

# GULF COAST MIGRATION BIRDING

Alabama, Mississippi, and the Yucatán Express!

April 24-May 1, 2025

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center* and *Nature Travel Specialists*

## TRIP REPORT & SIGHTINGS



### ***The Yucatán Express...***

*"They lift off at dusk, clearing the canopy heading out, over the Gulf of Mexico, climbing gradually into a tropical sky. Yesterday's sky.*

*At two thousand feet, beneath planets and stars, they level off, fixing a course along coordinates locked in genetic flight plans, falling into the rhythm of flight. A series of flaps followed by a folded wing glide. For the next twenty-one hours, this will be the rhythm of their lives."*

--Pete Dunne, *The Feather Quest*



**DAY 1 – Thursday, April 24 – Arrival in Mobile** Everyone arrived on-time without travel issues, and the hotel allowed early check-in for most. We had a brief meeting in the hotel and then walked to a nearby Mexican restaurant for our first dinner together.

**DAY 2 – Friday, April 25 – Dauphin Island** During our first day of birding we spent our time exploring the hotspots of Dauphin Island. We started at the airport, where a coastal marsh held many great birds, including Seaside Sparrow, Clapper Rail, Willet, Green Heron, and a couple fly-by flocks of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. Next up we checked Shell Mound Park to search for holdovers that had arrived the prior afternoon. There weren't a lot of migrants, but we did enjoy watching a pair of Brown Thrashers up close as they tended to their nest. At Dauphin Island pier, which led to the beach, we saw a pair of Loggerhead Shrikes patrolling the parking lot area. Out on the beach we spotted an adorable Snowy Plover – one that Drew has been monitoring all spring as they nested in the coastal dunes. We also saw Sanderlings and Willets on the shoreline, terns patrolling the waters (Least, Gull-billed, and Royal), and herons hunting in the Pelican Cover (Reddish Egret, Great Egret, and Great Blue Heron). Brown Pelicans cruised overhead up the shoreline. At the East End Boat Ramp we added Ruddy Turnstone, Snowy Egret, and a lone Redhead, among other birds.







Leaving the island for a bit in the afternoon, we checked out the Lightning Point Marsh Restoration Area, where we found at least 26 Whimbrels in addition to White Ibis, Tricolored Heron, and others. Back at Shell Mound Park to check the afternoon arrivals, we had looks at three Yellow-billed Cuckoos, plus our first Mississippi Kite sighting and close views of a very cooperative Northern Waterthrush. Unfortunately, due to favorable (for the birds) winds out of the south, we didn't experience a large influx of migrants – a

trend that would continue throughout our time birding on Dauphin Island. We finished our first day of birding back at the airport, where we had amazing views of both Short-billed and Long-billed dowitchers, as well as many other birds, including Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, and Bobolinks. With over 70 birds tallied on our first day, we finished up our birding and headed for dinner on the island.



**DAY 3 – Saturday, April 26 – Alabama Birding** We headed northeast into Alabama to start our day at Splinter Hill Bog, known for its spectacular array of carnivorous plants, including pitcher plants and sundews. The plants did not disappoint – none of us had ever seen so many pitcher plants in one place, with many of them flowering. Here we found a cooperative Bachman's Sparrow, but we had to work pretty hard to put together a checklist of 23 species, which also included Brown-headed Nuthatch and Summer Tanager. At the Mobile County River Delta Marina we found White-eyed Vireo, Orchard Oriole, and Prothonotary Warbler. While enjoying our picnic lunch at Bayfront Park we spotted several good



birds,



including Bald Eagle and Swallow-tailed Kite. Back on Dauphin Island we followed up a report of a Shiny Cowbird feeding on seed along Penicault Street, and while there we not only found the rare cowbird but also had a Tennessee Warbler and three Cape May Warblers. Finishing the day at Shell Mound Park, we found a Black-whiskered Vireo along with Red-eyed Vireo, Bay-breasted Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Indigo Bunting among others.

**DAY 4 – Sunday, April 27 – Alabama & Mississippi Birding** The plan for today called for one group of birders to head to the Mississippi coast for some birding, while the other group took a guided boat trip up the Mobile Bay Delta. Unfortunately, due to a scheduling conflict, our birding by boat group was not able to go out. With Andrew driving the minivan, the group made the most of the mishap by birding their way down to Fort Morgan. In addition to other birds, that group managed to find a Western

Kingbird and Common Nighthawks hunting by day. The Mississippi group visited several hotspots, including Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge, I.G. Levy Park North, Magnolia Birding Pier, Pascagoula Park, Pascagoula Beach Park, and the Gulf Islands National Seashore Visitor Center.



After regrouping on Dauphin Island, we once again checked Shell Mound Park for incoming migrants, but didn't find many new arrivals. After dinner on the island, we found a continuing Fulvous Whistling-Duck on the Dauphin Island Parkway en route to the hotel.

**DAY 5 – Monday, April 28 – Alabama & Mississippi Birding** Today both groups were able to get out on the water, traversing up the Mobile Bay Delta by boat. In the morning, the group that missed the boat the previous day headed to Mississippi, to roughly duplicate the birding the other group had the day before – managing to find several birds the previous day's group missed, including Bald Eagle, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Grosbeak, Orchard Oriole, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron.



The group on the boat enjoyed exploring the backwaters of the Mobile Bay Delta, replete with natural and cultural history interpretation provided by boat captain Ben Raines. In the afternoon, the groups switched. After a long day of birding and boating, the group was ready for dinner in Mobile.



**DAY 6 – Tuesday, April 29 – Mississippi & Alabama Birding** This morning we headed first to the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, where we were able to spot a trio of the non-migratory "Mississippi" subspecies of Sandhill Crane, whose population numbers approximately 200, up from the 30-35 birds in existence at the time the refuge was established in 1975. The refuge protects and restores the last remaining wet pine savanna in the United States, helping ensure the survival of the endangered crane.



Moving on from the crane refuge, we headed to the Bethel Bike Trails, a large stand of pine flatwoods home to the endangered and highly-managed Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Shortly after arriving, we spotted three of the rare woodpeckers tending to their nest holes. A short ways down the backwoods road, we found a Bachman's Sparrow and three Prairie Warblers along with several other bird species.



We enjoyed lunch at the Pascagoula River Audubon Center, and afterwards did some leisurely birding out on the dock by the river. There we had both King Rail and Clapper Rail, along with Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Little Blue Heron, nesting Osprey, and others. Some of our group managed to spot a Least Bittern as it flew across the river and dropped down into the reeds – before the rest of us were able to see it.

After another stop at I.G. Levy Park North, we headed back to Alabama. On the way, we cruised some grassy fields, where we found Eastern Meadowlark, White Ibis, Western Cattle-Egret, and Blue Grosbeak. On the Dauphin Island Parkway we enjoyed great views of Snowy Egrets, Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, and a lone drake Blue-winged Teal. At the East End Boat Launch we saw a very close Tricolored Heron hunting off the breakwall and a Black Skimmer fishing over the water. We finished our day with dinner on Dauphin Island.



**DAY 7 – Wednesday, April 30 – Alabama Birding** We headed to Dauphin Island this morning to catch the ferry to Fort Morgan. Before boarding the ferry, we checked the East End Boat Launch, which had the usual array of birds. The ferry ride took about 25 minutes, and once at Fort Morgan we searched unsuccessfully for a female Yellow-headed Blackbird that had been seen recently. We also cruised a couple roads in search of the Western Kingbird half our group spotted a couple days ago but did not refind the flycatcher. Out on the beach

we saw Willets and Sanderlings, but the reported Red Knots were absent. We took the ferry back to Dauphin Island, where we headed once again to Penicault Street, where we birded leisurely from the back deck of a friend of Andrew. From the deck we had great looks at several birds, including Black-bellied Plover, Black Skimmer, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Semipalmated Plover, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Tern, and more. One final stop at Shell Mound Park did not produce anything noteworthy. We concluded our trip with dinner at a nice steakhouse restaurant in Mobile.

**DAY 8 – Thursday, May 1 – Departure from Mobile** Most folks flew out Thursday morning, while a few didn't depart the area until afternoon.

## TOUR LEADERS

**Daryl Bernard** – *tour leader, Seven Ponds Nature Center*

**Andrew Haffenden** – *birding guide, Nature Travel Specialists*

## PARTICIPANTS

**Gavin Awerbuch** – *Hypoluxo, Florida*

**Jan Giesken** – *Lapeer, Michigan*

**Lynne Holmberg** – *Traverse City, Michigan*

**Yvonne Lentner** – *Lake Orion, Michigan*

**Pat O'Connor** – *Suttons Bay, Michigan*

**Candy Petrick** – *Beulah, Michigan*

**Brian Rippon** – *Farmington Hills, Michigan*

**Nancy Tazzia** – *Dryden, Michigan*

**Spencer Vanderhoof** – *Novi, Michigan*

**Colleen Vogler** – *Saline, Michigan*



## ACCOMMODATIONS

**Comfort Suites Mobile West** – *Tillmans Corner, Alabama*

## RESTAURANTS

**Aztecas Restaurant & Cantina** – *Tillmans Corner, Alabama*

**Pirates Bar and Grill** – *Dauphin Island, Alabama*

**Hacienda San Miguel** – *Theodore, Alabama*

**Capt'n Snapper's** – *Dauphin Island, Alabama*

**Walk On's Sports Bistreaux** – *Mobile, Alabama*

**Dority's Gulf Station** – *Dauphin Island, Alabama*

**Briquettes Steakhouse** – *Mobile, Alabama*





## **BIRDING LOCATIONS**

### **ALABAMA**

- Dauphin Island—Airport
- Dauphin Island—Shell Mound Park
- Dauphin Island—Pier
- Dauphin Island—East End Boat Ramp
- Shell Belt Road—Bayou la Batre
- Lightning Point Marsh Restoration Area
- Splinter Hill Bog (The Nature Conservancy)
- Mobile County River Delta Marina
- Bayfront Park/Village Point
- Cedar Point
- Dauphin Island—Penicault St. vicinity
- Dauphin Island Parkway
- Meaher State Park
- Wheatcraft Rd. fields
- Dauphin Island—Fort Morgan Ferry
- Fort Morgan State Historic Site
- Grass Island Beach
- Dauphin Island—Campground
- Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve—Tonsmeire Center
- Blakely River—Mobile Delta
- Petit Bateau
- One Mile Creek—Mobile-Bay Delta
- Urns Lake



### **MISSISSIPPI**

- Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge/National Estuarine Research Reserve
- US-90 overpass (Cliff Swallows)
- I.G. Levy Park North
- Magnolia Birding Pier
- Pascagoula Point Park
- Pascagoula Beach Park
- Gulf Islands National Seashore—Visitor Center
- Pascagoula Greenwood Cemetery
- Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge—Gautier Unit
- Bethel Bike Trails
- Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge—Fontainebleau Unit
- New Pascagoula River Audubon Center



## **BIRDS – 147** (bold birds pictured)

### **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck**

Fulvous Whistling-Duck

Canada Goose

### **Blue-winged Teal**

Mallard

Mottled Duck

### **Redhead**

Red-breasted Merganser

Rock Pigeon

Eurasian Collared-Dove

White-winged Dove

Mourning Dove

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Common Nighthawk

Chuck-will's-widow

Chimney Swift

King Rail

Clapper Rail

Sora

Common Gallinule

American Coot

Purple Gallinule

Sandhill Crane

Black-bellied Plover

Killdeer

Semipalmated Plover

Snowy Plover

Whimbrel

Short-billed Dowitcher

Long-billed Dowitcher

### **Spotted Sandpiper**

Solitary Sandpiper

Lesser Yellowlegs

Willet

Greater Yellowlegs





Ruddy Turnstone

**Sanderling**

Least Sandpiper

**Laughing Gull**

Ring-billed Gull

American Herring Gull

Black Skimmer

Least Tern

Gull-billed Tern

Caspian Tern

Forster's Tern

Sandwich Tern

Royal Tern

Common Loon

Anhinga

Double-crested Cormorant

White Ibis

Glossy Ibis

Least Bittern

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron**

Little Blue Heron

Tricolored Heron

Reddish Egret

**Snowy Egret**

Green Heron

Western Cattle-Egret

Great Egret

Great Blue Heron

American White Pelican

Brown Pelican

Black Vulture

Turkey Vulture

Osprey

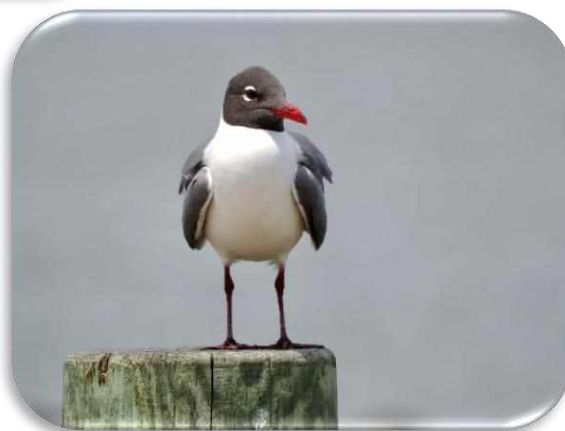
Swallow-tailed Kite

Bald Eagle

Mississippi Kite

Broad-winged Hawk

Red-shouldered Hawk



Red-tailed Hawk  
Belted Kingfisher  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Red-cockaded Woodpecker  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker



Eastern Wood-Pewee  
Eastern Phoebe  
Great Crested Flycatcher  
Western Kingbird  
Eastern Kingbird



**White-eyed Vireo**

Red-eyed Vireo

**Black-whiskered Vireo**

Loggerhead Shrike

Blue Jay

American Crow

Fish Crow

Carolina Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse

Tree Swallow

Purple Martin

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Barn Swallow

**Cliff Swallow**

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Brown-headed Nuthatch

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Marsh Wren

**Carolina Wren**

European Starling

Gray Catbird

Brown Thrasher

Northern Mockingbird

Eastern Bluebird

Gray-cheeked Thrush





Cedar Waxwing  
House Sparrow  
House Finch  
Bachman's Sparrow  
Seaside Sparrow  
Eastern Towhee  
Yellow-breasted Chat  
Bobolink



Eastern Meadowlark  
Orchard Oriole  
Baltimore Oriole  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Shiny Cowbird  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Common Grackle  
Boat-tailed Grackle  
Louisiana Waterthrush  
Northern Waterthrush  
Black-and-white Warbler



**Prothonotary Warbler**  
Tennessee Warbler  
Common Yellowthroat  
**Cape May Warbler**  
Northern Parula  
Bay-breasted Warbler  
Blackpoll Warbler  
Pine Warbler  
Yellow-throated Warbler



**Prairie Warbler**  
Black-throated Green Warbler  
**Summer Tanager**  
Scarlet Tanager  
Northern Cardinal  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Blue Grosbeak  
Indigo Bunting



## **OTHER UNIQUE FAUNA**

Gray Squirrel

Common Bottlenose Dolphin

American Alligator

Gulf Coast Box Turtle



### **PHOTO CREDITS**

**Nancy Tazzia** – Clapper Rail, Brown Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, Shiny Cowbird, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Blue Grosbeak, Mississippi Sandhill Crane, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, Tricolored Heron, Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Redhead, Spotted Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Snowy Egret, Cliff Swallow, Carolina Wren, Prothonotary Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Summer Tanager, American Alligator, Gulf Coast Box Turtle

**Spencer Vanderhoof** – Snowy Plover, White Ibis, Willet, Sanderling, Black-whiskered Vireo

**Daryl Bernard** – all other photos

