

# SPRING ON THE CENTRAL TEXAS COAST

## FALCON POINT RANCH AT SEADRIFT

### APRIL 18-23, 2010

©2009

*The Texas Coast -- everywhere along the Texas Coast – has long been known as one of the premier areas in the world to observe bird migration. Although the Central Coast is not as familiar to visiting birders as other parts of Texas, it offers almost unlimited possibilities for an exciting spring trip. This region is still largely devoted to traditional ranching and farming activities, and thus has a “wilder”, less-crowded feel to it. Many interesting habitats are readily accessible, making for very productive birding. With the opening of The Lodge at Falcon Point Ranch, we now have a wonderful place to stay, right on a 6000 acre hunting reserve fronting on San Antonio Bay opposite the vast Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The Lodge is luxurious by Texas coast standards, the food is exceptional, and the sunsets over the bay are never to be forgotten.*

*Every spring millions of birds journey north from their wintering grounds in the American tropics to breed in the forests and tundras of North America. Many fly over the Gulf of Mexico, and if they encounter north wind or rain, they may be put down by the thousands. Under these conditions, flock after flock of shorebirds pours into the fields, marshes and mudflats, while songbirds appear like magic in the isolated live oak “mottes” (groves). Surrounded by hundreds of square miles of coastal marsh and prairie, these small woodlands offer much needed food and shelter to the exhausted migrants, providing some of the most exciting birding to be found anywhere in the world. Here birders hope for “bad weather” to bring the birds in! This trip is timed to coincide with the peak of the spring migration along the Texas coast and we have a very good chance of experiencing the “fallout” phenomenon. Even if we don’t experience a major-fallout, there is always an incredible variety of birds to be seen in this region.*

*Every day on the Texas coast in spring is exciting for birders. A few migrants put down daily, while the coastal areas team with water-associated birds of a wide variety. This region harbors major nesting populations of Mottled Duck, Reddish Egret and other members of the heron family, ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, American Oystercatcher and numerous terns. The coastal bays, mudflats and nearby fields attract most of the North American shorebirds, while the vast marshes shelter specialties like Least Bittern, Clapper Rail and Seaside Sparrow. Raptors are a frequent sight on the coastal prairie, including the beautiful White-tailed Hawk in its major U.S. breeding area, plus White-tailed Kite, Crested Caracara and more familiar species. Woodland birds of the eastern forests reach their southern limit in this region, while a few of the South Texas birds extend their ranges northeastward to the isolated patches of brush here.*

*This tour is designed to provide an introduction to the rich avifauna of the Central Texas Coast. It will focus on bird migration, and we will spend time carefully studying and learning the birds, as well as discussing the phenomenon of bird migration and the habitats that are so critical to the migrants. This will be an exciting week on the Texas coast!*

## *Spring on the Central Texas Coast; Page 2*

**April 18, Day 1: Arrival in Corpus Christi.** Participants may plan to arrive in Corpus Christi, TX at any time today (airport code CRP) and transfer to our hotel where rooms will be reserved in your name. Taxicab service is available from the baggage claims area of the airport with fares approximately \$15-18. We will assemble as a in the hotel lobby at 6:30 P.M. for a get-acquainted dinner and orientation session.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites (Navigation Road), Corpus Christi

**April 19, Day 2: Corpus Christi area; drive to Falcon Point Ranch.** Located on Nueces Bay, Corpus Christi has consistently won “The Birdiest City in America” contest for years now, not surprising given the abundance of good habitat right within the city. There are many spots to check, but this morning we will concentrate on the coastal waterbirds (unless conditions are good for a “fallout”). The tidal mudflats of the Cayo de Oso attract throngs of shorebirds, offering a great chance to study and compare the various look-alikes, while the salt lagoons and beaches closer to the outer coast are home to Brown Pelican, Reddish Egret, Piping and Wilson’s plovers, American Avocet, Red Knot, eight species of terns, Black Skimmer and many others. Our schedule is flexible and if the weather looks good for a movement of migrant songbirds we will check several key groves of trees and scrub.

In the afternoon we will drive up the coastal prairies to Falcon Point Ranch, near the village of Seadrift. This 6000 acre private reserve is located on the Intracoastal Canal overlooking San Antonio Bay and offers excellent accommodation and food with an abundance of birds right at hand.

NIGHT: The Lodge at Falcon Point Ranch, Seadrift

**April 20-21, Days 3-4: Falcon Point Ranch and nearby region.** We will have two full days to bird Falcon Point Ranch and the nearby areas of the Central Coast. Our daily activities here will depend upon the weather. Inclement weather on the Texas coast in the spring often means that more migrants will stop along the coast, and with luck a "norther" will hit while we are here. The rain and winds associated with such frontal movements can cause an impressive “fallout” of migrants into the coastal groves. If this happens we will alter our plans to take advantage of the spectacle. Migrant warblers are everyone’s favorite group at this season – and we may see 20 or more species if we are lucky – but who complains about flocks of Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks flushing from the grasslands, or Summer and Scarlet tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Baltimore Orioles foraging through the trees?

Habitats are varied in this region and birds are abundant. In the coastal marshes and flats near the lodge we are likely to find most of the members of the heron family found in North America, plus birds like American White Pelican, Neotropic Cormorant, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit and other shorebirds. American Oystercatchers nest on the small oyster-shell islands in the bay. Throughout the region there are isolated patches of trees and brush that can shelter arriving migrants. The undeveloped coastal prairies of this region are home to the major U.S. population of the White-tailed Hawk, an especially beautiful raptor, and Crested Caracaras are a frequent sight. Wild Turkey, Northern Bobwhite, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Painted Buntings enliven the prairies where the wildflower displays can be spectacular.

In nearby marshes we may find Purple Gallinule, Clapper and perhaps other rails, Marsh and Sedge wrens, and secretive Seaside and Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrows. If we are lucky we will find a flooded rice field attracting some of the less common shorebirds like Buff-breasted and Stilt sandpipers, Hudsonian Godwit and Wilson’s Phalarope, and perhaps even Fulvous Whistling-Ducks. There is much to see and do here!

NIGHTS: The Lodge at Falcon Point Ranch, Seadrift

**April 22, Day 5: Falcon Point Ranch to Corpus Christi:** Flexibility is the name of the game for a successful migration trip on the Texas coast and how we spend this day will depend on the weather and the birds that we have not yet found. There are many possibilities. If conditions look good for a “fallout”, we will head to the

outer coast. Perhaps we will choose to bird the marshes and rice fields in the Falcon Point region again. Or we may visit the Rockport area. Whatever we do, we will end up in Corpus Christi in the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites (Navigation Road), Corpus Christi

**April 23, Day 6: Corpus Christi (morning) and departure for home.** We will have a final morning to bird the migrant traps in Corpus Christi today. Every day brings a turnover of migrants on the Texas coast and we are likely to find birds that had not been present in previous days. We plan to arrive at the Corpus Christi airport between 11-11:30 A.M., so participants should plan to book flights after 1:00 P.M.

**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:** The tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADER:** David Wolf and 2<sup>nd</sup> leader tba.

**David Wolf** is a senior member of the VENT staff and one of our most experienced tour leaders. After birding the U.S. and Mexico for over a decade, an interest in the wildlife of Africa led him to Kenya in 1975, where he spent over a year studying the birds and other wildlife of the African continent. Soon after his return to Texas he began leading Rockport Wildlife Weekends for VENT, at that time a new company, and he hasn't looked back since. In addition to Africa, David has extensive birding and tour-leading experience in North America and the Neotropics, and has birded widely on all of the continents. He unites great birding skills with a wide-ranging interest in all aspects of natural history, which he shares readily with tour participants. David and his wife, Mimi, live on a small farm in Nacogdoches, Texas, with assorted horses, cats, and dogs. They have two grown children, Matt and Elena, and are now happy grandparents.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$1935** per person in double occupancy from Corpus Christi. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast 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 Corpus Christi and return, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$320**. 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.

**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.

**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,

## *Spring on the Central Texas Coast; Page 4*

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.**

**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:** On all of our Texas tours, we ask participants to please limit their baggage to one medium-sized piece of luggage and one carry-on bag. Please avoid bringing rigid suitcases if possible. Soft-sided bags (roll-ons, duffel bags, etc.) are much preferred, as space for carrying luggage in vans is limited.

**CLOTHING:** Temperatures on the Central Texas coast in April normally involve lows in the 60s and highs in the 80s, with the possibility of even warmer weather. However, a late “norther” may bring rain and temperatures in the 50s. So, while light field clothing is the norm, you should also bring along a warm sweater or light jacket and raingear. Comfortable walking shoes or boots are essential. Dress will be informal throughout.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). An alarm clock is essential. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. If you are bringing a camera, we suggest you bring sufficient film also, as it will not always be readily available during the tour. It is also recommended that you bring a refillable water bottle to carry water. Laundry service is available from the lodge.

**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.

**INSECT PROTECTION:** Chiggers, mosquitoes, and ticks can be a problem in Texas, and insect repellent is strongly recommended (we suggest Cutters or Off; some people like to use them in combination).

**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 the world's species do not carry disease. They do feed on bodily fluids, however, 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 particular, 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 commonly employed by many.
- Apply a cream-style insect repellent, such as "Cutters" to your body from the waist down BEFORE putting on your clothing.
- Spray your pants and socks with a spray repellent such as "Cutters" or "Off." Repellents with high concentrations of DEET (70-100%) are most effective. You do not need to apply these to you skin, only to clothing. (Be careful as DEET will damage plastics and lens coatings). Repel Permanone is an odorless aerosol insecticide that offers perhaps the best defense against chiggers. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online. It should only be applied to clothes and allowed to dry before you dress. Never apply Permanone directly to the skin. Permethrin is known to be a highly toxic chemical to insects. It is the active ingredient in Permanone, but is present in a small amount (0.5%).
- 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.
- 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:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://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](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) which specializes in ornithology books.

**For use during the tour, we recommend:**

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. National Audubon Society. New York: Knopf, 2000.

***Birds:***

Choate, Ernest A. *The Dictionary of American Bird Names*. Boston: Harvard Commons Press, 1985.

## ***Spring on the Central Texas Coast; Page 6***

- DeGraaf, Richard M. & John H. Rappole. *Neotropical Migratory Birds: Natural History, Distribution, and Population Change*. Ithaca: Comstock/Cornell U. Press, 1995.
- Dunn, Jon & Kimball Garrett. *A Field Guide to the Warblers of North America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.
- Ehrlich, Paul R., David S. Dobkin & Darryl Wheye. *The Birder's Handbook. A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988.
- Holt, Harold R. *A Birder's Guide to the Texas Coast*. American Birding Association, 1993.
- Kaufman, Kenn. *Birds of North America*. Kaufman Focus Guides. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth Edition. Washington, D.C.: NGS, 2007.
- O'Brien, Michael et al. *The Shorebird Guide*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.
- Peterson, Roger Tory and James Fisher. *Wild America*. Boston: Riverside Press, 1963. See chapters 16 and 17 for the adventures of two great naturalists as they bird their way through Texas.
- Stokes, Donald and Lillian. *Field Guide to Warblers*. New York: Little Brown, 2004.

### ***Reference Only:***

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

### ***Wildflowers:***

- Loughmiller, Campbell and Lynn. *Texas Wildflowers*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984. Field guide with nice photos of many representative wildflowers.
- Irwin and Wills. *Roadside Flowers of Texas*. Austin. University of Texas Press. Good selection of typical wild flowers and attractive line drawings.
- Tveten, John and Gloria. *Wildflowers of Houston and Southeast Texas*. Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1993. The wildflower guide most appropriate to the area of the tour.

**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 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 June 10, 2009 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.