



L/R Lee Zieger, President Jimmy Carter
Rosylnn Carter, Steve Labuda

The President Carter Vacation Planning

By Lee Zieger

I was contacted in November 2003 by the Carter staff to set up a birding vacation sometime in April 2004. To me this looked like a personal opportunity and a chance to promote Birding in the Rio Grande Valley. The time was for birding without much if any political meetings. Arrangements suggested for meetings, even just a few invited guests, were met with opposition. I did not want President Carter to be disappointed; so, I did all I could to make sure he had the time he wanted. Initial contacts were made with three bed and breakfast and a birding itinerary established. I selected a guide, Steve Labuda, for the Carters and made sure he could be available, Thanks to Ken Merritt. A number of people I talked with were gracious, but kind of wondered where I was coming from. One local nature manager suggested I watch out for an April Fools Joke. I could not be specific on anything so maybe these thoughts were appropriate.

Another location got into the mix, February 2004. It was a Fish and Wildlife Park with little to no private birding industry involvement. I responded with a Rio Grande Valley Birding list of 499 species and a few local observations. I suggested his visit would most importantly be more productive birding here. Other important consideration would be the number of people he would help by being a part of the birding community here in the Rio Grande Valley. He would be helping all the birding locations like two US parks, two Texas Parks, restaurants, and Bed and Breakfasts. This would all increase birding

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Mark Your Calendars

June 7 Meeting 6PM President Jimmy Carter slide

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The President Carter Birding Begins

By Lee Zieger

President Jimmy Carter and Rosylnn visited the Rio Grande Valley for a birding vacation April 4 through 8, 2004. The birding Sunday at Anzaldues County Park and Bentsen Rio Grande Valley Park (WBC Headquarters) started the trip Sunday afternoon. WBC personnel helped with the guiding and finished up



the evening with the Elf Owl coming out about 8PM with supper being rescheduled twice. Thanks to Suzann at Indian Ridge B & B. Father Tom & Roy joined us for dinner and slides.

Frontera Audubon in Weslaco was Monday.

The Grooved-bill Ani had escaped us at Santa Ana that morning, but it did not escape our view at Frontera. The Black-bellied Whistling Ducks were the closest to us for

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Roy Rodriguez and Selen King lead the Carters at the Frontera Audubon Preserve

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the whole trip here.

Monday morning Falcon Dam provided the Muscovy Duck, Crested Caracara, and others. Thanks to Steve and the SS we were allowed at the end of the spillway to the dam. Rains kept us on surfaced roads. Lunch at Patio Inn in Rio Grande City.

Roy Rodriguez then helped lead us to an air strip, sewer plant, WBC Edinburg, and Frontera. Amy Winters, Manager (White Blouse) and the Edinburg City Manager met us at the WBC Edinburg facility.



Tuesday started early at Santa Ana NWR with Fr. Tom Pincelli joining us. The Tropical Parula escaped but we got the Clay-colored Robin plus lots

more.

A stop at Los Ebanos Preserve near Los Fresnos brought in good looks at the Altamira Oriole. Arriving at The Inn at Chachalaca Bend in Los Fresnos we had lunch then on to Boca Chica Beach. A hunt for the Brownsville Parakeets and



Fr Tom Pincelli, The Carters, Staff, and birders on the trail

Red Crown Parrot followed with success. The evening meal was at the Vermillion Restaurant in Brownsville.



L/R Lee Zieger, Brad McKinney, President & Mrs. Jimmy Carter



L/R Roy Rodriguez, Danny Davidson—Owner, President Carter, and Alma Zieger

President Carter popularity came to a head with more cell picture phones than I imagined could be in Brownsville. The attention was so overwhelming this was our last eating out experience of the trip. The same attention concerned the Secret Service the rest of the trip. Some of the locations were in danger of being taken off the trip which was my concern from the beginning.



Wednesday came Laguna Atascosa with fog burning off as we arrived. After our first real good

view of the Green Jay we signed in as was the practice at all locations visited. Laguna Atascosa did bring us lots of species like the White-tailed Hawk, Gull-billed Tern, and we had already seen there-introduced Aplomado Falcon.

President Carter agreed to a press conference just prior to leaving. The location took a day for me to get all parties to agree choosing my Rio RV Park activity center over two others. At this point crowd control, access, and a good exit was at the top of certain minds.

Wednesday continued with the South Padre Island board walk, Fins To Feathers South Bay trip, plus stops at the Sheephead St. drop out locations. That evening Steve and I joined the Carters and Breedloves for our last evening meal together. The first picture was taken at Cleve and Rosemary Breedlove's Inn at Chachalaca Bend.



L/R Brad McKinney joined us, Steve Labuda, Rosaylnn, Scarlet Colley joined us, President

Foggy and early Thursday we visited Audubon's Sabal Palm forest in Brownsville with Jimmy Paz. The Short-tailed Hawk was the target we landed at Sabal Palm. Another stop was canceled due to muddy

roads then on to the Press Conference. President Carter with the extra time was relaxed and enjoyed answering the media's question plus meeting Brownsville city officials. His response to the birding questions was great. "It is superb," Carter said, noting, "I could have gone anywhere in the world to watch birds." ... "I wouldn't have been here except for Lee," Carter said.



The full text can be seen on the web at http://www.brownsvilleherald.com/ts_comments.php?id=P58740_0_10_0_C His comments will help birding in all the RGV for a long time. My part will be forgotten, but all the locations and people involved will be spreading this news for a long time. Several national magazines are working on articles about his trip at this time.

President Jimmy Carter in his gracious way will help our area get better known for birding. This was my goal from the start and a press conference started spreading the word.



Thanks especially to the Carters, Secret Service, DPS, TPW, Border Petrol, and Steve Labuda, Fr. Tom Pincelli, Roy Rodriguez, Brad McKinney, and all others who helped.

Planning Continued

attention to our Deep South Texas location and Eco-tourism. An economically depressed area would be helped a lot. The increased travel here, lodging, restaurants, and markets would contribute more revenue to our area. President personally contacted me by phone and agreed to continue the planning and come the first part of April.

The planning got more intense. The trip started out with three nights then grew to four nights. Arrival was late Sunday night in McAllen with departure mid morning Thursday from Brownsville. All the scheduling was redone. Another review with Steve Labuda and President Carter's staff confirmed the timing and direction of the trip. Birding locations, lodging, and eating locations with names were developed and passed to the Secret Service. Due to the nature of birding (birds don't go by schedules) more locations were submitted than we thought we had time for—lucky for us we later found out.

Mid March the departure was changed to noon giving us a good half day in the Brownsville area. The trip needed only a small adjustment for this change. None of the schedules were released by me to anyone but Steve locally due to the flexible timing a trip of this nature required. Lodging and some of the meals were reconfirmed with me being much more specific on timing.

Two weeks out, I suggested the late arrival Sunday evening might be better earlier. Or, I could adjust the Monday schedule for the late Sunday arrival. One week out, arrival was changed to mid day Sunday. We now had another half day of birding to schedule and/or reorganize the existing locations. Thanks to this adjustment the WBC in Edinburg and the Frontera Audubon locations on the pending list were put on a more permanent list.

Keeping the visit hush-hush was getting exceedingly more difficult.

One week out, days were spent with the Secret Service visiting all the sites. They furnished the vehicles and drivers for the President. We had at least four vehicles in the caravan. At least one other vehicle visited all the sites prior to our arrival to bird. No confirmation yet on press conference or pictures during the trip.

You know the rest. The birding vacation went well with the birds, lodging, transportation and food. See **The President Carter Birding Begins** page one.

Brownsville
International Birding Festival

I have spent 100s of hours each summer, four years now, setting up, training, and retraining people for this festival. It is just too much. The support of BCVB was changing too.

Thanks to all those who helped like Jimmy Paz, Mike Baldwin, BCVB Staff, RGDA members, and volunteers.

I have passed the birding festival to the Brownsville Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Mike Gonzalez said they will take it over. Contact Mike at 956/546-3721 for information on the next birding festival.

Lee Zieger 956/831-4653 E-Mail RioRVpark@aol.com

Mission Statement

Rio Grande Delta Audubon is dedicated to conservation of our native habitat for the protection of birds, other wildlife, and for the enhancement and appreciation of our environment.

Dues for Rio Grande Delta are due now for the same as last year at \$25.00 for an individual and \$35.00 for a family. You can also join in Categories of Green Jay for \$100.00, Buff-bellied Hummingbird for \$250.00 and other business classes. A membership includes an annual free pass to Sabal Palm and other ANCA properties all over the USA and \$5.00 off a Los Ebanos Preserve annual membership.

See Page 4 for membership application or visit www.riograndedeltaaudubon.org for a downloadable application with all the membership details.

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 birding by joining Rio Grande Delta Audubon.**

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\$35	Family
\$60	Painted Bunting
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We do encourage membership in National Audubon to get a very fine Magazine and support national conservation.

Mark Your Calendar Continued

show with lots more information and photos. Come hear about the challenges met and over come by President Carter, his staff, the Secret Service, and myself for the first ever Presidential Birding Vacation. See you at the Historical Brownsville Museum 641 E. Madison June 7.

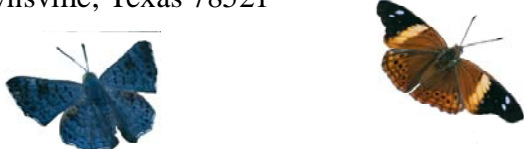
July 12, Potluck Meeting 6PM at Sally Arroyo residence.

A map will soon be on our web site with meeting locations designated.
 See more at www.riograndedeltaaudubon.org

June 20, Gorgas Science Foundation **trip to El Cielo Ranch**. Call 956/554-5050 for details and price.

Many thanks to **Selena King and Frontera Audubon** in Weslaco for their help in distributing this newsletter. Photography by Lee Zieger.

Rio Grande Delta Audubon
 8801 Boca Chica Blvd
 Brownsville, Texas 78521



- *President Jimmy Carter Trip Report*
- *Special Calendar Datesocial*
- *El Cielo Trip*
- *July 12 Potluck Meeting*