



*Interpretive Guide to:*

# STATE PARKS OF THE WORLD BIRDING CENTER

## VISIT ALL NINE SITES

The World Birding Center (WBC) is a partnership between local municipalities, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). Three of the WBC sites—Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley, Estero Llano Grande and Resaca de la Palma state parks—are managed by TPWD. The six other WBC sites are operated by local communities in Edinburg, Harlingen, Hidalgo, McAllen, Roma, and South Padre Island. For an unforgettable nature adventure, visit all nine sites.

- South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, South Padre Island
- Resaca de la Palma State Park, Brownsville
- Harlingen Arroyo Colorado, Harlingen
- Estero Llano Grande State Park, Weslaco
- Old Hidalgo Pumphouse, Hidalgo
- Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, Edinburg
- Quinta Mazatlan, McAllen
- Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, Mission
- Roma Bluffs, Roma

[www.worldbirdingcenter.org](http://www.worldbirdingcenter.org)



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Green Kingfisher

THE RHYTHMS, SOUNDS AND SONGS OF NATURE ONCE AGAIN FILL PARTS OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY LANDSCAPE. IN THE RESTORED WORLD BIRDING CENTER HABITATS, THE NATURAL ORCHESTRA IS IN FULL CHORUS. THE BUZZ OF INSECTS, BIRD SONGS AND CALLS, AND THE DEEP BASS OF FROGS AT DUSK EVOKE THE IMAGE OF A FULL SYMPHONY. THESE SOUNDS REASSURE US THAT RESTORING HABITATS RENEWS LIFE.



## A VANISHING HABITAT

Year-round, over 300 different species of birds travel through or make their homes in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. It is alarming that less than 5 percent of the natural habitat, which offers shelter, food, water and open spaces for birds and other wildlife, remains. Imagine having a house but only being able to use small parts of each room, and with each passing day having less to eat and drink, no way to replenish supplies, and fewer places to roam freely. Ranching, agriculture and urban growth, coupled with natural causes such as drought, have fragmented the landscape and chipped away at the framework of the natural “house” and the “neighborhood” surrounding it.

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## PARTNERSHIPS FOR RESTORATION



Common Buckeye

**R**egional partners including three state parks are collaborating to remedy the deterioration of habitats and to restore the health of the land in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Revegetation using native plants and careful water management has revitalized hundreds of acres. And park staff have developed irrigation systems and innovative water collection methods that mimic natural flooding patterns. The partners of the World Birding Center are working together to restore this landscape that was cut apart and to make it whole again.

## RESACA DE LA PALMA STATE PARK



Resaca de la Palma State Park is situated at the Rio Grande River Delta, the southern tip of Texas. Wetlands, woodlands and savannahs make up its 1,200 acres, much of it wild and undeveloped. A *resaca* (oxbow lake) cuts through the park and supplies the moisture that nurtures the large trees along its banks. Woodlands dominated by

Texas ebony and anacua trees, considered one of the most threatened plant communities in the United States, border the resaca. Humans can easily become disoriented in the dense vegetation, but it is a haven for wildlife including the ocelot and jaguarundi, both found only in extreme southern Texas within the United States.

Efforts to sustain this biologically significant site centered on the restoration of the resaca, the lifesource for much of the habitat. Work crews cleared the brush that choked the waterway. They channeled water to it and park staff now manage water levels to mimic natural flooding.

Since restoring the resaca to a wetland, the raucous croak of the black-crowned night heron, the laugh-like chatting of blue-winged



Marine Toad

teals and the chirping of Rio Grande chirping frogs emanate again from the rich habitat. This same habitat supports two rare amphibians, the black-spotted newt and Rio Grande lesser siren.

## ESTERO LLANO GRANDE STATE PARK

Situated along a stream coming from the Rio Grande, Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco was once a mosaic of woodlands, scrublands and grasslands. In the 1750s, Spanish settlers introduced cattle and sheep ranching. Grazing practices altered the landscape, which was further depleted by the removal of native vegetation during the “Magic Valley” agricultural and real-estate boom times of the early 1900s. In more recent times, agricultural practices in the Estero Llano Grande watershed contributed to siltation, the rapid accumulation of sand and clay that chokes streams and rivers.

Vermilion Flycatcher



Purple Gallinule

The construction of ponds to provide habitat to a variety of birds and other wildlife became the focus of restoration efforts. Recent re-introduction of native plant species will revitalize the remnants of historic natural habitat. Today, the 200-acre park, with its shallow and deep wetlands, savannahs and woodlands, provides easily accessible opportunities to view and hear a diversity of birds and other wildlife.

## BENTSEN-RIO GRANDE VALLEY STATE PARK

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park is located south of Mission almost on the Rio Grande. The 797-acre park is surrounded by 1,900 acres of protected native habitat. A principle of conservation biology is that the larger the fragment of unbroken habitat, the greater the diversity of species. This combination of wetland, scrub brush, riparian and woodland habitats makes Bentsen one of the best places in the United States to observe birds and wildlife most commonly found in the subtropics of northern Mexico.

For many years, campers and day visitors could drive into the park. But auto traffic compounded the pressures on the native vegetation and wildlife. To help protect the site, visitors now leave their vehicles at the headquarters and walk, bicycle or take a shuttle tram into the park. Community

volunteers helped to revegetate agricultural fields to restore the habitat that once existed. Plantings around the headquarters building represent native plants, which attract hummingbirds and hundreds of species of butterflies—some of them rare or never



Gulf Fritillary

before seen in the United States. As the plants become established they will attract even more wildlife. These animals will disperse seeds, increasing the flora and attracting even more wildlife, and adding to the symphony of nature in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.



**N**ature’s musical sounds—the deep tones of frogs, soothing melodies of water, scampering of quail, and even the buzzing of mosquitoes—at Resaca de la Palma, Estero Llano Grande and Bentsen-Rio Grande state parks tell us we are on our way to a healthier habitat. Together, we can continue to assure that these sounds are never silenced. Ask about volunteering at one of our state parks, or ask how you can create a habitat that supports an “orchestra” in your own backyard.