

TEXAS BIRDING BONANZA

The southernmost part of Texas doesn't factor high in most Americans' thinking—perhaps if they give it a thought, illegal immigration or spring break on South Padre Island come to mind. But to birders, it is one of the most famous regions of the entire country. It is home to many species of birds that occur nowhere else north of the Rio Grande and is known as a place where wildly unexpected birds from south of the border show up from time to time, much to birders' delight.

Earlier this year, Josh Engler of Red Hill Birding based in Highland Park Illinois, organized a short private birding tour for me, through his amazing birding and wildlife tour company. Josh and I had done a similar trip last fall to the Black Hills of South Dakota. This time, we flew to the town of Harlingen, close to the Mexican border and the Gulf of Mexico, and spent four nights based at a hotel there.

Despite unseasonably poor weather, we made the most of our time, visiting some of the region's most famous birding sites, like Sabal Palm Sanctuary (which you have to cross through the border wall to access), Estero Llano Grande State Park and the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center.

Some of the special birds that we saw included Green Jay, Plain Chachalaca, Altamira Oriole, Roseate Spoonbill, and Common Pauraque. We also visited a spectacular parrot roost, where nearly two hundred Red-crowned Parrots fed (and screamed) just over our heads fading late afternoon sun.



This region also has a rich human history. We visited the Palo Alto Battlefields National Historic Park, the site of the first battle of the Mexican-American War, with a small museum about the battle and the war; the Historic Brownsville Museum, which has displays about the history of the bustling region on both sides of the Rio Grande, the Palmito Hill Battlefield, site of the last battle of the Civil War, the famous Border Ball along the Texas/Mexican border, and Space X, Elon Musk's American space technology company headquartered at the Starbase

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development site near Brownsville, Texas. We really had a wonderful time, because Josh is a brilliant birding expert who is fun and extremely knowledgeable.



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