

TARGET BIRDS:

Black-bellied Whistling Duck

Mexican Duck

Northern Bobwhite

Scaled Quail

Montezuma Quail

Western Grebe

Clark's Grebe

Inca Dove

Common Ground-Dove

White-tipped Dove

Groove-billed Ani

Greater Roadrunner

Common Poorwill

White-throated Swift

Blue-throated Mountain-Gem

Lucifer Hummingbird

Broad-tailed Hummingbird

Harris's Hawk

Gray Hawk

Common Black Hawk

Zone-tailed Hawk

**Central Texas – Big Bend and Edwards Plateau
May 8 – 16, 2024**

This experience has been developed to celebrate the array of birds where east meets west, with an emphasis on three species with extremely limited ranges.

“Hill Country” may be a familiar term to some birders. It is an expansive area generally west of San Antonio that is comprised of rugged limestone hills blanketed in Ashe Juniper and Live Oak.

Forming the southeastern portion of the Edwards Plateau, Hill Country forms a green curtain between the southeast and the desert southwest. It is

here, amid a mixing zone of eastern and western birds that we will search for Golden-cheeked Warbler. Closely related to the familiar Black-throated Green Warbler, this highly localized species can only be found in the dry oak woodlands of Hill Country.



We will spend two mornings exploring the famed hotspots such as Hill Country State Natural Area and Lost Maples State Park. Many areas consist of birds like Carolina Wren and Great Crested Flycatcher singing right alongside their western counterparts, in this case, Canyon Wren and Brown-capped Flycatcher. While sorting through an array of birds, we will watch for Green Kingfisher, Vermillion Flycatcher, Olive Sparrow and Couch's Kingbird which reach their northernmost ranges here.

And of course, it is in this same area that our second sought-after species will be found – Black-capped Vireo. Although the vireo has a slightly broader range than the warbler, Hill Country is arguably one of the best places to view this rather small cousin to White-eyed Vireo.

Birds won't be the only highlight... One evening will be spent near Bracken Cave – home of the world's largest bat colony. Watching millions of Mexican Free-tailed Bats is an exciting experience!

Elf Owl

Burrowing Owl

Green Kingfisher

Golden-fronted
Woodpecker

Acorn Woodpecker

Ladder-backed
Woodpecker

Crested Caracara

Western Flycatcher

Gray Flycatcher

Vermillion Flycatcher

Ash-throated
Flycatcher

Brown-crested
Flycatcher

Couch's Kingbird

Bell's Vireo

Gray Vireo

Woodhouse's Scrub-
Jay

Mexican Jay

Chihuahuan Raven

Mountain Chickadee

Black-crested Titmouse

Verdin

Cave Swallow

After canvassing the Edwards Plateau, a day will be spent making the trek west to Big Bend National Park. It is a lengthy six-hour drive, but we will break it up by stopping for birds such as Hooded Oriole, Rufous-crowned Sparrow and Lark Bunting. It won't take long to notice the marked difference in the landscape as we move west. Raptors could be plentiful in the arid landscape, and we will keep eyes open for Crested Caracara, Harris' and Zone-tailed Hawks.

This experience will be anchored by a stay in Big Bend National Park. With expansive desert, riparian zones along the Rio Grande River and elevations rising to over 8,000 feet, this park has an



array of habitats to explore. Our accommodations are inside of the park so hiking and birding opportunities will exist right at our doorstep. The Chisos Mountains are the most obvious landform - the morning sun punctuating the varied angles of glimmering sandstone. It is here that our third target species exists – Colima Warbler. A high-elevation oak specialist, it is estimated that only a few hundred birds make up the entire U.S. population. The hike is a long one, but we will devote a whole day to complete the trek to find this highly localized species. Along the way, groups of Mexican Jays and White-throated Swifts, Scott's Oriole and Acorn Woodpeckers should be obvious. We will also be on the lookout for Blue-throated Mountain Gem, Painted Redstart and Lucy's Warbler. One evening will be spent along the Rio Grande to watch Common Poorwill and Lesser Nighthawks overhead, and plan to end the day with flashlights in hand, at a trusted location for Elf Owl. The varied habitats of the park will provide opportunity for a long list of birds, and we will work hard to find Common Black Hawk, Gray Hawk, Elf Owl, Crissal Thrasher and Varied Bunting. The park is still within range of Black-capped Vireo, so additional opportunities for this species, as well as the stunning Tropical Parula exist.

Before heading back toward San Antonio, a couple of days will be spent in and around the Davis Mountains. There could be lingering migrants such as Virginia's or Grace's Warbler, and time spent here increases the chances of finding Phainopepla, Hepatic Tanager, Gray Flycatcher and hopefully, Montezuma Quail.

What to Expect?

This is a nine-day experience with seven fairly rigorous days planned. Birding activities will be planned for about 10 hours per day. Hiking will average several miles daily, but the terrain is generally mild.

*Please note: two long hikes are planned during this experience. A 6-8 mile round-trip hike is expected at elevations up to 7000 feet for Colima Warbler. The trails are very well worn, but there is a 2000 foot elevation gain during this hike. An entire day will be devoted to this excursion, so the pace will be kept slow. Another long hike of approximately 4 miles may be planned, though at a lower elevation. **Alternative options can be given for anyone not wanting to make the full hike(s), but this would involve hiking or returning to the lodge/vehicle without the leader.

Multiple hotels are planned to lessen ground travel, however, two days will consist of long drives. These drives will be broken up by multiple stops.

What is Included?

The trip begins at Pittsburgh International Airport and includes:

- Roundtrip airfare between Pittsburgh and San Antonio
- 8 days of excursions
- 8 nights hotel accommodations
- Ground transportation in either a 12 or 15-passenger van
- Meals beginning with dinner on the first day and breakfast on the last day
- Entrance fees
- ASWP leader-guide

What's not Included?

- Airline luggage fees may apply depending on participant luggage needs
- Alcoholic beverages
- Items of personal nature
- Meals during air travel

Bushtit

Black-tailed
Gnatcatcher

Rock Wren

Canyon Wren

Cactus Wren

Crissal Thrasher

Phainopepla

Black-chinned Sparrow

Black-throated
Sparrow

Lark Sparrow

Rufous-crowned
Sparrow

Olive Sparrow

Canyon Towhee

Chihuahuan
Meadowlark

Hooded Oriole

Bullock's Oriole

Scott's Oriole

Colima Warbler

Tropical Parula

Painted Redstart

Black-capped Vireo

Summer Tanager

Painted Bunting

Additional Details

While staying in hotels, breakfasts will be continental-style; some may be “on-the-go” (danish and fresh fruit) to better accommodate an early departure. Boxed/Bagged lunches may be planned to increase time afield when available. Dinners will be spent at area establishments where participants can enjoy local cuisine.

While staying at Chisos Mountain Lodge in Big Bend, all meals will be provided by the onsite dining room. That menu is available here:

<https://www.chisosmountainslodge.com/dining/chisos-mountains-lodge-dining-room/>

To lessen daily ground travel, accommodations have been planned in convenient locations throughout central Texas. This trip will make use of accommodations near San Antonio, Uvalde, Big Bend, Ft. Davis and Kerrville.



Participant Cost (per person)

Double Occupancy Rate: \$2995.00

Single Occupancy Rate: If available, a \$650 supplement will be added to the remaining double-occupancy rate at the time of final payment.

Trip Registration

To register for the Central Texas trip, please use the ASWP website.

<http://aswp.org/pages/eco-tours-see-birds-of-the-world>

A 50% non-refundable deposit is required during registration, and final payment will be coordinated via the Audubon Nature Store prior to April 15, 2024.

The Fine Print

Due to extreme demand for accommodations at this time of year, single occupancy may not be available for this trip. Rooms have already been booked at Chisos Mountain Lodge In Big Bend, so single room availability may not be available and will depend upon the participant list.

Registration is taken on a first-come, first served basis.

ASWP does not provide travel insurance, but recommends participants explore this option.

Final payment is due on or before April 15, 2024.

This is a group experience. Delays caused by any participant will not be allowed to adversely affect the group. It is the responsibility of each participant to work with the leader-guide for any special needs or accommodations throughout the duration of this trip.