

vacation adventures

Happy Trails: Discovering The Wild Side Of The Lone Star State

(NAPSA)—Wild treasures in Texas go far beyond cattle, cactus and coyotes. Texas is also a resting place for over 600 bird species, more than any other state.

“Texas as a whole is a bird-watcher’s paradise, with over 500 species of birds having been documented in the lower Rio Grande Valley alone,” said Cliff Shackelford, an ornithologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife. “Both serious birders and casual tourists will be captivated by the area’s sights and sounds.”

In addition to a world-class bird-watching experience, adventurers who hike, bike, kayak or even camel trek their way through Texas will find opportunities to chase rare butterflies, spot an endangered ocelot, boat with dolphins, watch sea turtles make their nests or find shade under trees found nowhere else on earth.

Rio Grande Valley

The best introduction to the Rio Grande Valley’s wild side is at the World Birding Center (WBC) headquarters housed in the Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission, with 760 acres of habitat for “Valley specialties”—birds such as Altamira orioles and plain chachalacas that can’t be seen anywhere in the U.S. other than deep South Texas—as well as rare Mexican birds who occasionally pop across the border. (www.worldbirdingcenter.org)

Texas Gulf Coast

Visitors to the Texas Gulf Coast will find the area ideal not just for swimming and deep-sea fishing, but also spotting pelicans, herons and other waterfowl at coastal spots such as the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Rock-



Photo courtesy Texas Parks and Wildlife Department ©2003

Endangered whooping cranes call Texas home between November and March.

port. (<http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/texas/aransas.html>). A jaunt down to South Padre Island offers opportunities to spot endangered sea turtles or have a close-up encounter with bottle-nosed dolphins on a boating tour.

Big Bend

For the more adventurous at heart, the Texas Big Bend region, anchored by Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park, offers visitors rugged activities and dramatic vistas to explore. It is a vast, remote and wildly beautiful natural region offering hiking, camping, river running, horse riding, camel trekking, mountain bicycling, jeep touring, and an abundance of sightseeing opportunities. (www.nps.gov/bibe)

For more information about birding and other sports and recreation activities in Texas, visit www.traveltex.com.