



SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS & HILL COUNTRY EXTENSION

*March 29 - April 7, 2027
April 7 - 11, 2027*



Whooping crane © Barry Zimmer

This tour covers the Central Texas Coast, the King Ranch, the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and an extension to the beautiful Texas Hill Country, all at their finest when wonderful weather, a spectacular array of flowers, and arguably the best birding in the country combine for a truly memorable natural history experience. Beginning in Corpus Christi, the tour travels to Rockport – wintering grounds of the majestic Whooping Cranes and breeding grounds for many species of herons, egrets, and shorebirds. It is also a stopover point for migrant shorebirds and landbirds alike. We will then head south through the famed King Ranch to the Rio Grande Valley, home to 25 tropical species of birds whose United States range is basically restricted to this incredibly rich area. Included in this list are such highly sought species as Red-billed Pigeon, Ringed Kingfisher, Common Pauraque, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Morelet's Seedeater, and

Altamira and Audubon's orioles. The tour will conclude with an extension in the scenic Hill Country, the nesting grounds of the Golden-cheeked Warbler and the Black-capped Vireo. Including the extension, we should see around 250 species of birds and fantastic wildflower displays.

March 29, Day 1: Arrival in Corpus Christi

Participants should plan to be in Corpus Christi (airport code CRP) today and proceed to our hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:00 p.m. for a get-acquainted session, likely followed by some brief afternoon birding at a nearby marsh and a delicious seafood dinner.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites
Navigation Blvd., Corpus Christi



March 30 & 31, Days 2-3: Corpus Christi, Rockport and Whooping Crane Boat Trip

Although our schedule will be somewhat flexible over the next two-and-a-half days, mostly depending on weather patterns, it is likely that we will begin the day by visiting a migrant trap or two. Passerine migration is just beginning in early April, and though we are not likely to see large numbers of migrants, we should encounter a sprinkling of flycatchers, vireos, and warblers. Early migrant possibilities include Northern Parula, Black-and-white, Black-throated Green, Worm-eating, Blue-winged, Prothonotary, and Hooded warblers. Nearby coastal estuaries could harbor stunning pink Roseate Spoonbills, comical Reddish Egrets, Snowy (declining), Piping and Wilson's plovers, Long-billed Curlew, and Gull-billed Tern, among others.

One morning we will charter the “M/V Skimmer” to travel up the Intracoastal Waterway, where our target will be the endangered Whooping Crane. These magnificent birds begin migrating north in late March, but we have a very good chance to find a few lingering family groups. At one time only 15 Whooping Cranes remained in the wild, but now more than 500 make the long flight to and from their Canadian breeding grounds. Our search for the Whoopers should yield many other birds as well, including a variety of herons and egrets, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer and up to seven species of terns. Another morning will be spent at a nearby spartina marsh in hopes of locating Clapper Rail, Sedge Wren, and Seaside Sparrow. White and White-faced ibis, Black-bellied Whistling Duck, Mottled Duck, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Curlew, and Stilt, Pectoral, and Baird’s (uncommon) sandpipers are among the many possibilities. Coastlines around Rockport should yield Wilson’s Plover and perhaps Least Tern as well. One afternoon we will likely visit the Goose Island area in search of additional passerine migrants and seek out Boat-tailed Grackles at the southern edge of their range.

NIGHTS: Hampton Inn & Suites Rockport-Fulton



Tropical Parula © Barry Zimmer

April 1, Day 4: Mustang Island to Kingsville

We will begin the day by taking the ferry across the bay to Port Aransas. Here, at a freshwater marsh, we may encounter Least Bittern (scarce), Cinnamon Teal, Sora and Clapper Rail, in addition to many other shorebirds and waterfowl. Nearby Paradise Pond provides yet another opportunity for landbird migrants with a lovely boardwalk through a willow-lined pond. Finally, we will cruise down the beaches of Mustang Island where numerous rarities have been recorded. We will likely encounter such regular fare as Piping Plover, Red Knot (very uncommon), and Least, Sandwich, and Royal terns. Grasslands on the interior of the island may yield White-tailed Hawk or even the highly-sought Aplomado Falcon. In the early afternoon, we will begin heading for Kingsville via the Chapman Ranch. Fields in this area may harbor Upland Sandpiper, American Golden-Plover, and perhaps the rare Buff-breasted Sandpiper as well.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn, Kingsville

April 2, Day 5: King Ranch to McAllen

The better part of the day will be on the Norias Division of the spectacular King Ranch. Here, in the undisturbed mesquite savannas and small oak mottes, we will get our first taste of South Texas birding. Possibilities include White-tailed and Harris's hawks, Crested Caracara, the gem-like Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed woodpeckers, Couch's Kingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and Hooded Oriole. In addition, the very local Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet and the declining Audubon's Oriole might also be encountered. Our real targets here, however, will be the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl and the Tropical Parula – two species rarely seen in the United States outside the boundaries of this ranch. While both are elusive and somewhat scarce (and certainly not guaranteed), we will devote considerable time and effort to locating these King Ranch specialties. It should be noted that the recent listing by US Fish & Wildlife of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl as an endangered species has ended the use of playback or even whistling to attract the owl, thus making it much more difficult to see. Depending on our arrival time in McAllen, we may spend the early evening searching for Red-crowned Amazons and Green Parakeets as they noisily descend to their nighttime roosts.

NIGHT: Homewood Suites, McAllen

April 3-4, Days 6-7: The Lower Rio Grande Valley

We will have many options to choose from for our two days of birding. The southernmost tip of Texas has multiple state parks, wildlife refuges, Audubon sanctuaries and the like, and all are worth a visit. Our exact schedule will be determined in part by the presence of rarities, as well as current weather patterns. Possible destinations include Sabal Palm Grove, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Frontera Audubon Thicket, Estero Llano Grande State Park, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, Bentsen State Park, and South Padre Island. Whichever areas



Elf Owl © Barry Zimmer

we opt for, we will seek out such specialties as Least Grebe, Plain Chachalaca, White-tipped Dove, Ringed and Green kingfishers, Aplomado Falcon, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and Altamira Oriole. If any are known to be present, we will likely devote some time to searching for the rare and highly sought Hook-billed Kite as well (although this species has largely dried up in recent years in the United States). Some of these areas also play host to migrant landbirds when conditions are right, with a variety of warblers, vireos, flycatchers, orioles, and buntings possible. South Padre Island can be particularly good for such “fallout” events. On occasion, past tours have had the good fortune of encountering rare Mexican strays. Masked Duck, White-throated Thrush, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, Flame-colored Tanager and Blue Bunting have all made appearances. While none of these species are at all likely on a given trip, the mere possibility of such superb vagrants adds to the excitement of birding this area. One night after dinner we will have an optional nightbird excursion in hopes of locating Common Pauraque, as well as Elf (very uncommon) and Eastern Screech-Owls.

NIGHTS: Homewood Suites, McAllen

April 5, Day 8: Rio Grande Valley to Zapata

Today's schedule will be largely determined by what valley specialties we are still missing, by what rarities may be present, or by weather conditions that might be conducive to passerine fallouts. Visits to Bentsen State Park, Quinta Mazatlan, or the Frontera Audubon House Thicket in Weslaco are possible destinations. Clay-colored Thrushes, once accidental, have become a regular resident in recent years, making this species a very good possibility. If conditions are right, migrating raptors, including large flocks of Broad-winged and Swainson's hawks and smaller numbers of Mississippi Kites, often move through this area in April. The afternoon will find us heading upriver toward Zapata with the possibility of desert birding en route. An evening owl trip will be planned if we are lacking any of our nocturnal targets.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

April 6, Day 9: Falcon Dam Area

We will have a full day to thoroughly explore the rich Falcon Dam area. Here the avifauna shows more of a western flavor than in the lower valley, with Scaled Quail joining Northern Bobwhite, and such species as Ash-throated Flycatcher, Verdin, Curve-billed Thrasher, Cactus Wren, Pyrrhuloxia and Black-throated Sparrow present in the brushy uplands. Along the banks of the Rio Grande, the shy and retiring Audubon's Oriole is making its last stand within the U.S. borders. Altamira Orioles suspend their pendulous nests from riverine trees, and Ringed (declining) and Green kingfishers patrol the snag-lined banks. Noisy Great Kiskadees and Couch's Kingbirds call from exposed perches, while Long-billed Thrashers and Olive Sparrows scratch in the undergrowth. The rare Red-billed Pigeon, like the Audubon's Oriole, clings to a tenuous U.S. existence along the willow-lined banks of the river. Muscovy Duck, Gray Hawk and Hook-billed Kite are rare and irregular, but possible. Common species include Greater Roadrunner, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed woodpeckers, and Bewick's Wren.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, Zapata

April 7, Day 10: Falcon Dam to Laredo (main tour ends); extension to the Hill Country begins

We may briefly revisit the Falcon Dam area in the early morning. If Morelet's Seedeaters are present in San Ygnacio, Zapata or Laredo, we will make a special effort to locate them. This small finch was once very common in this area up until the 1940's, but by the end of the 1970's, it had all but vanished north of the Mexican border. In recent years it has reappeared in small numbers in the Falcon Dam area. The weedy edges and river banks here offer the last U.S. refuge for this tiny Mexican finch. From here we drive north to Laredo where the main tour will conclude at the Laredo airport at around 11:00 a.m. Flights out of Laredo (airport code LRD) should be scheduled for 1:00 p.m. or later. For those continuing on to the Hill Country extension, we will have an early lunch in Laredo and then head north to Concan and Neal's Lodges.



Santa Margarita Bluff © Barry Zimmer

Hill Country Extension

April 7, Day 1: Drive to Hill Country

The Texas Hill Country is one of the state's most pleasant and scenic regions. After departing Laredo, a two and half hour drive through mesquite brushland will lead us to Neal's Lodges on the southern edge of the Hill Country. En route we may spot Cave Swallows utilizing the highway culverts, or "skylarking" Cassin's Sparrows. Harris's Hawks, Crested Caracaras and Chihuahuan Ravens should be seen along the highways. We should arrive at Neal's Lodges by late afternoon. Neal's is a rustic, family-operated establishment on the banks of the clear, cool, rushing Frio River. Although the accommodations are basic, the family-style meals and homey atmosphere are delightful. Best of all, birds are everywhere on the grounds of the lodges. The amount of bird song and bird activity here is a real treat.

NIGHT: Neal's Lodges, Concan

April 8-10, Days 2-4: Concan Area



We will have the better part of three days to enjoy the pleasures of the Texas Hill Country. Birds are everywhere here, from the rocky flower-covered hillsides to the thick brush and cypress-lined river banks. The Hill Country is simply one of the "birdiest" places around and provides a unique setting for eastern and western birds to meet. Located right on the dividing line between the junipers and oaks of the Texas Hill Country and the thick brush of

Golden-cheeked Warbler © Barry Zimmer

South Texas, the Concan area is an ideal spot for studying the birds of both habitats. Some of the expected species present on the lodge grounds include Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Black and Eastern phoebes, Ash-throated and Brown-crested flycatchers, Verdin, Carolina Chickadee, Black-crested Titmouse, Bell's Yellow-throated, and White-eyed vireos, Bewick's, Carolina, Canyon and Cactus wrens, Yellow-throated Warbler, House Finch, and Canyon Towhee. A concerted effort will be made to find the two special Texas Hill Country birds, the Golden-cheeked Warbler (which nests nowhere else in the world!) and the Black-capped Vireo, both scarce and difficult to locate. This, however, is the heart of their range, and we have had great success on previous tours. Other typical Hill Country birds we should see are Black-chinned Hummingbird, Vermilion Flycatcher, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (declining), Common Raven, Lesser Goldfinch, and Rufous-crowned and Field sparrows. Green Kingfisher and Bushtit (declining) are also possible. Several South Texas species reach their northern limits in the Uvalde area, and thus are more readily found here than elsewhere in the Hill Country. Ringed and Green kingfishers, Couch's Kingbird, Long-billed Thrasher, and Olive Sparrow will certainly be targeted. We will likely visit Chalk Bluff Park one morning where rarities are occasionally seen, with the park hosting a vagrant Rufous-capped Warbler in 2011 & 2012.

One evening (likely the first), we will visit a nearby private ranch to view one of the greatest bat spectacles in the United States. Over ten million Mexican Free-tailed Bats pour from the entrance of a huge limestone cave. So great are their numbers that the long undulating column of bats stretches to the limits of vision and blackens a corner of the sky. The steady stream of bats continues well into the night. Hundreds of Cave Swallows nest here as well. On the way back to Neal's, we will look for Common Poorwills and possibly Chuck-will's-Widow on the unpaved ranch roads and Eastern Screech-Owl in the oak forests.

In the early afternoon on our final day, we will depart Neal's for the hour and a half drive to San Antonio.

NIGHT: Neal's Lodges, Concan (April 8 & 9)

NIGHT: Springhill Suites, San Antonio (April 10)



Mexican Free-tailed Bats © Barry Zimmer

April 11, Day 5: Departure for Home

Participants may make arrangements to depart from San Antonio (airport code SAT) any time today.

Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 12 tour participants.

TOUR LEADER(s): This tour is led by **Barry Zimmer**.



Barry Zimmer has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has coauthored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen

interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,600 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at

the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE - SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS: \$5,625 per person based on double occupancy or \$6,395 for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 10, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the “TIPPING” sub-section below.

TOUR FEE - HILL COUNTRY EXTENSION: \$2,695 per person based on double occupancy or \$3,160 for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The deposit for this tour is \$500 per person. We accept MasterCard and Visa.

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 120 days (November 29, 2026) prior to the tour departure date.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can handle the hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

FUEL SURCHARGES: Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit.
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours. Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

CANCELLATION BY VENT:

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

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

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

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

TRAVEL INSURANCE

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: 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 comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough

travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; 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: [Ripcord Travel Insurance](#); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > 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, second deposit, 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 costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

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.

About Medjet's MedjetAssist Plan

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company's primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: 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: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

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. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](https://www.tsa.gov) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: Dress is informal throughout.

- **Light field clothing**
- **Sweater or light jacket**
- **Raingear**
- **Hat**
- **Swimwear:** optional

FOOTWEAR: Comfortable walking shoes or hiking boots are essential.

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well-prepared:

- **Sunscreen**
- **Belt Pack or Day pack:** (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.).
- **Alarm Clock:** mobile phone alarm is fine
- **Camera:** If desired with sufficient memory cards
- **Small flashlight**

Binoculars: We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 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.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & TOUR CONDITIONS

CLIMATE & WEATHER: Temperatures in Texas in April range from 60 to 90 degrees with the possibility of even warmer weather (mid 90s) in the Valley. However, a late “norther” may bring rain and temperatures around 50 degrees. Our 2007 tour had record-breaking low temperatures, in the low 40’s, for two days. In the Hill Country, night time lows could also dip into the 40’s (we dipped to 39 degrees on our 2014 trip). Rain is possible at all locations. Much of the birding will be roadside birding. Walks will generally be over flat to mildly undulating ground and will be a mile or less in distance. The owling walk may be closer to two miles long.

CONDITIONS: Most mornings breakfast will be around 6:00 a.m., with departures for birding varying from 6:40 to 7:15 a.m.. The morning of our visit to the King Ranch, however, we will likely have breakfast at 5:30 a.m. and depart at 6:00 a.m. In the Hill Country, breakfast will be at 6:30 each day. On most days, we will try to return to the hotel an hour in advance of dinner to allow time to rest and clean up.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi is available in all hotels on the main tour and mobile phone service is also readily available throughout. On the extension, Wi-Fi is limited at Neal’s Lodges. The strongest signal is at the office/store/cafe area. Phone service at Neal’s depends on your carrier. **At the time of publication, AT&T customers have service, while Verizon and Sprint do not.**

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Guest laundry (self-service and/or valet) is available at all hotels.

HEALTH & SAFETY

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

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

COVID-19: 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 for avoiding COVID-19.

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. 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.

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.

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 it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must 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 United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.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 & TRIP PREPARATION

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 which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

For use during this tour we recommend either of these two books:

Dunn, Jon L. Field Guide to the Birds of North America. The National Geographic Society, 2017 (7th edition).

Sibley, David Allan. National Audubon Society: The Sibley Guide to Birds. Knopf Doubleday, 2000.

*Note that the Sibley Western guide does not cover most of the South Texas specialties.

Birds

Cooksey, Mel and Weeks, Ron J.. A Birder's Guide to the Texas Coast. (Lane/ABA Birdfinding Guide #413.) American Birding Association, 2006(revised).

Lockwood, Mark, Brad McKinney, Jim Paton, Barry Zimmer. A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley. (Lane/ABA Birdfinding Guide.) American Birding Association, 2008 (revised). Both this and the above guide are great background material.

Oberholser, Harry C. and Edgar B. Kincaid, Jr. (ed.) The Bird Life of Texas. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. Edited by Edgar Kincaid. The definitive two-volume reference work on the Texas avifauna, including distribution maps with a few paintings by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Detailed description material.

Peterson, Roger Tory and James Fisher. Wild America: The Record of the 30,000 Mile Journey. Mariner Books, 1997. See Chapters 16 and 17: The adventures of two great naturalists as they bird their way through Texas.

Wildflowers:

Enquist, Marshall. Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country. Austin: Lone Star Botanical, 1989. Very thorough and attractive guide with excellent photographs.

Wills, Mary M. and Howard S. Irvin. Roadside Flowers of Texas. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1961. Good selection of typical wildflowers and attractive line drawings.

Loughmiller, Campbell, Lynn Loughmiller and Lynn Sherrod. Texas Wildflowers. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1984. Field guide with nice photos of many representative wildflowers.

Niehaus, Theodore S. A Field Guide to Southwestern and Texas Wildflowers (Peterson Field Guide Series 31).

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998 (reprint). This book has the greatest selection of species of the popular guides, but many are black and white line drawings only.

CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY APPS & ONLINE RESOURCES:

eBird: 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: 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."

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

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.

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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.

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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.

View the complete [Terms and Conditions](#) on our website.

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