

CENTRAL TEXAS COAST BIRDING WORKSHOP

FALCON POINT RANCH AT SEADRIFT

MARCH 10-14, 2010

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The Central Texas Coast is well known as perhaps the “birdiest” area of the country. For decades, Christmas Bird Counts in this region have produced some of the highest totals of any in the country. And “big day” teams have chosen this area as the best in the country to find a large species total on a single spring day. On this workshop, we’ll take advantage of these riches, not for the purpose of compiling a large species total, but with the aim of be sorting through some of the tougher field identification problems that face birders in Texas, and elsewhere in North America. Although there will be many groups of birds we will see on this tour, we will pay particular attention to some of the more difficult ones such as cormorants, herons, waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, gulls, terns, sparrows, and meadowlarks. Any of these groups could warrant a workshop all their own, but we will dabble in all of them, taking advantage of whatever interesting challenges come our way, and turning them into learning opportunities. Along the way, we should see an array of other interesting birds, including a few of the South Texas specialties whose range reaches the Central Coast, such as White-tailed Hawk, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Couch’s Kingbird, Long-billed Thrasher, and Green Jay. We should also see Whooping Crane, a magnificent and very rare species whose winter range is restricted to this stretch of the Texas coast.

Our home base for this workshop will be the recently opened Falcon Point Lodge, located on a 6000-acre hunting reserve adjacent to the famous Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. This fabulous new lodge offers us comfortable accommodations, excellent food, and a wonderful array of birds right off our back porch. It even gives those who wish the opportunity to gather in the evening and discuss some of the day’s discoveries. The perfect arrangement for this workshop!

March 10, Day 1: Arrival in Corpus Christi. Participants should make arrangements to arrive in Corpus Christi, TX (airport code CRP) by 4:00 p.m. today at which time we will meet in the baggage claim area with your VENT leader. Once everyone has gathered together, we will depart 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

March 11-13, Days 2-4: Falcon Point area to Matagorda Island, Aransas NWR, and Corpus Christi. With the luxury of a flexible schedule, we will explore the many fine birding areas of this region, which abounds in coastal lagoons, fresh and salt marshes, mudflats, prairie, and rice fields. We will divide our time between these habitats in order to encounter a diverse suite of species. Some locations we will visit will include Magnolia Beach, Matagorda Island State Park, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Rockport, Port Aransas, Mustang Island, and Corpus Christi. We will move at a leisurely pace, giving us time to study the birds we see. Our destinations each day will depend on what species groups we want to focus on. There will be one or more optional evening presentations, offered to reinforce some of the identification criteria we study in the field.

NIGHTS: The Lodge at Falcon Point Ranch, Seadrift

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March 14, Day 5: Departure for home. After breakfast we will return to Corpus Christi and 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: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Michael O'Brien and 2nd leader TBA

Michael O'Brien is a freelance artist, author, and environmental consultant living in Cape May, New Jersey. He has traveled extensively throughout North and Central America and has a passionate interest in migration, bird vocalizations, and field identification. At home in Cape May, Michael serves as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops, writes a monthly ID column and photo quiz (see www.birdcapemay.org), and, for many years, conducted a fall songbird migration count. He is co-author of *The Shorebird Guide*, *Flight Calls of Migratory Birds*, and *America's 100 Most Wanted Birds*. His illustrations have been widely published in books and field guides, including the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* and the new *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Michael also has an intense interest in butterflies and leads several "Birds & Butterflies" tours with his wife, Louise Zemaitis.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$1625** per person in double occupancy from Corpus Christi. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 5; 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 **\$245**. 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.

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.

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.

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.

CLIMATE: Temperatures will range from warm to potentially quite cold if a cold front should pass through. Daytime highs could reach the mid to upper 70s, while nighttime lows may dip into the upper 30s. Temperatures ranging from the 50s to 70s would be closer to the norm. Rain is possible.

CLOTHING: Your best bet is to dress in layers. Jeans or similar durable field trousers are best, though some may wish to bring a pair of shorts. Be sure to bring a warm jacket plus a sweater or sweatshirt, since a cold and windy “norther” is always a possibility. Also bring light rain-wear, and a hat for protection from the cold or sun. Footwear is up to you; some people like to wear light boots, but sneakers are fine. Waterproof shoes are generally not required, but may be useful—there may be lots of dew in the early morning. Dress will be casual throughout.

EQUIPMENT: Pack a pair of binoculars in good repair. A close focusing binocular (focus to 6-8 feet) is ideal for butterfly-watching, but many of the better birding binoculars (with focus 10-12 feet) also work well. A belt pack or day pack is useful 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 leaders will have a spotting scope for birding stops; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Other items should include an alarm clock, as well as a good flashlight with extra batteries.

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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.

PHYSICAL EXERTION: This tour is not too physically demanding, as our walking will be on well-maintained trails and roads, and the terrain will be level. We will also be doing a fair amount of riding in vans.

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.

BIRDS

Sibley, David A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. Currently, this and the Geographic guide are the most complete and up-to-date field guides. If you elect to bring one of the smaller Sibley guides (2003), the Eastern guide covers this part of Texas.

Holt, Harold. *A Birder's Guide to the Texas Coast*. Colorado Springs: American Birding Association, 1993. The definitive bird-finding guide to the region.

Kaufman, Kenn. *A Field Guide to Advanced Birding*. Peterson Field Guide Series #39. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

Lockwood, Mark W., and Brush Freeman. *The TOS Handbook of Texas Birds*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. A good summary account of the birds of Texas.

National Geographic Society. *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 5th Edition. Washington, DC, 2006.

Oberholser, Harry C., Edgar B. Kincaid, Jr., ed. *The Bird Life of Texas*. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1984. The definitive two-volume reference work on the Texas avifauna, including distribution maps, with a few paintings by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Detailed description material. While out of print, used copies are available. Try the internet sources listed above.

OTHER

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

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.