

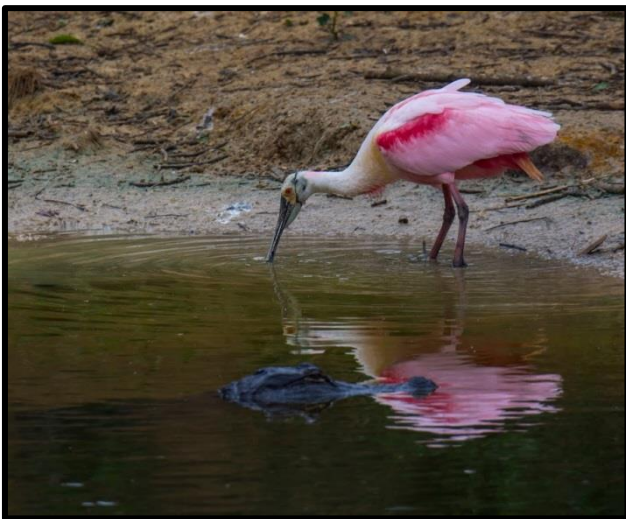
## Houston Audubon Senior Bus Trip April 2018

An intrepid group of senior bus trippers ventured forth for the April bus trip amid gloomy and raining skies. We met the bus at Memorial City Mall and as soon as all were boarded and checked in we began the misty trip east. It was not long before the group was calling for a stop at Buc-ee's on I-10. I obliged but cautioned all to not tarry. The bus was soon filled with the aroma of tacos and jerky and we continued our journey in the rain to High Island.



Many may think that a dreary and cold day on the upper Texas coast would not prove worth the effort but I knew we would have the woods to ourselves and lots of birds to enjoy. The migrants were struggling to make it across the gulf and need these precious stopovers for their very survival. This has been and continues to be a difficult spring for migratory birds. Houston Audubon sanctuaries are literally "Buc-ee's" for the birds. They need food, shelter, fresh water and a place to rest. I am so fortunate to work for an organization that manages so many pieces of critical habitat.

We finally arrived at Boy Scout Woods and quickly dispersed to enjoy the birds singing in the dense undergrowth. Buntings and swallows were abundant and a very cooperative Chuck-will's-widow was enjoyed by all.



From Boy Scout Woods we eagerly headed for the rookery at Smith Oaks. With all the misty rain there was no activity at the drips but I encouraged all to come again and revisit the drips. Many on the trip had never seen the rookery before so I knew it would be special. The rookery never disappoints. Huge thanks to our sanctuary team and the many volunteers who manage this property for



these nesting birds. It takes a village and lots of elbow grease and generous donations to keep this place secure for the birds. It doesn't matter how many times you visit the rookery at Smith Oaks it is always a special experience. Here are the birds, working so hard to raise their family in front of you with gators below waiting for their

chance at survival and the issues of this world seem very far away. It is a day by day survival for these young birds and this spring weather has been rough.

The bus trippers were in awe of the rookery but we had more to share. We headed to the Winnie Street entrance to watch Summer tanagers, a Black-and-white Warbler and Brown Thrasher singing its heart out. From there we headed west to Rollover Pass. It is always impressive to see how close the gulf is when you exit these sanctuaries. One minute you are in the woods and the next moment the waves are crashing over the beach adjacent to the highway.

The bus chugged on and we enjoyed the kites and pelicans along the road to Rollover Pass. We caught up with the great guides from Tropical Birding at the pass and they quickly pointed out the Pomarine Jaeger. It was such a treat! So many great birds were seen. There was also a Great Blue Heron who thought he had all the right moves and showed off for the bus before we left. Literally, he was showing off for the bus because the female was not interested at all.



The tide was high so we headed to the north jetty to watch hundreds of Lesser Scaup float along beside the ships and a flock of Cattle Egrets move in to the



marshes. We all watched a Forster's Tern catch a fish very close to the jetty and enjoyed a friendly Willet.

We then boarded the ferry with thoughts of gulls and dolphins. The dolphins were very active in front of the ferry as we waited to depart the docking area. Soon we headed to the back of the ferry to enjoy the gulls. I never tire of seeing the gulls following the ferry. It is always a treat. One Herring Gull hung in with the Laughing Gulls.

The photo album of our avian adventure can be viewed here:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/rZjKo3bjxQe3qB0q2>

We quickly made it to the mainland and opened the Oreo cookies and other treats. I gave permission for naps as we headed back to Houston. There were some undercurrent rumblings about stopping at Buc-ee's again but we had traffic to get through so folks could get home at a reasonable hour.

Houston Audubon Senior Bus Trips are always an adventure and we hope you consider joining us next time. There is a Buc-ee's stop in your future along with lots of amazing birds!



High Island--Smith Oaks Sanctuary (UTC 052), Galveston, Texas, US Apr 9, 2018 10:14 AM - 1:02 PM

Protocol: Traveling

4.475 mile(s)

42 species

Great Egret 47  
Snowy Egret 5  
Cattle Egret 1  
White Ibis 1  
Roseate Spoonbill 29  
Black Vulture 6  
Turkey Vulture 3  
Common Gallinule 2  
Spotted Sandpiper 1  
Royal Tern 1  
Chuck-will's-widow 1  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird 2  
Downy Woodpecker 1  
Great Crested Flycatcher 1  
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 2  
White-eyed Vireo 4  
Red-eyed Vireo 2  
Purple Martin 26  
Barn Swallow 4  
Cliff Swallow 4  
Gray Catbird 2  
Brown Thrasher 1  
Northern Mockingbird 1  
European Starling 4  
Cedar Waxwing 1  
Worm-eating Warbler 1  
Blue-winged Warbler 1  
Black-and-white Warbler 1  
Tennessee Warbler 1  
Kentucky Warbler 1  
Hooded Warbler 2  
American Redstart 1  
Northern Parula 3  
White-throated Sparrow 2  
Savannah Sparrow 1  
Summer Tanager 3  
Northern Cardinal 4  
Indigo Bunting 8  
Orchard Oriole 2  
Baltimore Oriole 5  
Great-tailed Grackle 6  
House Sparrow 3

Rollover Pass (UTC 056), Galveston, Texas, US Apr 9, 2018 1:20 PM - 1:40 PM

Protocol: Traveling

0.2 mile(s)

24 species

American White Pelican 12  
Brown Pelican 37  
Great Blue Heron 2  
Great Egret 33  
Snowy Egret 1  
Black-crowned Night-Heron 1  
Roseate Spoonbill 3  
Black-necked Stilt 2  
American Avocet 37  
Marbled Godwit 12  
Ruddy Turnstone 3  
Sanderling 2  
Least Sandpiper 9  
Long-billed Dowitcher 1  
Willet 3  
Pomarine Jaeger 1  
Laughing Gull 26  
Ring-billed Gull 4  
Herring Gull 1  
Forster's Tern 22  
Royal Tern 25  
Black Skimmer 78  
Crested Caracara 1  
Great-tailed Grackle 3

Port Bolivar, Galveston, Texas, US

Apr 9, 2018 2:00 PM - 3:10 PM

Protocol: Traveling

25.0 mile(s)

18 species

Blue-winged Teal 4  
Northern Shoveler 3  
Gadwall 2  
Green-winged Teal 4  
Lesser Scaup 250  
Pied-billed Grebe 1  
Great Blue Heron 1  
Cattle Egret 12  
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 1  
Osprey 1  
White-tailed Kite 2  
American Avocet 11

Willet 1  
Laughing Gull 55  
Forster's Tern 2  
Belted Kingfisher 1  
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher 1  
Red-winged Blackbird 3