

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!

March 13 – 19, 2024

April 14 – 20, 2024



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 unique birds. The ranch owner built permanent photography hides designed by photographers near tiny ponds that attract scores of colorful birds in this arid environment. Plus, we will use their raptor blinds 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 March 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 living at the ranch. The abundance of colorful songbirds, such as painted buntings, 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

www.lagunasecaranch.com



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

The Martin Refuge

On the last day of this 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

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
- Why you want to photograph wildlife with your fastest shooting speed
- Flight photography techniques that consistently work

Field Trips

We travel together in our two vehicles. Each morning field trip begins early (6:30 am) 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 at 3pm and photograph till dark.

After a morning of intensive photography, we return to Pharr to eat lunch and you have time to download images and recharge camera batteries. 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, 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. 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** (17 total) 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 vehicles once you arrive at the hotel
- **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
- Cab fare from the airport to the hotel

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:

\$3665 for one participant with a private motel room

\$3415 each for two participants sharing a room

Payment:

A \$1000 non-refundable deposit is required to enroll in this workshop. The balance is due 120 days before departure.

Cancellation fee:

90 days or more before departure: 50% of tuition is forfeited

89 or fewer days before departure: 100% of tuition is forfeited

Gerlach Nature Photography understands that challenges in life may cause you to cancel your trip with us. Broken bones, illness, severe weather, natural disasters, covid concerns, sick pets, family troubles or health issues, and many other reasons may cause you to have to change your plans. No matter the reason for your cancellation, we will follow our cancellation policy exactly as written. Now that we are conducting many all-inclusive workshops, fees for rental housing or motels, ranch fees, snowcoach fees, and many other fees must often be paid far in advance, and most are non-refundable. Should you decide to cancel the photo workshop, we still must pay for what you would have used even though you are not there. That means we cannot refund your money beyond what is in our cancellation policy. We wish we could be more generous, but we simply cannot afford to absorb significant financial losses because you cancel. When you enroll in our workshop, we reserve a spot for you and turn away others who would have gladly taken your spot. Even though we often have a waiting list, in most cases those on the waiting list make other plans and are not available to replace you. If we can get a

replacement for you (no guarantee) or you get a replacement, then we are happy to be more generous with the refund. We hope you understand our position. We wish to continue to offer high-quality photo workshops for small groups at reasonable prices. The obvious answer to safeguard your investment is to purchase Trip Cancellation Insurance that covers the most likely reasons you would cancel. That is what we do. And to be safe, you can buy 'Cancel for Any Reason' trip cancellation insurance for a higher price. Many companies that provide trip cancellation insurance are found on the web. Two well-known insurance companies include:

www.allianztravelinsurance.com

www.travelguard.com

Let us hope you never need to cancel your trip with us or anyone else!
Happy travels!



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

Itinerary

Day 1

Fly to McAllen International Airport (MFE) in McAllen, Texas. Use a cab to get to the Hampton Inn. We meet in the hotel lobby at 6 pm local time. We provide you with dinner and present a Powerpoint program covering wildlife photography techniques.

Day 2-5 Morning and afternoon photo sessions at Laguna Seca Ranch

Day 6 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.

Day 7

Your departure day.

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

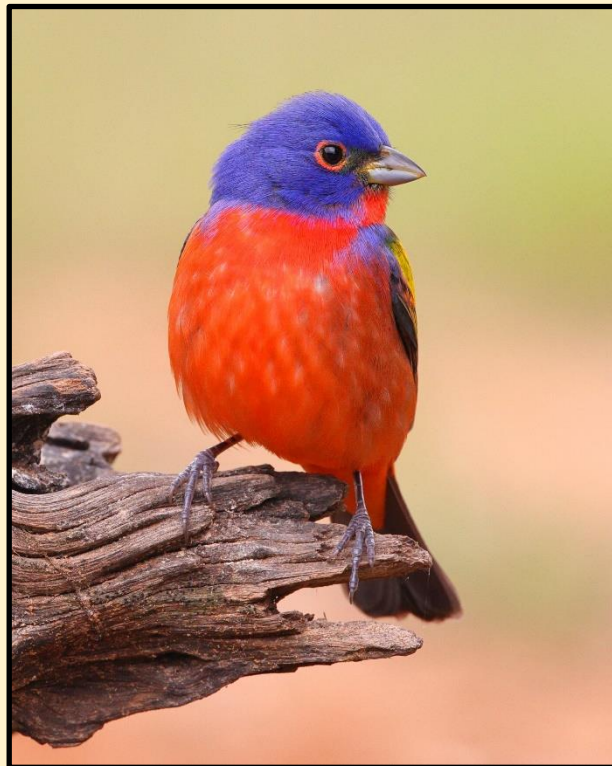




Figure 7 Crested caracaras are animated raptors that are a delight to photograph.



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. Bring a jacket or sweater 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 100-500mm lens and this is attached to a Wimberly Gimbal head on a sturdy Gitzo tripod. John found in 2023 that the RF 1.4x teleconverter worked well on the 100-500mm lens. It is a super combination that produced sharp results. With the 1.4x teleconverter on the Canon 100-500mm lens, the lens becomes a 480mm to 700mm lens and by switching the Canon R5 to the 1.6x crop factor, now the reach is $(700 \times 1.6) = 1120\text{mm}!!!!$ This combo works super well for bird photography! Dixie uses Nikon gear. The camera is the Nikon Z9, and she does well with a Nikon 100-400mm lens with a 1.4x teleconverter.

Examples: Long zoom lenses 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. Also excellent are zoom lenses that reach 500mm. Frankly, long zoom lenses are best for this kind of photography. Being able to zoom the lens lets you easily adjust the focal length for different sized subjects.



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.

By way of example, John avoids these problems in this way. He has five batteries for his Canon R5 and two battery chargers. Two batteries almost always get him through the morning or evening photo session. When the group returns to the hotel, two batteries are immediately put on the chargers. 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. These two cards will last all day. He downloads the images in the evening.

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 now only use SSD drives.



Figure 12 Crested caracara getting ready to be photographed.

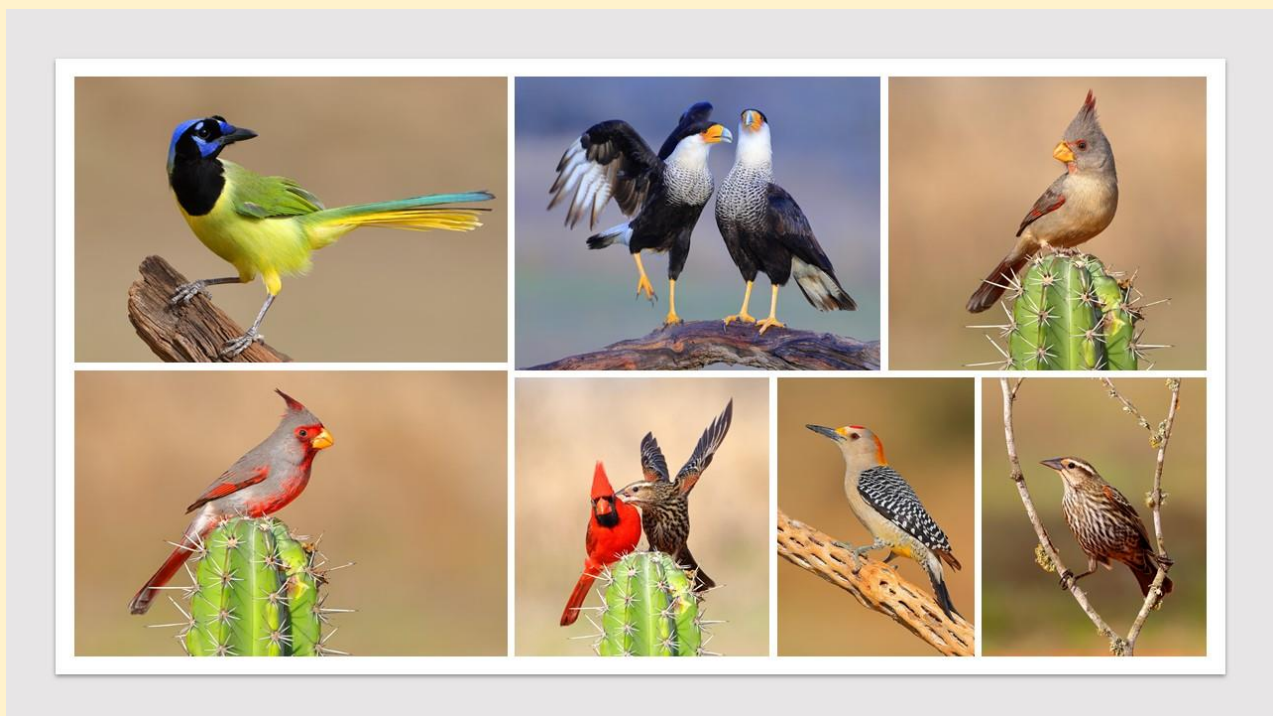




Figure 13 Crested caracara preparing to land.



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.

