

Texas Hill Country: Birding & Nature With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



April 13 – 18, 2021

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



**“Excellent birding,
beautiful scenery,
and the wonder of
bats! What fun! Can
hardly wait to go
again!”**

— Rolla Wagner



Explore one of America's best birding destinations on this top-rated Texas Hill Country Birding and Nature tour. Amidst the open landscape of the Edwards Plateau region, we explore the verdant area surrounding Concan, Texas, and its mosaic of avian life.

We stay at one delightful lodge, so it's an easy one-stop, unpack and relax tour, giving us ample time to soak in the area and its array of species and habitats.

Itinerary

Tues., Apr. 13 **San Antonio | Concan**

Welcome to Texas! Our group gathers at the San Antonio International Airport at 3:00 PM to begin our intriguing expedition into the Texas Hill Country. Some may want to arrive early to enjoy the Riverwalk and history of San Antonio on their own.

Straight from the airport we drive to Concan, Texas, a quiet community with an exciting abundance of Texas specialty birds that occur along the lush Rio Frio. Our route winds through Edwards Plateau, where crystal clear rivers have spent thousands of years cutting a path through gleaming limestone. Have binoculars and cameras ready, birds and blooms abound!

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy five nights at Neal's Lodge, a longtime hotspot for birders and naturalists
- Admire Golden-cheeked Warblers amidst Ashe Juniper at Lost Maples State Natural Area
- Observe millions of bats emerging from the Rio Frio Bat Cave
- Spot captivating raptors including Swainson's, Zone-tailed, and Harris' Hawks
- Discover one of the Green Kingfisher's few habitats in the United States
- Take in Hill Country's kaleidoscope of butterflies; over 140 species have been spotted in the area

Tour Summary

6-Day / 5-Night Birding & Nature Tour w/ Pat Lueders
\$2090, from San Antonio
Airport is San Antonio International (SAT)

Roadside birds might include Swainson's Hawk, Crested Caracara, and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. We arrive at Neal's Lodge, our comfortable accommodations in Concan. Built along the spring-fed Frio River, Neal's Lodge is our home this week. We settle in, unpack once, and turn our focus to the Hill Country's natural wonders.

Neal's grounds host birds from the Eastern and Western U.S., as well as the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This area has been a bucket list destination for naturalists for decades. *Accommodation at Neal's Lodge (D)*

Wed., Apr. 14 Uvalde | Ft. Inge | Fish Hatchery | Park Chalk Bluff

Today we head south to Uvalde. As we leave Concan, the habitat becomes noticeably more desert-like. Possible sightings on our drive include Harris' Hawk, Bell's Vireo, Bullock's Oriole, and Crested Caracara.

Arriving in Uvalde, we find the remains of frontier-era Fort Inge, now a 42-acre protected park along the Leona River. The park features a 140-foot volcanic plug, whose dry slopes attract Cactus and Bewick's Wrens, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Pyrrhuloxia. Along the Leona River, we find migrant and resident songbirds, and perhaps a Mississippi Kite.

A tour tradition is visiting Uvalde's classic soda fountain for ice cream, shakes, and malts — fun (and delicious)!

Next, we go west to the Uvalde National Fish Hatchery, where ponds attract a variety of shorebirds—surprising migrants can show up at this time of year. From a permanent blind we spot Black Phoebe, species of waterfowl such as Black-bellied Whistling-Duck and Blue Winged Teal, and a host of dragonflies.

We then drive northwest to Park Chalk Bluff, where Tamaulipan Scrub vegetation cloaks hillsides along the Nueces River. Here we find Brown-crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Black-crested Titmouse in a stand of live oaks.

Along the River, we scan cottonwoods, pecans, and mulberries for Yellow-breasted Chat, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Orchard Oriole, and Blue Grosbeak. We have another chance to see tiny Green Kingfisher, secretive Ringed Kingfisher, and a vulture-mimic, the Zone-Tailed Hawk.





The park's pecan grove may draw in migrants including Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and several warblers.
Accommodation at Neal's Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Apr. 15 Neal's Lodge | Rio Frio Bat Cave

This morning we get up early to bird the area around Neal's Lodge. We comfortably observe several species as permanent feeding stations draw in some of the Hill Country's best species. Clay-colored Sparrow are common at the "cattle guard feeder" — often joined by Black-throated, Lark, White-crowned and Chipping Sparrows. Three species of orioles are possible visitors, along with resident Olive Sparrow and Long-billed Thrasher.



Continuing to the pecan grove for more feeder watching, we look for Eastern Bluebird, Indigo Bunting, Carolina Chickadee, Black-crested Titmouse, and various migrants.

Neal's Lodge maintains hummingbird feeders throughout the grounds. These attract numerous Black-chinned Hummingbird, a few Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and the nectar-loving Hooded Oriole.

For lunch, we visit a delicious BBQ stand in Concan for tasty brisket and smoked turkey. After lunch we return to Neal's Lodge for continued feeder watching.

After dinner, we take a short drive to the Rio Frio Bat Cave. Every night, 10-million or more Mexican Free-tailed Bats exit the cave to feed. If you haven't experienced a bat cave emergence, you are sure to be mesmerized as the smoke-like river of bats emerges against the setting sun.



Local bat biologist Bain Walker joins us as we take in the sights and sounds of one of the largest gatherings of mammals in North America. Red-tailed and Swainson's Hawk are likely visitors as they feed on the frenzy of bats.

Cave Swallow share the cave and we see them as they return to roost.

Accommodation at Neal's Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Apr. 16 Lost Maples State Natural Area

Today we depart for Lost Maples State Natural Area, a 2,200-acre protected site straddling the serene Sabinal River. The park is famous for its Golden-cheeked Warbler, and is home to many other species.

Black-chinned Hummingbird, occasional Indigo Bunting, and Scott's Oriole often greet us at the visitor center's feeders.

Along the Maple Trail, we walk through a limestone canyon populated with oak, sycamore, and relict Bigtooth Maple. We listen for the sweet, buzzing song of the park's Golden-cheeked Warbler. We might also see Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated and White-eyed Vireos, and Black-and-white Warbler.

Lost Maples hosts a stunning array of butterflies; over 140 species live in and around Concan. A previous trip recorded many species, including Nysa Roadside-Skipper, Red Admiral, Gulf Fritillary, and Pipevine, Spicebush, and Giant Swallowtail.

After a picnic lunch we hike along rivers and ponds, scanning the branches for Green Kingfisher, a striking species rarely found in the United States.

For dinner, we visit Lost Maples Café and its regionally famous pies. *Accommodation at Neal's Lodge (B,L,D)*

Sat., Apr. 17 Kerr Wildlife Management Area | Black-capped Vireo

Today we visit the Kerr Wildlife Management Area in the basin of the Guadalupe River. On the drive, we look for Blue Bonnets and Mealy Sage. The park is home to a large population of Black-capped Vireo, an endangered specialty of Central Texas. Finding them is our focus, though abundant wildflowers can prove a pleasant distraction!

Other species at Kerr WMA include Wild Turkey, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Common Ground-Dove, Summer Tanager, Field Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and Painted Bunting.

Tonight we enjoy a final dinner and conversations, and then tally up the rich sightings from a week of birding the Texas Hill Country! *Accommodation at Neal's Lodge (B,L,D)*

Sun., Apr. 18 San Antonio & Departures

We load our vans with Blue Jay watching overhead, and return to San Antonio. Some may wish to stay on to explore this historic city, home to the Alamo and a delightful Riverwalk.

We plan to arrive at the airport at 11:00 AM, so please plan your departure (or connecting flight to El Paso if you plan to go on our Texas Big Bend Tour, too) after 12:00 PM. It's always hard to say goodbye to new travel friends, but with Naturalist Journeys loyal clientele, we're likely to travel together again.





Those continuing on our Big Bend journey can look forward to more amazing birds, fantastic scenery, and West Texas hospitality. Book the two tours and we'll pay the air between them, up to \$100! *Accommodation at Neal's Lodge (B)*

Guide Pat Lueders



Pat Lueders has been leading birding trips in the St. Louis area and Midwest for over 10 years. A love of traveling has taken her to many countries of the world and most of the US, often with Naturalist Journeys' trips. When not out birding, she is the coordinator of volunteers for a number of Citizen Science projects partnering with many agencies including U.S. Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Audubon, National Trumpeter Swan Society, and Missouri Department of Conservation. Pat serves on the boards of St. Louis Audubon & Audubon Society of Missouri and is on a bird banding team.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Plan to arrive in San Antonio no later than 2:00 PM on April 13. Since San Antonio is a fun city with a lot of historical interest and the Riverwalk, we have planned the journey so you can enjoy a weekend there either before or after as part of your vacation if you wish. Plan to depart after NOON on April 18.

Special Offer!

If you opt to pair this Texas Hill Country tour with our Texas Big Bend tour and we'll reimburse your connecting flight up to \$100. Talk to us for details.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this journey is \$2090 DBL / \$2390 SGL, from San Antonio, TX, and includes all accommodations, meals as specified in the itinerary, group airport transfers, professional guide services, local park and other area entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. The cost is based on a minimum number of 6 participants, with fewer a small group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300) may apply.

The cost does not include transportation to or from your home to San Antonio, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, portage, maid gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

Photo Credits

Golden-cheeked Warbler, Tom Dove (TD); Penstemon, Bob Behrstock (BB); Two-barred Flasher, BB; Crested Caracaras, Peg Abbott (PA); Frio River at Neal's Lodge, BB; Harris's Hawks, PA; Coppery Dancer, BB; Black-capped Vireo, TD; Sunset at Neal's Lodge, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS); Green Kingfisher, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Hill Country Group, NJS; Bullock's Oriole, PA; Painted Bunting, NJS; Exploring Lost Maples, BB; Summer Tanager, Sandy Sorkin; Blue Bonnets, BB; Pyrrhuloxia, Delsa Anderl; Frio Bat Cave, NJS; Black-chinned Hummingbird, PA; Green Kingfisher, PA; Hill Country Scenic, PA; Yellow Prick Poppy, BB; Armadillo, NJS; Eastern Screech Owl, BB; Canyon Wren, CS.

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