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(January 2006)

World Birding Center Opens in McAllen, Texas

McAllen, Texas

The World Birding Center in McAllen, Texas celebrates its grand opening this spring to mark the progress of plans begun in 1997 to restore wildlife habitat and promote birding and nature tourism in the Rio Grande Valley.

The McAllen Wing of the World Birding Center is known to many generations as “Quinta Mazatlan”. Back in the 1930’s, the architect and builder “named” his home envisioning great things for this Spanish Colonial Revival style mansion. Quinta Mazatlan is set on fifteen lush acres not far from McAllen’s airport, hotels and major shopping areas. It is envisioned as a one-of-a-kind conference center where visitors can enjoy modern amenities amidst an urban oasis of birds, butterflies and other wildlife.

Sometimes called the “front parlor of the World Birding Center,” Quinta Mazatlan is a distinctive part of the WBC’s network of nine birding sites across the Rio Grande Valley. A partnership between the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and South Texas communities from Roma to South Padre Island, the WBC works to promote the Valley as a premier birding destination, while also serving as a catalyst for nature preservation. Kenn Kaufman, a legend among birders, is quoted as saying “The Valley really is the best place in the United States for birdwatching” about the RGV.

Over 500 species of birds have been documented in the Rio Grande Valley, which makes up over 90% of the birds seen in Texas, and over 50% of the birds seen in North America. Colleen Hook, Manager of Quinta Mazatlan states “These are impressive figures knowing that the RGV makes up 1/10 of one percent of the land mass of North America...yet has documented over 50% of the birds in North America.” It’s very important habitat as Jimmy Carter mentions in his birding expedition to South Texas,

“_____”.

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Colleen Hook, Manager, says the backyard at Quinta Mazatlan serves as a “living demonstration” of what homeowners can do to attract birds, butterflies and other wildlife. Along the Mesquite Trails, surrounding the home, one finds a Native Butterfly Garden, Hummingbird Lane, Pauraque Lane, Chachalaca Bend and a Warbler Meadow. The

trails have been enhanced with water features, bird feeding stations and benches for all to enjoy.

In addition to Quinta Mazatlan's wild areas, historic architects have been careful to preserve the old mansion's unique architectural elements, which include tile frescoes, stained glass and cedar beams. The Texas Historical Commission has recognized Quinta Mazatlan as one of the largest adobe homes in the state. It was built in the 1930's using locally crafted, twelve-inch adobe blocks. Architects guesstimate that over 10,000 adobe blocks form Quinta Mazatlan. Renowned Swiss wood carver Peter Mansbendel created the impressive front doors, which include gargoyles and cherubs in the likeness of children of the property's original owners, Jason and Marcia Matthews.

The Matthews family lived in the home for 30 years from the 1930's to the 1960's. Following this era, the home was vacant for several years...and in 1968 it had a disastrous brush with Hurricane Beulah. The home was rescued and restored by the second family, Frank and Marilyn Shultz, who raised a family there over the course of 30 years as well. The home was again to be put up for sale and many an investor wanted it for other purposes...because of its commercial appeal. The home was rescued and restored, again, by the City of McAllen for the "Family of McAllen"...the citizens and the visitors to McAllen.

Birding and nature enthusiasts can look forward to a full range of events and activities at Quinta Mazatlan—from seminars and walking tours to birding classes and art exhibits—at the opening this March. Most "Valley Specialties"—such as the Great Kiskadee, Buff-bellied Hummingbird and Green Jay—may be found at Quinta Mazatlan, and the property boasts more than 150 species of trees, flowers and plants as well. A variety of celebratory events are in store including the Opening in March, the "Texas Tropics Nature Festival" from March 30th to April 2nd and "Hummingbird Days" for Families on May 6, 2006.

For more information about Quinta Mazatlan, please contact Colleen Hook at McAllen Parks and Recreation Department at (956) 688-3333, or visit the World Birding Center website at: www.worldbirdingcenter.org.

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