



**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS**

**ITINERARY**

# **SOUTH TEXAS IN STYLE**

## **A Birds, Nature & Culture Tour**

### **JANUARY 6–16, 2025**

## **UPPER VALLEY EXTENSION**

### **JANUARY 16–19, 2025**

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Lower Laguna Madre near Port Isabel © Brad McKinney

The Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas has long been known as one of America's greatest birding and wildlife areas. Few other regions in the country offer such unequaled birding opportunities combined with easy accessibility to diverse locations. Our new South Texas in Style tour will be based in two luxury hotels located near many of these prime birding areas.

Participants can expect great birding, nice accommodations, and excellent cuisine with several catered meals on this easy-paced tour. We will visit many of the Valley's famous birding spots, including Bentsen State Park, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Quinta Mazatlan, Estero Llano Grande State Park, Resaca de la Palma State Park, and the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center. Here, we will search for all of the South Texas specialty birds, including White-tipped Dove, Plain Chachalaca, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Ringed Kingfisher, Great Kiskadee, Tropical Kingbird, Green Jay, Olive Sparrow, Altamira Oriole, and many others.

In contrast to much of the United States in January, the weather in South Texas is generally mild and comfortable (with temperatures often in the 60s and 70s). Birding at this time of year is excellent, and aside from the "Valley specialties," the Lower Rio Grande Valley is also an outstanding destination for observing more widely occurring species of waterbirds and raptors. Waterfowl, hawks, shorebirds, and songbirds are well represented during the winter season. With its close proximity to Mexico, it is always possible for a rarity or two to show up during this season! We will also include several historical and cultural stops along the way, with visits to the fabulous Museum of South Texas History, the Palo Alto Battlefield (Mexican-American War), and the Port Isabel Historical Museum.



Altamira Oriole © Brad McKinney

The first half of our tour will be based at the beautiful Casa De Palmas hotel in the city of McAllen. We will have four fun-filled days to explore the varied regions of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in search of a host of Neotropical species not found outside the area. Our tour will then head towards the coast where we'll spend four days at the quaint Lighthouse Boutique Hotel in the historic town of Port Isabel. From Port Isabel we will visit nearby birding hotspots, including the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center and Resaca de la Palma State Park in Brownsville. We will also spend some time on the water, including both an amazing morning on a bayside boat trip along the Brazos Santiago Pass to view an abundance of waterbirds and a delightful sunset cruise that will dock at one of the Valley's finest restaurants.

With luxury accommodations, excellent food, incredible birding, and generally pleasant weather conditions, this South Texas in Style winter tour is a must.

For those who would like to search for a new suite of birds found in the arid South Texas chaparral, including Scaled Quail, Black-throated Sparrow, and Pyrrhuloxia, as well as specialties of the riparian zone along this limited stretch of the Rio Grande, like Red-billed Pigeon, Audubon's Oriole, and Morelet's Seedeater, we encourage you to join our Upper Valley Extension northwest of McAllen to the city of Zapata.

**January 6, Day 1: Arrival in McAllen.** Participants should plan to arrive in McAllen (airport code MFE) this afternoon. The Casa de Palmas Hotel offers complimentary airport shuttle service. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:30 p.m. for a trip welcome and orientation, followed by dinner at an excellent local restaurant.

NIGHT: Casa de Palmas, McAllen

**January 7, Day 2: Morning Birding at Quinta Mazatlan; Late Afternoon Parrot Excursion.** The Lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas is undeniably one of the country's preeminent destinations for birding and natural history observation. The sub-tropical environment that characterizes the region provides excellent birding conditions all year long, while an extensive system of parks and preserves protects large tracts of native brush, riparian woodland, and wetlands. The "Valley" is most famous for the assortment of range-restricted specialty birds found here and nowhere else in the United States.

Geographically, the Lower Rio Grande Valley extends from Falcon Dam in the north and west to the mouth of the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico to the south and east. Within this broad area, the Valley can be further divided into the "Lower," "Middle," and "Upper" Valleys. We will have four full days to explore the parks and preserves that dot the Middle Valley. All locations offer superb birding in terms of diversity, but of equal importance is the opportunity to observe birds at close range.



**Green Jay © Brad McKinney**

The first of the Middle Valley birding hot spots is Quinta Mazatlan, which is just minutes from the McAllen-Miller International Airport, and the McAllen wing of the World Birding Center complex. A beautiful mansion constructed in Spanish Revival architectural style, Quinta Mazatlan is both an historic site and a satellite member of the World Birding Center. Constructed in the 1930s, Quinta Mazatlan owns the distinction of being one of the largest adobe structures in Texas. The hacienda is the centerpiece of this 20-acre urban sanctuary, which is surrounded by lush tropical landscaping and Tamaulipan thorn-scrub habitat that attracts numerous bird species. The winding nature trails,

featuring several water features, hummingbird feeders, and bird feeding stations, hold many of the South Texas specialties, including Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, and more. Additionally, January can also be a good time to see overwintering warblers that otherwise are absent from the rest of the country. Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, Wilson's, Yellow-throated, and Black-throated Green warblers are all occasionally seen at this season. Quinta Mazatlan is also one of the easiest spots to see Clay-colored Thrush, as multiple birds are often seen along the trails. After a catered lunch on site, we will tour Quinta Mazatlan's country estate. There will also be time for participants to visit the Grand Hall, Art Gallery, museum shop, and see an array of sculptures and carvings that depict birds and animals native to South Texas. We will then head back to the hotel for an afternoon break before a late afternoon excursion for Red-crowned Parrots and Green Parakeets in residential McAllen.

NIGHT: Casa de Palmas, McAllen

**January 8, Day 3: Morning Birding at Bentsen State Park; Afternoon Tour of Museum of South Texas History.** The center of the World Birding Center system, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park hosts the full assortment of resident Valley specialties and a variety of other birds. We may spend the greater part of a morning here watching the antics of Plain Chachalacas and marveling at the colors of Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Great



Kiskadees, Green Jays, and Altamira Orioles, with these and other birds easy to observe at the park's feeding stations. Deep in the park is an elevated observation deck that allows for hawk watching and viewing of the resaca (oxbow lake) below. The deck is spacious and allows for unobstructed views of hawks and vultures from a variety of perspectives—from above, below, and at eye level—in addition to a variety of other birds. From our lofty position, we have chances for Sharp-shinned, Harris's, and Gray hawks; White-tailed Kite and other raptors; while the flooded resaca may yield a variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, American White Pelican, and Ringed and Green kingfishers. We will enjoy a catered lunch in the park and then head back to the hotel for a little down time before enjoying a guided tour of the Museum of South Texas History in nearby Edinburg. Afterwards, we will have dinner at a favorite local restaurant.

NIGHT: Casa de Palmas, McAllen



Plain Chachalaca © Brad McKinney

**January 9, Day 4: Morning Birding Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge; Afternoon at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands.**

Often called the “jewel of our national wildlife refuge system,” Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge captures the spirit of South Texas birding as much as any single place could. Within the boundaries of this 2,000-acre refuge sits a mosaic of habitats indicative of what early South Texas looked like. Dense, impenetrable brushland intermingles with cattail marshes, freshwater impoundments, and tropical hardwood forests. Perhaps more than any other single location in South Texas, Santa Ana exists as a bastion for native birds, plants, and animals. We will walk a number of the roads and trails that penetrate the native habitat searching for characteristic South Texas specialties such as White-tipped Dove, Plain Chachalaca, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green Jay, and Olive Sparrow. The marshy ponds and lakes in the center of the refuge commonly host Least Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, and a variety of winter waterfowl. Green Kingfishers are often sighted sitting quietly amongst the reeds or on some bare branch, only inches above the surface of the water. A walk to Pintail Lake might produce a host of ducks, shorebirds, herons, and egrets. Great Kiskadee, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Couch's Kingbird are often seen along the trails to Pintail Lake.

After birding at the refuge, we will return to McAllen for lunch. After a short break at the hotel, we will spend part of the afternoon birding at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands. Located a few minutes north of McAllen, Edinburg

Scenic Wetlands is a 40-acre site featuring wetlands, butterfly gardens, and a first-rate visitor center. Another of the World Birding Center satellites, the wetlands offer close encounters with nature in an otherwise urban setting, a delightful place that caters to local residents and visiting nature enthusiasts alike. A large tree-fringed lake is the park's centerpiece, and a great place to see various waterbirds at close range. While at Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, birders may be able to spot Least and Pied-billed grebes, Neotropic and Double-crested cormorants, Anhinga, Ringed and Green kingfishers, Great Kiskadee, and Couch's Kingbird. It is also a good spot for Buff-bellied Hummingbird in winter.

NIGHT: Casa de Palmas, McAllen

**January 10, Day 5: Morning Birding at Anzalduas County Park; Late Morning Birding at National Butterfly Center.**

Anzalduas County Park is a well-known hotspot and home to many Valley specialties in addition to winter residents alike. Unique to Anzalduas is a large grove of live oaks that shades an extensive picnic area. These trees sometimes harbor Gray Hawk as well as mixed species flocks in winter that may include Yellow-throated and Black-throated Gray (uncommon) warblers and occasionally a Tropical Parula (rare). Another target bird during the winter season is Sprague's Pipit, which is sometimes seen in the short grass fields within the park. Later in the morning we will visit the National Butterfly Center, which is dedicated to the conservation and study of wild butterflies in their native habitats. This 100-acre wildlife center contains botanical gardens, trails, and observation areas. In addition to great butterflies, the National Butterfly Center has great birds as well, harboring many of the region's specialties and overwintering species. After lunch in the nearby community of Mission, we will head back to the hotel for a relaxing afternoon off, with a second try for parrots and parakeets in McAllen if necessary. We will have dinner around six or a little after.



Great Kiskadee © Brad McKinney

After lunch in the nearby community of Mission, we will head back to the hotel for a relaxing afternoon off, with a second try for parrots and parakeets in McAllen if necessary. We will have dinner around six or a little after.

NIGHT: Casa de Palmas, McAllen

**January 11, Day 6: Morning Birding at Estero Llano Grande State Park; Afternoon at Palo Alto Battlefield Site; Transfer to Port Isabel.** Today will be a mix of birding and travel as we relocate to Port Isabel out on the coast. We'll start with a full morning at Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco.

Estero Llano Grande is both a state park and one of the World Birding Center sites, offering an exceptional mix of classic Valley birds, waterbirds and songbirds. Following its establishment in 2006, this site has emerged as the most exciting birding destination in the Valley. A system of flooded impoundments creates ideal feeding and roosting conditions for myriad birds associated with water. In fact, the viewing platform right at the visitor center is not to be missed! As evidence, we should enjoy stunning views of Anhinga, Neotropic Cormorant, Least Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, herons and egrets, ibises and spoonbills, Green and Belted kingfishers, and many others. The surrounding woodlands offer superb opportunities to view South Texas specialty birds such as Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Couch's and Tropical kingbirds, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Clay-colored Thrush, and Olive Sparrow. Frequently, a "stakeout" Common Pauraque is readily viewable off one of the trails. Adjacent to the main part of the park is its "Subtropical"





Common Pauraque © Brad McKinney

section, a former R.V. park in the process of reclamation. Here, native trees and shrubs mix with ornamental plantings, creating a smorgasbord at times for insectivorous and frugivorous birds. During winter, this section of the park is great for mixed species flocks, including Blue-headed Vireo, Black-crested Titmouse, and Black-throated Gray (uncommon) and Black-throated Green warblers. Altamira Orioles are conspicuous here, and even Hooded Oriole is possible during this season. Rarer species that turn up here from time to time include Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet and Tropical Parula. We will break for lunch at Nana's Taqueria, a local restaurant that serves authentic Mexican lunches. After lunch we will drive to the Palo Alto Battlefield in Brownsville, a National

Historical Park that is the site of the first major battle of the U.S.-Mexican war (1846) that changed the map of North America. Here, we will visit the battlefield and visitor center, and check for birds in the native vegetation around the center. We will then finish our travel day at the Lighthouse Boutique Hotel, with an optional visit to the Port Isabel Historical Museum (3:00-4:00 p.m.), with some down time at the hotel before dinner.

NIGHT: Lighthouse Boutique Hotel, Port Isabel

**January 12, Day 7: Morning Birding at South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, and the SPI Convention Center; Afternoon Visit to Valley Land Fund Woodlots at Sheepshead and Isla Blanca Park.** Our exploration of South Padre Island will begin after a short drive over the Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway, although we may see Brown Pelicans and other waterbirds as we drive over the Laguna Madre bay waters. Upon reaching South Padre, a short drive to the south will put us in close proximity to an expansive mudflat studded with large stands of Black Mangrove. Shorebirds and wading birds will be our objective as we scan our surroundings for groups of wintering plovers, sandpipers, herons, and egrets. Several miles to the north, both the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center and the South Padre Island Convention Center are excellent locations to view a diversity of waterbirds. In particular, the SPI Birding & Nature Center is of high appeal, with a beautiful facility featuring exhibits and a short boardwalk into a mangrove wetland. Here, tidal pools and mudflats offer sanctuary for a nice variety of birds that can be enjoyed at a surprisingly close range. Among the many species we might encounter here are Mottled Duck, American White Pelican, Reddish Egret, Tricolored Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, Piping and Semipalmated plovers, American Oystercatcher, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, and Black Skimmer.

The coastal mudflats at the South Padre Island Convention Center often host hundreds of wintering shorebirds and, depending on the tides, we could encounter several species of "ringed" plovers and an assortment of gulls and terns. Like the SPI Birding and Nature Center, the Convention Center has a boardwalk along the mangrove-lined wetlands that



American Oystercatcher © Brad McKinney

allow good viewing of Gulf Coast herons and egrets, and Clapper Rails. We will enjoy lunch at Blackbeard's Restaurant, a local restaurant featuring delicious seafood, steak, and sandwiches since 1978. After lunch, we will visit the Valley Land Fund woodlots at Sheepshead and the jetties at Isla Blanca Park. After some down time at the hotel, we will visit the Port Isabel Lighthouse (State Historical Site) before dinner.

NIGHT: Lighthouse Boutique Hotel, Port Isabel



"Mangrove" Yellow Warbler ©Brad McKinney

lunch at another favorite eating establishment, we will head back to hotel for some down time before dinner.

NIGHT: Lighthouse Boutique Hotel, Port Isabel

**January 14, Day 9: Morning Birding at Brownsville's Resaca de la Palma State Park; Sunset Boat Cruise.** While driving from Port Isabel to Resaca de la Palma State Park, we will watch for Chihuahuan Raven as well as raptors like White-tailed Kite, White-tailed Hawk, and Crested Caracara. At 1,700 acres, Brownsville's Resaca de la Palma State Park is the largest of the World Birding Center complex. Within the state park, habitats vary from Tamaulipan thorn scrub woodlands and mesquite thickets to open fields. There are several areas of the park that offer excellent birding opportunities, most of which are in the immediate vicinity of the visitor center. The large water feature and feeding stations behind the visitor center hold many of the Valley specialties, and we should get excellent looks at many of them. The tall trees around the center and adjacent parking lot attract mixed-species flocks in winter. The short (0.2 mile) Ebony Trail and the longer Tram Loop can be good at all seasons. We will have lunch at the family-owned Vermillion Restaurant, which has been serving down home American and Tex-Mex dishes since 1934 (On his 2004 birding tour to the Lower Rio Grande Valley, President Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter chose the Vermillion Restaurant while on the Brownsville leg of his trip). On the way back to Port Isabel we will make a slight detour to check for Aplomado Falcons on Old Port Isabel Road. We will get back to the hotel with plenty of time to relax before our sunset boat cruise, which departs the Viva (SPI) boat ramp at 5:00 p.m., returning by 6:00 p.m. for bayside dining at Viva.

NIGHT: Lighthouse Boutique Hotel, Port Isabel

**January 15, Day 10: Morning Birding Search for Aplomado Falcons En Route to Valley Nature Center in Weslaco.** On this travel day back to McAllen, today's schedule will be largely determined by what Valley specialties we are still missing or what rarities may be present; however, we will default to the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco. While driving north from Port Isabel, we will search for the beautiful Aplomado Falcon, which is sometimes seen along State Highway 100. Aplomado Falcon once occurred naturally amid the coastal prairie and scrubland of south Texas, but years of conversion of the native landscape eventually led to the extirpation of the species in Texas. Beginning in the early 1990's, the Peregrine Fund and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service collaborated to reintroduce the falcon to its native range. Despite many ups and downs, the program is

considered a success and the birds are established and increasing. We hope to spot one of the birds perched atop a yucca or perhaps a nearby power pole on our drive north of Port Isabel.

The Valley Nature Center is a six-acre urban park that contains a wonderful diversity of native plants, many of which were transplanted from areas that were slated for development. The local flora attracts hummingbirds to the park throughout the year, so this might be a place to look for Buff-bellied Hummingbird if we haven't seen one by now. The native vegetation attracts many of

the South Texas specialties and is a haven for overwintering species as well. We will have lunch at Blue Onion (Weslaco). After checking in to Casa de Palmas (McAllen), and after a little down time, we will likely go birding in the afternoon at Quinta Mazatlan. We'll enjoy a farewell dinner at The Patio on Guerra in McAllen.



**Aplomado Falcon ©Brad McKinney**

NIGHT: Casa de Palmas, McAllen

**January 16, Day 11: Departure for Home or Continue on with Upper Valley Extension.** Participants not continuing on the Upper Valley Extension may depart from McAllen at any time today. The hotel provides free airport shuttle service.



# UPPER VALLEY EXTENSION

## JANUARY 16–19, 2025



Scenic view of the Rio Grande from the bluffs of Santa Margarita © Brad McKinney

**This extension to VENT’s South Texas in Style tour seeks specialty birds of the desert and riparian habitats of the northern region of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This area around Falcon Dam is rich in history and retains much of its frontier character, providing a great backdrop to the region’s excellent birding.**

**As we head west from the citrus groves of the coastal plain of McAllen and Mission, we will soon enter arid and hilly brushlands called “chaparral.” Approaching our birding destinations of Santa Margarita Ranch and Salineño, the ridges and limestone mesas become more prominent, creating scenic overlooks at places like Roma and the bluffs of Santa Margarita Ranch. In the chaparral, we will be looking for a new suite of birds, like Scaled Quail, Greater Roadrunner, Say’s and Black phoebes, Verdin, Cactus and Rock wrens, Curve-billed Thrasher, Black-throated Sparrow, and Pyrrhuloxia.**

**In the riparian forests along the Rio Grande at Santa Margarita Ranch and Salineño, we will search for Mexican Duck, Gray Hawk, Ringed and Green kingfishers, Couch’s Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Green**

Jay, and Altamira and Audubon's orioles. Though far less predictable, chances do exist for some of the rarer birds of the upper valley, especially Muscovy duck, Red-billed Pigeon, and Hook-billed Kite.

The feeders at Salineño are THE place to see both Audubon's and Altamira Orioles, as well as an assortment of South Texas specialties like White-tipped Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, and Olive Sparrow. During winter, there should also be several wintering species in the mix, including Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo, Lincoln's and White-crowned sparrows, and Orange-crowned Warbler. Another target at Salineño is Morelet's Seedeater, a bird whose very limited U.S. range includes scattered locations from Salineño to the upriver communities of Zapata, San Ygnacio, and Laredo. With two nights at Zapata, we should have multiple opportunities to search for the seedeater in town where it has been fairly reliable over the years. This very birdy area of the upper Rio Grande Valley provides a wonderful conclusion to our South Texas in Style tour.



Audubon's Oriole © Brad McKinney

**January 16, Day 1: Morning Birding at Salineño and Post-Lunch Birding at Falcon State Park.** After breakfast at Casa de Palmas, we will head northwest toward Zapata, stopping for a full morning of birding at the small riverside community of Salineño. For many years, Salineño has been the birding hotspot of the Falcon Dam area. There is a good view of the river here, and bird feeders nearby are maintained during the winter months by caretakers of the Valley Land Fund property. We will visit several other habitats in the area, including riparian woodland; arid, thorn-scrub forest; a water treatment pond; and the dump road. The bird feeders may attract Inca and White-tipped doves, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed woodpeckers, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Bewick's Wren, Black-crested Titmouse, Clay-colored Thrush, Long-billed and Curve-billed thrashers, Olive Sparrow, Altamira and Audubon's orioles, and Lesser and American goldfinches, among others. Meanwhile, the river itself beckons, and from its muddy banks we may be treated to the sights of Ringed and Green kingfishers perched on exposed snags, Ospreys hovering high overhead, and various waterfowl, including Mexican Ducks, regularly winging past.



Green Kingfisher © Brad McKinney

A tropical waterfowl species, Muscovy duck still occurs along the river in very low numbers, and Salineño is one of the better places to watch for it. Historically a regular breeding species on the Rio Grande, it declined in numbers dramatically



following the destruction of the large riverine forest that covered the river's banks. The establishment of a nest box program in the 1980s allowed for the return of the species, although it seems to have declined again in recent years. Nevertheless, a few birds are still present, and with a bit of luck, we may spot one. Also here are Red-billed Pigeon and Hook-billed Kite, two tropical species found sparingly in close proximity to the river environment here in the Upper Valley. The pigeon is most numerous in the spring and summer months before withdrawing into Mexico after the breeding season. In some years, a few birds linger deep into the autumn and winter. The Hook-billed Kite could be seen at any time. Occasionally, birds will appear at the edge of the river sunning on an exposed branch, while at other times one may get up and soar on an unseen thermal.

While birding along the Rio Grande, one of our main targets is Morelet's Seedeater, which is very local in the weedy edges just upriver from the boat ramp at Salineño. A roughly 80-mile stretch of the Rio Grande from Santa Margarita to Laredo offers the last U.S. refuge for this tiny Mexican finch. If we have difficulty finding the seedeater at Salineño, we will try for it at the Zapata City Park (library) not far from our hotel.

In the Upper Valley, away from the riparian woodlands of the Rio Grande, there is a western flavor to the avifauna with Scaled Quail joining Northern Bobwhite, and such species as Curve-billed Thrasher, Cactus Wren, Pyrrhuloxia and Black-throated Sparrow common in the brushy uplands. We will look for these "western" species along with Sage Thrasher (rare), Cassin's Sparrow, and a variety of winter sparrows while driving the Salineño dump road and also at Falcon State Park. After a picnic lunch at Falcon State Park, we will scan Falcon Lake for American White Pelican, Double-crested and Neotropic cormorants, and a variety of waterfowl and wading birds. We will then drive to the town of Zapata where we will check in at the Holiday Inn Express. After a little break at the hotel, we will visit the nearby Zapata City Park (library) in search of Morelet's Seedeater.

Night: Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

**January 17, Day 2: Morning Birding at Santa Margarita Bluffs.**

After an early breakfast we will travel back downriver for a morning at the private and scenic Santa Margarita Ranch. Here, soaring limestone bluffs overlook a long stretch of the Rio Grande, revealing a wilder side of South Texas. Perched atop the bluffs, we will enjoy sweeping views of the river both upstream and down. January is a good time to spot waterfowl flying up and down the river, as well as Ringed and Green kingfishers. Altamira and Audubon's orioles are resident, as are Couch's Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, and Green Jay. This location is also one of the better places to watch for Muscovy Duck, Red-billed Pigeon, and Hook-billed Kite. A morning vigil atop the Santa Margarita bluffs often produces dozens of species of birds.



**Hook-billed Kite © Brad McKinney**

Recent sightings at Salineño of Brown Jay may warrant a longer trek from the bluffs to the riparian forests below. It is in this riparian habitat along the river that the jays have been found, sometimes numbering up to four individuals. We will use the most current information to determine whether or not this two-mile hike with short stretches of rugged yet paved trail is warranted. This habitat is also where we could see Gray Hawk, Red-billed Pigeon (rare), and Audubon's Oriole. With recent sightings of Rose-throated Becard, it feels as though almost anything is possible along this wild stretch of river. After lunch in Zapata, we will have a little down time before



afternoon birding options at Falcon County Park, FM-2098 ponds (near Falcon Heights), and Zapata City Park (library).

Night: Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

**January 18, Day 3: Morning Birding at Salineño and Surrounding Area, Including Falcon State Park and Falcon County Park; Return to McAllen.** After an early breakfast, we will head back to Salineño for one last visit to the bird feeding stations and the trails along the river. Today's schedule will be largely determined by what Valley specialties we are still missing. On the drive back to McAllen, we will stop for lunch at Casa de Adobe in Rio Grande City. An early afternoon arrival at our McAllen hotel (Casa de Palmas) could allow for an afternoon birding outing in the Middle Valley, and will be determined in part whether anything new has shown up. Our default afternoon birding location will be nearby Quinta Mazatlan. We'll enjoy a farewell dinner at 6:00 p.m.

NIGHT: Casa de Palmas, McAllen

**January 19, Day 4: Departure for Home.** Participants may depart from McAllen at any time today. The hotel provides free airport shuttle service.

**TOUR SIZE:** Each section will be limited to 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Brad McKinney and Rick Wright



**Brad McKinney** began birding during the winter of 1987–88, an exciting year in which many Mexican rarities were recorded in South Texas. His passion for birds has led to numerous birding trips and photography expeditions across North America, Mexico, Central America, and Hawaii. Brad loves pelagic birding and has guided Texas pelagic trips since 1995, many from his home town of South Padre Island. He has been a longtime tour leader at the Rio Grande Birding Festival and has led birding trips across Texas and Mexico. Brad has served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for six years and co-authored *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*. He received his degree in biology at the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in marine ecology at the University of Texas at Brownsville. Brad's other interests include nature photography, surfing, and snowboarding with his son, Will. He lives at South Padre Island with his wife, Janette, and their two dogs.



**Rick Wright** is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey*, the *ABA Field Guide to*

*Birds of Arizona*, and the *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows*. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Rick lives with his wife, Alison Beringer, and their jet-black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for **South Texas in Style** is **\$4,895** per person in double occupancy from McAllen, Texas. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 10, 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 and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for **South Texas in Style** is **\$675**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

The fee for the **Upper Valley Extension** is **\$1,365** per person in double occupancy from McAllen, Texas. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 1 to dinner on Day 3, 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 and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for the **Upper Valley Extension** is **\$300**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person per section. 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 (August 9, 2024 for the main tour; August 19 for the extension) prior to the tour departure date.

**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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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.**

**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.

**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 its **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 from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, 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 15 days of making your first trip payment. 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 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

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

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/).

**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. Per-person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**BAGGAGE:** For your trip to Texas, please try to refrain from bringing excessive amounts of baggage. Luggage space in the vans may be at a premium. Soft luggage is much preferable to rigid suitcases for making the most of limited storage space. Please limit your luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on per person. As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag.

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** South Texas is usually mild during the winter months. While beautiful and mild days are expected in January, cool temperatures and rain associated with cold fronts are possible. Typically, days will begin with cool mornings, with temperatures in the high 50s or 60s, before warming into the 70s, even the 80s, in the afternoon. In the unlikely event of a front from the north, we should be prepared for wind, rain, fog, and temperatures in the 40s.

**CLOTHING:** For this 11-day trip to South Texas, lightweight field clothing is the norm. January generally is still a warm time of the year, with mild to cool mornings and warm days. Short-sleeve shirts and shorts are acceptable, but you should definitely bring one or two pairs of long pants. Many people prefer field-type clothing consisting

of shirts (long- and short-sleeve) and pants made of lightweight but durable clothing with ventilated seams and zippered sections. Lightweight pants and long-sleeve shirts are ideal for woods birding, where some mosquitoes are typical. Dull colors or earth tones are preferable. Field clothing, such as that made by Columbia and REI is available at a variety of outdoor and sporting goods stores. We recommend Insect-Shield shirts and pants.

In the event of a cold front, which is certainly possible in January, conditions can change dramatically in a short amount of time. A cold front can bring overcast conditions accompanied by wind, rain, and plunging temperatures. So, while bringing lightweight field clothing is a safe bet, you should also pack an item or two of warm outerwear and a water-repellent parka or jacket. A hat for protection from the sun is essential. Wide-brimmed hats are preferable, but even a baseball cap will provide better sun protection than no hat at all. You may wish to bring along swimwear as the hotel does have a swimming pool.

**FOOTWEAR:** A light hiking boot or trail shoe will be appropriate for all outings. Athletic shoes are acceptable but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions. A good walking shoe (such as an athletic shoe), may be preferred when not in the field, such as museum stops and dinners.

**LAUNDRY:** While in McAllen (Days 1-5 and 10), Casa de Palmas offers laundry service for a fee Monday through Friday with same-day delivery. Although the Lighthouse Boutique Hotel in Port Isabel (Days 6-9) does not offer laundry service, there is a laundromat one block from the hotel. The Holiday Inn Express in Zapata offers laundry service as well as a self-serve option.

**CONDITIONS:** This tour is not physically demanding. With the exception of the Upper Valley extension where we may have a round-trip hike of 2-3 miles with stretches of uneven terrain and a 200 yard somewhat steep ascent/descent, all walks will be over even terrain on established roads, paths, and trails. Most will be of short distance, although we may offer an outing or two of up to a mile round-trip in length.

Travel will be by large 15-passenger vans during both the main trip and extension. The first five nights (and the last night) will be at the Casa de Palmas, Trademark Collection by Wyndham, in McAllen. Casa de Palmas is a full-service hotel located 2.5 miles from McAllen International Airport. Among the many services offered by the hotel are: full-service bar, free airport shuttle service, spacious non-smoking rooms, pool, room service, gym, and business center. Each non-smoking guest room features a flat-screen HDTV, mini-refrigerator, coffee maker, desk, ironing amenities, and hair dryer. The remaining four nights will be at The Lighthouse Boutique Hotel in Port Isabel. The Lighthouse Boutique Hotel offers a variety of amenities, with cable, smart TVs, and high-speed internet access in every room.

All breakfasts will be held at the hotels, while lunches and dinners will be at nice restaurants throughout the valley. We will enjoy two catered lunches in the field.

**EQUIPMENT:** One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip to Texas:

- **Daypack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Tissue packs**

## **BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:**

**Binoculars** – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

**Spotting Scopes** – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

**INTERNET SERVICE:** Wi-Fi is available at the Casa de Palmas Hotel, Lighthouse Boutique Hotel and Holiday Inn Express Zapata.

**TIME ZONE:** In January 2025 (standard time), Texas operates on Central Daylight Time (CDT). Sunrise is a little after 7:00 a.m. while sunset is a little before 6:00 p.m.

**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.

**Sun Exposure** – The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes). Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses. Note that south Texas in January is generally warmer than most other parts of the country, and participants should expect a couple of days with the potential for high sun exposure.

**Biting Insects** – Mosquitoes and chiggers are found in south Texas but are not expected to present a problem. Mosquitos can be encountered anywhere, particularly if there has been a lot of rain, while chiggers are found in grassy areas. Insect repellent will be provided, but for extra care we suggest bringing a stick-type repellent for your face and hands.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our



tours. 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>.  
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>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

**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:** Each of the following resources is as an excellent option for bird identification.

Dunn, Jon L. & Jonathan Alderfer (Editors). **National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America**. National Geographic. 2017 (seventh edition).

Sibley, David Allen. **The Sibley Guide to Birds**. National Audubon Society. Alfred E. Knopf Publishing, 2014 (second edition).

Sibley, David Allen. **The Sibley Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America**. National Audubon Society. Alfred A. Knopf, 2016 (second edition). This is the slimmed down version of the larger *Sibley* guide and features only the birds of Eastern North America rather than the whole continent.

#### **Finding Birds:**

Cooksey, Mel & Ron J. Weeks. **A Birder's Guide to the Texas Coast**. (Lane/ABA Birdfinding Guide.) American Birding Association, 2006.

Lockwood, Mark, Brad McKinney, Jim Paton, Barry Zimmer. **A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley**. (Lane/ABA Birdfinding Guide.) American Birding Association, 1999 (revised). Both this and the above guide are great background material.

#### **History:**

Robertson, Brian. **Rio Grande Heritage-A Pictorial History**. Hidalgo County Historical Museum. The Donning Company/Publishers 1985.

### ***Mammals:***

Kays, Roland W. and Don E. Wilson. ***Mammals of North America***. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2009 (second edition).

### ***CLO Apps & Online Resources:***

*eBird*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

*Merlin Bird ID*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack." For this trip, please download the pack for **U.S. and Canada: Continental and/or Texas and Oklahoma. Highly recommended.**

*Birds of the World*. "Discover the world of birds" through the Lab's Birds of the World online resource, offering comprehensive life histories for all bird species and families. Visit the [Birds of the World website](#), where for any bird you can learn about its appearance, distribution, diet, behavior, and more. Free samples are available through the home page while subscriptions are available at the monthly, annual, and three-year levels. **Highly recommended.**

**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 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 April 13, 2024 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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