



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## **Victor Emanuel Nature Tours Presents:**

**A Special Departure for the Cornell Lab of  
Ornithology's Chairman's Council**

**WEST TEXAS: CIBOLO CREEK RANCH  
OCTOBER 4–8, 2026**

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Vermilion Flycatcher © Ricardo Battistino/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Encompassing a vast area, the region we know as “West Texas” is larger than many U.S. states. Stretching from El Paso on the west to the Pecos River on the east, this is a handsome country where the birds and wildlife are often more visible than people. Geographically, it bears a resemblance to other parts of the Southwest, yet the combination of plateau limestone uplifts, ancient volcanic ranges, palisade rock formations, and broad desert grasslands give the region a distinctive brand.

Designed exclusively for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology’s Chairman’s Council, participants on this short trip will experience the bold landscapes, birds, and other wildlife of West Texas. Based out of the luxurious Cibolo Creek Ranch, near Marfa, we will spend three days exploring the Chihuahuan Desert, grasslands, and a “sky island” mountain range that are the defining features of the West Texas landscape. Hosting this trip are Ian Owens and Mary Guthrie from the Lab of Ornithology. Guiding our activities in the field are Barry, Lyon, Brian Gibbons, and Brad McKinney from Texas-based Victor Emanuel Nature Tours.



Acorn Woodpecker © Lisa Owens/  
Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Our visit is sure to produce encounters with an exciting mix of birds associated with the Southwest and Rocky Mountains. Early October coincides with the fall migration period, a time when southbound birds mix with an impressive array of resident birds and lingering summer breeders. Birds are abundant at this and we have chances to see

tantalizing species such as Zone-tailed Hawk, Scaled and Montezuma quail, White-throated Swift, Vermilion Flycatcher, Acorn Woodpecker, Western Scrub Jay, Loggerhead Shrike, Canyon and Green-tailed Towhees, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Hepatic Tanager, Chihuahuan Meadowlark, and many others.

While birds will be the focus of our daily field trips, this program also emphasizes general natural history including geology, mammal watching, botany, and stargazing. The mammal viewing can be surprisingly good, with chances for Coyote, Bobcat, Collared Peccary, Pronghorn, and Mule Deer.

Situated at the foot of the Chinati Mountains, Cibolo Creek Ranch promises a wonderful ranch-style retreat. Offering luxurious accommodation, excellent cuisine, and ready access to birds, the ranch is an ideal destination for a Chairman's Council trip. Every guest room is designed to capture the style and spirit of the dramatic history of the ranch. Each room has been individually designed and uniquely furnished according to traditional Mexican architectural style and includes spacious verandas and Saltillo tile floors, Mexican and Spanish antiques, down comforters, hand-stitched quilts, painted tin retablos, vintage lamps, bath amenities, and adobe fireplaces. The ranch grounds meanwhile are a tantalizing draw, particularly for morning and afternoon birding excursions.



Green-tailed Towhee ©  
Gene Collins/Macaulay Library at the Cornell  
Lab of Ornithology

We will visit different parts of the ranch over two days in search of birds. Two springs adjacent to the lodge are an irresistible draw for residents and migrant birds alike while less visited water sources and isolated groves of trees on other parts of the property are to be checked as well. On one morning we will visit the Davis Mountains and Davis Mountains State Park. The Davis Mountains are a true “sky-island” and host a variety of habitats and birds not available to us at the ranch. Ponderosa pine, alligator juniper, and a variety of grasses and other trees support a regime of birds we will not previously have seen.

Finally, while this trip promises many memorable natural history experiences, it is also a social event—a time to see old friends, learn about recent news from the Lab, and simply enjoy a great West Texas retreat.

**October 4, Day 1: Arrival in El Paso, Texas; transfer to Cibolo Creek Ranch.** Trip participants will arrive at El Paso International Airport (airport code ELP) today and transfer to the Cibolo Creek Ranch. Please plan to arrive in El Paso by 2:00 p.m. We will depart the airport in shifts starting around 1:00 p.m. for the drive to the ranch, which takes about 3½ hours. If you are unable to arrive in El Paso by early afternoon, we recommend arriving on the previous day (October 3) and overnight at a hotel near the airport. The VENT office has reserved rooms for early arriving guests at the **Marriott El Paso Airport** and will gladly confirm a room for you.

Once we are assembled, we'll begin the journey to Cibolo Creek. The drive to the ranch introduces us to the panoramas and high desert scenery of West Texas. Mesquite and the yucca-like Sotol characterize the terrain around El Paso, but moving east, we'll encounter isolated limestone mountain ranges fringed by sparse grassland and crowned with mesa-like tops. About two hours into the ride, at the town of Van Horn, the highway rises through higher elevation grasslands studded with One-seed Juniper, where we may encounter our first Pronghorn antelope. We may also spot a few bird species typical of this open country including Red-tailed Hawk, Common Raven, Say's Phoebe, and Loggerhead Shrike. We will arrive at Cibolo Creek in the late afternoon.

We will gather as a group at 6:00 p.m. for a welcome reception and the chance to meet with your fellow travelers and trip leaders. In this time we will also enjoy a short presentation outlining the events of the coming days. We will enjoy a superb dinner at 7:00 p.m.

More detailed information regarding our meeting place at the airport will be provided in the departure memo sent to you a couple of weeks before the start of the trip.

**Travel Notes:** We will use four touring vans for transportation for the duration of the trip. Departures from the airport for the ranch will begin as soon as the group begins assembling. The early arrival night in El Paso is not included in the trip fee. The Cibolo Creek Ranch maintains a private airstrip that is available to participants with access to their own air transportation. The airstrip is located on the ranch grounds in close proximity to the lodge. The ranch can accommodate most private planes up to commercial aircraft in size. Commercial-size aircraft should fly into Marfa or Alpine. The ranch provides transportation from either location for an added fee.

NIGHT: Cibolo Creek Ranch, Marfa

**October 5–7, Days 2–4: Cibolo Creek Ranch and the Davis Mountains.** Seated at the foot of the rugged Chinati Mountains, 45 minutes from the town of Marfa, the exquisite Cibolo Creek Ranch encompasses 25,000 acres of grasslands, thorn-scrub and inspiring high-desert scenery. The centerpiece of the ranch is a beautifully styled lodge offering luxury comfort, historic buildings, and excellent cuisine. Restored forts from the Indian-fighting era are found at three separate sites on the ranch and reflect the architectural style of the 1800s, complete with adobe walls, lovely accommodations, and period antiques. The lodge is constructed adjacent to two springs which support an abundance of resident and migratory birds.

We will have three full days to explore this one-of-a-kind property and the nearby Davis Mountains. We will spend the first and third days exploring the grounds around the lodge and visiting outlying parts of the property. The areas with water attract the greatest diversity of birds, and a variety of common species we should expect to see include Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed and Golden-fronted woodpeckers, Say's and Black phoebes, Vermilion Flycatcher, Cassin's Kingbird, Curve-



billed Thrasher, and Cactus Wren. Early October is also still at the peak time to experience fall migration in West Texas, when a wide variety of migrant birds are present. Cottonwoods and willows surrounding the nearby springs may harbor a range of migrant birds that could include Cassin's and Plumbeous vireos, Yellow-rumped and Townsend's warblers, and Western and Summer tanagers to name a few.



**Greater Roadrunner © Doug Smith/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology**

Our time on the ranch will also see us in the dry washes and higher canyons of the Chinati Mountains searching for a variety of birds that are especially well adapted to life in a desert environment. Golden Eagle, Zone-tailed Hawk, Scaled Quail, White-throated Swift, Rock and Canyon wrens, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Rufous-crowned and Black-throated sparrows, and Canyon Towhee are resident species here. Among the migrant birds we might see are Red-naped Sapsucker; Cordilleran, Dusky, Gray, and Hammond's flycatchers; Orange-crowned, Townsend's, Black-throated Gray, Yellow-rumped, Wilson's and MacGillivray's warblers; and Lark, Vesper, Brewer's, Clay-colored, Lincoln's, and White-crowned sparrows. Western Tanager, Green-tailed Towhee, Black-headed Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, and Lazuli Bunting are also certainly possible.

On one evening we will venture out on an owling expedition, with Common Poorwill and Western Screech-Owl our main targets. A nocturnal prowling could also turn up a surprise such as a Gray Fox or a group of Javelina (Collared Peccary).

On one day we will travel to the cool and scenic Davis Mountains, located back to the northeast.

As promoted by The Nature Conservancy, "the wild and remote Davis Mountains is considered one of the most scenic areas of Texas. Indeed, it is one of the most biologically diverse. Rising above the Chihuahuan Desert, the range forms a unique 'sky island' surrounded by the lowland desert. Animals

and plants living above 5,000 feet are isolated from other similar mountain ranges by vast distances. These are true ecological islands, preserving living remnants that otherwise occur nowhere else in Texas.

By any measure, the Davis Mountains are a special place, a very different part of Texas that features unique landscapes and an ambience of its own. We will have one day to explore this wonderful area. Our visit will center on the pine-oak-juniper woodland, ponderosa pine forest, and mid-elevation grasslands that define most of the mountain range. We will spend part of the morning in a large woodland where a variety of birds representing Rocky Mountain and Southwestern influences meet, including Acorn Woodpecker, Plumbeous Vireo, Western Scrub-Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Western Bluebird, Hepatic Tanager, and a variety of migrant warblers.



**Hepatic Tanager © Heriberto Reyes/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology**

Time permitting, we'll duck into nearby Davis Mountains State Park, where a scenic drive takes the visitor from oak-juniper woodland to the top of an escarpment that offers sweeping views of the desert spreading away to the east and south and palisade rock formations that form the mountains' southern ramparts.

On the way back into Marfa, we will offer, for those who wish, an optional trip to the internationally recognized Chinati Foundation, a contemporary art museum housing fine works of art from a limited number of contemporary artists.

We will return to the ranch by late afternoon, at which time participants may relax in their rooms or explore the lodge grounds on their own.

**NIGHTS: Cibolo Creek Ranch, Marfa**

## **Essential Tour Information**

**TRIP SIZE:** This trip is limited to 26 participants.

**TRIP HOSTS:** Ian Owens and Mary Guthrie

**TRIP LEADER(s):** This trip is led by **Barry Lyon, Brian Gibbons, Brad McKinney** and another leader to be announced.



**Mary Guthrie** is the Director of Major Gifts and Corporate Marketing Partnerships at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. With a lifelong interest in birds and nature, Mary has followed the Cornell Lab since her time as a Cornell undergraduate. She had a number of different roles at the Cornell Lab. Her efforts include licensing content for push-button books, calendars, toys, games, and apps that help people connect with birds. She has grown partnerships between the Cornell Lab and companies that share our goals. Examples include an app in Subaru cars that helps people find birds, seed and feeder companies that help us train teachers how to use birds in their classrooms, and binocular companies that support our Young Birders Program. Before joining the Lab, Mary worked at Cornell's Johnson Graduate School of Management, and prior

to coming to Cornell she worked in magazine publishing and was a reporter for a number of newspapers including the *Los Angeles Times*. She has an M.A. in Print Journalism from the University of Southern California and a B.A. in Government from Cornell University. Mary lives with her two teenagers, Maggie and Charlie, in Trumansburg, New York.



**Dr. Ian Owens** is the Louis Agassiz Fuertes Executive Director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Cornell University. A birder since his teens, he has traveled around the world in pursuit of birds and wild places, and has conducted research across Europe, Australasia, Asia, and the South West Pacific islands. Before joining the Lab, Ian held directorships at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, and the Natural History Museum in London, and was a professor at Imperial College London and University of Queensland. He has published more than 100 academic papers on birds and a book on *Evolutionary Ecology in Birds: Life Histories, Mating Systems and*

*Extinction Risk*. His main research interests are in large-scale patterns in biodiversity and evolution in wild populations. Ian has edited a number of international journals, sits on the board of a series of conservation organizations, and received the Zoological Medal from the Zoological Society of London for contributions to his field.





**Barry Lyon's** passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood in southern California. During his teenage years, he attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which ultimately led to his future involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson where he studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. Barry joined the VENT team as a tour leader in 1995 and embarked on a travel-based career that has taken him to an array of worldwide destinations. He has lived in Austin, Texas since 2004 when he joined our office staff as an administrative assistant. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. In 2023 Barry ascended to the role of Chief Executive Officer

(CEO). Although Barry still leads two or three trips a year, these days his work is geared almost entirely toward business, customer relations, and the management of the company. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have provided him with a strong interest in conservation. He is a former board member and past president of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and outdoor education for children. Barry resides in South Austin with his wife, Brooke Smith.



**Brian Gibbons** grew up in suburban Dallas where he began exploring the wild world in local creeks and parks. Chasing butterflies and any animal that was unfortunate enough to cross paths with the Gibbons boys occupied his childhood. A wooden bird feeder kit sparked a flame that was stoked by a gift of the *Golden Guide* and family camping trips to Texas state parks. Thirty years ago Brian attended two VENT camps for young birders. Birds are now his primary interest, but all things wild continue to captivate him. After college, Brian undertook a variety of field biology research jobs that have taken him to the Caribbean, the Bering Sea, and the land of the midnight sun, arctic Alaska. He enjoys working with kids, hoping to spark environmental awareness through birds. For many years Brian's field research has involved bird banding. His most amazing recoveries were a

female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years. Brian's recreational bird-seeking has taken him to Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Wall in China, the plains of East Africa, and the Himalayas in Nepal. Brian leads birding trips in the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, and Europe. As well as being a fanatical birder, he loves capturing birds with photography. He lives in Tucson, Arizona with his wife, Lacreia Johnson, and their son, Grayson.





**Brad McKinney** began birding during the winter of 1987–88, an exciting year in which many Mexican rarities were recorded in South Texas. His passion for birds has led to numerous birding trips and photography expeditions across North America, Mexico, Central America, and Hawaii. Brad loves pelagic birding and has guided Texas pelagic trips since 1995, many from his home town of South Padre Island. He has been a longtime tour leader at the Rio Grande Birding Festival and has led birding trips across Texas and Mexico. Brad has served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for six years and co-authored *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*. He received his degree in biology at the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in marine ecology at the University of Texas at Brownsville. Brad's other interests include nature photography, surfing, and snowboarding with his son, Will. He lives at South Padre Island with his wife, Janette, and their dog, Sam.

## **TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION**

**TOUR FEE:** \$5,025 per person based on double occupancy. This includes all meals and beverages from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the "TIPPING" sub-section below.

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT:** If you request single accommodations, a single supplement of **\$1,875** will be added to your tour fee.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. We accept MasterCard and Visa. If you choose not to register online, you may pay your deposit by credit card, check, money order, or bank transfer. If not paying online, or by card, your tour space will be held for 10 days pending receipt of your deposit.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (5/7/2026) prior to the tour departure date.

**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.

**FUEL SURCHARGES:** Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TIPPING:** An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

## **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS**

**CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:** Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Your deposit(s) minus \$250*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposits, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

**CANCELLATION BY VENT:** If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement.

A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**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.**

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

**SUGGESTED OPTIONS:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive Ripcord plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

### **About Redpoint Travel’s Ripcord Plan**

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [Ripcord Travel Insurance](#); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour



fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

### **About Medjet’s MedjetAssist Plan**

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company’s primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

### **GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

**AIR TRAVEL:** 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. Per-person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler’s consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**BAGGAGE:** Please limit luggage to one medium size roller bag and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

## **WHAT TO BRING**

**CLOTHING:** For this short trip to West Texas, light field clothing is the norm. Early October is a time of generally mild to warm days. In the event of an early cold front, which is unlikely but possible, conditions can change dramatically in a short amount of time. A cold front can bring overcast conditions accompanied by wind, rain, and falling temperatures. So, while bringing light clothing is a very safe bet, you should still come prepared for a variety of conditions. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are recommended. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela's and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular.
- **Shirts:** Several long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential. A broad-brimmed hat, such as those made by Tilley, provide the best protection, but you should bring a baseball-style cap at the very least.
- **Outerwear:** Mild to cool weather is expected on this trip, but a fleece and warm jacket or coat is strongly recommended in the event of a cold front.
- **Smart casual (optional):** This trip is casual, so field clothing is acceptable for all occasions; however, smart casual attire is certainly appropriate for those who prefer a dressier appearance. For men, this means slacks or khakis and open-collar shirts; for women, casual dresses, skirts/slacks, and blouses.
- **Swimsuit:** You may wish to bring along swimwear as the hotel does have a swimming pool.

**FOOTWEAR:** A lightweight hiking boot or trail shoe is recommended for birding excursions. Athletic shoes are acceptable but will not keep your feet dry and can become soiled from muddy conditions. For other situations, like when around the ranch, you may prefer sandals and/or athletic shoes.

**EQUIPMENT:** Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well prepared:

- **Backpack:** Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Field guides**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**

- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – a highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Tissue packs**

**Binoculars:** We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.

**Spotting Scopes:** Your trip leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

## **DESTINATION INFORMATION & TOUR CONDITIONS**

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** Early fall in West Texas is typically marked by beautiful days with warm to very warm daytime temperatures. Morning temperatures could be chilly, with temperatures in the upper 50s (°F) rising steadily through the day until reaching the mid-80s in the afternoons. In the Davis Mountains, we will anticipate pleasant conditions, with daytime temperatures in the mid-70s to low 80s. While precipitation is not expected, a cold front could usher in rain and colder temperatures.

**CONDITIONS:** The centerpiece of this trip is the Cibolo Creek Ranch. We will spend two full days exploring the ranch and nearby Chinati Mountains, where activities will include many short walks and drives to local birding areas. On another day we will travel to Fort Davis and the Davis Mountains, located about 90 minutes to the northeast, to experience habitats, ecosystems, and birds not found around the ranch. To maximize our time at this latter location, we will depart the lodge early, by 7:00. All walking will be over easy paths and roads. On the final afternoon we will offer an optional trip to nearby Marfa for an opportunity to visit the Chinati Foundation, a contemporary art museum with national recognition. This option will be contingent on sufficient interest and our available time.

A typical day will begin with breakfast around 7:00 a.m. followed by a full morning in the field. All travel will be aboard 15-passenger vans to some of the outstanding natural areas nearby. On most afternoons we will have some down time for relaxing amidst our beautiful surroundings or simply exploring the area on our own.

Cibolo Creek is recognized for its superior accommodations and cuisine. All guest rooms are spacious and well-appointed and styled and feature very comfortable beds. The menu offers a fine dining experience with traditional items combined with local flavors.

All walking will occur on well-marked paths, roads, and trails. The physical demands for this trip are low.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Internet access is available at most places on the ranch.

**TIME:** El Paso is located in the Mountain Time Zone while Cibolo Creek and the Davis Mountains fall into the Central Time Zone. Daylight savings time is in effect in early October. Mountain Daylight Time (MDT) is two hours behind Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) and Central Daylight Time (CDT) is one hour behind EDT.



**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** Due to the short length of this program, you are better off bringing enough clothing to get you through the trip without needing to rely on laundry service.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

**HEALTH:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, 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.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance for avoiding COVID-19.

**SUN EXPOSURE:** The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

**BITING INSECTS:** Mosquitos are not an anticipated problem in this dry environment. Chiggers occur in the Davis Mountains but are easily prevented by staying out of areas of taller grass and by using insect repellent.

**INSECT REPELLENTS:** Your trip leaders will have insect repellent available for group use in the event of chiggers or the occasional mosquito.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

## **SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION**

A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

### **FIELD GUIDES:**

**Birds:** Either of the following field guides are excellent choices for this trip.

Dunn, Jon L. & Jonathan Alderfer (Editors). *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Eighth edition, 2025.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Second edition. Alfred E. Knopf. National Audubon Society, 2014.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to the Birds of Western North America*. Second edition. Alfred A. Knopf, 2016. A smaller, more concise guide than the above title.

### **Mammals:**

Kays, Roland W. and Done E. Wilson. ***Mammals of North America***. Second edition. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2009 (second edition).

### **Butterflies:**

Kaufman, Kenn and Jim P. Brock. *Kaufman Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

### **CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY APPS & ONLINE RESOURCES:**

**eBird:** Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! To use eBird, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional “pack.” The pack for this trip is **US, Texas**.

**MERLIN BIRD ID:** Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer’s responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin’s Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional “pack.” The packs for this trip are either **US: Texas and Oklahoma** and **US and Canada: Continental**.

## **TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.**, a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant 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 participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on September 5, 2025 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant’s Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant’s risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the “**Airline**”) is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline’s aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

View the complete [Terms and Conditions](#) on our website.

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