

Welcome to the 30th Annual
Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival!

The Lower Rio Grande Valley sits at the convergence of the Central and Mississippi migratory flyways, meaning **many millions of birds** pass through our area every year on their way north and south. With environmental influences from the Gulf Coast to the east, Great Plains to the north, Chihuahuan desert to the west, and subtropical influence from the south, the LRGV is a melting pot for North American birds and easily one of the **top birding locations in the entire ABA Area**. Our festival is timed perfectly for birders to find lingering neotropical migrants still trickling through, wintering birds starting to wander south, and Mexican vagrants popping up from across the border with Mexico. Every year there are **spectacular rarities** found during the RGVBF. What will your group find this year?!

The 2023 Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival runs from November 8-12. Our festival is a nonprofit organization that seeks to provide an exceptional birding experience in a highly sought after location while also bringing tourism dollars to the Rio Grande Valley. With this in mind, we want to clarify that our field trips are all priced as low as possible to break even after paying site fees, guide fees, and vehicle rentals. **We are not here to profit off of our participants; we are here to enjoy birds and the help Rio Grande Valley!**

This year we have well **over 100 fantastic field trip offerings** to choose from including traditional tours through the parks we are so well known for as well as a number of new offerings such as private ranches for those seasoned returning festival birders. Special trips in the field with some of our featured speakers to further enhance their presentations are also always a great treat. In addition to field trips, we also have interesting **keynote speakers**, informative **workshops**, a giant tradeshow full of **vendors**, a **silent auction**, fun **socials with local music and food**, and of course ALL of the birds!

We can't wait to see you in 2023!

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Registration is \$50 for the full event or an individual pass can be purchased for \$10 per day for just Saturday or Sunday.

Registration is required before a participant is able to sign up for field trips, PhotoTrack, workshops, keynote speakers, or seminars. Registration is not necessary if you only plan to attend the Birder's Bazaar Tradeshow or family and children's activities.

The Kiskadee Pass is \$30 and can be added on top of registration to provide entrance to all Keynotes and Seminars. It is a huge savings over individually priced admission to these events. You can only purchase the Kiskadee Pass during online registration prior to the festival. Once the Festival commences, the Kiskadee Pass will no longer be available and only individual event tickets will be sold (providing there are still openings available).

RGVBF REFUND POLICY

Registration Fee

- 100% Refund if cancellation occurs before Sept, 29, 2023 - 11:59 PM
- 50% refund if cancellation occurs before Oct 13, 2023 - 5 PM
- No refunds - if cancellation occurs after Oct 13, 2023 - 5 PM

All Other Fees

- Full refund if cancellation occurs before Oct 13, 2023 - 5 PM
- 50% refund if cancellation occurs before Oct 20, 2023 - 5 PM
- No refunds if cancellation occurs after Oct 20, 2023 - 5 PM
- Online registration closes – Nov 01, 2023 - 5 PM

* A 5% processing will be applied to all above refunds

FIELD TRIPS

The RGVBF has long been known for its low ratio of participants to guides and for the quality of its leaders. Check out the Trip Leaders section on the webpage for a summary of this year's guides. As always, we have an outstanding group of talent this year to guide our field trips including local experts as well as guides from across the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

While we have kept the classic field trips that define our Festival, we have also added a few new locations, and a few twists on old favorites. Click on Trip Worksheet on the webpage for a simple overview of the daily trips. Below is a more detailed daily description of the activities offered.

IMPORTANT NOTES ON TRIPS:

- We encourage you to find overnight accommodations in Harlingen during the Festival – trips leave early!
- Be prepared for South Texas sun and bugs on all trips. Ticks and chiggers live here, so stay on paths when on field trips and avoid touching tall grasses when possible to avoid itchy britches! Bring appropriate remedies if chiggers love you.
- Drinking water is always provided on trips, but **PLEASE BRING YOUR REUSABLE WATER BOTTLES TO USE!** Be sure to fill them up in the lobby before your trip!
- Our guides will have scopes for most trips but if you really want to bring one on a trip, please arrive early to check with your driver first to see if it will fit on your van. For bus trips, tripods may need to be stored in the open luggage area in the bottom of the bus.
- Hand-held cameras are fine to bring on all trips; icons designate trips that offer a better opportunity for larger cameras or focused photography.
- Large cameras and tripods likely cannot be accommodated on most van trips other than PhotoTrack. To view special trips for photographers, see the PhotoTrack section.
- Vegetarian box lunches are available when lunch is provided – choose preference when registering online.
- “Bus” and “Van” designation may change based on participant signups.
- We reserve the right to make adjustments to anything and everything as needed.
- Join our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/rgvbf>) for exciting news, updates, and the latest information!

Field guide to the icons



ALERT: Trips to Boca Chica, Birds & Battlefields, and Kleberg Wetlands: Participants must have proper ID to join tours. **U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Check Stations** will be encountered. Each vehicle is subject to a quick inspection and basic questions. The process is routine, most stops are brief. All passengers need to carry one piece of proper identification (Driver's License/Passport/Student ID card) to verify U.S. Citizenship. Foreign nationals must have all appropriate documentation to avoid delay or detainment. Border Patrol agents are required to determine the immigration status of every traveler.



MORNING TRIPS

APLOMADO ALLEY – OLD PORT ISABEL ROAD

Fee \$75 / Thursday, Friday, Saturday / 6:30am – 12:30pm

Aplomado Falcons disappeared from South Texas in the 1950s, but a successful reintroduction program was begun in earnest in 1993 by The Peregrine Fund. Now over 30 breeding pairs grace the coastal prairies of Texas, and Old Port Isabel Road cuts right through prime habitat! Of course, we'll be birding around coastal prairies and wetlands the whole time, so we should also see a great variety of sparrows, raptors, shorebirds, and waterfowl as a bonus! If you need to see an Aplomado Falcon, this is your trip!

Note: If the road is partially impassable because of wet weather, we'll seek the falcons elsewhere. Restrooms are limited to gas stations.

Highlights: Aplomado Falcon, Long-billed Curlew, White-tailed Kite, White-tailed and Harris's Hawks, Crested Caracara, Cactus Wren, Sprague's Pipit, and Cassin's and other wintering sparrows.



RESTRICTED ACCESS!

ARROYO COLORADO UNIT – TPWD WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

with Ernesto Garcia-Ortega

Fee \$60 / Thursday, Friday / 6:30am – 12:00pm

Our festival is the only time of the year that birders are granted the opportunity to bird the limited access the Arroyo Colorado Unit of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Wildlife Management Areas. This site has long been protected for native species and hunting opportunities, so it is an island of woodlands amidst agricultural monotony. This WMA along the banks of the Arroyo Colorado river harbors a high density of RGV specialties and, not uncommonly, rarities. In recent years, this area of riverside thornscrub has had a variety of surprises including Golden-crowned Warbler, Blue Bunting, Mangrove Cuckoo, and Rose-throated Becard.

Highlights: Ringed and Green Kingfishers, most typical RGV specialty birds

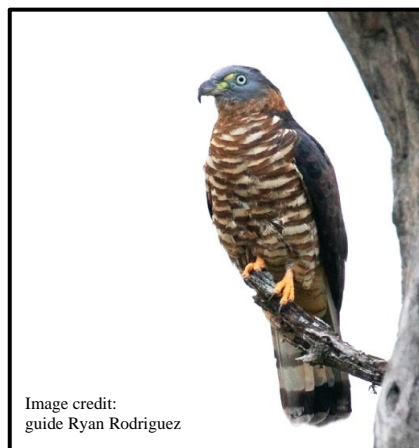


BENTSEN-RIO GRANDE VALLEY STATE PARK

Fee \$80 / Friday, Saturday / 6:30am – 12:30pm

With its nearly 800 acres of land and bird list of some 360 species, it's not surprising that this oldest of the South Texas state parks was chosen as the headquarters of the World Birding Center complex. The woodlands are home to many Valley specialties, the hawk tower gives uninterrupted views of the skies and the gardens surrounding the green-designed Visitor Center are a magnet for unusual passerines, hummingbirds, and butterflies. Though Hook-billed Kites are never a guarantee and they have been particularly hard to find over the last 5-10 years, we saw a resurgence over the last year and Bentsen-RGV SP has been THE place to go to see them! We hope that winter 2023-24 hosts a similarly large number of birds in the park.

Highlights: Various raptors especially including Hook-billed Kite (rare) and Gray Hawk, Green Kingfisher, Plain Chachalaca, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Rio Grande Wild Turkey, and numerous other typical RGV specialty birds.



BIG DAY VANS

Fee \$135 / Saturday / 6:00am – 4:30pm



Ever hear about birding Big Days and wonder what one would be like? Here's your chance to get in on the action! Our most talked-about trips, some call it 'whirlbirding' – it's fast and furious fun. Prepare to be flexible, as routes will be chosen by your skilled leaders to maximize your time seeing a diversity of habitats and species within them. Exercise those quick get-on-it skills – and make sure your crocs are in sport mode! (Just kidding, please wear closed-toe shoes). Several vans will be involved for lots of birds and for friendly competition. This is a great choice for both Festival returnees and listers. Top teams regularly push 150 species, though there is always a van or two dedicated to birding at a slower pace that still allows for a big list but also better looks at each species. A prize will be given to the participants in the van with the highest bird species list at the end of the day!

Highlights: Racking up an impressive day list – Rarities, valley specialties, migrants. Anything and everything!



Image credit:
guide Stephanie Bilodeau

BIRD BANDING – QUINTA MAZATLAN

with Mark Conway

Fee \$50 / Sunday / 7:00am – 12:00pm



Have you ever thought about how cool Green Jays look? What about seeing one in your hand?! Join biologist and educator Mark Conway as well as the Brush family for some close encounters with Valley specialties in the picturesque grounds of Quinta Mazatlan. Mark and the Brush family will explain their research as well as the intimate knowledge they have learned of birds in-hand. This is a perfect relaxing last trip of the festival for those that want to learn more about the biology of birds and see the many amazing characteristics of these species that cannot be seen with binoculars. Plus, you never know what might fly into the mist nets!

Highlights: (both in-hand and in-field): Clay-colored Thrush, Green Jay, Great Kiskadee, White-tipped Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Long-billed Thrasher, Altamira Oriole, Olive Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, and many more!

BIRDING FOR NEW BIRDERS

with Hannah Buschert & Erik Ostrander

Fee \$75 / Wednesday, Friday, Sunday / 7:00am – 1:00pm



Whether you're just discovering the joys of birding, seeking to develop your birding skills, or wanting to share your love of birding with your family, these trips with two of our festival-favorite guides in Hannah and Erik are for you! Each day there will be a different site and a different theme to help you develop your birding skills and enjoyment.

Wednesday: Bentsen RGV State Park – identification & record keeping

Friday: Estero Llano Grande State Park – bird lives & behavior

Sunday: South Padre Island Bird and Nature Center – migration, habitat & distribution

Highlights: Developing solid basic birding skills, learning bird identification, good practice in reporting sightings, progressing beyond bird-listing, and above all enjoying time in the field.



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

BRINGING IT BACK!

BIRDS AND BATTLEFIELDS

with Jon Dunn

Fee \$75 / Sunday / 7:00am – 1:00pm



Join us as we bring back this fun birding and history combo trip! Did you know that expert birder and field guide author Jon Dunn is quite the history buff, especially regarding the Civil War? Putting these three together – birds, battlefields, and Jon – is the perfect combination for one of our most unique trips. The Battle at Palmito Hill, unfortunately contested more than a month AFTER Lee's surrender to Grant, was the last battle of the Civil War. The Palo Alto Battlefield was where the first battle of the Mexican American War was fought. Both these sites are in the coastal prairie with expansive vistas, mature native thornscrub woodlands, and of course, the birds that thrive in these habitats. Learn about the history and significance of these geographic areas as you kick up prairie birds.

Important! Bring photo ID or passport. There is a U.S. Border Patrol Check Station on this route. Make sure you have your driver's license or other official photographic ID with you; participants without proper identification will not be permitted to join the trip.

Highlights: Aplomado Falcon, White-tailed Kite, Harris's and White-tailed Hawks, Long-billed Curlew, Cactus Wren, Curve-billed Thrasher, wintering sparrows.

NEW PAIRING!

BIRDS, RESACAS, LUNCH!

with Dave Irons

Fee \$100 / Wednesday, Friday / 7:00am – 2:30pm



Join birding luminaries (and two of our longest running RGVBF guides) Dave and Shawneen on this trip full of birds and "resacas". Resaca is the local word for an "oxbow lake", or a waterbody that used to be the bend of a lively river such as the Rio Grande but has since been naturally or artificially cut off from flow and is now its own water feature that provides great habitat for birds. We'll first visit Resaca de la Palma State Park with its 1200 acres of protected land, including the largest tract of native thornscrub and woodlands in the World Birding Center network. It's one of the less birded parks in the Valley. Next we'll visit a very different area in Brownsville – the resacas on the attractive campus of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, which have hosted some extraordinary rarities in recent years (think Social Flycatcher)! Finally we'll go to a great local restaurant for a mixed lunch on a patio overlooking a resaca. Lunch is included in your trip price!

Highlights: Green Kingfisher, Gray Hawk, Black Phoebe, Least Grebe, Groove-billed Ani (rare), Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green Parakeet, Anhinga, Great Kiskadee, Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, wintering passerines, and possible rarities!



BOCA CHICA – THE TIP OF TEXAS

Fee \$75/ Thursday, Saturday, Sunday / 6:30am – 1:00pm



Explore the "tip of Texas" along Boca Chica Highway – a road that dead ends at the southern-most part of the Texas Gulf Coast beach. On the way we will make stops in the coastal prairie that may hold Aplomado Falcon, lush thornscrub lomas that have high bird diversity (and previously, Ocelots), and wind tidal flats that provide a winter home for hundreds of thousands of shorebirds. If shorebird conditions are good, we may spend some extra time there. If SpaceX is testing rockets at their site by the beach or shorebird conditions are poor, we may spend more time in the prairies and thornscrub. Either way, this trip has so much to offer for people and wildlife that it is easily one of our favorite parts of the valley.

Important! There is a U.S. Border Patrol Check Station on Boca Chica Road. Make sure you have your driver's license or other official photographic ID with you; participants without proper identification will not be permitted to board. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please notify the festival at (956) 423-5565.

Highlights: Aplomado Falcon, White-tailed and Harris's Hawks, Piping and Snowy Plovers, Reddish Egret, Gull-billed Tern, Cassin's Sparrow, and maybe even some exotic Nilgai antelope!



NEW TRIP!

BREAKFAST BIRDING AT THE CACTUS CAFÉ ON CACTUS CREEK RANCH

Fee \$100 / Sunday / 6:30am - 11:30pm



This tasty, brand-new variant of our classic Cactus Creek Ranch trip (see below) will start off with a light breakfast along with a conservation chat with owner Mary Jo Bogatto (and guides) before venturing out for a leisurely stroll of highlights of the property. Cactus Creek Ranch is adjacent to Laguna Atascosa and has similarly native thornscrub woodlands scattered amongst surrounding coastal prairie. The property has occasional Aplomado Falcons at the back of the property, well stocked feeders, 9 small ponds and wetlands, and plenty of conservation history to discover.

Highlights: Sandhill Crane, Long-billed Curlew, numerous raptors, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay.

BRINGING IT BACK!

BRUSH COUNTRY SPARROWS AND MORE

Fee \$80 / Wednesday, Sunday / 6:00am – 1:00pm

This limited-participant trip will head out to the unique brush country in western Hidalgo county that holds a mix of open and low patchy vegetation with the goal of finding the birds that thrive there. "Little brown jobs" are always a challenge to ID, so we definitely plan to spend some time trying to sort through some of members of this group that love weedy fence lines! There are loads of other neat birds that call this habitat home, including many of our valley specialties.

Highlights: Black-throated Sparrow, Cassin's Sparrow, other wintering sparrows, Pyrrhuloxia, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, White-tailed Hawk, Cactus Wren, Greater Roadrunner.

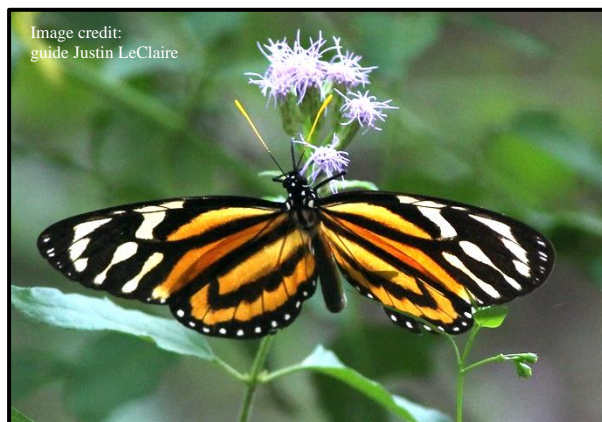


BUTTERFLIES – RGV JEWELS

Fee \$75 / Wednesday, Friday, Sunday 9:00am – 3:00pm

Over 300 species of butterflies have been recorded in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, making it by far the richest butterfly area in the U.S. This tour, led by some of our local lepidoptera experts, explores our most productive sites. On Wednesday and Friday we'll go to the National Butterfly Center in Mission, the flagship of the North American Butterfly Association. On Sunday we'll go to Resaca de la Palma State Park for a chance at some Cameron County specialties.

Highlights: Silver-banded Hairstreak, Red-bordered Pixie, Zebra Heliconian, Malachite, Band-celled Sister, Mexican Bluewing, Guava Skipper, Potrillo Skipper, rarities.



CACTUS CREEK RANCH

Fee \$85 / Thursday, Friday / 6:30am - 12:30pm

This private ranch is adjacent to Laguna Atascosa and has similarly native thornscrub woodlands scattered amongst surrounding coastal prairie. The owner, Mary Jo Bogatto, is an extremely passionate conservationist who consistently allows countless researchers, birders, and students onto the property to make the most of it and has received numerous awards as such. The ranch holds longevity records for the oldest recorded Bronzed Cowbird and Black-crested Titmouse via a local bird bander who visits regularly (see Mark Conway and our "Bird Banding" trip!). Cactus Creek ranch has occasional Aplomado Falcons at the back of the property, well stocked feeders, 9 small ponds and wetlands, and plenty of conservation history to discover.

Highlights: Sandhill Crane, Long-billed Curlew, numerous raptors, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, wintering sparrows.



COLLEY'S "PRIVATE" ISLAND

with Scarlet and George Colley

Fee \$ 135/ Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday / 6:00am – 1:00pm

A special version of the South Padre Island trip made famous by Island naturalists Scarlet and George Colley. Scarlet is well-known for her dolphin research and for many years both she and George have been leading advocates for Gulf Coast conservation. Enjoy being out on the bay in their pontoon boats (weather permitting) and exploring the unique ecosystems of the Laguna Madre. After the boat trip we will check out a couple sites on South Padre Island for late migrants dropping by and winter residents on the mudflats.



Note: Although there will be photo opportunities, please only bring hand-held cameras. Most of the morning will be on a small pontoon boat without restroom facilities. Restrooms near the dock. It may be cool on the boat – don't forget your jacket. The boat portion of the trip might have to be canceled if the weather is not cooperative.

Highlights: 'Mangrove' Yellow Warbler', Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Clapper Rail, Sora, Snowy and Piping Plovers, American Oystercatcher, Marbled Godwit, Peregrine Falcon; and, of course, dolphins!



EASY (BUT NOT LESS!) BIRDING TOURS

Fee \$ 75/ Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday / 7:00am – 1:00pm

Prefer less walking? These are the trips for you. Bird from electric carts at the State Parks and vans at Santa Ana along roads that leisurely loop the wildlife drives and back roads of our famous valley parks. For South Padre Island, will take our time on easy boardwalks, side streets, and roadside mudflats. These are on par with our lowest guide-to-participant ratio trips, so enjoy the quality time with your guide!

Wednesday – Estero Llano Grande State Park – OR – Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park
Thursday Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park – OR – Resaca de la Palma State Park

Friday – South Padre Island sites

Saturday – Estero Llano Grande State Park – OR – Resaca de la Palma State Park

Sunday – Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge – OR – South Padre Island sites

Note: Getting on and off vehicles and some limited walking is necessary. Restrooms are available at each site, but not on vehicles.

Highlights: See target listings for each of the destination site. Enjoy the quiet time on these small trips!



NEW PAIRING!

EDINBURG SCENIC WETLANDS AND HIDALGO PUMPHOUSE

Fee \$85 / Wednesday, Friday / 7:00am – 1:00pm

Edinburg Scenic Wetlands and the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse are both World Birding Center sites as well as inspiring examples of how enlightened local communities can conserve and enhance urban and suburban areas for the benefit of wildlife and the environment. Edinburg Scenic Wetlands has two large ponds, smaller water features, birding trails, feeding areas, butterfly gardens, observation platforms and a modern interpretative center set in some 40 acres of native vegetation and wetlands. Hidalgo Pumphouse is located close to the Rio Grande and though most of the park was blocked off by the border wall some years ago, it still has a wonderful pond surrounded by woodlands at the front of the park. The largest Monk Parakeet colony in the valley is also found in the nearby neighborhood!

Highlights: Green and Ringed Kingfishers, Monk Parakeet, Least Grebe, Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, hummingbirds (including Buff-bellied), Long-billed Thrasher, Altamira Oriole, and assorted waterfowl and wading birds.

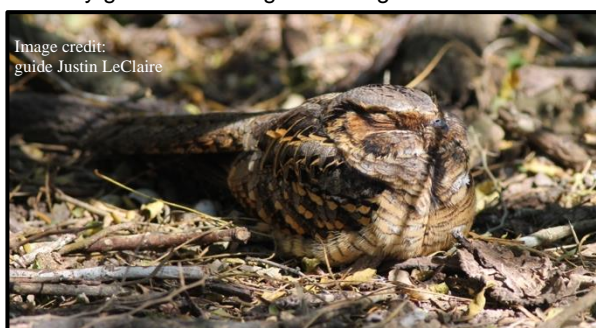
45m



ESTERO LLANO GRANDE STATE PARK

Fee \$85 / Friday, Sunday / 6:30am – 12:30pm

A thorough exploration of one of the World Birding Center network's most productive sites here in the Valley. Reclaimed wetlands, marshes, and ponds, all set alongside the Arroyo Colorado river, are ideal habitats for shorebirds, waders, waterfowl – and alligators! Add boardwalks, birding trails through woodlands and thornscrub, butterfly gardens and a green-design visitor center and you'll see why Estero Llano Grande SP has skyrocketed to



deserved fame! This site is always a favorite among guides and birders alike and is often recommended for new valley visitors. One day during almost any time of year can net you nearly 100 species here, including most of our valley specialties!

Highlights: Common Pauraque, Cinnamon Teal, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Least Grebe, White-tailed Kite, Anhinga, Roseate Spoonbill, hummingbirds (including Buff-bellied), Green Kingfisher, 'McCall's' Eastern Screech-Owl, Vermilion Flycatcher, wintering warblers, Couch's Kingbird.

30m



NEW TRIP!

FLYCATCHER WORKSHOP AT SABAL PALM SANCTUARY

with Cin-Ty Lee

Fee \$110 / Thursday / 6:30am – 1:30pm

45m



Our 2023 festival artist and speaker Cin-Ty Lee just released his brand new "Field Guide to North American Flycatchers – Empidonax and Pewees". While we are unlikely to see those two groups in November (even in the subtropical LRGV), we do still have a number of other flycatchers to learn about with him here and will utilize the rich riparian woodlands of Sabal Palm Sanctuary to do so. Cin-Ty will walk with us through the Sabal Palm woodlands here that are the last major remnant of an ecosystem once much more widespread in the Valley, and is unique in the U.S. Its shady depths and managed waterways shelter a remarkable diversity of wildlife (including flycatchers)! There's also a bird-feeding area that's always great for photo-ops. Depending on how the birding goes at Sabal Palm, we may also check out the UTRGV wooded resacas after!

Highlights: Flycatcher-focused trip including Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Great Kiskadee, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet (uncommon), and Eastern Phoebe as well as other valley specialties such as Least Grebe, Plain Chachalaca, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Clay-colored Thrush, Hooded and Altamira Orioles, Olive Sparrow, wintering warblers.

NEW TRIP!

GRAY HAWK NATURAL HISTORY TOUR

with Mike Stewart

Fee \$95 / Sunday / 7:00am – 12:30pm

Gray Hawks have to be one of our most handsome species in the valley with that sleek gray tuxedo they dawn. Mike Stewart has been studying these elegant raptors in the Valley for several years now in tandem with Bill Clark and others, gathering a wealth of scientific data and knowledge of the species in the process. These birds have very interesting differences in the habitats they decide to set up territories in – some pairs seem to prefer suburban neighborhoods with tall trees while others prefer more typical old growth riparian woodlands. But do they move around? Where do their chicks disperse to? Make sure to catch Mike's presentation on Friday night at the festival and then take this awesome limited-participant trip with him to see Gray Hawks on territory in a variety of different habitats! And yes, your guides will be pointing out plenty of other birds too!

Highlights: Gray Hawk, Harris's Hawk, Red-crowned Parrot, Green Parakeet, Couch's Kingbird, and other Valley specialties.



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

NEW TRIP!

HARRIS'S HAWK NATURAL HISTORY TOUR

with Brooke Poplin

Fee \$95 / Friday / 7:00am – 12:30pm

Harris's Hawks may not be quite as flashy as Gray Hawks in plumage, but their inquisitive, curious behaviors sure make up for it! This species is a quintessential valley bird, inhabiting almost every habitat here that has some form of trees or brush. Recent studies have shown that they hunt in family groups and "helper" birds in the group will even help feed the main pair's young each year. Brooke Poplin has been studying these birds the last couple years and similar to Mike, has plenty of interesting findings and anecdotes to offer on this limited-participant group to find and observe various Harris's Hawk groups and their habitats. Make sure to catch Brooke's presentation on Thursday night at the festival, too!

Highlights: Harris's Hawk, Gray Hawk, Red-crowned Parrot, Green Parakeet, Couch's Kingbird, and other Valley specialties.



KING RANCH NORIAS

Fee \$ 150/ Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Sunday / 6:00am – 1:00pm

Join us for an exciting excursion to the famed King Ranch, one of the largest ranches in the world (larger than the state of Rhode Island)! The Norias division is located just north of the valley along the coast and is the second largest section of this ranch. The sandy soils of Norias support extensive areas of grasslands, thornscrub and live oak woodlands, and more Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls than anywhere else in the US! This species used to be found more frequently throughout the valley but has been mostly absent outside of these coastal ranches since major flooding back in 2010 altered much of the habitat in Hidalgo and Starr Counties. In fact, our "Cactus" Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl subspecies in Texas was just listed as federally-threatened in summer 2023. With this new designation, we won't be able to use playback to entice them in on our trips, but the King Ranch's seasoned tour guides will still do everything in their power to find them for us! The ranch also has breeding Tropical Parulas, Audubon's Orioles, and some more northern species that we don't tend to see in the Valley. This top-selling trip is always a festival MUST!

Highlights: Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Tropical Parula, Audubon's Oriole (rare), Sprague's Pipit, Wild Turkey, Harris's Hawk, White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, Greater Roadrunner, and Vermilion Flycatcher.



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

KLEBERG COUNTY WETLANDS

Fee \$100 / Wednesday, Thursday / 6:00am – 4:30pm



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

One of the delights of Kleberg County (just north of the valley), particularly in years of above average rainfall, is its myriad of fresh and brackish wetlands. On this trip we'll drive from hotspot to hotspot, visiting the most productive patches in the county to build a quality trip list. Perfect for those who want to see sites beyond the bounds of the valley! The trip will be limited to eight participants and two guides, so enjoy the quality time!

Important! There is a U.S. Border Patrol Check Station on U.S. 77. Make sure you have your driver's license or other official photo ID with you: participants without proper identification will not be permitted to board. If you are not a U.S. citizen, please notify the RGVBF at info@rgvbf.org or (956)357-3457.

Highlights: Diverse waterfowl, waders, shorebirds, sparrows, and any other birds that love water!

RESTRICTED ACCESS!

LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE – BAHIA GRANDE UNIT

Fee \$75 / Wednesday, Saturday / 6:30am – 12:30pm

The ongoing restoration of the Bahia Grande tidal wetland complex is the most significant environmental success in South Texas in recent years. Over 21,000 acres were acquired as part of Laguna Atascosa NWR in 2000. At that time, because construction of the Intracoastal Waterway had severed its connections to the Laguna Madre, Bahia Grande had become an arid wasteland with only ephemeral wet areas. After new channels were excavated a natural tidal flow was restored and the wetlands flourished. On this trip, we'll have an opportunity of witnessing the dramatic restoration results and the privilege of birding an area not generally open to the public.

Note: There are no on-site restrooms; we will stop before and after the tour.

Highlights: Aplomado Falcon, White-tailed Hawk, wintering sparrows, and a diverse array of waterbirds and shorebirds.



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

NEW TRIP! RESTRICTED ACCESS!

LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE – LAKESIDE DRIVE

Fee \$75 / Wednesday / 6:30am – 12:30pm

For this one-time trip, we are being allowed to drive around Laguna Atascosa proper (the actual lake that gives the refuge its name) on the roads that cross through wetlands, coastal prairie, and thornscrub. There are a number of extraordinary viewing stops along this route that is not open for the public to drive on. The fresh water Laguna Atascosa is the local saloon for Redheads wintering on the hyper-saline Laguna Madre, where 70% of the world's Redhead population congregates. Plan to see a variety of waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, raptors, open country birds, and woodland passerines. This is just one of two festival trips that may see our local rare population Seaside Sparrow. The roads for this route are not paved so in the unfortunate event that the roads become too wet for our vans, we will revert this trip back to the paved Steve Thompson Wildlife Drive also on the refuge (see next trip description).

Highlights: Aplomado Falcon (rare), Seaside Sparrow, White-tailed Hawk, Harris's Hawks, Reddish Egret, numerous shorebirds, waterfowl, and who knows what else!

RESTRICTED ACCESS!

LAGUNA ATASCOSA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE – STEVE THOMPSON WILDLIFE DRIVE

Fee \$75 / Thursday, Friday, Saturday / 6:30am – 12:30pm

On this more relaxed trip we have the awesome privilege to explore the Steve Thompson Wildlife Drive with our trip vans – something that the public hasn't been allowed to do since changes to the refuge in 2013 to help protect the federally endangered Ocelot. This will allow us to cover a lot of ground and variety of habitats, such as Redhead Ridge – a vista over the Laguna Madre where 70% of the world's Redhead population winter – and known to birders as a good place to look for Groove-billed Anis in winter. An Aplomado Falcon nest platform is visible from the drive, and we'll look for this species which has been reintroduced in south Texas in part thanks to the work of former refuge manager Steve Thompson.

Highlights: Diverse waterfowl, Aplomado Falcon (fingers crossed), Groove-billed Ani (rare), Clay-colored Thrush, Harris's Hawks.

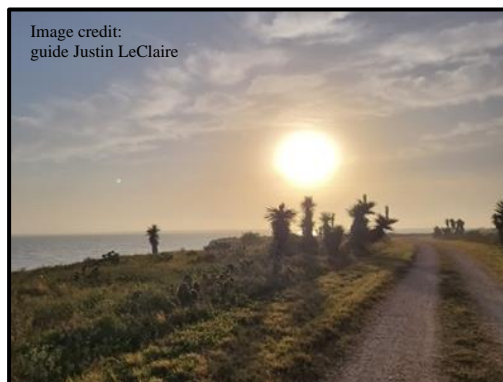


Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

NEW PAIRING!

LAGUNA MADRE BAY CRUISE AND LOS FRESNOS NATURE PARK

Fee \$100 / Saturday / 7:00am – 1:00pm

For this trip we will start at the recently improved and very under-birded Los Fresnos Nature Park that sits along a resaca and even has a resident Gray Hawk pair. This park has a great mix of habitats and birds, and several rarities have been found here in recent years! After the walk through the park, we will make our way to Port Isabel for a Laguna Madre bay cruise! Here we should see a great diversity of waterbirds while crossing touring through the lower end of the Laguna Madre and checking out the very birdy jetty-lined channel between the Laguna and the Gulf of Mexico. With some luck, we may spot an uncommon waterbird cruise past such as a frigatebird, jaeger, or booby! The bay cruise is always a popular trip, so sign up early!

Note: It can be cool on the boat – don't forget your jacket.

Highlights: Magnificent Frigatebird (rare), Gray Hawk, Green Kingfisher, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Brown Pelican, numerous terns and gulls, and valley specialties.

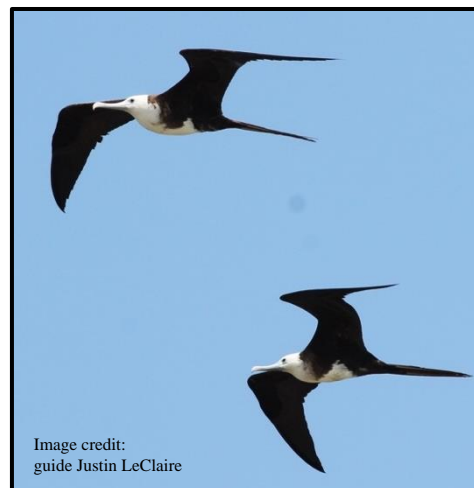


Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

LEARNING TO LISTEN

with Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis

Fee \$75 / Wednesday, Saturday, / 6:30am – 12:30pm



The ability to recognize bird songs and calls is critical to becoming a proficient birder, yet many of us have difficulty mastering the skill – often because we approach it in the wrong way. You can learn bird calls on all of our guides and trips, but these limited-participant trips with festival favorite guides steps that up to another level. Enjoy your quality time with bird ID superstars – Michael O'Brien (*Flight Calls of Migratory Birds* and *Larkwire* - an app for learning bird sounds) and Louise Zemaitis! We'll be IDing by visuals of course as well but this is our ONLY trip specifically dedicated to teaching bird calls!

Highlights: A lesson on listening to birds from some of the very best teachers that the RGVBF has to offer is a highlight in itself! But of course, we should both see and hear many of our valley specialties in addition to other birds.

MASTERCLASS BIRDING

with Jon Dunn, field guide author

Fee \$ 85/ Wednesday, Saturday / 7:00am to 1:00pm



This is a wonderful opportunity to bird in a small group with birding icon Jon Dunn, co-author of the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, and *Peterson Field Guides to Warblers* and *Gulls of the Americas*. Jon and co-guide won't just be pointing out birds but focusing on explaining bird ID and biology in this more intimate trip setting. For this slower-paced tour we'll visit two urban woodland gems in Weslaco – the 15 acres of Frontera Audubon thicket and the 6 acres of Valley Nature Center. Don't be misled by their size – both have attracted an impressive array of Mexican vagrants, including Blue Bunting, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, and Golden-crowned Warbler among others on previous Festival tours. With their mix of thornscrub, wetlands, and butterfly gardens, they provide nesting habitat for many of our Valley specialties and a haven for wintering passerines. Conditions permitting, we may stop at a local sod farm on the way back for some grassland shorebirds.



Highlights: Green Kingfisher, Plain Chachalaca, Common Ground-Dove, White-tipped Dove, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Green Jay, Clay-colored Thrush, Long-billed and Curve-billed Thrashers, Olive Sparrow, Altamira Oriole, Lesser Goldfinch.

NEW PAIRING!

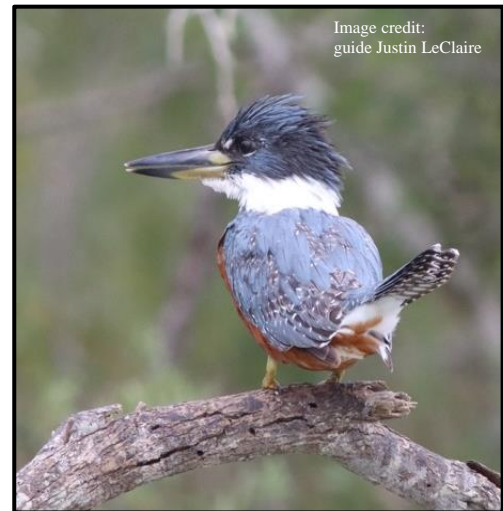
NATIONAL BUTTERFLY CENTER & ANZALDUAS PARK

Fee \$ 85/ Thursday, Sunday / 7:00am – 1:00pm



This trip is a great mix of water and woodlands! A visit to Anzalduas County Park will show the river from another perspective and you'll understand why this riverside area's fame goes beyond its county park status. The mature ash and Live Oak trees can also hold a wide variety of species, both resident and rare. If, as sometimes happens at short notice, Anzalduas is closed for government use, we shall instead visit the nearby World Birding Center at the Hidalgo Pumphouse. For the second half of the trip we will visit the beautiful native woodlands of the nearby National Butterfly Center where nearly all of our Valley specialties can be found. This is one of the few sites east of Starr County where an Audubon's Oriole has been regularly seen, even breeding and producing hybrid offspring with an Altamira Oriole!

Highlights: Ringed Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, Sprague's Pipit, Clay-colored Thrush, Audubon's Oriole, Altamira Oriole, Gray Hawk, Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, hummingbirds (including Buff-bellied), Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and wintering warblers.



NEW TRIP! RESTRICTED ACCESS!

NATIONAL BUTTERFLY CENTER & PIXIE PRESERVE

Fee \$85 / Friday / 7:00am – 1:00pm



Though these two properties are owned by the North American Butterfly Association, they are absolutely fantastic places for birds as well. The Pixie Preserve (formally called Chihuahua Woods) was recently acquired by NABA from The Nature Conservancy and there are plans in the works to enhance the habitat here and potential as a public nature park. This property, full of old-growth ebony woodlands, was the last known site for nesting Hook-billed Kites in the RGV a number of years ago. It has been off-limits to the public for some time now, so who knows what we'll find for birds in this dense native patch. With the time left in this trip, we'll visit NABA's other spectacular property nearby, the National Butterfly Center. Here the feeders and woodlands will give us really great looks at Valley specialties and whatever else the park has in store for us!

Highlights: Clay-colored Thrush, Audubon's Oriole, Altamira Oriole, Gray Hawk, Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, hummingbirds (including Buff-bellied), Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and wintering warblers.



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

PORT MANSFIELD – WILLACY COUNTY WANDERING

Fee \$95 / Friday, Saturday / 6:30am – 3:00pm



This limited-participant trip will be an exploration of parts of Willacy County – the least birded county in the Lower Rio Grande Valley – as well as an opportunity to learn a little of its history and culture. We'll bird through the various wetlands, thornscrub patches, and the Sacahuistale Flats before a picnic along the Laguna Madre in Port Mansfield where we can take advantage of their newly improved birding boardwalks and viewing platforms. This is a great opportunity for folks who bird away from some the "normal" touristy birding locations and get a solid bird list in Willacy County. Only one van per day will be used for this trip, so enjoy the quality time with your guides! Stops will be made at public restrooms.

Highlights: Waterfowl, herons and egrets, shorebirds, raptors, Cassin's Sparrow, wintering sparrows. A bit of everything!

RAPTOR BANDING

Fee \$85 / Saturday / 7:30am – 12:00pm



We're lucky to have several prominent raptor researchers who focus their work on our birds in the RGV. For this spectacular trip, you will meet and work with several of these local researchers in the field where we will be catching and banding raptors, weather permitting. Falcons, accipiters, and buteos are all possible! Join us on this trip to get a close view and learn intimate knowledge of some of our most majestic and charismatic bird species that North America has to offer. In the case of adverse and unsafe weather conditions for trapping, we will spend our time finding and observing the raptors.

Highlights: Gray Hawk, White-tailed Hawk, Harris's Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Crested Caracara. Who knows what we will see in the hand and in the field on this one of a kind trip!



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire



NEW TRIP!

RARITY ROUNDUP!

Fee \$100 / Sunday / 6:30am – 1:00pm



Have you been to our festival or another and so many good birds had been found by the last day, but you already had a trip booked so you didn't have time to chase anything? Plan ahead by booking this new trip that we're adding this year! We will have a number of vans and guides ready on Sunday morning to chase whatever spectacular rarities are found this year during the festival. Whether you still need to see Hook-billed Kites at Bentsen, a Tamaulipas Crow that just showed up at the Brownsville Dump, or a rare migrant on South Padre Island, hop on the van headed toward the target bird(s) that you're after! Of course, we'll spend time with other birds we see along the way. Please note that we likely will not have time for any Starr County trips as those sites are ~2 hours away, but everything in Cameron, Hidalgo, or Willacy County is fair game! Prepare to potentially be a little flexible, as we can only split up into as many groups as we have vans (which should still be plenty!).

Highlights: The highlights are totally up to you on this trip! There are ALWAYS incredible fun and/or rare birds found at the festival that will make for a great morning of birding.

NEW PAIRING!

RIO GRANDE PONTOON AND QUINTA MAZATLAN

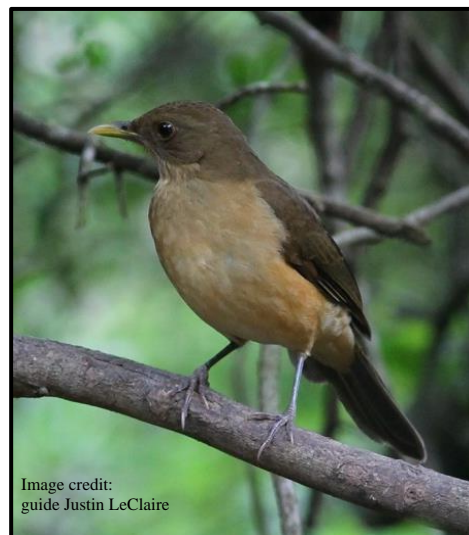
Fee \$100 / Thursday, Saturday / 6:00am – 1:00pm



This trip is as good a mix of RGV birding as you could *dream* of. Step aboard the large and comfortable *Riverside Dreamer* and see the Rio Grande river in a new way! The wooded banks on either side and our ability to traverse the river will allow for exceptional looks at many of our area's specialty birds and other exciting possibilities. After a couple hours on the river, we will switch gears at Quinta Mazatlan; a fantastic McAllen city birding hotspot at a restored adobe hacienda set in 15 acres of sub-tropical gardens and native woodlands. This beautiful park is complete with birding trails, feeding stations, and water features. Many Mexican rarities have been found here over the years!

Note: Can be cool on the boat in the mornings. Don't forget your jacket!

Highlights: Ringed Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, Clay-colored Thrush, "McCall's" Eastern Screech-Owl, Common Pauraque, Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, Altamira Oriole, and a decent rarity potential!



SABAL PALM SANCTUARY

Fee \$80 / Thursday, Saturday / 6:30am – 1:30pm



A visit to the Rio Grande Valley is NEVER complete without a visit to Sabal Palm Sanctuary! The site is now managed by the Gorgas Science Foundation, who have done a wonderful job of enhancing the already outstanding habitats and restoring the historic Rabb Plantation House, now the Sanctuary's impressive headquarters. The forest of native Sabal Palms is the last major remnant of an ecosystem once much more widespread in the Valley, and is unique in the U.S. Its shady depths and managed waterways shelter a remarkable diversity of wildlife. There's a bird-feeding area that's always great for photo-ops.

Highlights: Least Grebe, Plain Chachalaca, Groove-billed Ani (rare), Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green Kingfishers, Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Clay-colored Thrush, Hooded and Altamira Orioles, Olive Sparrow, wintering warblers.

BRINGING IT BACK! RESTRICTED ACCESS!

SALT LAKES AND BRUSH COUNTRY – LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

with Stephanie Bilodeau, USFWS Biologist

Fee \$75 / Wednesday / 6:30am – 1:00pm

La Sal del Rey – “Salt of the King” – is one of several natural salt lakes in the brush country northwest of Harlingen where Hidalgo and Willacy Counties meet. Salt from these lakes has been harvested since prehistoric times and continues even to this day. Since much of this area is protected as part of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge, there are vast expanses of native vegetation that has been spared from clearing for agricultural, urban development, and cattle grazing. This is also one of the few places where Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls have very rarely been seen within the last decade in the RGV outside of the large coastal ranches, so we’ll be keeping our eyes and ears out for them. Thanks to local biologist and bird guide, Stephanie Bilodeau, we’ll have special access and get to drive onto some of the restricted areas. Who knows what we’ll come across!

Highlights: Ferruginous Pygmy Owl (rare), Snowy Plover (and other shorebirds), Black-throated Sparrow, Pyrrhuloxia, Greater Roadrunner, “Rio Grande” Wild Turkey, Brewer’s Blackbird, wintering sparrows, and many of our Valley specialties!



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

SANTA ANA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Fee \$75 / Thursday, Saturday / 6:30am – 12:30pm



Widely famous and justly so, Santa Ana NWR, often called the “jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge system”, has one of the highest bird counts in the entire US NWR system. The dense riparian woodlands, numerous cattail-lined waterways, and banks of the Rio Grande at Santa Ana are a fantastic place to experience nearly all of the Valley’s endearing species. Additional park features include the 40-foot-tall hawk watch tower and the suspended catwalk, offering exceptional hawk watching opportunities and rare views of birds in their habitat from above the forest canopy. Numerous major rarities have been found here over the years due to the extensive native vegetation – think of the recent US/Canada-first ever Bat Falcon! Every visit to Santa Ana is a different experience and a trip to the valley would not be complete without a tour here! Many of our guides deem this as their favorite park and trip to guide.

Highlights: Hook-billed Kite (rare), Tropical Parula (rare), Ringed and Green Kingfishers, Least Grebe, Gray Hawk, Groove-billed Ani (rare), Northern Beardless -Tyrannulet, Cinnamon Teal, Plain Chachalaca, Clay-colored Thrush, Olive Sparrow, and who knows what rarities!

BRINGING IT BACK! RESTRICTED ACCESS!

SANTA MARGARITA RANCH

Fee \$110 / Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday / 5:00am – 2:00pm



If you haven't heard about Santa Margarita Ranch recently then you're missing out! This ranch just downstream from Salineño is always a festival favorite when we run it due to its spectacular mix of riparian thornscrub along the Rio Grande paired with the arid upland desert thornscrub that Starr County is known for. In particular, one species has been dominating the RGV birding scene over the last year – the return of Brown Jays! A family group (or two!) have been seen on nearly every private trip to the riparian section of this ranch since winter 2022-23, in part thanks to the returning private guides that keep a small citrus feeding station well-stocked, and we hope for this to continue through this coming winter. Even if the Brown Jays somehow turn out to be a no-show, this ranch offers absolutely stunning views of the Rio Grande from the desert bluffs overlook and many other very special rarities have been seen recently. This tour does involve a slightly strenuous hike down rocky trails (relative to our typically-flat valley trails) to get to the riparian corridor, so it is absolutely not a trip for those who have any difficulty walking. We will also be going behind a section of gated border wall that crosses through the ranch that the ranch owner will have to let us in and out of, so factor that into your signup if you need to. Safety is always our number 1 priority! We're so excited to offer this amazing trip again this year!



Image credit:
guide Ryan Rodriguez

Highlights: Brown Jay (rare), White-collared Seedeater (rare), Muscovy Duck (rare), Zone-tailed Hawk (rare), Red-billed Pigeon (rare), Scaled Quail (rare), Gray Hawk, Black-throated Sparrow, Green and Ringed Kingfishers, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Pyrrhuloxia, Audubon's Oriole.

SHOREBIRDING MADE EASY!

Fee \$80 / Thursday, Friday / 6:00am – 1:00pm



Did you know that the mudflats of the Laguna Madre and surrounding areas are world-class foraging habitat for millions of shorebirds every year from more than 30 species? The Laguna Madre serves as a vital stopover link in the migratory chain for most of these species such as the biofilm-licking Western Sandpiper, the 20,000-mile round trip migrant Red Knot, and polychaete-devouring Piping Plover. Many birders profess difficulty in identifying these shorebirds, but it is a skill that can readily be acquired with the proper help.



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

Once mastered, it is both a pleasure in itself and a potential tool to aid shorebird conservation - shorebird numbers can, after all, only be accurately monitored if they can be identified with confidence. Our highly experienced shorebird guides on this trip will teach you all about shorebird identification and biology at three distinctly different sites to build as big of a shorebird list as possible. We will also spend time with plenty of other coastal species such as Black Skimmer and Reddish Egret!

Highlights: 20+ potential species of shorebirds including oystercatchers, plovers, phalaropes, sandpipers, dowitchers, avocets, curlews, godwits and more!

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND BIRDING, NATURE, AND ALLIGATOR SANCTUARY

Fee \$80 / Wednesday, Saturday / 6:00am – 1:00pm



The South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center (and Alligator Sanctuary) was built as a part of the World Birding Center and has over 3300 feet of boardwalk, 5 shaded bird blinds, a 5-story viewing tower, and even an Alligator sanctuary! This location is one of just a few with any native woodlands left on South Padre Island and, coupled with the fact that it is adjacent to the wooded SPI Convention Center, it has become THE best “migrant trap” for birds passing by our area. The boardwalk around the property spans salt and freshwater marshes and lagoons, and offers



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

fantastic photography opportunities, often yielding unusually accommodating secretive rails in the cattails, close views of shorebirds on the mudflats, and waterfowl on the ponds. With some luck we may also have a number of migrants in the upland areas and mangrove forest throughout the property. Once we've finished at the Birding and Nature Center we'll make a stop at another SPI migrant trap – the Valley Land Fund lots on Sheephead Street to see what else might be present. Late fall has turned up a number of exceptional surprises on the SPI!

Highlights: “Mangrove” Yellow Warbler, Least Bittern, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Clapper Rail, Sora, Neotropic Cormorant, Peregrine Falcon, American Oystercatcher, Marsh Wren, and hopefully some migrants!

BRINGING IT BACK! RESTRICTED ACCESS!

SOUTHMOST PRESERVE – THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Fee \$75 / Thursday, Friday / 6:30am – 12:30pm



Adjacent to the Sabal Palm Sanctuary along the Rio Grande is a little-known jewel of shared habitat – the Nature Conservancy's Southmost Preserve. For the first time in several festivals we are being allowed access by special arrangement, so don't miss the chance to visit this unique area of Sabal Palms, and riparian woodland, and reclaimed agricultural land that is home to many of our Valley specialties and beyond. Using our vans will allow us access to remote areas (weather permitting) that were inaccessible on past trips.

Highlights: Gray Hawk, Least Grebe, Plain Chachalaca, Ringed and Green Kingfishers, Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Clay-colored Thrush, Altamira Oriole, Olive Sparrow, wintering warblers.

UPPER RIO GRANDE – SALINEÑO AND FALCON STATE PARK

Fee \$90/ Thursday, Friday / 5:00am – 2:00pm



The Rio Grande's wooded edges and the arid uplands in Starr County are rich with both riparian sub-tropical and desert southwest species. The feeding station at Salineño is always a highlight with a colorful frenzy of orioles, kiskadees, and Green Jays! A number of rare specialty birds are found along the Rio Grande in this area, and we'll look for them as best we can. After we've enjoyed the beautiful view of the Rio, we'll move on to Falcon State Park where we'll look for desert specialties.

Highlights: White-collared Seedeater (rare), Muscovy Duck (rare), Zone-tailed Hawk (rare), Red-billed Pigeon (rare), Gray Hawk, Black-throated Sparrow, Green and Ringed Kingfishers, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Pyrrhuloxia, Audubon's Oriole., White-tailed Kite.



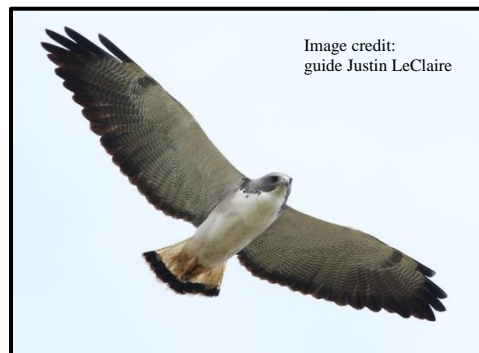
Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

VALLEY RAPTORS EXPEDITION

Fee \$95 / Wednesday / 6:30am – 4:00pm

Many birders have an innate love and appreciation for birds of prey. Judging by the fact that between 20 and 30 species of raptors nest, migrate through, or winter here, they sure seem to appreciate RGV birders too! For this trip, led by some of the festival's best raptor ID experts and researchers, we'll attempt to have experiences with as wide a variety of species as possible in the time available. While our primary targets will include some of our more rare raptors like Aplomado Falcon and Hook-billed Kite, we should hopefully see many other species in the process.

Highlights: Hook-billed Kite (rare), Zone-tailed Hawk (rare), Aplomado Falcon, White-tailed Hawk, Gray Hawk, Harris's Hawk, Crested Caracara, and more!



WATERBIRD CONSERVATION ON THE ARROYO AND LAGUNA MADRE

with Justin LeClaire, Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program
Fee \$100 / Thursday, Friday / 6:30am – 12:30pm

A festival favorite! This is a wonderful opportunity for a small group to explore the mouth of the Arroyo Colorado and world-class Laguna Madre by boat to get close, intimate views of birds (and marine mammals) utilizing this coastal ecosystem. This area encompasses vital breeding, foraging, and roosting habitat for dozens of species of waterbirds and shorebirds in the form of dense rookery spoil islands, extensive prey-rich tidal mudflats, and complex black mangrove marshes among many other habitat features.



Justin is a passionate Avian Conservation Biologist with the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program which has researched, monitored, and managed important spoil islands and mudflats for waterbirds and shorebirds throughout the Central and Lower Texas Coast for decades.

Note: Please only bring hand-held cameras for the boat trip. Much of the trip will be spent standing or sitting on an outboard boat in potentially windy or misty conditions. A restroom will only be available at the start and end of the boat tour. It can be cool on the boat, so bring an extra layer! Life jackets will be provided.

Highlights: 'Mangrove' Yellow Warbler, Seaside Sparrow, kingfishers, and all local waterbird and shorebird species.



WHERE THE LOCALS BIRD – HIDDEN GEMS

Fee \$90

Cameron County: Wednesday, Friday, Sunday / 6:30am – 1:00pm
Hidalgo County: Wednesday, Saturday / 6:30am – 1:00pm

Every birder has those out of the way locations, known only to a few, that are close to home and sure to yield a productive day of birding. For those lucky enough to live in the Rio Grande Valley, these hotspots become as familiar as our own backyard. Join some of our best local birders as they share with you a fantastic opportunity to bird the less traveled roads and ponds of Hidalgo or Cameron County. Ideal for returning festival goers who want to see more than just the "typical" parks and for county listers!

Highlights: There are no target birds but a variety of previously scouted habitats and locations will be visited on each trip, and participants (no more than ten on each trip) should see many Valley specialties and perhaps a surprise or two all while birding in quiet, tucked away patches!



AFTERNOON/EVENING TRIPS

NEW TRIP!

AFTERNOON BIRDING: JUST FIND WATER!

Fee \$65 / 2:00pm – 5:30pm

North Harlingen: Wednesday, Thursday

South Harlingen: Friday, Saturday

We often get requests from participants to have more options for things to do in the afternoons and evenings, so here's a brand-new trip just for you all! These quick afternoon jaunts will visit a few fantastic wetlands around the Harlingen area where we will check the water for waterbirds, the sky for raptors, and the surrounding woodlands for birds migrating or wintering passerines and RGV specialties. Wednesday and Thursday will visit wetlands along the north side of Harlingen; Friday and Saturday will visit the south side. Hop on one or two of these trips to help round out your bird list for the week and make the most out of your time in the valley!

Highlights: Least Grebe, Groove-billed Ani (rare), Fulvous Whistling-Duck (uncommon), Cinnamon Teal (uncommon), Green and Ringed Kingfishers, plus shorebirds, waterfowl, and wintering passerines oh my!



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

PARROT PALOOZA!

Fee \$50 / Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday / 4:00pm – 6:00pm



For this perfectly timed evening trip we will split up into several vans to separately hunt out parakeets first (which typically can be found earlier in the evening) throughout Harlingen. Our guides will communicate where the birds are being seen so that every van ends up getting on the birds when we find them. For the second half of the trip we will split up again to look for the large mixed parrot roost that should be assembling somewhere in the city and all meet again in the suburban neighborhood that it is found in! The roost typically provides an unforgettable viewing experience and photo opportunity as we watch the antics of these extremely smart, quizzical birds. Join us and use your eyes and ears to help search for these very loud, green beauties while they meet up for their big slumber party! This trip is a MUST for every RGVBF participant!

Note: Guides are not required to keep an eBird list for this trip, but you are welcome to keep your own.

Highlights: Red-Crowned Parrot, Green Parakeet, Red-lored Parrot, Lilac-crowned Parrot, Yellow-headed Parrot.



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire



Image credit:
guide Justin LeClaire

NEW TRIP!

CAMPFIRE CHAT AND CRITTER WALK AT CACTUS CREEK RANCH

Fee \$85 / Thursday / 5:00pm – 9:00pm



Another brand new variant of our Cactus Creek Ranch trip will let you see the ranch in a whole new light...well, actually no light except for our headlamps. We will arrive at sunset while the Sandhill Cranes are still calling and flying by to roost for the night. We will have smores and drinks by the campfire while chatting a bit about conservation with the ever-anecdotal owner Mary Jo Bogatto before going for a night walk in search of herps, calling nightjars and owls, and invertebrates.

Highlights: Sandhill Crane, Common Pauraque, owls ("McCall's" Eastern Screech, Barn, and Great Horned), bark scorpions, tarantulas, herps, and smores!



NEW TRIP!

NIGHT HIKE AT ESTERO LLANO GRANDE STATE PARK

Fee \$60 / Thursday / 5:00pm – 7:30pm



Join us for a short hike through one of our favorite places in the valley – but at a time that most seasoned valley visitors likely haven't visited before! has been a hit the last couple festivals! We will get to Estero Llano Grande State Park just before sunset and listen to diurnal bird songs turn into the calls of Pauragues, Owls, and herps. On our hike with park staff we'll watch for herps, creepy crawlies, and anything else that wants to show itself. Make sure to bring a headlamp to make the most out of this trip!

Highlights: Bark scorpions, tarantulas, herps, Common Pauraque, owls ("McCall's" Eastern Screech, Barn, and Great Horned), and whatever else we can turn up!



SUNSET SHENANIGANS AT RESACA DE LA PALMA STATE PARK

With Land Sea and Sky & Kowa Optics

Fee \$60 / Friday / 5:30pm – 9:00pm



This evening trip has been a hit the last couple festivals! We will travel just down the road to Resaca de la Palma State Park and World Birding Center for an evening of activities! We will arrive about sunset, and we will spend the evening star gazing, listening for owls and nightjars, and looking for other crawling creatures of the night. This is a unique opportunity to join Land Sea and Sky for a look through their astronomical telescopes, local lepidopterists for moths, and a chance to look for nocturnal critters. Make sure to bring a headlamp to make the most out of this trip!

Highlights: Telescopic views of planets and constellations (clear sky permitting), bark scorpions, tarantulas, herps, Common Pauraque, owls ("McCall's" Eastern Screech, Barn, and Great Horned).

THE FOLLOWING TRIPS WILL MEET AT SITE:
(You must still register for the festival and sign up for trips)

**HUGH RAMSEY NATURE PARK - HARLINGEN
WORLD BIRDING CENTER**

with local volunteers

FREE / Saturday, Sunday / 8:00am & 10:00am

The 55 acres of this World Birding Center are a microcosm of South Texas habitats enhanced by trails, water features, bird-feeding areas, photography blinds, and extensive plantings of native vegetation. This is truly a birding oasis close to the center of Harlingen, with over 270 recorded species.

The Park will be open for birding from dusk to dawn throughout the Festival. There are no tours from the Festival itself, but local birders will lead walks for Festival registrants at the Park each morning at 8 & 10 am. Each will last about 90 minutes. You can reserve a place on one of the walks at the registration desk once the Festival opens.

SAN BENITO WETLANDS

with local volunteers

FREE / Saturday, Sunday / 8:00am & 10:00am

The restoration of wetlands and riparian habitat on some 65 acres at the San Benito Wetlands is one of the most exciting on-going environmental projects in the area. It's spearheaded by Jaime Flores, the Program Coordinator of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership, and actively supported by the City of San Benito – the owners of the land.

For the time being, the site can only be entered with specific permission from the City of San Benito. During the Festival, however, there will be guided walks led by local birders at 8am and 10am each morning. You can reserve a place on one of the walks at the registration desk once the Festival opens or call 209-227-4823. In addition, anyone attending the Festival will be allowed entry to walk the trails between 2pm and 5pm each afternoon from the 9th to the 13th. Sign in at the Welcome tent. Just take a little care when walking, particularly after wet weather.

The site is well worth visiting. Almost 200 species have been seen to date (it is an eBird hotspot), and at times the sheer numbers of cormorants, herons, egrets and wildfowl can be overwhelming.

PHOTOTRACK

Our 2023 PhotoTrack is sure to generate excitement with opportunities for all experience levels no matter what type of camera you have. We offer something for every interest level and ability. Indoor classroom topics on digiscoping, in-the-field excursions to get hands-on experience, guidance from professionals, action shots, and demystifying those settings are some highlights. If you are new to digiscoping, you can learn from the master, Clay Taylor. If you're looking to get those crushing Crested Caracara photos, try the Martin Refuge for fantastic photo ops in natural settings or Laguna Seca Ranch for a fabulous reflective shot of Green Jays.

Note: All trips (*other than Sunsets, Birds and More*) meet on site – directions to PhotoTrack destinations will be provided via Cvent App/

LAGUNA SECA RANCH

Fee \$160 per session, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, 6:15am-10:30am or 2:15pm-5:30pm



Laguna Seca Ranch is open for special opportunities for a small number of festival participants in morning and afternoon sessions. Morning participants meet at 6:15am at Love's Truck Stop (Exit #12 on highway 281/69C). Afternoon participants meet at 2:15pm at Love's Truck Stop (same location). If you run late and miss us at the truck stop, call Randall at (817) 304-6653 to coordinate your arrival at the ranch.

You can choose to photograph from blinds specifically designed for the best photos of songbirds or raptors. The songbird blinds are below-ground level, which puts your camera at eye level with the birds. Songbirds are photographed both in the morning and afternoon sessions. The raptor area has three different blinds from which to photograph: above ground, below ground, and at ground level. Raptors are photographed during morning sessions only.

Modern bathrooms and electricity for charging camera batteries, etc., are on the premises. Photo opportunities for all hand-held cameras and those requiring tripods. Lenses equivalent to 300mm and longer are highly recommended.

SUNSETS, BIRDS, AND MORE!

With Clay Taylor, Swarovski Inc.

Fee \$60 / Wednesday, Friday 3:30pm – 9:00pm



We will depart the Convention Center in the late afternoon and head to South Padre Island, where we will scout locations and discuss settings and equipment. As the sun sets, we will try to silhouette birds in front of the sun for spectacular images! We will head to the South Padre Island Brewing Company for dinner before heading back to the Harlingen Convention Center.

Goals: Learning how to plan for sunset silhouettes of birds and rewarding ourselves with some great food!

MARTIN REFUGE

Fee \$165 / Thursday, Saturday 7:00am – 12:45pm



The Martin Refuge, owned by John and Audrey Martin, has hosted wildlife photographers since 2003 on its 300 acres of thorn scrub enhanced by water features and professionally designed photo-blinds. It is particularly renowned for the opportunities it affords to photographers for close views of Crested Caracaras, Harris's Hawks and other raptors. This trip is an excellent opportunity for behavioral observation and study as well. Patty Raney of Martin Refuge will guide us to the blinds for this unique chance to get great shots of wildlife at this private ranch. After a morning of photography with the raptors, the Refuge will be providing us with lunch at an open air palapa.

The trip will be limited to eight participants and is suitable for photographers of all levels. Bring lots of batteries – there is no electricity on site. Restroom available.

DIGISCOPING FROM THE DECK

With Clay Taylor, Swarovski Optik Ltd.

Fee \$20 / Thursday 2:00pm -5:00pm



This workshop, sponsored by Swarovski Optik, is designed to help digiscopers with all levels of experience but will be particularly valuable for struggling beginners. It will be conducted by Clay Taylor, the Naturalist Market Manager with Swarovski Optik Ltd and a pioneer of digiscoping in the U.S. **Meet onsite** at the deck at Estero Llano Grande State Park Visitor Center. Clay will cover setups, camera settings, field-shooting techniques and reviews of images. Please bring all your equipment including spotting scope, tripod, camera and adapter, fully charged batteries and empty memory cards. If you do not have a spotting scope, let Clay know in advance at Clay.Taylor@swarovskioptik.us. Clay will also have digiscoping adapters for DLSR cameras and smart phones available.

Goals: Understand the best ways to use your scope as a long lens to get the best up-close shots from a basic camera.

PHOTOGRAPHING SHOREBIRDS

With Paul Denman

Fee \$50 / Friday 6:30am - 10:30am



Meet Paul Denman in front of the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center for an early morning photo field trip on the nature center's boardwalk. He will guide camera-toting participants, share tips to improve photography, and teach many techniques he uses for photographing birds, including how to capture sharp images of birds in flight.

This trip is limited to a small number of festival participants for Paul to provide the most one-on-one help possible. Photo opportunities exist for all hand-held cameras and those requiring tripods. Lenses equivalent to 300mm and longer are recommended.

EVENING PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE SOUTH TEXAS ECOTOURISM CENTER

With Ruth Hoyt

Fee \$50 / Friday 3:30pm - 6:30pm



Meet Ruth Hoyt at the brand-new South Texas Ecotourism Center in LAGUNA VISTA for a late afternoon to early evening photo field trip. She will guide participants around this new location which is already known to nature lovers for its great variety of birds and wildlife as well as a high level of animal activity. Black-tailed jackrabbits and diamond-backed rattlesnakes are regulars, and you might meet "Weazzie," a wild, long-tailed weasel, at and around the visitors' center.

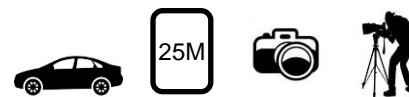
Ruth will share tips and techniques to improve your photography, whether for birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, or insects such as butterflies. This location is known for beautiful Texas sunsets, and often wild, (exotic) nilgai on the landscape. Photo opportunities exist for all hand-held cameras and those requiring tripods. Lenses equivalent to 300mm and longer are recommended for wildlife and shorter lenses for landscapes.

GETTING CLOSE TO THINGS WITH WINGS

Hands-on Close-up Field Trip

With Melody Lytle

Fee \$50 / Saturday 7:00am - 11:00am



Meet Melody Lytle at the West Wildlife Preserve for an early morning photo workshop for a few lucky participants. Here you will focus on things with wings, from butterflies and moths to dragonflies and damselflies, to birds, bees, and insects all around Melody guides you in the native plants and pollinator gardens as she shares tips to improve your photography and teaches various techniques she uses for expert close-up photography. This trip is limited to a small number of festival participants for Melody to provide the most one-on-one help possible. Photo opportunities exist for hand-held cameras and those requiring tripods. Cameras with macro lenses or normal lenses combined with extension tubes are recommended.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Entrance to all keynotes, seminars and socials are being offered for one flat price during the online registration period. This *Kiskadee Pass* is \$30 and allows you entry to all keynotes & seminars. A huge savings from individually priced admissions. You can purchase the Kiskadee Pass only during open registration. During the Festival, individual tickets will be sold for admission.

Field trips are not included in the Kiskadee Pass.

FLYCATCHER WORKSHOP



With Cin-Ty Lee
Fee \$20 or Free with Kiskadee Pass / Wednesday 6pm

Cin-Ty Lee, coauthor of the Princeton Field Guide series North American Flycatchers, presents a workshop on how to make flycatcher identification attainable to all, including beginners. The first volume of the series is dedicated to Empidonax flycatchers and pewees. Can-Ty will show you how to use the guide, focusing on how to see proportions and color contrasts and how to read maps and spectrograms. The workshop will end with a sneak preview of Volume 2, which is dedicated to the Myiarchus flycatchers and kingbirds.

Cin-Ty Lee was born in Taiwan and grew up in southern California. He has spent more than half his life in Houston, Texas. He is a geologist by profession, teaching and conducting research at Rice University, but his main passion is birding. He has written a number of articles on challenging bird identifications, such as on pipits, loons, pewees, dowitchers and female orioles. His most recent project is the three volume Princeton Field Guide series to North American Flycatchers. Can-Ty also enjoys illustrating birds, leading field trips, and listening to nocturnal flight calls.

100 YEARS OF COASTAL CONSERVATION AND HOW PEOPLE CAN SUPPORT COASTAL BIRDS



With Yvette Stewart
Fee \$20 or Free with Kiskadee Pass / Friday 6pm

In 2023, Audubon Texas is celebrating 100 years of coastal stewardship! As we peer into the next century of conservation needs, we reflect on the humble beginnings of Audubon's work in Texas, the living proof of good stewardship we see soaring above our coastal habitats, and we contemplate the new challenges we will face in the coming years and decades. Join Yvette Stewart, Community Outreach Coordinator, for a lively presentation on our story, hard-learned lessons, and a call to action for our beloved birds.

Yvette Stewart joined Audubon Texas in 2018. As the Community Outreach Coordinator, her priority project is the Audubon Conservation Leaders Program (ACL), a two-pronged approach to creating more conservation professionals. Yvette works with high schools in Dallas, Galveston, and San Antonio to introduce students to careers and experiences in the great outdoors. The other portion of ACL is working with university students and young professionals to get firsthand experience in the non-profit sector, in partnership with other statewide organizations. Yvette comes to Audubon Texas with a degree in Wildlife and Conservation Biology from the University of Rhode Island and has recently attained her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from University of Texas. Yvette is a former AmeriCorps service member, a passionate birder, and a lover of all creatures, from tiny spiders to soaring eagles. Yvette is most happy when she's helping people to learn and grow in the great outdoors!

HOME RANGE DYNAMICS AND JUVENILE DISPERSAL OF GRAY HAWKS (BUTEO PLAGIATUS) IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY



With Mike Stewart

Fee \$20 or Free with Kiskadee Pass / Saturday 6pm

Mike has color banded dozens of Gray Hawks in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties, along with deploying 30 GPS-GSM transmitters and 15 VHF radio transmitters, to determine when juveniles disperse from their natal sites and how far they travel. He has also determined the extent of breeding and nonbreeding home ranges for adults.

Come hear about his research with this uncommon raptor and discover what relevant information he has found that will guide conservation efforts for Gray Hawks, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Texas.

Mike Stewart is originally from Texas, but over the past 20 years he has lived in several states throughout the eastern U.S. He has been interested in birds since 2002 when a pair of Blue Jays nested outside his kitchen window. After retiring from the Army in 2019, he enrolled at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley with plans to attend Texas A&M University-Kingsville after completing his Master of Science in Biology. He lives in south Texas with his wife, Yvette, and their Green-cheeked Parakeet, Greenlee. Mike spends much of his spare time birding and trying to photograph birds, as well as banding songbirds and raptors.

AFTERNOON SEMINARS

THE BEAUTY OF TERNS



With Cameron Cox

Fee \$15 or Free with Kiskadee Pass / Wednesday 2:00pm -3:00pm

From the incredible migratory feats performed by some terns, to the elegance of the appearance, to their stunning courtship displays, terns are a joy to behold and ponder. We'll take the afternoon to explore terns in all of their charisma and beauty, while simultaneously weaving in the moments of joy, excitement, boredom, and heartbreak that went into creating the book, **Terns of North America**. While terns will be the subject, we'll also getting into the messy business of why it took nine years to write a book about them!

Cameron Cox: An avid birder for thirty years, Cameron's passion is teaching others the joy of birds and that even the nuances of bird identification can be fun to learn. He is the owner, instructor, and chef dishwasher for Avocet Birding Courses

(www.birdingABC.com). He is the coauthor of The Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching and Terns of North America, a Photographic Guide. He and his wife and their small herd of dogs and cats split their time between coastal Oregon and south Texas.

CONSERVATION AROUND THE WORLD

Free / Friday 1:00pm – 4:00pm

The Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival is lucky to attract many vendors from across the World. Many of the countries they represent are actively working to preserve the unique bird life and habitats of their country. Come hear from these representatives as they inform us about the efforts taking place in their homelands.

PHOTOGRAPHY FOR CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION



With Krisztina Scheeff

Fee \$15 or Free with Kiskadee Pass / Saturday 2:00pm -3:00pm

As a conservation photographer we take photos of our natural world with a mission. We use photos to raise public awareness of our conservation efforts, to educate and to advocate for wildlife, flora, and our environment. Photography is also a great tool to be used in education, from schools to businesses. Photos have a major impact in all areas of life and they do tell the story with more impact. By showcasing the beauty and value of natural environments or the challenges wildlife faces, conservation photography can inspire people to take action to protect and conserve them.

Krisztina Scheeff is an award-winning and professional nature photographer based in San Diego CA. Recognized for her photographic work in National Audubon Society as well as a finalist in the prestigious Wildlife Photograph of the Year competition, Krisztina's photos have been published in magazines and articles around the world, including National Geographic, Wild Planet Photo Magazine, California 101, San Diego Audubon Society, American Wild Magazine, Birders Digest, Marine Conservation Magazine – UK, North American Nature Photography Association, and more. They have also been featured in Art Shows and Galleries around the country. Krisztina operates a successful business leading Photography Workshops & Tours to Scotland (Puffins), Ireland, Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Hungary, Bosque del Apache, Grand Teton NP and more. She also leads workshops for Bird Festivals around the country and presents at various events. Krisztina spent years studying and photographing the Rushing Grebes and guides her clients at Lake Hodges in San Diego to experience this amazing behavior and capture their own photos. She is known as the "Grebe Whisperer", as they clients like to call her.

INTO THE REALM OF HARRIS'S HAWKS: EXPLORING SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN SOUTH TEXAS



With Brooke Poplin

Fee \$15 or Free with Kiskadee Pass / Saturday 3:30pm - 4:30pm

The University of North Texas (UNT) Harris's Hawk research team has begun research aiming to unveil the secrets of sociality in these majestic raptors. Recent findings have revealed that more than half of all Harris's Hawk nesting groups in south Texas comprise three or more individuals, engaging cooperative breeding and in dramatic cooperative hunts. In pursuit of a deeper understanding, our team has deployed VHF radio transmitters in 2023 to study these remarkable groups throughout the valley in both urban and natural

habitats. This presentation aims to shed light on the fascinating social behaviors exhibited by Harris's Hawks in specifically the Cameron County region. By exploring the lore of five distinct hawk groups, we will delve into their intriguing behaviors, including same-sex copulations, cooperative hunting large prey such as snakes and gulls, and the apparent instructional role that parents play in nurturing the juvenile hawks' cooperative hunting techniques. This research has broader implications for our knowledge of raptor behavior and the role of sociality in avian populations. Our discoveries offer valuable insights into the adaptability of Harris's Hawks and how their social structure contributes to their thriving presence in the harsh south Texas environment.

Brooke Poplin is a graduate student from the University of North Texas pursuing her Biology M.S. For her master's thesis, she is studying the social behavior of Harris's Hawks in the Rio Grande Valley using VHF radio transmitters in conjunction with direct behavioral observations. Brooke has been interested in ornithology since her early undergrad days as she became involved with multiple avian research projects in north Texas. Perhaps, the most exciting were studies on the behavior of the American Kestrel and breeding ecology of the Painted Bunting. Her ultimate career goal is to pursue a career as a raptor biologist, one day becoming a professor to help inspire diversity in the world of ecology.

PHOTOTRACK SEMINARS

SETTING UP AN OUTDOORS PHOTO STUDIO (FOR BIRDS AND MORE)



With Ruth Hoyt

Fee \$15 Thursday 1:00pm – 2:00pm

Join Ruth Hoyt for this indoor session, where she presents her program and demonstrates techniques for setting up an outdoor photo studio specifically for bird photography.

She shares tips and techniques she uses when consulting with ranch owners who want to build photo blinds for photography — what we want (photographs) and what the subjects need (food, water, shelter, and a place to rear their young).

Her slide show demonstrates how she attracts a variety of species to a photo area and prepares photographers for some specialty birds and surprise visitors, as well as details she includes in photo areas, such as water sources, foods to offer, and a key ingredient — having fun!

WHEN AND WHERE TO PHOTOGRAPH BIRDS ON SOUTH PADRE ISLAND



With Paul Denman

Fee \$15 /Thursday 2:30pm – 3:30pm

Photographer Paul Denman shares his indoors classroom program for birders who like to photograph and photographers who would like to know more about bird photography. Most people think of South Padre Island as a hotspot during spring migration, but Paul's presentation takes you to the best locations for photographing all kinds of birds on South Padre Island throughout the year. In addition, he provides his favorite techniques and tips to help you improve your bird photography, from mastering flight photography to getting down low to capture birds in and above the water.

DIGISCOPING DEMYSTIFIED

With Clay Taylor, Swarovski Optik Ltd.

Fee \$15 / Thursday 3:30-5:00pm

This indoor workshop held at the Harlingen Convention Center and sponsored by Swarovski Optik, will explain digiscoping — the process of attaching a digital camera or phone to a spotting scope. The workshop will be conducted by Clay Taylor, the Naturalist Market Manager with Swarovski Optik Ltd and a pioneer of digiscoping in the U.S. Clay will cover scope and camera equipment, attachment devices, and tips for success. This class can be taken in conjunction with Digiscoping from the Deck as a field experience or it can be a stand-alone class. Meet at the Harlingen Convention Center assigned breakout room.

WORKING WITH BIRDS IN PHOTOSHOP



With Esperanza S Chapa
Fee \$15 / Friday 1pm – 2:00pm

Esperanza will share her program, “Working with Birds in Photoshop” for birders who like to photograph. No matter what skill level you are, you are certain to learn several tips to improve your confidence and Photoshop workflow. Her presentation is a live demonstration of the usual kinds of adjustments that photographers can make when they work with their photographs. This includes removing and changing backgrounds, cleaning up distracting objects such as feathers, sticks, leaves, etc., enhancing and repairing birds’ eyes, and using the liquify filter to increase or reduce the size of a flower, bird, etc. Graphic artist, designer and photographer from McAllen, Texas,

Esperanza S. Chapa began her love affair with art during her childhood summers on her family’s ranch in Guanajuato, Mexico. She completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts degree from the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León in 1993 using the first version of Photoshop! Since then, her work has helped her clients earn national recognition and numerous, prestigious awards year after year. Esperanza has taken the Texas Master Naturalist training and served on the boards of various nature-related organizations in the Rio Grande Valley.

GETTING CLOSE TO THINGS WITH WINGS (Close-up Photography)



With Melody Lytle
Fee \$15 / Friday 2:30pm - 3:30pm

Expect to see and learn Melody Lytle’s techniques for capturing images of butterflies, moths, dragonflies, damselflies, and other insects and critters with wings. Melody shares her expertise and presents her custom slide show that illustrates numerous tips and techniques she uses for photographing things with wings. This includes camera gear, tripod, macro lenses, extension tubes, reflectors and more. This is the perfect classroom session if you plan to attend Melody’s hands-on workshop tomorrow Saturday 11/11/23 from 6:30 - 10:30 am at the **West Wildlife Preserve** in Rio Hondo.

LIGHTROOM BASICS FOR BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY



With Ruth Hoyt
Fee \$15 / Saturday 2:00pm – 3:00pm

Ruth Hoyt, bird & wildlife photographer and Texas master naturalist, shares her program, “Lightroom Basics for Bird Photographers” for birders who like to photograph.

Ruth will talk about some basic differences between Lightroom and Photoshop and what you can do with your photographs while working in Lightroom. This live presentation demonstrates the power of having a system on your computer for cataloging and managing your photographs. She will also show how to make basic adjustments to your photographs and export them for publication and sharing.

SPECIAL EVENTS

WELCOME KICK-OFF RECEPTION

Free with Registration/Tuesday 6:00pm – 8:00 pm

After you have picked up your credentials at the new Harlingen Convention Center between noon and 5pm, come to the Harlingen Arts & Heritage Museum at 2425 Boxwood Street (on Loop 499, across from the airport) to mingle with guides and participants while enjoying local music, refreshments, and hors d'oeuvres. Explore the exhibits, catch up with old friends, meet some new ones!



KISKADEE KORDIALS

Free with Registration/Thursday, Friday, Saturday 5:00pm -6:00pm

You are “kordially” invited to join us at the Birders Bazaar for refreshments during the last hour of the trade show, with some light snacks to hold you over until dinner. Cash bar of beer or wine available to anyone over 21. Festival ID badge required.

BIRDERS BAZAAR TRADE SHOW

Kiskadee Ballroom/Harlingen Convention Center

Free! Open to the Public/Thursday & Friday 12:00pm- 6:00pm, Saturday 10:00am – 6:00pm, Sunday 10:00am - 4:00pm

Enjoy all things birds and birdy as you wander through rows of vendors' booths at the Harlingen Convention Center. With over 70 vendors, there are ideas, information and items to buy, all under one roof. Visit booths from tour companies, local refuges and wildlife areas, tourist attractions, artists, birding optics and other gear, local nature organizations, and much more.

LEGENDS OF CONSERVATION GALA

Kiskadee Auditorium /Harlingen Convention Center

Fee \$100 / Thursday 6:00pm- 8:00pm

This first Legends of Conservation fund raiser is an opportunity for those who have never attended our festival to learn about what we do and what is being done by so many conservation groups and individuals to save habitat and thus save birds and other wildlife.

A nationally known conservationist will give a short presentation on conservations importance to everyone. A live auction of original art from our Childrens Art Contest will take place. You might want to arrive early to check out all of the children's art on display in the Birders Bazaar.

NOTE: Business or cocktail attire required.

SILENT AUCTION

Thursday-Saturday, Trade Show hours/Bidding closes 4:30pm on Saturday

One of the most fun satellite events for the Festival is the Silent Auction. With most of our vendors contributing items (from artwork to books, novelties to travel packages), and local merchants contributing to the inventory, it makes an exciting (and sometimes competitive) exercise in shopping.

FREE SHOWS/ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

SKY KING FALCONRY

Free / Thursday-Saturday, Trade Show hours with outdoor presentations at 1pm & 3pm

Sky Kings Falconry and Wildlife Revealed, a non-profit that travels the US conducting educational presentations with predatory birds and Raptors that specialize in free flight presentations and do take on roughly 20% rescue birds. Their birds consist of Falcons, Hawks, Owls, Vultures, Ravens and even Kookaburras as they are all meat-eating birds. Sky Kings staff presents an educational and at the same time fun show. They are dedicated to education and the preservation of our planet's wildlife and believe that providing the public with an up close and personal experience is a great way to get them interested in conservation.

LIVE BIRDS OF PREY FLIGHT SHOW

Free / Thursday – Sunday 1pm & 3pm in the pavilion area

CHILDREN'S ART WRITING AND PHOTO WINNERS ON DISPLAY IN BIRDER'S BAZZAR

Free / Thursday-Saturday, Trade Show hours

CHILDREN'S NATURE NOOK

Free / Saturday & Sunday 10am – 4:00pm

The Children's Nature Nook at the RGV Birding Festival showcases a variety of the best nature features in the Rio Grande Valley, with activities, crafts, games, and snow and tells. Learn about local birds, butterflies, and other animals, as well as the places where you can see them across the Rio Grande Valley.

ART/WRITING/PHOTO/CONTEST AWARDS

Free / Sunday 1:30pm – 3:30pm

Winners of the Art, Writing and Photo Contest will be presented their awards. Carlos Bethancourt, from Panama, will be our MC. He is a regular vendor at RGVBF representing The Canopy Family. Be sure to stay for the many door prizes to be given at the end of the presentation.

PRE-FESTIVAL SOUTH TEXAS PRIVATE RANCH BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP NOVEMBER 3-6, 2023

Join Ruth Hoyt for this pre-festival bird photography workshop on private ranches around Edinburg, TX. Space is limited to five. Special price for RGVBF attendees is \$2,600 (\$300 discount!), including double occupancy rooms at Comfort Inn, Edinburg.



Workshop Includes: orientation dinner Nov. 3, 2023 (bring camera & lens), photographic instruction, five photo sessions on two ranches, one at a World Birding Center facility, three box lunches (working lunches), three mid-day classroom sessions, water, and snacks.

Daily schedule includes: morning ranch visit, lunch break, classroom instruction, and afternoon ranch sessions. Dinner is on your own except for November 3. Final morning session is at a World Birding Center facility.

Physical capabilities: easy. We drive to the photo blinds; some walking is required at the final morning session.

Learn in the field: camera settings for capturing bird behavior, birds in flight, working from photo blinds, focus tracking, tricky lighting, anticipating behavior, critiques and suggestions for improvement.

Learn in the classroom: workflow, how to import and select images using Lightroom and Topaz, how to prepare images for output, critiques and suggestions for improvement.

Bring a DSLR or mirrorless camera, 300mm lens, memory cards, batteries, tripod, and a way to back up cards. Expect warm and cold weather. Wear sturdy, close-toed hiking shoes. Bring hats, sunscreen, and insect repellent.

Workshop does NOT Include transportation to and from the ranches, dinners other than orientation dinner on Nov. 3, alcoholic beverages, gratuities.

To sign up, visit Ruth's website (www.ruthhoyt.com)



PRE/POST FESTIVAL FIELD TRIP

Bird Camp with Cameron Cox

“Bird Camp is... Summer Camp. But in the fall not the summer, and for adults not kids. Sadly, there will not be bunk beds, you'll have to book your own hotel but there will be s'mores, and lots of birding, and presentations on birds, bird identification, and bird behavior from a team of camp counselors whose goal is to help you have the most fun you can while looking at birds and learning more about their lives. It is our belief that bird are fun and exciting and learning about them should be as well.”

These spectacularly educational birding courses through Avocet Birding Courses will be based in Harlingen from **November 3-6** (Session 1; pre-festival) or **November 13-16** (Session 2; post-festival).

Each session costs \$400 per person and will be limited to a **maximum of 12 participants**. Each day of a session is different but will generally include educational bird identification and how-to-bird lessons sandwiched between guided field birding. Transportation between sites is included but lodging and meals are not. Check out the full itinerary for each day of your session at <https://www.birdingabc.com/bird-camp>.

You can request more information or register for Bird Camp by emailing info@birdingABC.com. To support the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, be sure to let them know that you saw their advertisement here!

About Cameron Cox: An avid birder for thirty years, Cameron's passion is teaching others the joy of birds and that even the nuances of bird identification can be fun to learn. He is the owner, instructor, and chef dishwasher for Avocet Birding Courses. He is the coauthor of The Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching and Terns of North America, a Photographic Guide. He and his wife and their small herd of dogs and cats split their time between coastal Oregon and south Texas.

