

NATURE TOURISM

NEW WAYS TO USE YOUR RANCH TO MAKE MORE MONEY



BIRDING: A MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR INDUSTRY

About 18 million Americans take this hobby seriously enough to travel away from home on birding trips, according to a 2011 study conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A disproportionate number of them are retirees with higher-than-average incomes. That study estimated they spent a whopping \$15 billion on food, lodging, transportation and other travel expenses related to bird watching.

Birding Trips can range from \$150 - over \$1,000 a person!

With very limited public lands in Texas, your ranch could be the next big birding spot in Texas. Val Verde County is one of the world's richest and most unique birding destinations. The county is located in the Transition Zone between the Texas Hill Country and the South Texas Brush Country, and the western portion of the county is adjacent to the Chihuahuan Desert. The intersection of these distinctly different environments makes this the only place in the world where populations of the endangered golden-cheek warblers, black-capped vireos, and the scarce Montezuma quail overlap. As further testament to the region's rich diversity, the ranges of at least four species of orioles, four species of towhees, three species of quail, and two species of buntings make their home. The county's unique juxtaposition of soil types, geography, climate, and rainfall levels provides both birders and bird photographers with a large number of colorful and interesting avian species to watch and photograph. In addition, Val Verde County is located in the middle of the Central Flyway path. Consequently, birders can encounter spectacular opportunities to see a large variety and quantity of migrating birds. Join us on April 27, 2019 at 5:30 PM for "Benefiting from Birds" to learn about how birds can make you an extra buck!

Join us to learn how to create a
 Birding Nature Tourism Enterprise

BENEFITING FROM BIRDS

April 27, 2019

5:30 - 7 pm

\$25 Registration Fee (Dinner Included)
 RSVP online or by calling 830-774-7591
valverdeextension.ticketleap.com/benifiting-from-birds/



Photograph taken by Bryan Calk at Birding the Border 2018

5 QUICK TIPS FOR SONGBIRD HABITAT MANAGEMENT

by Dr. Maureen Frank, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Wildlife Specialist

1- Meet your feathered friends!

To know how to manage, you need to know what you have. Before managing for songbirds, grab a pair of binoculars and start identifying some of the common species you see. If you're new to birding, check out the Merlin Bird ID app and other resources from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Learning as much as you can about the songbirds in your backyard and back 40 will make you a better steward of that resource.

2 - Be a lazy gardener.

We humans like to make things neat and tidy, and there are certainly good reasons to remove dead plant stems and fallen leaves (for example, around the house to reduce pests). But leaving some dead branches and leaf litter in your ranch provides a place for insects to hide, and insects are a great food for many birds species! Wherever it's safe to do so, also leave dead trees (snags) standing to give cavity-dwelling birds a place to nest.

3-... but keep it clean.

"Messy" is one thing, but "dirty" is another. If you have a bird bath, pond, or other water source for wildlife, clean and inspect it regularly. Stagnant water will readily spread diseases, so a dirty water source can become a trap for thirsty birds who need water, but end up getting sick. Having multiple water sources helps spread out birds and other animals so the water doesn't become contaminated as quickly.

4 - Go native!

Native plants are the best way to attract native songbirds to your property. They provide food for birds year round – in the spring and summer by hosting insects, in the summer and fall with berries, and in the fall and winter with nuts and seeds. Native plants also provide a place to nest, to roost, and to hide from predators. In your garden, a bonus of native plants is that they are drought-tolerant and low-maintenance.

5 -Clear brush before or after nesting season.

We can change the timing of our management practices, but birds don't change when they lay eggs. Brush management during the nesting season can destroy eggs and young – which is not just sad, but also illegal. Depending on your tools and goals, clear brush early (before March) or late (after July) to avoid harming birds.

HOW CAN LANDOWNERS PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM LIABILITY?

by Tiffany Dowell Lashment, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Ag Law Specialist

A common concern for landowners across the country is how to ensure they are protected from liability if someone is injured on their property. Importantly, there is no silver-bullet that will ensure a landowner will not ever be liable for anything. Additionally, there is nothing a landowner can do to make it impossible for another person to file a lawsuit against the landowner. There are, however, numerous steps landowners can take to limit liability and protect their operations from this concern.

Carry Liability Insurance

“*This (Carrying liability insurance) is the most important step a landowner can take in order to protect his or her operation.*”

Every landowner needs to have a liability insurance policy that covers every activity taking place on the property. For example, if a landowner has a farm and ranch policy, but also conducts other activities like a roadside fruit stand or guided hunts, the landowner should confirm that the additional activities are covered by the farm and ranch policy's provisions. How much insurance should a landowner carry? Well, in typical attorney fashion I'll say that it depends. Landowners should consider the amount of risk associated with their operation. For example, a farm in the middle of nowhere that does not host any sort of events or have any guests would likely need a lower coverage amount than a farm that has a pumpkin patch and corn maze every fall with thousands of guests. Talking through the details of your operation with your insurance agent is a great way to determine the right coverage level and type of policy to obtain.

Check out Texas Ag Law Blog for more information on how you can protect your operation. <https://agrilife.org/texasaglaw/home/>

The April newsletter will include information regarding how to identify dangerous conditions on your land and how to provide warnings or make them safer.