

Pre-Festival Photo Workshop

Experience Wildlife, History & Hospitality at Jones “Alta Vista” Ranch
South Texas Birding Festival Photography Invitation

November 8-10, 2026



General Workshop Information

This new, pre-festival bird photography workshop offered by professional nature photographer Ruth Hoyt provides opportunities for photographers of all experience levels and physical abilities. Participants capture images of birds and wildlife at the historic Jones Alta Vista Ranch, a remote Deep South Texas ranch located south of Hebbronville in Jim Hogg County. The ranch includes permanent photo blinds built with optimal lighting in mind, allowing photographers to capture intimate encounters with key South Texas wildlife such as green jays, great kiskadees, thrashers, Northern cardinals, pyrrhuloxias, Northern bobwhites, crested caracaras and more.

Participants drive themselves to arrive Sunday, November 8, at 1pm to check into comfortable, clean, air-conditioned lodging with private bathrooms (every two rooms will share one bathroom) before gathering for snacks, a workshop orientation, and an equipment review to ensure recommended settings are in place. Over the course of the 3-day workshop, we visit the photography blinds in four multi-hour sessions: Sunday evening, Monday morning, Monday evening, and Tuesday morning. Between sessions, participants have the opportunity to participate in flexible editing sessions where images are reviewed and processed. The workshop ends Tuesday morning after brunch and before noon.

Minimum equipment requirements include a DSLR/mirrorless camera, minimum 300mm lens, tripod or beanbag recommended, and laptop with editing capabilities. Participants are required to wear close-toed shoes and asked to wear clothing of muted colors. Space is limited to six participants. Cost is \$800/person. Private bathrooms (rather than shared between paired rooms) are available for a \$100 supplement. The workshop is all-inclusive except for travel insurance, transportation, gratuities, and alcoholic beverages.

Ranch History

Nestled deep within the legendary South Texas brush country, Jones “Alta Vista” Ranch offers photographers a rare opportunity to experience one of the last well-preserved historic cattle ranches of the Wild Horse Desert. For more than 135 years—from the Spanish and Mexican colonial era to modern day—the 34,000-acre Alta Vista Ranch has remained carefully protected to preserve its rich history, native wildlife, and untouched beauty. Today, we proudly welcome photographers, birders, cinematographers, and nature enthusiasts to responsibly recreate and immerse themselves in the extraordinary South Texas ecosystem. Whether you are an award-winning wildlife photographer or simply beginning your photography journey, Alta Vista Ranch offers an unforgettable experience filled with wildlife encounters, stunning landscapes, dark skies, and authentic Texas hospitality.



A Unique Photography Destination

The ranch is home to an incredible diversity of wildlife and habitats that provide exceptional opportunities for bird and wildlife photography throughout the year.

Guests have photographed:

Raptors

Great Horned Owls

Bobcats

Coyotes

Quail

Badgers

Deer

Herptiles

Insects

Dozens of species of
migratory birds

Native South Texas wildlife



Beyond wildlife photography, the ranch offers historic and landscape photography opportunities including:

Ranch ruins from the 1800s

Historic cowboy camps

Barns and ranch structures

The 130-year-old Casa Mayor

Ancient Spanish settlement remnants at the San Javier pasture Astrophotography under pristine Dark Sky Zone conditions Purpose-built Photography Blinds Our 74-acre headquarters compound includes five strategically positioned photography blinds designed for both comfort and discretion during long or short sits.

The Raptor Blind

A 24' x 6' elevated blind positioned approximately six feet above ground level, creating eye-level opportunities with nearby staging points ideal for raptor photography.

The Owl Blind

A comfortable two-person blind nestled near the majestic oak tree behind the Main House—home to Great Horned Owls for many years.

The Evening Blind

A spacious below-ground blind designed specifically for dusk lighting conditions. It comfortably accommodates up to eight photographers and overlooks a water feature.



The Morning Blind

Positioned for ideal dawn lighting, this below-ground blind also accommodates up to eight photographers and provides eye-level views of wildlife activity around a water feature.

The Cotton Blind

A two-person blind centrally located within the compound, offering versatile opportunities for capturing general wildlife activity.

Historic Accommodations & Ranch Hospitality

The Alta Vista compound combines the charm of historic South Texas ranching life with the comforts of modern accommodations.

The Main House

Built in the late 1890s, the Main House features four bedrooms and three bathrooms, historic décor, leather furnishings, wood paneling, vintage photographs, and expansive porches lined with rocking chairs — all surrounded by the tranquility of the South Texas brush.

The Bunkhouse

The Bunkhouse includes four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a full kitchen, dining room, covered porch, and its own fire pit for relaxing evenings after a day in the field.

The Anaqua House

A cozy retreat featuring two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, dining room, kitchen, elevated porch, and private fire pit.

Guests also enjoy access to:

A beautiful courtyard with large dining tables
A swimming pool
Outdoor gathering spaces
A large communal fire pit perfect for star-filled Texas nights

At Alta Vista Ranch, guests can enjoy the conveniences of modern living while completely disconnecting from the rush of everyday life and reconnecting with nature.

Meet the Team

Kevin Avery | Ranch Manager

The great-great-grandson of W.W. Jones, Kevin is a sixth-generation steward of Alta Vista Ranch. Having lived full-time on the ranch for more than fifteen years, he knows every caliche road and quail trail across the property's 34,000 acres. Kevin wears many hats—guide, chef, storyteller, and caretaker of the ranch's legacy.

Anna Avery | Assistant Ranch Manager

Anna is a seventh-generation Texan and the great-great-great-granddaughter of W.W. Jones. She assists with bookings, communications, and marketing while helping preserve the ranch's family heritage for future generations.

Ale Avery | Administrator

Ale oversees guest hospitality, bookings, housekeeping, and the ranch kitchen. Her thoughtful attention to detail and warm hospitality have elevated the comfort and ambiance of every guest house, ensuring visitors feel right at home from the moment they arrive.

Join Us During the South Texas Birding Festival

We invite photographers and birding enthusiasts to experience the unmatched beauty, wildlife, and history of Jones "Alta Vista" Ranch.

Come experience:

Exceptional wildlife photography
Historic South Texas landscapes
Comfortable ranch lodging Authentic
Texas hospitality
Dark sky astrophotography
A truly private and immersive nature experience

We look forward to welcoming you to Alta Vista Ranch!