

Hill Country & Uvalde

March 17 - 18, 2026



A desert-ready Curved-bill Thrasher



Vermilion Flycatcher i: Still a stunner each and every time !

80-ish Trip Total Species

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/489973>

43 species for day

Jones Cemetery – 11

Utopia Park – 12

Lost Maples SNA – 31

59 species for day

Uvalde Memorial Park – 12 + 16

Uvalde Natl Fish Hatchery – 42

Cook's Slough Sanctuary - 6

City of Uvalde Cemetery – 8

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Jones Cemetery, Utopia

Today is the day! No, it is NOT the day to make mere mortals into super-birders. It is the day to put some Vortex Triumph binocs in the hands and let them decide how far they wish to go with birding. That's what's great about birding, which from 'oh, pretty red bird' to obsessing over identifying the species of silent Empidonax flycatcher landed over there. Either way, we hope of Texas Hill Country – Uvalde tour inspires a love for nature and life-long learning.

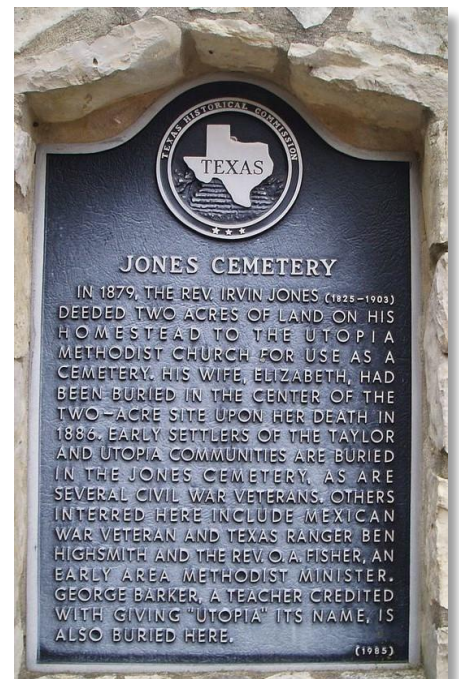
While the original plan was to stalk Golden-cheeked Warblers at Lost Maples, Mother Nature had other plans as night time temps were close enough to freezing for frost to appear on out fearless campers' roof. Since all Hill Country residents shun the cold – birds included – we decided to mix birding and morning site sighting. The lure of Vermilion Flycatcher at Jones Cemetery got us moving. Our *brasita de fuego* - 'little burning ember' - was found outside the fence, as well as a few more species hearty enough to brave the 46-degree cold. Of course, cemetery are also an interesting glimpse of local history. Discoveries lent themselves to further exploration into the Woodsmen of the World and the First Confederate flag.



Founded in 1890 and still active, this insurance company erected these interesting tombstones for their members



The Stars and Bars's 7 stars – eventually 13 – represent SC, MS, FL, AL, GA, LA and TEXAS



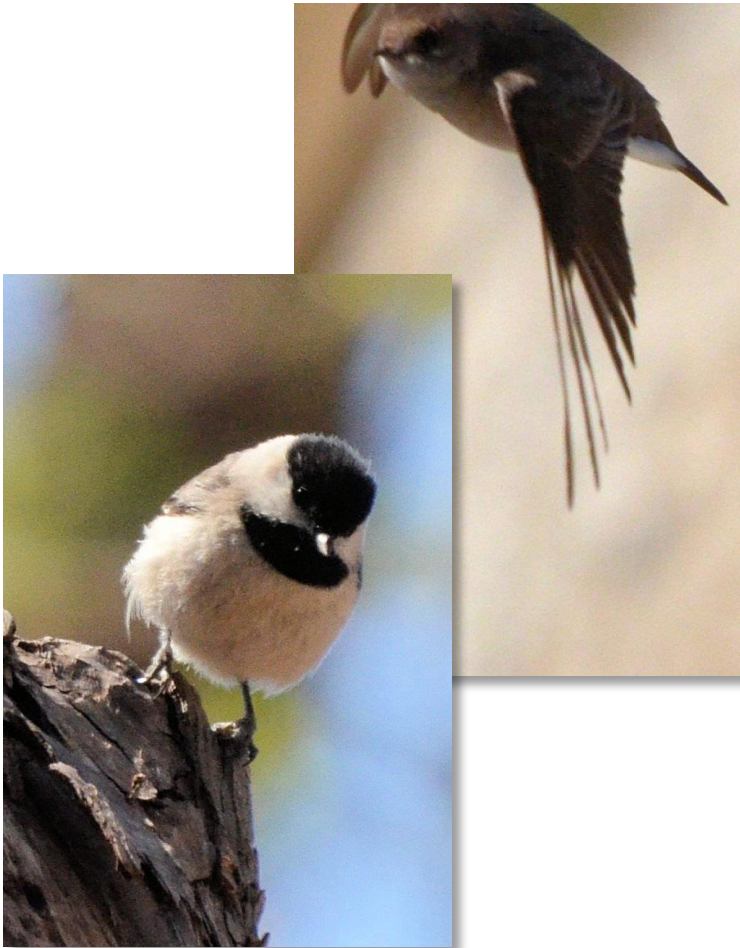
Originally named Waresville after an early settler, Barker claimed the place to be a utopia and it became so

Utopia Park

Lured by the promise of really big Bald Cypress trees and beautiful scenery, we ventured into Utopia Park. With our fast learners on those binoculars, all were treated to great views of **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, **Yellow-throated Vireos** and **Carolina Chickadees** and the likes. As for advanced photography, capturing a swallow in motion is a mix of skill, planning and luck. One **Rough-winged Swallow** flew off the dam and almost but not entirely out of the viewfinder. It's amazing to think about the amount of patience, skill and film was needed to get photos for those pixel-happy guide books. It goes a long way to explaining the even older illustrated field guides.

A single tree in a line of giants, all 5 of us 'hugged' the tree to measure a circumference of ~25 feet ! Calculations give a diameter of about 8 feet This tree is about $8 \text{ feet} \times 12 \text{ in/ft} \times 4.5 = > 430 \text{ years old!}$

Photography 101...not !



A tuxedo-clad Carolina Chickadee'



Bald Cypress : EVERYTHING's bigger in TEXAS !

Lost Maples State Natural Area (SNA)

After a not so small feast at Lost Maples Café, we were ready to conquer Lost Maples. As always, the bird blind held for us many rewards. Male **Lesser Goldfinches** showed off their crisp black and yellow plumage and male **Black-chinned Hummers** flashed us with their glimmery purple gorgets (chins). We spotted a **Spotted Towhee**, a first of season (FOS) **Scott's Oriole** and **Northern Cardinal** all on one rock. **Chipping, Rufous-Crowned** and **Lincoln's Sparrows** got us started in the 24+ possible Hill Country species. Behind the bird blind, a **Red-tailed Hawk** made a brief appearance, presumably enroute to a new – or possibly the established – nest site. It's always hard to leave the blind's many offerings but finally it was time to hot the trail. Thankfully, the canyon wall sheltered us from the winds that rocked the bird blind. On the trail, we found birds by both ear and eye. We heard the “car won't start” chi-chi-chi sound of the **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and even got to see its bright red crown a few times.

One tenet of birding is to “bird every bird”. It is as easy to dismiss a small bird foraging through a small bush as another Ruby-crowned Kinglet. However, a closer look revealed a **Golden-Crowned Kinglet**. Typically further north and east of here, they are always a treat to see in the Hill Country. While looking through the **Blue Gray Gnatcatchers** for breeding males, we did find one. From the below view – very punny – the outer white tail feathers of this species is visible. Our group photographer – as always – captured a better view featuring the tell-tale big black eyebrow and full personality of a breeding male.



Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher : Oops, wrong end



Ruby-crowned Kinglet : adorable name for an adorable bird



Golden-crowned Kinglet with his namesake crown

The most common warbler was by far the high-pitched eensy-eensy calling **Black and White Warbler**. Alas, a **Golden-Cheeked Warbler** slower song was heard but none were seen. Usually, they are high atop the trees by now establishing territory. With atypical weather patterns and an ongoing drought, maybe things are just a bit off this year. No doubt, they'll get here on their own schedule, not that of the birders. Near the end of the day, a side trek for **Canyon Wrens** (seen not heard) led us to this **Black Vulture** initially perched in a tree. Hopping down amongst the rocks, we were genuinely surprised to see it walk into this hole. A perfect dark, secluded cavity in which to lay its eggs; No nest required.



The Flying Bar code, aka Black and White Warbler



Campers beware:: Ravens love junk food



Black Vulture - if all bird names were so easy



Black vulture fledgling in a friend's backyard



BLVU "nesting" in here



Jones Cemetery, Utopia, Bandera, TX

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310171019>

Mar 17, 2026 10:00 AM - 10:30 AM

~0.3 miles; Temp: 46°F

Scattered clouds; Cloud Cover: 33%

Wind: Light breeze - gentle breeze

11 species

Turkey Vulture 3

Golden-fronted Woodpecker 1

Vermilion Flycatcher 1

Common Raven 2

Carolina Chickadee 2

Carolina Wren 1

Bewick's Wren 1

House Finch 2

Lark Sparrow 1

Red-winged Blackbird 1

Northern Cardinal 2

Utopia Park, Uvalde, TX

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310170706>

Mar 17, 2026 10:40 AM - 12:40 PM

~0.6 miles; Temp: 50 - 58°F

Scattered clouds - few clouds

Cloud Cover: 12 - 40%

Wind: Gentle breeze - moderate breeze

12 species

Black Vulture 1

Belted Kingfisher 1

American Kestrel 1

White-eyed Vireo 2

Hutton's Vireo 1

Yellow-throated Vireo 1

Carolina Chickadee 2

Northern Rough-winged Swallow 4

Black-and-white Warbler 1

Orange-crowned Warbler 1

Yellow-rumped Warbler 3

Yellow-throated Warbler 1



While you might expect this giant to be in the Hill Country, this enormous oak is right next to Uvalde Memorial Park. This juxtaposition epitomizes the blend of Hill Country and desert and the opportunities for both overlapping and distinctly different species in both.

Lost Maples SNA, Bandera, TX

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310170202>

Mar 17, 2026 2:00 PM - 6:30 PM

~3 miles; Temp: 58 - 60°F

Cloud Cover: 25 - 41%; Scattered clouds;

Wind: Moderate breeze

31 species

White-winged Dove 4
Black-chinned Hummingbird 3
Black Vulture 3
Seen entering hole in wall
Turkey Vulture 6
Red-tailed Hawk 1
Ladder-backed Woodpecker 1
Eastern Phoebe 1
Ash-throated Flycatcher 1
White-eyed Vireo 5
Hutton's Vireo 1
Common Raven 4
Carolina Chickadee 4
Black-crested Titmouse 12
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 5
Golden-crowned Kinglet 1
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 8
Canyon Wren 1
Hermit Thrush 2
House Finch 6
Lesser Goldfinch 5
Chipping Sparrow 10
Lincoln's Sparrow 1
Rufous-crowned Sparrow 2
Spotted Towhee 1
Scott's Oriole 1
Black-and-white Warbler 7
Orange-crowned Warbler 1
Yellow-rumped Warbler 1
Yellow-throated Warbler 1
Golden-cheeked Warbler 1
Northern Cardinal 8



Deep pink Texas Red Bud (above)
Light pink Mexican Buckeye
Purple Grape Mountain Laurel blooms



Reflecting upon what's there not to LOVE about Spring !?!

Total species for Hill Country day : 43

Includes Cooper's Hawk en route to Utopia but not reported on any eBird list

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/489570>

Knippa

A slightly warmer morning – yes, the seat warmers were appreciated – we were off to Uvalde calling out birds as we went. **Black-crested Titmouse**, **Red-tailed Hawk**, and **Mourning Dove** were the usual cast of characters sending us south. An impromptu ‘nature talk’ initiated the group into the worlds of eBird, Merlin iNaturalist and Seek. Naturally, talk of next month’s City Nature Challenge followed. Since it’s all about recruiting observers and identifiers for the world’s largest biodiversity database, we were happy to encourage our ‘opponents’ to join the friendly competition.

Once we got to Knippa, we “car-birded” the area in which a Burrowing Owl had been a regular through the end of January. Unable to locate it in late Feb, it presumably left the area but then a sighting in early March prompted just one more look. While we ‘dipped’ (birder’s term for did not find) the owl, nice finds included **Loggerhead Shrike**, **Long-billed Thrasher** and **Western Meadowlarks**. The flutist amongst could most appreciate its more melodious flute-like song when compared to Eastern or Chihuahuan Meadowlark. The Merlin app even agreed with us. As every birder knows, sparrow IDs can be tough. Like everything else, start with a few at a time. With more of the same sparrows to come at the fish hatchery, we eased into **Vesper** and **Savannah Sparrows** with nice long looks as they perched on the roadside fences.



Savannah Sparrow named not for its habitat but for being first described in Savannah, Georgia. Not always visible but note yellow near eye.



Named for its singing in the morning, Vesper Sparrow is paler, has a white eye ring and a sometimes visible, a brown spot on top of wing about where that blade of straw is in view. Note: Black on head is a shadow not its natural coloration.

Uvalde Memorial Park – INITIAL MORNING TRIP

Ready to bird on foot, we were welcomed to the park by the beep beep beep of a backhoe. Like the 17-foot tall cut-out of Matthew McConaughey at the city limits, it wasn't the welcome we had in mind. Although the project was wrapping up, we heard more than saw most birds. We were graced by one treasure, a **Green Kingfisher** who upon noticing us blasted out into the main part of the park. Fortunately, we were able to catch up with him and get some good shots. As expected, the park is home to countless **Great-tailed Grackles**, **European Starlings**, **domestic Mallard and Muscovy Ducks**. Hybridization has unbelievable diversity in the species. Like these tall, gray ladies, they've drifted way far away from their original 'pure' Mallard appearance.



Green Kingfisher, only one day late for St. Patrick's Day



Looks like this female Ladderbacked Woodpecker has eyes on the back of her head. Much like American Kestrels, this is a great adaptation for defense...or for being a teacher.



Uvalde National Fish Hatchery

Slowed but not beaten by construction, we bounced into a favorite birding spot, the fish hatchery. Surveying the shaded pond, much time was spent watching warring **Golden-fronted** and **Ladderbacked Woodpeckers**. While one **Vermilion Flycatcher** hogged the camera offering multiple tempting poses, their brilliant red is never the same pixels as in person. While Ladderbacks are smaller and sound different from Golden-fronteds, both woodpeckers have similar checkered backs. In the below photo, the 'golden front' is finally visible where bird meets trunk. Look through any field guide and notice the confusingly-named woodpeckers. Why the madness? Before our current high-quality existed allowed for more discerning field marks, woodpeckers were named with specimen in hand. Even so, they could have done better. What about a campaign to change Golden-fronted WP to Polka-dotted Woodpecker?



Ladder-backed Woodpecker male as determined by red on head



Golden-fronted Woodpecker female as determined by lack of red on head



Air traffic control : Gadwalls, Neotropic Cormorant and Northern Harrier (note owl-like face and not visible here but white spot atop rump)

Uvalde Memorial Park – AFTERNOON RETURN TRIP

Our time spent at the fish hatchery and a so-so lunch at a local favorite gave the birds plenty of time to re-acclimate to their usual calm. Our return trip rewarded us with better views of everyone despite what the below photos show. One **Green Jay** bobbed its entire body up and down while making an unusual noise. According to the Cornell's All About Birds, females indicate readiness for mating by bobbing up and down, puffing out body feathers, and retracting their heads, accompanied by a "rattle" call. Males perform similar, often slower, bobbing motions and accompany these with soft whistles or chirps. Don't know which sex we saw bobbing but that's ok. As long as they know who's who. According to eBird, the **Clay-colored Thrushes** here seem to be gradually increasing in number ... or visibility. Not surprising if they too are ready to engage in springtime activities.



The original Clay-Colored Thrush has been joined by a few more



Green Jays, are the only jays that are green says an older field guide. If needed, this could be the Groucho Marx Jay.



Another random skull - at least it wasn't in the cemetery



Birders might expect to find porcupines in a tree but not reindeer !

Cook's Slough Nature Sanctuary

Losing steam, sit-biding under the giant shade structure was the preferred birding method. A few **Double-crested Cormorants**, another (!) **Vermilion Flycatcher** and **Yellow-Rumped Warblers** added to the day's list. At one time, Yellow-rumped Warblers were Myrtle Warblers (white throat; eastern range) and Audubon Warblers (yellow throat and western range). They've since been lumped together as Yellow-Rumped Warblers.



Front and back views of Myrtle subspecies of a Butter Butt



City of Uvalde Cemetery

Our target species for here - Cactus Wren - did not make an appearance in its usual location near Jack Nance Garner's grave. No worries as a **Curved-billed Thrasher** came out to feast on hackberries. While the belly band (brown spots across bottom middle) and red tail both are very faint, This **Red-tailed Hawk** its patagial marks (black lines at leading edge of wing) nail the Red-tailed ID. If this hawk were perched, it'd have a "backpack V", white markings in the top side of the wing.



Enroute to Knippa

- * Not recorded in an eBird list
- Black-crested Titmouse 1
- Red tailed-Hawk 1
- Mourning Dove - many
- Common Raven - 3
- Rock Pigeons - many

Knippa Car Birding

- * Not recorded in an eBird list
- Great-tailed Grackle
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Vesper Sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Western Meadowlark
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Long-billed Thrasher

Uvalde Memorial Park, Uvalde - MORNING

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310487194>
 Mar 18, 2026 9:15 AM - 10:15 AM
 ~0.4 mile(s)
 * Less birds than usual due to active construction, hence return trip in the afternoon

Temp: 50 - 57°F
 Wind: Light - moderate breeze
 Direction: E - SE
 Humidity: 62 - 75%; Dew point: 42 - 44°F
 Sunrise: 7:45am; Sunset: 7:49pm

12 species

- Black-bellied Whistling-Duck 1
- Muscovy Duck (Domestic type) 1
- Mallard Ducks (Domestic type) 17
- Inca Dove 2
- White-winged Dove 4
- Red-shouldered Hawk 2 : 1 juvenile + 1 adult
- Green Kingfisher 1
- Great Kiskadee 5
- Clay-colored Thrush 3 Continuing birds
- House Finch 2
- Red-winged Blackbird 1
- European Starling & Great-tailed Grackle:
 Too many to count within park



XXX – rated photo:
 Asian lady beetle bugs
 taking a break from the
 all you can eat aphids



The 'nose' makes this an American Snout butterfly

Goat or Green Jay?



Uvalde Fish Hatchery (HOTW 027), Uvalde

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310488214>

Mar 18, 2026 10:30 AM - 1:00 PM

~3.0 mile(s)

Temp: 57 - 71°F

Scattered clouds - few clouds; Cloud Cover: 14 - 31%

Wind: Gentle - moderate breeze; Direction: SE - S

42 species

- Blue-winged Teal 15
- American Wigeon 6
- Ring-necked Duck 1
- Eurasian Collared-Dove 1
- White-winged Dove 4
- Mourning Dove 6
- American Coot 6
- Sandhill Crane 30
- Killdeer 3
- Solitary Sandpiper 1
- Least Grebe 5
- Neotropic Cormorant 1
- Great Blue Heron 1
- Black Vulture 5
- Turkey Vulture 5
- Cooper's Hawk 1
- Northern Harrier 1
- Red-tailed Hawk 2
- Belted Kingfisher 1
- Ladder-backed Woodpecker 2
- Crested Caracara 1
- Black Phoebe 2
- Eastern Phoebe 1
- Vermilion Flycatcher 10
- Great Kiskadee 4
- White-eyed Vireo 2
- Purple Martin 8
- Cliff/Cave Swallow 1
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 1
- Bewick's Wren 1
- Northern Mockingbird 1
- House Sparrow 8
- Lesser Goldfinch 6
- Vesper Sparrow 5
- Savannah Sparrow 5
- Lincoln's Sparrow 3
- olden-fronted Woodpecker 4
- Red-winged Blackbird 2
- Common Grackle 1
- Great-tailed Grackle 15
- Yellow-rumped Warbler 4
- Northern Cardinal 6



Mexican Honey Wasp nest



Purple Groundcherry



Uvalde Memorial Park, Uvalde – AFTERNOON

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310488909>

Mar 18, 2026 2:15 PM - 3:15 PM

~0.4 mile(s)

Clear sky; Cloud Cover: 0%

Temp: 74 - 77°F

Wind: Gentle - moderate breeze; Direction: SE

16 species

Mallard Ducks (Domestic type) 17
Red-shouldered Hawk 2
Ladder-backed Woodpecker 2
Eastern Phoebe 1
Great Kiskadee 6
White-eyed Vireo 2
Green Jay 4
Black-crested Titmouse 2
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1
Clay-colored Thrush 3 Continuing birds
House Finch 2
Audubon's Oriole 1
Great-tailed Grackle 5
Orange-crowned Warbler 2
Yellow-rumped Warbler 2
Northern Cardinal 4

Cook's Slough Sanctuary (HOTW 025)

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310487564>

Mar 18, 2026 3:40 PM - 4:00 PM

Sit-birding under covered area at pond

Temp: 77 - 78°F

Clear sky; Cloud Cover: 0%

Wind: Gentle breeze; Wind Direction: S - SE

6 species

Double-crested Cormorant 18
Black Vulture 1
Turkey Vulture 2
Vermilion Flycatcher 1
Bewick's Wren 1
Yellow-rumped Warbler 2

City of Uvalde Cemetery, Uvalde

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S310489267>

Mar 18, 2026 3:40 PM - 4:00 PM

~0.2 mile(s)

Clear sky; Cloud Cover: 0%

Temp: 77 - 78°F

Wind: Gentle breeze; Direction: S - SE

8 species

Red Junglefowl (Domestic type) 1
Red-tailed Hawk 1
Golden-fronted Woodpecker 2
Common Raven 1
Bewick's Wren 1
Curve-billed Thrasher 1
Northern Mockingbird 1
Northern Cardinal 2



Curved-bill Thrasher



2+ miles of trails leaves still much to do at the Slough

Total species for Uvalde day : 59

Includes thrasher, meadowlark and shrike en route to Uvalde but

not reported on any eBird list: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/489972>

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Not a Burrowing Owl but a cat inside these binocular-looking culverts

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