



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

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VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS PRESENTS:

**VENT'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
1976–2026**

APRIL 19–24, 2026

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Hooded Warbler, Piney Woods, East Texas © Greg Lasley

In 2026, VENT will turn 50! It has been an extraordinary five decades in business, thanks to many of the world's most highly skilled tour leaders, superb office personnel, and the support of wonderful and loyal clients. From our founding 50 years ago, VENT has been unwavering in its values: dedication to providing our travelers with the highest quality service, taking care of our employees, and supporting conservation. It is for these reasons that VENT is widely regarded among the world's finest birding and nature tour companies, a distinction of which we are immensely proud.

To celebrate our anniversary, we are planning a big event in our home state of Texas, where it all began in 1976. The site we have chosen to host the event is one of America's greatest birding areas: the Upper Texas Coast. Throughout the month of April, few other regions in the country offer such splendid birding opportunities combined with easy accessibility to a diversity of locations. Our celebration will be based at the MCM Eleganté Hotel in Beaumont. We will have four fun-filled days to explore the varied regions of the Upper Coast and piney-woods in search of Neotropical migrants and breeding resident species at the most dynamic time of the year.

Our 50th Anniversary Celebration is also a social event in which participants are treated to evening social hours, dinners, and presentations by distinguished guest speakers. Other attractions include book signings and an optics table hosted by Swarovski Optik. There will be numerous opportunities to interact with VENT tour leaders and office staff, special guests, and other celebration participants.



Blue Grosbeak, Upper Texas Coast, April © Michael O'Brien

In commemoration of the event, we have assembled an all-star team of tour leaders, nature writers, and guest speakers including Barry Lyon, David Ascanio, Max Breckenridge, Erik Bruhnke, Kevin Burke, Peter English, Rafael Galvez, Brian Gibbons, Steve Hilty, Dion Hobcroft, Gary Langham, Jeri Langham, Brad McKinney, Michael O'Brien and Louise Zemaitis, Doris Valencia, Raymond VanBuskirk, Andrew Whittaker, Barry Zimmer, Kevin Zimmer, and Peter Zika. We are especially pleased to announce a powerhouse lineup of keynote presenters that includes Scott Weidensaul, Jennifer Ackerman, Ed Yong, and Kenn Kaufman.

The MCM Elegante' Beaumont will serve as our hotel venue. We will accommodate 112 participants, 21 tour leaders, and special guests. The program will be structured to include field trips during the days and social hours, dinners, and presentations in the evenings.



American Avocets on the Bolivar Peninsula, Upper Texas Coast, April © Michael O'Brien

The Upper Texas Coast offers marvelous variety of habitats and birds. Field trips to the region's most important areas will operate daily, with two opportunities to visit the renowned High Island sanctuaries. For the field trip schedule, we've divided the greater area into four zones: 1) Bolivar Peninsula and High Island; 2) Beaumont Area and Sabine Woods; 3) Jocelyn Nungary (formerly Anahuac) National Wildlife Refuge and High Island; 4) Piney Woods. Every participant will have a chance to experience every field trip, and the opportunity to spend time in the field with most of the tour leaders.

On each of the four full days of the Celebration, an evening social will begin at 5:30 p.m. and will continue to 6:30, followed by dinner and the evening's presentation. Each presentation will be 45–60 minutes.

This anniversary celebration is a significant milestone for VENT, marking a half-century of worldwide birding and nature tourism. It is guaranteed to be an exciting and successful event. Join us in Beaumont in April 2026 and make new friends, renew old acquaintances, and help us celebrate our 50th Anniversary Celebration!

Those who prefer additional time in Texas are encouraged to join our pre- and post-event extensions to the Piney-woods region of East Texas and to Galveston Island. Those interested in experiencing an entirely different part of the state should consider joining our West Texas Spring Migration: Cibolo Creek Ranch and the Davis Mountains. Itineraries for these programs are published separately.

April 19, Day 1: Arrival in Beaumont. Participants should plan to arrive in Beaumont today. The MCM Elegante offers complimentary airport-hotel shuttle service from the Beaumont/Port Arthur Regional Airport (airport code BPT). Registration will take place all day in the lobby of the hotel. An evening social hour with cash bar will begin at 5:30 p.m. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. followed by an official event welcome.*

***IMPORTANT TRAVEL NOTE:** Air service into Beaumont is very limited; therefore, we recommend that participants arrive a day early (April 18) if there is any doubt about getting to the hotel in time for the start of the festivities. Many of your tour leaders will be in Houston on the night of the 18th; you may fly into Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) that day and overnight at our group hotel near the airport, then ride to Beaumont with the tour leaders on the 19th. The driving time is approximately 90 minutes.

Night: MCM Elegante, Beaumont

April 20–23, Days 2–5: Field trips and evening presentations. The Upper Texas Coast was chosen as the venue for this event because it is widely regarded as America's greatest springtime birding area. The section of coast bounded by Houston and Galveston on the west and south, and the Louisiana state line on the east, sits in the Central Flyway, and April is a perfect time for witnessing the full scope of spring migration. Thousands of hawks, shorebirds, wading birds, gulls, terns, and songbirds are pouring north through the region en masse at this time of the year. The variety of habitats here includes open beaches, mudflats, freshwater marshes, saltwater marshes, rice fields, coastal woodlands, bayous, and piney woods. Such habitat diversity in a relatively compact area translates to spectacular bird diversity. The "hotspots" of High Island and Sabine Woods are part of birding lore for the number and variety of Neotropical songbirds seen every year in these woodland oases. On any given day these coastal woods may teem with flycatchers, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings and orioles. Equally marvelous is that when bird activity in the woods is slow, nearby areas consistently are productive for shorebirds, wading birds, and other water-associated species. While observing migrant songbirds is of greatest interest to many, April is a prime time to visit the piney woods when resident birds of the southern forest are more readily found. In summary, there is never a lack of things to do, places to go, or birds to see on the Upper Coast!

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

- The following descriptions provide overviews of each field trip destination and its associated birdlife. Participants should be aware that the daily agenda will remain flexible so your tour leaders can adjust for varying circumstances including, but not limited to, changing weather conditions, migrant bird activity, and tidal conditions.
- Every few years, a “fallout” occurs along the coast in which hundreds, sometimes thousands, of migrating birds put down at once. In this phenomenon, northbound birds migrating over the Gulf of Mexico encounter strong wind or rain out of the north. The birds, already tired from the long ocean crossing, are further exhausted by the poor flying conditions and are forced to take shelter in the first patch of green that they encounter. Such events are rare and do not happen every year, but when they do occur, the results for birders can be spectacular. In the event of a fallout, your tour leader may abort the day’s intended plan to take advantage of the spectacle.
- Each field trip group will consist of 14 participants and two tour leaders in two touring vans. Two groups of 14 will visit each field trip zone each day, but with little to no overlap, to maintain a high quality of experience for our guests.
- **ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY OPTION:** For those with an interest in botany, we will offer field trips to the piney woods and coast each day. Each field trip will be offered twice to accommodate interest. These excursions will be led by Peter Zika, a botanist at the herbarium of the University of Washington and will be available by sign-up at a time to be announced.

FIELD TRIPS

Zone 1: Bolivar Peninsula and High Island Departs 6:30 a.m.; Returns by 4:45 p.m.



Blackburnian Warbler, High Island, Texas, April © Michael O'Brien

This field trip visits the Bolivar Peninsula and High Island, two of the region's most famous and beloved birding areas. The Bolivar Peninsula is a premier location for shorebirds, gulls, terns, and waders while High Island is one of the country's best known "hotspots" for observing Neotropical songbirds in migration. The order of visitation to these sites will be determined by the pulse of songbird migration, in the case of High Island, and by tidal conditions on the Bolivar Peninsula.

Approximately one hour southwest of Beaumont, the Bolivar Peninsula exists as a narrow, 30-mile expanse of sandy beaches, salt marshes, and tidal mudflats separating the Gulf of Mexico from Galveston Bay. Much of the peninsula is developed with beach house getaways, and small municipalities, yet much habitat remains in remarkably unspoiled condition. Consequently, the peninsula is an outstanding place to see a variety of birds associated with water and marsh, especially in April when diversity and numbers are peaking. Although birds can be seen almost anywhere, Rollover Pass and the Bolivar Flats consistently are the most productive destinations.



Piping Plover, Bolivar Flats, Texas, April © Erik Bruhnke

Rollover Pass is a broad area of sandflats and mudflats that are regularly inundated by tidal waters from the East Bay (of Galveston Bay). The best time to be here is at low tide when extensive areas of wet mud become visible and fill with amazing concentrations of birds. It is not an exaggeration to say that thousands of birds may be present under ideal conditions. When the tide is out, immense flocks of gulls and terns rest on the exposed flats and feed and bathe in the surrounding shallows. Resident Laughing gulls are common and handsome in their breeding dress, while a few Franklin's and Bonaparte's gulls are often seen. This area is also good for terns, where at least seven species may be seen at once including Caspian, Royal, Sandwich, Common, Forster's, Black, and Least terns. A marvelous variety of other water-loving species could also be present, a sampling of which includes American White Pelican; Reddish, Great, and Snowy egrets; elegant American Oystercatchers and Black-necked Stilts; Short-billed Dowitcher; and Dunlin and Western Sandpipers in breeding dress.

Near where the Bolivar Peninsula tapers to a pointed projection into Galveston Bay, the Bolivar Flats exist as a protected haven for birdlife. Here, on the open beaches of the Gulf, broad expanses of sand, mud, and salt marsh often play host to a superb mix of waterbirds. A dozen species of gulls and terns may be present including the immaculate Gull-billed Tern and striking Black Skimmer while Brown and American White pelicans, Neotropic Cormorants, and many species of shorebirds hug the waterline. This is also an excellent area to see the “ringed” plovers, where four species may be present including Wilson’s, Piping, Semipalmated, and Snowy plovers. American Avocets winter here and should be plentiful in their breeding dress prior to their impending migration.



Scarlet Tanager, High Island, Texas, April © Michael O'Brien

From the Bolivar Peninsula we will retrace our route to the community of High Island at the top of the peninsula. For first-time visitors, the word “island” can cause confusion, with expectations of a patch of land surrounded by water. Not an island in the traditional sense, High Island is an island of another type, a botanical island. This portion of the Texas coast is predominately flat, low-lying, and covered in salt marsh. In scattered areas, however, subterranean salt formations rise close to the surface and elevate the overlying soil above the surrounding terrain. These uplifted areas are perched above the tidal flow, i.e. saltwater inundation, allowing a mix of trees and plants to thrive in an environment otherwise absent of woody vegetation. Among the larger trees, live oaks and hackberries form “islands” of vegetation. To tired songbirds arriving on our shores after a lengthy ocean crossing, the trees of High Island represent the first opportunity for food and shelter. During spring migration, there are always at least some birds around, more on some days than on others, but these woods seldom disappoint. On days with greater activity, when lots of birds are moving, the Houston Audubon sanctuaries of Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks may be alive with colorful songbirds. Scarlet and Summer tanagers, Baltimore and Orchard orioles, Painted and

Indigo buntings, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are all regular here in April, all dazzling in their breeding dress. For many, it is the opportunity to see a dozen or more species of warblers in a day that are of greatest interest. Indeed, a good day for migration could turn up a tantalizing diversity of warblers. We'll watch for some of the early season migrants, like Northern Parula, and Prothonotary, Hooded, and Kentucky warblers alongside some of the species that occur more toward the second half of migration, such as Chestnut-sided and Magnolia warblers. Of course, anything is possible, and we may come across other goodies such as Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Cerulean, and Blackburnian warblers among many other species.

Zone 2: Beaumont Area and Sabine Woods

Departs 7:00 a.m.; Returns by 4:45 p.m.



Wood Thrush, Upper Texas Coast, April © Michael O'Brien

The city of Beaumont lies within an hour's drive of the Louisiana state line near the Lower Sabine River drainage. Beaumont is a gateway of sorts to the piney woods to the north and to the expansive salt marshes that fringe the easternmost section of the Texas coast. Within city limits are a variety of parks, sloughs, and patches of woods that are often quite "birdy," while the coastal oasis that is Sabine Woods is a preeminent destination for observing Neotropical migrants. On this day we'll stay closer to Beaumont. The focus of our activities will be on Sabine Woods and nearby Sea Rim State Park; however, there may be time today to visit a few sites in and around Beaumont depending on migration activity along the coast.

An hour or less from the hotel, Sabine Woods is located along the Upper Coast a short distance from Port Arthur. Like High Island, Sabine Woods is an "island" of vegetation amid miles of salt marsh, the only form of sanctuary available to tired and hungry birds on the move. The importance of this sanctuary cannot be

overstated. Owned by the Texas Ornithological Society (T.O.S.), Sabine Woods is a prime migration hotspot managed as a sanctuary for the birds, but with a utilitarian sensibility for birders. Underneath the canopy of live oaks is a network of trails, including a boardwalk, offering access throughout the woodland. On a “good” day we may encounter birds of all stripes from flycatchers to orioles, and from vireos to thrushes. A representation of the many species possible at Sabine Woods includes Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated vireos, Gray Catbird, Hooded and Kentucky warblers, Swainson’s Thrush, Wood Thrush, Veery, Painted Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, and Dickcissel. As with High Island, anything is possible, and if the day of our visit coincides with an especially good day for migration, we may end up spending most of our time here.



Reddish Egret (white morph) Upper Texas Coast, April © Erik Bruhnke

Down the road from Sabine Woods, Sea Rim State Park protects vast acreages of salt marsh and mud flats. Down here on the coast, the smell of salt-sea air provides a pleasant interlude from birding in the woods. Here, we will be in the realm of marsh birds, favored by Tricolored and Little Blue herons, Reddish Egret, Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned night-herons, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Willet, and a variety of shorebirds. Close inspection of the marsh could turn up a resident Clapper Rail while Marsh Wrens and Common Yellowthroats chatter and skulk as only they can.

In and around Beaumont we will keep our eyes open for Fish Crow, a bird that seldom strays from the Lower Sabine River drainage, yet one that is found consistently in a few places around the city. Tyrell Park is one possible destination, a place where we could catch up with a variety of more common species such as Blue Jay, Chimney Swift, Purple Martin, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse,

and Common Grackle among others. Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and Yellow-throated Warbler also occur in this area.

**Zone 3: Jocelyn Nungary (Anahuac) National Wildlife Refuge and High Island
Departs 7:30 a.m.; Returns by 4:45 p.m.**



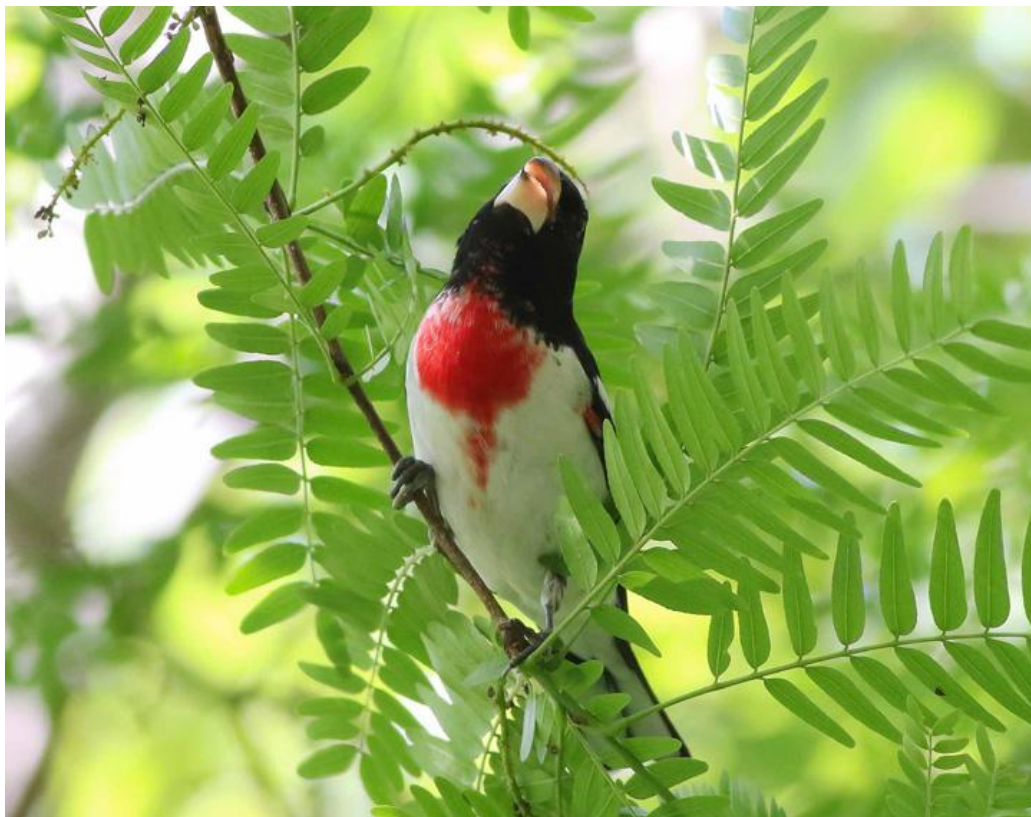
Roseate Spoonbill, Upper Texas Coast, April © Erik Bruhnke

When birders speak reverentially about their travels in Texas, Jocelyn Nungary National Wildlife Refuge (Anahuac NWR until March 2025) is a prime example of how this state can elicit such nostalgia. Not only is Nungary one of the single-best birding locations in Texas, but many people also regard it as one of the single-best sites in North America. Spectacular waterbird diversity in equally spectacular numbers are the primary draws, but the refuge is good for all types of wildlife. Moreover, Nungary lies a mere 20 minutes from High Island. Together, these two destinations make for an outstanding day trip.

For birders visiting the Upper Coast, a trip to Jocelyn Nungary National Wildlife Refuge is as essential as spending time at High Island. For it is here, adjacent to East Galveston Bay, a 34,000-acre mosaic of marshlands, flooded fields, reed beds, and impoundments supports a wonderful variety of birds. Although Nungary is productive at all seasons, it is springtime when the refuge is at its best. Thousands of waterfowl, shorebirds, ibis, and other birds utilize flooded fields within the refuge while other waterfowl, herons, egrets, rails, and gallinules are frequently encountered in the freshwater marshes. The chief attraction here is Shoveler Pond, accessed by a loop drive around an elevated dike. Water conditions vary, but the quality of birding does not.

A trip around Shoveler Pond will be first on our agenda, and as we make our way slowly around the auto-tour loop we will make frequent stops to observe birds and other wildlife. Nungary is particularly well-known for its populations of American and Least bitterns, Purple Gallinule, and King Rail, all of which we'll watch for carefully in addition to Neotropic Cormorant, Anhinga, Fulvous and Black-bellied whistling-ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Common Gallinule, Sora, Gull-billed Tern, and others. Besides birds, Nungary is a great place to study American Alligator, which thrives in the marshy environs. Closer to the refuge headquarters, flooded fields may hold hundreds of shorebirds of a dozen or more species. Among the more common Western and Semipalmated sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Semipalmated Plover, we'll hope to pick out Black-bellied Plover, American Golden Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper, Solitary and Stilt sandpipers, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, and Wilson's Phalarope. Another bird we'll watch for is Glossy Ibis, once rare in Texas but now regular in small numbers along the Upper Coast. We'll sort through the more common White and White-faced ibis to locate this less common species.

Between Jocelyn Nungary and High Island, the highway passes through a patchwork of cultivated fields and remnant coastal prairie. If we are fortunate to come across a field being flooded, we may capitalize on a bounty of shorebirds that stop to feed. Although not as many fields are in production as in past years, we usually are able to locate at least one field under irrigation. Should we be so fortunate, we will scan carefully for other birds including Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Upland Sandpiper, and less numerous species such as Hudsonian Godwit, and Buff-breasted and White-rumped sandpipers. This habitat is also superb for birds of prey and other open country species, where we have good chances of locating Northern Harrier; Red-tailed, White-tailed, and Swainson's Hawks; Peregrine Falcon; American Kestrel; Scissor-tailed Flycatcher; Loggerhead Shrike; and Eastern Meadowlark.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak, High Island, Texas, April © Michael O'Brien

In the afternoon we will visit High Island. We will poke our heads into Boy Scout Woods to gauge the flow of migration for the day, or check the water drip to see what's around, before heading over to Smith Oaks. Again, depending on bird activity we may spend the remainder of the day seeking warblers and other Neotropical migrants amid the oaks and understory vegetation. On the other hand, at some point we will certainly make the short walk over to the Rookery where we can observe at close range an array of nesting Anhingas, Neotropic Cormorants, and wading birds. A visit to the Rookery is a highlight of any springtime trip to High Island, where, from a distance of as little as 10 yards, it is possible to study Tricolored Herons, Great and Snowy Egrets, and Roseate Spoonbills at the height of the nesting cycle when birds are in peak breeding plumage, engaged in courtship, and actively nest building and chick rearing.

Zone 4: Piney Woods
Departs 6:00 a.m.; Returns by 4:45 p.m.



Swainson's Warbler, Big Thicket National Preserve, Texas, April © Greg Lasley

The Upper Texas Coast is a region whose diversity of birdlife is underpinned by an equal diversity of habitats. To demonstrate this point, today we will travel away from the coast for a day of birding in the piney woods and bottomlands of East Texas. This field trip is the earliest starting of the four trips yet promises exposure to habitat and associated birds not available on the other field trips. We will target regional specialty birds, principally Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Swainson's Warbler, but our travels this day will be about broader exposure to a southeastern bottomland ecosystem.

Our destination is Big Thicket National Preserve, situated a short forty minutes north of Beaumont. At more than 113,00 acres, Big Thicket is an ecological treasure renowned for the remarkable diversity of habitats that converge to form the greater ecosystem. In a compact area, the exploring naturalist may explore pine forests, cypress swamps, hardwood woodlands, and costal prairies. Due to extensive human habitation of the broader region, Big Thicket is not one continuous park, but rather a patchwork of protected areas, each

with its own character. Together these sections are home to a wonderful assortment of birds, mammals, fish, plants and trees, and a suite of invertebrates.

Our field trip will visit the Turkey Creek Unit, which, at 8,032 acres, is the most developed and biologically richest section of the preserve. Our travels will be structured around finding the local breeding birds and passage migrants. Among the birds we could encounter today are Mississippi Kite; Red-shouldered and Broad-winged hawks; Red-headed, Downy, Red-bellied, and Pileated woodpeckers; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker; Great-crested Flycatcher; White-eyed, Red-eyed, and Yellow-throated vireos; Blue Jay; Carolina Chickadee; Tufted Titmouse; Eastern Bluebird; Swainson's, Hooded, Pine, Yellow-throated, and Prothonotary warblers; Northern Parula; Summer Tanager; and more. Additionally, certain areas in this region are logged; at some point we will visit a regenerating clearing or two as this is the preferred habitat of the lovely Prairie Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Indigo Bunting.

Those with an interest in botany will appreciate the diversity of this area, which is home to a range of pines, oaks, hickories, Cherry Laurel, thickets of Yaupon and American hollies, Saw Palmetto, and myriad other plants.

Nights: MCM Eleganté, Beaumont

ALTERNATIVE FIELD TRIP OPTION: BOTANY

Departs 8:00 a.m.; Returns by 4:45 p.m.

Those with a keen interest in botany may be interested in our alternative field trip options. On each of the four field trip days, professional botanist Peter Zika will lead trips to the piney woods region north of Beaumont and to the coast in the vicinity of Beaumont and Sea Rim State Park or to the Bolivar Peninsula



Pitcher Plant Trail, Big Thicket National Preserve © YouTube

and High Island. Each field trip will be offered twice depending on interest. The piney woods trip will be offered on April 20 and 22; excursions to the coast will be offered on April 21 and 23. These trips will depart the hotel a little later and will return no later than 4:45. Important things to note are that the trips may return as early as the early afternoon, or perhaps not until 4:45. The leeway in timing allows for afternoon birding on the coast. Participation on these field trips will be available by sign-up on a first-come basis.

April 24, Day 6: Departure for home. Participants may depart Beaumont at any time today for flights home. The hotel provides complimentary shuttle service to the Beaumont/Port Arthur Regional Airport (airport code BPT). Participants who traveled to Beaumont from Houston on the 19th with a tour leader will be transferred by your tour leaders back to Houston (IAH). Please do not schedule flights departing prior to 12:00 p.m.

Essential Tour Information

EVENT SIZE: Our Anniversary Celebration can accommodate up to 112 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Barry Lyon, David Ascanio, Max Breckenridge, Erik Bruhnke, Kevin Burke, Peter English, Rafael Galvez, Brian Gibbons, Steve Hilty, Dion Hobcroft, Jeri Langham, Gary Langham, Brad McKinney, Michael O'Brien, Doris Valencia, Raymond VanBuskirk, Andrew Whittaker, Louise Zemaitis, Barry Zimmer, and Kevin Zimmer.



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.



David Ascanio, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent over 39 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, the Orinoco and Amazon River basins, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Guianas, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing voices of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela. David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about bird songs and coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published numerous papers about the birds of the *llanos* (plains), Orinoco River Island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species on which he has become an authority. He is the senior author of the *Field*

Guide to the Birds of Venezuela (2017). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists/guides in the Neotropics.



Max Breckenridge was born in the UK, but has lived virtually his entire life in Sydney, Australia. At age 12, his passion for birds was fostered when his parents took him and his brother out of school for 10 weeks to travel across Australia. After completing high school in Sydney, Max drove solo from Darwin to Broome, birding all the way, and spent the next month volunteering at the world-renowned Broome Bird Observatory. Max completed a Bachelor of Biodiversity & Conservation at Macquarie University in 2018. He has birded across every state and almost every corner of the Australian landmass. He has an excellent eye, and especially ear, for Australian birds. Some of his birding exploits in Australia include two separate trips to the remote rainforests of Iron Range National Park on Queensland's Cape York (including a fly-in-fly-out trip during the middle of the wet season, when he spent two weeks under a tarp in order to see some of the key

migrants from Papua New Guinea). Max is at home birding in the Old World and has spent the last decade covering as much of it as possible. He is incredibly passionate about wildlife conservation. In addition to guiding, he has spent much of his spare time working for BirdLife Australia, monitoring and researching the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, including working on several captive-releases of zoo-bred individuals. Max receives immense pleasure from birding and showing birds to others. He is currently living on Lake Macquarie, north of Sydney, with his partner, Fernanda.



Erik Bruhnke has loved birds since he was a child looking at chickadees. In 2008 he graduated from Northland College in Wisconsin with a Natural Resources degree. Erik taught field ornithology at Northland College for three semesters. Between 2009 and 2014, he spent his summers conducting field research focused on breeding bird transects in Upper Michigan, point counts for a breeding bird atlas in Minnesota and Wisconsin's Northwoods, vegetation and breeding bird surveys throughout wind farms in North Dakota's prairie potholes, and cavity-nesting surveys in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. A devoted raptor nerd, he is drawn to hawkwatches. He worked as an interpreter for six seasons at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, Minnesota; counted migrating raptors at the Corpus Christi HawkWatch in Texas in 2015; and was the 2016, 2017, and 2018 hawk counter at the Cape May Hawkwatch

in New Jersey. Erik's wildlife photography has won national awards, and he's written for the American Birding Association's *Birder's Guide*, *BirdWatching* magazine, and *Bird Watcher's Digest*. When not leading birding tours, Erik often leads field trips and speaks at birding festivals. He also enjoys hiking, kayaking, cross-country skiing, and just being out in the snow. In his free time he loves to cook and bake.



Kevin Burke is originally from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. He grew up running around in the woods and trails of Shenandoah National Park. His family spent many summers camping and hiking in the park. One of Kevin's favorite activities was jumping in the river and turning over every rock to see what was underneath. This eventually earned him the nickname "Hellgrammite Kid." This early exposure to the natural world has vaulted into a lifelong obsession with the outdoors. Kevin was introduced to birding while spending summers in Rhode Island at his grandmother's house. She would point out all the feeder birds and help him identify them. These early encounters helped foster a love for birds. An early Ornithology class at Hocking College in Ohio rekindled his love for birds. He has been birding every day since. He went on to get a Bachelor of Science in Ecotourism and Conservation Ecology from the University of Idaho. Kevin has been

involved with leading bird trips in some capacity for almost 20 years. He has led birding trips all throughout the United States, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. His birding journeys have also taken him to some spectacular locations such as Portugal, Colombia, The Bahamas, and Canada. This is truly a lifelong obsession. He currently resides with his family in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Kevin's wife and two kids also enjoy birding. They have fun kayaking, hiking, and camping in the mountains that surround their home. One of their favorite activities is jumping on the paddle board and kayaks and leisurely floating the French Broad River near their house.



Peter English grew up birding with Victor Emanuel and other tour leaders and was one of the inaugural camp leaders at the influential VENT youth camps. He went on to lead roughly 150 VENT tours in the US, Central America, and South America over the following 25 years. Peter earned his PhD studying mixed-species bird flocks in Amazonian Ecuador and has been both a Fulbright Scholar and a Watson Fellow. He has produced and published several bird call CDs with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Peter has been involved in rainforest conservation for most of his life, has built and managed ecotourism lodges in South America, has consulted on international ecotourism and conservation initiatives, and has lived or worked in 28 countries. Since his return to Austin, he has been a

professor at the University of Texas teaching ornithology and other biology courses while simultaneously serving as the executive director of a large professional society. Peter has brought all that experience to help VENT continue to be the leader in birding and nature tours.



Rafael Galvez has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. Always with a sketchpad in hand, he has traveled throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in pursuit of birds. He served several years as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, developing educational and conservation programs. He gained knowledge of the Caucasus region while directing a series of records and documentary shorts on the ancient chants of the Georgian nation. During that period he also produced retrospective books and catalogs on the works of Russian realist painters. He has combined his love of art, education, and birds while collaborating in several publications, including a field guide to *Raptors and Owls of Georgia (Caucasus)*, which he illustrated and coauthored. After working with raptor research along the Black Sea,

he returned to South Florida to spearhead a new phase for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project, where he has participated as director. As chair of citizen science and IBA monitoring at Tropical Audubon Society in Miami, he has reached out to underserved communities by providing opportunities for the greater appreciation of birds and Florida habitats. Currently, he lives in Homestead, spends much time in the Everglades, serves on the Florida Ornithological Society's Records Committee, and is on the Leica Sport Optics Pro Staff. He loves sharing his passion for birds with audiences of all ages, and has been a guide and teacher for over 15 years. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, GalvezBirds.com.



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.



Steve Hilty is the senior author of *A Guide to the Birds of Colombia*, and author of *Birds of Venezuela*, both by Princeton University Press, as well as the popular *Birds of Tropical America, A watcher's introduction to behavior, breeding and diversity*. He has also written a number of scientific papers on birds and plants, has described two species of birds new to science in Venezuela, and another, with a team of scientists, in Colombia. He also wrote the text and species accounts for the tanager family for the acclaimed *Handbook of Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Press in Barcelona. In a departure from ornithology, Steve also wrote *Dirt, Sweat, and Diesel: A Family Farm in the 21st Century*, a book focusing on a Midwestern farm family. However, he returned to birds with his recent (2021) *Birds of Colombia*, published by Lynx Editions of Barcelona, Spain. Steve holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Arizona and has worked

at the Arid Lands Department at the University of Arizona, and as a broker with Merrill Lynch. He is currently a research associate in ornithology at the University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute. Since 1983 he has also worked for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, guiding trips throughout North and South America, and co-leading trips to India, the Orient, and Australasian regions. With more than four decades of experience in South America and a wide range of natural history interests, he brings a unique breadth of expertise to his Neotropical tours. At night he often turns his binoculars towards the skies for stargazing. Steve lives in Kansas City with his wife, Beverly. They have two daughters.



Dion Hobcroft has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led many tours (more than 200) to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, Indonesia, India, China, Southwest Pacific, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Malawi, Myanmar, Japan, Russia, Alaska, Tanzania, Uganda, Madagascar, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the Antarctic. In 2007, 2013–2019, and 2022–2025 alone, Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients every calendar year. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 40 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australasia, listing over 1,200 species, placing him in the top echelons

of the region's birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities to his travel companions. Dion has published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife, Lise, and two grown-up children, Grace (age 24) and Daniel (age 20).



Gary Langham started birding at age 7, when his father discovered birding, and by age 13 he had seen more than 500 species in the lower 48. By age 18, he was co-leading VENT tours in Canada, California, Costa Rica, Panama, and, especially, Venezuela, eventually leading more than 100 tours. He is a broadly trained scientist with 20+ years of experience working on science-based solutions for people and the environment. In 2019, he became the Executive Director of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), a vibrant, academic, and scholarly society based in Washington, D.C. The AAG represents 9,000 members worldwide who work at the intersection of place, people, and the environment. Before this, Gary was Vice President and Chief Scientist of the National Audubon Society, directing Audubon's wide-reaching scientific initiatives and studies. His team used 100

years of Audubon data to create the first comprehensive analysis of the effects of future climate change on 588 North American bird species. In 2000, he became the founding President of the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy (NGC). The NGC gives grants to Latin American researchers studying grasslands in the Neotropics. Gary completed a National Science Foundation Bioinformatics postdoc at the University of California, Berkeley, and received his Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from Cornell University.



Jeri M. Langham has a Ph.D. in plant ecology from Washington State University, and after 38 years as a professor of biological sciences at California State University in Sacramento, retired in May 2008. He received the first Outstanding Teacher Award from the newly formed College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in 1997; the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Science Educational Equity and Minority Organization of Science Students organizations in 2005; and his University's third annual Lifetime Achievement Award for Community Service in 2006. Jeri has ardently birded all over North America, as well as Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Kenya, Borneo, South Africa, Thailand, Cuba, and Australia. Born and raised in Venezuela, he speaks fluent Spanish. Known for his enthusiasm and boundless energy, Jeri thoroughly enjoys searching for birds and

sharing them with others. His passion for teaching and his natural teaching abilities soon become apparent as his tour participants enjoy learning more about the biological world around them. Jeri is a former member of the California Bird Records Committee. He is a Founding Director and the Fundraising Director for the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy.



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.



Michael O'Brien is a freelance artist, author, and environmental consultant living in Cape May, New Jersey. He has a passionate interest in bird vocalizations and field identification, and a serious addiction to migration and nocturnal birding. His travels have taken him throughout North and Central America and beyond. At home in Cape May, Michael serves as an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops, 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*, and is primary author of *Larkwire*, an online and handheld application for learning bird sounds. 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 guides. Michael also has an intense interest in butterflies, leads several “Birds & Butterflies” tours with his wife, Louise Zemaitis, and is coordinator of the Cape May Butterfly Count.



Doris Valencia is a keen Peruvian birder and naturalist. She was born in Cusco, the capital of the Incas. Her passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in her childhood. She spent her early years in the Madre de Dios region (southern Amazon) where her parents managed an eco-lodge. Doris leads birding trips throughout Perú and Colombia and is expanding to Ecuador. She unites great birding skills with a wide-ranging knowledge in all aspects of natural history. She is also an avid student of Peruvian history. Her lectures on the history of Machu Picchu are superb. Doris is the director of the Pacha Conservancy Project, which works with reforestation, outdoor education, research, and community outreach in the fragile cloud forest north of Cusco-Perú. She is also an entrepreneur and has been working to promote women in the tourism industry as guides and naturalists, especially from the communities that surround important

bird areas.



Raymond L. VanBuskirk is an expert birder who has been guiding tours for over a decade. Raymond has led tours throughout the Western Hemisphere from Alaska to Chile and most parts in between. He has guided in almost every country in Central America, across the Caribbean, and down both sides of the Andes in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. Raymond’s experience is not limited to the New World—he has traveled widely across the globe, has spent a great deal of time in the Pacific studying pelagics, and has led tours in Asia and Africa.

Raymond has had a longtime commitment to ornithology. In addition to guiding, he has conducted research with USFWS in the Arctic Ocean, North Pacific, and New Mexico. He has held leadership roles in the Central New Mexico Bird Alliance and Western Field

Ornithologists. Raymond also helped guide the next generation of birders by being a regular instructor at the ABA’s youth birding camps and at the Hog Island Audubon camps in Hog Island, Maine.

Raymond is also committed to including everyone in birding, and organizes and leads annual conferences for QBNA, an informal club for LGBTQIA+ birders. When not leading tours or conducting research, Raymond can be found at his home in St. Louis, Missouri with his partner, Marissa; stepdaughter Savannah; and their dog and two large snakes.



Andrew Whittaker was born in the UK and began his birding passion at the early age of seven (thanks to his parents) but resides in Brazil. Andy is also a true all-around naturalist with an innate fascination for all aspects of the natural world and simply loves sharing in the field his intimate bird, wildlife, and orchid knowledge in a fun and enthusiastic manner. A senior member of the VENT staff, Andy has led VENT tours worldwide since 1993 from dense South and Central American rainforests to the great White Continent of Antarctica, and throughout Europe to the deserts of the Middle East. More recently Andy can be found leading in the bird-rich rainforests of West Africa, the mammal-rich savannas of East Africa, or observing the cute Red Panda or exotic tragopan in the mighty Himalayas of Nepal. In 2024 Andy was able to show over 2,000 bird species to VENT clients on his tours! Andy is an excellent communicator and calm tour organizer

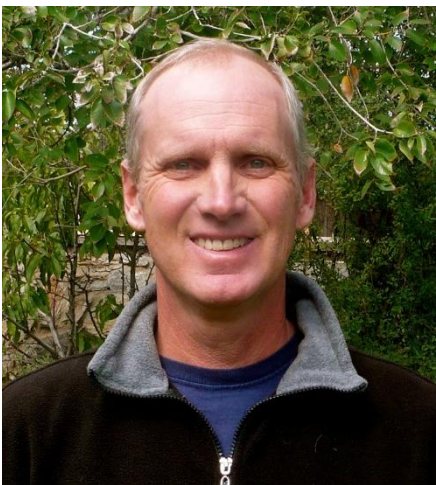
who loves nothing better than hearing, finding, and sharing a rare poorly known skulker, or telling one of his many fascinating and fun birding and travel stories. His enthusiasm in the field is simply contagious, and a combination of these traits has made him a favored leader amongst participants. Although born in England, Andy considers himself Brazilian, having lived more than 30 years in this mega biodiverse country, first working for the Smithsonian Institution, studying Amazonian rainforest birds in Manaus, as well as leading expeditions to remote corners of the Amazon; he feels privileged to have worked with the incredible Kayapo Indians. Andy is widely considered an authority on Amazonian birds, having authored numerous technical publications on the region's avifauna. He is well recognized for his amazing hearing and intimate knowledge of South American bird vocalizations. This trait has enabled him to discover several exciting new bird species (such as the Cryptic Forest-Falcon in 2002), as well as rediscover others thought to be extinct such as the White-tailed Tityra while on a VENT tour in 2006! He loves recording birds, too, with over 800 hours of recordings housed in the British Library Sound Archive. Andy is a qualified ringer/bander trained by the late Dr. Clive Minton (fondly known as the father of shorebird studies). His lifelong fascination with bird migration has seen Andy working around the globe at several top bird observatories: Eilat, Israel; Long Point, Canada; and in the UK at Sandwich Bay and on Fair Isle, Scotland, as well as researching shorebirds in Borneo on their East Asian flyway. Andy had the honor of working with Sir David Attenborough in Brazil as a consultant for the prestigious BBC *Life of Birds* series. At present, Andy is working with Kevin Zimmer on a comprehensive field guide to the birds of Brazil to be published by Princeton University Press. Andy is an associate researcher at the Museum Goeldi, Belem, an active conservationist, and loves bird photography and taxonomy. He is also an avid football/soccer fan of Birmingham City FC and Real Madrid due to its worldwide mega star Jude Bellingham coming from his home team. Andy lives near Porto Alegre, Southern Brazil with his partner, Jaqueline, and their many orchids.



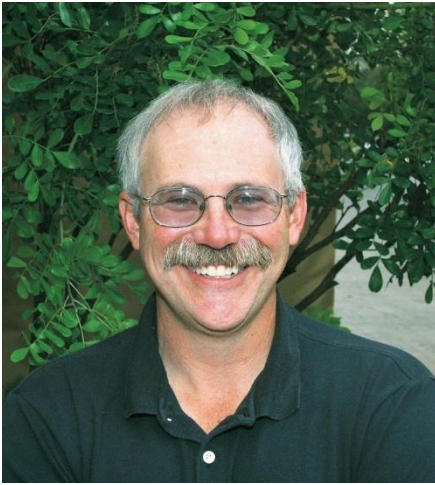
Louise Zemaitis is an artist and naturalist living in Cape May, New Jersey where she is a popular field trip leader teaching birding workshops as an Associate Naturalist with New Jersey Audubon's Cape May Bird Observatory. She also enjoys leading birding groups and lecturing at birding festivals and is known for her enthusiasm for all natural history subjects. Louise and her husband, Michael O'Brien, have been guiding young birders at birding events and conferences for many years. In addition to leading, Louise worked as field coordinator of the Monarch Monitoring Project in Cape May and served as compiler of the Cape May Christmas Bird Count for many years. An honors graduate of Temple University's Tyler School of Art (owner of Swallowtail Studio), she enjoys working as a freelance artist, and her illustrations have been widely published. Her proudest accomplishment has been the raising of her two sons: Bradley, a conservation educator and artist, and Alec, a library scientist and musician.



Peter Zika is a field biologist from Seattle, investigating and describing new species of plants from western North America. Working at the herbarium of the University of Washington, he is writing several chapters for new books on the plants of California, the Pacific Northwest, and the flora of North America, as well as conducting biological inventories of National Parks and Nature Conservancy preserves, studying interactions between noxious weeds and native wildlife, and researching the diet of fruit-eating birds. His interests in ecology have led him across the Tropics and into Polar Regions for the last 25 years. In addition to teaching wetland plant identification, he serves as a ship's naturalist on all oceans and continents. Peter has published more than 100 scientific notes, articles, and books, as well as occasional photographs, cards, and reviews in the popular press.



Barry Zimmer has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has coauthored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,600 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.



Kevin Zimmer has authored three books and numerous papers dealing with field identification and bird-finding in North America. His book, *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*, deals with finding and identifying birds in the western United States. Living in Alaska contributed to his affection for the Far North, where he has anchored VENT's tour program since 1986. For the past 30+ years he has concentrated his attention on the Neotropics, particularly on Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. He has directed VENT's Brazil program since 1991. In the past decade, he has rekindled a love affair with the birds and wildlife of Africa, an interest that began as a young boy (watching Marlin Perkins on *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*), but which blossomed with his first trip to Kenya in 1987 and leading several tours there through 1998. Following his return to Africa after a hiatus of more than a decade, his yearly tours to Africa have

taken him to Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Kevin has a PhD in biology (research emphasis in Avian Evolutionary Ecology) from New Mexico State University, and is a Research Associate of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, an elective member of the American Ornithologists' Society (AOS), and a member of the A.O.S. South American Classification Committee (SACC). He formerly served two terms on the American Birding Association (ABA) Check-list Committee, and is a regular contributor to Cornell's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds. He has authored numerous technical papers on the taxonomy, distribution, and behavior of Neotropical birds, particularly those of the Amazon Basin. In 2003 he completed (with co-author Mort Isler) the major chapter on the *Thamnophilidae* (antbirds) for the prestigious *Handbook of Birds of the World* series. In 2006, he and Curtis Marantz coauthored a six-CD compilation of *Bird Voices of Alta Floresta and Southeastern Amazonian Brazil* (produced by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds) that represents the most comprehensive set of commercially available bird recordings for any part of the Amazon Basin. He and Andrew Whittaker are currently at work on a comprehensive field guide to the birds of Brazil, to be published by Princeton University Press. Kevin lives in Atascadero, California with his wife, Susan. Their daughter, Marina, is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT). She and her husband, Ryan, and their children, Brinn and Clayton, are now living in Napa, California.

KEYNOTE PRESENTERS: Jennifer Ackerman, Kenn Kaufman, Scott Weidensaul, and Ed Yong



Jennifer Ackerman has been writing about science and nature for more than three decades. She is the author of bestselling books, including *The Genius of Birds* and *What an Owl Knows*, which have earned her critical acclaim and a dedicated readership. Her latest work, *What an Owl Knows*, delves into the enigmatic lives of owls, offering a brilliant scientific investigation into these elusive birds and why they captivate human imagination. Her writing is distinguished by its blend of scientific rigor and lyrical prose, making complex biological concepts accessible and engaging to a broad audience.

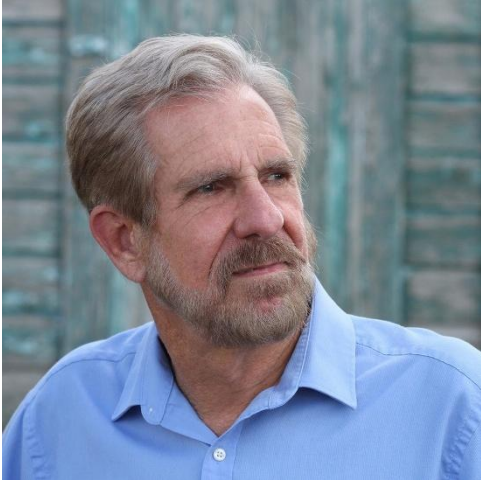
Ackerman's talks are enriched with her personal field observations and the latest scientific research, providing audiences with a profound appreciation for the avian world and the broader ecosystems they inhabit. Her talks are not just informative but transformative. Ackerman's ability to connect with audiences of all backgrounds and foster a deep connection to the natural world, make her an ideal choice for events focused on nature, wildlife conservation, and the wonders of the natural world.

In her latest book, *What an Owl Knows*, Ackerman collaborates with scientists in the field to investigate how modern technology and tools are being utilized to understand owl communication, hunting, courtship, mating, parenting, and seasonal movements. She enlivens this research with her own personal observations in the field, resulting in a captivating exploration of owls worldwide and throughout human history, offering a mesmerizing account of these mysterious birds.

Ackerman's New York Times bestselling book, *The Genius of Birds*, has been translated into twenty-eight languages and was named one of the best nonfiction books of 2016 by *The Wall Street Journal*, a Best Science Book by NPR's Science Friday, and a Nature Book of the Year by *The Sunday Times*. Combining a travelogue with a scientific investigation, a nature guide with a philosophical journey, *The Genius of Birds* offers readers a surprising and beautiful look at the extraordinary cleverness of birds, and a thought-provoking meditation on intelligence itself.

Her book, *The Bird Way: A New Look at How Birds Talk, Work, Play, Parent, and Think*, was a perfect follow-up for her loyal readers. *The Bird Way* draws on personal observations from Ackerman's travels, from the tropical rainforests of eastern Australia and the remote woodlands of northern Japan to the rolling hills of lower Austria and the islands of Alaska's Kachemak Bay. The book was a finalist for the PEN/E. O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award.

Her other books include *Birds by the Shore: Observing the Natural Life of the Atlantic Coast*, *Sex Sleep Eat Drink Dream: A Day in the Life of Your Body*, and *Chance in the House of Fate: A Natural History of Heredity*. Ackerman's articles and essays have appeared in *National Geographic*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Scientific American*, and many other publications. She is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, including a 2024 Guggenheim Fellowship, fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Bunting Institute, and a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

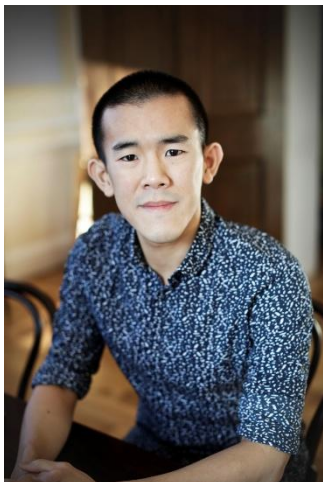


A dedicated naturalist from the age of six, **Kenn Kaufman** arrived on the birding scene as a teenager in the 1970s, hitch-hiking all over North America in search of birds -- an adventure later chronicled in his cult-classic book *Kingbird Highway*. His friendship with Victor Emanuel goes back to 1973. He joined VENT as a part-time leader in 1986, eventually leading workshops and tours to five continents, in between pursuing a parallel career as a writer, editor, and illustrator. Most of his energy currently goes into writing books and painting bird portraits. His 14 books include his latest, *The Birds That Audubon Missed*, published in 2024. Kenn is a field editor for the National Audubon Society, a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society, and the only person to have received the American Birding Association's lifetime achievement award twice. He lives in Oak Harbor, Ohio, with his wife, Kimberly

Kaufman, who is currently the director of the Black Swamp Bird Observatory.



Scott Weidensaul is the author of nearly 30 books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist "Living on the Wind" and his New York Times bestseller *A World on the Wing*. His latest book, *Return of the Oystercatcher*, coming in April 2026, showcases what's working for bird conservation around the world. Weidensaul is a contributing editor for Audubon magazine, a columnist for Bird Watcher's Digest, and writes for a variety of other publications including Living Bird. He is a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society and an active field researcher, studying saw-whet owl migration for 30 years, as well as winter hummingbirds in the East, bird migration in Alaska, and the winter movements of Snowy Owls through Project SNOWstorm, which he co-founded.



Ed Yong is a Pulitzer Prize-winning science reporter whose fascinating presentations on animals and the natural world are infused with humor, joy, wonder, and infectious enthusiasm. His *New York Times*-best-selling book, *An Immense World*, is an astounding tour of the radically different ways that animals perceive the world. Yong dives into each animal's *umwelt*—their specific "sensory bubble"—with curiosity and awe, exploring how different senses like heat, sound, smell, and echolocation inform how animals interact with their surroundings.

After years of pandemic reporting left him burnt out and struggling with his mental health, Yong turned to a new hobby—birdwatching—to help him heal and reconnect with his original beat of nature writing. In birdwatching, Yong found a much deeper connection to the natural world. Now, Yong speaks about how exploring your environment can be restorative as well as informative.

A *New York Times* bestseller, *An Immense World* won the Andrew Carnegie Medal, was a finalist for the Kirkus Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award, and was longlisted for the PEN America 2023 Literary Award, as well as appearing on many Best Books of the Year lists. In 2025 the book was a recipient of the Science + Literature award by the National Book Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. A beautiful, full-color adaptation of *An Immense World* for Young Readers was published in May 2025.

Ed Yong is also the bestselling author of *I Contain Multitudes: The Microbes Within Us*, a groundbreaking, informative, and entertaining examination of the relationship between animals and microbes. He won the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for Exemplary Reporting for his coverage of the pandemic, as well as the George Polk Award for science reporting; the Victor Cohn Prize for medical-science reporting; the Neil and Susan Sheehan Award for investigative journalism; the John P. McGovern Award from the American Medical Writers Association; and the AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Award for in-depth reporting. In 2024, Yong was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for his trailblazing science writing. A longtime science reporter for *The Atlantic*, his work has also appeared in *National Geographic*, the *New Yorker*, *Wired*, *Nature*, *New Scientist*, and *Scientific American*, among others.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: \$4,495 per person based on double occupancy. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 6, 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 alcoholic beverages, 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 \$365 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 event fee is due 150 days (November 20, 2025) prior to the event 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 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 \(TSA\)](https://www.transportation.gov/airport-security) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: For this short trip to the Upper Texas Coast, light field clothing is the norm. April is a time of generally mild to warm days. In the event of late cold front, which is entirely possible in April, 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 safe bet, you should come prepared for a variety of conditions. Please note that mosquitos may be present in all areas. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** Several 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 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.
- **Other cold weather gear:** In the event of a cold front, you will be very glad you brought a few items of clothing suitable for cold weather. We recommend bringing a fleece and/or light water-repellent jacket.
- **Smart-casual (optional):** Dinner each night will be in a large banquet hall, followed by a guest speaker's address. We emphasize that while the 50th Anniversary Celebration is an important event, participants are not expected to bring fancy apparel or semi-formal wear. Field clothing or casual wear is acceptable for the evening programs, but a 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 our hotel, 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**
- **Insect repellent**
- **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 tour 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: Spring on the Upper Texas Coast is generally one of the more pleasant and enjoyable times of the year to be in the region. Most days are sunny and warm and humidity is low. Temperatures on the Texas coast in April range from the middle 60s to the upper 80s. It is possible we could experience a strong weather front, bringing overcast skies, wind, and rain out of the north with temperatures dropping into the upper 40s.

CONDITIONS:

Hotel: All nights will be spent at the MCM Eleganté Hotel Beaumont. It is a full-service hotel located 12 miles from the Beaumont/Port Arthur airport. Among the many services offered by the hotel are airport shuttle service, full-service bar, spacious non-smoking rooms, pool, room service, and spa.

Celebration Program: The Celebration includes four days of field trips, evening social hour, group dinners, and keynote presentations. The following schedule details a typical day of the program.

- **Breakfast:** A breakfast buffet will be available each morning starting at 5:00 a.m.
- **Field Trip Departure/Return Times:** Field trip departure times range 6:00–7:30 a.m. All return times are listed as “by 4:45 p.m.” This does not mean that all field trips will return to the hotel at 4:45 p.m., but rather that the trips will return no later than 4:45 p.m. The alternative field trip option for those interested in botany will depart the hotel at 8:00 a.m. The return time will vary, but participants should be prepared to be away from the hotel until 4:45.
- **Lunch:** The hotel will provide high-quality box lunches. These will be augmented with snack and other food items by VENT.
- **Evening Social:** Each evening, a social hour will begin at 5:30 p.m. and will last until the start of dinner. A cash bar will be available during this time.
- **Dinner:** Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. each night.
- **Keynote Presentations:** A keynote presentation will be held each night following dinner and will begin at approximately 7:30 p.m. Each address will be 45-60 minutes in duration. The schedule:
 - Monday, April 20: Scott Weidensaul
 - Tuesday, April 21: Jennifer Ackerman
 - Wednesday, April 22: Ed Yong
 - Thursday, April 23: Kenn Kaufman

Keynote Presenter Books and Book Signings: All keynote presenters will be available to sign books at scheduled times. You may prefer to bring books by each author with you. Penguin RandomHouse books will have an authorized seller on site for books by Jennifer Ackerman, and Ed Yong's *An Immense World*. Please see the SUGGESTED READING section farther down for a list of books by each author.

Field Trip Information: The Upper Texas Coast offers some of the finest birding in North America. Within the region, VENT has identified four zones of importance to which field trips will be scheduled: Bolivar Flats and High Island, Beaumont area and Sabine Woods, Jocelyn Nungary National Wildlife Refuge and more of High Island, and the Piney Woods region north of Beaumont. There will be four days of field trips over the course of the celebration; every participant will experience every zone and spend time in the field with at least half of the tour leaders. Travel will be aboard 15 passenger vans. Each set of vans consists of two vans. Two sets of vans will depart each day for each zone; however, the two sets will not follow the exact same route. Each van will hold seven participants, and each set will hold a total of 14 participants. To accommodate our special guests (keynote presenters), one van in each set will hold an 8th passenger. Prior to the start of the event, participants will be assigned randomly to one of eight field trip groups. Each group will be given a bird name. Participants will remain with the group to which they are assigned through the duration of the event. While we are aware that some of our travelers have favorite tour leaders, we cannot grant requests to be placed in specific groups that will guarantee time with a specific tour leader. Before the event, you will receive a field trip survey form that allows you to identify other participants with whom you would like to travel on field trips (friends, spouses, companions). We will do our best to satisfy your requests.

Physical demands are light with walking limited to established roads and trails.

Bottled water and other cold drinks and snacks will be always provided by your tour leaders. Participants will pick up boxed lunches for each field trip day at breakfast.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi is readily available the MCM Elegante hotel.

TIME: In April, Texas operates on Central Daylight Time (CDT).

LAUNDRY SERVICE: The hotel offers laundry service for a fee Monday through Friday with next day delivery.

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: Mosquitoes and chiggers are present in the Upper Coast/Piney Woods region and can be a problem if there has been a lot of rain. It is always recommended that participants carry insect repellent and take appropriate steps to prevent insect bites, such as tucking pant legs into socks while out of the vans.

INSECT REPELLENTS: There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- **DEET:** (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- **Picaridin:** A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- **Herbal insect repellents:** Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

Insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- **Permanone® (Permethrin):** is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- **Insect Shield® apparel:** Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

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. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: 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 which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

Birds: Any of the following field guides are excellent choices for this event.

Kaufman, Kenn. *Kaufman Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. New York: Mariner Books, 2005.

National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Eighth edition. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2025.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Second edition. New York: Knopf, 2014.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America*. Second edition. New York: Knopf, 2016.

Mammals:

Kaufman, Kenn and Rick Bowers. *Kaufman Field Guide to the Mammals of North America*. Mariner Books, 2007.

Reptiles & Amphibians:

Conant, Roger and Joesph T. Collins. *Reptiles and Amphibians Eastern/Central North America*. Peterson Field Guides. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.

Butterflies:

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

Wildflowers:

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

Irwin and Wills. *Roadside Flowers of Texas*. Austin. University of Texas Press. Good selection of typical wildflowers and attractive line drawings.

Tveten, John and Gloria. *Wildflowers of Houston and Southeast Texas*. Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1993. The wildflower guide most appropriate to the area covered in this event.

Books by keynote speakers:

Scott Weidensaul

Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent's Natural Soul. North Point Press, 2024.

A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds. W. W. Norton & Company, 2021

Mountains of the Heart: A Natural History of the Appalachians. Chicago Review Press, 2016

The First Frontier: The Forgotten History of Struggle, Savagery, and Endurance in Early America. Harper, 2012.

The Ghost with Trembling Wings: Science, Wishful Thinking and the Search for Lost Species. North Point Press, 2003.

Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds. North Point Press, 1999

Jennifer Ackerman

What an Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds. Penguin Books, 2024

The Bird Way: A New Look at How Birds Talk, Work, Play, Parent, and Think. Penguin Books, 2021.

Birds by the Shore: Observing the Natural Life of the Atlantic Coast, Penguin Books, 2019.

The Genius of Birds. Penguin Books, 2017.

Ed Yong

An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us. Random House, 2022.

I Contain Multitudes. Ecco, 2018.

Kenn Kaufman

The Birds that Audubon Missed: Discovery and Desire in the American Wilderness. Simon & Schuster, 2024.

A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration. Houghton, Mifflin Harcourt, 2023.

Flights Against the Sunset: Stories that Reunited a Mother and Son. Houghton, Mifflin Harcourt, 2008

Kingbird Highway. Houghton, Mifflin Harcourt, 2006.

Kaufman Field Guides:

Birds of North America. Mariner, 2005.

Butterflies of North America. Mariner, 2006

Insects of North America. Mariner, 2007.

Mammals of North America. Mariner, 2007.

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! **Highly recommended.**

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." Two pack options for this event are **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 August 20, 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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9/1/2025 - BL

9/2/25 - PS/DE