



APRIL 22-27, 2026

Legacy Journey to Coastal Texas

Join us for this bird-watcher's dream getaway. Each year, springtime beckons more than two billion birds to embark on long flights from Central and South America to northern destinations, such as the Upper Texas Coast. During the first part of our journey, we search for red-cockaded woodpeckers, Bachman's sparrows, fish crows, brown-headed nuthatches and other species at Big Thicket, an area known for an impressive variety of dragonflies, damselflies and butterflies. Our adventures will also take us through the coastal woodlands of High Island and the rice fields, beaches and wetlands around Galveston Bay.



Photos: Roseate Spoonbills, FL © Joshua Pelta-Heller, TNC Photo Contest 2019; Fauna & Foliage at Brazos Woods Nature Preserve, TX © Jerod Foster

Legacy Journey Highlights

- Explore coastal mottes on the globally celebrated birding hot spot of High Island.
- Learn from TNC experts about conservation work to enhance the Upper Texas Coast's resiliency against storms and climate change through natural infrastructure like oyster reefs.
- Take a ferry to Galveston Island and Bolivar Flats, where marbled godwits, red knots, long-billed dowitchers and other shorebirds feast on a nutrient rich smorgasbord brought in by the tides.



Conservation Highlight: Longleaf Pine

Longleaf pine once blanketed more than 90 million acres across the Southeastern U.S. Today, just 5.2 million acres remain. Adjacent to Big Thicket National Preserve and sharing its longleaf pine habitat lies The Nature Conservancy's Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary. At the preserve, TNC is working with partners to restore longleaf pine woodlands and to protect the open meadows and bald cypress swamps found there.

In addition to practicing sustainable forest management on the preserve, TNC is utilizing prescribed burning, which emulates the natural historical disturbance required to maintain a healthy, fire-adapted longleaf pine ecosystem. Unlike wildfires and accidental fires ignited by humans, prescribed burns take place under specific weather conditions, require significant preparation and follow explicit safety protocols for both the public and fire practitioners.

By working with government agencies, Indigenous peoples and other partners, TNC is bringing the role of fire in nature back into balance and helping communities prepare for, manage and live safely with fire. And across the Lone Star State, our nature preserves are playing a critical role in demonstrating the value of fire.

Photo: Longleaf Pine at Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, TX © Kenny Braun

Itinerary Overview

DAY 1

Wednesday, April 22

Welcome to Texas! Upon arrival at Houston Airport, we will gather as a group mid-afternoon and depart for our home base for the next few days: Winnie, Texas, population: 2800. This small town is about an hour's drive from Houston and positions us well for exploring incredible birding hotspots along the Texas Coast. In the evening, enjoy a welcome dinner and trip orientation with your TNC hosts and naturalist guides.

Overnight in Winnie, TX

DAY 2

Thursday, April 23

After breakfast, we'll take off for Big Thicket National Preserve, located an hour's drive north of Winnie. Here along the Texas Coast, migrating birds make landfall after crossing the Gulf, fueling up before heading north to their summer breeding grounds. Big Thicket is a key stopping point for these species, and we'll spend the day exploring the preserve as we search for bright and beautiful warblers, including Swainson's, Kentucky, hooded, yellow-throated, and prairie, as well as pileated and red-headed woodpeckers. Wood ducks might be found in the streams and sloughs, and keep an eye out for flycatchers, tanagers, and vireos.

However, Big Thicket isn't just for the birds. The preserve's 176 square miles encompass nine different ecosystems, from longleaf pine forests to bayous thick with ancient cypress trees, home to a wide variety of mammals, reptiles, mollusks, and more. We'll be joined in our adventures today by TNC Texas staff who live and work in the area and can share their efforts to preserve this stunning habitat and the species that rely on it.

After returning to Winnie, enjoy dinner together before resting up for another day of exploration.

Overnight in Winnie, TX

DAY 3

Friday, April 24

After breakfast, we won't have to travel far to explore the excellent preserves of High Island managed by the Houston Audubon Society. These woodland oases or "coastal mottes" provide refuge to thousands of migrant songbirds. At Boy Scout Woods Sanctuary, Smith Oaks Sanctuary, and Rollover Pass, boardwalk trails allow for easy walking and consistently close viewing without disturbing birds and other wildlife. Walking the trails, it will be clear we are visiting at the peak of migration! Warblers, tanagers, thrushes, vireos, buntings, and more are unmissable. Bold and bright rose-breasted grosbeak and scarlet tanager gorge among the fruiting mulberry trees, while roseate spoonbills share the shallow waters with American alligators. The local heron and egret rookery at Smith Oaks also should be busy.

After an afternoon break, we drive down the Bolivar Peninsula, checking several areas along the shore for terns, gulls, and wading birds. Most impressive include the black skimmer, bright orange American avocet, and dainty black-necked stilt. Today, learn about TNC's efforts to restore oyster reefs along the Gulf Coast.

Enjoy dinner together and get a good night's rest on our final evening in Winnie.

Overnight in Winnie, TX



Conservation Highlight: Texas' Oyster Reefs

The eastern oyster is considered one of the most valuable fishery resources on the Texas coast. However, the alarming decline of shellfish reefs has made oyster reefs one of the most threatened marine habitats on Earth. A study led by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) found that 85% of oyster reefs globally have been lost due to the impacts of climate change, hurricanes, disease and changes in freshwater flows. While just 20-50% of original oyster reefs remain along the Gulf Coast, the Gulf is considered the best hope for restoring healthy oyster populations.

TNC has been working with a variety of partners across industries to bring our beloved oysters back to life. In Texas, we've had a hand in creating four reefs, resulting in over 160 acres restored. These efforts have not only enhanced marine biodiversity but also improved water quality by filtering millions of gallons of water daily. Reefs like these provide critical habitat for many marine species and support local economies through more sustainable oyster harvesting and increased recreational fishing opportunities. While there is still much to be done to restore healthy oyster populations, TNC is dedicated to making a lasting impact in the Gulf. We're actively engaging in habitat restoration, community collaboration and scientific research to develop integrated restoration, recovery and management plans that honor the traditional use and cultural ties to oyster harvesting.

Photo: Gulf Coast Oyster Reef Restoration, TX
© Erika Nortemann/TNC

Itinerary Overview (cont.)

DAY 4

Saturday, April 25

After an early breakfast, we'll check out of our hotel and depart for 34,000-acre Jocelyn Nungaray (formerly Anahuac) National Wildlife Refuge, located on the eastern end of Galveston Bay. En route look for feeding shorebirds in the agricultural fields, with American golden plovers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, and stilt sandpipers known to make an appearance.

At the refuge, we will circumnavigate Shoveler Pond on the auto route, stopping many times to view the abundant wading birds through our scopes. Some 280 bird species have been recorded at the refuge, attracted to its prairies, patchy woodland habitat, and marshes. Look for seaside sparrows in the grasses along the bay edge, as well as roseate spoonbills feeding alongside white (and sometimes white-faced) ibises. Yellow-crowned night herons and both least and American bitterns often put on a good display.

American alligators are plentiful in the extensive ponds and wet prairies, while Northern harrier hunt from above. Butterfly enthusiasts should keep an eye out for salt marsh skippers, and for those new to butterfly watching, the garden at headquarters makes learning and comparing species much easier! Mammals we may encounter include raccoon, mink, muskrat, and swamp rabbit. We'll stretch our legs on the short trails near headquarters before the two-hour drive to our lodging for the next two nights in Lake Jackson.

Overnight in Lake Jackson, TX

DAY 5

Sunday, April 26

After breakfast, we'll begin our morning at the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory's Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary. The observatory is a non-profit that conducts impressive conservation projects, including habitat enhancement, land acquisition, migration studies, and regional habitat mapping. Learn about TNC's history with this organization as we explore the sanctuary's trails and for those that wish, climb the observation tower. Quintana Island's position directly along a migration route makes it a vital bird stopover.

We'll spend the rest of the day exploring Brazos Bend State Park, which offers 37 miles of trails and 5,000 acres of coastal prairie, tallgrass prairie, live oak gallery forests and mixed bottomland forest. Learn from local TNC staff about the conservation efforts in place to safeguard this slice of globally imperiled habitat as we traverse the park in search of migratory birds. Be sure to scan the abundant swamps, marshes, and lakes for the American alligator and other wildlife.

After a busy day, we'll return to our lodging in Lake Jackson for a farewell dinner as we revisit the highlights of our time together.

Overnight in Lake Jackson, TX

DAY 6

Monday, April 27

Over breakfast, bid farewell to your fellow travelers and the adventures you shared along the Texas Coast. Return to Houston Airport to head home or wherever your travels take you next!



Trip Cost

Double Occupancy: \$3,890/person

Single Occupancy: \$4,870/person

This trip must have a minimum of 8 travelers and a maximum of 12.

This cost includes:

- Accommodations
- Group airport transfers
- Group ground transportation
- All meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 and ending with breakfast on Day 6
- Park, preserve, and other activity fees
- Miscellaneous program expenses
- Professional guide services
- 2 TNC hosts

This cost excludes:

- Travel to and from Houston, Texas
- Travel insurance
- Incidentals
- Alcohol
- Gratuities



Photos (from top to bottom): Northern Harrier Above the Treetops, TX © Karine Aigner; Yellow-Crowned Night Heron with a Crawfish Catch, TX © Paul Marto/TNC Photo Contest 2022; Black-Capped Vireo, TX © Rich Kostecke; Wood Ducks Resting on a Log, TX © Jorgen Hog/TNC Photo Contest 2019



Payment & Cancellation Terms

To make trip payments or cancel your registration, please contact Naturalist Journeys at travel@naturalistjourneys.com or call 866-900-1146.

Deposit:

- A deposit of \$750 per person is due at the time of registration.
 - Cancellation 121+ days prior to trip start: Deposit is refundable, less a \$250 per person cancellation fee (and 3% payment handling fee, if applicable).

Full Trip Payment:

- Full trip payment is due 120 days prior to trip start.
 - Cancellation 0-120 days prior to trip start: Full trip cost is non-refundable.

Contact Information

As you plan for your journey with The Nature Conservancy and Naturalist Journeys, please feel free to reach out with any questions.

TNC Legacy Journeys Team

legacyjourneys@tnc.org

317-829-1873

Naturalist Journeys Team

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

866-900-1146

TNC Travel Values

● Access

Travel with renowned Conservancy experts and local partners for an exclusive, on-the-ground experience. You won't just see amazing places, you'll see how you are helping save them.

● Impact

Witness how your commitment to our planet and your passion for conservation are making a difference in the wild places and communities you are impacting.

● Knowledge

Learn how we are applying the latest cutting-edge science to affect global change and drive conservation.

● Inspiration

Immerse yourself in local cultures and awe-inspiring landscapes to foster your own connection to our world.

● Globally Minded

Elevate your understanding of our work by observing first-hand how TNC and our partners act locally and how we turn local results in to global impact by scaling solutions that work.

Photo: Davis Mountain Preserve, TX © Jerod Foster



TNC Traveler Expectations

Group travel with The Nature Conservancy provides our donors with the opportunity to experience, alongside fellow supporters, the places TNC is working collaboratively to advance our conservation mission. Within these curated trips is the chance to engage with a community of active individuals and conservation staff who enjoy teaching and learning about the important conservation work we do and exploring the outdoors.

In order to ensure an enjoyable trip environment that supports learning and enrichment, we need your partnership. We ask that all participants review TNC's Code of Conduct prior to joining a trip. We also encourage you to carefully review all trip information to make an informed decision as to whether travel with TNC and a specific trip's characteristics and activities are right for you. Following the Code is an expectation and responsibility for everyone in the larger TNC community, including our staff, partners, vendors and supporters. To that end, by registering for a TNC trip, you agree to uphold the Code.

While the entire Code of Conduct is important, the tenets that are especially relevant to TNC group travel are:

- respect for each other,
- respect for the world around us, and
- acting with integrity.

The following traveler expectations are intended to provide guidance for how those tenets translate to group travel but are by no means an exhaustive list. By participating in a TNC trip, you make a commitment to act in accordance with the TNC Code of Conduct to your fellow travelers, as well as to TNC staff, partners, community members and vendors. Any violation of or disregard for the Code of Conduct may result in removal from a trip and/or denial of future TNC travel participation.

TNC Traveler Expectations (cont.)

● **Respect all people, places and perspectives.**

Each participant on a trip is an integral part of the travel experience. Demonstrating respect and consideration is imperative not only for nature, local communities and cultures in the places we visit, but also for fellow travelers, staff, partners, community members and vendors. Everyone will bring different goals, backgrounds, experiences and abilities, and it is important that the group respect each individual's perspectives and needs throughout the trip. Sometimes trip participants become lifelong friends, and we encourage the camaraderie and community built through these shared experiences!

● **Harassment in all its forms, including discrimination and microaggressions, is not tolerated.**

There is no place on any TNC travel experience for disrespect to or bullying or intimidation of fellow travelers, TNC staff, partners, community members or vendors. All travelers agree to support an environment free from any behavior that could make an individual feel unsafe or diminish their dignity. If you experience or observe this type of behavior on a trip, please report it to your trip host or guide.

Examples of behavior that will not be tolerated include, but are not limited, to:

- Racial discrimination in any form (jokes, comments and/or actions)
- Verbal abuse of any traveler, staff, partner, community member or vendor
- Actions or statements that exclude or divide people because of their differences or differing perspectives
- Jokes about gender or sexual orientation or that include sexual innuendo
- Discriminatory actions or statements based on gender or sexual orientation
- Unwelcome physical contact or physical intimidation of a sexual nature

● **Act in accordance with the applicable law of the location(s) of the trip.**

Your trip location(s) may have different laws from your home location. You are expected to be aware of and adhere to the trip destination's laws throughout the experience, even when locations change throughout a trip.

● **Employ an attitude of flexibility.**

At times, there may be changes in the itinerary when deemed necessary or advisable for the comfort and well-being of trip members. We appreciate your understanding, flexibility and adaptability in order to make the trip safe and enjoyable for you and everyone else.

TNC and its tour operators reserve the right to deny registration or remove a tour participant from a trip should such person's behavior, health or mental condition impact the safe and equitable operation of the trip.

Thank you for your attention and understanding, and please let a TNC travel representative know if you have any questions in advance of registering at legacyjourneys@tnc.org.

