

2026 SPEAKER BIOS

HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM SPEAKERS

Sky Kings Falconry – Wildlife Revealed Friday 5 p.m. & Saturday 3:40 p.m. – High School

Auditorium Raptors Plus (keynote speaker) is dedicated to the education and preservation of our planet's wildlife. Program features hawks, owls, falcons, vultures, and other meat eating birds. The focus is on the natural history, unique traits, and the abilities of these incredible creatures. Birds are in free-flight so arrive early as the doors need to stay closed after the presentation begins. You will have an opportunity to see the birds at the Hummer Mall during the weekend!

David Sarkozi - Friday 3:40 pm – High School Auditorium- David Sarkozi began birding as a teenager in Central Texas and has been an avid birder for over 45 years—still keeping his very first field guide. A past President of the Texas Ornithological Society and longtime board member, he has led countless birding trips across Texas and organized over 30 trips to Belize through KoziBirding.com. David's birding achievements include two Texas Big Years (500 species in 2015, 509 in 2017) and, in 2019, birding all 254 Texas counties in one year. Beyond birding, he enjoys cooking, craft beer, and amateur radio, where he holds an Extra Class license

Daniel Gomez - Sunday at 1:00 pm -High School Auditorium – Daniel is an avian wildlife photographer based in San Antonio. His work celebrates the rich bird life of Texas, blending artistic composition with ecological awareness. Daniel travels throughout the state to create images that highlight birds in their natural habitats. Daniel's path into photography began unexpectedly after a sports injury that required surgery. With time to recover and reflect, he picked up a camera and began to photograph birds in his backyard to help pass the time. Today, Daniel's work is recognized in multiple wildlife photography contests, and his images have been featured in various nature publications and across all social media platforms. Daniel also shares his process with others, giving educational presentations and workshops that combine practical tips, field-tested techniques, and personal stories. He aims to inspire photographers, birders, and nature lovers to connect more deeply with the beauty of Texas. Saturday, 5 p.m. – High School Auditorium

Ginger Easton-Smith – Saturday at 1:00 pm – High School Auditorium -Ginger has been captivated by the natural world since she was a young child, eventually leading her to earn B.S. and M.S. degrees in Horticulture Science from the University of Hawai'i. Ginger recently retired after many fruitful years as an Agriculture Extension Agent in Hawaii, and for the last 16 years, in Aransas County. She now has more time to garden, read, and indulge her love of chocolate.

Christine Anastas -Friday, at 10:20 am – High School Auditorium – Christine Anastas is a Texas Master Naturalist and Master Gardener. She has been involved with monarch citizen science projects since 2013 and has trained at Monarch Joint headquarters in Minnesota. She has been a speaker for the National Wildlife Federation and other organizations on monarch and milkweed topics. She is currently working with NWF on a new monarch fall roost count project and tagging monarchs with the new BlūMorpho radio tags. Her special interests are keeping up with monarch scientific studies, propagating native milkweed, and sharing knowledge.

Dr. Brent Ortego – Sunday at 11:40 am – High School Auditorium – Brent is a retired biologist with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department with much experience with nongame and endangered resources. He has managed hummingbirds for 3 decades at his home near Victoria, Texas, and conducted research on them across the Southwest. He has banded thousands at his home each year and managed to overwinter 160 hummers from 8 species during a winter.

Libby Even – Saturday at 2:20 pm – High School Auditorium -Libbby has been hooked on hawk migration since the day she saw 100,000 birds migrate past the Corpus Christi Hawk Watch in 1999. Like many, she returned year after year, making memories and forming lifelong friendships. Those friends include her late husband, veteran crew member Dane Ferrell, whom Libby met at the Hawk Watch in 2003. Libby has been a fixture at the Hawk Watch since relocating to Corpus in 2006, and she's thrilled to be the site's Lead Observer for Hawk Watch International for the Fall 2026 season. Libby loves to share this miracle of nature that is raptor migration with everyone.

Sam Wolfe – Friday at 11:40 am – High School Auditorium -is a shorebird biologist with Manomet. Sam has a master's degree in range and wildlife management from Texas A&M University—Kingsville, and lives in Rockport with her husband Carter, & dog Millie.

Dr. Liz Smith – Friday at 2:20 pm – High School Auditorium - Texan native with strong ties to the Coastal Bend, she committed her professional career to mentoring future professionals effecting conservation change at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and promoting conservation initiatives along the Texas Coast for wintering Whooping Cranes at The International Crane Foundation prior to her retirement in 2022. She continues to volunteer with various conservation-minded organizations and pursues an artistic adventure locally in the Aransas County area.

Glenn Olsen – Friday at 1:00 pm – High School Auditorium – Glenn leads birding and nature tours to exciting locations like the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica and exciting locations in the U.S. He teaches classes on bird identification and landscaping for birds and butterflies at Rice University's Continuing Studies Department, Houston Audubon. Glenn enjoys plants and has served as President of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT). He has led trips or presented programs for the Texas Ornithological Society, Houston Audubon, NPSOT, and birding festivals for the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, and Galveston Featherfest.

Ben Horstmann – Thursday at 2:30 pm – High School Auditorium. Ben serves as the Regional Interpretive Specialist for South Texas State Parks. His addiction to birding was a direct result of moving to the coastal bend and birding with the park staff and volunteers. His favorite pastime is birding in the State Parks and natural places of Texas.

Sara Rock is the interpretive ranger at Goose Island State Park. She was introduced to birding through an ornithology class at Texas State University in 2011 and has been birding ever since. When she's not leading programs at the park, you can find her exploring other parks and looking for rare birds. Saturday, 8:30-11:30am, Goose Island State Park

Jennifer Bristol – Saturday at 10:20 am – High School Auditorium -Jennifer is an award-winning author, conservation advocate, and champion for connecting people with nature. She is the author of *Wild Women for Good: Stories of Conservation in Texas*, *Parking Lot Birding: A Fun Guide to Discovering Birds in Texas*, and *Cemetery Birding: An Unexpected Guide to Discovering Birds in Texas*. She also co-authored *Texas State Parks: The First 100 Years, 1923–2023* with her father.

Jennifer serves as the Executive Director of the Victor Emanuel Young Naturalist Camp Scholarship Fund, which helps underserved youth attend birding camps and develop a lifelong appreciation for the natural world. She also shares her passion for birding as a guide with Nature Ninja Tours.

Dr. Rebekah Rylander – Saturday at 11:40 am -High School Auditorium – Rebekah grew up in Austin, Texas but now resides in Rockport where she considers the Whooping Cranes to be her best “neighbors.” Rebekah is currently the Science Coordinator for the Rio Grande Joint Venture under the American Bird Conservancy, and she earned her PhD from Texas State University in San Marcos studying avian behavior and wildlife ecology. Rebekah is additionally an avid birder, educational and outreach speaker, member of the Aransas Pathways Steering Committee, and permitted bird bander, among other involvements. She is passionate about avian conservation and loves being outside with her feathered friends.

Kelsey Low Sunday at 10:20 am – High School Auditorium – Kelsey is the Adult Programs Manager at the Houston Arboretum where she helps other adults connect to Houston’s urban wilderness through classes on native plants, art, cooking and bird watching. She has been a bird watcher for nearly 25 years and is particularly fascinated by bird behavior. A committed advocate for nature in the city, she is a member of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Urban Outreach Advisory Committee, the city of Sugar Land PARCS Board, and the Cullinan Park Conservancy Board.

Dr. Carter Crouch KEYNOTE SPEAKER – Saturday at 5:00 pm -High School Auditorium -Dr. Carter Crouch is the Director of the Gulf Coast Programs for the International Crane Foundation. He obtained his Bachelor of Science in Zoology from the University of Oklahoma in 2011. He completed a Master's in Range and Wildlife Management and a Ph.D. in Wildlife Science from Texas A&M University-Kingsville in 2014 and 2017. After graduate school, he worked for the Burns Paiute Tribe Natural Resources Department in eastern Oregon as the Wildlife Biologist and then as the Wildlife Program Manager. He started working with the International Crane Foundation in May 2022. Carter has done research on Whooping Cranes, Northern Bobwhite, American Kestrels, habitat and invasive species management, and the rarest grass in Oregon, and he has been involved in many different habitat restoration projects.

Title of Talk: Whooping Cranes: A Conservation Story that is Still Being Written

Short Descriptive paragraph of presentation: Everyone loves a comeback story, and the Whooping Crane has made a huge comeback from the low of 21 wild birds in the 1940’s and 1950’s. However, as the second rarest endangered bird in the United States today, there is still a lot of conservation work to be done and much of their story left to be written! At this presentation, Dr. Crouch will discuss the history of this species, their epic migration, the growing threats to their continued recovery, and the work still being done to recover North America’s tallest bird species.

ROCKPORT CENTER FOR THE ARTS SPEAKERS

Angie Birmingham – both Friday & Saturday at 10:20 each day – Rockport Center for the Arts -

Angie is a Master Photographer, award-winning nature and wildlife photographer, and author based in South Texas. She is the co-owner of Jeff and Angie Photography and the founder of Sharp Shooter Foto, a nonprofit dedicated to teaching youth nature photography. Angie is also the author of *Journey Through the Lens: A Creative Guide to Nature Photography*. Known for her fun, hands-on teaching style, she helps photographers quickly gain confidence with their cameras and start capturing the moments they've been missing. She is a sought-after speaker and workshop leader who makes photography simple, approachable, and exciting.

Bird Photography 101: Part 1 — Start Strong (1 Hour) Friday at 10:20 am

Love birds but frustrated with your photos? This beginner-friendly class is where it all starts. You'll learn the essential beginning camera settings, we will go over gear what you need and don't need, and simple techniques that will instantly improve your results. We'll also cover how to find birds, understand their behavior, and position yourself for better shots. This is the foundation every bird photographer needs—and the perfect setup for Part 2.

Bird Photography 101: Part 2 — Get Sharp, Get the Shot (1 Hour) Saturday at 10:20 am

If you've ever taken a photo of a bird only to find it blurry or soft, this class is your game changer. We'll break down exactly how to get sharp, crisp images—even when birds are moving. Learn the must-know settings, focusing techniques, and real-world strategies that dramatically increase your keeper rate. I will also recommend editing program and basic editing. Take Part 1 for the foundation—then Part 2 is where it all clicks.

Glenn Olsen – both Friday & Saturday at 8:30 am – Rockport Center for the Arts -

Glenn leads birding and nature tours to exciting locations like the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica and exciting locations in the U.S. He teaches classes on bird identification and landscaping for birds and butterflies at Rice University's Continuing Studies Department, Houston Audubon. Glenn enjoys plants and has served as President of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT). He has led trips or presented programs for the Texas Ornithological Society, Houston Audubon, NPSOT, and birding festivals for the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, and Galveston Featherfest.

Elizabeth White-Olsen – both Friday & Saturday at 9:30 am- Rockport Center for the Arts

-Elizabeth is the author of *Bringing Butterflies Home: Gardening to Heal Our Yards and Ourselves* and is the co-founder of Houston's GO Native Landscaping, LLC, along with her husband, Glenn Olsen. Through GO Native's on-site consultations, custom landscape designs, presentations, and classes, she and her husband have supported hundreds of homeowners, business owners, and municipal and nonprofit employees choose sustainable, bird-and-butterfly-friendly landscapes. She has achieved Native Plant Society of Texas Landscape Certification Levels 1 and 3. In 2021 White Olsen was trained and certified as a Texas Master Naturalist. She teaches adult nature education classes at Rice Glasscock School of Continuing Studies and holds two master's degrees of fine arts in writing.

