



2026 SPEAKER TOPICS & DESCRIPTIONS

SPEAKERS AT THE ROCKPORT-FULTON HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

THURSDAY:

-Ben Horstmann: Birding in Texas State Parks-Your Other Backyard- 2:20 PM

Join Ben Horstmann, Texas State Parks Regional Interpretive Specialist, in a virtual birding tour of the State Parks in South Texas. We'll see tremendous change in species as the habitats change throughout the region. We will also discuss how you can see those places for yourself and when is the best time to be there.

Birding Panel Discussion-Figure out how to get the most out of your time in the Rockport area as local birders discuss their favorite hotspots, must-see birds, and their experiences with both. We'll focus on time during the festival but also talk about visiting other times of the year.

FRIDAY:

-Christine Anastas-Monarch Butterflies: Biology, Innovative Tech Tracking, and New Fall Citizen Science -10:20 AM

We will start with a brief introduction to the monarch life cycle and migration. Then we will explore how revolutionary new radio trackers are upending previous scientific assumptions about their flight paths. Finally, you will be introduced to a new citizen science project where you can actively participate by logging your own fall monarch sightings.

-Sam Wolfe-The Secret Life of Whimbrels- 11:40 AMFollow a migratory shorebird as it travels across the western hemisphere to reach its nesting grounds on the north slope of Alaska. In this presentation you'll learn about the life history and migratory movements of the Hudsonian Whimbrel.

-Glenn Olsen – 3 Secrets to Attract Birds-1:00 PMThese secrets will draw birds to your yard like iron to a magnet and create an inspiring nature retreat for you to enjoy. Join us for this unveiling.

-Liz Smith-The Magic of Hummingbirds in Aransas County (and a Little Science)-2:20 PM

Hummingbirds belong to the family with the smallest birds in the world, including our Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds. So, how do they manage yearly migrations across continents and sustain themselves on flower nectar and tiny insects? Why do we have such high numbers of hummingbirds migrating through our area- and how do we ensure they have plenty of good habitat? Let's explore their life cycle and behavior that is indeed magical – and scientifically amazing and become habitat stewards for their continued survival.

-David Sarkozi-What's in a name, the Eponymous Names of Birds -3:40 PM

In 2023, the American Ornithological Society announced its intention to change the English common names of more than 80 bird species in its naming jurisdiction whose names are eponyms—that is, birds named after people. There are compelling arguments both for and against this proposal, but one thing is certain: many of the people behind these names have fascinating, complex, and sometimes surprising stories worth exploring.

-Sky Kings Falconry with Wildlife Revealed – 5:00 PM Birds in flight indoors. Program features hawks, owls, and other meat eating birds. The focus is on the natural history, unique traits, and the abilities of these incredible creatures. Sky Kings Falconry is dedicated to education and the preservation of our planet's wildlife. Birds are in free-flight so arrive early as the doors need to stay closed after the presentation begins.

SATURDAY:

Jennifer Bristol-10:20 AM - Join author Jennifer L. Bristol to discuss her new book- **Wild Women for Good: Stories of Conservation in Texas**. The book opens with the first big conservation movement in Texas and the United States - Saving the Birds. Jennifer will share how women in Texas have led that cause since the 1890s and are still at the front of the flock today. Attendees will learn about the history of avian conservation and understand what efforts and innovations are taking place today. Please come with questions and be part of the conversation.

Dr. Rebekah Rylander-The Power of E-Bird: How Citizen Science is Shaping Conservation

-11:40 AM - The number of naturalists and bird watchers across the globe is astounding, and in recent years, many portable apps have been developed to assist people with keeping bird lists. However, one such app, eBird, has become more than just a tool for the casual birder; it is a powerful database that scientists are using in amazing ways to tell stories about avian communities, population shifts, and conservation. Join Dr. Rebekah Rylander for a discussion about how eBird is taking citizen science data and using it to further bird conservation projects across the great state of Texas and beyond!

Ginger Easton Smith-Beyond Beautiful: Hummerbirds as Powerhouse Pollinators-1:00 PM

We love inviting hummingbirds into our yards for their beautiful colors and to watch their antics, but these tiny visitors do far more than delight us. Explore how hummingbirds play a vital role in plant pollination—and learn what is needed to attract them to your garden, regardless of its size.

Libby Even-Hawkwatching 101-2:20 PM All over the world there are places where migrating raptors are counted. Ever wonder how they count thousands of hawks overhead in a “kettle”. What's a kettle? You will learn a little about the history of hawkwatching, world-wide hawkwatches, why so many fly over Corpus Christi, why we count, how we count and get a little taste of how to identify raptors in flight.

-Sky Kings Falconry with Wildlife Revealed – 3:40 PM -Birds in flight indoors. Program features hawks, owls, and other meat eating birds. The focus is on the natural history, unique traits, and the abilities of these incredible creatures. Sky Kings Falconry is dedicated to education and the preservation of our planet's wildlife. Birds are in free-flight so arrive early as the doors need to stay closed after the presentation begins.

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Carter Crouch-Whooping Cranes: A Conservation Story that is Still Being Written. Everybody 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 State today, there is still a lot of conservation work to be done and much of their story is 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.

SUNDAY:

Kelsey Low-Decoding the Language of Birds-10:20 AM -Birds are noisy critters, but what does it all mean? Every caw, chirp, and tweet is communication, and with a little practice, you can learn to eavesdrop on some amazing bird conversations. Not only does learning bird sounds help you find and identity birds, it also gives you the gossip and what's going on in your neighborhood. In this interactive talk, we'll cover why birds make sounds, the difference between songs and calls, common call types and their meanings, and even take a little bird language proficiency quiz! (Don't panic, it won't be graded)

Brent Ortego- Christmas Bird Count Population Trends in Texas from 1966 – 2023 -11:40 AM
The National Audubon Society coordinates 2000+ Christmas Bird Counts in North America during the Christmas season which includes 125+ in Texas. The bird counts are used to monitor populations of birds. The highest increasing and decreasing populations will be discussed.

Daniel Gomez-The Art of Bird Watching: Where Birding and Photography Meet -1:00 PM
Bird watching and bird photography share more in common than many people realize. Both begin with curiosity, patience, and the simple act of slowing down to truly observe the natural world.

In this presentation, award-winning wildlife photographer Daniel Gomez explores how the skills of birders and photographers complement one another, revealing a deeper appreciation for birds beyond simply identifying a species or capturing a photograph. Through captivating images and personal stories from the field, you'll discover how understanding bird behavior, reading habitats, anticipating moments, and practicing patience can lead to more meaningful encounters with wildlife.

CONTINUED

SPEAKERS AT THE ROCKPORT CENTER FOR THE ARTS:

FRIDAY:

Lecture & Birding Field Trip w/Glenn Olsen 8:30 – 11:00 AM

Bountiful Birding: Habitat Gems of the Coastal Bend

Finding birds can sometime be challenging, but understand habitat can make a tremendous difference in our efforts to find and see birds. In this presentation we will discover the unique habitats (some of them hidden) of the Coastal Bend.

We will learn, not only where the best habitat occurs, but how to “find and read” the various component of habitat and which birds are likely to be found in each section. Images will show what the habitat looks like and include birds that are found in various habitat components. Armed with this foundational knowledge, you will find and see more birds!

The lecture will be at the Rockport Center for the Arts. You will board a bus and be taken to the birding location. After the field trip, you will have a solid foundation to begin the ID of hummingbirds of Texas.

BUTTERFLIES OF THE TEXAS COASTAL BEND WITH AUTHOR ELIZABETH WHITE-

9:30-10:30 AM OLSEN-The Coastal Bend serves as a migratory path for the beloved Monarch as well as for beautiful subtropical species such as Lyside Sulphur and American Snout. Discover where to see these and other gorgeous butterflies, and which tools and references to use to quickly ID them.

Bird Photography 101- Part 1- 10:30-11:30 AM -Join Master Photographer Angie Birmingham.

Rockport Center for the Arts, 204 S. Austin St., Downtown Rockport (upstairs meeting room)

Love birds but frustrated with your photos? This beginner-friendly class is where it all starts. You'll learn the essential beginning camera settings, go over your gear and what is need to find birds, understand bird behavior, and position your self for better shots. This class is a set-up to Part 2 held Saturday.

SATURDAY:

Lecture & Birding Field Trip w/Glenn Olsen – 8:30-11:00 AM

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HOW TO ATTRACT BUTTERFLIES TO YOUR YARD WITH AUTHOR ELIZABETH WHITE OLSEN – 9:30-10:30 AM

U.S. butterfly populations decreased by 22% between 2000 and 2020, according to North American Butterfly Association count data. The good news is there are easy ways we can help! Learn what butterflies need to survive and even thrive in our own backyards or in balcony container gardens. Join us for an inspiring and illuminating journey into the magical lives of one of nature's most wondrous creatures, the butterfly.

Bird Photography Class - 101 Part 2 – 10:30-11:30 AM

Join Master Photographer Angie Birminghamman.

Rockport Center for the Arts, 204 S. Austin St., Downtown Rockport (upstairs meeting room)

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. Increase your keeper rate. Angie will also recommend editing programs and basic editing. TakePart 1 for foundation-then Part 2 is where it all click