

## Native Plant Society of New Mexico 2023 conference

### Field trips

**Half to three-quarter day, which allows for participants to explore the area on their own in the afternoon. See the list of self-guided hikes and area attractions for ideas.**

#### **F-01. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) – Marathon Grasslands Preserve Tour**

30.311603,-103.118294, ~10 miles north of Marathon, TX toward Fort Stockton on HW 385.385  
42 miles, 40 min

*Description:* A private, guided tour of the Marathon Grassland Preserve which is closed to the public. Located in the northern portion of the Marathon Basin region, the 2,701-acre preserve is comprised of diverse grasslands that extend up to the Glass Mountains. The preserve represents some of the most diverse Chihuahuan Desert grassland habitat in Texas and supports an array of wildlife, including migratory raptors and grassland birds, pronghorn, kit foxes, burrowing owls, golden eagles and the federally endangered northern aplomado falcon. The Conservancy's work at Marathon Grasslands Preserve highlights conservation-friendly ranching techniques and complements more than two decades of conservation work in the Davis Mountains and Marfa grasslands.

#### Information

*Leader:* Dr. Carlos (Lalo) Gonzalez, Nau Endowed Professor of Habitat Research and Management at Borderlands Research Institute and Assistant Professor in the Natural Resource Management Department at Sul Ross State University

*Difficulty:* Easy to Moderate; there are no trails, but the landscape is very flat, and there won't be a lot of walking, mainly driving, stopping, and getting out to look around.

*Wheelchair/ADA accessible:* No

*Start Time/Duration:* Meet at Alpine Civic Center at 8 am to carpool to the preserve. We will arrive around 9 am. The tour will last around 2-3 hrs, and people can return to Alpine around 1 pm or continue to explore the region on their own.

*Maximum number of attendees:* 30

*Fees:* None

*Facilities:* None

*Other:* Signed Liability Release Required

*From Alpine Civic Center:* <https://goo.gl/maps/SH1XZwKvaDPVC7s5A>

E on US-67 N/US-90 E/W Holland Ave toward N 12th St. Keep right to continue on US-90. Turn left onto US-385 N and travel ~ 9 miles. Main entrance gate will be on the left-hand side of the road. There will be a tall green pipe entrance with The Nature Conservancy's sign attached to the gate.

## **F-02. Marfa Garden “The Wonders of Dry Desert Plants” Tour**

1000 N Capote Street, Marfa, TX

*32 miles, 30 min*

*Description:* A tour of the garden featured in the book “Marfa Garden: The Wonders of Dry Desert Plants” led by the author and landscape designer Jim Martinez. “Marfa Garden” is a full-color celebration of more than sixty flowering plants of the Chihuahuan Desert and neighboring regions. The desert, North America’s second largest at 140,000 square miles, spans West Texas, parts of New Mexico and Arizona, and northern Mexico. It is a surprising showcase for colorful plant diversity. This garden’s recognition has included a PBS episode of Garden Fit, and the 2021 book “Under Western Skies: Visionary Gardens from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast.”

[Information](#)

[More Information](#)

[Video – Garden to 11min, 30 sec](#)

*Leader:* Jim Martinez, author and landscape designer

*Difficulty:* Easy

*Wheelchair/ADA accessible:* Yes; the pathways are mostly shredded wood chippings. There are some areas of gravel that may be a little harder to manage on a wheelchair.

*Start Time/Duration:* Meet at Alpine Civic Center at 8 am to carpool to Marfa. The tour will last around 3 hrs, and people can return to Alpine around noon or continue to explore the region on their own.

*Maximum number of attendees:* 12

*Fees:* None

*Facilities:* Yes

*From Alpine Civic Center:*

Head east on W Holland Ave toward N 12th St. Turn Left onto N 11th St. Turn Left at the first cross street onto US-90 W/W Ave E. Follow US-90 W to Marfa.

On arriving in Marfa via US Hwy 90, there is a 4-way stop at HWY 90 and Highland Ave. Continue thru this intersection. Turn Right at the next intersection (Austin Street) and continue on Austin Street to Columbia Street (4-way Stop). You will make a Left onto W Columbia and follow it until it ends at Ridge Street. Turn Right and follow Ridge street to Fourth Street. Turn Left at Fourth Street and follow it to Capote Street.

Parking is along Capote Street (unpaved).

## **F-03. Caldwell Ranch Tour**

2 Caldwell Ranch Road, Fort Davis, TX 79734

53 miles, 1.2 hours

*Description:* A private tour of the Caldwell Ranch near The Nature Conservancy Davis Mountains Preserve. This pristine high-elevation ranch offers a unique opportunity to explore Davis Mountain vegetation communities in an area normally closed to the public. Depending on rainfall, the ranch will have diversity including native penstemons, golden rod, gay feather, Indian paintbrush, sumac, and Apache rose. Trees include pine, emery oak, grey oak, red oak, sycamore, black walnut, and wild Cherry.

*Leader:* Michael Eason and Pam and Will Harte, owners

*Difficulty:* Moderate; uneven and unimproved trails

*Wheelchair/ADA accessible:* No

*Start Time/Duration:* Meet at Alpine Civic Center at 8 am to carpool to the ranch. The tour will last around 3-4 hrs, and people can return to Alpine around 2 or 3 pm.

*Maximum number of attendees:* 20

*Fees:* None

*Facilities:* Yes

*Other:* Any photos taken during the field trip are for private use only, and may not be shared publicly, e.g., online. Vehicles with high clearance are recommended.

*From Alpine Civic Center:* <https://goo.gl/maps/Mvc8ENJF2dXmoR949>

*Head east on W Holland Ave toward N 12th St. Turn Left onto TX-118 N/N 5th St. Continue to follow TX-118 N. Turn Left to stay on TX-118 N. Turn Right onto Caldwell Ranch Rd.*

#### **F-04. Aquatics and riparian habitats**

Location TBD

*Possible locations* O6 Ranch is 30 min; Balmorhea State Park and Sandia Springs are 65 miles, 1.25 hours

*Description:* Most people do not think of aquatic habitats when considering the Trans-Pecos. In fact, many of the aquatic habitats support rare plants that are at risk due to changes in hydrology caused by increased droughts and groundwater pumping. Casey Williams has been surveying these habitats for several years, and has found many interesting species. This field trip will visit some of the locations to see some of these plants. The locations visited will depend on the monsoon rains. The preferred location is the O6 ranch located between Alpine and Fort Davis. This private ranch has a variety of habitats including mountain streams, ephemeral pools and springs. A brief talk on the ranch history and watersheds of the ranch will open the tour. Species we may encounter include Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum* sp.), Beggar's ticks (*Bidens laevis*), Monkey flower (*Erythranthe guttata*) and several uncommon pondweeds (*Potamogeton* species). If the area is dry the reserve option is a visit to Sandia Wetlands and the Balmorhea cienagas which have a good array of aquatic species any time of the year.

*Leader:* Casey Williams

*Difficulty:* Moderate; uneven and unimproved trails

*Wheelchair/ADA accessible:* No

*Start Time/Duration:* Meet at Alpine Civic Center at 8 am to carpool to the location. The tour will last around 2-3 hrs, and people can return to Alpine around 2 or 3 pm.

*Maximum number of attendees:* 20

*Fees:* If visiting Balmorhea: Balmorhea State Park: \$7 per person or Texas Parks Pass.

Balmorhea Lake: \$5 per person  
*Facilities:* Available at Balmorhea

Driving directions will be provided to participants once the locations are finalized.

### **Field trips to Big Bend National Park (full day)**

There are two options for Big Bend field trips. One will spend more time hiking one or more trails, with limited stops at some of the scenic areas. The other is for people who do not want to hike, and will be a driving tour that will visit more locations in the park but without exploring much away from the roads.

Participants who wish to spend more time in Big Bend can stay in the area after the tour ends. Just make sure not to carpool with anyone who needs to return to Alpine in the evening.

### **F-05. Big Bend National Park Chisos Basin Hike**

*Alpine to Chisos Basin Visitor Center is 108 miles, 2 hours*

*Chisos Basin to Santa Elena Canyon is 47 miles, 1.25 hours*

*Santa Elena Canyon to Alpine is 121 miles, 2.25 hours*

*Description:* The Chisos Mountains are the center of Big Bend, and have peaks that reach well above 7000 ft above sea level. The Chisos Mountain Basin holds a ranger station, hotel, and restaurant, and is the start of many trails. We plan to hike the Windows Trail, but this might change depending on summer monsoons and where the plants will look the best. Participants will be notified in the week prior to the conference if the location does change. The Windows Trail offers a mix of shady forest and open, foothills vegetation. This trail descends through Oak Creek Canyon to the Window pour-off which frames panoramic desert vistas. At the base of the Window is a pour-off where a seasonal waterfall plunges 220-ft. down the west side of the Chisos Mountains. Plants we might see include *Agave havardiana*, *Opuntia* and smaller cacti, white honeysuckle, Texas Mountain Laurel, Mexican buckeye, evergreen sumac, and several species of oaks.

During wetter periods Oak Creek may be flowing, and must be crossed several times. The roundtrip distance from the Chisos Basin Trailhead is 5.5 miles. Use caution on this trail: the top of the Window pour-off is slickrock with no railings. Keep in mind that it is an easy downhill walk to the Window, but the return trip is a challenging climb of 900 feet.

After the hike we can drive to Santa Elena Canyon, about 1.25 hours from the Basin, and take the short walk to the mouth of the canyon. Other quick stops along the way or on the way out of the park will depend on conditions of the plants and the participants.

[Information about the park](#)

*Leader:* Carolyn Whiting, Big Bend National Park botanist, and others TBA

*Difficulty:* Moderate; uneven and unimproved trails

*Wheelchair/ADA accessible:* No

*Start Time/Duration:* Meet at Alpine Civic Center at 8 am to carpool to the park. The hike typically takes 3 hours, but might take longer with the typical pace we take when looking at plants. After the hike we will visit Santa Elena Canyon and possibly other stops along the way. We expect to return to Alpine around 6 or 7 pm.

*Maximum number of attendees:* 20

*Fees:* \$30 per vehicle or National Parks Pass

*Facilities:* Yes

*Other:* There are limited gas stations around the park, so please fill up in Alpine before meeting in the morning.

Directions will be provided to participants once the locations are finalized.

### **F-06. Big Bend National Park Driving Tour**

*Alpine to Rio Grande Village is 120 miles, 2.25 hours*

*Rio Grande Village to Chisos Basin is 30 miles, 45 min*

*Chisos Basin to Santa Elena Canyon is 47 miles, 1.25 hours*

*Santa Elena Canyon to Alpine is 121 miles, 2.25 hours*

*Description:* This field trip is a highlight reel of Big Bend National Park. We will start at the eastern side of the park at Rio Grande Village. There is a short nature trail that passes through a beaver pond and views of the Rio Grande. A short distance from here is the Boquillas Canyon Lookout. We will then head back west towards the Chisos Basin. We might stop along the way at Dugout Wells or the Panther Junction Visitor Center before starting the drive up into the basin. The Chihuahuan Desert flora of ocotillo and creosote begin to change into woodlands and grassy montane meadows. In the Basin is a visitor center and small store. There is a short Window View Trail that provides a beautiful view out to the west side of the basin. We will descend back out of the mountains and continue west, turning onto the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive. We can see the Chisos Mountains from below, along with many desert vistas. There are several locations for quick stops as we follow the drive towards Santa Elena Canyon. There is a short walk to the mouth of the canyon, one of the most photographed parts of the park. From there we will start the return to Alpine, stopping as the scenery and vegetation dictates.

[Descriptions of the driving tour](#)

[One day itineraries of Big Bend](#)

*Leader:* TBA

*Difficulty:* Easy, mostly driving and short walks

*Wheelchair/ADA accessible:* No

*Start Time/Duration:* Meet at Alpine Civic Center at 8 am to carpool to the park. We will cover a lot of the park as described above. We expect to return to Alpine around 6 or 7 pm.

*Maximum number of attendees:* 20

*Fees:* \$30 per vehicle or National Parks Pass

*Facilities:* Yes

*Other:* There are limited gas stations around the park, so please fill up in Alpine before meeting in the morning.

Directions will be provided to participants once the locations are finalized.