

Hi Birdos4Eric,

April started as expected—slowly. I was in Berkeley for the start of the month, having driven back from Portland the day before. My plan for the first half of April was to chase down missing local birds—mostly one at a time. This is what it would take if I was to accomplish the local task that my friend Eddie Bartley had set out for me—to get 1,000 birds worldwide over the year, I needed to get 300 in California. At the beginning of April I had 233, so I needed to get to work.

I started with one I had been chasing in March—the Surfbird. Bob Lewis told me to go at high tide. I checked the tide table; high tide would be mid-morning that week. The first day out Maggie got a good swim in the San Francisco Bay before I proceeded to Pt. Emery. No Surfbird. But the next day was better—Maggie got in her swim (an amazing feat for a Scottie since they are all head and no legs) and then I drove a few hundred yards down the road and noticed birds in the water. I began chalking up the usual suspects when I saw a large congregation of birds on a culvert over the water. They were mostly Willets and Black Turnstones, taking their mid-morning siesta so I got close. I scanned though the 18 turnstones, and, voila!, one Surfbird in their midst.

The next day there was a report of a Warbling Vireo in the Valle Vista watershed of the East Bay Municipal Utility District (East Bay MUD to us locals). Hearing aids were in place and tuned into bird frequency, and so I heard the bird before I saw it. As I was staring up into a Buckeye tree, trying to sort out the bird, another birded approached. “Warbling Vireo?” he asked. “Up there somewhere,” I replied. And then I spotted it overhead. Once that was done, we introduced ourselves, and my new birding friend Marty Lycan and I got two more Warbling Vireos walking back to the car park.

My Big Day in the first half of April was a GGAS Birdathon trip down to Garin Regional Park. The walk was led by two of my friends from my Master Birder Program, Miya Lucas and Wendy Beers, and I was joined that day by another class alum, Chris Tarr. Garin is great in the spring. Wendy says, “I come to Garin in the spring to get all those birds I’m reading about on eBird that I can’t get in Berkeley.” And sure enough, right away standing in the field near the parking lot, we got Bullock’s and Hooded Orioles and I saw my first Western Kingbird of the year.

Additionally, there were four kinds of swallows, Western Bluebirds, and lots of Cedar Waxwings. Moving into the woods, Miya found Brown Creeper (twice!), House and Bewick’s Wrens, Spotted Towhees, and Yellow-rumped and Wilson’s Warblers. I also picked up my first Black-headed Grosbeak of the year. Towards the end of the walk we climbed a steep hill, emerging from the tall canopy into grasslands. At the top of the ridge we looked down onto a steep slope. This was Wendy and Miya’s go-to place for Grasshopper Sparrows, and within about five minutes one was spotted below. While we watched it, someone pointed out another sparrow nearby. Putting my scope on it, I recognized it as a Rufous-crowned Sparrow—the bird I had work so hard to see for the first three months of the year before

getting it in March with Bob Lewis out on Mines Rd. Seems like I should have just come to Garin for this bird, too.



Grasshopper Sparrow by Miya Lucas



Rufous-crown Sparrow by Miya Lucas

A couple of days later I went birding at the Tilden Park Nature Area, one of my favorite spots, with Pat Kirkpatrick, one of my big year supporters. It was a great morning for the spring birds—we saw lots of Wilson’s Warblers and a pair of Black-headed Grosbeaks (which I had missed on this same walk a week earlier.) We also got a good look at a Warbling Vireo, a first bird for Pat, which she enjoyed seeing. Jewel Lake was quiet when we approached, but soon we heard—then saw—a Belted Kingfisher. Then we began hearing a loud cry from the far side of the lake. The kingfisher? No. This call was insistent like the kingfisher’s but much sharper and lacked the other bird’s rattle. We watched the reeds where the sounds were coming from and figured out it must be a Virginia Rail. I knew that Virginia Rails were on the eBird list for the Tilden Nature Area, but I had never seen (nor heard) one before. We staked the bird out for about 45 minutes—I got three very quick glimpses of this secretive rail. It was a first bird for the year (somehow I missed it while getting the Ridgway’s Rail and Sora at Arrowhead Marsh in January), and I liked seeing it at this special place.

My second Birdathon trip in April was to Elkhorn Slough to see birds, Harbor Seals, and Sea Otters. Bob Lewis led this trip—two hours of birding (and sea mammal) bliss. Although I didn’t pick up any new birds on the boat, the trip was a highlight of my birding year. We were traveling on a pontoon boat, so we were close to the water and got excellent looks at seabirds and waders. Some of the morning’s stars included a Red-breasted Merganser, and both Common and Red-throated Loons, some of which were transitioning into breeding plumage. We also got a great look at a Pigeon Guillemot and the colony of Brandt’s Cormorants that were nesting on the pilings at the mouth of the harbor. For many on the boat, however, the highlight was the close-up looks at Harbor Seals with their newborn pups and Sea Otters, some of which also had newborns riding around on their stomachs as mom did the backstroke across the slough.



Sea Otter by Bob Lewis



Pigeon Guillemot by Bob Lewis



Pigeon Guillemot by me

Bob knew I was looking for a Lesser Yellowlegs, so he suggested that I stop at Kirby Park, on upper Elkhorn Slough, on the way home. Susan was agreeable to the plan but when we got there, she decided to rest her knee so I set off following Bob's directions. They were excellent and within five minutes I was looking at the place he had recommended. No birds at all. So I set off following the trail that ran further up the slough. There were lots of duck and shorebirds; particularly noteworthy was a flock of 44 Whimbrels, a species that the naturalist on the morning boat had told us was rare in these parts. I also noticed a Pacific Golden Plover, a bird I've seen in Hawaii. This was another first bird for the year, and one that I later learned, when I entered it into my eBird list, was very rare in this area.

Back at the pond my attention was attracted by a kingfisher, and as I was watching it, I noticed a shorebird out of the corner of my eye. A Yellowlegs!! But fifteen minutes of staring at the bird couldn't turn a Greater Yellowlegs into a Lesser. I finally walked up the hill, content with my 44 Whimbrel and my one Pacific Golden Plover. (And that Lesser Yellowlegs? I picked it up the next morning at the Albany Bulb, about two and a half miles from home.)

On the 14<sup>th</sup> I flew to South Texas for a 9-day GGAS birding trip, led by Eddie Bartley and Noreen Weeden, who had led the California Desert trip I did back in January. I was meeting my birding buddies from Australia, Tony Read and Nancy Bombardieri. A former neighbor from Berkeley, Ann Stewart, was also signed up, along with Miya Lucas and Wendy Beers (who had led the Garin Birdathon trip.) This was Wendy's second time on this trip which told me a lot about what a great trip it was going to be.

Eddie and Noreen met the California group at the airport and they had Tony and Nancy with them, so we began birding as soon as we left the parking lot. Eddie had scouted a little grassy area that had some water running through it and we went there directly. Eddie knows about my big year and had asked me at the airport how I was doing. He seemed pleased with my progress. After our quick stop outside the airport, he asked "Did you add any new birds to your list?" "Five," I replied. "Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Eastern Meadowlark, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Upland Sandpiper." Then I added, "And the last four were also life birds." Now that's what I call a good start to a birding trip!

A DIGRESSION. There's a thing in the birding world called "listing." That's when birders keep records of species they've seen and tick them off lists. With the advent of eBird, listing has taken on dimensions hitherto unimagined. (A note on eBird—eBird is a database run out of Cornell which allows birders to open a free account and keep detailed records of all the birds they see—when they saw them, where they saw them, dates, times, numbers of species—well, you get the picture. It's obvious what's in it for birders. What's in it for Cornell you ask? One of the world's largest citizen science programs and a remarkable, enormous, worldwide database on the 10,000 plus bird species.) So birders are able to record and track their birding data—and then view that data in all sorts of ways.

This is relevant to my particular narrative in several ways. As you know, I'm trying to see 1,000 birds in a year so eBird is obviously playing an important role in this endeavor. But several years ago my pal Bob Lewis discovered that I had records I'd kept in field guides of birds I'd seen globally—in Australia, India, Southern Africa, the Galapagos, and several other places. By then I'd begun using eBird for recording my sightings. Bob told me that I HAD to go back and enter all the data from those old field guides into my eBird account, using the "historical" rubric (don't worry—I've explained enough and will say no more about the mechanics of this.)

The bottom line here is that when I began my big year, I had tallied 1957 species on eBird. Between the beginning of the year and my departure for Texas I had added another 35 birds (what birders call "lifers.") I knew after that first foray outside the Corpus Christi airport that I would go sailing past a large round number—2000—on the trip. This happened on the second day. So I found myself one night at dinner offering to pick up the drinks tab. Unfortunately, my pal Tony was sitting next to me that night and we got a little carried away—the waiter offered us a 25% discount on a rather expensive bottle of wine, and so the night began. Enough said on this topic.

BACK TO THE STORY. The next morning we were up early and ready to start birding Mustang Island. Eddie and Noreen introduced us to our first "motte." Mottes are small hummocks covered in native vegetation—live oaks feature prominently—that are bird magnets. They are usually good places to look for migrant birds enjoying a rest stop on their long journey. At the two mottes we visited we were looking specifically for warblers—several in the group saw a Black-and-white (which I missed) but I saw several Tennessees. We also picked up several Orchard Orioles (another new species for me). A wetland near the mottes gave me another wren for the year—the Sedge Wren—and I was introduced to a couple species of local ducks—the Mottled Duck and the Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (this latter species is particularly beautiful.)

A brief stop at a small freshwater pond produced more beauties—the Louisiana Waterthrush (another warbler, actually) and another oriole species, the Baltimore Oriole. We spent the rest of the morning around Port Aransas looking for wetland birds. Our efforts netted us a large list of shorebirds, ducks, and gulls. We ended up seeing about 70 species over several hours. One of my favorite species, the Roseate Spoonbill, put in an appearance. I picked up a couple of new species, a flock of forty American Golden Plovers and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Wilson's Phalarope was the one that got away here....

In the afternoon we did something that was anathema to those of us from California—Eddie drove the van onto the beach at the Port Aransas Jetty. We were going to have a look at a very large colony of gulls and tern. There was a large flock of Laughing Gulls and smaller numbers of Ring-billed and Franklin’s Gulls (which were particularly beautiful, having a slight pinkish hue on their otherwise white their breasts.) Earlier we had seen Least Terns and Gull-billed Terns, and here we added Common, Royal, and Sandwich Terns. This description conveys a bit of the variety we saw but not the numbers—over 100 terns and 200 gulls. These birds were really packed into a small area. There was a lot of fishing going on, and one Royal Tern was courting a mate with an offering of a fish (which she ended up turning down.)



Royal Tern courtship



Terns, gulls, and a Great-blue Heron with a fish

Our final stop of the day was Blucher Park near downtown Corpus Christi, a park that consists of a small patch of native vegetation. But before we went into the park, Eddie took us into the grounds of an old Audubon Society house, now closed, across the street from the park. As we enter the park, we startled a Chuck-will’s-widow that had been sleeping on a branch of a large oak tree, a large bird that went screaming past us. What’s a Chuck-will’s-widow, you ask? And rightly so. eBird describes it as a “large night bird with a remarkably big head.” Look it up. You’ll be glad you did. (Why wouldn’t you look up a bird with such a weird name??) Across the street in the park we kept bumping into the Chuck-will’s-widow which would instantly relocate when it saw us coming. But we also picked up three hummingbird species—Black-chinned, Ruby-throated, and Buff-bellied—as well as several other new species: Inca Dove, Hooded Warbler, and Chimney Swift.

The next morning we visited Hazel Bazemore Park, a birding hotspot in South Texas. We did well with raptors here, seeing Red-Shouldered Hawks, Crested Caracaras, Swainson’s Hawks, and both Turkey and Black Vultures. We also added some very colorful birds, including Green Jays, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Brown-crested Flycatchers, Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Red-winged Blackbirds, Bronzed Cowbirds, Northern Cardinals, Olive sparrows, and Indigo Buntings. In keeping with the color theme, later in the day we added Hooded and Orchard Orioles, Eastern Bluebirds, White-winged Doves, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and Gray Catbirds.



Male and female Golden-fronted Woodpeckers

But the bird of the day was the Aplomado Falcon—a bird so rare in the USA that each sighting makes the American Birding Association’s Rare Bird list. We had glimpsed a pair of them the day before but at a distance and flying away from us—other than Eddie and Noreen, none of us in the group would have been confident in identifying this bird. But when we stopped on the second day to look for them, Paulette spotted one and quickly all scopes were on it. An excellent look at a bird that the state of Texas is trying to reintroduce into the wild.

We spent the next three days on South Padre Island. Our days assumed a rhythm—we would drop in on a couple of hot spots in the morning—the Convention Center (CC) and the Valley Land Fund Lots (VLFL)—then visit a major wildlife sanctuary in the afternoon—then check back on the VLFL a final time in the late afternoon. Our first morning South Padre Island we began at the CC and the highlights that morning were mostly out on the boardwalk—Roseate Spoonbills, Yellow-Crowned Night Herons, a Sora, and three Least Bitterns, normally very reclusive birds—I had hoped to get a glimpse of one on the trip so seeing three was a little bit over the top. We also spent about ten minutes watching a Green Heron display-dancing on the railing right in front of us—and making a very impressive gurgling sound.

When we got to the VLFL it was clear that a “fallout” had begun. A fallout occurs when migrating birds face a headwind and become exhausted. South Texas can be amazing when this happens because birds crossing the Caribbean that encounter a wind blowing south will land at the first opportunity—often on South Padre island. The two reserves we were visiting are well known fallout hotspots. Warblers are often the stars of a fallout. Our warblers included a couple of familiar birds—the Yellow-rumped and the Yellow--and several new ones—the Blackpoll, the Worm-eating (I’m not making this up!), and the Yellow-breasted Chat. Additionally, we picked up another beautiful grosbeak, the Rose-breasted Grosbeak and the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (there were lots of jokes about this bird in the van on the way back to the hotel—yes, there really IS such a bird.)

By the next morning the fallout was in freefall. We kept bouncing between our two local hotspots, putting together an impressive list of warblers. We have relatively few warblers on the West Coast, so for me this was an exercise in checking off lifers as quickly as I could spot them. After a quick lunch stop, we went out to the Audubon Society’s Sabal Palm Sanctuary, which features a landscape of native South Texas palms. It was an excellent raptor site: Grey Hawks and Broad-winged Hawks. Then on the way back we stopped at a wetland that had a large number of shorebirds. Scanning them, I saw a bird I couldn’t identify and I pointed it out to Eddie with the caveat that it was probably something ordinary. Eddie looked, then looked again. “That’s not ordinary,” he said; “that’s a Hudsonian Godwit.” Tick. Another lifer, and on the day of the fallout it wasn’t even a warbler!

We made a final stop at the VLFL where we picked up even more warblers. I added the Black-and-white, the Nashville, the Palm, the Black-throated Green, the Prothonotary, and the Northern Parula. Over the two day span we had also added five vireos, a genus of New World birds whose name from Latin means “to be green” (even though some don’t look very green.) We saw the White-eyed, the Red-eyed, the Philadelphia, the Blue-headed, and the Warbling (all of which except the last were new for me.)

*Can You Name That Warbler?? (Easier than it might sound—answers on the last page. Here’s some help: Prothonotary, Black and White, Hooded, and Black and White Green.)*



A.



B.



C.



D.

The next day, the fallout was slowing, but it wasn’t quite over. We saw some warblers we had seen previously and added the Canadian Warbler. But the bird of the day was the Loggerhead Shrike. Seems like an odd choice, right? After all, we’d seen about a dozen of them already on the

trip. But Wendy watched one fly into a tree and when she got her binoculars on it, it turned out to be two proud parents and six birds almost big enough to fledge. It was a wonderful sighting.



Young Loggerhead Shrikes still in the nest (time to get a life!)

Following our visit to South Padre Island, we moved into the lower Rio Grande Valley. Our first stop there was the Santa Ana reserve which is actually located on the Mexico side of The Wall (despite the fact that it's on the U.S. side of the Rio Grande River). There were more lifers here, including the Clay-colored Thrush, the Cave Swallow, and our target species, the Green Kingfisher. I particularly wanted to see this last bird since I'm a great fan of kingfishers, and this is one of only three found in North America. (Those of you who are birders will know that another of these birds—the Belted Kingfisher—is common in the U.S., a bird I've seen several times this year already in Northern California.)

After lunch we went to the Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center, looking for another rare bird, the Crimson-collared Grosbeak. Like the Aplomado Falcon, this grosbeak is an ABA rarity. Its range extends to northern Mexico but not across the border into Texas. This particular bird had been reported off and on for the past several months on the daily ABA rarities list that hardcore birders can subscribe to. Unlike with the falcon that Eddie had previously scouted and knew to be in one of several spots, with this bird he was keeping expectations low. "We have a

slim chance of finding this bird,” he told us. We knew the area where it had been seen so we staked that out for a while with no luck.

We went in search of a bird that Eddie and Noreen had scouted the previous week and we found a parent Eastern Screech-owl and a chick sticking their heads out of a hollow tree—a new owl for me. After walking around the rest of the reserve (and seeing few birds since it was almost 3 PM and very hot) we returned to the spot where the Crimson-collared Grosbeak had been seen previously and sat down to wait. The bird had been showing up mostly around this time when it had been recorded. At 3:07, Noreen and I saw something flutter into the Potato Bush (reportedly its favorite food) and a few seconds later the bird made a short appearance, coming into full view before retreating into some further shrubbery where she could still be made out. I say “she” advisedly—even though the bird is called “Crimson-collared,” the females are green, rather than bright red. After a few more minutes she fluttered off out of sight. On our way out, a new troop of birders came marching in, with the expected questions, “Have you seen the bird?” “Where exactly was it?” “Is it still there?” “Where did it go?”

We made another late afternoon stop at Estero Llano Grande State Park. While we were still in the parking lot, an excited birder approached us saying that in the nearby trees, there was a Cerulean Warbler, one of the few warbler species we had missed on South Padre Island. The tree was fitting around overhead in dense leaves. One by one people in our group got onto the bird. I was one of the last—I had seen a bird that was bright white below and passed it over, thinking it was a vireo species. But Eddie explained that the bird was bright white below and Tony helped me to pick it out again. Another great view—from below. I was missing the bright blue on the bird’s wings. But we moved on and even a poor look is better than no look.

Our last stop of the evening was for dinner in downtown McAllen, Texas. After we ordered our food, Eddie asked me if I wanted to grab my binoculars and join him outside the restaurant. Above us on the powerlines were dozens of Green Parakeets. We went back inside to get the others and by the time we were finished watching them, Eddie had counted about three hundred of them (and one Yellow-chevroned Parakeet, which the rest of us had missed.) It’s unclear whether these birds had migrated up from Mexico or were escaped caged birds that had found one another and established a successful breeding population. But it was clear indeed that they were in South Texas to stay.

On Easter morning, we visited Bensten-Rio Grande Valley State Park, looking for the last of the North American kingfishers, the Ringed. We found it quickly, completing my kingfisher trifecta. Bensten is famous for its hawk watch platform but the wind had really come up and the hawks weren’t flying. Despite the wind, we managed to get a couple of new birds in the afternoon, the Horned Lark and the Buff-bellied Sandpiper, but shortly after that we called it a day because of the strong winds.

Our last full day of birding began early—we were in the van by 6:15 and met Jim, our guide for the day, at the gate to King Ranch at 7:00. King Ranch is the largest ranch in the U.S. (it likes to boast that at 825,000 acres it is larger than the state of Rhode Island) and several large tracts of it are open to birding parties. We covered almost 35 miles of just one tract—the Norias Division—which is best known for its specialty birds: two ABA rarities: the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and the Tropical Parula. At the first owl stop we made, Jim played a recording of the owl's call. No response. Another try with the same response. Jim was getting nervous. These birds breed at the ranch and they are its most famous resident. At the third stop, however, Wendy thought she heard the bird. Faint and then louder. It came and perched in sight and everyone got on the bird. Jim's relief was obvious.

We had broken up into two vehicles and I was in the trailing van. Noreen received a text from the first vehicle saying that Nancy had seen her first Roadrunner—she'd never seen one before and it was her target bird for the trip. Needless to say, she was very pleased. At one point on the drive I got a look at a Northern Bobwhite, a first bird for me. At our next stop Jim called for a Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, a bird that Eddie and I had gotten the previous day but everyone else had missed. One responded and everyone got a good look.

Next up was the Tropical Parula—another call and another target bird appearing so that again everyone saw it. More difficult was the Audubon's Oriole that Eddie had heard calling—he and I got on the bird but it flew, and a recording wouldn't persuade it to return. One of the highlights of the morning was a Western Diamondback Rattlesnake crossing the road in front of us—it was about five feet long and had a conspicuous lump in its stomach—a cottontail rabbit Jim guessed.



Western Diamondback Rattlesnake

After our picnic lunch, we drove down a grassy two-track dirt road, looking for sparrows and pipits. The day had warmed up and the birds were scarce. We finally turned up a Sprague's Pipit, though—a rather plain-looking bird, but another first for me. No sparrows. Our final stop was at a pond that was quickly drying up. We saw some of the usual suspects—ducks and shorebirds—but as we were finishing, Wendy spotted a small flock of Wilson's Phalaropes in the middle of the pond. These are slight birds with long slender bills—I had missed them earlier in the week so I was glad to see them here.



Nancy's Greater Roadrunner



Tropical Parula

The trip to South Texas was a huge success—I saw 215 species on the trip, about half of which were year birds for me and about a third of them were life birds. My final birding stop in Texas was to be Big Bend National Park. Tony, Nancy, and I picked up a car in Corpus Christi, drove to San Antonio where we picked up Susan the next day, then drove to Big Bend the next day. My target bird at Big Bend was the Colima Warbler, a bird that mostly lives in Mexico although some of them breed in the Chisos Mountains in the heart of Big Bend—the only place in the U.S. where this species can be found.

In Big Bend we met up with Tony's brother Tim and his wife Sherry, who had come from Delaware to meet up with us. On the first full day in Big Bend we split up; Nancy and I were the only two who had decided to hike up to the top of the mountain where the Colima Warbler resides. This hike turned out to be longer (and steeper) than we had planned. What we originally thought would take 4-5 hours took 7+. We saw some good birds on the way up, including some new ones like Plumbeous Vireo, Mexican Jay, and Crissal Thrasher. And we heard Colima Warblers. At about four hundred yards from the top Nancy felt a bit dizzy (we were close to 7,000 feet of altitude, having climbed over 1,500 feet) and she decided to start down.

I continued on and then at the top started down the Boot Canyon trail, supposedly the best place in the park to see the Colima Warbler. Once again I heard the bird. But no luck seeing it. Back at the trailhead I thought I heard it up the trail that continued on to Emory Peak (another mile and a half!) I went a few hundred yards but the bird I heard calling sounded only superficially like a Colima Warbler—it had a hitch in its song that include a small initial buzz—a bit like a wren. I looked up and overhead in a tree was a Canyon Wren, the bird I had been chasing for three months in California. As I headed back down the mountain, completing my 8-mile roundtrip I was a little sad about missed the Colima but very pleased at having seen the Canyon Wren.



Mexican Jay—for those of you who love our California Scrub Jay, note the lack of white on the head

The next two days were spent birding at various locations in the park, generally trying to see birds early in the day before it heated up too much (temperatures were reaching the 90°s by noon.) I saw a pair of Hepatic Tanagers at breakfast one morning, right outside the tall glass windows in the dining room, trying to corral insects against the glass. Susan made friends with a Black-chinned Sparrow on the porch of our cabin, which turned out to be another life bird for me, as was the Gray Vireo I saw on my last attempt to see the Colima Warbler (I had gotten up early on our last day to look for the bird on a loop trail not far from our cabin.)

One memorable walk was the Nature Trail at Rio Grande Village. It had a boardwalk over a small wetland that had been created by a beaver dam. We didn't see the beaver but we did see a family of nutria, as well as a Blotched Water Snake (which I mistook for a Cottonmouth—a ranger later explained the difference and told us there are no Cottonmouths in Big Bend). We also saw a Sora (a strong candidate for April's Bird of the Month) walking about in plain sight, indifferent to the crowd it was attracting (these are normally very secretive birds). And on our way out, Susan spotted a Virginia Rail (my elusive bird from the beginning of the month), but this one had the sense to go back to being elusive.

So no iconic Colima Warbler at Big Bend. The silver lining is that I'll have to make another trip back to the park someday for that bird. It's an amazing walk up to Boot Canyon, and now that I know how long the hike is likely to take me, I'll leave earlier and plan on spending more time at the top. But overall, April was spectacular. I did better than expected at home in California. And while I had imagined that the South Texas trip with Eddie and Noreen would be great, I still wasn't prepared for the number and variety of species I saw—240 species in Texas, with 111 being year birds and 50 being life birds. I also picked up a few new species at home, including a lifer (thanks, Wendy and Miya for that Grasshopper Sparrow), and nine year birds (including 4 lifers) at Big Bend. Overall, I saw 304 species this month with 120 of them being new, bringing my year's total to 405. Enough statistics. I'm ahead of the game at the moment, and I can relax for a while. But I probably won't. On to Arizona.

**Bird of the month.** Very tough month. So many possibilities. I'm going with a bird that I saw at home and several places in Texas—the Green Heron. I remember my first Green Heron. I had been working at UC Davis for a few years and we had a new lecturer in our department. What most people noticed first about Jim McElroy was his Irish accent. What I noticed was his interest in birds. One day not long after we met, he asked me whether I'd seen the Green Heron along the stream in the arboretum. I told him I hadn't (but didn't add that I'd never seen one) and so he took me down there and pointed out this beautiful compact heron, sitting on a stick over the water, waiting for a meal to swim by. The one that we saw on South Padre Island performing for us on the boardwalk was equally memorable.



Green Heron in its various poses

Answers to the **Name that Warbler Quiz**:

A) Black and White, B) Black and White Green, C) Prothonotary, D) Hooded (See? It wasn't hard!)

Finally (you thought this would never end, didn't you?) I'd like to end this update by welcoming new subscribers to my newsletter and by thanking those of you who have been reading it from the start. I'd particularly like to thank those who donated to GGAS this past month, including Ellen Lange, my wonderful colleague and friend from UC Davis; Christina Tarr, my classmate from the Master Birder Program; and my anonymous donors. If you are new to this newsletter, please consider making a donation to GGAS. You can pledge a donation for every bird I see (just email me at [ejschroeder@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ejschroeder@ucdavis.edu) and I'll bill you at the end or you can make a one-time donation online at: <https://goldengateaudubon.z2systems.com/np/clients/goldengateaudubon/donation.jsp?campaign=449>