

SOUTH TEXAS

Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley

28.04° N - 25.91° N



February 22 - Mar 1, 2026



Wild **LATITUDES**
WORLDWIDE NATURE TOURS

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Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley

Greetings, fellow nature lover!

We invite you to join Wild Latitudes on our tour of one of the best birding regions in the United States: the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas!

You can't get much further south and still be in the US. The latitude and ecosystems of South Texas are subtropical. Exotic birds and other wildlife more typical of Mexico reach their northern range limits here. This means you can see wonderful species that you'll find nowhere else in the US.

Bird specialties of the Lower Rio Grande Valley include the beautiful Green Jay (shown on the cover), the Great Kiskadee, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Inca Dove, Olive Sparrow, and Altamira Oriole.

The region has a variety of excellent wildlife refuges and parks nestled among suburban and agricultural areas. As we look for birds in these natural areas, we'll keep our eyes open for other exciting animals, such as American Alligator, Collared Peccary, Spiny Softshell Turtle, and Armadillo.

This tour will also explore the region around Corpus Christi, on the coast north of the Rio Grande. There, we'll make a special effort to find the amazing and endangered Whooping Crane. We'll enjoy a boat trip through coastal lagoons to search for cranes and dozens of species of waterbirds, raptors, and shorebirds.

This will be an easy-going, fun exploration of a special region. We expect to get great looks at many wonderful birds. You'll learn about the ecoregions of South Texas, about the conservation challenges in the region, and about its interesting human history.

We hope you'll be part of the group on this adventure in the Lower Rio Grande Valley!



Steve Robertson and Ivan Phillipsen

Co-owners and Lead Guides at Wild Latitudes

info@wildlatitudes.com 503-714-3504

TRIP DETAILS

Start Date: Feb 22, 2026

Duration of Tour: 8 days

Number of participants: Max of 12

Price of Tour: \$3,850 per person

Deposit: \$1,900

Single Supplement: \$900

Trip Leaders: David Jaffe and Eryn Bordes

Activity Level: Easy

Included:

- Double-occupancy lodging
- Ground transportation
- Breakfasts and lunches
- Excursions and park fees
- Guiding services

Not Included:

- Airfare to/from Texas at trip beginning/end
- Dinners
- Optional Activities
- Alcoholic beverages
- Personal items
- Optional gratuities for guides

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ITINERARY

Tentative and subject to change depending on weather, road, or other conditions.

Day 1 - Feb 22 - Arrive in Corpus Christi

Welcome to Texas! The tour begins with our arrival at Corpus Christi International Airport. We'll drive a short distance north to our lodging in Rockport, on the shore of Aransas Bay. After introductions all around, we'll have a brief orientation presentation and then enjoy our first dinner together.

Lodging: [Inn at Fulton Harbor, Rockport](#)

Day 2 - Feb 23 - Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

Today we get an early start and head north to explore **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge**. This large tract of public land protects marshes, oak woodlands, and prairies. We'll take a couple easy walks through wetlands along the edge of San Antonio Bay. Birds we hope to see here include **wintering waterfowl, White Ibis, Forster's Tern, White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, Eastern Phoebe, Carolina Wren, Northern**

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Cardinal, and **Short-eared Owl**. **American Alligators** are common in this area and with luck we'll encounter a few of these amazing reptiles!

An observation tower will give us a wide view over the refuge and may help us spot more birds. We'll drive the 9-mile auto tour loop in a leisurely fashion, stopping to identify birds and wildlife. Some mammals we may come across are **Nine-banded Armadillo**, **Bobcat**, and **Javelina** (also called Collared Peccary; a wild species of New World pig).

We'll return to our lodge in the later afternoon. Following our customary gathering to fill out our bird and wildlife lists, we'll head out to have a hearty dinner.

Lodging: [Inn at Fulton Harbor](#), Rockport

Day 3 - Feb 24 - Birding Boat Tour and Head South to Brownsville

Just across the street from our lodge is a small harbor. After breakfast, we'll head over to the harbor and board our tour boat. For the next several hours, we'll enjoy an intimate 3-hour cruise north to explore the wild margins of Aransas Wildlife Refuge. Our boat will hug the shore, skirting oyster reefs, to give us a unique vantage point



Whooping Crane

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for wildlife observation. We'll have great opportunities to see dozens of bird species: shorebirds, waders, and raptors. It's likely that we'll get close-up looks at the unforgettable and highly endangered **Whooping Crane**! We'll take extra time to watch the behavior of these elegant birds and hopefully get some good photos.

After our cruise, we'll have lunch, and then drive south towards Brownsville. Time allowing, we may stop to do some birding at Port Aransas Nature Preserve and/or Mustang Island State Park. We'll check the bird feeders at the King Ranch Visitor Center. This vast ranch protects a significant amount of natural habitat. At the visitor center we may see **Green Jay, White-winged Dove, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and Long-billed Thrasher**.



We have now crossed into the South Texas Plains ecoregion, characterized today by thorn scrub vegetation and home to many rare plants and animals that are more common in Mexico.

We arrive at our lodging in the early evening. We'll gather before dinner to go through our bird and wildlife lists.

Lodging: [Fairfield Inn, Brownsville](#)

Day 4 - Feb 25 - South Padre Island

This morning we head out early to visit Padre Island. At 113 miles from north to south, this is the world's longest barrier island. After driving through the glitz and traffic of a busy beach town, we'll visit the **South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center**. The boardwalks and bird blinds here face the mudflats and tidal wetlands

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on the east side of the island. Up-close encounters with numerous bird species along the path make this a great place to stroll for a couple hours. Species we may see include **Mottled Duck, Roseate Spoonbill, Reddish Egret, Least Bittern, and Black Skimmer.**

After lunch we'll take time to enjoy a stroll on the beach, look for some shorebirds, and dip our toes in the Gulf of Mexico. Then we head back to Brownsville. We may stop on the way to scan for **Aplomado Falcons** in the fields south of the highway. There is also the new South Texas Ecotourism Center for us to visit.

Not far from our hotel is **Resaca de La Palma State Park**. This is the first of several units of the **World Birding Center** that we'll visit. 'Resaca' is the local, Spanish name for an oxbow lake. These were once meandering sections of the Rio Grande River and now they provide important habitats for birds and other wildlife. Depending on how our day goes, we may have time to stroll the trails and observation decks of this park before or even after dinner.

Lodging: [Fairfield Inn, Brownsville](#)

Day 5 - Feb 26 - Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge

After checking out of our hotel, we head off this morning to visit **Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge**. This large refuge contains a unique mix of habitats: coastal prairie, thorn forest, dunes, wetlands, and tidal flats. Laguna Madre—the body of water on the eastern edge of the refuge—is one of only five hypersaline lagoons in the world. These habitats and the geography of the region make Laguna Atascosa a major migratory stopover for countless birds. There are plenty of resident and wintering birds here as well. The refuge is also home to some special mammals. It protects one of the only remaining breeding populations of **Ocelot** in the US. The Ocelot is a small, beautiful wild cat.

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Laguna Atascosa NWR



American Alligator

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We'll go birding along the trails and roads of the refuge all morning and then have a picnic lunch on site. The Visitor Center also has bird feeders and baths that attract many species. We have good chances of encountering birds like **Long-billed Thrasher**, **Greater Roadrunner**, **Harris's Hawk**, and **Olive Sparrow**.

We head west in the afternoon to the city of Weslaco, where we'll check into our hotel. After freshening up, we'll take a short drive to **Estero Llano Grande State Park**. This lovely park is another unit of the World Birding Center. A large wetland and woodland complex fills the 230-acre park. Some birds we're likely to spot here are **Least Grebe**, **Plain Chachalaca**, **Buff-bellied Hummingbird**, **Neotropic Cormorant**, **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**, and **White-eyed Vireo**.

Lodging: [Hampton Inn](#), Weslaco

Day 6 - Feb 27 - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park

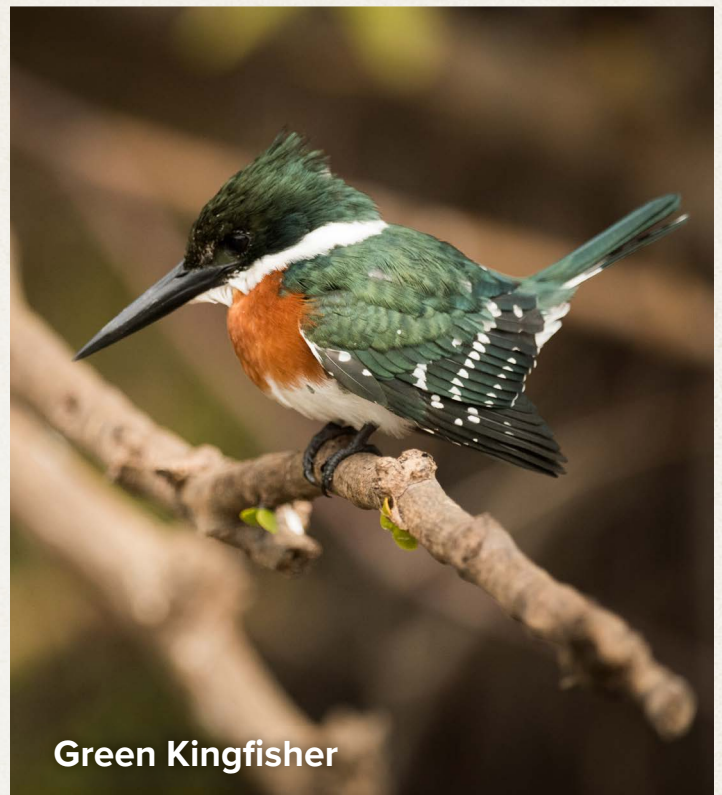
We'll spend most of today exploring the habitats of **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park**. This is the headquarters of the World Birding Center. We'll be on the lookout for more of the specialty birds of the Rio Grande Valley. We should see more charismatic **Green Jays** and hopefully birds like **Great Kiskadee**, **Gray Hawk**, **Ringed Kingfisher**, and **Altamira Oriole**. We'll picnic in the park and make sure to scan the countryside from the Hawk Observation Tower, where we can see across the border into Mexico.



Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP



Nine-banded Armadillo



Green Kingfisher

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Just around the corner is the privately-owned **National Butterfly Center**. We'll stop here in the afternoon to admire the free-flying butterflies among the flowers along the trails. Over 230 butterfly species have been seen here, including many that you'll find nowhere else in the US except in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

If time allows, we may also visit the historic adobe mansion of **Quinta Mazatlan**. The grounds are covered extensively with native plants and it's a great place to do some easy birding. We'll catch up on our bird and wildlife lists before heading to dinner.

Lodging: [Hampton Inn](#), Weslaco

Our Commitment to Conservation

On every Wild Latitudes tour, we aim to make a positive conservation impact wherever we travel. We utilize the services of local guides and, when possible, stay in environmentally-sensitive, locally-owned lodges. Through our partnership with the Rainforest Trust, a portion of all international tour fees goes to purchasing rainforest acreage, for its protection in perpetuity. On every trip, we also make a contribution to a local conservation effort that works to protect a native species or ecosystem.

Hawk Tower at Bentsen-RGV State Park



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Day 7 - Feb 28 - Salineño Nature Preserve and Falcon State Park

This morning, we make a journey 1.5 hours to the west, into the Texas-Tamaulipan Thornscrub ecosystem. This region is far less urbanized and is mostly a patchwork of large cattle ranches. We'll visit the tiny **Salineño Nature Preserve**, close to the banks of the Rio Grande. This spot has a year-round host who tends to bird feeders that teem with marvelous bird activity. We should find many of the species we've seen already on this trip and perhaps a few new ones. For example, we might spot Northern Bobwhite, Audubon's Oriole, Hooded Oriole, and White-tipped Dove. Salineño Preserve was, until recently, under threat of being destroyed by the construction of the border wall.

A little further west is **Falcon State Park**. The habitat here is arid, almost desert-like. Some birds we hope to find here include Common Ground Dove, Pyrrhuloxia, Verdin, Vermilion Flycatcher, Greater Roadrunner, and White-tailed Kite.

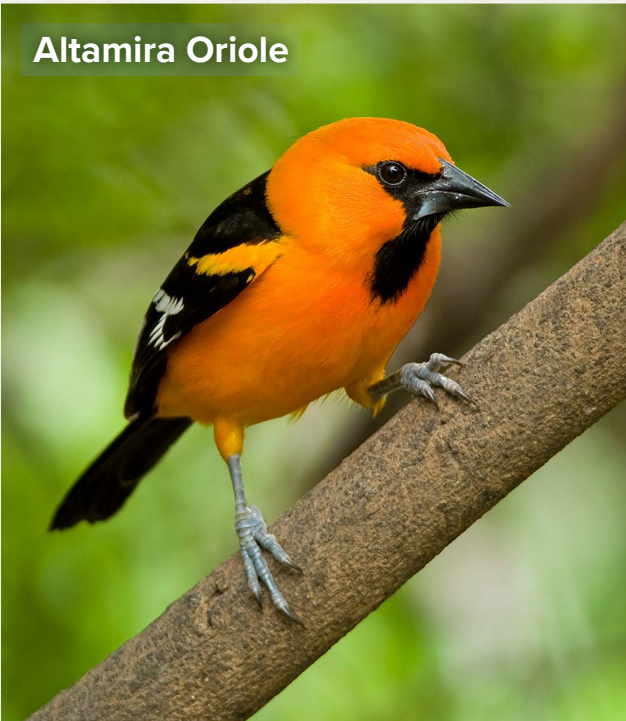
Returning to our hotel, we'll do one last round of filling out our bird lists and enjoy a final dinner together.

Lodging: [Hampton Inn](#), Weslaco

Day 8 - Mar 1 -Departures

Today we say our goodbyes—*adios amigos!*—and part company.

Altamira Oriole



Vermilion Flycatcher



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Your Guides

DAVID JAFFE

David Jaffe has been guiding and teaching since 1991. His childhood interest in nature eventually led him to Evergreen State College, WA where he earned a B.S. in Environmental Studies and Geology. After 13 years of 'life-experience' he returned to graduate school, earning a M.S. in Applied Ecology with The Field Naturalist Program from the University of Vermont.

David has trekked through the Himalaya in Nepal, looked into the eyes of masked boobies in the Galápagos, sought nudibranchs on the Great Barrier Reef, and walked the Ghats along the Ganges River in India. He has led backcountry trips in Denali National Park, learned from students in Kentucky, and gained great insights while hitchhiking home from work in Yosemite National Park. He has experience as a naturalist in many of the lower 48 states and Baja California. David worked as a divemaster in Australia, Costa Rica, and India. He assisted with the establishment of a marine protected area off the coast of Madagascar and researched and formally studied birds in Canada and South America. His understanding, love and enthusiasm about the natural world continues to grow.



STEVE BACKUS

Steve is an avid birder and naturalist with a background in the maritime industry hailing from North Carolina. Through his work and personal travels he has gotten to see many beautiful corners of the world and loves to share what he has experienced.

An infinitely curious person by nature, Steve is drawn to explore the life around him and the environments they occupy. Though the particulars of the individual organisms are incredibly exciting, he feels particularly drawn to the stories told of the relationships in the world around us and how those came to be. The constant flux of the natural world is of endless interest to him, and sharing the things he has learned is a great passion of his. Learning how life interacts and connects is a true passion of Steve's.

As a mariner, waterbirds are of particular interest to Steve and his time as a ship's naturalist, a captain of wildlife cruises, a point counter at migration hot-spots, and many other employments and community science efforts has deepened his appreciation of them. Though our feathered friends are Steve's primary area of expertise, he can be found peeking under logs and listening by swamps at night for the creeping and crawling life found beneath us.



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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

THE PACE AND STYLE OF OUR TOURS

The primary goal of our trips is to experience and learn about the natural world, especially the region's birds and other wildlife, and of course, to have fun! As birding is often a primary focus of our tours, and birds are active in the morning, we will sometimes have early morning outings before breakfast. That said, our style of birding may not be ideal for hard-core "listers." We prefer to spend time observing the species we encounter, and learn a bit about their natural history, rather than rushing through the field to add the maximum number of species to our bird list. We also make diversions for interesting, non-avian wildlife, plants, geological wonders, and cultural activities. The pace of most of our trips is moderate, and we encourage anyone in good health to attend and enjoy the experience. Please contact us if you need specific information on the types of physical activities on a tour and their physical requirements.

We strive to immerse participants in the local culture and to that end, wherever possible, we stay in locally owned and operated hotels that are designed and run in an environmentally sustainable way. Though some accommodations may be more basic than others, all are safe, clean and comfortable. We also utilize the services of local guides, visit local markets, and other culturally significant sites.

TOUR DATE AND TRIP LEADER CHANGES

Leaders and schedules are determined up to a year in advance of our tours. In the event that we have a change in a tour's dates or leaders, we reserve the right to do so, and will strive to inform participants as early in the process as possible. Additional leaders may be added to tours according to the group size, and will be specified in the tour itinerary. We also reserve the right to cancel any trip for which there are insufficient reservations.

HOW TO REGISTER FOR THE TOUR

When you're ready to sign up for the tour, please let us know by doing one of the following:

- Send us an email at info@wildlatitudes.com
- Call us at 503-714-3504

Then we'll send you the link to our online registration form. You can choose to pay your deposit by credit card or check. See 'Deposit Policy' below.

DEPOSIT POLICY

A deposit is due at the time of registration. ***A deposit is the only thing that guarantees your place on the trip.*** Registration with a credit card can be done with our online form or by calling: 503-714-3504. *Note:* there is an additional 3.0% fee for credit card payments. This is only what we are charged by the credit card company.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Checks are happily accepted and should be made out to *Wild Latitudes LLC*. Include the tour name on the memo line of the check and send to:

Wild Latitudes, PO Box 25115, Portland, OR 97298.

PAYMENT POLICY

Full payment is required **90 days** prior to the tour departure date for international tours or any tour involving flights; and **30 days** prior to the tour departure date for local (i.e. in the Portland, Oregon area), van-based tours.

CANCELLATION POLICY

In the event a participant needs to cancel a reservation for any tour, the following policies will apply:

- **90 days** or more prior to tour departure date, the deposit will be refunded, minus an administrative fee of \$100.
- **Less than 90 days but more than 60 days** prior to tour departure date, all payments refunded, minus 50% of deposit.
- **Less than 60 days** prior to tour departure date, no refunds will be given.

We *strongly* recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself from unforeseen circumstances.

If for any reason Wild Latitudes cancels a tour prior to the start of the tour, full refunds—minus the cost of any internal/in-country airline tickets purchased and/or any non-refundable deposits or expenses already made by Wild Latitudes—will be given to all participants. In the event that the tour is canceled while underway due to unforeseeable events such as but not limited to natural disaster, military activities, social uprising, or other extremely dangerous conditions not within the control of Wild Latitudes, no refund will be issued.
