



HOW TO ENJOY YOUR LONG DAY AT SEA:

If you have never been on a pelagic birding trip or a Texas Pelagic birding trip then you really need to carefully read this document and follow its advice. If you've been on a Texas Pelagic before it would still be worthwhile to review this for any updated information. I'll try to give you a good idea of what to expect so you can be prepared both mentally and physically.

Lodging for Pelagic Trips:

Please keep in mind that since the pelagic trips are dependent on good weather make sure your hotel reservations offer free cancellation or can be cancelled within a few days of the trip without incurring a large cancellation fee.

South Padre Island Make Friday night reservations for lodging close to or on South Padre Island:

The months of June, July and August are high tourist season on South Padre so hotel rates on the island are significantly higher by 2-3 times on the island than they are off the island, but it also has the advantage of being very close to the departure point at 5:30am. Off the island there are hotels in Port Isabel, San Benito, Harlingen and Brownsville and other smaller towns but these are up to a 40 minute to one hour driving distance from the island. I personally find Harlingen a good place to stay during these months. I recently stayed at the Harlingen Hampton Inn and Suites for \$100/night. When I checked the Island even the Super 8 was charging over \$300/night for a room that wasn't half as nice as The Hampton Inn. I remember staying at the Super 8 a few times in past summers for less than \$120/night. If you don't mind paying inflated tourist season rates there of plenty of nice expensive hotels on SPI.

I consider staying on SPI in the off-season months of September, October and November when the rates drop to more affordable levels.

Port Aransas: Make Friday night reservations for lodging in or near Port Aransas.

There are a number of hotels in Port Aransas but they charge higher rates during the summer vacation season than other hotels off the islands. If price or availability is an issue in Port Aransas these other locations offer additional options for lodging. Aransas Pass offers a few hotels just 7 miles to the west and a ferry ride away, so be sure to factor in extra travel time in the morning for the ferry. I would guess that at 3:00 am there will be no line and only a short wait for the ferry to depart. I've found that these hotels are about ½ the price or less than similar lodging in Port Aransas. Ingleside is just beyond Aransas Pass to the west and has a few hotels too.

Mustang Island stretches for 19 miles south of Port A and has numerous condo style lodgings. North Padre Island is just over the Packery Channel bridge from Mustang Island about 20 miles / 30 minutes south of Port A. There are a few hotels here but being on the island they are also more expensive. Corpus Christi is about 30 miles away from Port A to the west of North Padre Island across the JFK Causeway.



Learn the Birds:

Seabirds are among the most difficult families of birds to identify. To the untrained eye they all look basically alike within each family group. The difference between one species and another could be just subtle differences in underwing shading, size or some other subtle feature that can be very difficult to ascertain under typical at sea viewing conditions. Reviewing the ID field marks of the birds listed on the checklists, even if you've seen them before really helps because more than likely it may have been last year or longer since you've seen these birds. Aside from that there is not time to refer to the field guide when you're trying to stay on the bird from the boat so it really helps to know what to look for. And if something rare shows up you'll be more prepared to recognize it.

Well before the day of the trip review field guides to familiarize yourself with the birds we may hope to encounter. On my website there are seabird photo galleries which are a nice study aid: <http://texaspelagics.com/seabird-occurance/tx-seabirds/>

Also check out the Texas Seabirds Bargraph checklist I created that is available on the website at: <http://texaspelagics.com/seabird-occurance/seabirds-bargraph-checklist/> This will help you to anticipate what birds can be seen during any month of the year.

Check out Brad McKinney's annotated checklist found here: <http://texaspelagics.com/pelagic-sea-birds/seabirds-ltc/> for an idea of the possibilities.

The Weather - Sea Conditions:

- If you're really interested in watching the weather there is a good NOAA website I always start checking for marine forecasts beginning 5 days before the trip. <http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?site=bro&zmx=1&zmy=1&map.x=320&map.y=220>
- Check out the GOM Weather page for more information and links to good marine weather forecasting websites. <http://texaspelagics.com/gom-info/gom-marine-weather/>
- I will email all the participants on the evening of 5 days before the trip with the long-range marine forecast for trip day. (Monday evening if the trip is on Saturday). This is the earliest a marine wave forecast is available for trip day. This is just an early heads up, as more than likely the forecast will have changed several times between now and trip day.
- If you're not that concerned, leave this to the trip organizer and leaders. I will be diligently checking the latest forecast and worrying about the trip beginning the weekend before our departure. The trip organizer (Garett Hodne of <http://TexasPelagics.com>) will decide if sea conditions warrant cancelling the trip the morning before departure.
- In general if the seas are forecast to be greater than 5 feet it would be very difficult to have a viable Texas Pelagic, and the trip would be cancelled. The reason is two-fold: We need to travel at least 50 miles from shore to reach the shelf edge and pelagic depth waters. When seas are greater the 5 feet we cannot cruise fast enough to make it that far and back in 12 hours. Secondly wave periods in the Gulf of Mexico are short compared to waves of the



same height in the open oceans of the East or West Coasts so that makes for a much rougher ride which is a safety concern.

- I will be in contact with the boat captain and will send out an email to all the participants around 10am on the day before the trip to let everyone know if the trip is a “Go” or “No Go”.
- If possible you might consider delaying your departure for South Padre Island until you get the green light that the trip is a “Go” around 10am on the day before the trip. This will save you a long drive and a lot of trouble if weather conditions are lousy and the trip is cancelled ahead of time. If the “Go ahead” is given on the day before departure it doesn’t guarantee that the trip will definitely sail as conditions could still get bad overnight, but there is nothing anyone can do about that.

Equipment to Bring:

- Waterproof Binoculars: 7x or 8x may prove easier to hold steady on a rocking boat, yet some people do use 10x anyway. Bring a lens wipe as they will get wet from sea spray. But rinse your bins in fresh water before using the wipe so salt crystals won't scratch the optics.
- Cameras are always good for documenting birds or marine mammals, but take precautions to protect them from highly corrosive salt spray.
- A small bag or daypack for stuff. (store it in cabin)
- Field Guides. (store it in cabin) We sometimes have an assortment of Sea Bird and Marine Animal guides on board the boat for everyone's reference. These are kept on a table in the cabin, where they should remain. If you want one at your side bring one for you pocket. Although you should study up at home first.
- ☒ Leave the scope, tripod or monopod behind onshore; they will be useless at sea even in the very calmest conditions. And they won't be permitted onboard.

Food and Beverages:

- A small cooler for food and drinks. (store it in cabin) *No Glass Containers!*
- Plenty of water and/or your favorite drinks.
- The difference between feeling good or getting seasick may be what you eat or drink. Here is a list of items that may help you avoid feeling nauseous:
 - ☺ Pretzels
 - ☺ Plain Crackers
 - ☺ Rice Cakes
 - ☺ Bagels
 - ☺ Plain sandwiches
 - ☺ Ginger Ale
 - ☺ Cola
- Keep well hydrated during the day. Drink small sips constantly. Also nibbling constantly on crackers or other safe items may help keep your stomach settled.
- You may want to avoid these items:
 - ☹ Potato Chips
 - ☹ Sandwiches with salami, Oil, Mayo, onions, peppers



- ⊗ Corn chips
- ⊗ Chocolate
- ⊗ Other fatty or greasy foods.
- ⊗ Canned anchovies. (but it does make good chum)

Seasickness prevention:

- Get good night's sleep. Don't be hung over from a lack of sleep or partying.
- Most importantly keep a positive attitude and stay engaged in conversation to keep your mind off getting sick.
- Eat a decent breakfast. Don't have an empty stomach.
- Watch what you eat and drink during the trip.
- Stay out in the fresh air, avoid the stuffy cabin and frequently scan the horizon this helps keep your equilibrium focused on a level stable surface.
- Try sitting in the middle of the boat near the railing when the rocking and rolling is less pronounced.
- ⊗ Avoid the stern where diesel fumes may be wafting by and the fish oil fat chum is being prepared.
- ⊗ Avoid the upper deck where the wave motion is exaggerated.
- Over-the-Counter Meds: There are a number of motion sickness medications available at a drug store. They have different active ingredients and be aware that some of these may make you drowsy, which isn't as bad as being sea sick but you will miss some birds if you're asleep all day in the cabin.
- Prescription Meds: Check with your doctor. Many people use the "Transderm Scop Patch" and I've had good luck with it, but it too has side effects.
- Many over-the-counter and prescription meds need to be started the evening before or two evenings (see below) departure to be effective.
- Wrist Bands. I've seen people use wrist bands with a little marble on the pressure point that's supposed to reduce nausea. That may work for some but I've also seen a few of these same people get sea sick.
- Search the Web for more Motion Sickness information. i.e. www.motionsickness.net

One of our frequent Pelagic Birders shared her tips for dealing with Mal-de-Mar: *I was asked to share what I do to guard against seasickness. A couple of quick statements: As with any medication please be sure and check with your doctor first. And remember that works for one may not be the best thing for another.*

Here's what works for me: I take Meclizine 25 mg tablets. If the Pelagic is Saturday, then I take one tablet Thursday evening before bed and one around 6pm on Friday evening and I am done. I do NOT take any the day of the trip. I also keep some ginger gum on hand just in case the trip is unusually rough. At the slightest sense of queasiness I will chew a piece.

A money saving tip: Dramamine markets 25 mg of Meclizine in their "less-drowsy formula". Usually 8 tablets for about \$4.00. However, if you go to Wal-Mart Pharmacy (and maybe other pharmacies too) they generally have meclizine 25mg tablets in a bottle of 100, behind the counter and the cost is usually right around \$5.00 for the whole bottle. They can sell this without a prescription if the bottle is unopened.

Finally is all this fails and you must succumb to chumming, deliberately head for the stern (back) of the boat with the wind at your back so the barf goes overboard (where it may actually do some good). Never lose it in the head (toilet) or you and everyone else on board will be very sorry you did.

What to wear and Avoiding Sun Exposure:

In July, August and September it's likely to be very warm or hot offshore.

- **Light quick drying clothing** that offers full sun protection is best. I prefer shorts but judge for yourself.
- **Light weight shoes** that dry quickly if soaked, work well. Open toe sandals especially are seriously discouraged. **Flip-flops will not be permitted!** Quarters are tight and in rough seas someone else could easily stomp on your toes if caught off balance. In my opinion the ideal footwear for Texas Pelagics is the Keen Sandal like this one:



- **Sunglasses:** With UVA / UVB protection. Also polarized lenses help in spotting fish below the sea surface.
- **Hats:** Most Texas Pelagic Birding trips are run during the summer months when the intense tropical Texas sun is bearing down on us for the entire day. So a good hat affording good protection from the rays is an essential piece of a Pelagic Birders gear. Think about rigging up a lanyard with a clip to your shirt to keep your hat from blowing overboard. I have seen a few hats lost overboard including mine. It's always windy when the boat is cruising.
- Here is a selection of **"Texas Pelagics" hats** that should be a part of your pelagic experience. These two hats are ideally suited for pelagics offering good sun protection and a clip and lanyard to protect you hat from blowing overboard. I for one have had more than one hat blow overboard. These hats will be on sale during all the upcoming Texas Pelagics.



Adams Extreme Performance Cap: Four-panel, low profile cap made of 70% cotton/ 30% nylon UV protective (UPF 45+) fabric, with elongated bill for sun protection, mesh on the two side panels for extra breathing ability, nylon webbing outside Velcro closure, elastic cord and plastic clip. Also includes Adams exclusive Cool-Crown comfort mesh lining, and terrycloth sweatband. Care Instructions: Hand wash in cold water. Do not bleach. Do not iron. Do not tumble-dry. One Size Fits Most. Available in Navy and Stone - **\$25.00**



Adams Extreme Outdoor Cap: Need a hat for those long, hot afternoons on the pelagic? Lightweight 70% cotton, 30% nylon fabric is treated with DuPont Teflon water and stain repellent to reflect UV rays (UPF 45+). Neck cape with patented zipper pocket. Terry cloth sweatband. Sewn eyelets. Matching fabric lining only behind front panel. Metal clip attaches to collar and a cord system with a barrel lock adjusts sizing. Adams exclusive Cool-Crown mesh lining. 3-3/4" visor length for added sun protection. Green under visor to reduce sun glare. One Size Fits All. **\$30.00**



During the months of October and November the weather can be highly variable.

- The temperature can be very comfortable in the fall. It can still be warm but not usually hot and very rarely cool. You probably would not be too hot if you wore long pants. Since sea spray is often blowing it helps to wear quick drying materials, rather than cotton. Lightweight water resistant pants are a good choice. In the early morning hours before sunrise it might be a little chilly in the breeze so a light water-repellant jacket will come in handy.
- **About Rain Gear:** I have yet to go on a Texas Pelagic where I thought it would have been nice to have rain gear. Usually it is just too hot to wear it. There are times when spray from the waves and wind can drench one side of the boat but then it is usually just a matter of avoiding the lower deck on the windward side. The upper deck rarely gets spray and then usually only on the bow. Plus the water is usually very warm (85[°]) along with the air so it's never really a matter of needing to stay dry to stay warm. Sometimes it just feels good to catch some spray to cool off. It does rain on rare trips but then it's usually only scattered showers that last a few minutes and shelter is available on the boat. The seats get wet from rain and spray running down the sides so sometimes your shorts get wet from that. It's never really bothered me since it's almost always warm out. During the cooler (that's a relative term, remember this is a Texas transplant talking) months of October and November if you really want to stay dry from spray than a light rain jacket and pants will come in handy. I personally prefer to wear quick drying clothing including underwear, and not worry too much about occasionally getting wet from spray.

Exposure and Dehydration:

- Sunscreen: Apply early and often. The sun can be brutal when combined with being reflected off the water.
- Lip balm with high SPF.
- Please drink PLENTY of water. I recommend drinking about a gallon of water during the day. The intense south Texas sun and the sea breeze combine to make dehydration a serious concern on Texas Pelagics. If you're not urinating every few hours you're getting dehydrated. If you get dehydrated your more susceptible to seasickness and sun stroke. And you will feel bad the night following the trip.
- The noise from the diesel engines on the stern of the boat is rather loud, you may find it comfortable to wear foam earplugs.

The Night Before and Morning of:

- **Be well rested:** If you've been driving all night from a distant point somewhere in Texas and arrive at the dock an hour before the boat sails you will probably have a miserable pelagic trip. Lack of sleep is a major factor in getting seasick. Arrive early the day before and sleep well at a local motel.

PELAGIC TRIP REPARATIONS

www.TexasPelagics.com



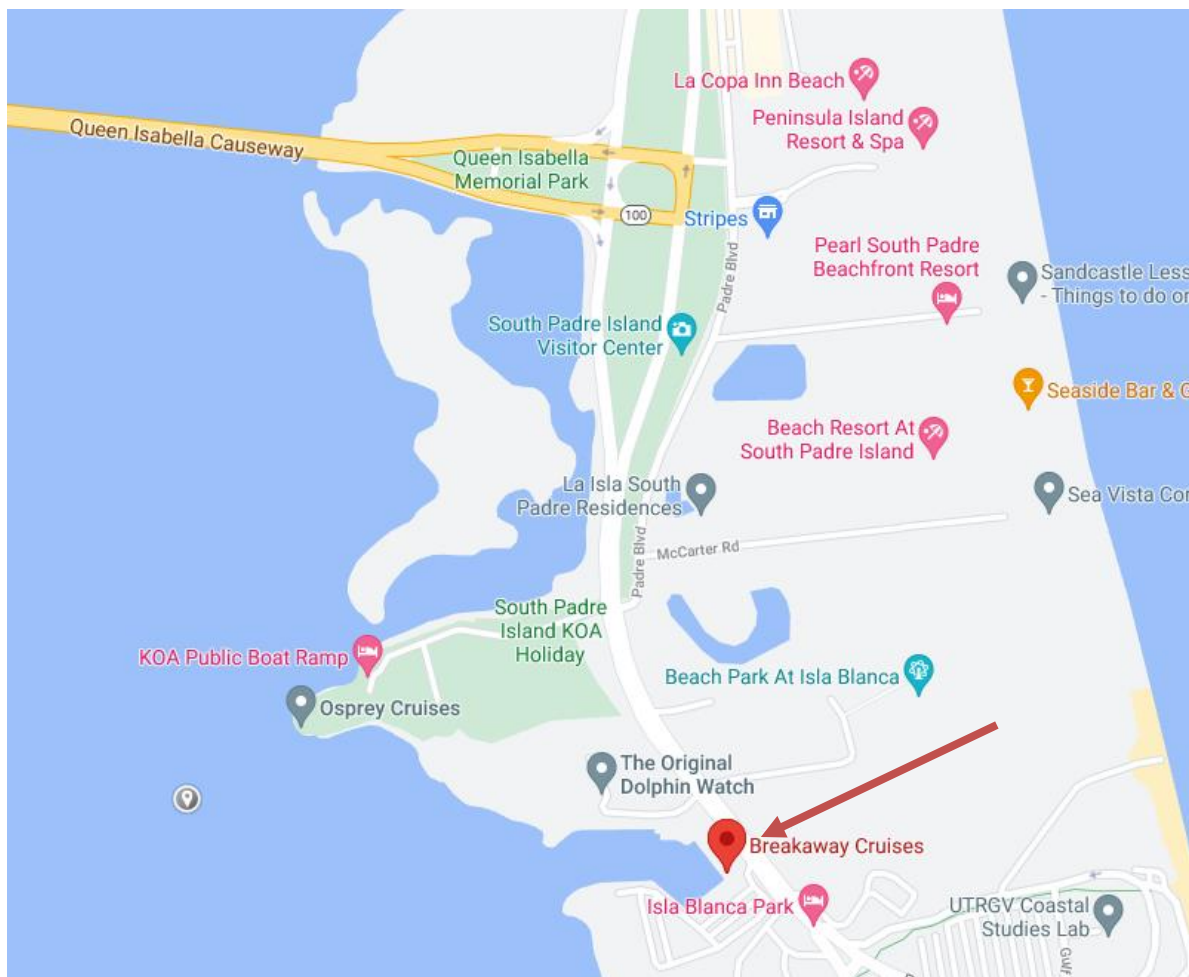
- **Eat a good Breakfast:** You know what keeps your stomach settled. Oatmeal, toast and bagels may work. I've heard a high protein breakfast is also good. I like hard-boiled eggs.
- **Keep a positive outlook:** We never know what the day will bring in bird and wildlife sightings. Help yourself and everyone else out by constantly scanning the horizon for birds. The more eyes that are on the lookout the less likely we are to miss something. Plus staying engaged and scanning the horizon helps you keep your balance and may help to avert seasickness.

When and Where to Meet: The posted departure time for each trip is when the boat leaves from the dock. All participants should plan to arrive at the dock no later than 30 minutes prior to the departure time for sign-in and a safety briefing. **Please be on time, we cannot wait if you are late.**

South Padre Island:

The Isabella Dock is located on South Padre Island about .6 miles south of the Queen Isabella Causeway which spans the bay from Port Isabel to South Padre Island on the bay (west) side. After crossing the Queen Isabella Causeway from Port Isabel to South Padre Island turn right on Padre Island Blvd proceed .6 mile to the second right turn onto the parking lot, make a quick left turn and Breakaway Cruises and the Isabella dock is on the right just behind the Breakaway Cruises store front / office.

Here is a map to [Isabella Boat at Breakaway Cruises on South Padre Island.](#)



Port Aransas:

Captain Kelly's Deep Sea Headquarters is located very close to the ferry landing on the Municipal Boat Harbor in Port Aransas. If you're coming off the ferry from Aransas Pass it is just beyond the first intersection traffic light (Cut-Off Road + W. Cotter Ave) on the left. They have asked that we pull up to the Headquarters to drop off our stuff. Then someone in the parking lot will direct you to the satellite parking lot about a block away.

Here is a link to an interactive map: <http://texaspelagics.com/port-aransas-kingfisher/>





Safety onboard:

A rocking boat far offshore has inherent dangers that you need to be aware of for your own safety. On the morning before departure the boat crew reviews safety procedures including the location of life vests, rafts and etc. and be sure to pay attention. The trip leaders will also review most of the information I've prepared here and probably a few things I forgot. One day at sea is not long enough to acquire good sea legs so be careful how you walk about and hang on to the railings or seat backs.

The upper deck on the boat is the best place to view seabirds. It offers an almost 360 degree view of the Gulf. However it is also much rockier up there than it is on the lower deck. So standing is more difficult and if you're prone to seasickness than you will have a rougher time on the upper deck. Please access the upper deck only from the rear stairs on the stern.

One more thing is to watch the cabin hatch doors. These heavy watertight metal doors can swing wildly if left unsecured and could easily smash your fingers or ring your gong. 😊 Always hang on tight to them when passing in or out of the cabin and be sure to latch them behind you.

What to expect during the Trip:

No two Texas pelagic trips are alike. We just never know what we're gonna see! On some trips we may experience calm seas and have fantastic close-up views of many birds floating on the sea and hundreds of marine mammals and fish. Other trips may have more challenging, rougher sea conditions where it is difficult to hold your binoculars steady enough to see anything very well and all the seabirds are quickly flying by. Some trips will have nearly continuous action for most of the day with hundreds of seabirds being seen. However other trips may experience only a few dozen widely scattered sightings with long and boring periods in between where nothing is seen, not a single bird or marine animal of any kind. Pelagic birding can be challenging and admittedly it is not for everyone.

But despite its challenges many Texas Pelagics can be unbelievably awesome, amazing and exciting life experiences you will never forget. Our leaders and our large following of "Regular" participants have experienced multiple trips like this. It is what keeps us coming back for every trip year after year. There is nowhere else you can go birding in Texas where you can routinely expect to get a "Texas Review Species" on almost every trip. There is still so much yet to be discovered about seabirds in the Gulf of Mexico. Undoubtedly many species considered very rare or accidental in offshore Texas are in fact probably regular, there is just no one out there to observe them often enough.

To really get a feel for the Texas Pelagic experience there are three great resources available to you. The www.TexasPelagics.com website has an extensive and exclusive collection of trip archives. Links to trip reports from almost every past public trip and photo albums from many



past trips are available here: <http://texaspelagics.com/summary-table/> Browse through the website for seabird and marine mammal galleries and tons of other information related to Texas Pelagics and the Gulf of Mexico.

The past few years as our Facebook Texas Pelagics group has grown there are a huge number of leaders and participants photos, videos and commentary posted to this site. It is an incredibly valuable resource to browse through. I highly recommend that everyone who is planning to participate in a Texas Pelagic join the group. This link will take you there:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/219671194850690/>

There is also a Texas Pelagics Facebook Page that you should like to see the latest updates on Texas Pelagics from me. <https://www.facebook.com/Texas-Pelagics-173057036078295/?ref=hl>

Spotting birds and other Marine life:

Pelagic birding is undoubtedly one the most difficult types of birding. Not only are the birds difficult to identify but the sea conditions make it extra challenging. A rocking boat with unsteady footing, sea spray, wind, sun glare and a distant flying bird frequently ducking behind the waves all combine to make a pelagic birder's viewing conditions very difficult.

During the trip it really helps if everyone takes and active part in searching for birds. When a suspected seabird is sighted use the clock reference to describe where the bird is. 12 o'clock is straight off the bow, 3:00 is to the right (starboard) when facing the forward; 6:00 straight off the stern and 9:00 off the left (port) side. Also use the horizon as a reference, is the bird above or below the horizon, low to the water or up high. Describe which direction is it flying and what is its approximate distance.

PLEASE speak-up **LOUDLY** and immediately if you see something interesting. There is no reason pelagic birders need to keep quiet, so yell out so you are easily heard by as many people as possible. Keep you binoculars focused on the animal and yell out where you are looking and what it is. Just yelling out "**BIRD**" is not very helpful. Yelling out "**BIRD AT 3 O'CLOCK, BELOW THE HORIZON, FLYING LEFT, 100 YARDS OUT**" is extremely helpful!

CARDINAL RULE #1: Don't tell us about the bird or animal you saw an hour later or worse yet back at the dock. Always speak up immediately even if you are unsure about what it is or if it is interesting enough. We are always interested in EVERYTHING offshore. Identification at sea is very challenging so don't be shy.

If you're going to sit or sleep inside the cabin and wait to be called when a sighting happens then you should accept that you're going to miss a lot. Often birds will fly by the boat without stopping. Even if you are actively scanning for birds you will still miss some things. In fact even if you're standing next to the person who calls out a sighting you may still miss it. This is just the



nature of pelagic birding. But try not to get discouraged. Keep practicing and with experience you should get the hang of it.

Seabird Photography:

Digital photography has helped to revolutionize seabird identification. Given the inherent difficulties of seabird identification in typical at sea field conditions, sometimes a decent digital photograph will confirm or change a visual identification. We have experienced this many times while still out at sea. Everyone is encouraged to bring their cameras and attempt to photograph the birds we see. Be careful to protect your camera from corrosive sea spray. My favorite water resistant cover for cameras is the "[Storm Jacket](#)" available here in a variety of sizes and colors. I couple the storm jacket with a "[Black Rapid](#)" camera strap for quick access to my long lens.

ACTION REQUIRED: I have a simple request for all the photographers. Please take 1 minute to synch the time on your digital cameras accurately to the time on your mobile phone, as all mobile phone networks are synched to the standard atomic clock. This is important because the only practical way to compare all the different photographer's images of the same bird is to reference the camera time stamp embedded in the exif file of every digital photo.

Post-Trip Follow-Up:

- **Trip Report:** Usually within a few days after the trip I will email a trip report to everyone on the trip. The report will also be posted to www.TexasPelagics.com - [Trip Report Archives](#), the [Texas Pelagics group on Facebook](#) and to [the Texbirds listserv](#). A couple of our leaders usually put together an eBIRD sightings report that is available to everyone as well. This sometime takes a bit of time to gather everyone's digital sighting logs together and compile all the sightings.
- **Photo Sharing:** I encourage everyone to share their photos from the trip with the Texas Pelagics Facebook group. You will need to ask to join the group to post photos. https://www.facebook.com/groups/219671194850690/541979762619830/?notif_t=group_activity

Please make sure the all the photos you post are named as to species. Also now that you've ensured you camera's time is accurate, please be sure to include an accurate time stamp either in the photo filename or in the comments. There are some programs that will do this automatically like Lightroom if you use it to link to your Facebook albums. By doing this simple task we are able to accurately compare different photographer's photos and make some sense of all the photographs of any bird whose identification may be in question.

Photos of storm-petrels, shearwaters, jaegers or any other birds where the ID should be reviewed are especially useful to post. Some very worthwhile discussion of the finer points of identification are shared on this venue, often from nationally known sea birders, that

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www.TexasPelagics.com



provides everyone with a great education. If you're not on Facebook, well then you're missing out on this valuable resource for birders. If there are particularly good photos of any rarities I may ask you to email a full size jpeg to me so I can permanently archive them in the photo galleries on the www.TexasPelagics.com website.