

# **RIO GRANDE VALLEY: BIRDS & BUTTERFLIES**

**NOVEMBER 14-19, 2022**

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**Mexican Bluewing © Michael O'Brien**

*With the publication of some new and excellent field guides, butterfly watching in the United States has taken off explosively, and in some areas butterfly watchers are becoming almost as common as bird watchers. In fact, many birders are broadening their scope to become active seekers of not only birds, but also butterflies, dragonflies, and other wildlife. The primary focus of this tour is to introduce interested birders and naturalists to the hobby of butterfly watching. The relative emphasis of birding vs. butterflying will vary from one location to another, but the overall emphasis is to see the specialty birds and butterflies of each region, while learning to appreciate all aspects of the natural world.*

*In the United States, there is no better area for butterfly watching than the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. As with birds, many Mexican species of butterflies cross into the United States only in South Texas. More species have been recorded there than in any other region of the United States—of the*

*approximately 815 butterfly species recorded in the United States and Canada, more than 300 have been found in the four southernmost counties of Texas. Increased interest in butterflies has resulted in an explosion of “butterfly gardens” throughout the Valley. This short tour will spend five nights in McAllen, and*



*from there explore various habitats around the Valley seeking both the birds and butterflies that make this region so popular. Depending on what areas are “hot,” we will probably head east on one day to the coast, and on another day we’ll head up-river to the western Valley (near Falcon Dam), where desert habitats support different species.*

*Especially interesting South Texas butterflies that we hope to see include Pipevine and Giant swallowtails, Tailed Orange, Mimosa Yellow, Silver-banded and Xami hairstreaks, Clytie Ministreak, Blue and Red-bordered metalmarks, Red-bordered Pixie, Julia, Zebra Heliconian, Theona Checkerspot, Bordered Patch, Malachite, Mexican Bluewing, Tropical Leafwing, White-striped Longtail, Mazans Scallopwing, Sickie-winged Skipper, Turk’s-cap White-Skipper, Julia’s and Fawn-spotted skippers, and Celia’s Roadside-Skipper. Our greatest challenge will be sorting out the dizzying array of skipper species, many of which are subtly marked. The showier of possible rarities include Polydamas and Ruby-spotted swallowtails, Banded Peacock, Red Rim, Band-celled Sister, Blue-eyed Sailor, Silver Emperor, Two-barred Flasher, and Guava Skipper, among many others.*



Buff-bellied Hummingbird © Michael O'Brien

*Of course, the Rio Grande Valley is also famous for birds, with many specialties occurring here and nowhere else in the United States. Some avian highlights may include Plain Chachalaca, Least Grebe, White-tailed Hawk, White-tipped Dove, Groove-billed Ani, Common Pauraque, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Ringed and Green kingfishers, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Aplomado Falcon, Red-crowned Parrot, Green Parakeet, Great Kiskadee, Tropical and Couch’s kingbirds, Green Jay, Black-crested Titmouse, Clay-colored Thrush, Long-billed Thrasher, Tropical Parula, Olive Sparrow, and Altimira and Audubon’s orioles.*

*Due to time limitations, we may not attempt to find such difficult species as Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and Morelet’s Seedeater, though we will gladly take time to enjoy them*



*should we happen across them. These species are regularly encountered on VENT's other Rio Grande Valley tours. If a particularly rare bird appears in the area, and meets with our schedule, we will certainly plan to search for it. Our schedule will remain flexible throughout the tour, and we will try to take advantage of weather conditions and current "hotspots" to maximize our butterfly and bird opportunities. Therefore, we consider the itinerary outlined below to be somewhat tentative.*

**November 14, Day 1: Arrival in McAllen.** Participants should make arrangements to arrive in McAllen, TX (airport code MFE) today and take the complimentary shuttle to our hotel. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. for an introductory meeting, followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Casa De Palmas, McAllen, TX

**November 15, Day 2: Laguna Atascosa and South Padre Island.** Our first day will be spent primarily along the coast, beginning at the famed Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The feeders around the Visitor's Center are usually well stocked and tended by a wide variety of South Texas specialties such as Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, and Olive Sparrow. The coastal prairie and lagoons in that region are home to Reddish Egret, White-tailed and Harris's hawks, Aplomado Falcon, and wintering Redhead, Long-billed Curlew, Sandhill Crane, and Cassin's Sparrow. Butterfly gardens at Laguna are often excellent and are particularly good for Blue Metalmark, Mazans Scallopwing, and Obscure Skipper. After lunch, we'll head to South Padre Island where we should see a nice variety of shorebirds, gulls, and terns, and possibly Clapper Rail. A small patch of trees and shrubs at the South Padre Island Convention Center is a magnet for migrant songbirds, so we'll be sure to give it a look for any lingering flycatchers, vireos, warblers, or tanagers.

NIGHT: Casa De Palmas, McAllen, TX

**November 16-17, Days 3-4: Central Rio Grande Valley.** Butterfly gardens have become very popular in the central Valley. More and more patches of habitat are being preserved in the Valley, and with every visit it seems there is an exciting new area to look for birds or bugs. A sampling of the areas that we may visit includes Estero Llano Grande State Park, Frontera Audubon Center, and Valley Nature Center in Weslaco; Quinta Mazatlan in McAllen; and nearby Edinburg Scenic Wetlands.

Our two days in the central Valley will center on two spots in particular. On one day we will spend much of our time at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. Santa Ana ranks as the best single location for a



**Guava Skipper © Michael O'Brien**

naturalist in the lower Valley, due primarily to its wide array of habitats—its bird and butterfly lists are the highest for any NWR in the nation. The butterfly garden at the Visitor's Center can be very good in late fall, and the possibility for an exciting stray is very real. After ample time at the garden, we will explore the trails. Mature tropical hardwood forests provide a unique habitat in the lower Valley and are a great place to find some of the resident specialty birds such as Clay-colored Thrush and Tropical Parula. Open areas around the several lakes should be good for waterfowl, shorebirds, soaring raptors, and various butterflies, providing something for everyone.



Great Kiskadee ©Michael O'Brien

Our other day will center on Bentsen State Park, with the adjacent World Birding Center and NABA Butterfly Park. Butterfly gardens here are probably the best in the Valley and have produced a continual stream of new North American records in recent autumns. While it is unlikely that we will find anything *that* rare, this is sure to be one of the butterfly highlights of our trip.

NIGHTS: Casa De Palmas, McAllen, TX

**November 18, Day 5: Upper Rio Grande Valley.** Today we will rise early and visit several sites in the Upper Rio Grande Valley looking for birds and butterflies, particularly at Salineño and Falcon State Park. The drier climate here is much better for desert species (both butterflies and birds) and is home to several specialties we are unlikely to find farther east. We will spend the full day exploring this area before returning to McAllen for dinner.

NIGHT: Casa De Palmas, McAllen, TX

**November 19, Day 6: Departure for Home.** For those interested, there will be opportunities for a couple hours of birding this morning before arriving at the McAllen International Airport in time for flights departing after 12:00 p.m.. Those wishing to take earlier flights can catch an airport shuttle from the hotel at any time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis



**Michael O'Brien** is a freelance artist, author, and environmental consultant living in Cape May, New Jersey. He has a passionate interest in bird vocalizations and field identification, and a serious addiction to migration and nocturnal birding. His travels have taken him throughout North and Central America and beyond. At home in Cape May, Michael serves as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops, and, for many years, conducted a fall songbird migration count. He is co-author of *The Shorebird Guide*, *Flight Calls of Migratory Birds*, and *America's 100 Most Wanted Birds*, and is primary author of *Larkwire*, an online and handheld application for learning bird sounds. His illustrations have been widely published in books and field guides, including the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and the new Peterson field guides. Michael also has

an intense interest in butterflies, leads several "Birds & Butterflies" tours with his wife, Louise Zemaitis, and is coordinator of the Cape May Butterfly Count.



**Louise Zemaitis** is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey where she is a popular field trip leader teaching birding workshops as an Associate Naturalist with New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory. She also enjoys leading birding groups and lecturing at birding festivals and is known for her enthusiasm for all natural history subjects. Louise and her husband, Michael O'Brien, have been guiding young birders at birding events and conferences for many years. In addition to leading, Louise is field coordinator of the Monarch Monitoring Project in Cape May, served as compiler of the Cape May Christmas Bird Count for over 20 years, and owns Swallowtail Studio in West Cape May. An honors graduate of Temple University's Tyler School of Art, she enjoys working as a freelance artist and her illustrations have been widely published. Her proudest accomplishment has been the raising of her two

sons, Bradley and Alec.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$1,995** per person in double occupancy from McAllen, Texas. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 6, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to McAllen, Texas and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$350**.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (June 17, 2022).

### **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

#### **Cancellation by Participant:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$250\*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

**Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A ***"Force Majeure"*** event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing**



**medical conditions exclusion**, and a “**Cancel for Any Reason**” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: <https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

#### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit (“Premium Credit”) is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link: [https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord’s comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**CONDITIONS:** Though this will not be a particularly strenuous tour, our days in the field will be full, and participants need to be in reasonably good physical condition. We will be doing a fair amount of riding in vans, interspersed with many periods of moderate to long walks of up to two hours or more. Most walking will be on

trails or in gardens, sometimes on uneven ground. If it rains, some trails may be muddy. A typical day will begin with breakfast around 6:00 a.m. followed by a full day in the field.

**Special Note:** On some tours and in certain areas, the larger 15-passenger vans are not available. Every effort will be made to secure the larger vehicle for this tour. However, when smaller vans are reserved, participants will not always have a window seat and you will be asked to rotate daily.

**CLIMATE:** Temperatures will range from very warm to potentially quite cold if a cold front should pass through. Daytime highs could reach the mid to upper 80s, while nighttime lows may dip into the 40s (rarely, high 30s). Temperatures ranging from the 50s to 70s would be closer to the norm. Rain is possible.

**CLOTHING:** Your best bet is to dress in layers. Jeans or similar durable field trousers are best, though some may wish to bring a pair of shorts. Be sure to bring a warm jacket plus a light sweater or sweatshirt, since a cold and windy “norther” is always a possibility. Also bring light rain-wear, and a hat for protection from the cold or sun. Footwear is up to you; some people like to wear light boots, but sneakers are fine. Waterproof shoes are generally not required, but may be useful—there may be lots of dew in the early morning and if it rains, some trails may become muddy. Dress will be casual throughout. There are coin-operated laundry facilities at our hotel.

**BAGGAGE:** As space in the vehicles is limited, please restrict your luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on bag. Soft-sided bags are preferred as they pack much more easily.

**EQUIPMENT:** Pack a pair of binoculars in good condition. A close focusing binocular (focus to 6-8 feet) is ideal for butterfly watching, but many of the better birding binoculars (with focus 10-12 feet) also work well. A belt pack or daypack is useful for carrying books, sunscreen, etc. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leaders will have a spotting scope for birding stops; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Sunglasses and sunscreen are essential, as the sun can be intense. A wide-brimmed hat is also recommended for sun protection. We may encounter a few mosquitos at some point, so insect repellent is recommended (also, see note below about chiggers). Some sort of travel alarm clock or cell phone alarm is essential. Either a small travel umbrella or rain jacket is essential in the event we encounter rain. Because we’ll be spending a good bit of time on foot, some participants may wish to bring a collapsible walking stick, or possibly a portable fold-up travel chair. A camera is recommended for scenery shots or chance bird and butterfly photography. However, if you are a serious bird photographer, please be aware that excessive camera gear or bulky, hard-framed camera cases are not appropriate for this tour.

**HEALTH:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

**COVID-19:** The world has been in the grip of a pandemic since early 2020, a result of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19. COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person contact, almost always through inhaling respiratory aerosols or droplets exuded from an infected person. Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. Based on what is known about the disease, COVID-19 is far more serious than seasonal flu. Few places in the world have been unaffected. The impact on travel has been substantial, as demonstrated by the fact that VENT did not operate a tour between late March 2020 and late April 2021. The development and deployment



of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the United States, has allowed VENT to return to tour operations. We emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT instituted a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must be fully vaccinated in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), full vaccination is defined as an individual being 14 days beyond having received the required amount of vaccine for reaching full immunity to the degree specific vaccines confer. In the United States, so far, this means either the two-shot sequence for the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour and kept with you while on the tour. Because the world is a very different place than it was before the pandemic, we've made a number of important adjustments to our processes to ensure that our tours can operate as safely as possible. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19>, where you may view our **COVID-19 Protocols for VENT Tours** document, which details the guidance VENT will follow in the operation of its tours in the time of pandemic. Our decision and policy are firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. As we move forward, VENT will continue to follow the latest information from the CDC and will update our policy accordingly. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

**Insect Repellents** – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

**A Note About Chiggers:** This tour visits areas where chiggers are known to occur. Chiggers are tiny parasitic mites found in most warm weather areas of the southern United States and the world's tropics. They are especially numerous in grassy areas, where, in the immature stage, they attach themselves to other animals or humans who make contact with the grass as they pass by. Chiggers do not suck blood and the majority of species do not carry

disease. They do feed on bodily fluids through a process in which a digestive enzyme is produced by the chigger which essentially liquefies the skin around the area where the chigger is attached. The chigger is not usually attached to the skin for more than a few hours before it either falls off or is knocked off. Our bodies respond by producing a hardened area as a defense against the chigger's digestive enzyme. Though the chigger may be long gone, it is the presence of the hardened area, and the body's natural process of reabsorbing it that typically causes intense itching, often lasting for a week or more. Chiggers like to attach themselves to areas of thin skin, like around the ankles, beltline, undergarment lines, knees, and elbows.

Chiggers can be avoided by following these procedures:

- Avoid walking or standing in areas dominated by grass. These areas are where one is most likely to encounter chiggers.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to avoid direct skin-to-grass contact. Chiggers can find their way through clothing, but this is a standard and effective prevention technique.
- Apply insect repellent to your skin and clothing. Please refer to the Insect Repellent section that follows for important information about selecting and applying repellent.
- Powdered sulfur applied to waist, bottoms of pants, sock and boots is also effective at repelling chiggers. However, be warned that clothes will retain the sulfur odor for several washings. If using sulfur, never touch your eyes, nose, or mouth before washing your hands first.
- Shower at the end of each day in the field. Use a washcloth to vigorously rub your legs, feet, and ankles.

By following these methods, you should be able to avoid all chigger bites, as well as tick bites. If, however, you are bitten by chiggers anyway, you can reduce or eliminate the symptoms by applying benzocaine or hydrocortisone creams, calamine lotion, After Bite, or any number of anti-itch products.

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

***Birds:***

Any of the following guides are excellent choices for this tour:

Kaufman, Kenn. *Kaufman Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005.

National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to North American Birds*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, 2017.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Eastern Birds: Second Edition*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.  
A more portable version of the larger Sibley Guide, covering only eastern birds. Probably the best guide for this tour.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Second Edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. A large book, but arguably the best North American field guide, with the most complete and accurate ID information.

***Bird References:***

Lockwood, Mark W., Brad McKinney, Jim Paton, Barry Zimmer. *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley: Fourth Edition*. Colorado Springs: American Birding Association, 2008. The definitive bird-finding guide to the region.

Lockwood, Mark W., and Brush Freeman. *The TOS Handbook of Texas Birds*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. A good summary account of the birds of Texas.

Oberholser, Harry C., Edgar B. Kincaid, Jr., ed. *The Bird Life of Texas*. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1984. The definitive two-volume reference work on the Texas avifauna, including distribution maps, with a few paintings by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Detailed description material. While out of print, used copies are available. Try the internet sources listed above.

***Butterflies:***

Brock, Jim P. and Kenn Kaufman. *Butterflies of North America*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2003. Perhaps the best butterfly guide for beginners, this book with modified photos treats all species we are likely to encounter.

Garwood, Kim and Richard Lehman. *Butterflies of Northeastern Mexico: Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Monterrey, Mexico, 2005. A photo guide with no text, this provides images of the rarer Rio Grande vagrant butterflies, as well as images of most of the commoner species.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of Mexico and Central America: Second Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2018. The best source for information about any stray Mexican butterflies not covered in the North American guides.

Glassberg, Jeffrey. *A Swift Guide to the Butterflies of North America: Second Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2017. The most authoritative treatment of North American butterflies, with good treatment of all likely strays along the Mexican border.

North American Butterfly Association. *Checklist & English Names of North American Butterflies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Morristown, NJ: North American Butterfly Association, 2001. A checklist with current names.

Scott, James A. *The Butterflies of North America: A Natural History and Field Guide*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986. Large volume; nationwide perspective.

Wauer, Roland H. *Butterflies of the Lower Rio Grande Valley*. Boulder, CO: Johnson Books, 2004. Treats all species we are likely to encounter, but the photos are not all of top quality. Still, a relevant guide for this trip.

***Dragonflies:***

Abbott, John C. *Dragonflies and Damselflies of Texas and the South-Central United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. Specific to the region, this is a large volume but includes both dragonflies and damselflies and treats both as well as any book to date.

Dunkle, Sidney W. *Dragonflies through Binoculars: A Field Guide to the Dragonflies of North America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000. An excellent nationwide perspective on dragonfly identification.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other

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services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on January 21, 2022, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "***Airline***") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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