

# TOS Field Trips – Weslaco, Winter 2024

Friday – 11 trips      Saturday – 13 trips      Sunday – 7 trips

*Please select a first and second option each day, as some trips fill quickly.*

**NOTE:** Participants must meet their field trip group at the Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border Ave, Weslaco at least 15 minutes prior to start time. Due to logistical complications, it is not possible for individuals to meet the group at any other location. Please plan accordingly. Also, there will be **entrance fees** at some locations. Please have small bills available as well as bringing your state and national parks passes. Sunday trips will be modified by the trip leaders to allow ample time to drive home.

NUMBER	FIELD TRIP AND DESCRIPTION	COUNTY	DIFFICULTY	DEPARTURE & HOTEL RETURN TIMES	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
1	<p><b>BIRDY BROWNSVILLE:</b> Discover the coastal prairie and riparian treasures near Brownsville. Explore renowned sites such as the <b>Sabal Palm Sanctuary</b>, home to one of the last remaining tracts of Sabal Palm forest in the USA. This unique habitat, with its wetlands, forests, and proximity to the Rio Grande attracts many bird species including exciting rarities. Uncover the hidden gems of the Coastal Prairie, where the Cassin’s Sparrow, Gull-billed Tern, and Aplomado Falcon thrive.</p> <p>On Friday and Saturday our journey also takes us to <b>Resaca de la Palma State Park</b> in Brownsville, where water birds await our observation.</p> <p><b>Note: There is a \$5 admission fee at Sabal Palm</b></p> <p><i>There will be some walking in both parks.</i></p>	CAMERON	MODERATE	6:30 am-3:00 pm	X	X	X

2A	<p><b>COASTAL EXTRAVAGANZA:</b> <i>(These activities are identical to those in trip 2B, but in different sequence.)</i> Participants from trips 2A and 2B begin with a quest for Aplomado Falcons in the <b>coastal prairie</b>. Then trip 2A travelers will experience a captivating <b>sailing journey</b> from Port Isabel. Accompanied by Captain Henry, we'll explore island bays where the elusive Mangrove Yellow Warbler nests. Witness the spectacle of Red Knots, American Oystercatchers, Reddish Egrets, and more, all while enjoying the possibility of Bottlenose dolphins in the bow's wake.</p> <p>Our day continues on <b>South Padre Island</b> with the pursuit of coastal specialties up and down the island, including the <b>SPI Birding and Nature Center and Alligator Sanctuary</b> grounds and the <b>Valley Land Fund Migratory Bird Lots</b> on Sheepshead St. and the <b>Convention Center</b> property.</p> <p>We will finish the day checking the <b>resacas on Hwy 100</b> (think Amazon Kingfisher!). Early registration is crucial due to Coast Guard boat occupancy limits.</p> <p><b><i>Please note: There is a \$50 fee for the boat trip paid upon registration – maximum of 5 participants. Fee of \$8 - \$10 required at the SPI Birding Sanctuary.</i></b></p> <p><i>Must be able to get in and out of the boat. Somewhat lengthy walking on the boardwalk at SPI Nature Center.</i></p>	CAMERON	MODERATE	6:30 am–3:30 pm	X	X	
----	---	---------	----------	-----------------	---	---	--

2B	<p><b>COASTAL EXTRAVAGANZA:</b> <i>(These activities are identical to those in trip 2A, but in different sequence.)</i> Participants from trips 2A and 2B begin with a quest for Aplomado Falcons in the <b>coastal prairie</b>. Then trip 2B travelers continue on <b>South Padre Island</b> with the pursuit of coastal specialties up and down the island, including the <b>SPI Birding and Nature Center and Alligator Sanctuary</b> grounds and the <b>Valley Land Fund Migratory Bird Lots</b> on Sheepshead St. and the <b>Convention Center</b> property.</p> <p>This is followed by a captivating <b>sailing journey</b> from Port Isabel. Accompanied by Captain Henry, we'll explore island bays where the elusive Mangrove Yellow Warbler nests. Witness the spectacle of Red Knots, American Oystercatchers, Reddish Egrets, and more, all while enjoying the possibility of Bottlenose dolphins in the bow's wake.</p> <p>We will finish the day checking the <b>resacas on Hwy 100</b> (think Amazon Kingfisher!). Early registration is crucial due to Coast Guard boat occupancy limits.</p> <p><b>Please note: There is a \$50 fee for the boat trip paid upon registration – maximum of 5 participants. Fee of \$8 - \$10 required at the SPI Birding Sanctuary.</b></p> <p><i>Must be able to get in and out of the boat. Somewhat lengthy walking on the boardwalk at SPI Nature Center.</i></p>	CAMERON	MODERATE	6:30 am–3:30 pm	X	X
3	<p><b>SPI SPECIALTY EXPLORATION:</b> This trip is similar to trips 2A and 2B but without the boat trip. The day begins with a quest for Aplomado Falcons in the <b>coastal prairie</b>. We move to <b>South Padre Island</b> looking for coastal specialties up and down the island, including the <b>SPI Birding, Nature Center and Alligator Sanctuary</b> grounds and the <b>Valley Land Fund Migratory Bird Lots</b> on Sheepshead St. and the <b>Convention Center</b> property.</p> <p>We will finish the day checking the <b>resacas on Hwy 100</b> (think Amazon Kingfisher!).</p> <p><b>Note: Fee of \$8 - \$10 required at the SPI Birding Sanctuary.</b></p> <p><i>Somewhat lengthy walking on the boardwalk at SPI Nature Center; birding from the car and paved walks.</i></p>	CAMERON	EASY	6:30 am–3:00 pm	X	X

4	<p><b>KING RANCH (KLEBERG COUNTY CENTURY CLUB TRIP):</b> Indulge in the exclusivity of the <b>King Ranch</b> (Sta. Gertrudis Division) bird tour. This legendary property, with its oak mottes, grasslands, and rolling terrain, is the original site of Captain King’s first cow camp and contains the ranch headquarters. Abundant birds and occasional rarities make this tour truly exceptional. We could see between 70 and 80 species here.</p> <p>On the return home we will visit the <b>Sarita rest stop</b> about 30 miles south of Kingsville for lunch and to walk the trails and pick up a few extra species.</p> <p><b>Please note: There is a \$65 entrance fee for King Ranch that covers a local guide and van transportation.</b></p> <p><i>Short walks from the King Ranch van; short trail at the rest stop.</i></p>	KLEBERG	EASY	5:45 am–3:30 pm		X	
5	<p><b>LAGUNA ATASCOSA: Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge</b>, situated along the Laguna Madre’s shores, stands as a haven for avian enthusiasts. With the highest bird species count of any National Wildlife Refuge in the country, it is also home to the largest remaining population of protected ocelots in the USA. Expect encounters with Reddish Egrets, White-tailed Hawks, and much more.</p> <p>On Saturday we will also check out <b>Hwy. 100 resacas</b> on the way back.</p> <p><i>Walking on mud flats; short walks from the car.</i></p>	CAMERON	MODERATE	6:15 am–3:00 pm		X	X

6	<p><b>MISSION/MCALLEN:</b> Enjoy the esteemed <b>National Butterfly Center</b> for the ease with which visitors get to see so many target species, including the distinctive Green Jay, the vibrant Altamira Oriole, the elusive Olive Sparrow, the charming Clay-colored Thrush, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Gray Hawk. Access to the Rio Grande here also provides the opportunity for the coveted kingfisher trifacta.</p> <p>At the renowned <b>Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park</b>, the Hawk Tower overlooking the oxbow offers an exceptional vantage point to witness raptors soaring through the skies.</p> <p>The afternoon will be spent in McAllen at <b>Quinta Mazatlan in McAllen</b> observing features that may inspire replication, as they invite numerous species to stop, rest, and take a drink.</p> <p><i>Please note: There is a \$5 entry fee at the butterfly center and \$2-\$3 fee at Quinta Mazatlan.</i></p> <p><i>Walking on smooth or paved trails.</i></p>	HIDALGO	MODERATE	6:30 am–3:00 pm	X	X	
7	<p><b>SALT LAKES AND PLAYAS:</b> We will explore the avian wonders of the <b>salt lakes north of Edinburg</b>. Amidst the dry thorn scrub, we'll encounter an intriguing mix of birds, from shorebirds to sparrows and wrens.</p> <p>Our journey continues to <b>Delta Lake</b> for lunch to view a captivating array of waterbirds and winter birds.</p> <p>On Saturday we'll uncover more wetland gems along <b>roadside sites</b>, including ducks, a variety of shorebirds, Northern Bobwhite, and more.</p> <p><i>Walking in un-shaded habitat at the salt lakes; short walks from the car.</i></p>	HIDALGO	MODERATE	6:30 am–3:00 pm		X	X
8	<p><b>SANTA ANA AND THE HIDALGO PUMPHOUSE:</b> Delve into the enchanting realms of the <b>Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge</b>. Witness Lower Rio Grande Valley specialties and raptors in the productive wetland and riparian habitats. Towering trees and scenic trails offer exceptional observation opportunities.</p> <p>Following this, we'll journey to the <b>Hidalgo Pumphouse</b> where many intriguing species await.</p> <p><i>Walking trails at Santa Ana; paved walks at the Pumphouse.</i></p>	HIDALGO	MODERATE	6:30 am–3:00 pm	X		X

9	<p><b>WESLACO:</b> This lush locale boasts three rich nature sites: <b>Estero Llano Grande State Park</b>, the <b>Valley Nature Center</b>, and <b>Frontera Audubon</b>.</p> <p>Prepare to encounter a diverse array of local specialties and keep an eye out for possible rarities.</p> <p><i>Please note: Entry fee of \$3-\$5 at Frontera Audubon.</i></p> <p><i>Short distance walking on paved and smooth gravel paths.</i></p>	HIDALGO	EASY	6:45 am – 3:00 pm	X	X	X
10	<p><b>JIM HOGG COUNTY CENTURY CLUB:</b> Join our fearless leaders in this severely under-birded county of south Texas. Targets include Rio Grande Valley Turkey, Lark Bunting, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Pyrrhuloxia. Extensive driving to/from sites in Hebbronville and extensive roadside birding with leaders who have birded this tough county before. Target: 60+ species were found on a similar 2017 TOS trip.</p> <p><i>Birding close to the vehicles.</i></p>	JIM HOGG	EASY	6:00 am–4:00 pm	X	X	
11	<p><b>WILLACY COUNTY CENTURY CLUB:</b> Located on the eastern side of the Rio Grande Valley, Willacy County boasts a variety of habitats: agricultural fields, mudflats, beaches, resacas, coastal prairies, thornscrub, and wetlands.</p> <p>We will work our way east to west hitting the Teniente and East Lake Tracts of Lower Rio Grande NWR to Raymondville and ultimately Port Mansfield. We will try for rare residents like N. Beardless-Tyrannulet, Clay-colored Thrush, and Black-throated Sparrow but our focus will be on species diversity and finding water if current drought conditions remain into January.</p> <p><i>Extensive driving to/ from sites, and roadside birding.</i></p>	WILLACY	EASY	6:15 am –4:00 pm	X	X	
12	<p><b>BROOKS COUNTY CENTURY CLUB:</b> Go on a quest to get your life list to 100 species in the wilds of this county with a population of just 7,223 people. Brooks County includes the famous <b>Falfurrias Rest Stop</b> which has been home to quite a few rarities over the years. The quirky <b>Sacred Heart Cemetery</b> in Falfurrias has an impressive list of species.</p> <p><i>Extensive driving to/from sites, and roadside birding close to the vehicles.</i></p>	BROOKS	EASY	6:15 am–3:30 pm		X	X

13	<p><b>ZAPATA COUNTY CENTURY CLUB:</b> Try to knock this county off your Century Club list. Targets include Greater Roadrunner, Red-billed Pigeon, Hooded and Audubon's Orioles, and Black-throated Sparrow. Possible fees.</p> <p><i>Extensive driving to/from sites, and roadside birding close to the vehicles.</i></p>	ZAPATA	EASY	5:30 am–4:00 pm	X	X	
14	<p><b>STARR COUNTY CENTURY CLUB TRIP:</b> Starr County lies in the western part of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, along the banks of the Rio Grande. Possible sightings include Red-billed Pigeons, Audubon's Orioles, Morelet's Seedeater, and more. Arid areas reveal avian wonders like the iconic Greater Roadrunner, the captivating Cactus Wren, the elusive Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Scaled Quail.</p> <p>Our journey begins at <b>Santa Margarita Ranch</b> with a stunning Rio Grande River overlook and probable Brown Jay sightings, followed by exploration at <b>Salineño</b> and <b>Falcon State Park</b>.</p> <p><b>NOTE: \$45 admission fee at Santa Margarita Ranch.</b></p> <p><i>Hiking up and down hills in full sun on uneven ground at Santa Margarita; walking stick helpful. Uneven trails at Salineño.</i></p>	STARR	DIFFICULT	6:00 am.–3:30 pm	X	X	X