

A Great Egret is the central focus of the image, perched on a dark, thin branch. The bird is white with a long, sharp yellow beak and a distinctive green patch around its eye. Its most striking feature is a large, flowing plume of long, thin white feathers that extends from its back and neck, giving it a graceful, almost ethereal appearance. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural, wooded environment. In the lower right corner, there are some green leaves and small, reddish-orange flowers, adding a touch of detail to the foreground.

Nature Photography

On the Road in Texas

Alan and Elaine Wilson

Preface

Texas is an incredibly vast state with habitat that spans bald cypress swamps and rain shadow desert to windswept plains and prairie strewn with cactus, arid brush lands and mesquite. Its position on major migratory routes makes it a birding paradise, second only to California for total species count. Although Texas has an extensive series of birding and wildlife trails covering scores of sites over the entire state, we feel the best photography is largely confined to several regions in the south. Here you will find some of the most famous birding sites in North America: High Island, Bolivar Tidal Flats, the World Birding Center at Estero Llano Grande State Park and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, the latter best known for one bird, the Whooping Crane. More importantly, a host of private ranches cater to avid bird photographers by providing some of the best woodland and desert photography in the country.

Seasonality and weather are the prime factors that influence productive bird photography in any area. The best months in Texas are February in the south and May as you progress north. There is really no end of exciting venues. Its richness of bird life makes it a place that can be explored over and over with something new cropping up on every outing.

This book contains images from five areas located in three outstanding southern photography hotspots - the Upper Gulf Coast, Rio Grande Valley and what we arbitrarily call the Coastal Interior which is an area roughly skirting the city of Houston. It by no means exhausts either the incredible number of species or the tremendous locations that Texas has to offer. It is simply a selection of birds and wildlife we were lucky to encounter and photograph in their natural environment in three regions that we feel are some of the best in Texas.

Alan D. and Elaine R. Wilson
Vernon, British Columbia

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Publisher: Alan D. Wilson
 Vernon, British Columbia
 Canada V1H1C2

Cover and Book Design: Blurb BookWright

Front Cover Photograph: Great Egret - Alan D. Wilson

Back Cover Photographs – American Alligator, Green Heron, Crested Caracara - Alan D. Wilson

Last Page: Pixel Bender Oil Painting – Northern Bobwhite Quail “Hidden in the Trees” - Alan D. Wilson

Book Photographs: Alan D. Wilson and Elaine R. Wilson

This book was developed using the BookWright software platform provided by Blurb publishing service and is set in a combination of Times New Roman, Abril Fatface and Playfair Display SC fonts, printed on #140 Proline Pearl Photo paper and bound in Canada.

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Galveston Island

If there is such a thing as “birding paradise,” Galveston Island could easily lay claim to the title. This is due to its varied habitat, robust resident population and a spring and fall migration across the Gulf of Mexico that is arguably unrivaled anywhere in North America. In total, the area supports well over 400 species annually and is best known for its prolific migrant “water traps.” Notwithstanding, it’s impossible to take it all in during one visit. The focus on our first trip to this area in April 2014 was the early gulf migrants that we hoped would be prevalent during the latter part of April and early May when the birds were sporting colorful breeding plumage that produce very compelling images.

Our early research relied heavily on a book by Jim Stevenson, a prominent Galveston ornithologist, photographer and author of “Birdlife of Galveston.” Thereafter, it was a simple matter of isolating locations that looked promising and determining what time of day was likely to produce the best results. Although we had corresponded with several local photographers to help improve our productivity, their advice came with several caveats. Firstly, success would be completely dependent on the weather. With luck, a prevailing cold front and high winds would hopefully push migrants across the gulf and create spectacular results as they crowd the water traps to rest and feed: flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, orioles and more. However, we were warned that a preceding west wind would most likely shift landings elsewhere, leaving us wondering what the spectacular migrant hubbub was all about. We were also aware that a prolonged rain would tend to ground birds and lead to less than optimal conditions for photography. This set the stage for our visit and tended to dampen our expectations somewhat. As such, we decided to enroll in a local songbird workshop as a hedge against any chance that the weather might not cooperate. We also felt if all else failed and the migrants simply trickled in, it certainly wouldn’t be disappointing to exercise a little patience and await the stragglers or search the local littoral zones for resident or migrant shorebirds.

SCARLET TANAGER (MALE)
Galveston Island, Texas





We started by visiting the water attractions at several well-known migrant traps, including Laffite's Cove Nature Preserve, Corp Woods Nature Sanctuary and Dos Vacas Muertos Bird Sanctuary. What we found was mostly dense and dark forest habitat that made isolating birds difficult and certainly didn't yield much in the way of interesting compositions. However, the beach and sand flats surrounding San Luis Pass on the southern tip of the island, including each end of the toll bridge, turned out to be great locations for shorebirds when Black Skimmers, American Avocets, Royal Terns, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings and Laughing Gulls are there in abundance. A closer look often revealed Franklin's Gulls and Black Turnstones in the crowd. Opportunities improved considerably when we placed a Blue Crab or some small shrimp in the shallow water and waited for American Oystercatchers, Ruddy Turnstones and Willets to descend on the easy meal.

There was also a great variety of birds in the fields and marshes along Sportsman Road in the late afternoon and early evening. There we encountered Cattle Egrets, Reddish Egrets, Tricolored Herons and Clapper Rails. On nearby Settegast Road, there were many roosting Common Nighthawks and surprisingly, several foraging Helmeted Guineafowl. At Galveston Island State Park, we found a nesting Eastern Kingbird and a White-Tailed Kite. A great area for Sandwich, Royal and Least Turns was the southern end of the Blue Water highway. Here we drove the beach for miles in the late morning and early afternoon using our vehicle as a blind.

During our time here, we had genuine fun photographing Carolina Anoles. Commonly known as the Green Anole, it is a small arboreal lizard with a striking red dewlap or throat fan that when extended makes a great image, especially if caught in natural habitat. We can't say enough about Galveston Island. It's an area that certainly never let us down and produced some of the best images in our photography archives.

PAINTED BUNTING (MALE)
Galveston Island, Texas





INDIGO BUNTING (MALE)
Galveston Island, Texas



INDIGO BUNTING (FEMALE)
Galveston Island, Texas

RUDDY TURNSTONE

San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER

San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas





AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Texas



GREAT BLUE HERON
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Texas

NESTING KILLDEER
Indian Beach, Galveston Island,
Texas



KILLDEER CHICK
Indian Beach, Galveston Island,
Texas





ROYAL TERN
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas

LAUGHING GULLS
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



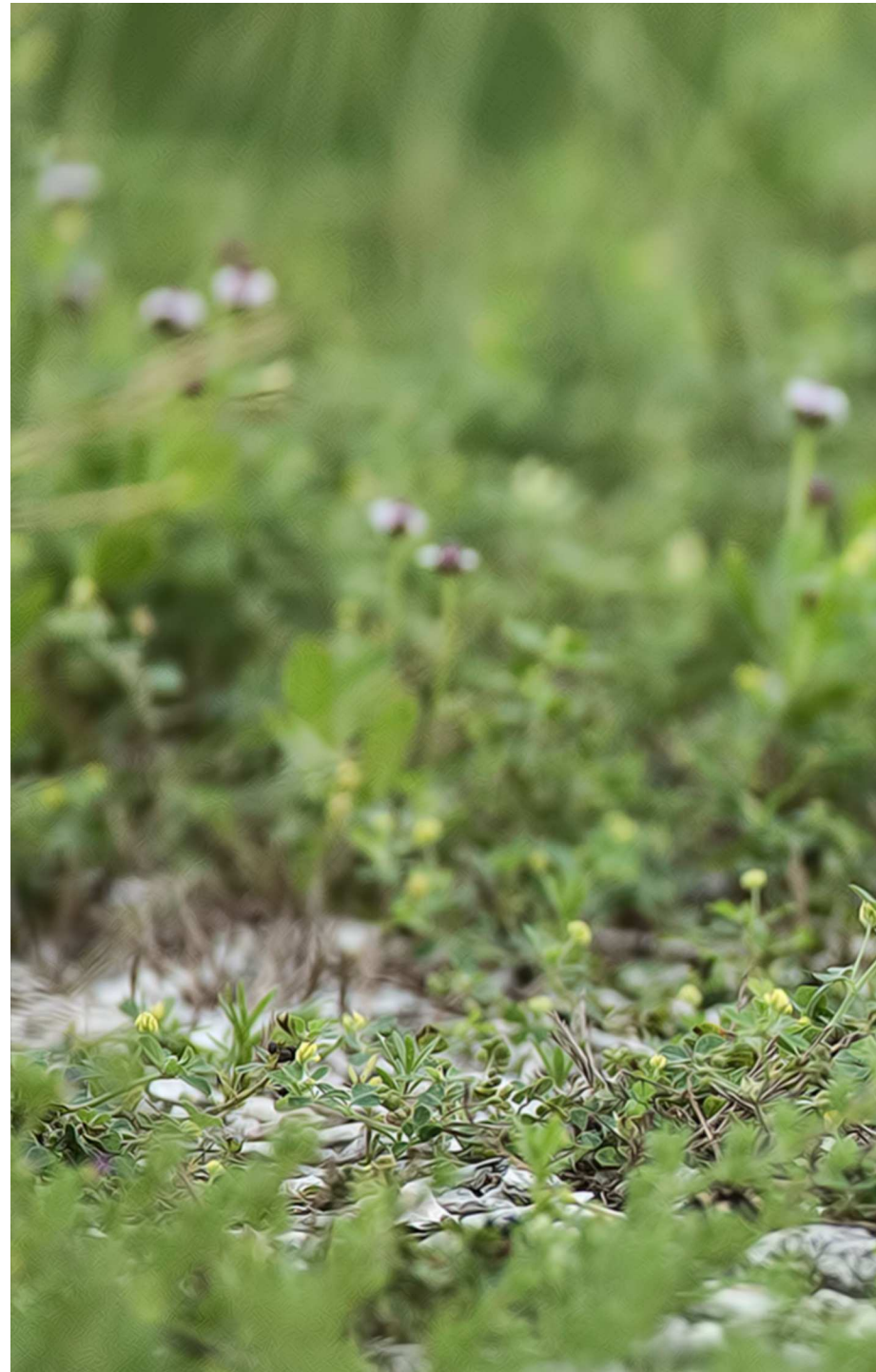
LAUGHING GULL
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



ROYAL TERN
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas

KILLDEER

Threat Display, Bluewater Highway near San Luis Pass,
Galveston Island,
Texas





AMERICAN REDSTART

Galveston Island,
Texas



WORM-EATING WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas





CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas



RED-EYED VIREO

Galveston Island,
Texas



TRICOLORED HERON
Sportsman Road, Galveston Island, Texas



TRICOLORED HERON
Sportsman Road, Galveston Island, Texas



CLAPPER RAIL

Bluewater Highway near San Luis Pass,
Galveston Island,
Texas





CLAPPER RAIL

Bluewater Highway near San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Texas



AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Texas



BLACK SKIMMER

San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



AMERICAN AVOCET

San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas

SUMMER TANAGER (FEMALE)
Galveston Island, Texas





ORCHARD ORIOLE (FEMALE)

Galveston Island, Texas



BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER

Galveston Island,

Texas

BLUE-WINGED WARBLER

Galveston Island,

Texas



HOODED WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas



TENNESSEE WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas



SUMMER TANAGER (MALE)
Galveston Island, Texas



WOOD THRUSH
Galveston Island, Texas



YELLOW WARBLER
Galveston Island, Texas



YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO
Galveston Island, Texas

ROYAL TERNS

Courtship Display near San Luis Pass,
Galveston Island, Texas







BLACK SKIMMER
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Texas



RUDDY TURNSTONE

San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



SANDERLING

San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



GREAT EGRET (Left)
TRICOLORED HERON (Top)
REDDISH EGRET (Right)

Sportsman Road, Galveston Island, Texas



COMMON NIGHTHAWK

Settegast Road,
Galveston Island,
Texas



COMMON NIGHTHAWK

Indian Beach,
Galveston Island,
Texas





HELMETED GUINEAFOWL
Settegast Road, Galveston Island, Texas



OVENBIRD
Galveston Island,
Texas



LINCOLN'S SPARROW
Galveston Island,
Texas

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

Galveston Island,
Texas



NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH

Galveston Island,
Texas



SANDERLING AND RUDDY TURNSTONE

San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Texas



MATING SANDWICH TERNS
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



WILLET
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island,
Texas



GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (MALE)
San Luis Pass, Galveston Island, Texas



GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (FEMALE)
Sportsman Road, Galveston Island, Texas

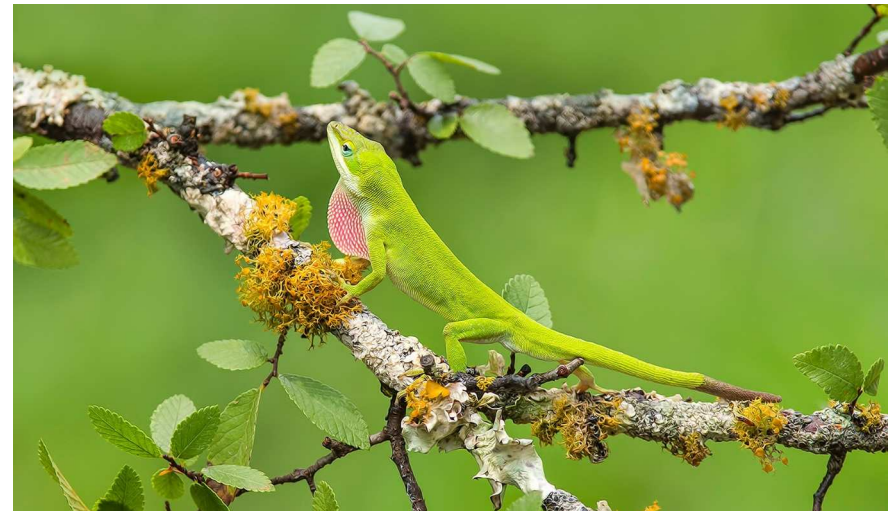
ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (MALE)



ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (FEMALE)



COMMON YELLOWTHROAT



CAROLINA "GREEN" ANOLE



BALTIMORE ORIOLE
Galveston Island, Texas

KENTUCKY WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas



BLACKPOLL WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas





GRAY CATBIRD
Galveston Island, Texas



ORCHARD ORIOLE (MALE)

Galveston Island, Texas



BAY-BREASTED WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas



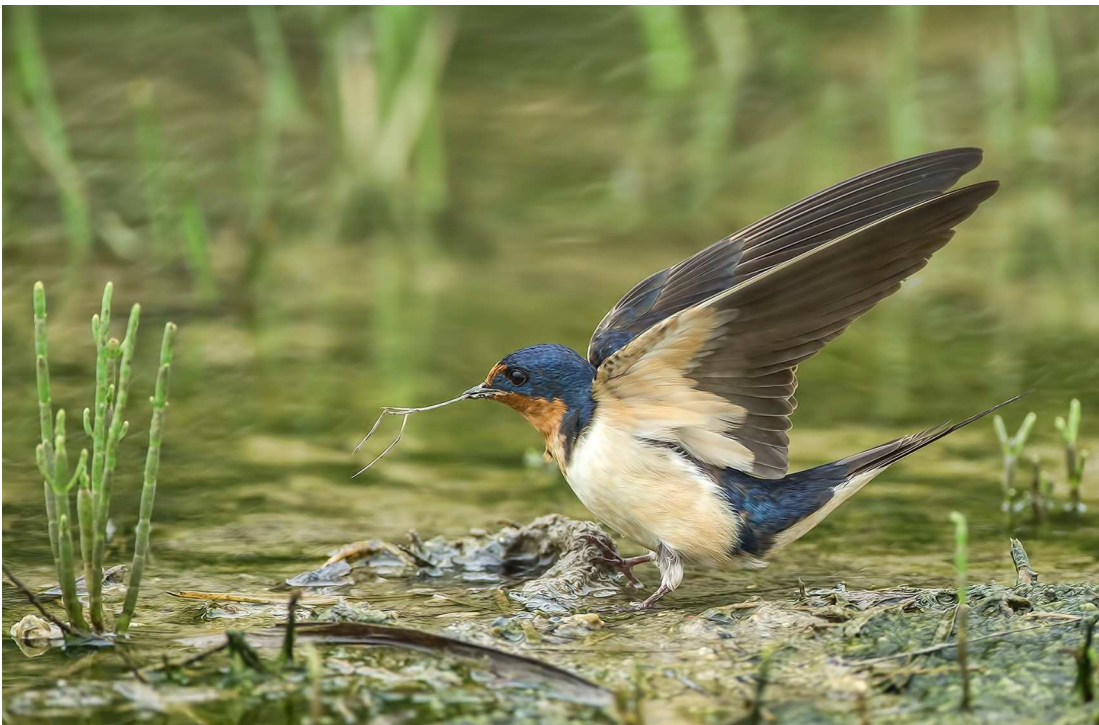
YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER

Galveston Island,
Texas



EASTERN KINGBIRD

State Park, Galveston Island, Texas



BARN SWALLOW

Sportsman Road,
Galveston Island,
Texas



BALTIMORE ORIOLE (JUVENILE)

Galveston Island,
Texas





CATTLE EGRET
Indian Beach, Galveston Island, Texas

Bolivar Peninsula

This can be an incredibly prolific area if you can muster some patience when working the crowded nesting sites and overgrown auto routes. A must, of course, was the rookery at High Island. The Audubon Smith Oakes Bird Sanctuary is a late afternoon, early evening location where the main attractions were Roseate Spoonbills, Great Egrets and Neotropic Cormorants. The sheer number of birds coupled with swarms of mosquitoes and constant squabbling amongst species makes working this site extremely difficult. Isolating birds requires patience, but many opportunities will pop up and flight images can be good from any of the well-placed viewing stands, especially with a moderate wind.

The auto route at the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge was a haven for Least Bitterns. We encountered many Scissor-Tailed Flycatchers along the entrance driveway. There were also several good locations along the northern portion of the Blue Water highway as we approached the Bolivar Ferry, most notably Rollover Pass, Bob Road and Frenchtown Road. The former is certainly the best as we encountered Black Skimmers feeding at high tide. It's also home to the Tidal Flats, one of the best birding locations in the area. We were also treated to several hard to get species along the western side of Tuna Road, most notably the Seaside Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-Tailed Sparrow and Wilson's Plover.

GREAT EGRET

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith Oakes
Bird Sanctuary near Stowell, Texas







NEOTROPIC CORMORANT

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith Oakes Bird Sanctuary near Stowell, Texas



NESTING GREAT EGRETS

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary near Stowell, Texas



ROSEATE SPOONBILL

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith Oakes Bird Sanctuary near Stowell, Texas

ROSEATE SPOONBILL

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith Oakes Bird Sanctuary near Stowell, Texas





GREAT EGRET NEST
Houston Audubon High Island, Smith
Oakes Bird Sanctuary near Stowell,
Texas







SNOWY EGRETS

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary near Stowell, Texas



ROSEATE SPOONBILL

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith
Oakes Bird Sanctuary near Stowell,
Texas



WHITE IBIS

Houston Audubon High Island Smith
Oakes Bird Sanctuary near Stowell,
Texas



NEOTROPIC CORMORANT NEST

Houston Audubon High Island, Smith Oakes Bird Sanctuary
near Stowell, Texas



**NELSON'S
SHARP-TAILED SPARROW**
North Tuna Drive, Bolivar Peninsula,
Texas







Coastal Interior

Although we loosely define this area as supporting many good bird and wildlife sanctuaries that roughly skirt the City of Houston, we certainly had some favourite locations. The Forty Acre Lake walking trail at Brazos Bend State Park leads through a live oak and hackberry forest mottled with cascading Spanish moss. Here the waterway hosts Yellow-Crowned Night-Herons, Purple Gallinules, Little Blue and Green Herons. It was also an excellent place to catch early migrants such as the Prothonotary Warbler and Northern Parula. We had to keep an eye out for American alligators and poison ivy as the trail edge can be a dangerous place for the unaware. The auto route at Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge was good for Common Yellowthroat roadside. Again, we had to be aware that chiggers and cottonmouth snakes were a hazard.

Although slightly outside the greater Houston area, we did visit the Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary and adjacent Xeriscape Park. These were morning events and, in our opinion, had better water attractions than those found on Galveston Island. There was also the opportunity to capture Purple Martin in flight at the Visitor's Center. We certainly enjoyed driving the shoreline at nearby Bryans Beach where Least and Sandwich Terns provided good flight image opportunities as they moved back and forth along the shoreline and jetty. The surf also coughed up several gulls, most notably the Lesser Black-Backed, California and Herring, contributing overall to a satisfying photography experience for this area.

CATTLE EGRET EATING A SKINK

Brazos Bend State Park near Needville, Texas

High on the agenda of our last visit to this area in April 2016 was to track down a Dickcissel, a bird that has eluded us for some time. It's a late arrival in early May and somewhat of a loner that requires a fair amount of patience to ferret out. We visited many of the known locations and finally hit pay dirt at the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge in Brazoria County where we found our quarry roadside in the low scrub along the Moccasin Pond Loop.

One evening we had a great visit to the Texas City Dike which proved a fitting ending to our trip. This drivable levee projects nearly five miles into the mouth of Galveston Bay. Here the shorebirds were habituated to humans and we found many compliant subjects bathed in the last rays of the evening sun.

DICKCISSEL

San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge near Brazoria, Texas





NORTHERN PARULA
Brazos Bend State Park near Needville,
Texas



COMMON GALLINULE
Brazos Bend State Park near Needville,
Texas

PURPLE GALLINULE

Brazos Bend State Park near Needville,
Texas



SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER

Anahuac National Wildlife
Refuge near Winnie,
Texas



LITTLE BLUE HERON

Brazos Bend State Park near Needville, Texas



AMERICAN AVOCET
Dike near Texas City, Texas

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON



PROTHONOTARY WARBLER



AMERICAN BITTERN



GREAT EGRET



GREEN HERON

Brazos Bend State Park near Needville, Texas

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR
San Bernard National Wildlife
Refuge near Brazoria,
Texas



AMERICAN ALLIGATOR
Brazos Bend State Park near Needville,
Texas





AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge near Angleton, Texas



WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL
Sugar Land near Houston, Texas



BLUE JAY

Sugar Land near Houston,
Texas



CAROLINA CHICKADEE

Sugar Land near Houston,
Texas

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

Sugar Land near Houston,
Texas



WHITE-WINGED DOVE

Sugar Land near Houston,
Texas





YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON
Brazos Bend State Park near Needville, Texas

Eastern Lower Gulf Coast

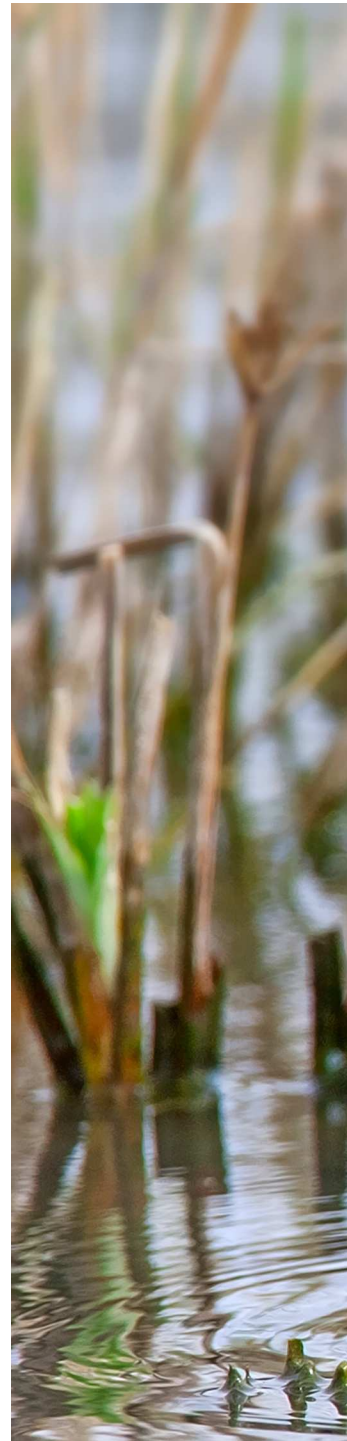
The Rio Grande Valley is an area located in the southernmost tip of Texas. It lies along the northern bank of the Rio Grande River which separates Mexico from the United States. It is really a delta or floodplain that stretches from the lush lower gulf coast in the east to arid plains in the west. It is mostly a flat, fertile terrain known for hot weather year-round. Much of the interior, however, is covered with a dense growth of prickly pear cactus and wild shrubs such as dwarf oak and mesquite.

Our introduction to this area began in late 2005 on South Padre Island near the Black Mangrove Tidal Flats across from Port Isabel. This was not only our first really extended photography excursion but also early on in our learning curve when we were still grappling with unsophisticated equipment and the initial vagaries of digital camera technology. Notwithstanding, it was an exciting step forward in a location where great weather and prolific bird life combined to create incredible photography opportunities. Here, next to Fish Bones pier, portraits of Brown Pelicans were easy to capture as they roosted and preened on the pylons or simply floated lazily in the water awaiting a handout from the commercial fish boats. North of the pier at the Laguna Madre Breakwater we found terns and gulls in abundance. But the prime spot was the boardwalk at the Laguna Madre Nature Trail where we encountered Clapper Rails, White Ibis and Little Blue Herons. It was also a great location to photograph Black Skimmers as they glided with open beaks over the water surface foraging for dinner in the late afternoon.

We were treated to a rare but fleeting glimpse of an Ocelot along the Bayside Drive auto route at the nearby Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Although the interior is overgrown and difficult to position for any meaningful photography, it was a good location for Greater Roadrunners as they consistently made an appearance roadside in late afternoon next to the refuge entrance. Aplomado Falcons and other raptors were prevalent on all the surrounding country roads where they perch and hunt for mice from farm fence posts.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL

World Birding Center,
Estero Llano Grande State Park near Weslaco, Texas





Although we also found dense vegetation at the Audubon Sabal Palm Sanctuary at Brownsville, the boardwalk and photo blind coughed up several Black-Crowned Night-Herons and a Belted Kingfisher in open terrain with good light.

We visited several other well-known locations in the area. Goose Island, especially near the pier, was a good place for Willet and Long-Billed Curlew. A great day trip was the Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge as Wild Turkey, Collared Peccary and Armadillo frequent the area. The real attraction here, of course, was the Whooping Crane. We soon found that they were simply too far from the elevated viewing platform for any realistic photography. Instead, we booked one of the charters that cater to photographers that want to capture this bird as it forages along the coastline. We enjoyed a great day on the "Jack Flash" and the outing provided an opportunity to see the refuge from a completely different perspective.

In early 2006, we progressed north along the coast to Rockport. Our favourite location in this area was the Port Aransas Birding Center where we honed our flight image skills on Black-Bellied Whistling Ducks and Roseate Spoonbills. Although the nearby Paradise Pond was overgrown, it was a wonderful place to find roosting Great Blue Herons or various passerines such as the Yellow-Rumped Warbler. We enjoyed a spectacular beach drive on Mustang Island where calm surf and a sweet late afternoon light combined to create many intimate eye-level opportunities to photograph resting and foraging shorebirds. Our trip to Rockport also included many visits to Fulton Harbor. This turned out to be a hangout for American White Pelicans attracted to the rocky shoreline by buckets of fish “guts” doled out by commercial fishermen, an afternoon event that both the birds and photographers looked forward to. We discovered a great way to end the day was to visit either Rockport Beach Park or the city pier to take advantage of the evening light.

What an area – the opportunities to us seemed endless!

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT

World Birding Center,
Estero Llano Grande State Park near Weslaco, Texas





BROWN PELICAN

Fish Bones Pier, South Padre Island, Texas



ANHINGA

World Birding Center, Estero Llano
Grande State Park near Weslaco,
Texas



WHITE IBIS

World Birding Center, Estero Llano
Grande State Park near Weslaco,
Texas



APLOMADO FALCON
Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife
Refuge, Cameron County,
Texas

WHOOPING CRANE
Matagorda Island,
Texas





WILD TURKEY TOM

Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge near Hopper's Landing, Texas



ARMADILLO

Aransas and Matagorda Island
National Wildlife Refuge
near Hopper's Landing,
Texas

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN

Fulton Harbor,
Texas



**BLACK-BELLIED
WHISTLING DUCK**

Birding Center,
Port Aransas,
Texas



SOLITARY SANDPIPER

World Birding Center,
Estero Llano Grande State Park,
Weslaco,
Texas





Western Private Ranches

Besides the easily accessible public locations, south Texas is unique in that there are many private ranches whose owners protect or are restoring habitat to attract resident and migratory birds and wildlife with regular feed and water attractions. Most have well-established blind setups and cater to both birders and photographers for a fee. We had several target species in mind but were keying on the Audubon Oriole and Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl advertised at two ranch locations. Although both species inhabit south Texas, their secretive nature makes them difficult to find and photograph. Many of these locations also attract songbirds, especially warblers. In April and May, migrants stop at the ranch water traps to rest and refuel before continuing north.

We found the ponds located in front of the blinds were incredible for capturing reflection or action images of birds as they drink and bathe. The blinds we utilized were usually well positioned to take advantage of morning or afternoon light, many either partially buried or on elevated stands that produced intimate eye-level photographs. Here we sat and photographed in comfort, avoiding the overgrown habitat and pressure of crowded refuges. It also afforded us the opportunity to create controlled “set-piece” compositions using indigenous perch material in good light and with decent backdrops. It was not surprising that many professional photographers use these ranches to lead workshops.

Three of the most notable ranches we visited in the Edinburg area were Laguna Seca, Martin Refuge and Santa Clara. On an earlier trip, we tried the Ramirez Ranch in Roma and the now closed Martin Homestead where our bucket list included Harris's Hawk and Crested Caracara at the former and Great Kiskadee at the latter. A favourite near the coast was Casa Santa Ana where our targets were the Clay-Colored Thrush and Buff-Bellied Hummingbird. Although there are roughly twenty ranches located throughout the state, we feel these are some of the best that south Texas has to offer.

GREATER ROADRUNNER

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (MALE)
Casa Santa Ana near Alamo, Texas



NORTHERN CARDINAL (FEMALE)
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas





WHITE-TAILED HAWK

Laguna Seca Ranch near Edinburg, Texas

HARRIS'S HAWK

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



BRONZED COWBIRD (MALE)

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



NORTHERN BOBWHITE QUAIL

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas





CLAY-COLORED THRUSH

Casa Santa Ana near Alamo,
Texas



PYRRHULOXIA (FEMALE)

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas

CRESTED CARACARA

Laguna Seca Ranch near Edinburg,
Texas



CRESTED CARACARA

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas





CRESTED CARACARA
Laguna Seca Ranch near Edinburg, Texas



PYRRHULOXIA (MALE)
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas

PLAIN CHACHALACA
Martin Refuge near Mission,
Texas



COMMON GROUND DOVE
Martin Homestead Refuge near Edinburg,
Texas



WHITE-TAILED HAWK
Laguna Seca Ranch near Edinburg,
Texas



GREATER ROADRUNNER
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



MEXICAN GROUND SQUIRREL
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



GOLDEN FRONTED WOODPECKER (MALE)

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



CURVE-BILLED THRASHER
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



LONG-BILLED THRASHER
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas

GREEN JAY

Casa Santa Ana near Alamo,
Texas



ALTIMIRA ORIOLE

Casa Santa Ana near Alamo,
Texas





GREAT KISKADEE
Casa Santa Ana near Alamo, Texas



GREAT KISKADEE
Casa Santa Ana near Alamo, Texas



GREAT KISKADEE

Casa Santa Ana near Alamo, Texas

MOURNING DOVE

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



LEOPARD FROG

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas





COACH WHIP SNAKE

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



INCA DOVE

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



CRESTED CARACARA
Martin Refuge near Mission, Texas



CRESTED CARACARA

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



LARK SPARROW
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



OLIVE SPARROW
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



AUDUBON ORIOLE (MALE)
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



FERRUGINOUS PYGMY OWL
San Miguelito Ranch near Raymondville, Texas



TURKEY VULTURE

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas



CRESTED CARACARA

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook,
Texas

NORTHERN CARDINAL (MALE)



BROWN COWBIRD (MALE)



BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE



NORTHERN CARDINAL (MALE)

Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



COLLARED PECCARY "JAVELINA"
Santa Clara Ranch near McCook, Texas



NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

Ramirez Ranch near Roma,
Texas



WHITE-TAILED HAWK

Laguna Seca Ranch near Edinburg,
Texas

HARRIS'S HAWK
Ramirez Ranch near Roma,
Texas



WHITE-TIPPED DOVE
Ramirez Ranch near Roma,
Texas



PIXEL BENDER OIL PAINTING
NORTHERN BOBWHITE QUAIL “HIDDEN IN THE TREES”

Our Photography Journey...

The adventure began during the latter part of our careers when we started to ponder the question of what to do during our retirement. We had no objective in mind but finally settled on the combination of travel and nature photography as something that might be an interesting pastime. After months of agonizing research, we became early adopters of Canon's transition from film to digital camera bodies. What started as an overwhelming introduction to an emerging and complex technology soon mushroomed into somewhat of an obsession, especially as we progressed from wandering around local habitat searching for compliant subjects to attracting birds to sets we designed and photographed from a blind in our back yard. As we became more proficient behind the camera, we decided to focus our attention on travelling to locations in western North America, targeting sites known for outstanding bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography. Although our approach to stalking subjects "in the wild" produced some compelling images, we soon learned that most eye-catching exposures are the result of set-piece creations where subject behavior and ambient light are manipulated in a controlled setting. This is most readily achieved when photographing birds. The concept of "Birds as Art" was first introduced by Arthur Morris and subsequently taken to unprecedented heights as an artform by Alan Murphy. Both photographers raised the bar for what eventually became a photographic standard and one we passionately pursued as an adjunct to the traditional approach of simply searching for subjects in their natural habitat.

Not surprisingly, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began by producing web graphics and hosting an educational blog online for beginner photographers. As the sophistication of the digital darkroom evolved, a host of programs began to appear that elevated post-processing techniques to a new and exciting level. This led us to not only improve our web graphics but also to experiment in-house with the production of large prints on specialty media, including textured watercolor paper and canvas. During this time, we became overwhelmed by the emerging world of digital art, a niche genre designed to create stunning special effects from photographs. At the time of publication, our favorites were Pixel Bender, a Photoshop plug-in with an Oil Paint filter and LucisArt, a standalone program that creates incredible watercolor renditions. Both programs became mainstays in our Photoshop workflow.

This book is our self-published attempt to showcase, in print, a selection of photographs from our Texas travels.

Texas

Nature Photography

Bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography is an enjoyable and absorbing pastime. It's also an immense amount of fun! The advent of the digital camera and image enhancement software has had a significant impact on what was once the domain of professionals and serious amateurs. Today, it's an accessible and affordable hobby, no matter what your level of entry.

Like most photographers, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began with web graphics of photographs captured at outstanding locations throughout western North America, including: Alaska, Alberta, Arizona, British Columbia, California, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Nunavut, Oregon, Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, the Yukon and several sites we visited in eastern Canada.

This book contains selected images from our travels throughout Texas.

