

Gerlach Nature Photography
South Texas Bird Photography Workshop
at the world-renown **Laguna Seca Ranch Photography**
Blinds
With John Gerlach and Dixie Calderone
4 Days of Intensive Bird Photography!
April 16 – 21, 2026



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 700 acre ranch is undeveloped pristine brushland that attracts an abundance of colorful unique birds. The ranch owner built four permanent photography hides designed by photographers near tiny ponds right in front of the

blind that attract scores of remarkable birds in this arid environment. Two blinds are situated for the morning light and two for the evening light. Plus, we will use their three raptor blinds where hamburger and chicken 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 April is the optimal time to visit the ranch. Two dozen or more crested caracaras are drawn to the photo blinds with meat. And many resident birds such as green jays, cardinals, black-crested titmice, 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 and summer tanagers, 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 make plenty of photos of them 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 dug into the ground for eye-level photos 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!

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 to best advantage
- 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
- How to quickly sort through thousands of bird photos, find the absolute best images, and process them.
- How to use excellent light for photos and control your backgrounds

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 of the Laguna Seca Ranch, we return to Pharr, TX 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 four intensive days of photography. Laguna Seca Ranch has two morning and two evening blinds.



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** (14 total) beginning with dinner the first evening and ending with breakfast on the last morning
- **5 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!!!!**
- **Four full days of intensive bird 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:**

\$3600 for one participant with a private motel room

\$3350 each for two participants sharing a room

Payment:

Payment may be sent to Dixie Calderone/3750 S. Whitehorse Rd/Nashville, IN/47448. You could also call Dixie at 812-350-0799 with a credit card.

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 the camera!

Itinerary

Day 1 April 16

Fly to McAllen International Airport (MFE) in McAllen, Texas. Take 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 have a short introductory meeting at the hotel to cover our daily schedule for the week.

Day 2 - 5 April 17-20 Morning and afternoon photo sessions at Laguna Seca Ranch.

Day 6 April 21 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 in April. While dawn may be in the low fifties, temperatures tend to warm up quickly into the seventies and even the low nineties are possible, though humidity is low. 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.

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

Sunrise/Sunset and Average Temperatures

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

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) We have two 256GB cards in our cameras to get us through the day.
- Computer with external hard drives to download your 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 with gimbal head
- Shorter zoom lens for photographing the blinds and our activities at the ranch such as a 24-70mm
- John uses the Canon R5 Mark 2 mirrorless camera with a Canon 100-500mm lens or his Canon 600mm f/4 and this is attached to a Wimberly Gimbal head on a sturdy Gitzo tripod. John found in 2024 that the RF 1.4x teleconverter worked well on the 100-500mm lens. It is a super combination that produces 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. Her camera is the Nikon Z9, and she does well with a Nikon 100-400mm lens with a 1.4x teleconverter.

Examples: 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.

As an example, here is how John avoids these problems. He has four batteries for his Canon R5 Mark II and two battery chargers. Two batteries always get him through the morning or evening photo session. When the group returns to the hotel, he immediately puts two batteries on chargers. In his Canon R5 camera there are slots for 1 CFexpress card and 1 SD card. John uses a Delkin Devices 512GB 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. hard drive. The SSD drives are more dependable and quicker than

the older external hard drives with no moving parts inside them. Both Dixie and John now only use SSD drives.



Figure 12 Crested caracara getting ready to be photographed.

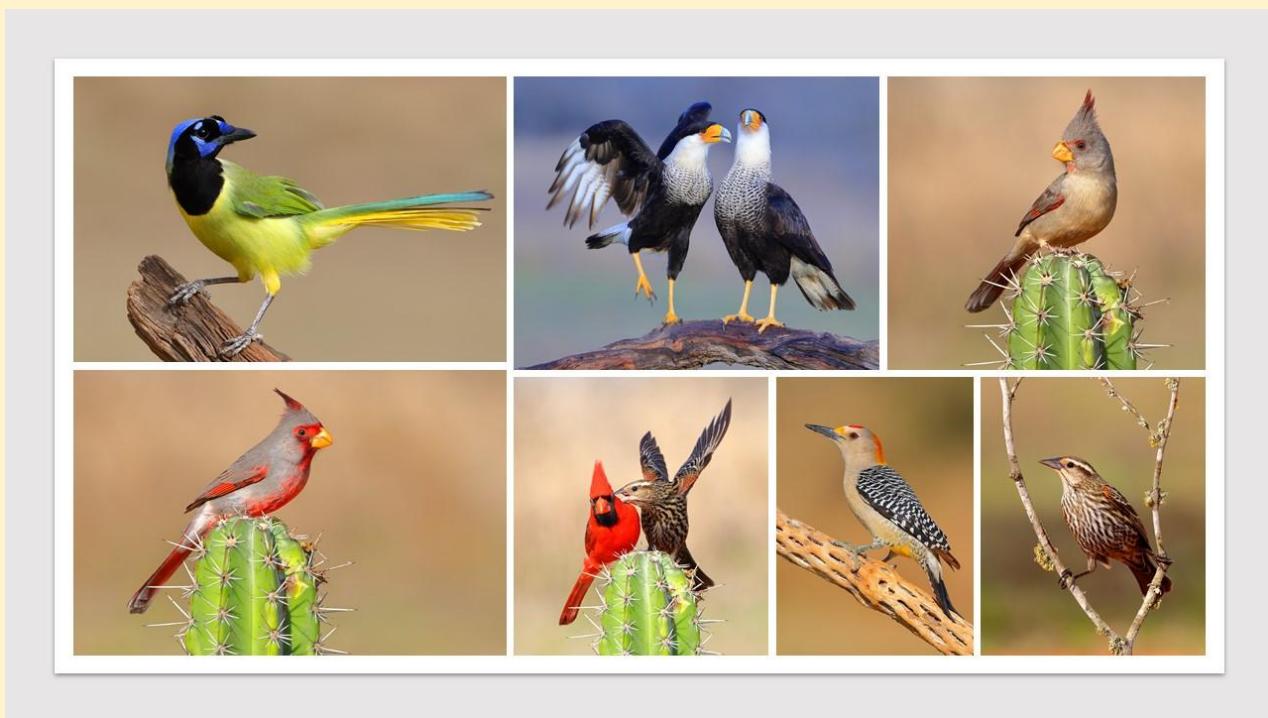




Figure 13 Crested caracara preparing to land.



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.

