

For Immediate Release



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HummerBird Celebration: The Big Year

An event celebrating the spectacular fall migration of hummingbirds

Rockport-Fulton, Texas Celebrate the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and all fall migrants at the 31st Annual HummerBird Celebration in Rockport and Fulton, Texas, Thursday - Sunday September 19-22.

At 5 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 19, attendees will be treated to a Welcome Reception at the Rockport Center for the Arts building located at 101 S. Austin St. in Downtown Rockport. It is free to all attendees. It features wine, cheese, fine art and information on the event. The opening dinner will be a Texas Style Barbecue at the newly remodeled Saltwater Pavilion of Rockport Beach from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. This is a ticketed event.

Over the three-day event period, event attendees have an array of activities to experience. The choices include: guided bus trips to see the hummingbirds, boat and nature tours, photography talks, field trips guided by experts, lectures from world renowned speakers, workshops, outdoor exhibits and two Hummer Malls filled with vendors marketing nature-related products. Each day is filled with something special such as the Opening Texas Barbecue Dinner on Thursday, Sept. 19, featuring local birder of the year Martha McLeod and Niharika Raiput, a wildlife and conservation artist from New Delhi, India. Friday's highlight is the live bird talk given by representatives from Sky King Falconry out of San Antonio. Saturday begins with a unique Hummer Breakfast on the grounds of the History Center of Aransas County, and ends with the keynote presentation from Greg Miller, a world renowned birder whose character was played by Hollywood actor, Jack Black in the movie "The Big Year". Throughout the weekend at special times indicated in the event program, a banding demonstration will take place with Master Bander Sumita Prasad, who has been banding and recording valuable information about hummingbirds for nearly 20 years. There are three photography workshops this year where local photographers offer their talents and information on photographing birds. Another highlight for this year is a paper and wire bird making workshop where attendees will learn preservation through art.

Since its inception in 1988, the HummerBird Celebration has continuously added new and exciting activities to the event. Over the last couple of years, it has spawned related events from other organizations which allow attendees to enjoy an even greater array of experiences. Aransas Pathways, an organization that promotes, birding, history, kayaking and hike and bike trails, has put together an early event to intrigue festival goers to find their best poker hand by encouraging them to visit birding sites around the community collecting cards. The winner will receive a pair of Eagle Optics Kingbird 6.5 x 32 Binoculars. The event will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, Sept. 19 at the Aransas Pathways Pavilion, just off of Hwy 35 at the northern entrance to Walmart. All Aransas Pathways sites are open and free to the public. Another event for early birds are a number of Hummer Homes which open up to the public and will be made available for early viewing of their backyards Saturday prior to the event. Inquire at the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center for that list of homes.

Also new this year is the WingDing Event highlighted on Saturday, Sept. 21 from 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. (5:30 p.m. Cash Bar) at the Rockport Country Club Clubhouse located at 101 Champions Drive in Rockport. Tickets are \$50 or tables of 10 are \$400 and can be purchased online at www.windsrescuecenter.com. The annual WingDing supports Wings Rescue Center's efforts to rescue and rehabilitate injured birds and to rescue and raise abandoned baby birds. Since 2016, Wings Rescue Center has rescued over 700 birds, and released many of

them back to nature. Wings Rescue Center is a local non-profit organization and is totally volunteer-driven with all funds used for expenses of rescue, rehabilitation and release.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department naturalist and expert birder Ben Horstmann will give a presentation 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Sunday, Sept. 22 on "Birding Texas State Parks in South Texas" followed by a unique bird walk to go look for those birds. This event is ticketed and will begin in the historic CCC building of Goose Island State Park. This building, one of the shelters in more than 800 parks nationwide, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was a work relief program after the Great Depression of the 1930s.

A new feature this year will be an "Art for Wildlife Conservation" initiative. The workshops, titled CHIRRUPS: Paper and Wire Bird Making" are hand-building sessions where one can learn how to create miniature 3D models of birds using epoxy, paper and wire. It will be offered both Saturday and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Niharika Rajput, a conservation artist direct from New Delhi, India, will lead the workshops.

This 31st HummerBird Celebration is an event that showcases the communities of Rockport and Fulton's commitment to birding with a tribute to the Ruby-throated hummingbird, and all migrant and resident birds of the area. To purchase tickets, volunteer, or find out more information on activities and events, please visit www.rockporthummingbird.com or contact the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce at 361-729-6445. Tickets may also be purchased onsite at the event at the Martha Luigi Auditorium Box Office, 1803 Omohundro St. Rockport, TX.

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About the HummerBird Celebration

HummerBird Celebration - 1988-2019 ~ The HummerBird Story

The event was founded in the late 1980s by local part-time resident Betty Baker, Wildlife expert Jesse Grantham and others. Their idea was to create an event as a means of celebrating the spectacular fall migration of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds as they pass through the Rockport-Fulton area on their way south to their winter homes in Mexico and beyond. This magnificent occurrence was first documented by the famous Texas birdwatcher Connie Hagar of Rockport. The hummingbirds pause here each fall to prepare for the most arduous leg of their migration. Upon leaving here, they will fly non-stop across the Gulf of Mexico, an incredible journey of some 800 plus miles. While here, they must eat enough to increase their body fat up to 50% which will be used to fuel their continued migration. In 1995, Texas Parks and Wildlife Officials observed our Hummer Home sites and later created the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail unveiling the first sign of site #50 at the Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary. In 2011, a local venue tax was allowed to fund Aransas Pathways; a project creating, protecting and maintaining birding along with history, kayak, bike and hike sites and trails throughout the county. The legacy of the HummerBird Celebration has created such an important footprint for Aransas County and serves as a great example to all.

Keynote Speakers:

Opening Dinner, 6:30pm at the Rockport Beach Saltwater Pavilion

Martha McLeod, Program Title: "Vibrant Migrants". An award-winning teacher and youth birding program sponsor, Martha has been in education for 25 years Her student birding team competes yearly in the Great Texas Birding Classic achieving top honors. She was recently named "Birder of the Year" by Swarovski Optiks/Bird Watcher's Digest.

Niharika Raiput is a professional wildlife and conservation artist specializing in intricate Paper and Epoxy sculptures. A native of India, she was awarded an Artist in Residency in British Columbia where she worked on three different species: Rufous, Calliope and Black chinned Hummingbirds. Program Title: *Preservation through Art*. Date and time of program: Thursday Dinner. Sept 19, at Saltwater Pavilion

following Martha McLeod. Niharika will also do a presentation in the Martha Luigi Auditorium on Saturday, Sept. 21, 10:20 am.

Sky Kings Falconry, 5 p.m. Friday: "Raptors Revealed" in the Martha Luigi Auditorium. Sky Kings Falconry features hawks, owls, falcons, vultures, parrots and other colorful and interesting animals. The program will focus on natural history, unique traits and the natural abilities of these incredible animals. Sky Kings Falconry is dedicated to the Education, and preservation of our planet's wildlife, and employing its natural abilities to correct environmental issues. Birds in flight so arrive early as the doors need to stay closed after the presentation begins. Sky Kings will also do a program in the Middle School Band Hall Saturday, Sept. 21, 2:20

Greg Miller, 5: p.m. Saturday in the Auditorium: Miller is a world renowned birder whose character was played by Jack Black in the movie "*The Big Year*". Miller has been birding since he was too young to remember. His father that got him into birding at an early age, over 50 years ago. He has birded in all 50 states and much of Canada. In 1998, he traveled over 130,000 miles while trying to hold down a full time job at a nuclear power plant—to try to see as many species of birds in one calendar year as possible. It was an incredible experience passing the 700-species mark—an achievement many birders aspire to in a lifetime. Sandy Komito and Al Levantin also did Big Years the same year and also broke the 700-mark (documented in the 2004 nonfiction book, *The Big Year*, by Pulitzer Prize winning author Mark Obmascik). Twentieth Century Fox made a full feature motion picture inspired by the book! It has A-list actors Jack Black, Steve Martin, and Owen Wilson. The movie released in 2011. It is available now on both DVD and Blu-ray Netflix and Redbox. In his talk, he will highlight this experience and more.

Other featured speakers:

Ben Horstmann, serves as the regional Interpretive Specialist for South Texas State Parks. His addiction to birding was a direct result of moving here and birding with the park staff and volunteers at the parks. Program Title: *Birding South Texas State Parks and GISP Bird Walk*. Dates and times of program: Sunday Sept 22, 8:30 am - 11:30 am Location: Goose Island State Park.

David Sikes and Susan Chilcoat, David is an award-winning writer and photographer who was part of the Corpus Christi Caller-Times news staff covering Port Aransas, Rockport, Aransas Pass, as well as coastal issues. In 1998, David became the paper's Outdoors columnist. He retired in 2019, after 23 years with the Caller-Times. Susan is the executive director for the nonprofit Wildlife in Focus, as well as its former education coordinator. Dates and times of program: Friday, Sept. 20, 3:40 pm Location: Auditorium and Saturday, Sept. 21 at 1:00 pm Middle School Band Hall.

Jason Loghry will be sharing a presentation about his adventure in the Artic. Program Title: *Summer in Utqiagvik: A look at Shorebirds in the Artic*. Dates and times of program: Friday, Sept. 20, 11:40 am Auditorium and Sunday, Sept. 22, 10:20 am Middle School Band Hall.

Glenn Olsen teaches bird identification and nature classes at Rice University's Continuing Studies Department and at Houston Audubon. Program Title: *Napoleon: The Ruby-throated Hummingbird*. Dates and times of program: Thursday, Sept. 19, 3:40 pm. Saltwater Pavilion at Rockport Beach and Saturday Sept 21, 1:00pm Auditorium.

Brent Ortego recently retired from Texas Parks and Wildlife. He primarily worked with conservation of endangered and nongame species. Program Title: *The Hummingbirds of Texas*. Dates and times of program: Friday, Sept 20, 3:40 pm; Sunday Sept. 22, 11:40 am located in Middle School Band Hall

Sid Rucker, Sid and his belated wife, Shirley Rucker's photographs have been published in books, magazines and calendars. They spent 5 of those years as the photographers for Texas Parks and Wildlife book, *Hummingbirds of Texas*. Program Title: *Birds, Birds, More Birds and Their Stories*. Dates and times of program: Friday, Sept 20, 11:40 am, Saturday, Sept. 21, 1 pm. located in Middle School Band Hall.

Dr. Liz Smith Ph.D. Most of Liz's career has been focused on coastal Texas. She has been nationally recognized in receiving the Coastal America Partnership Award for Restoration at Bahia Grande and Protection

at Shamrock Island, EPA Award for Environmental Excellence in Wetlands, as well as regionally recognized in receiving the Conservation and Environmental Stewardship Award for Higher Education and Pathways to Success in Science Programs. Program Title: *Aransas: Link Between Hummingbirds and Whooping Cranes*. Dates and times of program: Friday, Sept. 20, 1 pm Auditorium; Saturday, Sept. 21, 10:20 am Middle School Band Hall.

Juan Bahamon was born in Columbia and emigrated to the U.S. to study and practice in the field of Neurology. When he is not using his skills in the medical field, he is pursuing his passion for photographing hummingbirds. Bahamon's photos have been used for the HummerBird Celebration advertising this year and in the recent past years. His photographs have been seen world-wide on limited edition Hummingbird wall calendars. Program Title: *Hummingbirds of Columbia*. Dates and times of program: Friday, Sept 20, 2:20 pm and Saturday, Sept. 21, 2:20 pm located in the Auditorium.

David Sarkozi David has been birding seriously for more than 20 years. He has worked for University of Houston while actively leading field trips in Texas, Belize and Costa Rica. He is a past President of Texas Ornithological Society, Friends of Anahuac Refuge and Chair of Houston Outdoor Nature Club-Ornithology Group. He leads birding trips both nationally and internationally. Program Title: *The Dirty Dozen: 12 Hardest Regular birds in Texas to See*. Dates and times of program: Friday Sept. 20, 2:20 pm Middle School Band Hall and Saturday, Sept. 21, 11:40 am located in the Auditorium.

Bill Lindeman A native Texan from Gonzales County, Lindemann earned BS and MA degrees from the University of Texas in Austin. As an exploration geologist, he worked for Exxon around the world searching for oil and gas, uranium, synthetic fuels and other minerals for 32 years. Retiring to Fredericksburg in 1994, Lindemann became a self-trained naturalist to fully appreciate the wonderful natural heritage found in the Hill Country. He wrote a weekly newspaper column on birding for 19 years, twice served as president of the Native Plant Society of Texas, founded the Fredericksburg Nature Center, and was a member of the Hill Country Land Trust for 15 years serving as its president for four years. Has been an avid birder for more than 50 years and continues to expand his knowledge of plants, butterflies and odonates(dragonflies). He is a wildlife photographer and frequent speaker on nature subjects around the state. Program Title: *"Hummingbird Courtship: Flash! Zoom! Bang! And Done!"*. Dates and times of program: Friday Sept. 20, 10:20 am and Saturday, Sept. 21, 11:40 am located in the Middle School Band Hall.

Christy Ilfrey is a writer and public speaker who moved to Rockport in 2011, leaving a promising career in higher education to pursue a career educating others about sustainable landscaping and living. Christy is a native plant gardener and farmer. The mission of her business is to conserve, preserve, restore and celebrate nature. Program Title: *Living and Landscaping with Native Plants*. Dates and times of program: Friday, Sept. 20, 10:20 am located in the Auditorium.