

# Trip from Texas to Colorado - Spring 2006

*by Sylvia R. Gallagher*

## Part 3

**Sun., April 9, 2006**

**Goose Island State Park, north of Rockport, TX**

No entry.

**9:15 p.m., Mon., April 10, 2006**

**Goose Island State Park, TX**

We didn't get away from Adolph Thomae Park until around 11:00. We stopped for lunch in Raymondville and got here around 4:00. The drive was tedious, mostly through the King Ranch, then through various agricultural areas and the outskirts of generic-looking towns.

We were thrilled to discover that our favorite site, #103, was available. They'd only let us take it for two nights, pending reservations that might kick us out. We had to come back this morning to find out. Then they let us have it through Wed. night, which was what we wanted. I really don't understand their system, and I don't think they do either, for it seems to be interpreted differently at every state park.

When we drove to the site, we found the people who had been there the night before had not left yet, despite the 2:00 checkout time. They said they'd be out in ten minutes, so we drove out to the waterfront area to see if there were any shorebirds. There weren't, but the tide was pretty high and the place had seen hordes of Sunday visitors. A flamingo, supposedly countable, has been in Copano Bay, and someone told us it could be seen from the tour boats. When I looked in the office at the notebook of interesting bird sightings, I discovered it had been seen from the fishing pier a few days ago. It happened that when we were out at the pier, a man who had been camped a few days in one of the waterfront sites was also there. He said it is sometimes seen from the boats and sometimes from here, but hasn't been seen from here since it was recorded in the book on April 4. I haven't been out there yet to look for it.

Our site under the oaks was just as nice as we remembered from at least three previous visits, and Jim quickly assembled his bird attractants in the usual spot. Unfortunately there have been no migrants so far, just the usual assortment of Northern Cardinal (all the time, and always vocalizing, which drives me crazy for some reason), Black-crested Titmouse, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Wren, Inca Dove, White-eyed Vireo, Lincoln's Sparrow.

Today I spent the morning editing the last two weeks of my diary to mail them to Nancy, which I did late this afternoon. Jim went into Rockport for a number of errands and accomplished them all, including buying a new toilet for the trailer, and didn't even get lost. And it's easy to get lost here. This afternoon I sat outside watching in vain for migrants and working on my embroidery. As usual here, there were a number of mosquitos, so I had to use insect repellent for the first time. (Maybe I used a little at Sabal Palm.) Temperature today was delightful, high of around 80degrees, I'd guess, and the humidity wasn't

especially high. There's supposed to be a warming trend all week with increasing humidity, but I don't think it's going to get impossibly hot.

While Jim was in town, I told him to find out where there was a good fish restaurant. At the RV supply store they told him the best one was The Big Fisherman "only a couple of miles on down the road, turn right at Hwy. 188." We went there this evening, and Hwy. 188 must have been at least five miles past the RV store, which must be at least 12 miles from our campground. Since we had come so far, we persisted and found it. It's about 1/3 mile west of SR 35 on 188. When we got there, we discovered it to be an enormous place, and all by itself out in the country halfway between Rockport and Aransas Pass. It's obviously a destination restaurant. Huge cavernous dining room and bar that can hold hundreds of people, outside area for entertainment, huge parking lot, etc. There weren't very many people there tonight, though. I suppose it's really active on weekends, etc. The menu consisted of seafood, steaks, and chicken. I ordered a shrimp/steak combination, which was about right. Jim selected the combination platter, and what a piled up feed it was: shrimp, scallops, oysters, stuffed crab, fish fillets. He barely made a dent in it, and I barely got the leftovers in the refrigerator when we got back. They'll feed both us for a couple more meals. [We had a dinner and a lundh.] It was all very good, even warmed over, but I'm not sure we'd drive that far from here again to eat there. It wasn't that special.

**8:15 p.m., Tues., April 11, 2006**  
**Goose Island State Park, TX**

We're OK here until Thurs. morning, which is how long we want to stay. We'll hope for more migrants than we've had so far, which is close to zero. We had one warbler today--an Orange-crowned. Big deal!

Sky was overcast most of the day with a marine layer. It kept the temperature down, but will probably make for a warm night. I suspect the high was about the same as yesterday, but with more humidity.

This morning Jim installed the new toilet, having to make a trip back to the store for a part only once. That's better than average for one of his do-it-yourself projects. The new toilet is taller than the old one, so he needed a longer piece of water tubing.

He also bought me a 7-foot pole, which I wanted to place between the floor and the bottom of the A/C. The case of the stupid thing, which is fairly new, sets up an incredibly noisy vibration, which I find intolerable. The pole works perfectly, but the only place to put it when we're not using it is on the floor along the sink, and Toby has decided it's a wonderful new chew-toy and has hauled it out into the middle of the room a couple dozen times already--and counting. [Later: I finally had to spray the ends with "Chew-Stop," a bitter-tasting product sold for that purpose. I've also had to use it on the corners of some of the throw-rugs.]

This morning I had Jim take me and Toby to the fishing pier. Since pets aren't permitted on the pier. I had him wait for me while I walked out and scanned in vain for the flamingo. Then I leashed up Toby and we walked around the shore area of the park, then back to the trailer--gone maybe a couple of hours. Nothing very exciting, not even the nice assortment of shorebirds I had in 2002. Then Jim got wonderful adult Baird's, Semipalmated, and I forget what else. Today there was nothing we don't get in California. (We do get Baird's and Semipalmated, but almost exclusively juveniles in the fall.)

Again I sat outside the rest of the day reading and embroidering. Actually it's kind of a nice rest from all the going we've been doing the last week and a half. We were always getting up early so as to get somewhere at daybreak. And the "somewheres" were often a

long drive from where we camped. The last couple of days I've actually slept in long enough to lie in bed and listen to the dawn chorus, but in these parts it consists only of cardinals.

I welcome the time to embroider, for I'd really like to get the squares for my North America quilt finished. I only have a few left to do and brought them all with me. When I'm home, I never seem to have time to do much, although when I'm teaching an embroidery class as I hope to this summer if enough people enroll, I seem to have more incentive to work on it. Anyone want to sign up? See June *Tattler* or this website.

**Wed., April 12, 2006**  
**Goose Island SP, TX**

No entry.

**8:40 p.m., Thurs., April 13, 2006**  
**Quail Springs RV Park, Uvalde, TX**

Not much to report either yesterday or today, but here goes.

Yesterday morning I walked Toby around the wooded camping section at Goose Island for a couple of hours. The only new bird I added was a Yellow-breasted Chat not far from the trailer. Before long Jim was photographing it. It seemed to have more of an orange throat than the one at Adolph Thomaes, but it may have been because it was wet. (Some chats are noticeably orange, and I'd love to find one of those sometime.)

In the early afternoon when Jim happened to be in the trailer, I got a glimpse of a male Orchard Oriole in the bushes near the water drip and orange half, but it disappeared never to return. Jim really doesn't need that bird, having overdone it in Michigan and Nebraska on the last two trips, respectively.

The Texas coast has really been a disappointment so far in terms of migrants. My bird list for Goose Island SP totalled only 50 species. When we were here in 2002, it was also very quiet, but a couple of times we've had all sorts of wonderful migrants right in our site. It all has to do with the weather, and right now we're getting day after day of strong southeasterly winds, which blow everything far inland. This type of weather is also very unpleasant, as well, being hot and humid. Temperature yesterday was a fairly comfortable high of 84 degrees, but a gradual warming trend to near 90 degrees is forecast. This is true of the coast and the interior. There's little cooling effect from being on the Gulf (or Atlantic) coast because of the warm Gulf Stream. It's nice to visit this area and see different birds, but for pleasant living, give me my home in Huntington Beach anytime.

This morning Jim decided to sit in the blind an hour or so before we left to see if anything would show up. I heard a Blue-headed Vireo singing off in the distance, and it actually worked its way closer and closer and gave me a glimpse of it in the treetops. Despite being audible for maybe twenty minutes, it never came down to Jim's water drip, although I heard it at one point in the shrubs 15-20 ft away.

Finally around 9:00 Jim decided to pack up, and we got on the road around 9:30. It was a drive of about 230 miles, mostly on very bumpy back roads. The pavement wasn't broken, it was just poorly laid down in the first place; the roadbed was very uneven. Things in the trailer were really in disarray whenever we stopped, but I don't think anything broke.

We decided to stay in a commercial RV park for the Easter weekend. There's no point in trying to get into any state park on this major holiday. I picked Uvalde because it's

close to our next stop in the hill country. Also, Clair de Beauvoir gave us a copy of June Osborne's brand new 2006 book, "Birder's Guide to Concan, Texas (and surrounding area)." It has his cute picture of a wet Yellow-throated Warbler staring out from the cover. The book seems very nice, and I'm anxious to explore some of the places she recommends. (Distributed by June Osborne, 2717 Braemar, Waco, TX 76710. Phone: 254-772-0728. Email: [JObirder@aol.com](mailto:JObirder@aol.com). I don't know the price.)

It has a section on Uvalde, which is 23 miles from Concan. Among the places recommended is the Uvalde Fish Hatchery. I remember it from my shorebirds class, for it is the only place north of the Mexican border that has had a Collared Plover. Not only that, most vagrant shorebirds come from the northeast or northwest; this one came from the south. I don't expect to see a Collared Plover, but I'd like to see the place, and it sounds rather interesting.

Quail Springs RV Park is on the east edge of town, but is definitely in town. It's quite nice, with lots of shady oaks and most sites vacant. The winter Texans have gone home. Of course, like most commercial parks, there are almost no shrubs to attract birds. Furthermore, the two advertised things seem to be lacking: quail and springs.

We're 200 miles from the coast, and temperature topped out in Uvalde at 85 degrees, and the humidity doesn't feel much less than it was at Goose Island SP. Forecast is for more of the same, with a warming trend to 90 degrees over the next five days. Nights were around 70 degrees along the coast, but should dip into the mid-60's here along towards morning.

### **8:30 p.m., Fri., April 14, 2006** **Quail Springs RV Park, Uvalde, TX**

It did indeed cool off nicely last night--to around 60 degrees -- due to the lower humidity. This morning it was still only 77degrees at 11:00 when we came back from our morning's birding. But, of course, we're on daylight saving time and at the western edge of the central time zone. By late afternoon it had heated up to 92 degrees and is still 89 degrees at 8:30 p.m.

We went out to the National Fish Hatchery just outside town on the west side. The pond where the Collared Plover had been found and which was good in general for shorebirds was all dry. They'd drained it in order to repair the posts for the two blinds that are out over the water. To accommodate the shorebirds, another pond was partly drained so it had some shoreline, but when we drove by it, we saw no shorebirds. All the repair work on the blind had been done by a volunteer. They're very short-staffed--more of the Bush funding cuts for the environment in evidence. The two staff members who were on duty were very friendly. The one who told us about the blind work and that the shorebirds might be elsewhere went inside the office and asked the boss for permission for us to drive the dike road out to the other pond. A while later another man, who I think was the boss came out and asked us what we thought of the blinds. He wanted to complete the restoration of them in a way that would be most effective for birding and photography. Jim had already told me everything that was wrong with it and had no trouble conveying the same information to the manager. (I think he was the manager because he looked Chinese and the name of the manager on an information sheet I picked up was also Chinese-looking. It seems unlikely to have more than one Asian here.)

June Osborne's book had said the Fish Hatchery was only open on weekdays from 8 to 4, but I decided to confirm that with one of the employees. He said office hours are 8 to 3:30 now, but that the grounds are always open for birding--earlier, later, and on weekends. We'll have to tell June that when we see her.

Despite its drained state, we did our best birding in the trees, shrubs, and grassy weeds around the dry pond. As soon as we got out of the car, I heard Bell's Vireos singing from two different places in the mesquite across from the office. Walking around the pond, I heard what sounded like a Blue Grosbeak, but I so rarely hear that sound that I wasn't completely sure. I recorded the song and played it back, to no avail, but a few minutes later two birds flew up to the top of a small bare tree, a Blue Grosbeak and a Painted Bunting--a thrilling look at two gorgeous birds, and to have them right together was really special. The Blue Grosbeak started to sing, and I knew I was right. Later I got a somewhat better song from him, using one of the blinds as a windbreak. It didn't work perfectly, though. We plan to go out there again tomorrow morning early--before the wind gets up.

We spent the afternoon holed up in the trailer out of the heat. I tried sitting outside in the shade for a while, but it was just too hot and I came in after about a half hour. But I was out there long enough to find out what was coming to Jim's water drip. Best were some Lesser Goldfinches of the eastern black-backed variety. (This is about the eastern extent of the species' range.) Jim went out in the late afternoon and got some photos and plans to set things up a little differently tomorrow and get some more. I think this is the first time I've ever seen truly black-backed Lesser Goldfinches. Even at Hueco Tanks SP near El Paso, they're gray-backed. Of course, the ones we have in the far west have green backs. [When I mentioned this to Nancy Kenyon in an email, she swore she occasionally sees black-backed ones at her feeder in Irvine.]

The main birds that are eating Jim's birdseed are Red-winged Blackbirds. While feeding, they sing a rudimentary song ending with the typical Red-wing trill. I was reading and not paying much attention, but gradually I became aware that there was also a House Finch up in a tree. As I listened to its song, I discovered that the final harsh note that is its signature was identical to the Red-winged Blackbirds' final trill. I should have recorded it, but it didn't seem possible that it would continue to sing while I got my gear out. Even without my moving, it soon flew off, proving me right. Lots more birds imitate sounds around them than people realize, and this was the first time I've been aware of a House Finch doing it.

Toby has been getting increasingly shaggy, and I could tell that the heat bothered him, so I decided that since we'd be in a town for three days I'd try to find a groomer. I really lucked out. The brochure for the RV park said that a vet at the other end of town did grooming, but when I called them yesterday afternoon, they said they didn't, and the gal who answered the phone seemed astounded that I'd even ask. However, she did know that the Oasis Outback sporting goods and animal supply store did pet grooming. I asked where it was, and she didn't know. So I walked over to the office to try to find out, but as I looked out the driveway of our RV park, there it was right across the street. So I got in the truck and drove over there--too hot to walk and the traffic in US 90 is pretty heavy. The groomer had gone home for the day, but they gave me her card and I called her. She said was fully booked for today and wasn't going to work this Saturday, but she kindly fitted him in anyway, if I was willing to leave him there all afternoon.

I took him in at 1:00 and he was there until 5:30. But does he ever look nice!! She said he behaved pretty well, too--a surprise, for he always attacks the brush after I bathe him. (She told me what I've heard from other groomers--that dogs have more respect for groomers than for their owners.) I wish I could find a groomer close to home like her. My long-standing one moved away. I tried one shop with Charlie and it was awful. The people were disagreeable and he looked practically shaved. Linda Gray has been coming down

from Lake Arrowhead to do Toby, but I always feel I'm imposing on her. Also, she needs me to help hold him, and there goes the respect for the groomer!

For my future reference--or that of any of my readers who have dogs or cats (she was doing one of those when I took Toby in)--here is the information on the groomer, Keri Rosano. I think she runs her own business and just rents shop space from Oasis Outback. Anyway her phone numbers are 830-591-3706 or 830-278-7203. Her business card says it all: "36 years experience grooming all breeds. Uvalde's *only* certified groomer. Fancy hand scissoring. Cute short cuts--not 'stripped'". I'll vouch for her work 100%. He really looks darling, and he's nice and short for the hot weather. He shouldn't need a haircut again for quite a while.

**8:00 p.m., Sat., April 15, 2006**  
**Quail Springs RV Park, Uvalde, TX**

It only got down to the mid-60's last night--and took plenty of time doing it. It was still 82 degrees when I went to bed at 10:30. Both yesterday morning and today, there was what we'd call a marine layer at home until late morning. That kept the temperature from getting unbearable until afternoon. But it got up to 97 degrees this afternoon and right now it's 88 degrees. Guess we'll sleep with the A/C on most of the night again.

This morning we went back to the Fish Hatchery, but I did much worse than yesterday on the Blue Grosbeak. The breeze was up first thing, and I never heard the bird except way off in the distance. After spending a while there, we tried another spot in June Osborne's book, County Rd. 202. It cuts south from US 90 5.1 miles from the junction of US 83 in the center of Uvalde. It's a gravel road and goes through typical scrubby habitat for 2.6 miles, ending at the Nueces River. She recommends birding all along the road, but we decided to just drive to the end and see what it was all like. At the end the river is quite wide with lots of white gravel bars. June explains that the trees were scoured out in the heavy floods of 2002. I could see where some new ones were growing and were about six to eight feet tall. It's recommended as a place for Great Kiskadee, Black Phoebe, and all three kingfishers. Unfortunately we only saw the first two species, which we didn't need, and didn't see any kingfishers. I did hear and probably saw a Yellow-breasted Chat. Jim played the Bell's Vireo recording I made for him a few times and really got a reaction from the one there. He says he may have gotten one or more good photos. This would also be the southeastern race.

I wanted to save some time to take Toby for a walk in the city park before it got too hot. It runs a ways along the bottomlands of the Leona River, and there are walkways under some nice shady oaks. So we went back to the trailer and got him, and I walked him around for a half-hour or so. Lots of people admired him. He's really cute, both in behavior and appearance, and is shaped almost like an adult dog now, instead of a puppy. We're really happy how he's turning out--and his apricot color is still persisting. Hurray! Nice long legs, really a nice shape. We're two proud "parents."

While on the walk, I saw two Green Kingfishers right in the area where there were lots of people. One I flushed from the railing of the path, because I didn't notice it. The other flew by me with a fish in its mouth. Each of them flew downstream from the developed area of the park into a section of river with lots of low shrubs and overhanging vegetation--a perfect place for a Green Kingfisher. Jim stood around an hour or so, but only saw a single fly-by. He thinks it's hopeless to photograph the bird there--no place to hide from it.

We got back to the trailer around 12:30, by which time it was pretty hot. Rest of the afternoon spent indoors, except for some time Jim spent photographing the goldfinches from the truck window.

Both last night and tonight we ate out. Our RV park is along a business road with lots of inviting restaurangs. Last night it was a Mexican place, Don Marcelino. It was quite good, but I wouldn't call it outstanding. Tonight we went to a Golden Corral, one of the large chain of buffet places that are all over the country--except where we live. We occasionally eat lunch in these places, but seldom are near one for dinner. Food was very good, as usual. We've actually eaten three dinners out this week, including The Big Fisherman earlier in the week. Usually we're camped way out in the country, so go for weeks on end eating only my cooking. Enroute from one place to another, we often eat lunches out, but with the heat, we've confined ourselves to fast-food takeout because of Toby.

**9:00 p.m., Sun., April 16, 2006**

**Garner State Park, 35 miles north of Uvalde, TX**

We didn't want to get to Garner SP too early today. Since most state parks have a check-out time of 2:00 p.m., we aimed for that. I took Toby for a walk around our RV park and discovered there were Blue Grosbeaks singing in the small weedy field behind the park. No way to record them. The rest of the morning I spent reading the Sunday paper and embroidering. Jim spent lots of time in the truck trying to get those goldfinches some more. I don't think any really nice looking ones came in for him this time. A lot of the males are rather moth-eaten looking and patchy. I wonder if they're immature birds, for I know this species doesn't have a different basic and alternate plumage, as Americans do.

The temperature only got down to 70 degrees last night, but we had overcast skies until around noon, so it didn't heat up much until the sky cleared. It was 88 degrees when we left Uvalde and 98 degrees when we arrived at Garner SP. Wow! It's cooling off a little faster tonight. It's down to 84 degrees now, while it was 88degrees last night at this time in Uvalde.

Jim had to wait in a long line the office to register at 2:00--maybe 20 min. We don't understand why, for the people didn't look as though they were camping. There were no RV's, just people in private cars. I wonder if they weren't taking the campsites the weekenders had to vacate at 2:00 and just using them for the rest of the day. Jim was told the site we had last time and liked (#105) was occupied, so he took the one next to it (106) sight-unseen. After we had been situated in the site a few minutes, the people in #105 left. We were rather disgusted, but decided it was too hot to move. Later in the afternoon, we discovered that we had misjudged the way the sun was moving and found ourselves in a totally sunny spot, with the sun coming from the side, which heated up the trailer pretty badly. Jim decided to go back to the office and see if we could move, but it was closed! And it wasn't quite 5:00 when he arrived. We don't get it. We've been looking over other sites and think maybe we'll try for #108 tomorrow. It's even shadier than #105, and that seems essential in this heat, which isn't supposed to abate until Wednesday. Today's high was forecast to be a record-breaker in San Antonio, and I'm sure it made it. Tomorrow will be just as hot, but not a record. The record is 100 degrees.

Another aggravation: they've removed all the pay phones in the park, so we can't send our emails. The office was closed, but Jim didn't think he saw one in there while he was waiting, but he may not have noticed it. We'll have to search for one outside the park tomorrow. Our cellphone works, but the signal seems to fluctuate, a situation where Pocketmail usually doesn't work.

Despite the heat, Jim set up all his bird attracting gear. So far it's been patronized mainly by Carolina Chickadees and Black-crested Titmice, but he put it directly behind the trailer, where it's hard to monitor. Right outside the window this afternoon we saw an exquisite male Summer Tanager, whose red-orange plumage glowed like a calcium flame, especially when set off by the new green leaves of the tree it was in. His mate was also around, for we saw her displace him from a perch atop the electric box at the next campsite (105).

It's 9:30 as I finish this, and the temperature outside has gone down to 78 degrees in just a half-hour. Maybe it'll be a nice cool night and I can turn off the A/C when I go to bed.

**8:30 p.m., Mon., April 17, 2006**

**Garner SP, TX**

Another 98 degrees scorcher. It's 84degrees now, a half hour earlier than it was 84 degrees last night. (It got down to 66 degrees by morning.) According to Sunday's paper, the latest weather report we have, it's supposed to be marginally cooler tomorrow.

When I went outside early this morning, I heard a vireo song. It had simple and complex phrases with timing similar to the "Solitary" group, but the tone was quite hoarse. A quick look at Kaufman's (my favorite for this purpose) song descriptions agreed with my thought that it might be a Yellow-throated. Later in the morning it came in closer and I was able to watch it singing. It was a Yellow-throated. Maybe there's hope for me yet on those hard vireo songs. I still don't think I can tell a Red-eyed from a Philadelphia. Need lots more practice.

We were able to move to site 105 this morning, but with some hassle. Jim went over to the office at 8:30 and was told the site was free for us to move into, but we couldn't register for it until 9:00. No reason given. So he dutifully went back at 9:00 and took care of it. We really see why we like this site so much. It's been shady most of the day, with dappled sun a good bit of the time. We got the A/C on early, so the trailer didn't ever heat up too badly, not even in the bedroom, which is farthest from the cool airflow.

It was after 9:30 by the time we got the trailer moved. I spent the rest of the morning putting away threads from a completed embroidery and selecting them for the new one. It's going to be a tough picture to do--the Sharp-tailed Grouse that impressed us so in Nebraska last year. Jim got a great head-down display pose that I'm using, and I really want it to be nice.

There was fog most of the morning, so I was able to work on the picnic table outside on the above project. By lunchtime it was pretty hot, so I was happy to come inside for the rest of the day.

Jim spent the entire day in his blind, shooting Summer Tanagers, Carolina Wrens and a Black-and-white Warbler--and other less interesting subjects, I'm sure. I don't know how he stood it.

**8:30 p.m., Tues., April 18, 2006**

**Garner SP, TX**

Another scorcher, topping out at 97 degrees. There was little wind, especially first thing in the morning, so I went out at first light and stayed out until shortly after sunrise. That's not particularly early, since sunrise is after 7:00 here. I got lots of nice recordings, but with so many White-winged Doves and Black-crested Titmice emoting almost constantly, it wasn't possible to get solos of anything, except perhaps brief separable single songs. I did record the Summer Tanager songs and calls, Carolina Chickadee songs



(heard mostly at daybreak in my experience, calls the rest of the time), Yellow-throated Vireo, and a few others.

After breakfast I had Jim take me and Toby over by the river where I remember there were Yellow-throated Warblers in the tall Bald Cypress trees. Last time it was too windy to get very good recordings. Today it wasn't windy, but I soon realized that it wasn't the wind so much as some rapids in the river that marred my recordings last time. I did hear the bird high in the treetops, but didn't see one. Toby was more of a handicap than I had expected, constantly jerking at the leash. Then I'd put my foot on the leash, giving him very short tether. This made him whine, not exactly what I wanted in my recordings. So I finally gave up and decided to simply walk Toby.

When I got back, I set up my chair outdoors by the picnic table with a good view of the action in front of Jim's blind, hoping it wouldn't get hot too soon. I soon became aware of almost constant Yellow-throated Vireo activity almost directly above the blind and a little to one side. After watching the birds for a while, one slipped into a nest! That's all it took. Now Jim could get photos of the bird. It was maybe 15-18 ft high, and we could view it from several angles. The birds seemed to be in the final stages of nest construction and were bringing in invisible nesting material (spider silk?) and placing it around the lip of the nest. [Later I checked Kaufman's "Lives of North American Birds" and read that this is exactly what they do--wind spider silk around the nest as a final step in construction.]

Finding this bird was a real coup, for the only photos Jim has of this bird are distinctly second rate ones of an individual in Huntington Central Park in 1985. I have first rate recordings from a few other places, especially Ft. Niobrara NWR in Nebraska last year.

We drove down to Concan eight miles away to mail some film at the post office. We also stopped by Neal's Lodges to see if June Osborne was there, but she wasn't around. We've met her a couple of times and always found her exceedingly friendly. In addition, Clair and Sue had told her we'd stop by. I left her a short note, which will have to suffice.

Again Jim spent the entire hot afternoon in his blind, but was disappointed that the Summer Tanagers made almost no visits to his water. In fact, it was a dull afternoon for him. I saw no reason for me to be outside, so amused myself in the cool trailer.

A cool (not cold) front supposed to come through and tomorrow is forecast to be 10-12 degrees cooler. Even that will be in the upper 80's. I read in a San Antonio paper that the normal high temperature there in April is 80 degrees. We've been having record-breakers. The paper also said they've had to use rolling blackouts in the San Antonio area because some power plants were down for scheduled maintenance. They didn't anticipate the heat wave.

About dusk Toby started barking his silly head off at something out the window. It turned out to be a small group of White-tailed Deer grazing on the grass not far away. I couldn't get him to shut up, so put him in his kennel until the deer wandered off. We've also seen some exotic spotted deer over by the park entrance. I think they're Axis Deer (aka Chital), based on Kaufman's mammal guide. A number of species of exotic hoofed mammals have gone feral here in Texas. A great many ranchers have imported them for hunters. They make more money from trophy hunters than from raising cattle or other domestic livestock.

**8:30 p.m., Wed., April 19, 2006**  
**Garner State Park, TX**

The main event today was a visit from our friends Clair and Sue de Beauvoir. They've been travelling around Texas for some time, too, and we've been wanting to get together. They were in Junction, 72 miles north of here, and drove down for the morning

and early afternoon. The Yellow-throated Vireos couldn't have been better performers! They paid no attention to the four of us watching them complete their nest. Both Jim and Clair got multiple shots of nest-building and of the birds on various perches on trees. As we were watching them, Sue and I could see a difference between the sexes. The female had yellow that didn't come so far down on her breast, and the area around her eyes was only a light yellow, while his was bright. Clair had never photographed the species before, although he had had glimpses of it in the treetops, as had we. We were all ecstatic about the day's success. Around noon we went out to lunch at a nearby restaurant maybe five miles north of the park on US 83. It was OK, but not wonderful. Very few restaurants are open this time of year. More are open in the summer.

Clair told us more about the Axis Deer on the park grounds. There was a huge flood on the Frio River in 2002; we'd heard about it and seen TV pictures at the time. He said it washed out many of the fences on the exotic animal ranches around here, releasing a lot of animals.

As Clair and Sue were driving in, they caught sight of a tiny White-tailed Deer fawn on one of the park lawns near the road. He drove Jim and me back to see it and get pictures. When we got there, we were disgusted to see some park visitors in golf carts had parked right next to it, gotten out of their vehicles and walked right up to it so they could photograph it with their short lenses. There was nothing for Jim and Clair to do but join the party. Jim was so excited, he couldn't hold his monopod steady--most unusual. So we came back for his tripod, but before they got back over there, the fawn had fled. Smart fawn, but it shouldn't have been in the middle of the lawn 20 feet from the main park road in the first place.

I took Toby for an early am walk before Clair and Sue got here at 8:30 and discovered a singing Yellow-throated Warbler that was not next to the noisy river. I hadn't taken my tape recorder, having learned that it and Toby don't mix. While chatting with Sue around 10:00, I began to realize that the bird was singing again in the same place ca. 200 yards away, so I excused myself and went over to record it. It sang and sang for me, but unfortunately so did the Black-crested Titmice, Carolina Wrens, and especially the White-winged Doves. There was also a fair amount of traffic on the park road and an occasional airplane, but little breeze. I recorded about fifteen minutes of song and hope I got an occasional solo. I'll find out when I evaluate my recordings at home. (I don't do it as we go along, because I like to listen to them on my good speakers at home and note the counter numbers on the tabletop AIWA tape recorder that I use to prepare programs.)

The temperature didn't cool down as much as we had hoped today. We ran the A/C all night, too, for it was still 84 degrees when I awoke at 12:30 and checked it. It topped out at a muggy 91 degrees and is still 87degrees now. It's totally cloudy and we had a few sprinkles around dinnertime--just enough for me to decide to cook inside instead of outdoors. Jim was just outside and he saw some distant lightning in the west, so maybe we'll get a thunderstorm to cool things down. Our weatheradio doesn't work here in this valley and we haven't bought a paper today, so don't really know what's going on. Of course, we have no TV. Yesterday's paper forecast a cool front coming through last night, which usually means drier air after it. Maybe it's just late. Oh, I just heard some thunder, but it's still not really close.

We had been planning to go to South Llano River SP tomorrow, but Clair and Sue advised against it. They are well acquainted with the campground hosts and have been told the park fills up just about every weekend. So we paid for three more nights here in Garner and will go there Sunday.

Jim just went outside again and says it's starting to sprinkle (9:00). I think it'll be our first rain since we left Caspers Park.

**8:30 p.m., Thurs., April 20, 2006**  
**Garner SP, TX**

It didn't rain much last night, but there was lots of thunder and lightning off in the distance. We also had a pretty good wind storm. In fact, it blew one of Jim's tarps off the top of his blind--the underneath one. The top one was heavy waterproof canvas--old and very dirty--so he always puts a blue plastic one under it to keep the fabric top of his blind clean. The top one was tied down, but the underneath one wasn't. Apparently the wind lifted the upper one enough to blow the lower one right out. We found it about 30 feet away a short distance up the hill behind the trailer.

It was still hot when I went to bed, but cooled off into the upper 70s around 12:30, when I awoke. So I opened the windows and turned off the noisy A/C. It was 74\_ when we got up this morning and very muggy. The sky was partly cloudy.

After breakfast I decided to walk a ways on the old park entry road, which is now a hiking and biking trail. This is the place where we've found Golden-cheeked Warblers the last two times we've been here. I also wondered what had become of the Canyon Wrens, which were high profile in our campsite the last time we were here. I had barely started up the trail, which runs along the hillside behind our trailer about half-way up, when I started to hear the shimmering descending song of the Canyon Wren way upslope from where I was. But it wasn't until I was walking back down that I heard a buzzy song from up the hill. I turned on my microphone, so I could record it and hear it better. It was the Golden-cheeked Warbler, and pretty soon I got a brief glimpse of it to clinch the ID. Not a good photo subject, so I didn't try to get Jim up there. He has fair pictures of the species.

When I got back to the trailer, I found Jim a few sites away with his chair set up in front of a Golden-fronted Woodpecker nest hole he'd discovered while walking Toby. The adults seemed to be feeding young. He stayed there a while, but before the parents returned again (woodpeckers often have very long intervals between feedings), the sky became really dark and threatening, so he decided he'd better close up shop lest the sky open up.

It actually didn't start to rain for the better part of an hour, but it certainly was dark. When it did start around 10:00, it was very light at first, gradually becoming moderate. It rained continuously from then until around 4:00, when it gradually let up and stopped. It really cooled things off. The highest temperature I noted today was 76 degrees, which was around 9:30 when I got back from my walk. The low was 69 degrees when the rain lessened briefly in the early afternoon and Jim went out to check it. What a relief from all that heat, but it's been terribly muggy.

Of course, all the rain reduced the demand for Jim's water drip to zero. Every rock on the hillside has holes on top, and they were full of water. Not to mention the standing water here and there on the paved road. Fortunately, about that time the Summer Tanager pair discovered the Magic Meal Jim had place in the tree crotch right outside the trailer window. So after the rain stopped, he wiped the window clean and photographed the birds from the trailer. He even used flash, wrapping a cloth around the sunshade of the lens and wedging it against the glass so there'd be no reflection from the flash on the picture. Both sexes came in occasionally, and Jim even ate dinner with his head at a 90\_ angle to the table, keeping track of the action. No bird came while we were eating, but afterwards, when it was almost dark, one of them came in for a last bite.

After my morning walk, my day consisted of defrosting the refrigerator, a little reading, and lots of embroidery. I sat outside for several hours after the rain stopped. So far we've had no mosquitos here--unusual for this place--but I suspect the rain will start them hatching out and they'll be bad in a few days. As I've mentioned in other accounts, we have had mosquitos, but they were in areas near the coast or resacas in the lower Rio Grande Valley. There were none in Uvalde or here.

We were certainly glad we'd decided not to drive to South Llano SP today. It was pleasant to be in the COOL trailer with the windows open and the A/C OFF listening to the gentle rain and the birds, not the steady roar of the A/C. Even with the pole stopping the vibration, it's still pretty loud.

**9:15 p.m., Fri., April 21, 2006**  
**Garner State Park, TX**

Last night around 12:30 a.m. we were treated to a rip-snorter of a thunderstorm. It lasted around an hour and a half, with maybe 15 minutes of extremely loud thunder claps right close to us. Jim always stays in bed during those things, but since I know I won't be able to sleep, I usually get up and read until the thing moves on. This time I was also concerned that Toby might be afraid. He was locked in his kennel on the dinette bench and could see me sitting on the couch. Only twice did he rouse up and look at me--questioningly and not fearfully, thank goodness. He never whimpered. I took the opportunity to try to instill in him the idea that those loud noises were just one more type of fun, and Toby is an extremely fun-loving dog. So I said upbeat things like, "Wasn't that a nice loud one?" and "Aren't we having a good time?" He immediately subsided and despite a few more ear-splitters, I didn't see any more of him. One more potential hurdle that turned out to be no problem.

After the thunderstorm, I think the front passed, because it was 64 degrees when we got up this morning, the coolest it's been in at least ten days. There was a little high fog, but it soon cleared to a very nice day. It did warm up to the mid-80s in the afternoon, but there was a nice breeze.

In the morning we drove down to Neal's Lodges at Concan and sat around the Black-capped Vireo spot for an hour or so. Very little came in. Jim fired off a couple of shots at an Olive Sparrow, "just to see if my camera was working." Finally we left and investigated the new property Neal's has acquired in an old pecan grove. Clair had told us about it and it's also written up in June Osborne's book. The turn-off is on a gravel road across the street and slightly east of the new bank/postoffice building. There is a sign for the pecan grove visible from the east, but not from the west. We followed the signs after we got on the gravel road--and there were several corners where one had to know which way to turn--and within a mile came to the place. The entire road was a varied mix of habitats that look like a cross between the thornscrubby desert habitat down by Uvalde and the more wooded habitat of the Hill Country.

The grove itself was very beautiful, and June has fixed up a watering and feeding station there. Clair said he's seen some nice birds at the water drip, but we saw very little, since everything was still damp from last night's torrential rain. Also it was 11:00 by the time we got there. I want to go back early tomorrow morning and walk the entire road.

This afternoon I sat outside the entire time--the first day that has been possible since we arrived at Garner. (I wouldn't subject myself to that heat the way Jim did.) It was fun to watch the behavior of the small number of species in our site. The Yellow-throated Vireos were the most interesting. They'd occasionally make desultory visits to their nest, fixing things a bit, then squirming around inside to see if it was comfortable--or something. But

the activity wasn't nearly as frequent as on Wednesday. I conjectured that perhaps they'd started their clutch of eggs and were just checking on it, but we'll never know. Most of the time the vireos just moved about the trees in the deliberate fashion of their kind.

Jim had told me that the vireos always seemed to chase away the Black-crested Titmice when they ventured within 15 or 20 feet of the nest. I discovered that they also chased away Summer Tanagers and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers on several occasions. Nothing else came near, so my guess is that they'd chase away any other bird.

That may be why Jim has had so little action at his water drip. This afternoon he spent most of the time in the trailer shooting the tanagers, woodpeckers, etc., out the window as he did yesterday. Finally he moved his blind over in front of the trailer and continued the same activity. We're also getting hummingbirds at the syrup feeder on the same tree, but they're all females. I can't tell female Black-chins from Ruby-throateds, but since all the males at Neal's feeders seem to be Black-chins, that's probably what these females are.

Late this afternoon a Canyon Wren came down far enough on the hillside to be audible from our site. It sounded as though it was close enough to see, but I never did.

I really love those beautiful Summer Tanagers. This evening after dinner just before dark I took Toby on a long walk, and their "chicky-tucky-tuck" was audible the whole time I was out. The only other birdsong was a few distant (for a change) White-winged Doves.

We thought a lot of campers might arrive for the weekend, but so far we still have the entire loop to ourselves except for the "host" across the ditch. We don't know what he does--have never seen a woman around the trailer. We seldom see him, and the curtains seem always to be closed. Yet there are nearly always two vehicles parked nearby. Curious.

Our loop is probably one of the less popular ones, because it is the farthest from the river, and most people come here to fish or play in the water. Riding the river in innertubes--actually modern replacements--is a very popular activity, and there are even services that will provide the innertubes and take you upstream to drift down.

**8:30 p.m., Sat., April 22, 2006**  
**Garner State Park, TX**

This afternoon I drove around the other camping loops and discovered that most of the sites near the river are occupied, mostly with tent-camping families, even the electrical sites. Our loop again is almost empty. There is one tent half-way down and an RV barely visible at the far end. How wonderful that our favorite site in our favorite loop is so unpopular.

Our vireos and tanagers entertained us all afternoon again. Even though this campsite has probably attracted the smallest number of species so far on the trip (except for some in-town private campgrounds), you can't complain about Yellow-throated Vireos and Summer Tanagers. I'm also hearing Yellow-throated and Nashville Warblers and Great Crested Flycatchers in the treetops. A Black-and-white Warbler comes to the water drip once in a great while. Regulars also include White-eyed Vireo, Carolina Chickadee, Chipping Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Black-crested Titmouse and NO Great-tailed Grackles or Red-winged Blackbirds. Hooded Orioles come rarely to the syrup feeder and orange half. The only things Jim has to chase away are squirrels.

This morning we went early to Neal's Lodges at Concan, and I walked from the highway to the pecan grove--about a half-mile--then walked the trails around in the grove and the nearby meadow area. All very nice--and especially nice for a private establishment to have so much natural habitat and be willing to manage it for the birds. Even more

unusual is the fact that outsiders are welcome to come on the grounds and walk the trails and enjoy the birds at the feeders. Really a special place. According to June's new book, they're doing a lot of refurbishing of the interiors of the cabins and building a number of new ones.

The recording conditions weren't superb because Concan is at a crossroads, and both highways have a lot of traffic. The best thing I recorded was a Yellow-breasted Chat and a Mockingbird singing simultaneously. Most interesting was the way the Mocker kept including chat motifs in his song. I'll have to use that tape as a workshop practice tape sometime--when I prepare a new workshop with chat in it.

June drove by and chatted briefly with me, then went on to where Jim was in the pecan grove and they had a longer conversation. I'm glad we were able to see her after all--and meet her husband, who recently retired and now spends the migration period here with her.

While I was wandering around, Jim spent the entire time at the water drip. He said a Yellow-throated Warbler and a probable Wilson's came in briefly, but he couldn't get any pictures. All the time he was there he was mentally redesigning the water drip. The pool of water is just too deep for little birds. Although it has logs and stones in it, they protrude up too much, so there is no place for little birds--or even medium-sized ones--to bathe. They were bathing in the muddy overflow from the bath and hard to see. A pigpen isn't too far away, so we even wonder how clean the water is.

Since Clair is going to be staying there the first week in May, Jim has decided to take a rock with a nice depression in it from the hillside behind our campsite down there, attach a splitter and some small-diameter water tubing to the faucet, and rig up the right kind of water drip for the place. We can't imagine that they'd object. The other set-up will still be there as it was. Jim even found out from June where Clair usually sits to take pictures, so he'll place the rock the right distance from that spot. (He hadn't thought of fixing up the place when he was talking to June, or he'd probably have discussed it with her. She was going away for a couple of days.)

Since he's already shot more film than he really needs of the birds in our campsite, he got out his digital camera and got some images of the vireos and tanagers. Then he tried to remember how to download them to his computer. It's been a while and it took a lot of profanity before he figured it out. (I was glad I was outside most of the time and didn't have to listen to it.)

I tried to record the soft call of the Y-t Vireos, a brief little "zhreek" that is quite different from other vireos' calls that I know. They do it a lot, especially when another species enters their territory. Unfortunately the wind and all the traffic and camper activity along the road just outside our camping loop interfered with getting anything very good. I'll try again in the morning before anyone wakes up. [It didn't work--only song and too much wind.]

The weather today started out in the high 60s with low clouds--sort of like June-gloom at home, but warmer and therefore muggier. The sun didn't come out until around 1:00, then it warmed up quickly. Late afternoon was borderline uncomfortable in the high 80s, but I stayed outside anyway. We did turn on the A/C in the trailer. In fact, it's still on, because insects come in through the screen on warm evenings. I'll turn it off when I go to bed and turn out the lights. . . . I just went outside and found it's still 82degrees out there, another reason to keep it on. There's been a 10 mph breeze all day, also interfering somewhat with recording. . . Later yet: I didn't turn it off until 1:30 am. It was 72 degrees when we awoke in the morning.

**8:30 a.m., Mon., April 24, 2006**  
**South Llano River SP, Junction, TX**

It was 10:00 last night before I could have sat down to write up the day's activities, so I delayed it until this morning.

Yesterday morning I stayed in the trailer editing the last two weeks of my diary to send to Nancy. Jim went back to the pecan grove at Neal's to set up the new water feature for Clair. He didn't try to make it drip, because he had no way to suspend the end of the little hose above the rock. But it's so close to the other water that the birds will surely find it and discover how nice and shallow it is--just right for a bath.

While he was there Jon Dunn came by with a birding tour group. It seems as though we invariably run into Jon on these spring trips--somewhere. Jim told them about the Yellow-throated Vireo nest in our campsite, but neglected to mention that we were leaving that day. Jon said they'd stop by around noon, but it was almost 2:00 when they got there. The birds had been very low-profile all morning, but when that large group arrived, they both immediately flew up to where the nest was and flitted around in an agitated fashion. It was apparent that they were defending their nest from us. This increases my confidence that they are in the process of laying their clutch of eggs. I had checked occasionally before that and never seen a bird incubating yet.

The morning was cool and overcast, with the sun not coming out until about the time we were getting ready to leave around 2:00 to drive the 76 miles to South Llano River SP near Junction. The temperature topped out at a very steamy 88 degrees. This morning is overcast again, but it only got down to 74 degrees last night, one of the warmest ones we've had. It's supposed to cool off tomorrow, with thunderstorms forecast every day for the rest of the week.

We weren't able to get a very good site here in the park, which has only a rather small campground. All the shady sites on the outside of the one camping loop were taken, so we have one in the middle that's right next to the trail to the rest rooms. No water drip here for Jim, for there aren't even any shrubs in it. However, the park has a lot of photo and observation bird blinds, which Jim is checking out at this very moment.

We got here around 4:30 and had barely gotten settled when Clair pulled into the visitors parking area by the rest rooms and caught sight of me sitting in my chair. He came over and then drove us around and showed us two special places: the area of the river where he found and photographed the Green Kingfishers (male and female) and an area east of Junction where he photographed the Black-capped Vireo.

It was after 7:00 when we got back. I had marinated some chicken thighs (huge ones that took a long time to cook) and had to grill them that evening. So it was probably around 8:30 when we sat down to dinner.

Point of information: Forget all you learned in Spanish class about pronunciation. Here Llano is pronounced "Lanno" with a short "a."

This seems like a good place to end this installment. My readers will find out in a couple of weeks how our stay here turned out.