

Gerlach Nature Photography
South Texas Bird Photography Workshop
at the marvelous **Laguna Seca Ranch**

with John Gerlach and Dixie Calderone

www.gerlachnaturephoto.com

Feb. 15 – 20, 2021

Feb. 20 – 23, 2021 whooping crane extension

April 19 – 24, 2021



Figure 1 Crested Caracaras are common at the ranch, especially during February.

The Laguna Seca Ranch in south Texas is devoted to wildlife photographers. 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 near waterholes that attract scores of colorful birds. Plus, they have raptor blinds where food is provided to attract crested caracaras, hawks, and vultures. All birds are photographed at close range with telephoto lenses in the 400-600mm range.

We scheduled time at the ranch during the spring of 2020, but Covid closed the ranch. Now the ranch is open, and in December we secured some space for us and our small group in both February and again in April. Both months are terrific for bird photography. During February, numerous raptors, including more than two dozen crested caracaras are drawn to the photo blinds with food and water. And many resident birds such as green jays, cardinals, black-crested titmouse, long-billed thrashers, and pyrrhuloxias regularly visit the photo blinds. During April, spring migration is underway, and this is a superb time to photograph some migrants along with all the local birds that live at the ranch. Raptors are less numerous then as they spread out to nest, but the abundance of colorful songbirds at the photo blinds is a joy to see and photograph. Most of the birds you will photograph at close range are new species for you.

This is a fantastic trip that is physically easy. Sit in a shaded blind and wildlife regularly come to you – perfect! John and Dixie will be 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 Audubon's oriole is a ranch resident and 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. During 2020, they shot more than 200,000 bird images from their floating blinds, seed feeder setups in their yard, and water features built in the nearby aspen forest. We are experts at bird photography and will teach you how to consistently shoot 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 and easily
- Tripods and heads that work best for wildlife
- How to work the natural light for best results
- How to produce strong compositions
- Optimize all your camera settings for wildlife photography
- How to edit bird photos with Canon's DPP4 and post them on the web

Field Trips

We all travel together in our Ford Expedition Max SUV. Each morning field trip begins early as we plan to be at the ranch at sunrise when bird activity is high. We will shoot thousands of images, break for a hearty lunch in Edinburg, and return to the ranch in the late afternoon for more photos.



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

Tour Limit: **6 participants** during the Feb. and April ranch session (**only 4** for the Feb. whooping crane extension)

What's Included:

- **Intensive photo instruction** from John and Dixie in the classroom and in the field
- **All meals** beginning with dinner on 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 Ford Expedition Max
- **Teaching slide programs**
- **All ranch fees** for using their blinds and property
- **Answers to all the questions you care to ask!!!!**

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 already have a block of room reserved for our group and since we pay for your room, you do not need to contact the hotel. We will take care of lodging.

Price and Payments

Price:

\$2600 for one participant with a private motel room

\$2400 each for two participants sharing a room

\$3200 if you are taking the special Feb. whooping crane extension – limited to only four participants and that includes extra meals, lodging, transportation, and boat fees

Payment:

Full payment for the February workshop is due now and full payment for the April workshop is due March 1, 2021. 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 April photo workshop. Full payment for the April workshop is due March 1, 2021.

We suggest buying trip cancellation insurance to protect your investment.

Refunds and Cancellation Policy

Due to the short time before these workshops begin, we cannot refund fees unless the cancellation is due to a Covid reason such as the state shutting its doors or airlines not flying. In the unlikely event that happens, we will refund all fees paid that are recoverable from suppliers.

John Gerlach or Dixie Calderone

johngerlachphotography@gmail.com

812-350-0799



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

Feb. 15 – 20, 2021 Bird Photography Workshop

Itinerary

Day 1: Monday

Feb. 15: 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. After a short meet and greet, we take you to dinner. When we return to the hotel, we will have a short meeting to prepare you for the week.

Day 2-5: Tuesday – Friday

Feb: 16-19: We take everyone in our Ford Explorer Expedition to the Laguna Seca ranch to be there in time for the first light of dawn and all the hungry and thirsty birds. After a full morning of intensive photography, we return to Pharr to eat lunch, discuss photo techniques, view teaching programs, view images, and rest. Then we return to the ranch and photograph birds in the beautiful afternoon light around 4pm till sunset. We use different blinds and perches to produce a variety

of images. With a maximum of six participants and John and Dixie, we will shoot in groups of four and share the blinds during out four intensive days of photography.

Day 6: Saturday

Feb 20: We eat breakfast together and for those who are not going on the extension, we will drive you to the airport.

Feb. 20 – 23 Whooping Crane Extension

www.texasbirdingphotos.net Whooping crane extension

Endangered whooping cranes are making a comeback and the best place to see and photograph them is Rockport, Texas where the largest wintering population resides. Prime time to photograph them is mid-February to mid-March before they migrate to Canada. We have chartered a custom photography boat that can get us close to the whooping cranes and many other birds too. The boat has room for six photographers so we must limit this to the first four who wish to join us. This is by far the best opportunity there is to photograph whooping cranes.

Extension Schedule:

Feb 20 – 23

Feb 20 Relax in the morning while those who are not going on the extension are driven to the airport. We will make a local field trip for photos in the afternoon.

Feb 21 We check out of the hotel and drive 3 hours to Rockport, TX.

Feb 22 We depart the hotel early and board the Lady Lori for a 4-6-hour photo cruise to the birds on the bay with special emphasis on whooping cranes. In the afternoon we return to Pharr for the night where we stay at the Hampton Inn.

Feb 23 We drive you to the airport.

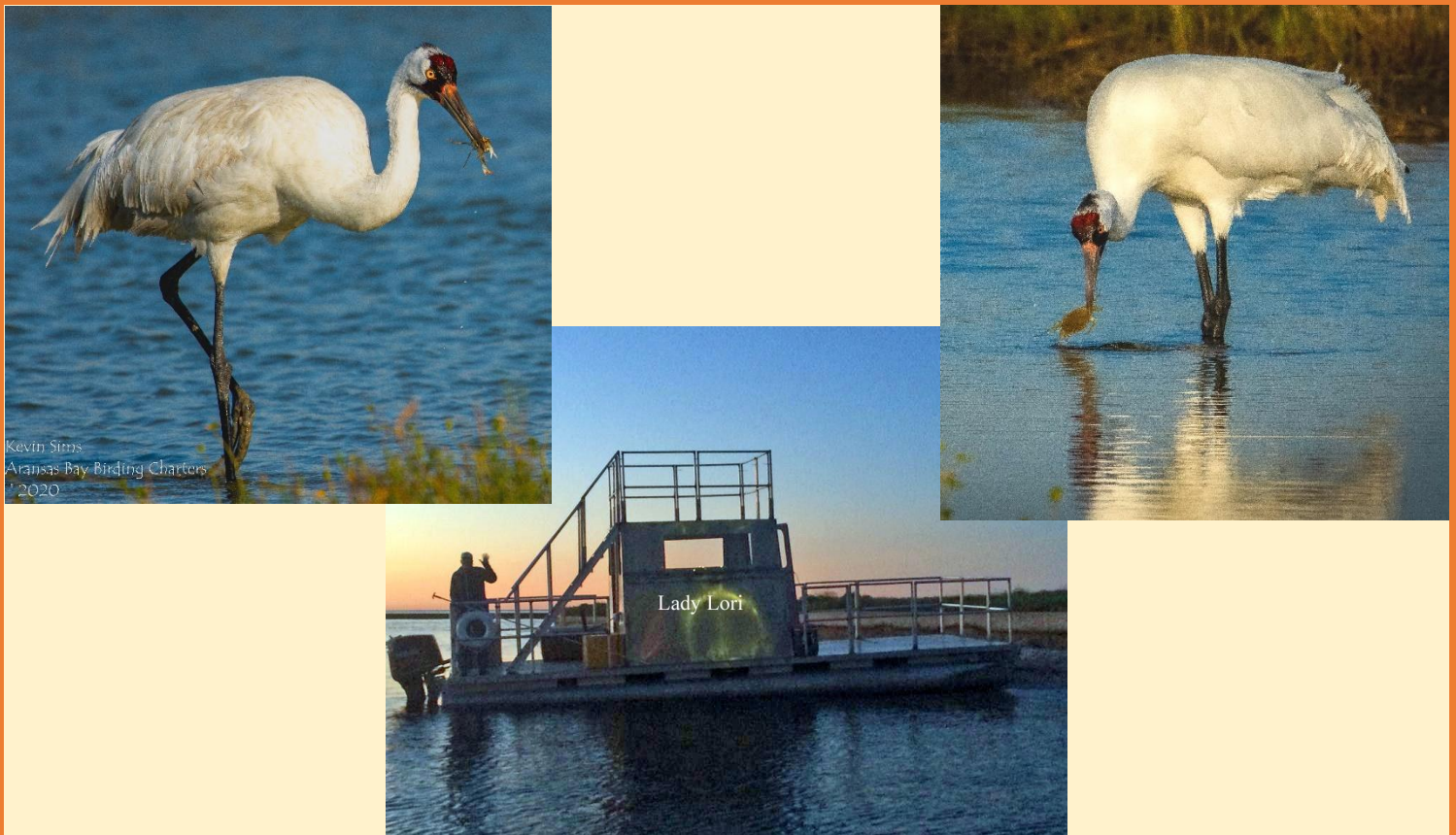


Figure 5 Whooping crane with a crab breakfast and the Lucky Lori that is built for photographers. Photos are courtesy of Kevin Sims from Aransas Bay Birding Charters

April 19 – 24, 2021 Bird Photography Workshop

Itinerary

Day 1: Monday

April 19: Fly to McAllen International Airport (MFE), Texas. Let us know when you will arrive so we can pick you up at the airport. We meet in the hotel lobby at 6 pm local time and will take you out to dinner. Then we return to the hotel for a short meeting.

Day 2-4: Tuesday – Thursday

April 20-22: We drive everyone in our Ford Explorer Expedition to the Laguna Seca ranch to be there in time for the first light of dawn and all the hungry and thirsty birds. After a full morning of intensive photography, we return to Edinburg to eat lunch, discuss photo techniques, view instructional slide programs, and rest. Then we return to the ranch at 4pm and photograph birds in the beautiful afternoon

light until sunset. We use different blinds and perches to produce a variety of images. With six participants maximum and John and Dixie, we will shoot in groups of four and share the blinds during out three intensive days of photography.

Day 5: Friday

April 23: We spend the day photographing birds at a popular bird refuge that offers excellent photo opportunities.

Day 6: Saturday

April 24: We eat breakfast together and take you to the airport, so you have plenty of time before departure.



Figure 6 Crested caracaras are highly animated raptors that are a delight to photograph.



Figure 7 You probably know the blue jay. Did you know another jay called the green jay is common at the ranch we are photographing at? They mostly live in Mexico and are plentiful along the Texas border.

What to bring:

Clothes

South Texas is warm, even in February. While dawn may be in the low fifties, temperatures tend to warm up quickly into the seventies and low nineties are possible. Dress in layers to stay warm at dawn, and 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

Feb. 20 Sunrise: 7:06am Sunset: 6:28pm

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

Feb. average temp 75 and 53

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
- 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 D500 or D6 with a 500mm PF lens or a Tamron 150-600mm.

Examples: Long prime lenses of 500mm and 600mm are excellent for wildlife. But they are big and expensive. A shorter lens such as a 300mm f/4 become a 420mm f5.6 lens when a 1.4x teleconverter is used. That works well. And so does a small-sensor camera like the Canon 7D Mark II or new Canon 90D. Both have a 1.6x crop factor. That means the lens sees a smaller angle of view like a longer lens. A 1.6x crop factor camera used on a 300mm lens is similar to having a $300\text{mm} \times 1.6 = 480\text{mm}$ lens!



Figure 8 Crested caracaras often squabble with each other.

ccccpcp



Figure 9 Harris's hawk is often attracted to the raptor blinds.



Figure 10 Though it resembles a female cardinal, this is a desert dweller known as the pyrrhuloxia.

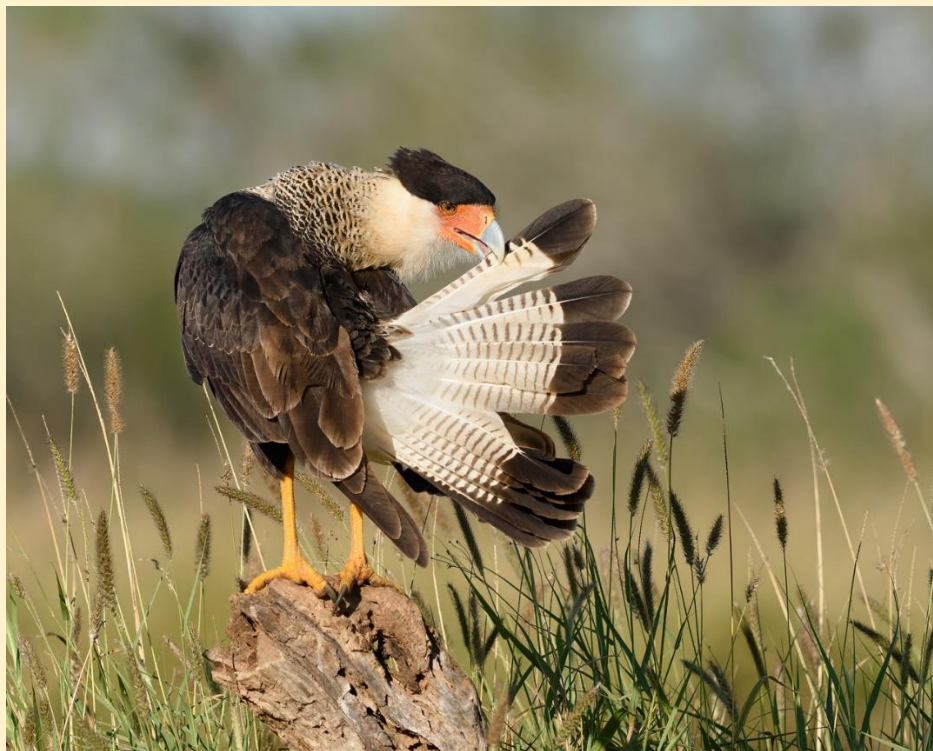


Figure 11 Crested caracara getting ready to be photographed



Figure 12 Other birds we expect to photograph include: Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Black-crested titmouse, Common ground-dove, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Audubon's oriole, and Long-billed Thrasher!

