Eastern Screech-Owl
- Great Horned Owl
- **Common Parakeet\*\***
- Rufous Hummingbird
- Buff-bellied Hummingbird
- **Ringed Kingfisher**
- Belted Kingfisher
- **Green Kingfisher**
- **Golden-fronted Woodpecker**
- **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**
- Downy Woodpecker
- Crested Caracara
- American Kestrel
- **Aplomado Falcon**
- Peregrine Falcon
- **Green Parakeet**
- **Red-crowned Parrot**
- **Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet**
- Eastern Phoebe
- Vermilion Flycatcher
- **Great Kiskadee**
- **Tropical Kingbird**
- **Couch's Kingbird**
- Loggerhead Shrike
- White-eyed Vireo
- Blue-headed Vireo
- **Green Jay**
- **Chihuahuan Raven**
- Tree Swallow
- Cave Swallow
- **Black-crested Titmouse**
- House Wren
- Sedge Wren
- Marsh Wren
- Carolina Wren
- **Bewick's Wren**
- **Cactus Wren**
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- American Robin
- **Clay-colored Thrush**
- Gray Catbird
- **Curve-billed Thrasher**
- **Long-billed Thrasher**
- Northern Mockingbird
- European Starling
- American Pipit
- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Nashville Warbler
- Common Yellowthroat
- **Tropical Parula**
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Yellow-throated Warbler
- Black-throated Gray Warbler
- **White-colored Seedeater\*\***
- **Olive Sparrow**
- Savannah Sparrow
- Northern Cardinal
- **Pyrrhuloxia**
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Western Meadowlark
- Great-tailed Grackle
- **Bronzed Cowbird**
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- **Hooded Oriole**

- **Altamira Oriole**
- **Audubon's Oriole**
- House Finch
- **Lesser Goldfinch**
- House Sparrow



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**BSG BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Direct inquires to the Editor, Amanda Lewis, at (318) 797-5215.



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Renewals, please update information below.

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Yes, please add me to the email Bird Alert

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## BIRD STUDY GROUP PHONE NUMBERS AND MORE

Bird Study Group meets the second Tuesday of each month, September through June, 6:00 p.m. To be placed on the list to send & receive emails, email [birdalert@birdstudygroup.org](mailto:birdalert@birdstudygroup.org).

Contact the BSG by email: [lhardy@lsus.edu](mailto:lhardy@lsus.edu) or phone (318) 797-5338.

Visit us on the web at <http://www.birdstudygroup.org>

*Bird Quiz answer = Hermit Thrush*