

Post-Meeting Trip to Aransas

by John and Victoria Carley



Flat _____ A flat landscape.

Neither of us had ever traveled in Texas prior to this trip and we were fascinated by the extremes, and the subtleties, of the scenery we experienced. The land between Corpus Christi and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge was some of the flattest land we had ever seen. The only elevation in the miles and miles of flat landscape was the highway overpasses. There was a certain beauty to the flat land and under the sameness of the fields you could see the hand of man had changed marsh to agriculture.

We were driving independently of the group bus, since we were headed to the Houston airport after this trip. On the flat stretch of Highway 774, approaching the refuge, we noticed an undulating carpet of gray lumps in the fields. Having come to butterflying from a birding background, we stopped. The field was alive with Sandhill Cranes, feeding and calling and chortling and, amazingly, a quarter mile away, 24 *American Butterflies*, Winter 2010

one large white lump: a Whooping Crane. A “life” bird! As we watched, conveniently for us, it took off and soared about, giving us excellent views.

Above: A view of the extensive marshes at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

Above inset: Trip participants were rewarded by the sight of one of the first of the endangered Whooping Cranes to return last fall.

Opposite page: One of the authors surveying for water lilies and alligators.

Elated, we met up with the group at the refuge visitor’s centre, where the twitchers of the group were already nervous about the prospects of spotting our target species (False Duskywing).

Although some interest was shown in our bird sighting, this was a butterfly trip and we proceeded south into the refuge, led with enthusiasm by our leader, Lizee Cavazos. Our first stop was the observation tower and boardwalk where, after a few minutes, panic set in — no False Duskywing — in fact, not that many butterflies in total. However, we did see a number of Palamedes Swallowtails: trying to get a photo of one of them perched is like trying to catch quicksilver.

We retreated back up the public road, to the picnic area and the clearing under a hydro line swath. Finally, in with its host plant, Coastal Indigo, *Indigofera miniata*, a False Duskywing was spotted. A “life” butterfly! Cheers, shouts,

and a minor stampede ensued. Eventually a total of three were observed at this site. The small clearings produced a number of delights, from Sickle-winged Skippers to White-striped Longtails, Sachem, and unexpectedly, for us, a female Horace’s Duskywing. Common Buckeyes were everywhere, necessitating close looks for the very occasional Tropical Buckeye. This area was the most productive of the stops. Trails closer to the visitor’s centre were walked, with a few new species seen, including Obscure and Ocola Skippers.

The reserve had a deserted, totally off-season feel. We were essentially the only park visitors, and the trails were all ours, except for the alligators.

Finally, after a long afternoon of butterflying, on the way back to the Portland hotel, we all stopped again on Highway 774, set up our scopes, and the whole group saw the Whooping