

## Birding Undiscovered Secret

### **ZAPATA COUNTY TEXAS, BIRDING'S UNDISCOVERED SECRET**

Zapata County is one of the great, undiscovered secrets in the birding world. With no fewer than 290 species recorded in the county, it offers many of the lower Rio Grande specialty species that birders come from around the world to see.

- Chachalaca,
- Altamira Oriole,
- White-Tipped Dove,
- Ringed Kingfisher,
- Great Kiskadee
- Olive Sparrow
- Long-Billed Thrasher
- Green Jay
- Couch Kingbird
- Audubon's Oriole
- Hooded Oriole
- Olive Sparrow.

In addition, the area also offers many desert bird species.

- Cactus Wren
- Varied Bunting
- Scaled Quail
- Verdin
- Chihuahua Raven
- Poor-Will
- Black Phoebe
- Black-Tailed Gnatcatcher
- Green-Tailed Grackle
- Cassin's Sparrow
- Black-Throated Sparrow.

And several local specialty species

- Red-Billed Pigeon
- Muscovy Duck
- White-Collared Seedeater.

These birds, combined with wide open spaces, the Mexican culture and hospitality of the area, and you can create a truly memorable experience. Also take into consideration the number of species of birds found in Mexico within 150 miles of Zapata County.

- Rufous-Browed Pepper Shrike
- Boat-Billed Flycatcher,
- Altamira, Yellowthroat
- Linnated Woodpecker
- Blue-Crowned Motmot
- Crimson-Collared Grosbeak
- White-Bellied Wren
- Rusty Sparrow
- Tawny-Collared Nightjar
- Golden-crowned warbler

And maybe you will be the first to record a new bird species on American soil!

The Tama Lipan thorn forest that dominates the landscape of Zapata County is dominated by: mesquite, spiny hackberry (granjeno), prickly ash, and Texas ebony (ebano). Once you move closer to the Rio Grande, the desert scrub gives way to deciduous woodland with mixed areas of tropical semi deciduous forest.

We are only now beginning to realize the potential birding opportunities within Zapata County. Come explore what is last South Texas birding Frontier.

Texas Lower Coast Birding Trail Site #87 is the San Ygnacio Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary located off highway US 83 in San Ygnacio, TX. Make a turn towards the river onto Washington Avenue all the way to the end of the street. Park on the left parking lot and walk down into the Rio Grande River Flood Plain. The Sanctuary consist of two river front acres to the left of the end of Washington Ave. The main attraction is the White-Collared Seedeater. These birds nests in the Carrizo (fragmite) that is found in mostly by the river in San Ygnacio. A total of 115 different species of birds have been documented. Another hot location for the WCSE in Zapata is behind the Olga Figueroa Library around a pond located there.

Other rare birds that have been seen in San Ygnacio are:

- Roadside Hawk
- Yucatan Jay
- Red-billed Pigeon
- Clay Color Robin
- Brown Jay
- Muscovy Duck

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Zapata has excellent birdwatching opportunities. The white-collared seedeater has made its home near City Park for years. In, addition the scaled quail, red-billed pigeon, Cassin's & black-throated sparrow, black-tailed gnatcatcher & varied bunting can be seen here. Many other species of birds associated with Lower Rio Grande Valley have been spotted here as well.

## Birding Sites on the Lower Texas Coast

### Roma Bluffs:

On the Rio Grande River you will find steps leading down the steep bank to a picnic area. (be careful) On the south end of the Historic Plaza and west of the International Bridge is the best wildlife viewing spot. Visitor Center open daily.

**Directions:** From US 83 in Roma, turns SW on Lincoln St 3 blocks to Estrella St. park in the historical district along the Rio Grande River.

**Bird Species:** Muscovy Duck, Red-billed Pigeon, Clay-colored Robin, Audubon's Oriole, Lesser Goldfinch, Belted Green and Ringed Kingfisher.

**Butterfly Species:** Polydamas Swallowtail, Orange-barrred Sulphur, Statura Sulphur, Mexican Yellow, Tailed Orange, Mimosa Yellow, Marine Blue, Fatal Metalmark, Red-bordered Metalmark, Mexican Silverspot, Zebra, Mexican Fritillary, Banded Peacock, Band-celled Sister, Mexican Bluewing, Coomon Mestra.

### Fronton:

Covered in native habitat this stretch of Rio Grande River provides some of the best remaining riparian woodlands along this river.

**Directions:** From US 83 North of Roma turn West on Fm 650. Go 4.8 miles to Fronton, turn South on River Rd and continue South to Rio Grand River.

**Bird Species:** Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants, Spotted, Western and Least Sandpipers, Sora, Common Moorhen, Common Yellowthroat, Red-winged Blackbird, Belted, Green and Ringed Kingfisher, Groove-billed Ani, Altamira and Audubon's Oriole.

### Chapeno: - Call Ahead

From the Manager's house, road parallels the Rio Grande River and then curves down to the river. If, picnic area is closed, it is permissible to go around it. Fee of \$2.00 for bird watching.

**Directions:** From US 83 W of Roma, 10 miles, turn W on Fm 2098. Entering Falcon Heights watch for Chapeno Rd across from the Catholic Church. Turn South on Chapeno Rd and go 2.7 miles.

**Bird Species:** Muscovy Duck, Hook-billed Kite, Gray Hawk, Red-billed Piegion, Brown Jay and Audubon's Oriole.

### Falcon Dam and Spillway:

The best birding done from below the dam, accessible by foot only. Walk past gate on dirt road leading down river and there are several side roads that you can explore. To drive onto the dam road you will have to go thru customs coming back. We suggest you ask to park at customs ( 7:15am to 8:45pm daily) and walk onto the dam road to view 60-mile long lake.

**Directions:** From US 83 West of Roma, 10 miles, turn West on FM 2098, go thru Falcon Heights turn South on Spur 2098. Turn SE at 1 mile before you arrive at the customs station.

**Bird Species:** Least and Baird's Sandpipers, Zone-tailed Hwaks, Turkey Vultures, Couch's Kingbirds, Osprey, Red-billed Pigeon, Ringed Kingfisher, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, Brown Jays, Audubon's Orioles.

### Falcon Ranch

This is a private game refuge, but viewing is permissible from the road.

**Directions:** From US 83 West of Roma, 10 miles, turn West on FM 2098 Proceed thru Falcon Heights. Turn NE and continue on FM 2098 1.4 miles to a great overlook of a pond on the NW side of the highway.

**Bird Species:** Hooded Merganser, Vermillion Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Great Blue Heron, Caracara, Harris's Hawk, Common Ground Doves.

### Salineno Tract

Riverfront and Valley Land Fund Dewind Tract area. At fork go right and continue thru town past the Catholic Church, to the Rio Grande River and the lookout. Just up road from lookout and about 60 yards back from river's edge is the Dewind Tract. Maintained Nov-March, Open 7:30am-4:00pm daily by Pat and Gale Dewind. Area is surrounded by a chain link fence and has no signage. Roll gate back to a closed position after entering, but do not enter if no one is around or a No Trespassing sign is on the gate. Up the road from the Birder Colony is the water treatment pond.

**Directions:** From US 83 West of Roma, turn left at sign for Salineno.

**Bird Species;** Pied-billed Grebe, Neotropic and Double-crested Cormorants, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted, Western and Least Sandpipers, American Pipit, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Great Kiskadee, Brown and Green Jay, Bewick's Wren, Black-crested Titmouse, Olive Sparrow, Nothern Cardinal, Altamira, Audubon's and Hooded Orioles.

### Santa Margarita Ranch:

Do not get out of the car at the house due to guard dogs. \$2.00 per person – Residents of the ranch are not responsible for injuries sustained while on their property. Residents will show you where to park and walk to the river.

**Directions:** On US 83 West of Roma go 5.7 miles, turn South on old US 83 Rd, turn South onto the 1<sup>st</sup> unmarked dirt road after crossing the bridge. Continue .7 miles and take the W(right) fork, continue .3 miles and take the S(left) fork. At the top of the hill you can see the ranch houses, proceed 1 mile. Go to the 1<sup>st</sup> house and honk your horn. If, no one comes out, go to the 2<sup>nd</sup> house and park at the gate. Continue on foot to the river.

**Bird Species:** Muscovy Duck, Red Billed Pigeon, Common Pauraque, Belted, Ringed and Green Kingfishers, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Cactus Wren, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo, Painted and Varied Buntings, Pyrrhuloxia, Altamira and Audubon's Orioles, Eastern Screech-Owl, Elf Owl, Great Horned Owl, "Texas" Red-shouldered Hawk.

**Butterfly Species:** Large Orange Sulphur, Lyside Sulphur, Mexican Yellow, Mimosa Yellow, Marine Blue, Fatal Metalmark, Rounded Metalmark, Red-bordered Metalmark, Walker's Metalmark, Mexican Fritillary, Rosita Patch, Elada Cherckerspot, Banded Peacock, Common Mestra.

### Zapata County Park / Birding Trail:

Area is partially surrounded by wooded area and has a pond. Zapata is the best location in the Rio Grande Valley to find the White-collared Seedeater.

**Directions:** On US 83 from Roma go West 40 miles to Zapata. Turn West on 9<sup>th</sup> St and proceed 2 blocks to the park. Parking is at the Zapata County Library.

**Bird Species:** White-collared Seedeater, Cave Swallow, Green Jay, Altamira Oriole, Say's Phoebe, Vermillion Flycatcher, Couch's Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Long-billed Thrasher, Cassin's Sparrow.