

# **Gerlach Nature Photography**

## **South Texas Bird Photography Workshop**

at the world-renown **Laguna Seca Ranch**

along with a wonderful raptor photo

morning at the **Martin Refuge**

**With John Gerlach and Dixie Calderone**

**5 Days of Bird Photography!**

**Feb 24 – March 2, 2023**

Feb. 25-28 at Laguna Seca

March 1 at Martin Refuge

**April 14 – 20, 2023**

April 15-18 at Laguna Seca

April 19 at Martin Refuge



*Figure 1 A Northern cardinal pair having family time together.*

## Laguna Seca Ranch

The south Texas Laguna Seca Ranch is known worldwide for superb bird photography. The ranch is 700 acres of pristine brushland that attracts an abundance of wildlife including many unique birds. The ranch owner built permanent photography hides designed by photographers for photographers near tiny ponds that attract scores of colorful birds in this arid environment. Plus, we will use their raptor blinds when dawn weather is optimum where meat is provided to attract crested caracaras, Harris's hawks, black vultures, and turkey vultures. All birds are photographed at close range with telephoto lenses in the 400-600mm range.

These tours are spectacular for bird photography and February through April are terrific times to be here. More than two dozen crested caracaras are drawn to the photo blinds with meat. And many resident birds such as green jays, cardinals, black-crested titmouse, long-billed thrashers, and pyrrhuloxias regularly visit the small bird photo blinds. During April, spring migration is underway, and this is a superb time to photograph migrating birds along with all the local birds that live at the ranch. The abundance of colorful songbirds at the photo blinds is a joy to see and photograph. Many of the birds like this striking green jay you probably have never seen before, but you will photograph them a lot in this workshop.



*Figure 1 You will get plenty of chances to photograph the green jay!*

This physically easy trip is fantastic. Sit in a shaded blind and birds continually come to you – perfect! John and Dixie are busy setting up attractive perches for your photos and changing them at times to provide a variety of colorful settings.

For more info about Laguna Seca Ranch, visit them online.

[www.facebook.com/LagunaSecaRanch](https://www.facebook.com/LagunaSecaRanch)

[www.lagunasecaranch.com](http://www.lagunasecaranch.com)



*Figure 2 The striking ground dove is a joy to see and photograph!*

### **The Martin Refuge**

On the last day of your bird photography workshop, we will visit the nearby Martin Refuge for their superb dawn raptor shoot. The situation at the Martin Refuge is quite different as it is more wooded and provides vastly different photos than Laguna Seca. Previous workshops loved photographing raptors at both places.

For more info about the refuge, go to: [www.martinrefuge.com](http://www.martinrefuge.com)

What you will learn:

Take your bird photography to the next level! John and Dixie are avid bird photographers. They have shot more than one million bird images just in the past couple of years alone. We are experts at bird photography and will teach you how to consistently capture outstanding images.

- Learn to focus precisely and instantly
- Learn to shoot perfect exposures easily and quickly
- When to use manual exposure or Auto ISO to achieve excellent exposures
- How to select and attract birds to photogenic perches
- How to use long lenses effectively
- Tripods and heads that work best for wildlife
- How to work the natural light for best results
- How to produce strong bird compositions
- Optimize your camera settings for wildlife photography
- How to edit bird photos with Canon's DPP4 and post them on the web
- Why you want to photograph wildlife with your fastest shooting speed
- Flight photography techniques that consistently work

## **Field Trips**

We all travel together in our Ford Expedition Max SUV or our rented vehicle. Each morning field trip begins early (6:30 am) as we plan to be at the ranch at sunrise (around 7am) when bird activity is high, and the light is superb. We will shoot thousands of images, break for a hearty lunch at a local restaurant, and return to the ranch in the afternoon for more photos.

After a full morning of intensive photography, we return to Pharr to eat lunch and get your images downloading and batteries recharging. Then we return to the ranch and photograph birds in the beautiful afternoon light around 3pm till sunset. We use different blinds and perches to produce a variety of images. With a maximum of ten participants and us, we will shoot in groups of six and share the blinds during our five intensive days of photography. Laguna Seca Ranch has two

morning and two evening blinds that we share. On the last day, we all photograph using the raptor blinds at the Martin Refuge.



*Figure 3 Northern cardinals are common in south Texas and readily attracted to the water and food provided at the ranch.*

Tour Limit: **10 participants**

**What's Included:**

- **Intensive photo instruction** from John and Dixie in the classroom and in the field
- **All meals** beginning with dinner the first evening and ending with breakfast on the last morning
- **6 nights lodging** at the Hampton Inn in Pharr, TX
- **All ground** transportation in our Ford Expedition Max or rented SUV,
- **We will pick you up and return you to the airport.**
- **Teaching slide programs**
- **All ranch fees** for using their blinds and property
- **Answers to all the questions you care to ask!!!!**
- **Five days of photography**

**Not Included:**

- Airfare
- Items of a personal nature, such as alcoholic drinks

- Trip Cancellation Insurance

**Lodging:**

Hampton Inn & Suites  
300 W. Nolana Loop  
Pharr, TX 78577  
(956) 781-1116

We have already reserved your room. You do not need to contact the hotel. We take care of the lodging for you.

**Price and Payments**

Price:

**\$3450** for one participant with a private motel room

**\$3200** each for two participants sharing a room

**Payment:**

Full payment for the February or April workshop is due two months before the start of each workshop. Payment can be made by check and made payable to: Gerlach Nature Photography. Mail check to John Gerlach/PO Box 318/Island Park, ID 83429. To use a credit card, call Dixie at (812) 350-0799.

A \$1000 per-person **deposit** holds your space in the workshop.

We suggest buying trip cancellation insurance to protect your investment.

**Refunds and Cancellation Policy if written Cancellation is Received****Cancellation Fee:**

90 days or prior: 100% refund minus fees we cannot recover (normally only credit card charges)

89 to 61 days prior: 50% of trip fee

60 day or less: no refund unless we can refill your spot

We strongly suggest buying trip cancellation insurance to protect your investment.



*Figure 4 The curved-billed thrasher is a common resident that loves to pose for your camera!*

## **Feb 24 – March 2, 2023, Session**

### **Itinerary**

Feb 24: Friday

Fly to McAllen International Airport (MFE) in McAllen, Texas. Let us know when you arrive, so we can pick you up at the airport. We meet in the hotel lobby at 6 pm local time. Then we take you to dinner. When we return to the hotel, we will have a short meeting to prepare you for the week.

Feb. 25-28: Morning and afternoon photo sessions at Laguna Seca Ranch

March 1 Enjoy a dawn raptor photo shoot at the Martin Refuge. This afternoon you are free to prepare photos for the evening get together or pack for your trip home.

March 2 Thursday



Your departure day. We are available all day to transfer you to the airport – no matter how early or late you fly out.

### **April 14 (Fri) – 20 (Thurs), 2023 Session**

#### **Itinerary**

April 14: Friday

Fly to McAllen International Airport (MFE) in McAllen, Texas. Let us know when you arrive, so we can pick you up at the airport. We meet in the hotel lobby at 6 pm local time. Then we take you to dinner. When we return to the hotel, we will have a short meeting to prepare you for the week.

April 15 - 18: Morning and afternoon photo sessions at Laguna Seca Ranch

April 19 Enjoy a dawn raptor photo shoot at the Martin Refuge. This afternoon you are free to prepare photos for the evening get together or pack for your trip home.

April 20 (Thurs) Your departure day. We are available all day to transfer you to the airport – no matter how early or late you fly out.

The tiny painted bunting is the star of the show in April.







*Figure 7 Crested caracaras are animated raptors that are a delight to photograph.*



*Figure 8 You probably know the blue jay. Did you know another jay called the green jay is common at the Laguna Seca Ranch? They mostly live in Mexico but are abundant along the Texas border.*

What to bring:

### **Clothes**

South Texas is warm, even in March. While dawn may be in the low fifties, temperatures tend to warm up quickly into the seventies and even the low nineties are possible. Dress in layers to stay warm at dawn and take some layers off to stay cool during the rest of the day. Enclosed shoes protect you from cactus spines, spiders, and possible scorpions.

This will help you plan for the weather. Rain is unlikely, but possible.

### **Sunrise/Sunset and Average Temperatures**

March 1 Sunrise: 6:56am Sunset: 6:34pm

April 20 Sunrise: 7:04am Sunset: 7:59pm

March. average temp 79 and 59

April average temp 87 and 65

### **Camera Equipment Camera Gear:**

- 2 cameras (one as a spare)

- Plenty of memory cards as it is easy to shoot thousands of images each day (500GB is not too much)
- Computer with external hard drives to download your new images
- Camera lens that reaches out to 500mm and that can include a crop factor camera. For example, a Canon 100-400mm lens on a Canon camera with a 1.6x crop factor is like having a 160mm – 640mm lens
- A sturdy tripod for holding a heavy long lens
- Shorter zoom lens for photographing the blinds and our activities at the ranch such as a 70-200mm
- John uses a Canon R5 mirrorless camera with a Canon 600mm f/4 lens and this is attached to a Wimberly Gimbal head on a sturdy Gitzo tripod and Dixie uses Nikon gear that includes a D6 and Z9 with a 500mm PF lens or a Tamron 150-600mm.

Examples: Long prime lenses of 500mm and 600mm are excellent for wildlife and work best at the ranch. You can buy a long lens or use teleconverters on a shorter lens. For example, a 1.4x teleconverter used on a 400mm lens gives it the reach of a 560mm lens.



*Figure 2 Crested caracaras have a discussion.*

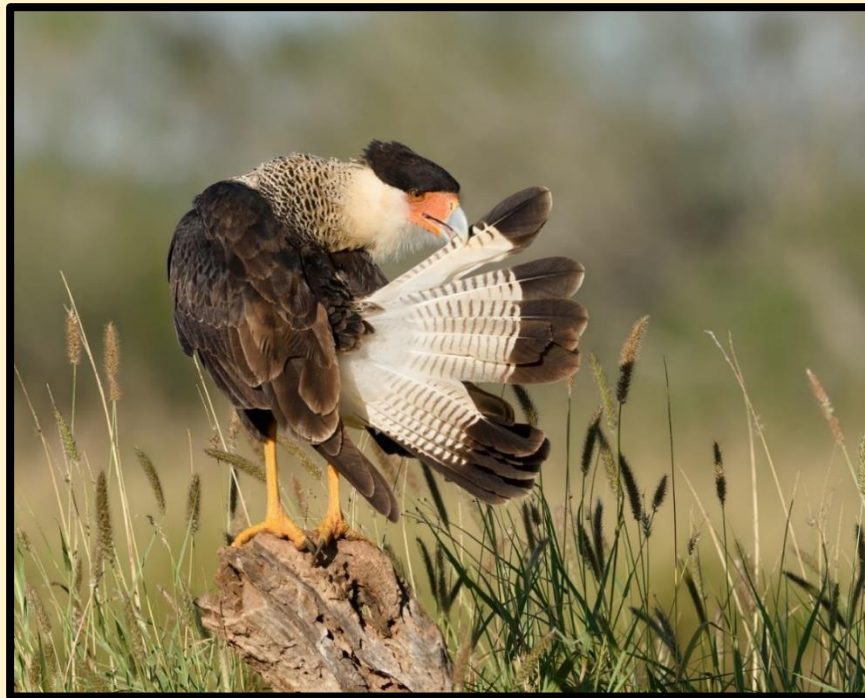
## Important Notice

The enormous number of images our workshop participants shoot creates their biggest problem. It is rather easy to shoot 10,000 images per day or more. Downloading and storing this many images and keeping camera batteries charged can be troublesome.

This is how John avoids these problems. He has five LPE6NH batteries for his Canon R5 and two Canon LC-E6 battery chargers. Two batteries normally get him through the morning photo session, but sometimes a third is needed. When the group returns to the hotel, two batteries are immediately put on the chargers to be ready to go for the afternoon shoot. In his Canon R5 camera are slots for 1 CFexpress card and 1 SD card. John uses a Sony Tough 256GB CFexpress card and a Lexar 256GB SD card. This will normally last all day. He downloads the images in the evening. John has a spare 128GB SD card in his photo bag at all times just in case more camera memory is needed.

Downloading images takes time, but the process is much faster by using a SanDisk Extreme Portable V2-Solid State Drive-4TB-external – USB 3.2 Gen. The SSD drives are more dependable and quicker than the older external hard drives with moving parts inside them. Both Dixie and John only use SSD drives now.





*Figure 12 Crested caracara getting ready to be photographed.*





*Figure 13 Crested caracara preparing to land.*



Bobwhite quail pass by every so often, and sometimes they come to the small ponds for water.



Crested caracara, golden-fronted woodpecker, green jay, pyrrhuloxia, Harris hawk, and black Vulture. Photos from 2022 workshops.

