

WEST TEXAS CIBOLO CREEK LODGE SEPTEMBER 8-14, 2009

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Located at the base of the Chinati Mountains in the Big Bend Country of west Texas, Cibolo Creek Ranch is simply put, a birder's paradise. This incredible lodge has wonderful rooms, a swimming pool, superb food, and great birding as soon as you step outside your room. We will spend four nights at the ranch and will scour the area looking for the numerous resident birds and enjoying the height of fall migration. A wide variety of western migrants as well as southwestern specialty birds are possible. In addition we will have one full day in the Davis Mountains, where higher elevations and heavily wooded slopes yield a different variety of birds. We will spend some time learning the birds and the different habitats in which they occur. This should be a relaxing trip since we only use two hotels, but should also produce a very impressive list of birds.

September 8, Day 1: Arrival in El Paso; Wilderness Park. Participants should make arrangements to arrive in El Paso today. Once at the airport you may proceed to call the Wyndham Hotel from the courtesy phone in the baggage claim area to request a transfer to the hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. If your luggage is light, you may wish to walk as the Wyndham is only about 200 yards from the airport terminal. We will meet in the lobby at 4:00 p.m. for a brief orientation session, followed by birding at a desert locale at the base of the Franklin Mountains in north El Paso. The Wilderness Park Museum, located here, hosts a variety of common Chihuahuan Desert species. We could see Gambel's and Scaled quails, Cactus Wren, Verdin, Pyrrhuloxia, and Black-throated Sparrow, among others. With luck we might find the elusive Crissal Thrasher. This excursion should serve as a good introduction to some of the representative birds as well as the desert plants that occur in the area. Time permitting we may also check some nearby hummingbird feeders, as hummingbird migration is in full swing at this time. We will return to a restaurant near the hotel this evening for dinner.

NIGHT: Wyndham Hotel, El Paso

September 9, Day 2: El Paso to Cibolo Creek Ranch. We will start our day early this morning, working our way southeast of El Paso along the Rio Grande river valley. Stops at nearby irrigation impoundments should yield a variety of waterbirds. Both Western and Clark's grebes are to be expected, and numerous ducks, shorebirds, and terns are possible. The drive through the agricultural lands will provide more opportunities for locating a Crissal Thrasher. Other species to look for include Swainson's Hawk, Harris's Hawk (localized), Greater Roadrunner, Burrowing Owl, Western Kingbird, and Blue Grosbeak. By mid to late morning, we will head eastward toward Van Horn, where we will stop for lunch.

The drive from Van Horn to Cibolo Creek will take us through some high desert grasslands. Pronghorns may be in evidence along the way. A variety of sparrows (including Lark Bunting) are possible along the way, as are other open country species such as Swainson's Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike, Say's Phoebe, Chihuahuan Raven, and Eastern Meadowlark. We may arrive at Cibolo Creek in time for some late afternoon birding (the grounds here are quite birdy) or we may opt to relax a bit before dinner.

NIGHT: Cibolo Creek Ranch

September 10-12, Days 3-5: Cibolo Creek Ranch & Davis Mountains. Cibolo Creek is a 25,000-acre ranch that sits at the base of the Chinati Mountains. The owner has built a beautiful lodge adjacent to two springs called Hacienda de Cibolo. This is a luxurious facility, complete with lovely rooms and excellent food. Best of all, it is crawling with birds. The lodge grounds themselves and the nearby springs serve as an oasis for both resident and migrating birds. Species seen commonly near the lodge include Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Say's and Black phoebes, Vermilion Flycatcher, Cassin's Kingbird, and Curve-billed Thrasher. Cottonwoods and willows surrounding the springs may harbor Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Phainopepla (sporadic), Bells' Vireo, Blue Grosbeak, Painted and Varied buntings, and Summer Tanager. We will have two full days to leisurely bird the ranch property itself and another to venture to the cool and scenic Davis Mountains a short distance to the northeast.

Our journeys around the ranch will take us into higher canyons of the Chinatis. Here one may encounter Golden Eagle (uncommon); Zone-tailed Hawk; Scaled Quail; White-throated Swift; Rock, Canyon, and Bewick's wrens; Black-tailed Gnatcatcher; Rufous-crowned and Black-throated sparrows; and Canyon Towhee. Mid-September is the peak of passerine migration in West Texas, so a wide variety of migrant flycatchers (possibly including the likes of Cordilleran, Dusky, Gray, and Hammond's flycatchers; Western Wood-Pewee; and Olive-sided Flycatcher), vireos (Warbling and Plumbeous), warblers (Orange-crowned, Virginia's, Townsend's, Black-throated Gray, Yellow-rumped, Wilson's and MacGillivray's), and sparrows (Lark, Vesper, Brewer's, Clay-colored, Lincoln's, and White-crowned) could be encountered. Western Tanager, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-headed Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, and Scott's Oriole are also likely. Even the highly sought Gray Vireo is a possibility in this area. One evening we will venture out on an owling expedition with Western Screech-Owl as our main target. Any nocturnal prowling could also turn up an unexpected surprise such as a Gray Fox or a group of Javelinas.

Our day in the Davis Mountains should yield a slightly different group of birds. The mountains here are heavily forested with pines, junipers, and oaks. As a result they host a correspondingly different group of birds. Acorn Woodpecker, Cassin's Kingbird, Bushtit, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-crested Titmouse, Western Bluebird, and Hepatic Tanager are among the possibilities. With real luck we could stumble onto a Montezuma Quail along the roadside.

NIGHTS: Cibolo Creek Ranch

September 13, Day 6: Cibolo Creek to El Paso. Our schedule today will depend on what species we are missing and the movement of migrants throughout the area. We may spend some part of the morning around Cibolo Creek, but will certainly reserve time for birding back in the El Paso area. This may include revisiting the local reservoirs (species change on a day-to-day basis at this season) or checking out a local residence with hummingbird feeders (Black-chinned, Broad-tailed, Rufous, and Calliope are all good possibilities). By late afternoon we will be back at the Wyndham Hotel in El Paso.

NIGHT: Wyndham Hotel, El Paso

September 14, Day 7: Departure for home. Participants may make arrangements to depart El Paso at any time today.

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 very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Barry Zimmer and Brennan Mulrooney

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 co-authored 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 1,000 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.

Brennan Mulrooney was born and raised in San Diego, California. Growing up, his heart and mind were captured by the ocean. He split his summer days between helping out behind the scenes at southern California's leading aquarium and working on sport fishing vessels off the coast. As a wildlife and fisheries biology major at UC Davis, he developed his fascination with birds and love of birding while taking a required ornithology course. Since graduating from UC Davis, Brennan has traveled throughout the United States working on widespread ornithological field studies. His work has taken him from the mountains of northern California to the Salton Sea in southern California, and from Cape May, New Jersey to Key Largo, Florida. Currently Brennan lives in San Diego with his wife Brynne and their son Declan. Participants often comment that Brennan's sharp eyes, sharper wit, and easygoing attitude make it a pleasure to bird with him.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$3055** per person in double occupancy from El Paso, Texas. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 6, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to El Paso and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$565**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$150** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date
Between 120 and 90 days before departure
Fewer than 90 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$150.
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.
No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends “Travel Insured International” as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available however stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact “Travel Insured International” prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than “Travel Insured International”, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

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.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

AIR INFORMATION: 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. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: To prevent crowding in the vehicles, we ask participants to limit your luggage to one medium sized suitcase per person, plus one carry-on bag. As a precaution, if you are flying to meet the tour and checking luggage, we urge you to pack a change of clothes, your binoculars, any medication, toiletries, and other essentials into your airline carry-on bag.

CLIMATE/CLOTHING: Temperatures vary at this season from year to year. Expected highs would be in the mid to upper 80s with lows in the low 60s to mid50s. Lingering summer heat could bring temperatures into the 90s, or an early fall could result in lows well down in the 50s. Rain is possible, as this is the tail end of the monsoon season, so make sure to bring some light rain gear. Dress will be casual throughout. Jeans or other field pants and a combination of short-sleeved and long-sleeved shirts will be appropriate for most birding. Shorts may be useful for warmer afternoons and a light jacket could be needed for cooler mornings. There will not be any laundry stops available. The ranch has a lovely pool, so please bring a swimsuit as there will be some time off in the mid-afternoon for pool use. Comfortable walking shoes (such as tennis shoes) and a pair of hiking boots are recommended. A good hat for sun protection is also recommended.

CONDITIONS: We will make a few short, relatively leisurely hikes on most days. None of these will likely cover more than one mile total. Most will be over relatively flat ground, but there may be some elevational gain on the hikes in the higher canyons. Elevations along our route vary from around 4000 feet in El Paso to over 6500 feet in the Davis Mountains. Bring a water bottle along for the hikes. Breakfast times will vary from about 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m. Generally we will bird most of the morning, take a post-lunch break, and then resume in the late afternoon. We will try to allow plenty of time to enjoy the ranch itself while still maximizing our birding hours. This schedule will not apply to travel days.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope (especially useful for water birding around El Paso), but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

Sunscreen is essential, as is an alarm clock, as there is no wake-up service at Cibolo Creek. If you bring a camera, bring plenty of film as it will not be readily available during the course of the tour. There is a possibility that we may offer an optional owling excursion one night, so a small flashlight may come in handy. Lip balm can be a good thing to have in the dry climate of West Texas.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots.

INSECTS: As this is the tail end of the rainy season in the desert southwest, we may encounter some mosquitoes (especially in areas near the river or impoundments). Chiggers can be a problem in much of Texas, but are generally not found in Big Bend country. We suggest you bring a can of repellent as a precaution.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Indispensable in the field will be your favorite North American field guides, plus guides to other topics that particularly interest you (mammals, reptiles and amphibians, trees, cacti, geology, etc.). A guide to the birds of Mexico will be carried by your leader in the unlikely, but always possible, event that a stray Mexican species of bird is encountered. **To use during the tour, we recommend a good U.S. field guide, such as the *National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of North America*.**

- Davis, William B. and David Schmidly. *The Mammals of Texas*. Texas Parks & Wildlife, 1994.
- Glassburg, Jeffrey. *Butterflies through Binoculars, The West*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Lockwood, Mark and Brush Freeman. *Handbook of Texas Birds*. Texas A&M University Press, 2004.
- Lockwood, Mark W. and Brad McKinney, James Paton, and Barry Zimmer. *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*. Lane/ ABA Birdfinding Guide. American Birding Association, 1999.
- Peterson, Jim and Barry Zimmer. *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1998.
- Tennant, Alan. *A Field Guide to Texas Snakes*. Texas Monthly Press, 1985.
- Tweit, Susan J. *The great Southwest Nature Factbook*. Alaska Northwest Books, 1992.
- Wauer, Roland H. and Carl Fleming. *A Naturalist's Big Bend*. College Station. Texas A&M Press 2002.
- West, Steve. Northern Chihuahuan *Desert Wildflowers*. Falcon Publishing, 2002.
- Zimmer, Kevin J. *Birding in the American West*. Cornell University Press, 2000.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger 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

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defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect November 14, 2008 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.