

South Texas: Fall Migration!

with Naturalist Journeys



October 9 – 16, 2022

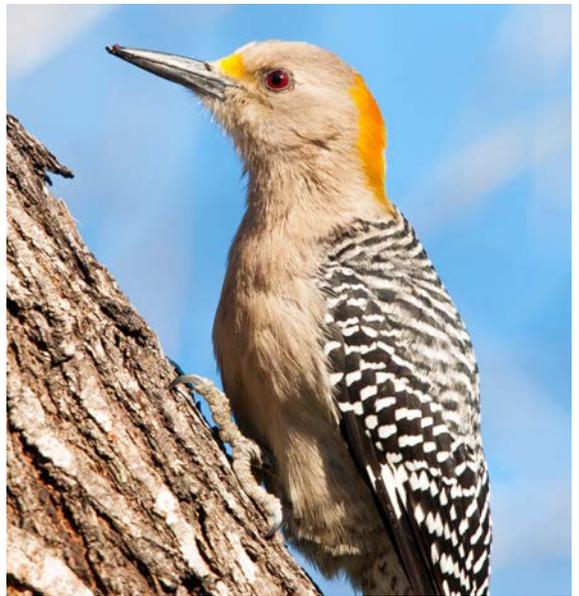
866.900.1146

520.558.1146

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook & Instagram
at Naturalist Journeys, LLC





Tour Highlights

- Search for Pauragues, Clay-colored Thrushes, Long-billed Thrashers, Olive Sparrows and other regional specialties at the World birding Centers of Santa Ana NWR, Estero Llano Grande SP, Bentsen-Rio Grande SP at a time, following the breeding season, when their populations are at their peak
- Experience the sights and sounds of hundreds of Red-crowned Parrots as they come into roost in Brownsville
- Visit the wetlands and coastal grasslands of Cameron County for shorebirds, waders, Least Grebe, Green and Ringed Kingfishers, White-tailed Hawk, and Aplomado Falcon
- Marvel at the beauty of some of the over 300 species of butterflies that have been recorded in the Valley at gardens at the National Butterfly Center and elsewhere
- Take delight in close views of Green Jays, Greater Kiskadees, Altamira Orioles, and other photogenic species at feeders throughout the Valley
- Watch a myriad of waders and shorebirds while being entertained by playful dolphins on a boat tour of Aransas Bay
- Learn a little about the fascinating history of South Texas while travelling through the ranchlands of King and Kenedy Counties

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night South Texas Birding & Nature Tour
\$2390 from McAllen, TX, Departing Corpus Christi, TX
Arrival Airport is McAllen Miller International (MFE);
departure Airport is Corpus Christi International (CRP)

"Plenty of birds plus a great experienced leader equals an unequalled Rio Grande safari."

— Chase Davies

South Texas is one of the great birding destinations in the United States, and for good reason. Due to its proximity to the humid tropics of Mexico, the subtropical woodlands of the Rio Grande Valley boast over two dozen tropical bird species that spill across the border, from chachalacas to pauragues. Here, colorful Great Kiskadee and personable Green Jay mingle with temperate species. These tropical species occur nowhere else in the United States.

We explore three of South Texas' most productive regions: coastal lagoons and shallow wetlands that throng with thousands of shorebirds, and waders; subtropical savannas and riparian woodlands of the Lower Rio Grande Valley with their decidedly tropical species like Hook-billed Kite and Altamira Oriole; and migrant hotspots of Corpus Christi and the Coastal Bend.

This tour has been specially times to coincide with the height of the fall migration of raptors and other neotropical species in South Texas. It concludes with a full day and part of a morning at Hawk Watch International's annual Celebration of Flight at Hazel Bazemore Park in Corpus Christi—the site of the largest raptor migration in the U.S.

Additionally, over 300 species of butterflies have been recorded in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. As many of the sites we visit have plantings to attract butterflies, we should see a diversity of these delightful creatures, as well as some of the nearly 100 species of dragonflies and damselflies found in the area.



Itinerary

Sun., Oct. 9 Arrival in McAllen

Welcome to one of America's top birding hotspots, often referred to as the Texas Tropics where warm air, fresh breezes, and brilliant blooms let you know you've reached an exotic realm without ever leaving the USA!

For a group pick-up, please plan to arrive at McAllen International Airport (MFE) no later than 1:00 PM. If you must arrive later, let us know in advance so that we can make special arrangements to meet you.

From the airport, we head east for some relaxed birding in the delightful grounds of the Frontera Audubon Society in the heart of Weslaco. The 15 acres of Tamaulipan forest, thorn-scrub, and wetlands here are a microcosm of local habitats that, with the added attractions of bird-feeding stations and butterfly gardens, provide a wonderful introduction to Valley birding. They are a haven for regional specialties such as flamboyant Great Kiskadees, Green Jays, Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, as well as warblers and other neotropical migrants.

After checking into the renowned Alamo Inn, we enjoy dinner at one of our favorite restaurants and the opportunity to get acquainted with your guide and fellow traveling companions.

Accommodations at the Inn at the Alamo Inn, Alamo, TX (D)

Mon., Oct. 10

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park | National Butterfly Center | Anzalduas County Park

Today we visit Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, one of the Valley's World Birding Center sites. Bentsen protects an array of forest, thorn-scrub, and mesquite habitats that support most of the Valley's special birds, including Plain Chachalaca, Gray Hawk, Altamira Oriole, White-tipped Dove, and Golden-fronted Woodpecker. We shall also spend some time at Bentsen's hawk watch in the hope of migrating raptors and perhaps even a Hook-billed Kite.

After a picnic lunch, we could, if there is interest, visit the gardens at the North American Butterfly Association's (NABA) National Butterfly Center, only a few minutes from Bentsen. During its short existence this site has already produced a huge number of butterfly species, including several first U.S. records. A feeding station often attracts Plain Chachalacas, Altamira Orioles, Olive Sparrows, and Long-billed Thrashers.

We then visit Anzalduas County Park with its Spanish moss-clad live oak trees and grasslands on the banks of the Rio Grande. Gray Hawk, Cave Swallow, Ringed Kingfisher, and Vermilion Flycatcher are some of our target species here, as well as the possibility of migrating raptors and passerines.



Nearby McAllen has a regular evening roost of Green Parakeets that sometimes number in the hundreds; we may visit their roosting area before dinner at a Mexican restaurant just across from our Inn.

Accommodations at the Alamo Inn (B,L,D)

Tues., Oct. 11 Santa Ana NWR | Estero Llano Grande State Park

This morning we head towards Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, which protects 2,000 acres in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley Wildlife Corridor. With some 350 species of birds recorded, many birders regard this reserve as the highlight of a South Texas visit. Extensive trails allow exploration of wetlands, fields, and thorn-scrub habitats. We listen for the boisterous calls of Couch's Kingbird and Great Kiskadee, as well as the repeated whistle of the diminutive Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet. To get eye-level views of Gray Hawk and a chance at seeing the rare Hook-billed Kite, there is the option of going up the hawk watch tower.

At red-flowering Turk's Caps we check for Buff-bellied and other hummingbirds. Least Grebe may cruise the small ponds as a Green Kingfisher hunts from an overhanging branch, while we keep our eyes open for Sora, White & White-faced Ibises, Neotropic Cormorant, and migrating shorebirds.

From one of the oldest reserves in the valley, we then visit one of the newest: Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco. Amazingly, it has already accrued a bird list almost as impressive as that of its older cousin. It offers a wonderful variety of wetland and woodland habitats with plenty of easy walking trails that attract more birders than just about anywhere else in the valley. Some of the species we look for here include Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, White-tailed Kite, Common Pauraque, Green Kingfisher, and Clay-colored Thrush.

The Rancho Viejo Country Club and Resort is conveniently situated just west of Brownsville. Well-appointed guest houses and delectable on-site dining options offer the chance to unwind after birding. The attractive grounds feature a number of resacas (former channels of the Rio Grande, now oxbow lakes) with birds including Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Inca Dove, Tropical Kingbird, and Green Jay.

Accommodations at Rancho Viejo Country Club and Resort (B,L,D)

Wed., Oct. 12

Old Port Isabel Road | Laguna Atascosa NWR | South Padre Island

After breakfast, we drive straight to Old Port Isabel Road in search of White-tailed and Harris's Hawks, Cassin's Sparrow, and especially Aplomado Falcon. Extirpated by the 1950s from much of its original range in the United States, this elegant falcon is making a comeback in this part of the world due to reintroduction efforts by the Peregrine Fund. On the way to Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, we stop at the Bayview resacas; here we have a great chance of Anhinga, Neotropic Cormorant, Green and Ringed Kingfishers, and other wetland species.



Lying on the western shore of the Laguna Madre, the Laguna Atascosa protects over 65,000 acres of coastal habitats. More than 400 species of birds have been recorded here, including nesting Aplomado Falcons. At the visitor center and nearby trails, we check out the feeders for close-up views of Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and perhaps a herd of Javelina (Peccary). With luck, we may also encounter Coyote, Bobcat, Nine-banded Armadillo, Texas Tortoise, or even (but very improbably!) an Ocelot.

We then head east to South Padre Island, stopping on the way to walk the nature trail at Laguna Vista for migrating hummingbirds and warblers. The trees and bushes by the South Padre Island Convention Center and the contiguous Birding and Nature Center are the best places in the Valley for seeing migrants in September, and the boardwalks there cross both fresh and saltwater wetlands that can provide spectacular views of such normally secretive birds as Clapper and Virginia Rails.

There are many other species to see here, including Reddish Egret, and Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, Black Skimmer, Sandwich Tern, Brown and American White Pelicans, American Avocet, and a plethora of other shorebirds, terns, and waders. We also hope to find Piping Plover - one of the country's most threatened shorebirds.

Following the island visit, we head back to Brownsville, which has the largest parrot roost in South Texas and, if everyone's not too tired after a full day of birding, we could fit in a visit to the roost before dinner. There are sometimes as many as 300 individuals of these colorful (and noisy!) birds roosting together. Red-crowned Parrots are the most numerous, but Red-lored, White-fronted, Yellow-headed, and Lilac-crowned Parrots are all possible.

Accommodations at the Rancho Viejo Country Club and Resort (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 13 Blucher Park | N. Padre & Mustang Islands | Port Aransas

This morning we head north on our journey of some 200 miles to Fulton by way of North Padre and Mustang Islands. The first two hours or so cross some of the historic ranchlands of South Texas, including parts of the King and Kenedy Ranches. We'll keep an eye out particularly for raptors, including Crested Caracara and White-tailed Hawk, as well as White-tailed Deer, exotic Nilgai antelopes, and other wildlife.

In Corpus Christi, we spend some time birding the migrant hotspots of Blucher Park and Packery Channel before lunch at Snoopy's Pier and an afternoon of birding on Mustang Island and Port Aransas. These have some of the most productive birding sites in South Texas with chances of Piping and Snowy Plovers on the salt-flats, Purple



Gallinules and Least Bitterns in the freshwater marshes, and a variety of warblers and other migrants in the wooded areas.

We then catch the ferry to the mainland on our way to our Inn in Fulton and a dinner of local seafood, with perhaps a brief stop for intimate views of roosting Black Skimmers at Rockport Beach Park on the way. *Accommodations at the Inn at Fulton Harbor (B,L,D)*

Fri., Oct. 14 Rockport | Goose Island State Park | Aransas Bay Boat Tour

After breakfast, we visit one or two birding places in Rockport in the hope of coming across concentrations of the many Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrating through the area at this time. We then drive north across Copano Bay to Goose Island State Park, one of the primary migrant hotspots in the region, looking particularly for migrating warblers, flycatchers, and other passerines. Non-avian creatures we may encounter include Texas Coral Snake, White-tailed Deer, Javelina (Peccary), and Nine-banded Armadillo. With luck, we may see a Bobcat.

After lunch, we take a boat tour of Aransas Bay in the celebrated 'Skimmer'. While on the boat we look for several species of herons, egrets, and even Roseate Spoonbill. Captain Tommy guides us, aiming to get within close range of these remarkable creatures. With everyone alert on deck, we often find Long-billed Curlew, American Oystercatcher, Seaside Sparrow, and Mottled Duck, as well as a number of other waterfowl and shorebirds. With luck we shall be accompanied on our trip by playful dolphins.

Accommodations at the Inn at Fulton Harbor (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 15 Hazel Bazemore County Park | Corpus Christi

After an early breakfast we head for Hazel Bazemore County Park in Corpus Christi. This is the site of the pre-eminent hawk watch in the U.S.—and the only one to have recorded more than a million raptors in a single season. This is the weekend of Hawk Watch International's annual Celebration of Flight at the Park so, as well as the thrill of witnessing raptor migration, we will also have the chance to participate in the festivities and meet some of the country's leading raptor experts. Most of the raptors we see are likely to be Broad-winged Hawks, with lesser numbers of Mississippi Kites and perhaps Swainson's Hawks. More unusual species recorded here at this time last year included Golden Eagle, Swallow-tailed Kite, and Zone-tailed Hawk.



During the day, depending on the pattern of the raptor migration, we will take the opportunity of driving around Hazel Bazemore Park, where birds we come across are likely to include Inca Dove, Couch's Kingbird, and Cave Swallow, as well as visiting nearby Pollywog Ponds. This is a wonderful mix of woodlands and wetlands with a good chance of Groove-billed Ani and, depending on the weather, an array of warblers and other neotropical migrants.

We then dine at a local restaurant before driving to our nearby hotel in Corpus Christi.
Accommodations at the Holiday Inn Corpus Christi Airport & Convention Center (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 16 Corpus Christi | Departures

We make sure that everyone who has not made other arrangements gets to the Corpus Christi International Airport (MFE) by noon. It's only a 15 minute or so drive from our hotel so there's time in the morning to do some last-minute birding at Hazel Bazemore County Park. The hope is that some of the migrating raptors will have roosted in trees in the surrounding area and we will be able to witness a 'lift-off' as they take to the air to continue their journey south—one of the memorable sights of birding and, with luck, a fitting climax to what should prove to be a productive and enjoyable visit to South Texas. (B)



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 at McAllen Miller International Airport (MFE), in McAllen no later than 1:00 PM on October 9. If you must arrive later, let us know in advance so that we can make special arrangements to meet you. We plan to arrive at our departure airport, Corpus Christi International Airport (CRP) by NOON on October 16, so please plan your flights out after 2:00 PM.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$2390 DBL / \$2895 SGL, based on double occupancy, from McAllen, TX, departing Corpus Christi, TX. Cost includes seven nights' accommodations, all meals as noted in the itinerary, airport transfers, ground transportation in vans, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Not included is round-trip airfare to McAllen and from Corpus Christi, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

Photo Credits

Ringed Kingfisher, Barry Ulman (BU); Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Tom Dove, (TD); Long-billed Thrasher (TD); Green Jay, TD; Altimore Oriole, Terry Peterson (TP); Mississippi Kite, Steve Wolfe (SW); Golden-fronted Woodpecker, TD; Clay-colored Thrush, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Olive Sparrow, CS; Roseate Spoonbill, Betty Andres; Least Bittern, TD; Plain Chachalaca, TD; Virginia Rail, TD; Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Peg Abbott; Broad-winged Hawk, CS; Green Kingfisher, TD; Red-lored Parrot, Susan Hartley; Aplomado Falcon, Barry Ramdass; Greater Kiskadee, Naturalist Journeys Stock; Common Pauraque, Tarran Maharaj

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.