

RGVBF PRE- and POST-festival Trips

Starr County Showcase with Cameron Cox!

- *PRE-FESTIVAL TRIP: 8am November 8th – 2pm November 10th, 2026*
- *POST-FESTIVAL TRIP: 8am November 16th – 2pm November 18th, 2026*



This all-inclusive trip will spend 3 days & 2 nights birding the upriver portions of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, primarily in scenic Starr County. This “upper” portion of the LRGV is not only more rural than areas closer to the coast but also adds an arid desert component for unmatched habitat contrast and species diversity. We’ll split our time between subtropical woodlands in remote stretches of the Rio Grande along with the polar opposite dry desert scrub of the uplands, highlighted by one of the best private properties for birding in the entire country recently – Santa Margarita Ranch.

Note: the Santa Margarita Ranch aspect of this trip can be difficult for those with any mobility issues due to some short but steep trails over rolling hills and 3-4 miles of total walking (though the walking is easy apart from the couple of hills). Those with even slight mobility issues may not be able to make the full hike and should not consider this trip.

Cost

- \$750 per person for double occupancy rooms
- \$350 added supplement for single occupancy*
- \$550 per person for triple occupancy room**

Your ticket price includes all travel (starting/ending at the convention center pickup location), all normal meals, rooms, and entry fees. Alcoholic beverages are not included. Five total rooms and 11 total slots for participants are available. Four rooms have a queen bed and a quality pull-out full sofa bed (doubles); one room has a queen bed and a twin bed in separate bedrooms along with a quality pull-out full sofa (triple). If you choose double occupancy and are registering with a family member or friend, please let us know in registration to pair you together. *If you choose double occupancy and do not have a roommate, we will attempt to pair you with another participant of the same gender. If a roommate cannot be found, **you will be charged the \$350 supplement for single occupancy.** You may also request single occupancy during registration although we may limit this to only one room based on demand. **If three people agree to split the triple room, each will only be charged \$550. Please direct any questions regarding pricing and rooms to registration@rgvbf.org.

Target species

In the riverside woodlands along the Rio Grande River, we'll be targeting Brown Jay, Morelet's Seedeater, Red-billed Pigeon, Muscovy Duck, Audubon's Oriole, Zone-tailed Hawk, Gray Hawk, and several other possible rarities along with our typical valley specialties. In the desert scrub, we'll be watching for Scaled Quail, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Black-throated Sparrow, and Pyrrhuloxia among many others.



Trip Guides

Your lead guide for this trip will be long time professional bird guide and RGVBF veteran Cameron Cox. Cameron has been birding for decades and co-authored the Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching: Eastern Waterbirds in Flight as well as authored the recent Terns of North America: A Photographic Guide. Cameron has spent ample time in Starr County and helped run this trip the last two years, so you will be in good hands! A second guide will also help lead this trip given enough participants. Your guides will be fully paid, but please feel free to tip them for their exceptional service!

Transportation, Lodging, Site Fees

The cost of transportation, lodging, and all site fees are included in your ticket for this trip. Our travel will be conducted in a 15-passenger van, with a minivan as a secondary vehicle if needed depending on participant count.

We will spend our two nights at the beautiful “Las Casitas at Rancho Lomitas” with ranch hosts and valley legends Benito and Toni Trevino. Benito and Toni are extremely knowledgeable about local flora and fauna and have a special appreciation for this landscape that they will be able to share with us. The casitas have fully furnished rooms and communal space including a kitchen. You can learn more at www.rancholomitas.com.

Meals

All main meals and some snacks are included in your ticket for this trip. Breakfasts will include pre-bought pastries, yogurt, and fruit. Lunch will be quick stops for fast-food-style tacos and burgers, and our two dinners will be at local Tex-Mex restaurants with various meal options.

Meals included in the trip price include:

- Sunday Nov 8/Monday Nov 16: lunch, dinner (make sure to eat breakfast before you meet us for the morning)
- Monday Nov 9/Tuesday Nov 17: breakfast, lunch, dinner
- Tuesday Nov 10/Wednesday Nov 18: breakfast, lunch

General Itinerary (subject to change depending on current conditions and rarities)

Sunday, November 8 or Monday November 16

Meet your expert guides at the Harlingen Convention Center - RGVBF headquarters – at 8am. From there we'll begin our drive west while stopping to bird along the way at the La Puerta tract of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. After dropping our bags off in our rooms at Rancho Lomitas, we'll grab a quick lunch and continue heading west to bird on the Rio Grande at Chapeño, Falcon State Park and Falcon County Park. We'll return to Rio Grande City for dinner at Casa de Adobo.

Monday, November 9 or Tuesday November 17

We will leave early to spend all morning at the famous Santa Margarita Ranch – possibly the #1 birding location in all of Texas over the last couple years! Here we'll spend a couple hours on the “bluffs” overlooking the Rio Grande watching for waterbirds, kingfishers, pigeons, hawks, and more before making our way below into the riverside woodlands in search of Brown Jays, orioles, and numerous other valley specialties. **Note – the hike at Santa Margarita does have a couple short but steep hills and in total we will likely walk 3-4 miles. This pre-festival trip is therefore not designed for those with severe mobility issues, though it is absolutely worth it for those that are physically able.** We'll leave Santa Margarita in the early afternoon and grab a quick lunch on the way back to Rancho Lomitas. We'll rest our legs for a bit and do some birding on the ranch, including a plant and bird wagon ride tour with Benito, as well as try to get closeups of some local desert species like Scaled Quail at their well-stocked feeders. We will head back to Rio Grande City for dinner at Ranch Café.

Tuesday, November 10 or Wednesday November 18

This morning we will pack up our bags and head over to Salineño, a must-stop for any visit to the LRGV! Salineño is just upriver from Santa Margarita Ranch and share many of the same spectacular species to give us a second shot at some of the local rarities. The feeding station here also provides yet another great opportunity for photographers. When we're done here, we'll drive some backroads in the general area to search for some more desert species. By noon, we'll start heading back to Harlingen and should complete the tour around 2-3pm Tuesday afternoon. Just in time for you to check in to your Harlingen hotel and come hang out at our festival kickoff reception at 5pm!