

SPRING MIGRATION IN AMERICA'S AMAZON:

The Mobile-Tensaw Delta and Gulf Coast Alabama

APRIL 9-12, 2024





Experience the Ultimate Birding Paradise

– the beaches, dunes, forests and marshes of Alabama’s Gulf Coast and Mobile Bay - when hundreds of species pass along this flyway each spring heading north to disperse across North America.

Dauphin Island and Fort Morgan, part of the archipelago of barrier islands, are the key Gulf Coast birding destinations - classic migrant traps that offer exceptional experiences during Spring migration. Mid-April fallout events, triggered by southward-moving cold fronts with rain and northerly winds, create awe-inspiring displays as birds literally fall from the sky.

We can hope to see intrepid Chimney Swifts, resplendent Golden-winged Warblers, Chuck-will’s-widows and Bobolinks.

In a breathtaking spectacle, flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers, and tanagers seek respite on their migratory journey.

We are treated to an equally remarkable display of nesting birds. On the sandy shores, one encounters the delicate Least Terns and the industrious Piping Plovers, while the marshes teem with life as Clapper Rails, a myriad of herons and egrets, and the elusive Seaside Sparrows inhabit the vibrant ecosystem.

Venture into the mainland pine forests to search for Great Crested Flycatchers, the resplendent Summer Tanagers, and the captivating Indigo Buntings; perhaps even Painted Buntings.

ITINERARY SUMMARY

FOUR DAY FIELD STUDY

Day 1: Dauphin Island / Bellingerth Gardens
Day 2: Eastern Shore / Five Rivers Delta / Mobile Bay
Day 3: Fort Morgan / Dauphin Island / Audubon Bird Sanctuary
Day 4: Dauphin Island / Pelican Point

Price: \$1599 per person

FIVE DAY FIELD STUDY

Day 1: Dauphin Island / Bellingerth Gardens
Day 2: Eastern Shore / Five Rivers Delta
Day 3: Fort Morgan / Dauphin Island / Audubon Bird Sanctuary
Day 4: Dauphin Island / Pelican Point
Day 5: Blackwater River / Mobile Bay

Price: \$1999 per person

THE ALABAMA SPRING MIGRATION BIRDING FIELD EXPERIENCE INCLUDES

- ✓ A comprehensive schedule of birding field trips, hosted by naturalists and local birders
- ✓ Round-Trip Private Motorcoach Transportation from designated Meeting Points in downtown Mobile, Alabama to each day’s birding field trip
- ✓ Entrance fees for all included activities during the field trips
- ✓ Daily lunch during field trips

EXCLUSIONS

- Accommodations
- Transportation to/from the designated Meeting Points
- Meals other than those described in the itinerary as included



DETAILED DAY DESCRIPTION

Days 1-4 Departures from Mobile, Alabama Meeting Points

Please Note: These departure times will be strictly observed. No refunds will be issued for late arrivals / missed pick-up.

6:00 AM Candlewood Suites (Downtown 121 North Royal Street)

6:15 AM Renaissance Mobile Riverview and Hampton Inn and Suites (51 S Royal Street)

6:30 AM Holiday Inn Downtown and Quality Inn Downtown (Holiday Inn, South Jackson Street entrance)

FOUR DAY FIELD STUDY

Day 1: Monday, April 8, 2024

DAUPHIN ISLAND AND BELLINGRATH GARDENS

Morning: Dauphin Island, named for the future Louis XV of France, sits at the mouth of Mobile Bay and extends along the Gulf Coast, encompassing approximately six square miles of beach, dune, and forest landscapes. Serving as the initial landfall for countless migrants crossing the Gulf of Mexico during spring, Dauphin Island becomes a bustling hub where, under optimal weather conditions, an extraordinary multitude of warblers, thrushes, vireos, orioles, buntings, tanagers, and catbirds literally fall onto the island exhausted, out of the sky. This avian spectacle occurs when their northward journey encounters the impediment of a spring cold front. Even on less climactic days, the island hosts an impressive array of birds, ranging from noteworthy to utterly dazzling in both numbers and variety. Explore the diverse ecosystems of the island, ranging from sandy beaches hosting Piping Plovers and Least Terns to small woodlots teeming with warblers and vireos. Our field trip will take us through tidal marshes inhabited by Clapper Rails and Sedge Wrens, as well as jetties and piers frequented by Royal Terns and Sanderlings. The range of possibilities here is virtually limitless, with unique and uncommon combinations of birds sighted at one time. The exact sites will be chosen on the day of operation, to ensure the best birding experience based on the conditions on the day.

Afternoon: Bellingrath Gardens. Lunch is included in the park café. Bellingrath Gardens, originally a fish camp situated along the Fowl

River, underwent a transformation into a captivating garden by its owners, Walter and Bessie Bellingrath. Spanning 900 acres, this site serves as a bird sanctuary, featuring a prominent observation tower that offers stunning views of the Fowl River and salt marsh. Within this expansive complex, 65 acres have been meticulously cultivated, boasting an array of annual blooms that provide continuous color. While the birding experience remains excellent throughout the year, the potential for spotting neotropical migrants is particularly high during the spring and fall seasons. A noteworthy addition to the birding points is the Ecological Boardwalk—a 1600-foot pathway along the riverbanks. This scenic route offers opportunities to observe wading birds and those inhabiting the bottomland hardwood forest.

Return to Mobile in the late afternoon.

Day 2: Tuesday, April 9, 2024

THE EASTERN SHORE AND FIVE RIVERS DELTA

Morning: Eastern Shore

The eastern shore of Mobile Bay, stretching from Daphne to Fort Morgan, remains a hidden gem for birders in comparison to the more well-known Dauphin Island. Despite its lower profile, the birdwatching experience in this area can be just as breathtaking. Just minutes from downtown Mobile, search for Anhingas, Purple Gallinules, Marsh Wrens, and the American Alligator, seen basking in the sun or stealthily swimming through the slow-moving water. Continuing south along the shore, we explore the intertwined parks of Village Point and Bayfront. This densely wooded, swampy expanse is crisscrossed by broad gravel paths and elevated boardwalks. Notable among the resident warblers are the Prothonotary and Swainson's Warblers. The latter, a particularly rare Parulid, is often discernible by its distinctive call, though catching a glimpse of this modestly attired, large-billed bird requires both patience and a stroke of good fortune. The bushes in this area may resonate with the melodies of White-eyed Vireos, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Brown Thrashers, while the nearby beaches provide a conducive environment for observing swallows.

Afternoon: Five Rivers Delta

After an included lunch, we'll take a 2-hour boat trip on the Five Rivers, to explore the estuarine marshes. This area holds historical

significance in American ornithology, having been visited by the renowned Philadelphia botanist, explorer, and nature historian William Bartram in 1775. Commissioned by George III to document the flora and fauna of Georgia, Florida, and Alabama, Bartram's observations during this expedition were published in 1791 as "Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida." This work stands as a pivotal contribution to North American natural history and a lasting influence on literature related to the American frontier. During our exploration, we'll be particularly focused on discovering the evening primrose, an alluring species initially documented by Bartram in this region. Additionally, we'll keep a keen eye out for avian specialties inhabiting brackish and fresh water, including Purple Gallinules, Least Bitterns, and Swallow-tailed Kites.

Day 3: Wednesday, April 10, 2024

FORT MORGAN / DAUPHIN ISLAND

Morning: Drive down the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay to historic Fort Morgan. The area of the fort, now a state historic park, is just as attractive to migrants as Dauphin itself, and we will check the compact grounds for Cattle Egrets, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, or even a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher or two, as well as variety of migrants such as Indigo Buntings, Black-and-white Warblers, or Acadian Flycatchers.

Included lunch overlooking the bay.

Afternoon: Take the ferry to cross over to Dauphin Island, where we have a good chance of experiencing daytime arrivals. We'll check the island's hotspots for additional sightings.

Day 4: Thursday, April 11, 2024

DAUPHIN ISLAND

Given the ever-changing numbers and diversity of northbound migrants, today's itinerary will blend new sites with locations we've previously explored. While our primary focus will be on Dauphin Island, we've designed our schedule to remain highly flexible. This flexibility allows us to make last-minute adjustments and shift to alternative destinations promptly, especially if there's breaking news of an exciting rarity within easy reach of Mobile. Lunch is included.

This evening, we've made a reservation for dinner at your own cost, at Mobile's iconic and award-winning restaurant, The Hummingbird Way

FIVE DAY FIELD STUDY

Day 5: Friday, April 12, 2024

BLACKWATER RIVER STATE PARK AND MOBILE BAY

EARLY Departures from Mobile, Alabama Meeting Points

Please Note: These departure times will be strictly observed. No refunds will be issued for late arrivals / missed pick-up.

5:00 AM Candlewood Suites (Downtown 121 North Royal Street)

5:15 AM Renaissance Mobile Riverview and Hampton Inn and Suites (51 S Royal Street)

5:30 AM Holiday Inn Downtown and Quality Inn Downtown (Holiday Inn, South Jackson Street entrance)

Morning: Drive south to explore the lowland pine forests of the Florida Panhandle, where our targets include the elusive Bachman's Sparrow, the white-eyed canaster subspecies of the Eastern Towhee, the endearing Brown-headed Nuthatch, and both Pine and Prairie Warblers. However, our primary focus will be on spotting one of the rarest birds in the American southeast—the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Confined to old-growth longleaf pine within their limited range, these discreet birds form loose colonies, known as "clusters" or "clans," by excavating nest cavities in living pine trunks weakened by the red pine fungus. The nest sites are marked by a flow of gummy sap, deterring potential predators like snakes. April provides an excellent opportunity to find breeding groups of this uncommon woodpecker, although sightings are never guaranteed even in the most suitable habitats.

Beyond the unique avian species, Blackwater is notable for its botanical treasures. The seepage bogs in the Florida panhandle harbor an extraordinary abundance of rare plants, a concentration that is nearly unparalleled in North America. Regrettably, approximately 97% of these distinctive wetlands have succumbed to drainage and destruction. However, the surviving areas showcase an array of orchids, lilies, and, notably, carnivorous plants such as pitcher plants, sundews, butterworts, and bladderworts. We'll take time to explore one of these distinctive wetlands, delving into its fascinating ecosystem encompassing both plant and animal life.

Included lunch in a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Depending on the day's tidal schedule, as we make our way back to Mobile, we may have opportunities to search for shorebirds on the mudflats of Mobile Bay, where, during the lowest tide, the mudflats frequently teem with congregations of Sandwich and Royal Terns, Short-billed Dowitchers, as well as both Brown and American White Pelicans. Another possible location is the little-frequented tidal march boardwalk behind Battleship Park, where we may sight Tricolored Herons, Glossy Ibis, and the recently colonizing White-winged Dove.



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