

BIRDER'S GUIDE TO UPPER TEXAS GULF COAST

# BEAUMONT TEXAS





# BEAUMONT, TEXAS

Like humans, birds are drawn to different areas for the physical and physiological characteristics they provide: food, water, shelter, safety. During migration, they trade their wintering grounds for areas rich with food and resources during the breeding season. One area they're particularly attracted to? The Upper Texas Gulf Coast.

Located in the southernmost part of the United States and the centre of the continent, Texas regularly attracts birds from the east coast, west coast, and Mexico, but also is a major stopover for neotropical migrants flying from Central and South America. Of the estimated 10,000 known species in the world, almost 1,000 can be found in America. There are over 600 documented sightings in Texas alone, making it an unrivaled year-round hot spot for birders.

## THE HEART AND THE HUB

Beaumont, in particular, is located on two of the four migratory flyways in the U.S., the Central and Mississippi. Thanks to its unique position near the Gulf of Mexico, there are 28 Great Texas Coastal Birding trails within a 40-mile radius of the city. The American Birding Association called it one of the most interesting avifaunal confluences in the country. For beginning birders, it's a fantastic place to practice identifying wading birds and ducks. For advanced birders, this eastern Texas coastal region presents a number of unique and intriguing ID challenges due to range overlaps not present elsewhere. And for photographers, Beaumont is as good as it gets.

## A HAVEN AND A HIDEAWAY

Beaumont offers a desirable environment with protection from major predators with many designated wildlife conservation areas and preserves, making it a well-known fallout spot to see rare species. With four distinct habitats (woods, wetlands, marsh, and shore), it is a place of contrast where you can experience everything from piney forest to coastal plains, a home to a variety of endemic species from shorebirds to tree-dwellers.

## PLAN YOUR VISIT

Peak spring migration occurs March through May while peak fall migration takes place from August through November. Close to 400 bird species are spotted in and around Beaumont annually, so you're all but guaranteed to check more than a few off your life list.

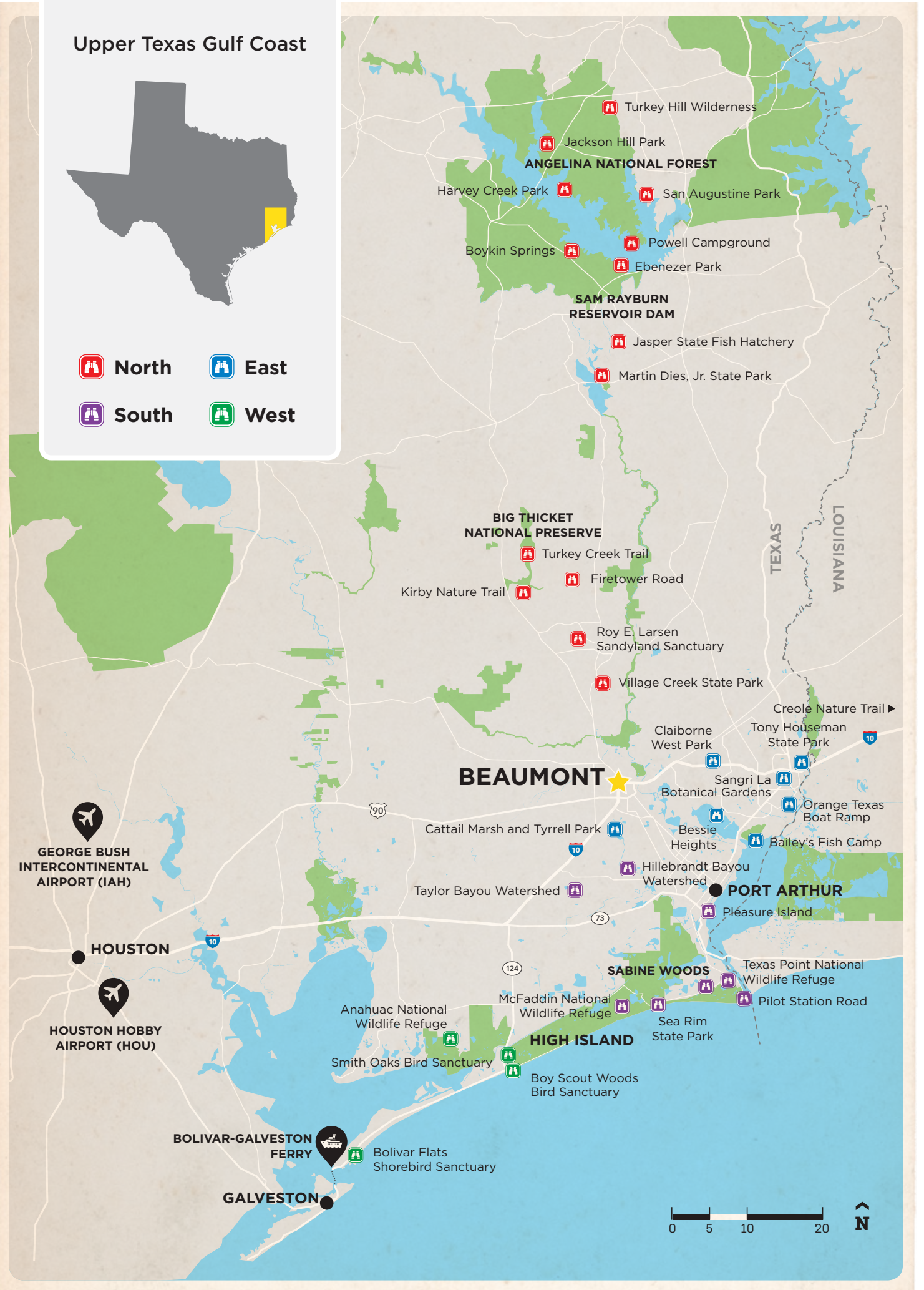
One thing's for sure...Beaumont is for the birds.



# Upper Texas Gulf Coast



-  North
-  East
-  South
-  West



# WETLAND OASIS

The most biologically diverse ecosystem, the east is a magical mélange of species and a year-round breeding ground.



## CATTAIL MARSH AND TYRRELL PARK

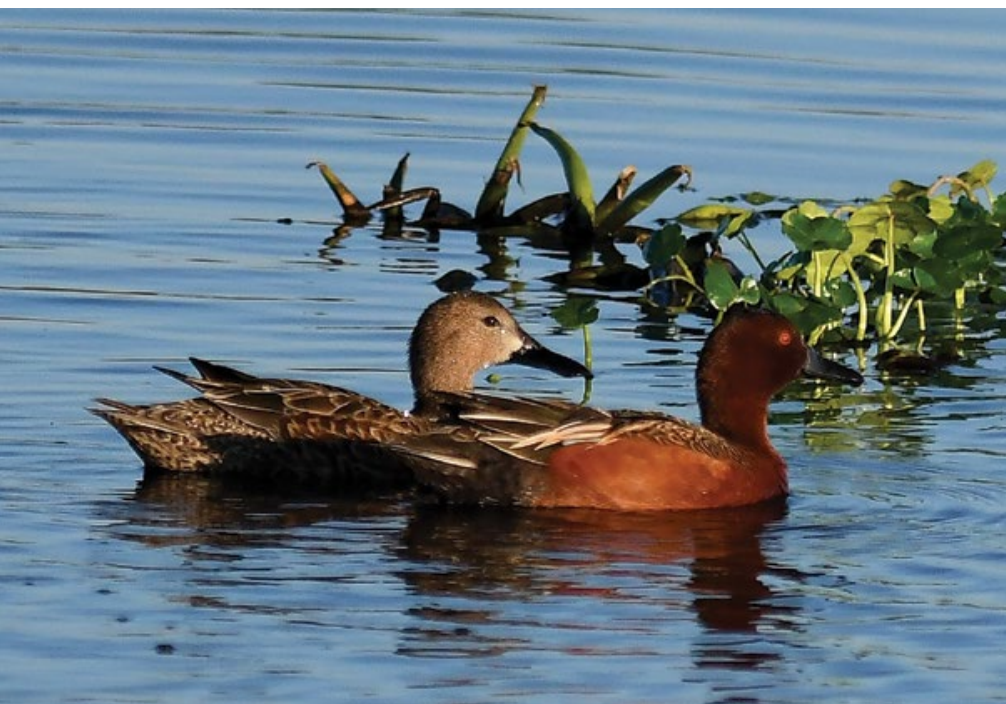
With 900 acres of scenic wetlands, Cattail Marsh is a repurposed wastewater treatment facility, utilizing an innovative nitrification process to reclaim the habitat. 15-20 million gallons of water are processed a day, which has created a thriving ecosystem for animals, birds, and fish. The massive marsh complex boasts over 275 species of fowl, eight miles of levees

and boardwalks, and a brand-new wetlands education center. Part of the larger Tyrrell Park, the area has an abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities from horseback riding to golf and biking.

The trails skirt around grassy areas which are home to meadowlarks and sparrows and forests

that host wintering or migrating passerines. Raptors frequently fly overhead, from Northern Harriers to Crested Caracaras, and a Bald Eagle nest is a thrilling highlight. Egrets, ibis, doves, Red-winged Blackbirds are typical species to look out for.

The views of Roseate Spoonbills, Black-necked Stilts, and American Avocets are standouts, and while the Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, and Northern Shoveler winter in numbers others like Gadwall should be around in smaller cohorts. Diving ducks like Lesser Scaup may also be present, and the duck species composition is dynamic, which only adds to the fun. Both Black-bellied and Fulvous whistling ducks can be found, although summer is better for Fulvous. Particularly exciting is the strong possibility of Cinnamon Teal, which has recently become more regular, representing an extreme eastern occurrence for this species. Another more recent and regular species is Least Grebe, the northernmost location for this species. Boat-tailed, Great-tailed, and Common Grackle are another group that coincides at Cattail Marsh, along with the Brown-headed Cowbird and Red-winged Blackbird. In July and August in particular, it's possible to find seven species of swallow (Northern Rough-winged, Cave, Cliff, Tree, Bank, Barn, and Purple Martin) within as little as half an hour.





## SHANGRI LA BOTANICAL GARDENS AND NATURE CENTER

With a name inspired by the book *Lost Horizon*, Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center is a 262-acre preserve that includes upland forests, cypress/tupelo swamps, and Adams Bayou, a lush riparian area. More than 300 species of birds have been seen, including a heronry with 15 different species that nest from late February through June. An observation blind is provided that is handicapped accessible and located near restrooms. Alligators are commonly observed in Ruby Lake and in the spring, the garden area is an excellent place to observe migrating songbirds. An Outpost Tour allows visitors to travel to a Beaver Pond where Prothonotary Warblers nest. Common mammals include swamp rabbits and nutria along with a great variety of reptiles and amphibians. Generally, because most of Shangri La has been left in a natural state, it is a wonderland of wildlife.

Bailey's Fish Camp is part of Lower Neches River Wildlife Management Area which grants birders access to the marsh. An observation platform offers great views of herons, egrets, ibis, spoonbills, and waterfowl. Depending on water levels, shorebirds may also be present. Another location to access the marsh is Bessie Heights. For a different habitat in the same region, Claiborne West Park is comprised of mature woodland and pine forest where you can see Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warblers, and the Red-headed Woodpecker. It has five miles of trails and a pedestrian bridge over Cow Bayou.

### MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

Bailey's Fish Camp, Bessie Heights, Tony Houseman State Park, Claiborne West Park

DANA NELSON

# PLAN YOUR TRIP



### RESOURCES:

**BEAUMONT CONVENTION  
AND VISITOR'S BUREAU**  
[beaumontcvb.com/birding](http://beaumontcvb.com/birding)

**TEXAS PARKS AND  
WILDLIFE**  
[tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/  
wildlife/wildlife-trails/utc](http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wildlife/wildlife-trails/utc)

**HOUSTON AUDUBON**  
[houstonaudubon.org](http://houstonaudubon.org)

**CREOLE NATURE TRAIL**  
[visitlakecharles.org/creole-  
nature-trail/](http://visitlakecharles.org/creole-nature-trail/)

### TOUR COMPANIES SPECIALIZING IN BEAUMONT BIRDING:

#### SABREWING NATURE TOURS

One of the premier birding companies in the US, Sabrewing Nature Tours is run by a passionate team that's very active in the birding community. No matter how long your stay, the size of your group, or your experience level, they offer custom guided trips throughout the US and beyond and are happy to help you check off new species from your life list.

**SabrewingNatureTours.com**  
++1 317 324 8505



### ATTEND A BIRDING FESTIVAL:

As a partner to the **Rio Grande Birding Fest** (fall, [rgvbf.org](http://rgvbf.org)) and **Galveston Feather Fest** (spring), Beaumont offers pre-tour trips for both festivals meaning there's no better time to combine your visit with a bigger tour of the valley.



# A PINEY WOODDED WONDERLAND

Ongoing conservation efforts help rare and endangered species grow and thrive, while working to maintain a habitat unique to Texas and the South.

## BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

The piney woods of the Big Thicket are much different from coastal Texas and thus have a totally different mix of species. A patchwork of protected areas has created a convergence of ecosystems ranging from longleaf pine forests to cypress rimmed bayous, resulting in a biological crossroads and some of the greatest diversity in North America. The trail network could keep you busy for days from the 15-mile Turkey Creek Trail to the 2.5-mile Kirby Trail, but kayaking or paddling is another popular way to explore.

Neotropical migrants navigate across the Gulf to nest at this location in winter and spring. Common sightings include Swainson's, Prothonotary, Hooded, and Yellow-throated Warblers, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Great Crested and Acadian Flycatchers, White-eyed, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos, Summer Tanager, and many others. The winter brings mixed foraging flocks of Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Blue-headed Vireo, and Pine and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Other species such as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, and Eastern Towhees are also common in winter.

### MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

Kirby Nature Trail, Firetower Road, Turkey Creek Trail, Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, Village Creek State Park



## SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR DAM

The dam at Sam Rayburn Reservoir and B.A. Steinhagen Lake at Martin Dies Jr. State Park are easily incorporated into a day of birding at Angelina National Forest, offering a stark contrast from the forest cover and attracting water birds in droves.

Common sightings include the Common Loon, Bonaparte's, Ring-billed, Herring Gulls, ducks, and grebes. The site is best in the winter but also has great potential for seabirds after a tropical storm or hurricane. It is also one of the few spots in the region where the graceful Swallow-tailed Kite and Mississippi Kites breed. The passerines attracted to the woodlands are similar to those found in the Big Thicket National Preserve.

### **ADDITIONAL BIRDING SITES:**

Sandy Creek Park, Hen House Ridge Unit, Martin Dies Jr. State Park, Walnut Ridge Unit, Martin Dies Jr. State Park, Jasper State Fish Hatchery, Ebenezer Park



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*Located on two major U.S. flyways and blessed with a unique gulf habitat, Beaumont is an essential birding hotspot for breeding, wintering, and migrating.*

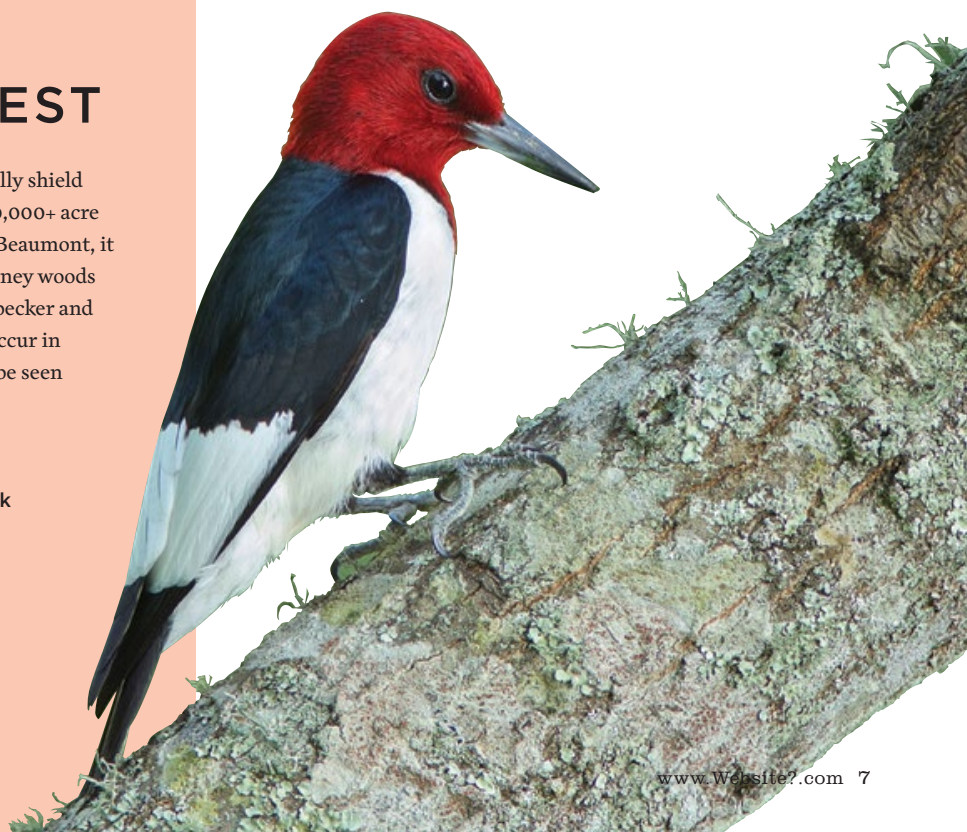
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## ANGELINA NATIONAL FOREST

A place where towering pines and whimsical loblolly shield you from reality, Angelina National Forest is a 150,000+ acre nature retreat. About an hour and a half north of Beaumont, it is one of just four national forests in Texas. The piney woods are home to the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker and the uncommon Bachman's Sparrow, which only occur in the southeastern United States. Both species can be seen around the Boykin Springs Recreation Area.

### **MAJOR BIRDING SITES:**

Powell Park, San Augustine Park, Harvey Creek Park, Jackson Hill Park, Turkey Hill, Boykin Springs Recreation Area



# A LAND OF CONTRASTS

From Rookeries to refugees, rare ecological features like salt marshes, sand dunes, and chenier plains attract passersby's in droves, anxious to land and hungry for resources.



## SEA RIM STATE PARK

Where the sea meets the marsh, Sea Rim skirts the Louisiana state line, providing great birding year-round with access to salt marsh, sand dunes, and an open Gulf habitat. A delicate ecosystem rocked by the latest bout of hurricanes, it stands defiantly, damaged but never destroyed.

The salt marsh is a good place to see species such as Seaside Sparrow, Clapper Rail, and practically any species of wading birds like Great, Snowy, and Cattle Egrets, Tricolored, and Little Blue Heron, both types of Night-Heron, White Ibis, and Roseate Spoonbill. The best access is a .75-mile-long nature trail called the Gambusia Marsh Boardwalk. The beach provides an opportunity to see uncommon species such as Piping, Snowy, and Wilson's Plovers, many types of terns (Least, Black, Forster's, Common, Caspian, Royal, and Sandwich), and nesting Common Nighthawks. The expansive waters of the Gulf can produce huge flocks of Lesser Scaup and if you're patient, unique species of ducks such as scoters can be picked out. The open areas with short scrub are great for flycatchers such as Eastern and Western Kingbirds and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, as well as raptors like Crested Caracara and White-tailed Kite.

### MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge





# SABINE WOODS

Privately owned by Texas Ornithological Society and managed by local Audubon chapter, Sabine Woods is a shining example of a chenier plain woodlot. The slightly elevated beach ridge allows oak trees to grow along the coast, which attracts migrants in droves. The peak time to visit is late March-early May when the woodland is practically dripping in neotropical passer-bys. Many trails wind through the woods filled with mulberry trees, providing access to birds along with locally-maintained water drips to entice even more.

Warblers, Vireos, Thrushes, Orioles, Flycatchers, Tanagers, and Cuckoos can be seen in stunning numbers if you get the right weather to produce a fallout. Standout species include Black-billed Cuckoo, Veery, and Gray-cheeked Thrush, Cerulean, Golden-winged, and Swainson's Warblers, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Blue Grosbeak, and Orchard and Baltimore Orioles. Sabine Woods is also the place to see grassland species such as Sedge Wren and other wading fowl because the site is surrounded by marsh. Both species of kinglets can be found in winter along with a handful of warblers like Black-and-white, Orange-crowned, and Yellow-rumped. The Hermit Thrush also winters here, along with a few dozen Greater White-fronted Geese, and a few hundred to thousand Snow Geese in the adjacent wetlands.

Texas Point National Wildlife Reserve provides further access to the saltmarsh and a large body of water, Clam Lake. Birds such as Seaside Sparrow and Clapper Rail can be seen along Cattlewalk Trail, while

Pilot Station Road is a great location for Clapper Rail, Seaside Sparrow, and Nelson's Sparrow in winter. Species such as Lesser Scaup and Red-breasted Merganser can be common in the ship channel that parallels the road. This location is good for species such as Common and Purple Gallinules as well as several species of waterfowl.

Pleasure Island offers birders road access to Sabine Lake, a great spot to scope for ducks, grebes, and seabirds. Best in winter and early spring, Ruddy Ducks can be particularly numerous but Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Redhead, and a few others can also be seen, along with Horned and Eared Grebes, Ospreys, Bald Eagles, and the occasional Brown Booby, Long-tailed Duck, and several species of scoter.

Also birded from the road, Taylor Bayou Watershed and Hillebrandt Bayou Watershed are more good sites in winter and spring. Close to the coast, it is much different than the typical marsh and Gulf birding. Hillebrandt Bayou hosts thousands of Snow Geese with smaller numbers of Ross's and Greater White-fronted Geese, along with species such as Broad-winged Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker, Barred Owl, and Wood Ducks.

## MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

Pilot Station Road, Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge

## ADDITIONAL AREAS:

Pleasure Island, Taylor Bayou Watershed, Hillebrandt Bayou Watershed



# WORLD-RENOWNED COASTAL BIRDING

The most sought-after stop when birding Texas, the West is privy to immense diversity in both species and habits thanks to a phenomenal passerine migration.

## ANAHUAC

A sprawling 34,000-acre wildlife refuge, Anahuac is an oasis for birds and a paradise for birders. Home to hundreds of thousands of birds you can see on a driveable car-loop, the coastal marsh and prairie habitat is a year-round birding hotspot that only gets hotter during spring migration. Waterfowl and shorebirds are common throughout the bayou in winter, but perhaps the most exciting is the potential for raptors. Once an ancient flood plain, the area is now teeming with flora, fauna, and feathered friends.



Tens of thousands of geese make landfall in winter, most commonly the Snow Goose. Greater White-fronted Geese are also abundant with Ross's Geese present in smaller numbers. Thousands of ducks in over 15 species call the area home in winter and you can expect to see the Fulvous and Black-bellied Whistling species, although most Fulvous head south for the winter. It's also a great location to spot American Bittern, White-tailed Hawks, and White-tailed Kite during the colder months. Migration brings thousands of shorebirds if the water levels are right. Hudsonian Godwit and White-rumped Sandpiper are two of the highlights along with vagrants such as Ruff and Surf-birds. Swallows are common in the refuge and Cave is regular from spring-fall. In the spring and summer, you can usually see Purple Gallinules and Least Bitterns.

Smith Point is a fantastic location to catch the fall hawk migration. There's an official raptor count so there is always a good birder or two present. Large numbers of geese and ducks can be seen, such as Franklin's Gulls, Wood Storks, Anhingas, big flocks of American White Pelicans, Mississippi Kites (peak days in the thousands), Broad-winged Hawks (peak days in the tens of thousands), hundreds of Eastern

Kingbirds, and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in the late summer/fall, thousands of swallows (seven species), hundreds of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and smaller numbers of other migrants.

### MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge Shoveler Pond Loop, Willows Trail, Skillern Tract

### ADDITIONAL AREAS:

Candy Cain Abshier Wildlife Management, Smith Point and James H. Robbins Memorial Park



# HIGH ISLAND

Best known from the movie, *The Big Year*, High Island is a spectacular birding location in the spring when migrants come pouring across the Gulf. A salt dome and mineral spring set at the edge of the Gulf of Mexico, the island's name is apropos as the habitat does rise 32 feet above the surrounding marshes, providing soil conditions favourable to trees and shrubs. Sightings and numbers are highest during a fallout, which generally occurs with a fast-moving cold front so be sure to keep an eye on the weather.

The Houston Audubon society manages four bird sanctuaries in the area, the two most popular being Boy Scout Woods, which is staffed with volunteers from mid-March through mid-May, and Smith Oaks, the largest reserve, which also has a rookery with two great overlooks. Boy Scout Woods has bleachers set up next to water features so you can post up for a while and study their behavior. All four have great hiking trails that provide an amazing view into the lives of these unique creatures.

## MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

Boy Scout Woods Bird Sanctuary, Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary

## ADDITIONAL AREAS:

Eubanks Woods Bird Sanctuary, S.E. Gast Red Bay Sanctuary



# BOLIVAR FLATS

Bolivar Flats produces the most consistent phenomenal birding in the area with impressive concentrations of species resting and nesting year-round. A “Globally Important Bird Area” according to the Shorebird Reserve Network, the habitat is a combination of salt marsh, mudflats, and beach. Weather plays a big role in diversity, but on average, the number of birds at this location is a spectacle to see. It’s also where you catch the ferry to Galveston, a quick 20-minute ride away.

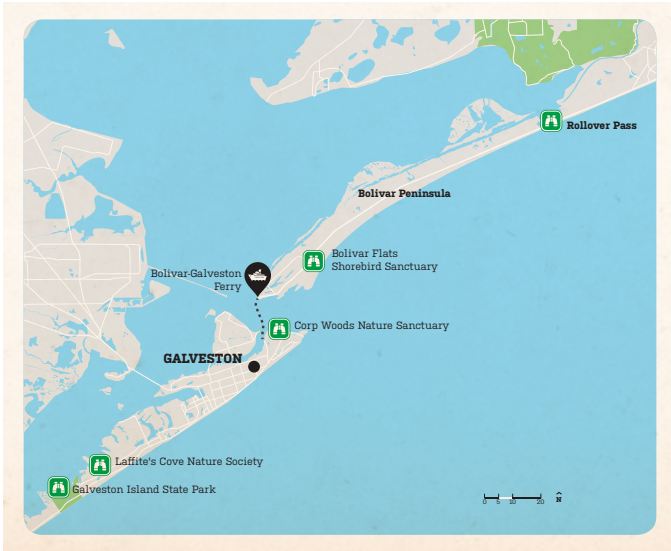
Thousands of American Avocets winter at this location along with 30 other species of shorebirds such as Red Knot, Snowy, Wilson’s, Piping Plovers, Long-billed Curlew, and Marbled Godwits. Least Terns are common breeders and usually start arriving in late March or early April. This is also a great location to see Reddish Egrets (year-round), Magnificent Frigatebirds (summer), and one of the most consistent places to spot Franklin’s Gulls during migration.

## MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

Rollover Pass, Bolivar Peninsula, Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary, Bolivar-Galveston Ferry

# EXTEND YOUR TRIP

## GALVESTON ISLAND



Galveston Island offers consistent coastal birding along with the opportunity to see several lifers during spring migration. Not to miss spots include Corps Wood, Laffite's Cove, and Galveston Island State Park. Similar to what you'd see at Sabine Woods or High Island, they're teeming with warblers, vireos, thrushes, flycatchers, and tanagers. Woodland trails and 8-mile Road/Sportsmen's Road provide road access to a marsh and field habitat that dead-ends in West Bay where many water birds gather.

Birds such as Black Skimmer and American Oystercatchers can be seen here. It is also a good location to see Magnificent Frigatebirds and Reddish Egrets in the summer. In the marsh and field habitat, birds like Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Crested Caracara, White-tailed Kite, and Vermillion Flycatcher (winter) are common.

Galveston Island State Park is composed of a beach and marsh habitat along with the open waters of the Gulf. The park has two observation towers, but you can also walk the miles of trail networks. Many shorebirds such as Sanderling, Black-bellied Plover, and Willet can be spotted among the waves. There is a blind overlooking a small pond to stay hidden from view.

### MAJOR BIRDING SITES:

Corps Woods Nature Sanctuary, 8-Mile/Sportsmen's Road, Settegast (Nottingham Ranch) Road, Laffite's Cove Nature Preserve, Galveston Island State Park

### HOW TO GET THERE

In addition to being an attractive location for the birds, Beaumont is incredibly accessible by air. Flight service is available on American Airlines into Jack Brooks Regional Airport (BPT), or on a variety of major carriers at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental (IAH) and William B Hobby (HOU) airports, both just 90-minutes away. IAH is a major international hub with direct flights to such European cities as Amsterdam, Frankfurt, London, Manchester, Munich, and Paris. It's close to other U.S. cities such as Austin and New Orleans (both four hours), and Dallas (4.5 hours) in case you're looking to extend your trip to see more of the U.S. while you're in the area.



## CREOLE NATURE TRAIL

Just over the border in Louisiana, the Creole Nature Trail is of America's greatest drives and one of 43 official scenic byways in the USA. The 180-mile route takes you from the marshland to the Gulf of Mexico beaches and features over 400 species of birds, alligators, and Cajun culture in what's affectionately referred to as Louisiana's Outback.

# BOOK A BEAUMONT BIRDING PACKAGE

Includes discounted hotel rates, souvenir book, trail maps, checklist, itinerary, and an exclusive stuffed birdie!

Visit [www.beaumontcvb.com/birder/](http://www.beaumontcvb.com/birder/) for more info.

