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Numbers are in; *Birdiest Festival in America's* reputation soars!

PHOTOS: Denise Housler



CORPUS CHRISTI—The BIRDIEST FESTIVAL IN AMERICA firmly established its top-flight birding festival reputation in a year when COVID discouraged air travel, the keynote speaker cancelled not being able to get vaccinated in his home state of Massachusetts, and previous year's cancellation! This year's festival was April 21-25, with Rio Grande Valley pre-trip April 17-20.

"There were 289 different bird species sighted by 163 registrants from 18 states plus Texas—both much better than expected, and breaking our record of 262 species," event chair Denise Housler reported. "This year brings our four-year sighting history to 311, a level we've heard no other birding festival has reached," she emphasized. "Though we hoped only to break even financially due to speaker postponement and travel concerns, the festival actually netted a small profit, assuring its continuity."

SUPPORTING SPONSORS were: *City of Corpus Christi Arts & Culture Commission, Port Corpus Christi, AEP Texas, Swarovski Optik, Vortex Optics, HOME2Suites and Alamo Inn.*

This year's birders were quite impressed with the schedule of speakers, variety of trips, beauty of home-base South Texas Botanical Gardens even after the freeze, accommodations and of course two "fallouts" of birds during two cold fronts—one during the Rio Grande Valley pre-trip, and another during the Festival itself. "Fallout" refers to birds landing for a migration break when weather dictates, increasing sightings.

Sighting specifics:

- Warblers, 33 species.
- Shorebirds, 32 species.
- "Best bird" was a late pair of Whooping Cranes seen on the new Aransas National Wildlife Refuge field trip, which also added a late La Conte's Sparrow.
- King and Virginia's Rails were sighted on Guadalupe Delta field trip.
- Other new species: White-tailed Kite, Field Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, Black-headed Grosbeak and Sooty Tern.



Next year's dates are April 20-24, when keynote speaker, top birding author/illustrator David Sibley, has rescheduled. Registration opens in December, at BIRDIESTFESTIVAL.ORG.