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Rio Grande Valley, Texas area Bird Count Reaches 510

The number of recorded bird species in Texas' southernmost four county area has reached 510, according to Nancy Millar, Director of the McAllen, Texas Convention and Visitors' Bureau.

The McAllen area, long known as the U.S.'s premier birding destination by hard core birders, has only become aware of its natural assets in the last decade, Millar said. "The birders have known us for many years. The locals have only just discovered that there is money in birding."

The number of species is significant because of the amount of money generated in the area by birding. 125,000 birders visit each year, leaving behind \$125 million. "Obviously, the more birds that are reported in the area, the more attractive the Valley is to birders," said Millar.

"Officially, we are at 509 species," she said. "But the recent irrefutable sighting of the snow bunting has pushed us to 510."

If the region, known as the Rio Grande Valley, were a state, it would rank #5 in the entire country for species. "Only New Mexico, Arizona, California and, of course, the entire state of Texas, have more bird species than the Rio Grande Valley," said Millar. "Comparing our region in size to entire states, especially states the size of Texas and California, we are obviously much, much smaller. But we still have the species. And having them more concentrated in a smaller area, people are more likely to see them here."

The McAllen area, in the southernmost tip of Texas, is home to many Mexican bird species, whose northernmost range just reaches into the U.S. in South Texas. It is also located at the funnel for Western Hemisphere's primary migratory flyway. "We have our brightly colored year-round birds," she said, and then, twice a year, an amazingly diverse array of migrants."

A current list of all Rio Grande Valley reported birds is available at www.southtexasnature.com.