

# Birding & Nature at Zapata Ranch

## With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

### A Celebrity Tour with Ted Floyd

**June 13 – 20, 2021**

866.900.1146

800.426.7781

520.558.1146

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook at

Naturalist Journeys, LLC





## Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Colorado Birding Tour  
With Ted Floyd & Pat Lueders  
\$3995, from Western City of Your Choice  
(see travel details)

NEW! Join Naturalist Journeys' first celebrity tour with renowned birder and author Ted Floyd. Ted is widely known as the editor of the American Birding Association's magazine *Birding*. Ted has authored several books and is familiar to many having been the keynote speaker at a variety of birding festivals. This exciting new Naturalist Journeys' tour invites you to spend a week with Ted to explore the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado from The Nature Conservancy's Zapata Ranch. With 10 or more clients, Naturalist Journeys' popular guide Pat Lueders joins the group. Our goal is to take over the whole ranch (with our guides, just 13 guest rooms available) for a bird-themed week.

This is a one-stop tour, so you can arrive, unpack, and focus on daily exploration. The ranch is in one of the most beautiful and pristine places left in the western USA, and yes you can enjoy the relaxing ambiance of western life and spice it up with horseback riding if you like. Those that wish to can have a chance to ride horses, learn about the ranch's bison management program, and try your hand at ranch life.

## Tour Highlights

- UNPLUG! Be inspired as you bird—this remote location gives a sense of unlimited space and quiet, so rare in today's world
- Visit wildlife refuges to find Western Grebe, White-faced Ibis, Cinnamon Teal, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Virginia Rail, and Black-crowned Night-Heron
- Watch Great Horned Owl fledglings learn about life in the grand cottonwood trees that surround the ranch and look for Elk with their young in the sage
- See Common Nighthawk display at dusk, listen to a chorus of Coyote song, then marvel at stars so brilliant in the dark skies
- Enjoy an optional, gentle horseback ride with stunning views; enjoy western meals, perhaps some music and fun (experienced riders can request more horse time—ask us for details)
- Search for six possible woodpecker species, and learn to identify western flycatchers
- Study bird behavior in detail and learn about caching by resident Pinyon Jay, a fascinating lifestyle!
- Look for rare Black Swift by Zapata Falls and nesting American Dipper in the rushing stream that flows from it
- Find nesting Mountain Bluebird, Mountain Chickadee, Sage Thrasher, Sage Sparrow, Western Tanager, and western warblers
- Wake to the calls of Western Meadowlark before learning more about ranch history and daily ranch life

June is still spring in the high country of Colorado, an exciting and active time for finding classic breeding birds of the American West. With your own guides on hand, it's a great time to improve your skills as you learn bird song and behavior. Expect spectacular mountain scenery, the country's tallest sand dunes, and plenty of sagebrush,





forest, and riverine birding. Yes, American Dipper, Mountain Bluebird, and Golden Eagle await! And, your visit benefits conservation in this lovely corner of the planet.

*Please note that specific daily activities detailed in the itinerary below may change based on weather, birds seen, and other factors, but each location is visited over the course of the week. Many of the sites you visit are on private lands, opened especially for our group.*

### **Sun., June 13    Arrival at The Nature Conservancy's Zapata Ranch**

Our tour starts at the ranch, outside of Alamosa, Colorado. Those driving in personal or rental cars can meet up at Zapata Ranch at leisure today. The ranch is about four hours from either Denver or Albuquerque, or 2.5 hours from Colorado Springs.

Other arrival options include flying into the small regional airport in Alamosa, Colorado, from which you can take a shuttle service to the ranch and we offer a group shuttle at noon from Denver for a limited number of people for the four-hour drive to Zapata Ranch. It's also possible to take the train to Denver and to catch our shuttle, something different to consider this holiday!

The ranch is nestled up against the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. June feels like spring at 7500 feet. Enjoy views of snow-capped peaks and wildflowers at your feet. Join our group for happy hour and introductions, followed by a welcome dinner, and an early evening orientation stroll around the ranch grounds. Summer evenings in the Rockies are hard to beat. Take a deep breath to savor the piñon-juniper habitat of the ranch, and take your first looks at a diversity of woodland species including Broad-tailed and Calliope Hummingbirds, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, Western Scrub-Jay, Black-billed Magpie, Mountain Chickadee, Mountain Bluebird, Western Tanager, Green-tailed Towhee, and more.

*Accommodations at TNC's Zapata Ranch (D)*

#### **About Zapata Ranch**

Owned by The Nature Conservancy, the Zapata Ranch is a 103,000-acre bison and guest ranch located on the eastern wall of the San Luis Valley. Managed through a partnership with Ranchlands, it is a sustainable working livestock operation, as well as a guest ranch, with the lodge and cabins part of the original ranch established in the late 1800s. The lodge features a roomy and attractive indoor dining area with a fireplace, and a cozy sitting area. Guest rooms in the lodge or private rooms in an adjacent bunkhouse are comfortable and beautifully decorated with large beds, wide windows and many views—each room also contains a full private bathroom. Some are in the main house, and others in cottages nearby with a private entrance. Delicious dinners often feature baked goods, ranch-raised bison, and other fresh local meats and produce. Elk, mule deer, migratory birds, breeding birds, eagles and black bears can be seen on site.



### **Mon., June 14 Medano & Zapata Ranches | Sagebrush Specialty Species**

After an early but filling ranch breakfast at the lodge, we drive a short distance to the Medano Ranch, an important part of The Nature Conservancy's Medano-Zapata Ranch holdings. Though we only go a short distance, the transition to sage-steppe habitat allows us to look for special desert birds including Brewer's Sparrow, Sagebrush Sparrow, and Sage Thrasher. In addition, we visit several seasonal wetlands that should be brimming with birdlife. This is also the first of several opportunities to take an optional half or full day horseback ride on the ranch property.

After lunch back at the ranch and a brief rest, enjoy birding on the Zapata Ranch grounds in more depth than the night before. Older buildings are photogenic and irrigation ditches lined by chokecherry, willow, and other shrubs provide great birding habitat. The corrals and barns are always an attraction. Or feel free to stroll at your leisure to photograph, go for a short close-in horseback ride, or just enjoy the views and the restful property.

*Accommodations at TNC's Zapata Ranch (B,L,D)*

### **Tues., June 15 John James Canyon | Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge**

Today is gloriously full! We are up and out early in anticipation of breakfast in the field and a morning hike. Start at John James Canyon, in southern Conejos County, where the sights, sounds, and birds feel like New Mexico. Explore the base of the canyon for Black-throated Sparrow before heading into and up the canyon for melodious Rock Wren and Canyon Wren, soaring Prairie Falcon and Golden Eagle, and a rare butterfly, Rhesus Skipper. In the more arid habitat we look for lizards and blooming wildflowers and are on the lookout for possible rattlesnakes—this is the west and your leaders prep you on how take caution, then tell you more about their fascinating role in arid-land ecosystems.

We return to the base of the canyon for lunch, followed by a change of scene with a trip to the spectacular Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge. Water provides the lifeblood of the San Luis Valley, and networks of riparian corridors and wetlands like those found at the refuge breakup large areas of desert and upland habitat. Bird the refuge on leisurely strolls or from the van, enjoying a wide variety of waterfowl, waders, and shorebirds. This is a great spot for night herons, bitterns, and rails.

We return to the ranch with time for a break or fun joining in wine, beer and munchies before dinner in the cozy, western ranch dining room.

*Accommodations at TNC's Zapata Ranch (B,L,D)*

### **Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge**

The refuge's wet meadows provide a staging area for migrating Greater Sandhill Crane, while seasonal wetlands



and semi-permanent wetlands support White-faced Ibis, American Avocet, Wilson's Snipe, Neotropical Cormorant, and a variety of waterfowl. Keep an eye out for Black-crowned Night-Heron, Virginia and Sora Rail, and Yellow-headed Blackbird, along with nesting Northern Harrier and Short-eared Owl.

## **Wed., June 16**

### **Blanca Wetlands | Ted's Tips on the Art & Best Practices of Birding**

Depart after a leisurely breakfast in the lodge, heading to meet informative biologists at the Blanca Wetlands. Learn about the amazing geology of these threatened hyper-saline wetlands, as well as important and inspiring work to protect Snowy Plover and other wetlands inhabitants. This is a sensitive area for several species we are here to help survey with special permission. Bird at an easy pace, looking for lots of birds such as Cinnamon Teal, Wilson's Phalarope, American Avocet, Clark's and Western Grebes, and Swainson's Hawk.

After a late lunch at the lodge, participate in a fun and very informative field workshop on "best practices" for documenting birds and other wildlife with smartphones, point-and-shoot cameras, and pocket sound recorders.

After a late afternoon break, happy hour and dinner at the lodge, Ted offers a short indoor program on editing and sharing photos, audio, and video of birds and other wildlife.

*Accommodations at TNC's Zapata Ranch (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., June 17 Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area | Night Sky Viewing**

Today is another chance to explore this beautiful part of the Rockies. After an early breakfast at the lodge, we head out to stunning Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area in the northern San Luis Valley near the town of Saguache; we may be lucky enough to see dust devils on the lakeshore. This is a lush wetland with bulrushes and cattails, perfect for Marsh Wren and Common Yellowthroat, in several lakes, with nearby spring-fed streams. We hope to find Osprey, American White Pelican, American Avocet, American Bittern, Snowy Egret, Clark's and Western Grebes, Sora, Virginia Rail, White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and other species. Surrounding sagebrush gives us a chance at Brewer's Sparrow and Sage Thrasher; don't be surprised if we kick up a jackrabbit as we wander, and we should see Muskrat and Mule Deer as well. Butterflies and dragonflies abound.

After a picnic lunch, we drive to the base of the Sangre de Cristo Range for spectacular mountain scenery and seeking out additional mountain birds including raptors like Golden Eagle, Prairie or Peregrine Falcons, and more.

By now the rhythm of ranch life has kicked in. Return with time to freshen up, happy hour, and dinner. If it's clear tonight, the night-sky viewing is just incredible!

*Accommodations at TNC's Zapata Ranch (B,L,D)*





### **Fri., June 18 Great Sand Dunes National Park**

After a relaxing breakfast at the lodge, we take a short drive to Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, which is close enough to be visible from the northern portion of Zapata Ranch. These magnificent dunes rise to over 750 feet—they are strikingly high and wide. There are options today to hike the dunes (unforgettable but a bit strenuous), to look for the rare Great Sand Dunes Tiger Beetle (found only here), and to look for birds and butterflies along the steep but well-maintained trail that heads to Mosca Pass.

Enjoy a picnic lunch at the very informative park Visitor's Center and take time to explore the exhibits. Then we can return to the ranch to relax, walk, or possibly take a ride. Or, continue on with our guides to bird the park's low-elevation pinewoods before returning to the lodge for happy hour and dinner.

After dinner, Ted caps off our week with a very special (and understandable!) evening program on the dizzying changes of late involving avian systematics and taxonomy.

*Accommodations at TNC's Zapata Ranch (B,L,D)*

### **Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve**

This special area is a gem of the National Park Service. Massive dunes rise 800 feet from the valley floor, a surprising sight snuggled up tight against the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Take time to walk, climb, and roll!

### **Sat., June 19 Zapata Falls | Smith Lakes State Wildlife Area**

The final full day of our tour starts quite early, with a drive to Zapata Falls before breakfast, where we hope to see the breathtaking morning flight of Black Swifts as they blast their way out from behind the waterfall. Then bird the foothills trail in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains looking for American Dipper, and the full suite of western mountain warblers, vireos, tanagers, flycatchers, and more in a very birdy morning.

We return to the lodge for lunch, followed by a visit to Smith Lake State Wildlife Area, just south of the ranch. This magnet for rarities may surprise us and delights with a diversity of common desert and wetland species of the valley regardless.

This evening we celebrate our trip with a farewell dinner at Zapata Ranch, and a celebration of all we have seen in the week.

*Accommodations at TNC's Zapata Ranch (B,L,D)*

### **Sun., June 20 Departures**

Those of us who are driving can enjoy a leisurely morning. For those returning to Denver on the shared-cost shuttle, we depart after an early breakfast for our four-hour drive to the Denver International Airport. Please plan your flight to leave no earlier than 2 PM. If you would like to stay longer in Denver, we are happy to provide suggestions for hotels and activities. *(B)*



### Guide Ted Floyd

Ted Floyd proudly serves as Editor of *Birding* magazine and as Managing Editor of *North American Birds*. He also contributes to The ABA Blog, The American Birding Podcast, and the ABA's young birder programs. Ted is the author of five bird books and more than 200 articles on birds and other aspects of nature, and he is a frequent speaker at bird festivals and ornithological society meetings. The Cal Ripken of eBird, he has submitted at least one complete eBird checklist per day for 3,862 consecutive days. Ted and his family live in Boulder County, Colorado.



### Guide Pat Lueders

Pat Lueders has been leading birding trips in the St. Louis area and Midwest for over 10 years. A love of traveling has taken her to many countries of the world and most of the US, often with Naturalist Journeys' trips. When not out birding, she is the coordinator of volunteers for a number of Citizen Science projects partnering with many agencies including U.S. Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Audubon, National Trumpeter Swan Society, and Missouri Department of Conservation. Pat serves on the boards of St. Louis Audubon & Audubon Society of Missouri and is on a bird banding team.



## Cost of the Journey

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### Travel Information

Please plan to arrive on or before June 13. You can arrive at and rent a car from either Denver, Colorado Springs, or Albuquerque, arriving to the ranch at your leisure on June 13. If you plan to fly into Alamosa, there is a shuttle to the ranch. Or, if you fly to Denver and do NOT want to rent a car, we will offer a limited space, shared cost shuttle at 12:00 PM. Please let us know if you would like to be included in this shuttle (not guaranteed). If you rented a car and drove yourself, please plan your departures at leisure on June 20. If you took the shuttle from Denver, please plan your flight out of Denver no earlier than 2:00 PM. If you plan to fly out of Alamosa, the airport is just a short 40-minute drive from the ranch. A shuttle back will be coordinated.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$3995 DBL** from Denver, Colorado Springs, Alamosa, or Albuquerque. **This cost includes** accommodations for seven nights, meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=dinner), professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses.

**Cost does not include:** round-trip airfare to and from your arrival city of choice, items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

### Photo Credits

Group Riding, Lynn Tennefoss (LT); Bison, Marissa Chiantella; Mountain Bluebird, Hugh Simmons (HUSI); Merlin, Greg Smith (GRSM); Bald Eagle, GRSM; American Dipper, Ted Floyd (TEFL); Bullock's Oriole, GRSM; Horned Lark, GRSM; American Kestrel, GRSM; Northern Harrier, GRSM; Swainson's Hawk, GRSM; Ted Floyd, courtesy ABA; Pat Lueders, NJ Stock; Lewis's Woodpecker, Sandy Sorkin (SS).

*Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.*