TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK AND VICINITY

Including Lajitas, Redford, Presidio, Ruidosa, Candelaria, Shafter, Casa Piedra and Terlingua; also Chinati Mountains State Natural Area



A FIELD CHECKLIST

INTRODUCTION

Not to be confused with the similarly named national park to the east, Big Bend Ranch State Park, located in extreme southeastern Presidio County, encompasses 280,000 acres of vast Chihuahuan Desert habitat including grasslands, desert scrub, canyons, riparian woodlands and thickets, streams, rivers, and numerous permanent springs. The bulk of the park includes the Bofecillos Mountains and, an extinct volcano, with outlier alluvial fans that form a mountainous plateau averaging 4,000 feet elevation. As such, the majority of the landscape is dominated by igneous soils and rock; however, a number of areas include outcrops of sedimentary rock (limestone) especially along Cienega Creek in the northwestern portion of the park.

A prominent feature of the park is The Solitario, a collapsed volcanic dome or laccolith, approximately 10 miles in diameter, which pushed up several concentric geologic layers that are now exposed through the harsh actions of erosion. Overall, the geology of the park is as diverse as any comparable location in the United States. The climate of the area is warm to hot year-round; rainfall averages 8-10 inches per year, most of which (approximately 75%) falls during the late summer/early fall monsoon season. The lowest elevation in the park is near Lajitas (approximately 2,300'), where the Rio Grande continues its pathway southeastward. The highest elevation is Oso Peak at 5,135'.

Big Bend Ranch State Park was acquired in 1988. Long known as the Diamond 'A' Cattle Company, its ranching heritage dates back to the 1850s for limited portions of the property and to the 1880s for the bulk of the park. Sheep, goats, cattle, horses, exotic game animals, and longhorns occupied the land at various periods of the ranching operation; only desert-hardy longhorns and some horses survived the harsh environment and were present at the time of acquisition. Artifacts of that heritage still persist today; watering structures such as windmills, concrete troughs and dirt tanks provide locations for productive birding at times. Albeit the landscape is adorned with numerous springs and permanent streams. Most of the deeper canyons have permanent water of some kind that is a great benefit to all species of wildlife. In many areas deep pools of persistent standing water called "tinajas" supplement water resources year-round. Springs and streams are usually found in association with riparian woodlands (cottonwood-willow-hackberry and shrub thickets) which are often the most productive habitats for bird diversity and abundance. An area easily accessed by park visitors is Ojito Adentro where a trail from the parking area traverses through desert scrub, then into riparian woodlands. This area serves as a prime representative of similar locations and habitats within this vast park and should be productive for birding at most times of the year. A 30' waterfall (seasonal) defines the limit of the woodland and is an excellent location to sit quietly and absorb the sights and sounds of a moist and cool desert enclave.

Typical of many Chihuahuan Desert settings, common to abundant resident bird species include Red-tailed Hawk, Scaled Quail, Whitewinged and Mourning Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Say's Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, Verdin, Cactus, Rock, Canyon and Bewick's Wren, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Northern Mockingbird, Curve-billed and Crissal Thrasher, Canyon Towhee, Rufous-crowned and Black-throated Sparrow and Pyrrhuloxia. In aquatic-related habitats such as pools, streams and marshes (called cienegas) one can expect to find birds typically associated with these habitats including waterfowl, rails, Common Gallinule, American Coot, shorebirds, Black Phoebe, Vermilion Flycatcher, swallows, Common Yellowthroat and Red-winged Blackbird. A number of locations close to the Sauceda Headquarters can be accessed to watch birds. These include Cinco Tinajas, Leyva Canyon and its associated drainage and the Llano Pasture loop road.

Winter months can often be very productive in desert scrub and desert grassland settings. Look for various species of sparrows including but not limited to Green-tailed and Spotted Towhees, Brewer's Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Sagebrush Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Savannah Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco. Longspurs have been observed in the vicinity of the airport runway just east of Sauceda. In these desert settings in winter, look for pools of water, which have persisted from the rains the previous summer and/or fall. Hundreds, sometimes thousands of birds will make multiple trips daily to these locations to obtain moisture. It would not be unusual to observe all the species mentioned above, plus many more by sitting quietly at a single location with water. In the Rio Grande floodplain (and elsewhere) in winter look for the following species: Pied-billed Grebe, several species of waterfowl, Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, White-throated Swift, American Pipit, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler and American Goldfinch. Terrestrial Rio Grande floodplain habitats in winter can often harbor some of the less common (rare to occasional) wintering passerines such as Dusky and Gray Flycatcher; and Cassin's Vireo; Carolina and Winter Wren; Long-billed Thrasher; Lucy's Warbler; Blue Grosbeak; and Varied and Painted Bunting.

Undoubtedly, the most spectacular seasons for birds include the migration periods in spring and fall. Typically, fall migration is more spectacular with respect to diversity and abundance of bird species. Migrants utilize all habitats but are especially attracted to riparian corridors. Thus, the Rio Grande and its associated floodplain woodland and thorn-scrub thickets provide a zone for major movements of migrants. These habitats have changed historically from an assemblage of native trees, shrub thickets and Common Reed (Phragmites) to a vegetation community dominated by the invasive, non-native species: Salt Cedar, Giant Reed (Arundo) and Tree Tobacco, all in less than 100 years. Common migrants include but are not limited to several species of hummingbirds, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, several Empidonax flycatchers including Willow, Least, Hammond's, Dusky, Grav and Western; Western Kingbird; Plumbeous, Cassin's and Warbling Vireos; Violet-green Swallow; Virginia's, Yellow, Townsend's, MacGillivray's, and Wilson's Warblers; Western Tanager; and Blackheaded Grosbeak.

The extent of the summer season is often open to interpretation; for human visitors to the park, 100-degree temperatures can begin as early as February and persist through November. Birds recognize the more traditional summer season, arriving in mid to late April and migrating south by the end of September. Typical summer residents which breed within the region are Zone-tailed Hawk; Yellow-billed Cuckoo; Elf Owl; Lesser and Common Nighthawk; Black-chinned Hummingbird; Cassin's Kingbird; Bell's Vireo; Cliff, Cave, and Barn Swallow; Yellow-breasted Chat; Lucy's Warbler; Summer Tanager; Blue Grosbeak; Varied and Painted Bunting; and Orchard, Hooded and Scott's Oriole.

This checklist includes all species known to occur within the boundaries of Big Bend Ranch State Park and the immediate vicinity as defined above. Seasonal status and distribution information also applies to Chinati Mountains State Natural Area located northwest of BBRSP. Species that typically occupy oak-juniper habitats have abundance designations that only apply to the higher elevations of the Chinati Mountains. CMSNA is not currently open to the general public; inquiries about the status of the future park should be directed to BBRSP.

Checklist nomenclature and organization follow the A.O.U. *Checklist of North American Birds*, 7th Edition (2023).

Please help protect natural avian communities by refraining from using playback tapes of bird songs. Frequent use of these tapes alters normal avian activity patterns, disrupts essential territorial behavior, and may lead to nest failure. Also remember that most land in the region is privately owned regardless of whether it is fenced or not. This includes all of the property either side of all major paved roads in the region as well as unpaved county roads such as Casa Piedra Road and Pinto Canyon Road. At the present time, general public access is only permitted Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park. DO NOT TRESPASS ON ANY PRIVATE LANDS. If in doubt of ownership, please do not enter.

Cover: Illustration of Black-tailed Gnatcatcher by Jeremy Boehm.

LEGEND

Seasonal Occurrence

- SP Spring (March, April, May)
- S Summer (June, July)
- EF Early Fall (August, September)
- LF Late Fall (October, November)
- W Winter (December, January, February)

Abundance Designations

- A Abundant, always present and observed, expect large numbers in proper habitat and season
- C Common, always encountered in proper habitat and season, numbers may vary from low to high
- U Uncommon, usually present in proper habitat and season but may be overlooked, never common or abundant
- 0 Occasional, not always present but usually encountered at least once during season indicated, may occur in a narrow time frame within a season or in a very specialized habitat, numbers may vary
- R Rare, seldom recorded, not expected each season as designated, may not be recorded each year
- X Accidental, may be observed only once in ten years or more, not expected
- I Irruptive/Irregular, invasion species which may be absent some seasons/years-abundant others

CHECKLIST

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	Х	Х	Х		
Ross's Goose	R			U	
Snow Goose	U			U	R
Canada Goose	R			R	R
Wood Duck	U		U	U	0
Garganey	Х				
Blue-winged Teal	С		С	U	R
Cinnamon Teal	С	0	0	U	U
Northern Shoveler	С	R	U	С	С
Gadwall	С		U	С	U
American Wigeon	U		U	U	U
Mallard	U	R	0	U	U
Mexican Duck	Α	С	А	А	А
Northern Pintail	U		R	U	U
Green-winged Teal	С	R	U	С	С
Canvasback	0			0	0
Redhead	R			R	R
Ring-necked Duck	С		U	С	С
Lesser Scaup	U		0	U	0
Bufflehead	С		0	С	С
Common Goldeneye	R			R	0
Hooded Merganser	U			0	U
Common Merganser	R			R	R
Red-breasted Merganser	R			R	R
Ruddy Duck	С	U	U	С	U
Scaled Quail	С	С	С	С	С
Gambel's Quail	С	С	С	С	С
Least Grebe	U	U	U	U	U
Pied-billed Grebe	U	U	U	С	С
Eared Grebe	0		R	0	0
Rock Pigeon	А	A	A	А	А
Band-tailed Pigeon	R			R	R
Eurasian Collared-Dove	С	С	С	С	С

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
Inca Dove	С	U	С	С	U
Common Ground Dove	0	0	U	U	0
White-winged Dove	А	А	А	А	А
Mourning Dove	А	А	А	А	А
Groove-billed Ani		Х	Х		
Greater Roadrunner	С	С	С	С	С
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	U	U	U		
Black-billed Cuckoo	Х				
Lesser Nighthawk	А	А	А	U	R
Common Nighthawk	U	U	U		
Common Poorwill	А	А	А	U	U
Mexican Whip-poor-will	Х		Х		
White-throated Swift	U	R	U	U	U
Rivoli's Hummingbird	R		R		
Blue-throated Mountain-gem	R		R		
Lucifer Hummingbird	U	R	U	0	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Х		0	R	
Black-chinned Hummingbird	А	А	А	U	
Anna's Hummingbird	0			U	U
Calliope Hummingbird			R	R	
Rufous Hummingbird	R		С	U	R
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	U		U	U	
King Rail		Х			Х
Virginia Rail	U	Х	R	U	U
Sora	С	R	U	U	С
Common Gallinule	U	U	U	U	U
American Coot	С	U	С	С	С
Sandhill Crane	U			U	0
Black-necked Stilt	С	U	С	0	R
American Avocet	С	R	С	С	0
Killdeer	С	С	С	С	С
Upland Sandpiper	U	0	U		
Long-billed Curlew	U	R	U	U	R
Stilt Sandpiper	0		0		
Baird's Sandpiper	U	0	U	0	
Least Sandpiper	С	0	С	С	С

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
White-rumped Sandpiper	0				_
Semipalmated Sandpiper	R	R	0		
Western Sandpiper	U	0	U	U	0
Long-billed Dowitcher	С	R	U	U	0
Wilson's Snipe	С		U	С	С
Spotted Sandpiper	С	0	U	С	С
Solitary Sandpiper	U	0	U	U	R
Lesser Yellowlegs	0	R	U	R	
Greater Yellowlegs	С	R	С	С	U
Wilson's Phalarope	С	0	С	U	
Red-necked Phalarope			R	R	
Bonaparte's Gull	Х			R	
Franklin's Gull	R		R		
Ring-billed Gull	0			0	0
Herring Gull				R	
Double-crested Cormorant	U	R	R	U	С
Neotropic Cormorant	С		С	С	С
American White Pelican	U		U	U	U
Brown Pelican				Х	
American Bittern	R			U	R
Least Bittern	U	U	U	U	R
Great Blue Heron	U	0	U	U	U
Great Egret	U	0	U	U	U
Snowy Egret	U	U	U	U	U
Little Blue Heron	R		R		
Tricolored Heron	R		R	R	R
Western Cattle Egret	U	0	U	0	0
Green Heron	U	С	U	U	0
Black-crowned Night-Heron	U	U	U	U	U
White-faced Ibis	U	R	U	U	Ι
Black Vulture	U	U	U	U	U
Turkey Vulture	А	А	А	С	U
Osprey	U	Х	U	U	Х
White-tailed Kite	R	R	R		
Golden Eagle	0	R	0	U	U
Northern Harrier	С		0	С	С

vies	SP	S	EF	LF	W
_ Sharp-shinned Hawk	С		U	С	U
_ Cooper's Hawk	С	R	U	С	С
_ Bald Eagle	R			R	R
_ Mississippi Kite	0	R	0	0	
Common Black Hawk	R	R	R		
Harris's Hawk	U	U	U	U	U
Red-shouldered Hawk	Х			Ι	
Broad-winged Hawk	U		U		
Swainson's Hawk	С	U	С	R	
Zone-tailed Hawk	U	U	U	R	
Red-tailed Hawk	С	С	С	С	С
Rough-legged Hawk	R			R	R
Ferruginous Hawk	R			U	U
Barn Owl	0	0	0	0	0
Flammulated Owl	R		R		
Western Screech-Owl	С	С	С	С	С
Great Horned Owl	С	С	С	С	С
Elf Owl	С	С	С	R	
Burrowing Owl	U	U	U	U	U
Long-eared Owl				Х	
Belted Kingfisher	U	R	U	U	U
Green Kingfisher	U	U	U	U	U
Lewis's Woodpecker	Ι			Ι	Ι
Golden-fronted Woodpecker	С	С	С	С	С
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	U		0	U	U
Red-naped Sapsucker	U		0	U	U
Red-breasted Sapsucker					Х
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	С	С	С	С	С
Northern Flicker	С	R	С	С	С
American Kestrel	С	U	С	С	С
Merlin	0		R	U	U
Aplomado Falcon	Х			Х	Х
Peregrine Falcon	U	R	U	U	U
Prairie Falcon	U	R	0	U	U
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet		Х			

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
Cassin's Kingbird	С	С	С	U	Ι
Western Kingbird	С	U	С	0	
Eastern Kingbird	0		R		
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	0		0		
Olive-sided Flycatcher	С		С		
Western Wood-Pewee	С	0	С	R	
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Х				
Willow Flycatcher	0		U	R	
Least Flycatcher	0		0	R	R
Hammond's Flycatcher	R		0	0	R
Gray Flycatcher	С		U	U	U
Dusky Flycatcher	С		С	U	0
Western Flycatcher	U		U	0	
Black Phoebe	С	С	С	С	С
Eastern Phoebe	0		0	U	U
Say's Phoebe	С	С	С	С	С
Vermilion Flycatcher	С	С	С	С	С
Black-capped Vireo	Х				
White-eyed Vireo	Х				
Bell's Vireo	С	С	С	0	
Gray Vireo	U	U	U	U	U
Yellow-throated Vireo	R		R		
Cassin's Vireo	U		U	U	R
Blue-headed Vireo	Х				
Plumbeous Vireo	U		U	0	R
Philadelphia Vireo	R				
Warbling Vireo	U		U	R	
Red-eyed Vireo	0		0		
Loggerhead Shrike	С	С	С	С	С
Steller's Jay				Х	Х
Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay	0	0	0	0	0
Chihuahuan Raven	U	U	U	0	0
Common Raven	С	С	С	С	С
Verdin	С	С	С	С	С
Black-crested Titmouse	U	U	U	U	U
Horned Lark	U	0	U	U	U

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
Bank Swallow	U	0	U		
Tree Swallow	С		U	0	R
Violet-green Swallow	U	0	U	U	R
No. Rough-winged Swallow	А	0	С	С	С
Barn Swallow	А	А	А	С	R
Cliff Swallow	А	A	А	U	
Cave Swallow	С	U	С	U	U
Bushtit	U	U	U	U	U
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	А		U	А	А
Golden-crowned Kinglet	0			0	R
Cedar Waxwing	Ι		Ι	Ι	Ι
Phainopepla	U	U	U	U	U
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Ι		Ι	Ι	Ι
White-breasted Nuthatch	R	R	R	R	R
Brown Creeper	R		Х	R	R
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	А	0	А	С	С
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	А	А	А	A	А
Rock Wren	С	U	С	С	С
Canyon Wren	С	С	С	С	С
Cactus Wren	С	С	С	С	С
Bewick's Wren	U	U	U	U	U
Carolina Wren	R	R	R	R	R
House Wren	U		U	U	U
Winter Wren	R			R	Ι
Sedge Wren	R			R	Ι
Marsh Wren	С	0	U	С	С
Gray Catbird	R		0	R	R
Curve-billed Thrasher	С	С	С	С	С
Brown Thrasher	R			R	R
Long-billed Thrasher	Х		Х	Х	Х
Crissal Thrasher	С	С	С	С	С
Sage Thrasher	Ι			Ι	Ι
Northern Mockingbird	А	A	А	А	А
European Starling	U	U	U	U	U
Eastern Bluebird	Ι			Ι	Ι
Western Bluebird	Ι			Ι	Ι

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
Mountain Bluebird	Ι			Ι	Ι
Townsend's Solitaire	Ι			Ι	Ι
Gray-cheeked Thrush	Х				
Swainson's Thrush	U		0		
Hermit Thrush	С		U	С	С
American Robin	Ι			Ι	Ι
Olive Warbler			Х		
House Sparrow	А	A	А	A	А
American Pipit	С		0	А	А
Sprague's Pipit	R		R	R	U
Evening Grosbeak	Ι			Ι	Ι
House Finch	А	А	А	A	А
Cassin's Finch	Ι			Ι	Ι
Pine Siskin	Ι	Х	Ι	Ι	Ι
Lesser Goldfinch	С	С	С	С	С
Lawrence's Goldfinch				Х	Х
American Goldfinch	U			U	Ι
Chestnut-collared Longspur	U			С	С
Thick-billed Longspur				0	0
Botteri's Sparrow		Х	Х		
Cassin's Sparrow	Ι	А	А	С	U
Grasshopper Sparrow	U	Ι	0	U	U
Black-throated Sparrow	А	А	А	А	А
Lark Sparrow	А	А	А	С	Ι
Lark Bunting	Ι	R	Ι	Ι	Ι
Chipping Sparrow	А	U	А	А	Ι
Clay-colored Sparrow	С		С	0	Ι
Black-chinned Sparrow	R	R	R	U	U
Field Sparrow	R			R	R
Brewer's Sparrow	А		С	А	А
Fox Sparrow	R			R	R
Dark-eyed Junco	U		0	Ι	Ι
White-crowned Sparrow	А		С	A	А
Golden-crowned Sparrow				Х	Х
Harris's Sparrow	Х			Х	Х
White-throated Sparrow	R			R	R

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
Sagebrush Sparrow	U			U	Ι
Vesper Sparrow	А		U	А	А
Baird's Sparrow	0			0	R
Savannah Sparrow	С		U	С	С
Song Sparrow	U			U	U
Lincoln's Sparrow	С	Х	U	С	Ι
Swamp Sparrow	U			U	U
Canyon Towhee	С	С	С	С	С
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	С	С	С	С	С
Green-tailed Towhee	С		U	С	С
Spotted Towhee	С		С	С	С
Eastern Towhee	Х				
Yellow-breasted Chat	С	С	С	0	
Yellow-headed Blackbird	С		С	U	R
Chihuahuan Meadowlark	U	U	U	U	U
Western Meadowlark	С		С	С	С
Orchard Oriole	С	U	С	R	
Hooded Oriole	0	0	0		
Bullock's Oriole	С	U	С	U	R
Scott's Oriole	С	С	С	0	R
Red-winged Blackbird	U	U	U	С	С
Bronzed Cowbird	U	U	U		
Brown-headed Cowbird	А	А	С	С	U
Brewer's Blackbird	С		U	A	А
Common Grackle	R			R	R
Great-tailed Grackle	А	А	А	А	А
Ovenbird	Х		Х		
Worm-eating Warbler	Х				
Louisiana Waterthrush	R		R	R	
Northern Waterthrush	U		U	0	
Black-and-white Warbler	U		U	0	
Prothonotary Warbler	Х				
Tennessee Warbler	R		R		
Orange-crowned Warbler	С		U	С	А
Lucy's Warbler	U	U	U	0	R
Nashville Warbler	С		U	С	
Lucy's Warbler	U	U	U	0	

Species	SP	S	EF	LF	W
Virginia's Warbler	С		С	0	
MacGillivray's Warbler	U		U	0	
Mourning Warbler	Х		Х		
Common Yellowthroat	С	U	С	С	С
Hooded Warbler	Х				
American Redstart	0	Х	0	0	
Northern Parula	0		0	0	R
Magnolia Warbler	Х			Х	
Blackburnian Warbler	Х				
Yellow Warbler	А		А	0	R
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Х				
Palm Warbler	Х				
Yellow-rumped Warbler	А		С	A	С
Yellow-throated Warbler	0	Х	0		
Grace's Warbler	Х		Х		
Black-throated Gray Warbler	U		U	0	R
Townsend's Warbler	U		С	U	R
Hermit Warbler	Х		R		
Black-throated Green Warbler	0		0		
Wilson's Warbler	А	0	А	U	Х
Painted Redstart			Х		
Hepatic Tanager	R		R		
Summer Tanager	С	С	С	0	
Western Tanager	С		С	0	
Northern Cardinal	С	С	С	С	С
Pyrrhuloxia	А	А	А	A	A
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	0		0		
Black-headed Grosbeak	С	С	С	U	
Blue Grosbeak	А	А	А	U	R
Lazuli Bunting	U		U		
Indigo Bunting	0	R	0	U	
Varied Bunting	Č	С	Č	0	R
Painted Bunting	Č	C	Č	0	R
Dickcissel		-	Č	-	

CITATION

Edits for the March 2024 list were made by Texas State Park Staff to the February 2011 list created by Bryan, Kelly B. Birds of Big Bend Ranch State Park and vicinity: a field checklist. Texas State Parks Division, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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