



Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley

with

Sarett Nature Center

March 29-April 4, 2017



Deep South Texas, which is considered to be one of the most biologically diverse regions in North America, is a must for birders. It is where you have to go to see such specialties as green jay, Audubon's oriole, green and ringed kingfisher, olive sparrow and more. This region is home to at least 30 species that can be found nowhere else in the U.S. As an added bonus, early April also brings a wide array of northbound migrant passerines, raptors, and shorebirds. Join Sarett as we explore this not to be missed birding destination.

Day 1, Wednesday, March 29

Plan to arrive at the Harlingen, TX airport by 2:40 PM. We will head out for a bit of local birding before we check in to our motel. If your flight arrives later, our motel (the Holiday Inn Express in Harlingen) offers a free shuttle and we will meet you there later.

PM Holiday Inn Express, Harlingen

Day 2 Thursday, March 30

Today we will visit South Padre Island. Planned stops for the day include the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and the Sabal Palm Sanctuary.

The South Padre Island Birding Center is one of the Rio Grande Valley's premier destinations for birding. Its unique location on the island is the perfect place to observe the birds, butterflies and natural wildlife in coastal South Texas. The Birding Center has over 3300 feet of boardwalk, five blinds and a five story tower. It is home to Brown Pelican, White Ibis, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Little Blue Heron, Tri-colored Heron, Red-winged Blackbirds, Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Clapper Rail, Willet, Long-billed Curlew, Common Gallinule, Black-necked Stilt and American



Alligators.

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge boasts an impressive 417 species of birds, 45 mammals, 44 reptiles, 130 butterfly and 450 plant species. Our target bird here is the endangered Aplomado Falcon. Once widespread throughout the



American Southwest, only two remaining pairs of Aplomado falcons were known to exist in the 1940s and 50s. This summer, Peregrine Fund biologists announced that they had recorded no fewer than 37 territorial pairs and 93 individual falcons along the Texas coast in 2016, some of the highest totals to date.

Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary, the southernmost point in Texas that is accessible to the public, is a gem. It occupies part of the former Rabb Plantation, a 19th-century sugarcane plantation on the bank of the Rio Grande River. More than 5 miles of nature trails, an observation deck overlooking the river and a well stocked feeding station combine to make this sanctuary irresistible to birders. We could see buff-bellied hummingbirds, plain chachalacas, green jays and more.

PM Holiday Inn Express, Harlingen

Day 3 Friday, March 31

This morning we leave Harlingen behind and travel west toward Zapata. Our birding stops will include Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park.

When we visit Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge we will step into a rare tropical world. Spanish moss drips from trees. Noisy chachalacas welcome the morning dawn. A malachite butterfly flits from the shadows. Twelve miles of trails and many wildlife species not found in the U.S. beyond the most southern tip of Texas await us! Established in 1943



for the protection of migratory birds, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge happens to be positioned along an east-west and north-south juncture of two major migratory routes for many species of birds. It is also at the northern-most point for many species whose range extends south into Central and South America. The

refuge is right in the middle of all this biological diversity, which is what makes this 2,088 acre parcel the 'jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge System.'



As part of the World Birding Center, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park is a world-class destination for bird-watching. Most out-of-town visitors see or hear a new bird species before even making it into the refuge's Visitor Center! We will ride the open-air tram and hike some of the more than 14 miles of trails in the park. The two-story-high

Hawk Observation Tower will give us a bird's-eye view of the canopy as well as a peek into Mexico.

PM Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

Day 4 Saturday, April 1

Today we will get an early start in our search for the elusive white-collared seedeater. This tiny finch is a native to Mexico and Central America, with a small breeding population in southern Texas. We will spend our day exploring various locations where this bird is known to nest, such as the grounds surrounding the Zapata County Public Library. Thousands of birders flock to the library grounds every year in search of the seedeater.



PM Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

Day 5 Sunday, April 2

If we missed the seedeater yesterday, we will take more time seeking it this morning. We will also explore some of the desert habitats around the Falcon Dam in search of cactus wrens, long and curve-billed thrashers and pyrrhuloxia.

As we return to Harlingen we will make a stop at the Butterfly Center near Mission. This flagship project of the North American Butterfly Association is committed to 'Growing Connections' between people, plants, and the winged wonders that pollinate and propagate all that grows around us. The Center showcases live animals and plants, in wild and cultivated settings.

PM Holiday Inn Express, Harlingen

Day 6, Monday, April 3

We are keeping our last day in Texas open to search for birds we may have missed, chase a rarity that shows up, or revisit a location that we would like one more look at.

PM Holiday Inn Express, Harlingen

Day 7, Tuesday, April 4

Plan your flight home after 12:25 PM. If your flight does leave earlier, our motel offers a free shuttle to the airport.

PLEASE NOTE: This is the planned itinerary. Destinations may be changed based on weather conditions, or if a rare bird is being seen nearby.

GENERAL INFORMATION

COST: \$1700.00 per person, based on double occupancy, plus a current Family Membership (\$50.00).

DEPOSIT: A non-refundable deposit of \$150.00 will hold your space on this trip. Send your deposit in soon as space on this trip is limited. Deposits must be received by Tuesday, January 10, 2017.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE: A final payment of \$1550.00 is due on or before Wednesday, February 8, 2017.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Your deposit (\$150.00) is non-refundable. If you must cancel before March 1 you will be refunded any additional money you have paid. After March 1, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless we can fill your space.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Trip cancellation insurance is highly recommended.

BAGGAGE: Please limit your luggage to 1 suitcase and 1 daypack.

PRICE INCLUDES: *Round-trip ground transportation from the Harlingen, TX airport

*6 continental breakfasts (provided by our motels)

*5 picnic lunches (provided by Sarett)

*Entrance fees for all parks included in the itinerary

*Lodging in Harlingen and Zapata

*Services of Sarett naturalist(s)

NOT INCLUDED: *Airfare to and from Harlingen

*Meals on Day 1

*Meals after breakfast on Day 7

*Suppers

*Items of a personal nature

RESPONSIBILITY: It is clearly understood that Sarett Nature Center will provide interpretive services on this trip and is in no way whatsoever responsible for the operations of airlines, local agents, and other transportation companies. The Sarett Nature Center will act only as agents for the passenger with respect to transportation, hotels, and others providing services in connection with this tour. The Sarett Nature Center and its agents shall not be liable for any injuries, damage, losses, accidents, expenses, delays, or irregularities that are beyond their control. We cannot accept responsibility for unexpected transport delays and changes resulting from strikes and other causes, nor liability for additional expense or loss of time incurred by tour participants resulting therefrom. On advancement of deposit to Sarett Nature Center, the depositor agrees to be bound by the terms and conditions here mentioned.

INFORMATION: For more information contact Mindy Walker at Sarett Nature Center, 2300 Benton Center Rd., Benton Harbor, MI, 49022, or call (269)927-4832.