



BIRDING TEXAS & BEYOND

ITINERARY, 2026

Rio Grande Valley Spring in the Valley April 22 - 28, 2026



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher © Greg Lasley

The Rio Grande Valley is located in the southernmost tip of Texas where the Rio Grande River and Gulf coast meet and extends from South Padre Island west to Falcon Lake. Many tropical bird species reach their northernmost range in the Rio Grande Valley making it one of the top birding destinations in the country. The area features Gulf beaches, tidal flats, bays, coastal prairies in the eastern Valley, subtropical woodlands in the mid-Valley, and desert-like scrub in the western Valley. Its geographic location, varied habitats and potential to see many species of birds, including rarities, make it a prime destination for birders. Our schedule will be flexible to changing conditions, ensuring we optimize our opportunities to observe a

diverse range of species. We will enjoy comfortable lodging accommodations, great regional cuisine and moderate drives to various birding locations to enjoy the varied bird life in this exciting region.

The tour's main focus is on finding many of the resident Rio Grande Valley specialties, spring migrants, wintering birds and any rarities that may be present in the region. The most recent rarities seen in the Rio Grande Valley include Mottled Owl, Crimson-collared Grosbeak, Roadside Hawk, and Rose-throated Becard. Some of the locations we will visit include Salineño Wildlife Preserve, Santa Margarita Ranch, Falcon State Park, and iconic birding sites including Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

The first part of the tour leads us to the upper Valley, where diverse bird species can be observed due to the distinct habitats in the area. The arid uplands of Falcon State Park include rolling hills covered with mesquite, wild olive, cactus and native grasses offer sightings of birds like Black-throated Sparrow, Pyrrhuloxia, Verdin, and Cactus Wren to name a few. Moving east towards Salineño and Santa Margarita Ranch, the riparian areas along the Rio Grande River provide habitat for Audubon's Oriole, Muscovy Duck, Brown Jay, Ringed and Green Kingfishers, Morelet's Seedeater, and Red-billed Pigeon. We continue the tour downriver to the mid-Valley region. The habitat in this region is characterized by subtropical woodlands, featuring moss-covered cedar elm trees, ebony, willows, and an assortment of native shrubs and flowers. The wetlands in the area offer essential water sources for wildlife and play a critical role in the ecosystem and sustainability of bird life in the region. Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, and Estero Llano Grande State Park are great places to see Altamira Oriole, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Common Pauraque, Least Grebe, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, and Olive Sparrow.

We conclude our tour on the eastern end of the Valley, which includes Laguna Vista Nature Trail, South Padre Island, and Brownsville. The extensive mudflats and wetlands in this region provide habitat for waterfowl and shorebird species. In addition, the wooded habitats allow for resident species and migrating passerines such as warblers, vireos, thrushes, buntings, and flycatchers. The coastal prairie areas between Brownsville and the Gulf coast support a variety of raptor species including Aplomado Falcon, White-tailed Kite, Harris's Hawk and White-tailed Hawk. While in Brownsville, we stop at Oliveira Park to observe several species of Amazon parrots as they settle into their evening roost.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Look for desert species such as Black-throated Sparrow, Scaled Quail, Cactus Wren, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Greater Roadrunner at Falcon State Park.
- Marvel at the variety of tropical bird species that reach their northernmost range in this region including Green Jay, Altamira Oriole, Ringed Kingfisher, Plain Chachalaca, Morelet's Seedeater, Brown Jay, and Hook-billed Kite.

- Observe large numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds at South Padre Island and the possibility of spring migrant passerines.
- Spot several raptor species including Gray Hawk, White-tailed Hawk, Harris's Hawk, Crested Caracara, Hook-billed Kite, and Aplomado Falcon.
- Welcome the possibility of seeing rare vagrant birds from south of the border.

TOUR LEADER: Cameron Cox



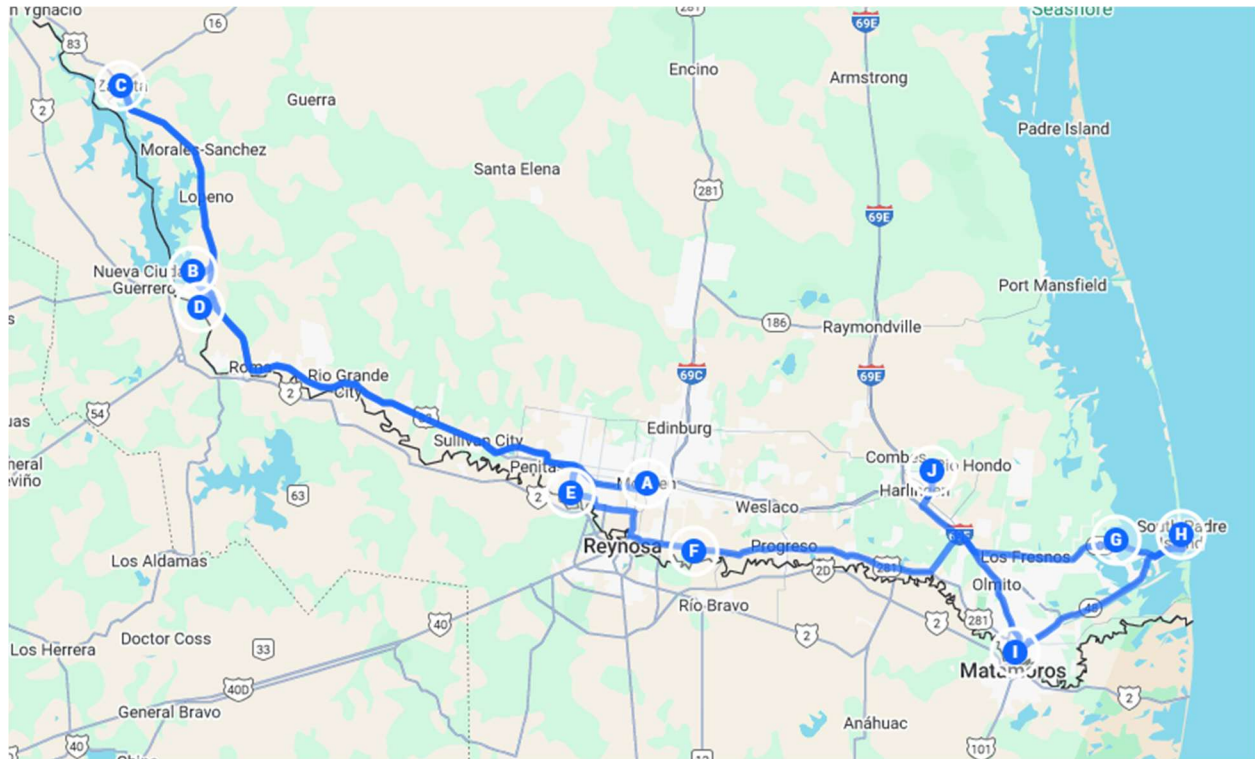
An avid birder for over thirty years, Cameron's passion is teaching others the joy of birds and that even the nuances of bird identification can be fun to learn. He is the author of *Terns of North America*, a *Photographic Guide* and coauthor of *The Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching*. When guiding his focus is on keeping things fun so everyone gets the best experience possible while being peppered by bird facts and ID tips. He and his wife, Allison, and their small herd of dogs and cats split their time between coastal Washington and south Texas.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 8 participants

DIFFICULTY LEVEL & PACE OF THE TOUR: Moderate (2-3 miles of daily walking). Field time each day is typically between 7-10 hours (weather permitting). Most of the birding is done on trails, boardwalks, beaches and along the road as we drive to various birding locations. Walking on uneven, soggy terrain, or in the rain is possible. Days generally start with breakfast at the hotel and departure for the field between 6:30 to 7:00 am. with the exception of one earlier morning departure the day we visit Santa Margarita Ranch. We bird throughout the morning, take a break for lunch and resume birding until 5:00 pm followed by dinner at a local restaurant.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION: The tour price is \$3,115 per person in double occupancy. The single supplement for this tour is \$540. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single room accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot arrange one for you. The tour package includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7, ground transportation during the tour, entrance fees to parks/preserves, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, and guided services provided by the tour leader(s). It does not include travel expenses including but not limited to airfare to and from the tour destination, travel insurance, extended stays (before and/or after the tour), alcoholic beverages, gratuities, and items/expenses of personal nature.

TOUR ROUTE



J - Start/End: Harlingen, Valley International Airport (VIA)
(Hotel-Overnight Stay in Harlingen, Nights 4-6)

A – McAllen (Hotel-Overnight Stay, Nights 1-3)

B – Falcon State Park

C – Zapata

D – Salineño Wildlife Preserve / Santa Margarita Ranch / Fronton

E – Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park

F – Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge / Estero Llano Grande State Park

G – Laguna Vista Nature Trail

H – South Padre Island / Convention Center Boardwalk / Valley Land Fund Migratory Bird Sanctuary Lots

I – Brownsville / Resaca de La Palma State Park

ITINERARY

Wednesday, April 22 – Day 1: Arrive to Harlingen Valley International Airport (VIA) before 2 pm. After meeting everyone at the airport, we drive west to McAllen to check in to our hotel. If time allows, we try to get in a few hours of birding at local sites before the evening orientation session and welcome dinner. Overnight: Home2 Suites, McAllen.

Thursday, April 23 – Day 2: Santa Margarita Ranch, Zapata, and Falcon State Park.

Today we head to the western end of the Rio Grande Valley to bird the arid thorn scrub and riparian areas along the Rio Grande River. Our first stop is Santa Margarita Ranch, which is a private ranch located downriver from Falcon Dam. This location offers a unique birding experience as you stand on high bluffs overlooking the Rio Grande River and the riparian woodlands of the property. Currently, the ranch is the only location in the United States where you can reliably see Brown Jay. In addition to the jays, we have a good chance to see Muscovy Duck, Red-billed Pigeon, Hook-billed Kite, Ringed Kingfisher, Green Kingfisher, and a large number of wintering ducks in the river below. There have also been a number of rare birds seen in recent years on the ranch including Rose-throated Becard and Mottled Owl. Next, we visit a local park in Zapata to look for the highly localized Morelet's Seedeater which always proves a challenge to find. Our final stop of the day is Falcon State Park, which sits on the shores of Falcon Lake with opportunities to see Black-throated Sparrow, Cactus Wren, Pyrrhuloxia, Greater Roadrunner and other desert birds. The lake can also be a good place to see American White Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, and a variety of wintering ducks. Overnight: Home2 Suites, McAllen.



Pyrrhuloxia © Greg Lasley

Friday, April 24 – Day 3: Salineño, Fronton, and Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park.

We return to the upper Valley to pick up where we left off to explore Salineño, Fronton and a brief visit to Roma Bluffs. We will concentrate on any upper Valley specialties we may have missed on our first day as well as targeting any rarities that may be present in the area. In Salineño, volunteers often maintain bird feeding stations which allow us to get great views of various specialty birds including Audubon's Oriole and Green Jay. The Rio Grande River at Salineño is an ideal location to scan the water and sky for Muscovy Duck and Red-billed Pigeon, while the surrounding upland areas may yield Scaled Quail, Rock Wren, and Lark



Altamira Oriole © Greg Lasley

day in McAllen to look for Green Parakeets returning to their roosting sites, we may also see Bronzed Cowbird among the hundreds of Great-tailed Grackles. Overnight: Home2 Suites, McAllen.

Bunting. Later in the day we drive east to visit Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Here we have a chance to see an extensive list of Valley specialties including White-tipped Dove, Olive Sparrow, Altamira Oriole, Green Jay, Plain Chachalaca, Harris's Hawk, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, and more. The hawk watch tower is an excellent place to scan the treetops and sky above the park for both Hook-billed Kite and Gray Hawk. We end the

Saturday, April 25 – Day 4: Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and Estero Llano Grande State Park. Today we focus our efforts in the mid-Valley region visiting Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and Estero Llano Grande State Park. The iconic Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge has a long history of being one of the top birding spots in the country. We spend a few hours exploring the subtropical woodlands and ponds in the refuge where we may see Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Couch's Kingbird, Great Kiskadee, Green Kingfisher, Groove-billed Ani, and Least Grebe. Like Bentsen State Park, Santa Ana also has a hawk watch tower which we visit to get a bird's eye view of the park's canopy and open skies, where we may see migrating raptors such as Mississippi Kite, Broad-winged and



Common Pauraque © Greg Lasley

Swainson's Hawks. Our final destination for the day is Estero Llano Grande State Park. This small park offers a variety of habitats and with that a large array of bird species. We can see Common Pauraque, Brown-crested Flycatcher, and Tropical Parula as well as White-tailed Kite, Least Bittern, and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in the open fields and wetlands. Overnight: Hampton Inn and Suites, Harlingen.

Sunday, April 26 – Day 5:
Laguna Vista Nature Trail,
South Padre Island, and
Brownsville.

We drive to the eastern end of the Valley and bird the coastal areas including Laguna Vista Nature Trail, South Padre Island and other nearby areas. The walking trail and observation blinds of the Laguna Vista Nature Trail provide opportunities to see many species up close such as Green Jay, Olive Sparrow,



Painted Bunting © Greg Lasley

Long-billed and Curve-billed Thrashers, as well as the possibility of migrants such as Painted Bunting. Next, we depart for South Padre Island to visit the South Padre Island Convention Center Boardwalk and the Valley Land Fund Migratory Bird Sanctuary lots which provide habitat for neotropical migrants and overwintering species. Depending on weather conditions, we may have the opportunity to witness a spring fallout with several species of



American Oystercatcher © Greg Lasley

migrant species present, including warblers, vireos, orioles, thrushes, buntings, and flycatchers. The coastal marshes and mudflats are brimming with birds including Wilson's Plover, Snowy Plover, American Oystercatcher, Reddish Egret, Clapper Rail, Roseate Spoonbill, Brown Pelican and more. We also spend time along the Gulf beach to look for any ducks, shorebirds, or pelagic species. We end our day in

Brownsville at Oliveira Park to witness the nightly flight of Amazon parrots coming into the park to roost. Here we can see Red-crowned, Red-lored, Yellow-headed and White-fronted Parrots in addition to Green Parakeet. Overnight: Hampton Inn and Suites, Harlingen.

Monday, April 27 – Day 6: Resaca de la Palma State Park, Coastal Prairies, and Brownsville. We drive east towards Brownsville and visit Resaca de la Palma State Park and some of the coastal prairie areas east of Brownsville. Resaca de la Palma is a great place to

see various Rio Grande Valley specialty birds. We spend the morning exploring the park before departing for the coastal prairies located between Brownsville and Port Isabel. These coastal prairies are made up of various native grasses with mesquite, Spanish dagger, and prickly pear. There are also bodies of water in these prairies providing habitat for various waterbirds. Our main target will be the Aplomado Falcon which has re-established a small



Aplomado Falcon © Greg Lasley

population in this area after disappearing in the 1930s. Other birds we may see in the coastal prairies include Botteri's and Cassin's Sparrows, White-tailed Hawk, Chihuahuan Raven and a variety of shorebirds. The afternoon will be flexible to allow us to look for species we may have missed, rarities that may be in the area or revisit a favorite birding location. Overnight: Hampton Inn and Suites, Harlingen.

Tuesday, April 28 – Day 7: Tour Conclusion & Departures. If time allows, we visit a few local birding spots in Harlingen including Hugh Ramsey Nature Park, to get in some final birding before your flight home. We will arrive at the airport by no later than 11 am. Participants may arrange departing flights from Harlingen Valley International Airport (VIA) after 1 pm.

TARGET SPECIES. The following is a brief list of target species to look for during our tour – along with a possibility of adding a rarity or two.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	Hook-billed Kite	Brown Jay
Muscovy Duck	White-tailed Hawk	Green Jay
Plain Chachalaca	Gray Hawk	Long-billed Thrasher
Least Grebe	Ringed Kingfisher	Clay-colored Thrush
Red-billed Pigeon	Green Kingfisher	Tropical Parula
White-tipped Dove	Aplomado Falcon	Olive Sparrow
Groove-billed Ani	Great Kiskadee	Morelet's Seedeater
Common Pauraque	Couch's Kingbird	Altamira Oriole
Buff-bellied Hummingbird	Tropical Kingbird	Audubon's Oriole
White-tailed Kite	Gull-billed Tern	Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet
Sandwich Tern	Botteri's Sparrow	And many more!

REGISTRATION & PAYMENTS: To register for this tour you will need to complete an online reservation form. The non-refundable deposit for this tour is \$300 per person. All payments, including initial deposits and final balances, may be made by credit card through PayPal, check, money order, or bank/wire transfer (we will provide our bank information). Deposits are due 14 days from the date you submit your reservation form. Full payment is due as soon as the tour confirms or 60 days prior to the tour start date, whichever comes first. We will invoice you accordingly.

Please read our Terms and Conditions for more information before booking any of our tours or services. Our Terms and Conditions include important information about how we operate our tours, including the cancellation policy, travel insurance, health and fitness requirements, and more.