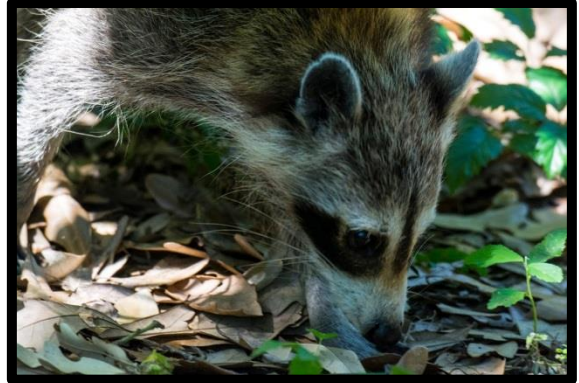


Houston Audubon May Senior Bus Trip 2018



The sun was just peaking over the horizon when I arrived at the bus rendezvous location. Folks were already on board and ready to go at 7:15AM. It was going to be a full day and a long drive to Sabine Pass.

The weather was predicted to be perfect yet hot and steamy but that was no deterrent to the Houston Audubon Bus Trippers. Fighting traffic from as far away as Sealy and Austin the group was slowly arriving. Our bus driver was concerned about lunch at such a remote destination but I had him covered with a sub sandwich and lots of snacks for all.

At 7:45AM we were ready to go but one person was missing. JR was nowhere in sight. Suddenly a BMW was seen in the early morning light and JR had arrived. The bus erupted in a cheer as we pretended to pull away when he was parking. The trip was on and all were excited about our multiple destinations.

Our first stop was the Safety Rest Area in Chambers County. There were oohs and aahs about the bird mosaics in the restrooms and it was a nice welcome break to the monotony of driving in Houston traffic. We finally hit the Winnie exit and headed towards Port Arthur. The sun was climbing high in the sky as we reached Sabine Pass. Sabine Pass is the location of a famous Civil War battle that kept the pass in Confederate hands many years ago.



We caught glimpses of great birds along the way including a Swainson's Hawk, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Red-winged Blackbirds and plenty of egrets. Slowly the bus pulled into the parking at Sabine Woods. This location has taken some hard hits from hurricanes over the years and all were eager to visit. The woods were alive with bird song and activity and as anyone who has visited Sabine Woods knows it is not always easy to "see" the birds in the dense foliage. The group persevered and soon everyone was waving in great appreciation of the birds they were seeing. Actually that is not



true. We were all waving to try to thwart the swarms of flies.

Apparently, the flies could care less if we were covered in mosquito repellent. So down the trails we went hitting each other and waving our arms frantically trying to wave off the fly swarms. An active raccoon was not impressed with our synchronized hand motions and he carried on

with his business as if we were not even there. Thankfully the birds didn't care if we looked ridiculous. Indigo Buntings, Summer Tanagers and more were in sight for all to enjoy. Boat-tailed Grackles were a welcome change from the Great-tailed we are all accustomed to.

After roaming the woods with our arms flailing for a while we left our donations and headed for Sea Rim State Park. It soon turned out that it would be a "sora" of a day. We checked in at the headquarters and soon headed to the beach where the Red-winged Blackbirds were on full display. A few Dunlin and Western Sandpipers were on the sand along with some Sanderlings. The beach was pretty quiet except for the blackbirds so we headed to the marsh trail. Lunch was a brown bag on board and I finally released access to the Oreo cookies. The marsh trail was a treasure trove of soras and other shorebirds. The sun was beating down on human and bird alike as the afternoon wore on and it was soon time to hit the road again in a nice air-conditioned county bus. Yes, some folks may look upon us and think "well there goes another group of prisoners" but this crew had cookies, ice cold water and Texas oranges on board for all to enjoy.

The bus was soon churning into the bustling town of Port Arthur that was hit hard by Hurricane Harvey, Rita, Humberto and more. It seems to be the town that is always in recovery mode. The downtown is pretty desolate except for the Police Station and museum. We arrived at the Museum of the Gulf Coast just in time for a tour from their new programs director Andy. Few on the bus had ever visited the museum and all were impressed with the history on display. It is not just the home of Janis Joplin but home to many more famous





folks from the Golden Triangle area and includes lots of historical war history and ecological history. From historic spindle top photos to current drone footage of Bolivar Peninsula the museum was a hit!

The hot May sun was signaling it was time to hit the road again and we all loaded the bus wishing we

had much more time at all of our locations. We pulled out of Port Arthur with a hum on the bus of a good day of birding and exploration. It was time for snacks and naps as we braced for the impending Houston traffic.

We sincerely thank Harris County for these bus trips and look forward to many more in the future. Thanks Jim Whitaker for the museum and group shot photos!

