



## Meet the Professional Guides of Sabrewing Nature Tours who will be at High Island this spring.

### Jack Parlapiano

Jack's birding career sparked 12 years ago after going to The Festival of the Cranes at Bosque del Apache with his grandmother. Since then, he has grown into a birder, naturalist, and photographer traveling across New Mexico to see the incredible biodiversity the state has to offer. Even after traveling across the United States, there's nowhere quite like home.

Jack currently studies Biology, Chemistry, and avian migration at the University of New Mexico. Here, he hopes to apply his extensive knowledge of the state and its avifauna toward the conservation of imperiled areas. His fascination with migration has led him to spend many hours at migrant traps, observing morning flight, hawk-watching, and studying how birds use their habitat. In the summers, he conducted endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher surveys south of Albuquerque, and worked with *Leiothlypis* warblers in Texas's sky islands. When the holiday season rolls around, there is only one day Jack looks forward to, the Albuquerque Christmas Bird Count: where he has been an annual participant since he was a young birder.



To extend his passion for birds and the community, Jack has fallen in love with guiding, both within New Mexico and across the United States. He has been fortunate to guide with Sabrewing Nature Tours in High Island, Texas, become a Junior Instructor at Hog Island Audubon, Maine, and lead bird walks around Albuquerque with the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico. He loves nothing more than sharing a special moment with clients, friends, and his grandmother.

### **Eric Ripma**

Eric enjoys sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge, especially about identification, with birders of all ages and experience levels. After beginning birding at the age of ten in Indianapolis, Indiana, he birded every chance he had throughout his childhood. Birding has led him from spectacular migratory hotspots in the Great Lakes region to the Pacific coast and beyond. Eric has also spent time birding in many tropical locations throughout Central and South America.

He has worked for numerous bird-related projects including bird banding in the United States and Belize, monitoring breeding Caspian Terns in Oregon, counting migrating waterbirds at Whitefish Point, Michigan, and conducting shorebird surveys on Louisiana's barrier islands. He is currently living in Louisiana assisting on a PhD project studying Royal Terns and Black Skimmers and conducting breeding bird surveys in his spare time.



### **Jamie Cunningham**

Jamie has had a lifelong interest in all nature and wildlife, but especially birds. A visit to Magee Marsh in NW Ohio during the Biggest Week festival turned her interest into a passion. That was in 2012, now she is a field trip leader for the festival. Since then Jamie has dove headfirst into birding and especially bird photography. Her award-winning images have been featured in a number of publications and were even featured in her own gallery. Jamie was instrumental in forming a Nature Photography club in her hometown, where she shares her wealth of knowledge with members. She also serves on the board of directors for the Tri-Moraine Audubon Society. Jamie is most proud of her involvement as an advisor for the Ohio Young Birder's Club. She is passionate about sharing her love of birds with youth.



### **Whitney Lanfranco**

Whitney's passion for nature began at a young age while growing up on a ranch in rural Central Texas, where she spent her childhood learning the names of wildflowers and observing bacteria under her microscope. While earning her degree in zoology from Texas A&M University, she discovered her true passion was birds. She completed an ecological study abroad in South Africa before beginning work as an aviculturist at the San Antonio Zoo, where she did breeding conservation work with species such as Guam Kingfisher and Attwater Prairie Chicken.

Realizing that her true joy was educating and sharing her passion with others, she discovered the world of bird guiding and ecotourism and started her new career as a guide on King Ranch in South Texas. Her passion for birds and guiding has since taken her to various places in Central and South America and southern Europe. In 2020, she joined the optics industry and was the Nature Sales Manager for Leica Sport Optics before becoming the Birding and Nature Manager for Land Sea and Sky, a Houston-based optics company. She can now be found at festivals and events all over the country, guiding and talking about all things optics.



### **Rob Ripma**

Rob is a lifelong Indiana resident and co-owner of Sabrewing Nature Tours. He has birded extensively throughout the Americas and also spent time birding in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Rob is currently on the executive boards of two organizations: Past President of the Board of the Amos Butler Audubon Society in Indianapolis (after leading the board as President for 6 years) and Secretary for Ohio's Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO). He also serves as the field trip coordinator for BSBO's Biggest Week in American Birding annual event. Rob sat on the executive board of the Indiana Audubon Society for three years as Treasurer and Vice President. He is a co-founder of the Indiana Young Birders Club and speaks at a variety of organizations and schools about birds and birding to share his knowledge and experiences in the field. His



leadership and expertise led to Rob working as the primary bird blogger for *Birds & Blooms Magazine* from 2013-2017.

Rob enjoys working with both new and experienced birders of all ages and believes that teaching people about birds will not only increase interest in birding but also help them better understand why we must work to protect them and their habitats. Additionally, he loves educating others about the positive impact nature tourism can have on local economies, especially in developing countries. This passion led to his involvement in the production of a PBS television program called, "Flight Path: The World of Migratory Birds", where a crew accompanied him on a tour to Panama to highlight and bring to life the effect that birds and birding have on both the people that see them and those who work and live in areas visited by birders and nature lovers. Rob graduated from Indiana University's Kelley School of Business in 2008 and lives in Carmel, Indiana, with his daughter.

### **Maynor Ovando**

Maynor Ovando is a dedicated and passionate Guatemalan naturalist who left his career as a civil engineer to observe birds every day of his life.

He began birding in 2004, and since then, he has traveled throughout the Guatemalan territory in search of the country's abundant avian biodiversity. This experience has given him a precise understanding of the geographical distribution of birds in Guatemala. His skills have made him a respected birder and a well-known tourist guide specializing in the field.

Maynor designs birding routes for enthusiasts from around the world, catering to different interests to meet their expectations during their trips to Guatemala. He enables them to observe the country's specialties while making the most of its natural, historical, and cultural resources.

Recently, he has ventured into new areas of biodiversity, such as butterfly and dragonfly watching, as well as tours focused on natural history. He now also dedicates part of his time to the professional training of birding specialist guides.



### **Carlos Bethencourt**

Carlos was born in Panama City in 1978 and raised in the small rural village of Huile, next to the Canal Zone. It was here where he learned many lessons of nature from his mother and grandmother, both of whom were deeply connected to nature and involved with conservation.



After high school Carlos was awarded a scholarship to Mt. Hood Community College in Oregon, where he studied natural resources and received his first formal training in ornithology. Carlos began his career at the Canopy Tower in October of 2000 and has since attended numerous birding conferences and conventions in the US and Great Britain, where he led tours, workshops and presented programs on Panama's birds. Carlos is a very popular and a much-requested guide, a testament not only to his birding ability, but also to his sincere friendly demeanor.

In 2018 he was awarded "Best Nature Tour Guide" by EcoTripMatch, as part of their mission to support conservation through ecotourism and the desire to recognize outstanding guides. EcoTripMatch accepted nominations from all over the world to crown the guide who is best at connecting tourists to the natural areas they are visiting. When not guiding, Carlos is busy at the office working on marketing and other projects for the Canopy Family.

### **Luke Safford**

Luke's grandparents gave him his first bird book when he was six and he quickly became enamored with the idea of keeping track of the day-to-day bird life in his backyard near Tacoma, WA. Later, Luke became involved with Yakima Valley Audubon and served on the board, as field trip coordinator, CBC compiler, and field trip leader. At the end of 2014 Luke and his family moved to Tucson, where he began attending, then leading, the weekly Sweetwater Wetlands bird walk with Tucson Audubon. Luke is currently the Engagement Director for Tucson Audubon Society, leads field trips and tours throughout Southeast Arizona and around the nation at bird festivals, and oversees the Southeast Arizona Birding Festival in Tucson.



**Andrew Marden**

Andrew has had an interest in birds for most of his life, and he began birding around his home state of New Jersey where he started making regular trips to Cape May to observe its fall migration spectacle. He soon started traveling the country and around the world in pursuit of birds, and he discovered a passion for guiding which led him to work at the Biggest Week in American Birding in Ohio, as an interpretive naturalist for Cape May Bird Observatory as a field teacher at Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center, and as a guide for Sabrewing Nature Tours and Houston Audubon at High Island. He is very grateful to be back for a second year and can't wait to experience another spring on the Upper Texas Coast! Andrew is currently a Masters student at Northeastern University studying Environmental Science and Policy.

