



NEWS RELEASE

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SOUTH-OF-THE-BORDER BIRDS FLOCK TO NORTH-OF-THE-BORDER REFUGE

CARMEL, Ind.—Feb. 15, 2005 — Serious bird enthusiasts are often willing to travel to the four corners of the world in search of sightings of exotic species. Thanks to efforts in 1942 to preserve a thorn forest habitat near the southern tip of Texas, birdwatchers don't need to leave the United States to see a wide variety of species native to Mexico.

The Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 2,088 acres along the bank of the Rio Grande River just southeast of McAllen. Located at the meeting point of subtropical climate, the Gulf Coast, Great Plains and the Chihuahuan Desert, Santa Ana is an ecological crossroads that attracts a wide variety of birds and other animals, including half of the butterfly species known in the U.S.

An important migration stop for thousands of birds each year, Santa Ana offers the opportunity to see nearly 400 species, including the very rare Hook-Billed Kite and Gray Hawk. A number of raptors travel through the refuge during migration, including the Osprey, Broadwing Hawk, Northern Harrier and Peregrine Falcon. Santa Ana is a springtime stop for more than 35 species of warblers. Lucky birders may spy three species of kingfishers in a morning: tiny Green's, the common Belted's, and their super-sized cousins the Ringed. Waterfowl and shorebirds ranging from the Least Grebe to the Black-bellied Whistling Duck are also spotted here.

One of the best vantage points in the refuge is the observation blind perched at the edge of water near the visitor's center. The blind, which is a highlight for the tens of thousands of visitors who visit Santa Ana each year, was recently rebuilt with a \$25,000 grant from the Wild Birds Unlimited Pathways To Nature Conservation Fund.

In addition to birdwatching from the blind, visitors to Santa Ana can hike more than 12 miles of trails, bike or drive the seven-mile-long wildlife drive, or take an interpretive tram to learn more about the area's fascinating history and ecology. They may even be fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of endangered ocelots or jaguarundi. To learn more about the refuge and the many species it protects, visit <http://southwest.fws.gov/refuges/texas/santana.html>.

The original and largest franchise system of backyard birdfeeding and nature specialty stores with over 300 locations throughout the North America, Wild Birds Unlimited established the

Pathways To Nature Conservation Fund in 1999 as part of its mission to bring people and nature together. Funded by a contribution from every Wild Birds Unlimited store, Pathways To Nature has provided nearly \$740,000 in grants to 25 environmental education and wildlife viewing projects. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation partners with the company in this effort, using federal funds and a challenge grant program to match the grants, thereby increasing their impact. Wild Birds Unlimited thanks its customers for helping them make a difference through this program, details of which are available at www.pathwaystonature.com.

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