

ITINERARY  
**TEXAS'S BIG BEND & HILL COUNTRY**  
*April 20 – 29, 2024*



*The Colima Warbler can be found in one place in the United States: Big Bend National Park! The hike to its breeding locale can be strenuous, but we've been able to get some great views of this specialty.  
Photograph by guide Alex Sundvall.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2024 Field Guides Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country tour:*

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

*These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:*

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

**S**o different is Big Bend from the rest of Texas, it could be a different country. It is a land of desert grandeur, of dramatic limestone canyons carved by the Rio Grande, of hidden springs and waterfalls, and of igneous mountains looming to 7800 feet. The Chisos Mountains, southernmost mountains in the continental US, are entirely contained within the 800,000-acre Big Bend National Park. To the birder they are best known as the only US breeding locality of the Colima Warbler, an essentially Mexican species at home in the wooded upper canyons of the Chisos. A hike to Boot Spring should produce several singing Colimas (twenty or more in some wet years!), as well as numerous southwestern specialties of more widespread distribution—Zone-tailed Hawk, Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Hepatic Tanager, and Black-chinned Sparrow.



But Big Bend Park supports a diversity of additional habitats, ranging from floodplain thickets and dry arroyos to sotol grassland and open slopes of pinyon, juniper, and oak. More than 450 species of birds have been recorded in the park, more than for any other national park. Regular but challenging specialties include Lucifer Hummingbird, Gray Vireo, Varied Bunting, and Crissal Thrasher. The Chisos Mountains and the desert oases (such as Rio Grande Village and Cottonwood Campground) also function as “traps” for migrants and Mexican vagrants. Over the years they have produced such rarities as Ruddy Ground-Dove, Thick-billed Kingbird, Aztec Thrush, Slate-throated Redstart, Rufous-capped Warbler, and Flame-colored Tanager. In recent years Common Black Hawk has nested at Rio Grande Village, and Gray Hawk has nested there and at Cottonwood Campground. One never knows what surprises may be in store.

In addition to four days in Big Bend, we'll visit the volcanic Davis Mountains in search of Montezuma Quail. This tour begins and ends in San Antonio, and we spend our last three nights in a beautiful section of the Edwards Plateau where we'll seek the special Hill Country breeders, the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo, and watch the emergence of bats from the world's fourth-largest bat cave.



*The Montezuma Quail is a difficult bird to find, but we will make the effort when we visit the David Mountains of western Texas. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

*We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.*

### Physical requirements of this tour

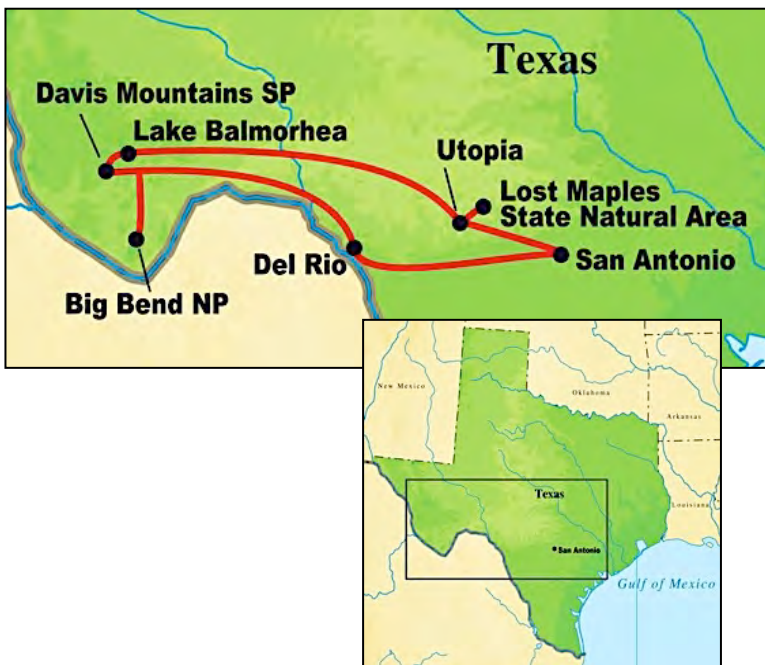
- **TRAILS & WALKING:** This tour involves extensive walking, and one full-day, strenuous hike of 10 miles, with several steep uphill and downhill stretches and areas with small, loose rocks underfoot. We will take at least one other fairly long but mostly level trail (3-4 miles). Other walks may be on uneven and rocky terrain. Walking sticks are recommended. At night, we'll bird mostly along roadsides.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We cover much ground on this tour, and some days will feature long periods of time in the vans and lots of roadside birding with much getting in and out of vans.

- **PACE:** Early mornings (5:00-5:30 a.m. breakfasts), with several afternoon breaks during the tour. On one day, we will be walking throughout the day, with a packed picnic lunch (each participant carries his or her lunch and water). Optional post-dinner excursions on several days, with return to lodging not later than 10:00 p.m.
- **ELEVATION:** Our birding will take place in the lower elevations of deserts and hill country and at moderately high mountain elevations, where we lodge at about 5400 feet and from there hike up as high as about 7430 feet.
- **WEATHER:** Spring weather is warm in southern and western Texas. Expect temperatures in the low 50s in the evening in the mountains, with days ranging from the mid-70s F to lower 90s. Rain showers are a possibility.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Whenever possible, we use modern, indoor restrooms, but on occasion, participants must be prepared to make a comfort stop in nature.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations.

**Note:** Several of the special birds on this tour are endangered or otherwise sensitive (e.g., nesting raptors). We will put time into seeing them and our track record is good, but there will be times when the need to be restrained in our pursuit will lead to (gulp!) a miss. We do not use tapes on endangered species anywhere, and Big Bend National Park prohibits the use of tape recorders and spotlights on any species—this will have some minor effects, most notably with a few nightbirds and skulkers.

*This tour may be combined with our first TEXAS COAST MIGRATION SPECTACLE I tour, April 13 - 19, 2024.*

## About the Birding Areas



**Del Rio area**—Located about three hours drive west of the San Antonio airport, the bustling town of Del Rio sits along the Rio Grande River, at the very northwestern edge of South Texas Brush Country. In addition to providing a convenient stopover on our route to Big Bend (and the last place to stock up on fresh groceries before heading into the park), the area is home to many bird species typically considered to be South Texas specialties. We'll spend part of a morning birding along the river, narrow here below the Amistad Dam, searching for Ringed and Green kingfishers, Neotropical Cormorant, and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck as well as any lingering shorebirds and waterfowl. Brushy mesquite thickets along the river hold Couch's Kingbird, Long-billed Thrasher, and Olive Sparrow—representatives of the South Texas Brush Country avifauna, here near the edge of their ranges—while taller trees provide hunting perches (and singing posts) for Great Kiskadee and Brown-crested Flycatcher. Our last few tours have been fortunate to encounter Morelet's Seedeater.

**Big Bend National Park**, established in 1944, now protects more than 800,000 acres of desert and mountain grandeur that is biogeographically a northern extension of the Chihuahuan Desert within a huge southward bend of the Rio Grande. The Chisos Mountains, the only contiguous mountain range completely contained within a US national park, represent block-faulted intrusive and extrusive igneous rocks uplifted to 7835 feet at their summit atop Emory Peak. Some of the higher, cooler canyons, including Boot Canyon, collect enough moisture year-round to support a veritable forest of oaks, pines, Arizona cypress, and even Douglas fir. It is these upper canyon woodlands that comprise prime habitat for the Colima Warbler. The sunnier, more open slopes support more xeric communities—from pinyon-juniper-oak woodland to a



chaparral-like shrubbery with cacti, ocotillo, and *Agave* well represented. Moisture decreases with decreasing elevation, the mountain woodlands being ringed by a golden grassland studded with sotol in an irregular band between 3500 and 5500 feet. Below 3500 feet—down to 1800 feet, the lowest point in the park—is a shrub desert formation of less than 10 inches annual rainfall, a relative sea of Chihuahuan Desert plants, most often thorny, succulent, or with seasonal leaves. This shrub desert formation covers almost half the acreage of the park. It is dissected by seasonal creeks (*arroyos*), a few permanently flowing streams or springs, and by the Rio Grande itself with its lush, linear floodplain choked with broadleaf trees and shrubs on the water-holding soils. These desert oases, though comprising a very small percentage of the park area, are critical to a number of breeders and to many migrant birds. They function as “vagrant traps” for off-course migrants in need of water, food, and shelter. At such areas as Rio Grande Village, Cottonwood Campground, Dugout Wells, and the Sam Nail Ranch, people have enhanced the oasis character of the sites by irrigating, planting additional trees, and/or allowing windmills to supply dripping pools. We’ll sample each of these habitats during our stay in the Big Bend.

As we climb steeply into the Chisos—looming above the desert like a fortress—we’ll pass through the zone of sotol grassland and enter the pinyon-juniper-oak-madrone woodland of Green Gulch that spills over the pass and fills much of the Basin below. This rather open woodland supports a number of species that are common around our lodge: Greater Roadrunner, Acorn Woodpecker, Say’s Phoebe, Mexican Jay, Bewick’s and Cactus wrens, Black-headed Grosbeak, Canyon Towhee, and Scott’s Oriole. Nearby stands of ponderosa pines are favored by Hepatic Tanagers, while Black-chinned Sparrows prefer the low shrubs on the sunnier slopes. Each evening as the sun sets through the Window (the slickened pour-off for Oak Creek, which drains the entire Basin), the illuminated walls of Casa Grande looming above the Basin to the east glow with an intensely warm pink-red, even with the incipient cooling of the desert mountain night.

During our time in Big Bend, we’ll bird desert arroyos and ocotillo-clad slopes for such special breeders as Lucifer Hummingbird, Crissal Thrasher, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Gray Vireo, Pyrrhuloxia, Black-throated Sparrow, and Varied Bunting as well as for western migrants. Western Tanagers, Western Wood-Pewees, and MacGillivray’s Warblers turn up just about anywhere at this time of year. We’ll watch for nesting Vermilion Flycatchers, Summer Tanagers, Yellow-breasted Chats, Verdins, Bell’s Vireos, Lucy’s Warblers (rare and local in Big Bend), and Painted Buntings in the river floodplain. We’ll hike in the upper Chisos in search of the Colima Warbler (approaching its peak period of territorial singing now) as well as Zone-tailed Hawk, Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, White-throated Swift, Violet-green Swallow, Cordilleran Flycatcher (sporadic), Hutton’s Vireo (the distinct interior form), migrant Townsend’s and Hermit (scarce) warblers, and Dusky Flycatchers.



*The Mexican Jay enters the US in this part of Texas; we’ll watch and listen for them in the Chisos Mountains.  
Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

One morning we'll go down to Rio Grande Village, where the riparian, floodplain vegetation of willow and tamarisk and the extensive groves of planted cottonwoods create a large oasis along the river that attracts numbers of western migrants. Widespread rains over the desert can precipitate a mini-fallout at Rio Grande Village. Under such conditions, Blue Grosbeaks and four species of colorful buntings—Painted, Indigo, Lazuli, and Varied—can be found in the same clump of grass! On past trips we've watched a Gray Hawk on its nest and a pair of Zone-tailed Hawks soaring and screaming overhead. For the last several years a pair of Common Black Hawks has also taken up residence. Here, too, is where such Mexican strays as Ruddy Ground-Dove, Thick-billed Kingbird, Tufted Flycatcher, Rufous-backed Robin, and Black-vented Oriole have turned up over the decades. But even without unusual birds or weather, there are many birds to be seen, including Common Ground-Dove, Inca Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo (a late arrival), Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and Hooded and Orchard orioles.



*The Common Black Hawk is not common in the US, but a pair of these large raptors has been nesting in the cottonwoods near Rio Grande Village in recent years. We'll spend time in the area and hope to see them.  
Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

**The Davis Mountains** offer welcome relief from the hot, dry Chihuahuan Desert. Rising to 8000 feet (Mt. Livermore, at 8382 feet, is the second-highest peak in Texas and the easternmost peak of its elevation in North America), the range receives around 20 inches of rainfall a year—enough to support (usually) verdant grasslands. Composed of geologically young lava flows, the Davis Mountains are not yet deeply eroded except in the north where streams have dissected the basalt. One such stream, Limpia Creek, flows intermittently for miles through a picturesque canyon; its banks are lined with magnificent Fremont cottonwoods.

Our foremost target in the Davis Mountains, however, is the beautiful Montezuma Quail, another species whose isolated population here has made the Davis Mountains well known to birders. The quail prefers slopes and canyons with good stands of bunch grass and scattered live oaks or pinyon pines, its population varying with the rainfall and the food supply. The Montezuma Quail has strong legs, feet, and claws used for scratching tubers and bulbs from the soil—a foraging habit almost unique among American birds. It also eats acorns, pinyon nuts, seeds, and insects. After personnel at Davis Mountains State Park started feeding the quail in 1993, at least one pair (and sometimes six!) were regularly seen at the state park until 2001, when the quail went AWOL from the feeders, forcing a return to the less reliable method of covering territory and hoping. Since 2002, we have had intermittent success in our quail quest with some great views on past tours. We'll hope for rain, a good breeding season, and a dedicated campground host running the feeder before our tour!

Our time in the Davis Mountains is limited, as we have decided not to extend the tour in order to search for the handful of widespread western species that reach the higher parts of the Davis Mountains but are easily seen on several of our other western tours. Still, we should see a few other new birds, among them Cassin's Kingbird, Woodhouse's



Scrub-Jay, and possibly Green-tailed Towhee, Phainopepla, and MacGillivray's Warbler (if we haven't encountered them in Big Bend). Acorn Woodpeckers, Curve-billed Thrashers, and Black-headed Grosbeaks are common in the campground, and Common Poorwills often sing from the slopes, and are seen sometimes right in the parking lot.

**Lake Balmorhea**—This 500-acre impoundment of Sandía Creek is used primarily for irrigation, fishing, and boating. However, such a large body of water in the arid trans-Pecos does not go unnoticed by waterbirds and shorebirds, especially during migration. The lake itself is good for western ducks and grebes, and the shallow mudflats and marshes support a nice variety of shorebirds and waders. Possibilities of interest include Eared, Western and Clark's grebes, Cinnamon Teal, Mexican Duck (recently split, formerly considered a subspecies of Mallard), White-faced Ibis, the occasional rail, Baird's Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Snowy Plover (low-water years), Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Black Tern, Franklin's Gull, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. It's also a good place for a real surprise. In 2017 it was the shocking discovery of an Aplomado Falcon!



*The brilliant Golden-cheeked Warbler is another endangered species we'll seek when we visit the Hill Country region. These gorgeous warblers nest only in Texas, and rely on a specialized oak-juniper habitat, making them vulnerable to habitat destruction. Photograph by guide Chris Benesh.*

**The Texas Hill Country**—The uplifted limestone hills known as the Edwards Plateau or the Texas Hill Country are renowned among birders primarily for their two breeding specialties, the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. Breeding only on the Edwards Plateau, the beautiful Golden-cheek is the only bird species whose entire nesting range is within Texas. Males arrive in March—followed shortly by females—from their Central American wintering grounds to stake out their song-proclaimed breeding territories among lovely stands of ashe juniper (*Juniperus ashei*) and Spanish oak (*Quercus texana*) on the slopes and in the canyons of the Plateau. Under pressure of increased clearing and development, the Golden-cheek's habitat has become more and more fragmented, and some patches that seem perfectly suitable no longer support them.

The Black-capped Vireo, most boldly patterned—and one of the most skulking though active—of all the vireos, breeds from central Oklahoma to Coahuila; its healthiest populations occurring in the hills of central Texas. The vireos arrive from their wintering grounds in western Mexico during early April and establish nesting territories in dense thickets of oaks, sumacs, and Texas mountain laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*) on dry, sun-drenched hilltops, ridges, slopes, and gulches of the Plateau. Like the Golden-cheek, the vireo seems to have suffered directly from fragmentation of habitat, but it is also particularly vulnerable to brood parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird, whose numbers have increased greatly in recent years. This species is furtive, and it takes some patience and sharp eyes to view it slipping through the scrub.

The massive limestone layers of the Edwards Plateau were deposited primarily during the Cretaceous period at the bottom of a large sea that later receded as the land was uplifted. Today this fossiliferous limestone supports a beautiful ecosystem of semiarid communities on the rugged slopes and more mesic communities along the numerous gurgling creeks and rivers that drain the hills. These rivers and seeps dissolve the porous limestone, creating a karst topography with impressive caves and sinkholes, home to more than 100 million Brazilian (or Mexican) Free-tailed Bats, *Tadarida brasiliensis*, the most numerous warm-blooded animal in the world.

**Utopia**—We'll sample the various Hill Country habitats near the southern edge of the Edwards Plateau, where it is bordered to the south by the South Texas Brush Country. Our lodging in Utopia—on the Sabinal River—is in a beautiful setting. The avifauna of the immediate area includes species common on the Plateau, such as Bewick's and Canyon wrens, Black-crested Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Eastern Bluebird, and Field and Rufous-crowned sparrows. The mesic woodland along the river contributes species of eastern affinities, such as Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Acadian Flycatcher, which approach the western limit of their ranges here. It's an interesting mixture of breeders. A river walk can produce some of these species as well as Green Kingfisher (depending on the water level), Black Phoebe, and the striking black-backed population of the Lesser Goldfinch.

**Lost Maples State Natural Area**—Named for its relict population of bigtooth maples (*Acer grandidentatum*), Lost Maples State Natural Area preserves 2200 acres of rugged Plateau habitats. In the wooded canyons of the bald cypress-lined Sabinal River, Golden-cheeks defend breeding territories while the furtive Black-cap vocalizes from clumps of shrubby oaks and sumacs on the drier slopes. Other breeders sharing these habitats include Wild Turkey, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Vermilion Flycatcher and Yellow-breasted Chat (both in aerial song-display), Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, Painted and Indigo buntings, Blue Grosbeak, Lark, Field, and Rufous-crowned sparrows, and Hooded and Orchard orioles. The fields near the park are intermittently good for Western Kingbirds, Dickcissels, and Clay-colored, Grasshopper, and Cassin's sparrows.



*We'll visit the Rio Frio Cavern, near Concan, where at sunset we'll view the emergence of thousands of Mexican Free-tailed Bats. On occasion, we've seen raptors catching their dinners here as well!  
Photograph by guide Micah Riegner.*

**Rio Frio Cavern**—By evening we'll visit a nearby limestone sinkhole for one of the greatest mammalian spectacles in North America: the crepuscular emergence of countless thousands of Brazilian Free-tailed Bats. The bats in this nursery cave represent the fourth largest gathering of warm-blooded animals in the world (the first three being at other bat caves

on the Plateau)! From the extensive Rio Frio Cavern system (twenty-three miles long, according to locals) the bats pour forth in seemingly endless streams, eventually breaking into discrete clouds that drift off toward the east (absent rain, this is a very reliable phenomenon). Radar-tracked individuals have been traced as far south as Corpus Christi on the central coast—a distance of 200 miles! So abundant are these freetails that during the summer peak population (estimated at ten million), the bats of the Frio Cave alone are said to consume more than a million pounds of insects in just four nights! Recent radar studies have revealed that they fly as high as 10,000 feet in pursuit of some of North America's most destructive agricultural pests, especially corn earworms (Noctuid moths), which swarm high above Texas by the billions at this time of year. The spectacle attracts other viewers as well: Red-tailed Hawks make repeated dramatic passes through the diverging streams, usually emerging with talons full. In the midst of the hectic emergence of so many bats, nesting Cave Swallows spiral to roost in the cave.



*The elegant Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is a common sight across much of Texas in the spring and summer. We'll have ample opportunities to study these beauties on the tour. Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.*

## Itinerary for Texas's Big Bend & Hill Country

**Day 1, Sat, 20 Apr. San Antonio to Del Rio.** Please make arrangements **to arrive in San Antonio in time to join the group by 2:00 p.m.** (see the information bulletin about our meeting point on the arrivals level at the end of Terminal B closest to Terminal A). We'll plan to leave the San Antonio airport *no later than 2:00 p.m.* for our drive to Del Rio, at the northwestern edge of the South Texas brush country. Have your binoculars handy, for our route west takes us through the mesquite brush country, with several bird possibilities of particular interest to those who haven't birded much in the Southwest, including Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, migrating Mississippi Kites, Swainson's and Harris's hawks, and Crested Caracara, along with Gray Vireo. Night in Del Rio.

**Day 2, Sun, 21 Apr. Del Rio to Big Bend.** After early birding near our lodging—in hopes of Ringed Kingfisher, Long-billed Thrasher, Olive Sparrow, and other bonus South Texas species—we'll head west, crossing the famous Pecos high bridge where we'll officially enter West Texas, a sparsely populated land of wide-open spaces. West of the Pecos River the junipers give way to creosote and the vistas are vast. In the sandy plains west of Sanderson (the Marathon Basin), watch for Swainson's Hawks and Lark Buntings as we enter Big Bend Country. The afternoon is primarily travel time, but we'll take some breaks—at the scenic Pecos River and at Langtry (where Judge Roy Bean meted out law west of the Pecos). We plan a late arrival into the Basin of Big Bend; you may want to leave out a sweater or light jacket. Night at Chisos Mountains Lodge, Big Bend National Park.



**Days 3-6, Mon-Thu, 22-25 Apr. Big Bend National Park.** Our general procedure at Big Bend will be to start early with a picnic breakfast, return for lunch and a short break during the heat of the day, and go birding again in the afternoon before returning to our comfortable base lodge. Exactly which sites we visit and the order in which we bird them will depend on the group and the weather. It is often quite possible to see the Colima Warbler without hiking all the way to Boot Spring. The Boot Canyon trail is steep but good and affords magnificent vistas of the entire Basin, the desert below, and of towering Emory Peak; it's a rigorous all-day hike (requiring comfortable hiking boots or shoes and two canteens full of water), and there will be an opportunity to do it for those who wish. Those who would prefer to seek the Colima in the easiest manner possible and return to the lodge to relax can easily do so. The easiest Colimas are often about two-and-a-half or three hours up the trail (1200 feet in elevation gain).

Our routine also includes some other walks such as Blue Creek and/or the Window Trail; these walks, while less strenuous than Boot Spring, involve roundtrips of about five miles and net elevation gain and loss of 800 feet. On our hikes we maintain a slow, steady pace, stopping often to bird (or to huff and puff). We will also work in a stop at the park headquarters at Panther Junction to see the interpretative exhibits and to purchase reference material and important stuff, like t-shirts. On Day 6, we'll leave the park and head for the Davis Mountains. With selective stops, we should reach Fort Davis by mid-afternoon, with an evening planned for seeking quail and poorwill. Three nights at Chisos Mountains Lodge; last night at Hotel Limpia, Fort Davis.



*The Pinnacles Trail in Big Bend National Park takes us into the higher elevations, where we'll find specialties such as the Colima Warbler. Photograph by participant Jeff Turner.*

**Day 7, Fri, 26 Apr. Lake Balmorhea to Utopia.** This is a long travel day. After breakfast and some early birding, we'll head north toward Balmorhea, where we'll detour to Lake Balmorhea in search of western waterbirds and shorebirds. Continuing east we'll leave arid West Texas behind, slipping into the ever-greener Edwards Plateau, now at the peak of its bloom. We should reach Utopia as the late-afternoon sunlight illuminates the hordes of roadside wildflowers for which Texas is justly famous. Night in Utopia. *[Note: In Utopia, Some people may have to share a bathroom due to cabin configurations.]*

**Days 8-10, Sat-Mon, 27-29 Apr. Texas Hill Country.** We'll have two days (Days 8-9) to bird Lost Maples State Natural Area and a variety of other Hill Country spots. In the late afternoon of one day we'll head for the Rio Frio Cavern, where we'll stay until all light fades on the evening emergence of bats from the world's fourth-largest bat cave. After breakfast in Utopia on Day 10, we'll load up and head for the San Antonio Airport. **Please don't book your departure flight before noon on April 29.** Nights of Days 8 and 9 in Utopia.

## About Your Guides

**Chris Benesh** grew up studying natural history in California, where he was inspired by his father to take up birding as a teenager. After earning a degree in zoology from UC Santa Barbara in 1987, Chris moved to Austin to join the Field Guides staff. Since then, his life has undergone a wonderful transformation. The intervening years at Field Guides have taken him to many corners of the world and across both the Arctic and Antarctic circles!

Chris takes an interest in nearly anything that flies, and you might catch him sneaking a peek at a passing aircraft or stopping to examine a butterfly or odonate. You might also notice him getting especially excited at the sighting of a rare or wonderful mammal (heck, he can get excited about a squirrel).

Chris's passion for education has led to his serving on the Arizona Bird Committee, leading the occasional workshop, presenting at birding conventions, and—we must add—thoroughly explaining in admirable detail the nuances of flycatchers to tour participants and colleagues alike. These days, most of his “down time” is spent at home in Tucson watching his two wonderful kids, Sean and Linnea, grow.

*“Chris Benesh is such an excellent guide who shares his knowledge with a cheerful manner. You know he is doing his best to make the tour an enjoyable experience for all the participants, regardless of their experience level.”*  
M.P., South Texas Rarities

**A second leader will be added as tour size warrants.**

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Chris's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

## Financial Information

**FEE: \$4175 from San Antonio**

**DEPOSIT: \$425 per person**

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE: October 23, 2023**

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$1000**

**LIMIT: 14**

**All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one).** Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

## Other Things You Need to Know

**TOUR MANAGER:** The manager for this tour is Nicole Cannon. Nicole will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

**AIR ARRANGEMENTS:** Please plan to arrive in San Antonio in time to get your luggage and join the group by 2:00 p.m. on Day 1 (April 20). On Day 10 (April 29), please plan to depart from San Antonio after 12:00 noon.

Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

**Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights**



**not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.**

**LUGGAGE:** Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The **tour fee** is **\$4175** for one person in double occupancy from San Antonio. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 9, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 10, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from San Antonio, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is **\$1000**. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room.

**TOUR LIMITS:** Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, the guide in training will be taking a seat in the van or bus. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact us at [fieldguides.com/contact-us/](https://fieldguides.com/contact-us/). Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$425** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by October 23, 2023**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

**SMOKING:** Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

**Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii.** We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right 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. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

NCP 7/2020

6/19 CB

5/20 NC; 1/22peg; 10/22NC,peg; 7/23NC; 8/23peg