



Lake Charles/Southwest Louisiana  
& the Creole Nature Trail All-American Road



# *Birding*

Calcasieu & Cameron Parishes





## Introduction

2

## Tips on Birding Calcasieu-Cameron Parishes

6

## Suggested Tour

10

## Summary of Highlighted Birding Sites

17



## *Introduction*

With a combined total area of about 1.6 million acres, Calcasieu and Cameron parishes represent just under five-percent of Louisiana's 33 million total acres. Yet, eighty-nine-percent of Louisiana's total 456 bird species have been recorded from this relatively small area in the extreme southwestern corner of the state. Why? To borrow the key phrase from the realtor's credo, we arrive at the answer: location, location, location!

Strategically located at the "corner" of the Gulf Coastal Plain to the east and the Lower Rio Grande Valley to the south, Southwest Louisiana's Calcasieu-Cameron area, conducts avian migrants from throughout the U.S., Canada, and even Mexico during their annual treks.

From a continental perspective, it is also true that Calcasieu-Cameron lies at the juncture of the eastern and western halves of the U.S. as well as the juncture of the temperate and tropical Americas. Climatically, the region enjoys mild winters, hot, humid summers, and frequent rains. Lake Charles, Louisiana, the parish (county) seat of Calcasieu parish, and the largest city in the region, occupies about the same latitude as Shanghai or Jerusalem.

The resulting bird community can be likened to the human community of a large cosmopolitan city like New Orleans or even New York, burgeoning with a savory combination of vacationers, business travelers, and year-round residents.

Ecologically, the region is comprised of a diverse array of habitats. Spring-fed sandy-bottomed streams run through mixed pine-hardwood forests at the extreme northern edge of the region, hosting Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and other pineland specialties. To the immediate south of the mixed forest is a substantial belt of coastal tallgrass prairie habitat, presently converted to rice, sugar cane, and cattle production. Within this modified grassland habitat, winter raptors (including occasional sightings of regional rarities such as White-tailed Hawk, Harris' Hawk, and Ferruginous Hawk) waterfowl, and sparrows are especially abundant.

South of the prairie belt, elevation dips ever closer to sea level, giving way to hundreds of thousands of acres of fresh, brackish, and saltwater marshes, sheltering a dizzying array of raptors, waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds, particularly during the fall, winter, and spring months. Examples of rarer birds within the



marsh matrix include Mask Duck, Cinnamon Teal, Brant, Black Rail, Ruff, and Red-necked Phalarope.

Interspersed upon low ridges through the prairies, croplands, and marshes are miscellaneous patches of hardwood forests. Down near the gulf shore itself, these coastal woodlands take on a special character. Dominated by coast live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) and hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*), they are referred to as cheniers (translated, "oak grove," pronounced "shin-EAR") the nickname given them centuries ago by early French colonists. Cheniers have been found to play crucial roles in providing specialized "stopover" food and shelter for neotropical migrant songbirds during the spring and fall months.

Besides conducting the vast majority of eastern North America's neotropical migrant songbirds every spring and fall, the list of vagrant birds from the western U.S. and Mexico, which have been recorded in Southwest Louisiana's cheniers and other coastal woodlands is as long as it is impressive. Examples include Tropical and Couch's Kingbirds, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Yellow-green Vireo, Red-faced Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Hermit Warbler, and Painted Redstart.



Marie Pitre Johnson

Just north of the beaches, and contiguous with them, lies a very thin and curious band of open, shrub-dominated woodland referred to as "thorn-scrub" or "shrub-scrub" by ecologists.

This specialized habitat type becomes quite common southward along the gulf shore into the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and Mexico as well. Only a small remnant exists in Southwest Louisiana, however. Common plants include prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia lindheimeri*), sweet acacia (*Acacia farnesiana*) prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum clavaherculis*), honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), green hawthorn (*Crataegus viridis*), and others. Thorn-scrub habitat holds an amazingly diverse bird community on a nearly year-round basis. Not surprisingly, this habitat commonly attracts numerous arid-country birds during migrations as well as winter. Some of the more occasional migrants and winter residents include Vermilion Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, and Clay-colored Sparrow. Some of the rarer or "accidental" species have included Sage Thrasher, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Virginia's Warbler, Lucy's Warbler, Blue Bunting, and Varied Bunting.

The gulf beaches themselves are extensive and vary in composition from sand to shell fragments, to mud. Here, common nesters include Snowy Plover, Wilson's Plover, and Least Tern. Rarities have included Little Gull, Glaucous Gull, California Gull, Thayer's Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Smith's Longspur, and Yellow-nosed Albatross, to mention a few.

Excluding the six cities, Calcasieu-Cameron is a decidedly rustic area. Towns, convenience stores, and restrooms are relatively few and far between; similar in some ways to that of the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, or of the settled areas of Alaska. Please keep this fact in mind when planning your birding tour. Listed to the right are additional tips that travelers should be aware of when birding the Calcasieu-Cameron region.



# *Tips on birding Calcasieu-Cameron*

## **Tip #1 – The Weather**

Weather changes can be sudden, particularly during the winter and spring months. Likewise, summer and early fall can be oppressively hot, humid, and insect-ridden at times. Regardless of the season, wear long sleeves and long pants, and bring along a rain-proof windbreaker, an extra undershirt, and extra socks. Dress in layers (Undershirt, shirt, and in fall/winter, a sweater and/or coat). Waterproof footwear, a hat, a trusty water bottle, and insect repellent are also suggested items.

## **Tip #2 – Where Not To Walk**

Remember that beyond the state parks and national wildlife refuges, the vast majority of Calcasieu-Cameron lands are privately-owned. Do not walk on privately-owned lands without permission! And please, do not attempt to walk in the marshes or even cross the roadside ditches. Most marshes and ditches are extremely soft-bottomed, consisting of many feet of jello-like mud, covered with a little water. Uninformed recreationists who attempt to walk across marshes and ditches commonly sink to their waists or even armpits.

## **Tip #3 – Accommodations**

Lake Charles, Sulphur, and Vinton, in Calcasieu Parish, offer excellent hotels/motels, restaurants, and many amenities. Outside Calcasieu Parish, however, be prepared to encounter somewhat less luxuriant settings. While adequate for hard-core birders, oilfield workers, hunters, and fishermen, motel accommodations are limited in number. Outside of the few state parks, national wildlife refuge headquarters, motels, and restaurants, restroom facilities are limited. Plan ahead by visiting [www.CreoleNatureTrail.org](http://www.CreoleNatureTrail.org).

For those visitors equipped with campers, campgrounds are available at Sam Houston Jones State Park, Holbrook Park, Intracoastal Park (just north of Hackberry) and Holly Beach.

## **Tip #4 – Roadside Shoulders**

Please take precautions when pulling off of roadways. Most locals make generous use of any sort of "Pull-off," which include oilfield roads and pumping facilities, do not wander far from your vehicle.

## **Tip #5 – Look Up and Out whenever Possible**

This tip cannot be overemphasized, especially in the marsh, prairie, beach, and other open-country habitats where raptors and other large birds hunt, perch and soar. Included within this class are seabirds, ducks, geese, falcons, kites, hawks, eagles, and others.

## **Tip #6 – The Cattle Pen/Grain Dryer/Utility Depot/ Gas Compressor Station Equation**

Cattle-ranching, farming, and natural gas production play large roles throughout Southwest Louisiana. Whenever such facilities are encountered, pull over or slow down enough to look for birds. Uncommon species such as Bronzed Cowbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Yellow Headed Blackbird, as well as Western Flycatcher and other flycatchers are all attracted to the ground and surrounding fences in these places.

## **Tip #7 – Regional Birds**

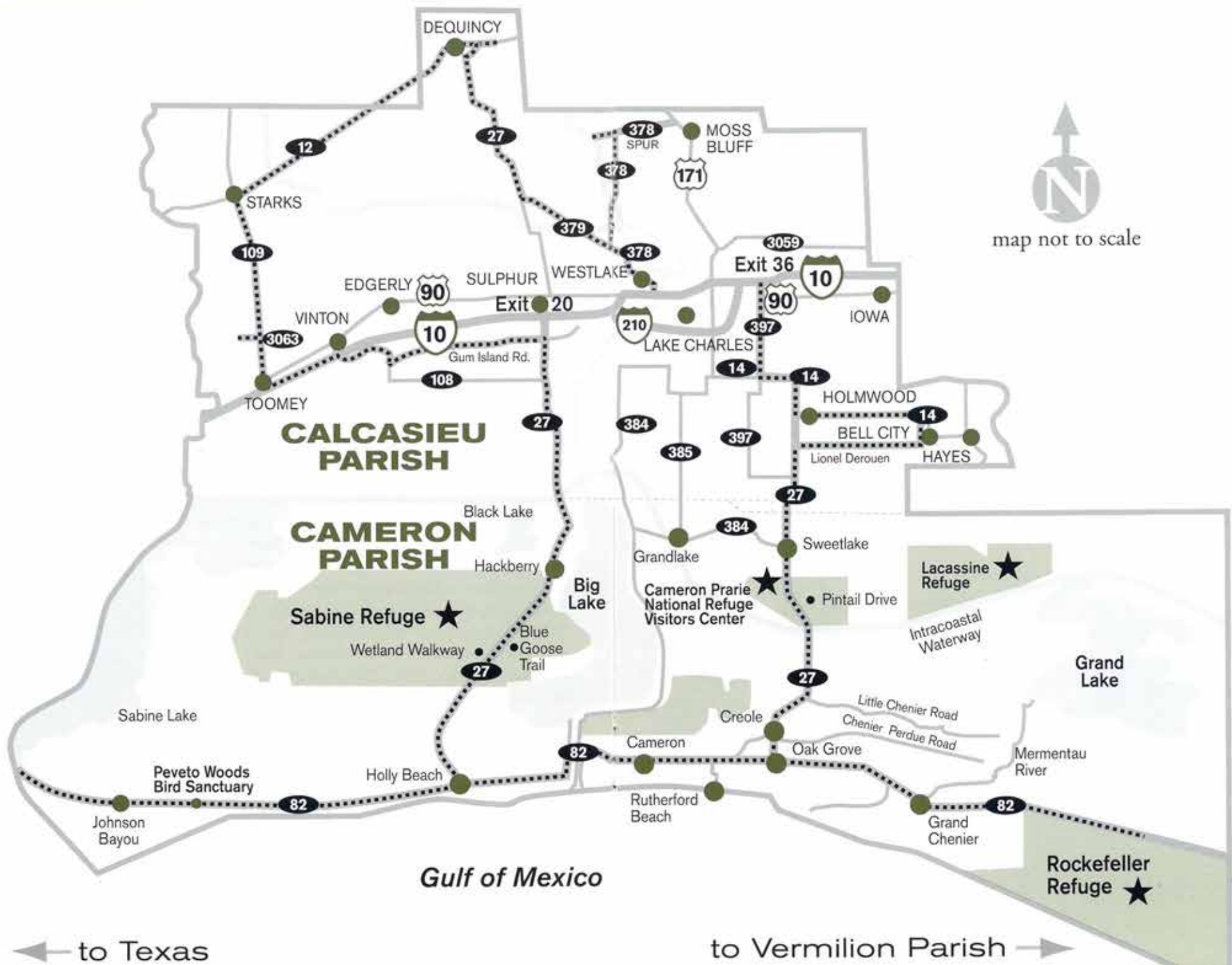
Last but not least, remember that certain "suites" of birds reside only within certain regions or districts of the Calcasieu/Cameron region. It would be fruitless, for example, to go looking for a Bachman's Sparrow in coastal Cameron Parish since the Bachman's Sparrow habitat is strictly limited to the mature pine forests located mostly north of Interstate-10. Here is a capsule listing of bird species which are especially limited in distribution within the Calcasieu-Cameron region:

**Primarily Inland/Upland/Pine Regions -** (Primarily north of and within the Interstate-10 Corridor)

Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted-titmouse, Carolina Wren, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Eastern Towhee, Bachman's Sparrow, Purple Finch.

**Primarily Coastal Regions -** (Beach and Immediate Vicinity)

Common Loon, Western Grebe, Yellow-nosed Albatross, Masked Booby, Northern Gannet, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Reddish Egret, Scoters, Snowy Plover, Wilson's Plover, Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Red Phalarope, Jaegers, Little Gull, Black-Legged Kittiwake, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern, Bridled Tern, Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy, Black Skimmer, Seaside Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-Tailed Sparrow, Boat-Tailed Grackle.



## Suggested Tour

This tour is designed to you through a sampling of each habitat type, both to enjoy the ecological diversity as well as to build a maximum-sized bird list! In all, the tour encompasses some 242 miles. To get the most out of the tour, plan a somewhat leisurely pace. Perhaps explore the stretch from Westlake through Holly Beach and Peveto Woods Sanctuary on one day and the stretch from Cameron back up to Lake Charles via LA27E on a second day.

To begin, get on Interstate-10 west-bound in Lake Charles, cross the bridge over the lake to **Westlake, LA**. Take the Westlake exit down to the traffic light. Turn left onto Sampson. Then right onto Sulphur Avenue. Finally, turn left on Miller Avenue and travel about 1 mile to the **Parish Boat Launch** on the right (east) side of the road for lovely views of the west fork of the Calcasieu River. Here, mixed pine forest grades down into bald cypress-tupelo gum swamp associated with the backwaters of the river. Look for herons, egrets, and other wading birds, as well as Osprey, Red-Shouldered Hawk, waterfowl, and miscellaneous woodland songbirds which associate in the interface between upland and lowland forests.

Continue north on Miller Avenue and take a right (east) onto Bagdad Road, a quiet residential area which skirts the backwaters of the river. During the winter months, American White Pelicans, Osprey, and other large water birds often congregate there. **Bagdad Road** dead-ends within 2 miles.



Marie Pitre Johnson

Backtrack to Miller Avenue, take a right, and follow the "Moss Bluff" signs to connect onto LA378 at Moss Bluff, LA. Then, follow the signs to **Sam Houston Jones State Park** via the LA378 spur. Park roads will take you through three distinct forest (habitat) types: Mixed pine-hardwood, bottomland hardwood, and cypress-tupelo swamp. Each forest type features different birds. This park, along with Holbrook Park,

Vicki Sensat



provides excellent opportunities for finding Barred Owl, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, American Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and Carolina Wren.

From Sam Houston Jones State Park, you may want to continue north to **Holbrook Park**, located approximately 6.5 miles southeast of DeQuincy,

LA, in order to experience more in the way of upland forest habitats. At this point, keep in mind that the two local specialties, Brown-headed Nuthatch and Bachman's Sparrow, can be found within almost any parcel of pine-canopy-dominated forest up here. Try finding them within the taller pine forests along the quieter roadways. Remember to pull well off the roadway, get out of your vehicle, and listen for the telltale nasal "bit-bit-bit" of the nuthatch. Bachman's Sparrows are somewhat shy and can be best detected during the months of April and May when males sit atop low bushes beneath high pine canopies to sing their beautiful breeding songs. Additional breeding birds of interest here would include Pine Warbler, Yellow-Breasted Chat, and Eastern Towhee.

To find **Holbrook Park**, exit Sam Houston Jones State Park on Sutherland Road, heading north on Sutherland for 2.8 miles then left (west) on Dunn Ferry Road for 2.5 miles, then right (north) on Holbrook Park Road for 0.5 miles, then right (east) onto the entry road. Follow signs to the boat landing for best viewing. As is the case at Sam Houston Jones State Park, Holbrook Park hosts dense concentrations of resident birds, as well as a varying number of neotropical thrushes, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, orioles, etc., during the spring and fall migration period. The best time to search for these migrants is immediately after rainstorms.



Marie Pitre Johnson





During the summer months, search the trees for nesting White-eyed, Red-eyed, and Yellow-throated Vireos, along with Northern Parula, Prothonotary, and Hooded Warblers. During the winter months, forested habitats such as these commonly host additional species, including Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, and American Goldfinch.

Continue on to **DeQuincy, LA**, the northernmost of the six cities in Calcasieu Parish. First, take a right (northwest) back onto Holbrook Park Road, traveling 8.6 miles to its terminus at LA27. Take a right (north) onto LA27, traveling about 3.5 miles into DeQuincy. In DeQuincy, go left (west) on LA12, traveling through a mosaic of upland mixed pine forests, bottomland hardwoods, and rolling pastures to Starks, LA. In Starks, take a left (south) onto LA109, traveling about 9 miles before taking a right (west) onto Niblett's Bluff Road. Follow the road to **Niblett's Bluff**, a quiet campground in **Vinton, LA**, studded with huge loblolly pines, and situated on a beautiful stretch of the Sabine River. Cabins, trails, restrooms, and a nice observation wharf are all located here. Look for raptors, waterfowl, and a plethora of woodland songbirds.

From Niblett's Bluff, backtrack to LA109, and go right (south) for about 3 miles, over the interstate (where LA109 changes names to "Toomey Road"), traveling a mile or so before Toomey Road ends. Here, turn right (west) onto Broussard Road. In less than a



pbase.com\_pattonpix

mile, go left (south) onto **Old Highway 90 Road** (also known as "**the burned-out-bridge road**" by locals). This wonderful roadway is located on a 6-mile oak ridge that passes through a maze of bayous, bar ditches, and freshwater marsh. Irises bloom along the roadside by the thousands during the month of April. Ditto for the American Lotus in the summer. Various gaps

within the oak forest allow for the excellent waterfowl viewing during the winter months. Warblers, vireos, tanagers, orioles, etc., find safe harbor in the big oaks during spring and fall migration. True to its nickname, the road terminates at an old burned-out bridge over the Sabine River. The city of Orange, Texas, lies only a few hundred yards west of the road's terminus.

Backtrack to Broussard Road (go right), then left back on to Toomey Road, entering eastbound Interstate-10. Continue 5 miles east on I-10 through Vinton, LA, and take the LA108 (exit 188) exit, continuing eastward on LA108, parallel with the freeway for just under 2 miles. Here, LA108 will curve sharply to the right (southward), but instead of following LA108, continue straight onto Gum Island Road. Follow this road eastward for just under 2 miles and take a right (south) onto **Fabacher Road**.

From an ornithological perspective, **Fabacher Road** is undoubtedly one of the most interesting roadways in Louisiana, featuring some of the most unspoiled grassland habitats within the southern third of the state. On Fabacher Road, approximately one mile south of Gum Island Road, you'll note a curious copse of pine trees to your right (west). Curious, because grasslands surround this small clump of trees for miles in every direction. Crested Caracaras nest along the low tree line to the immediate north of the pines, and can often be observed soaring or even eating roadkill upon Fabacher Road itself. Also, pay particular attention to the shrubby thickets lining either side of the road. During the fall, winter, and spring months, these thickets hold an incredible number of buntings, sparrows, and other finch-like birds. Continuously scan the horizons for raptors as well. Red-tailed Hawks are abundant during the winter months, and rare species such as Swainson's Hawk and Ferruginous Hawk turn up here as well. Also, pay attention to the utility lines, where Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and other flycatcher species may be seen.





Just south of the "Caracara Pines," Fabacher Road terminates at Johnny Breaux Road/LA108. From this point, the object is to head back east in order to connect with LA27W, the main roadway through Cameron Parish. Turn left (east) on Johnny Breaux Road/LA108 for 8 miles to LA27W.

At LA27W, turn right (south) to access the west side of the

Creole Nature Trail All-American Road. In about 5 miles, you will cross the Ellender Bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway. Once on the southern end of the bridge, those who are in dire need of restroom facilities may turn right (west) and swing back beneath the bridge and into **Intracoastal Park**, a parish operated camping facility with restrooms. Here, the view onto the Intracoastal Waterway is quite nice. Watch for gulls, terns, assorted raptors and waterfowl. As you backtrack to LA27W, stop to scan the Black Lake marsh to your right (west), for it is often filled with various species of wading birds (including Roseate Spoonbill), shorebirds and waterfowl.

Go right (south) on LA27W for 5 miles and cross a small bridge into the rustic fishing village of **Hackberry, LA**. There are only a few side streets here, so don't be concerned about getting lost. Among others, Inca Doves are common "urban" species here. During the summer months, in particular, consider taking a left (east) onto Old Town Road, then another left onto Volunteer Lane (looks like a driveway) to a wading bird rookery right behind the local ambulance facility. There, look for herons, egrets, ibis, and allies, along with various perching birds such as Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Orchard Oriole, and others.

Take a left onto Old Town Road (it loops back to LA27W in either direction) and consider taking another left (southeast) onto Magnolia Road, then another left (east) onto Channelview Drive, and follow the signs to the public boat launch for a nice view of the Calcasieu Lake Ship Channel (note: locals refer to Calcasieu Lake as "Big Lake"). Check for wading birds, sea birds, and other aquatic/marine species.



Wind back to LA27W and go left (south). As soon as you clear the Hackberry community, notice that the marsh country really opens up and dominates the landscape. Find the **Sabine National Wildlife Refuge's Blue Goose Trail** on the left-hand (east) side of LA27W, 7.5 miles south of Hackberry.

Just south, stop to peruse the grove of live oak (*Quercus Virginiana*) trees. This grove often holds neotropical migrant songbirds during spring and fall, as well as other birds of interest during the winter and summer months. One or two Merlin always commandeer this grove into their own winter headquarters. King and Virginia Rails can be heard calling all around the complex. Waterfowl and wading birds are almost always up in the sky above.

Continue south (left) on LA27W for 3 miles to the **Sabine National Wildlife Refuge's Wetland Walkway**. A 1.5-mile accessible boardwalk loops out into the marsh! Songbirds use the red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) and other low trees and shrubs which are interspersed along the way, particularly during spring and fall migration. Of course, waterfowl and wading birds are the main attractions here, along with two non-avian species: American alligators and nutrias (*Myocastor coypus*, a beaver-like wetland rodent introduced to Louisiana from South America in the early twentieth century). Again, keep looking up into the skies for Osprey, hawks and falcons, Turkey Vulture, and other raptors. Halfway through the walk, climb up into the observation tower for a panoramic view of the Sabine NWR's 125,000 watery acres which stretch west all the way to the Sabine River.

Return to LA27W, continuing southward (right) for 7.0 miles to the community of **Holly Beach, LA**, then turn right (west) onto LA82, which parallels the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico. This particular stretch of highway borders the



pbase.com\_pattonpix





most ornithologically-storied land in all Louisiana, producing a long list of “extreme rarities” including Yellow-nosed Albatross, White-winged Scoter, Masked Duck, Glaucous Gull, Thayer’s Gull, Little Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Rock Wren, Williamson’s Sapsucker, White Wagtail, and Blue

Bunting, to mention a few. Take your time, and take full advantage of any of the numerous pull-offs. The main habitat types along this stretch include gulf beach/nearshore waters, coastal woodland, coastal shrub-scrub, coastal prairie (now primarily pastured), and coastal marsh.

A few miles west of the Holly Beach community, you’ll notice rock break-water structures just offshore. For those interested in rare gulls, this is the place to look, especially during the spring and fall migration months. Scan the beach itself for gulls, terns, plovers, and sandpipers, all of which abound there during low tide periods.



pbase.com\_pattonpix

On the right (north) side of LA82, check all power lines, fences, and cattle pens for flycatchers and other small birds such as Brewer’s Blackbird (winter) and Yellow-headed Blackbird (spring, fall, winter). Five miles west of Holly Beach, LA82 veers slightly northward away from the gulf shore. At this point, look north along the fence lines and up into the northern sky for the White-tailed Kites, which always seem to hang around.

Nearly 9.0 miles west of Holly Beach, turn left (south) onto Gulfview Avenue and follow signs to the **Peveto Woods Sanctuary**, a small-but-potent patch of coastal woodland which harbors multitudes of passerine birds during the spring and fall migration periods. Beyond the usual fare of neotropical flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks and orioles from throughout eastern North America, Peveto Woods had also repeatedly hosted numerous species from the western U.S. and Mexico, including Lesser Nighthawk, Groove-billed Ani, Red-faced Warbler, Hermit Warbler, Western Tanager, Hepatic Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli bunting, and Hooded Oriole.



Back on LA82, head west 3.8 miles and go left (south) on Jim Erbeling Lane and follow it to its terminus at **Mae’s Beach**, perhaps the most pristine of Southwest Louisiana’s Gulf beaches. Like Holly Beach, Mae’s Beach can hold lots of shorebirds and seabirds, depending on the season. Late spring and early summer are great times to look for Surf Scoter and other scoter species in the nearshore waters here.

Once back on LA82, head west (left) toward the Louisiana-Texas border. Go 13.4 miles, pull to the side of the road, and check the shell bank a few hundred yards to the south of the road for American Oystercatchers, Black-necked Stilts, and other shorebirds. The **Sabine Pass Bridge**, located 0.6 miles farther west, sits directly on the Louisiana-Texas border. On the “Louisiana side,” the substructure of this bridge holds a few pairs of nesting Cave Swallows along with numerous pairs of Cliff and Barn Swallows. Sabine Lake, together



Vicki Sensat



with the narrow pass which the bridge crosses, often holds interesting waterfowl during the winter months.

Here you can choose to turn around and head back east to Holly Beach or continue to the west to bird the Southeast Texas Gulf Coast.

Assuming you returned to Holly Beach, continue east on LA82/LA27. During the winter months, this 9-mile stretch of highway between Holly Beach and the Cameron Ferry holds many birds of interest, including ducks, geese, and hawks. A long-tailed Duck was once found in the small "borrow ditch" on the left (north) side of the road! Numerous additional views of the Gulf of Mexico occur throughout this stretch as well.

At the **Cameron Ferry** across the Calcasieu Lake ship channel, be on the lookout for unusual gulls, terns, and other seabirds. These and others will fly right up to the ferry, both when parked and when the boat is moving. Note that there is a nominal ferry toll involved when headed west out of Cameron, only. Those coming east into Cameron from Holly Beach do not pay the toll.

Several excellent birding areas exist within the town of Cameron itself. First, check out the live oak trees around the **Cameron Parish Courthouse** (1.3 miles east of the ferry, on the left side of the road) on the western edge of town. Vireos, thrushes, tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles commonly occur here during the spring months. Of further interest is the fact that four species of doves can be found throughout Cameron: Mourning, Eurasian-collared, White-winged, and Inca.



pbase.com\_pattonpix

From the courthouse area, continue eastward on LA82/27 and turn right (south) on **Davis Road**. The mosaic of marsh and prairie along the east side of Davis Road

is also good for raptors, wading birds, waterfowl, and shorebirds at various times of the year, particularly during fall, winter, and spring.

Back at LA82/LA27, go right (east) for 6.1 miles and turn right (south) toward **Rutherford Beach**. The freshwater marshes on either side of the entry road are loaded with wading birds, waterfowl, rails, and some seabirds during most months of the year. Once you reach the beach, look for shorebirds and seabirds in all directions. For the more intrepid birders, excellent bird habitat awaits both east and west of Rutherford Beach, though walking will be necessary. To the east of Rutherford Beach lies Hackberry Ridge, an old coastal woodland that stretches eastward for several miles. To the west of Rutherford Beach is a 6.5-mile stretch of shrub-scrub habitat which holds sparrows, warblers, and other passerine birds, especially during the fall and winter months.

Back on LA82/LA27, continue east 1 mile to the community of Oak Grove, continuing east for another 21 miles on LA82 to the **Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge's Price Lake Road** (open March 1-December 1), a 6+ mile driving trail through a Southwest Louisiana marsh where myriad waterfowl, seabirds, herons, egrets, and other wading birds can be seen year-round.

Backtrack to Oak Grove, and head right (north) on LA27E for about 10 miles to the **Conway LeBleu Memorial Bridge** over the Intracoastal Waterway. The marshes on either side of LA27E hold a fantastic assortment of waterbirds but resist the temptation to pull over along this busy highway. Instead, pull off (east/right) onto the small service road near the southern base of the bridge,







where you can safely and leisurely bird to your heart's delight. Besides wading birds, waterfowl, gulls, and terns (be on the lookout for the relatively uncommon Gull-billed Tern here) and other sundry marsh birds, raptors such as Osprey and Peregrine Falcon are also common in this area.

Back on LA27E, go right (north), crossing the Conway LeBleu Memorial Bridge. Once across the bridge, you will have entered the **Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge**. About 0.25 miles past the bridge, notice a turn-off onto **Pintail Wildlife Drive** on the right (east) side of LA27E. This is a popular 3-mile wildlife-watching loop through the marsh and associated woodland ridge. Among other birds, the beautiful Vermilion Flycatcher is often encountered here during the winter months. A short distance further (1.8 miles) north on LA27E, follow the sign to the **refuge headquarters** on the left (west) side of the road. Restrooms, maps, and literature will be available here.

Back on LA27E, go left (north) from the refuge headquarters, traveling approximately 7.8 miles to the intersection of LA27E with



WanderWithWonder.com

**Lionel Derouen Road.**

During the winter months, take time to search the agricultural fields around this intersection for Sandhill Cranes. A large flock headquarters in this area. Also, remember to keep an eye out for waterfowl, hawks, and other raptors. Go right (east) on Lionel Derouen Road, stopping at your conve-



nience to check out the massive hedgerows lining the road for songbirds. The associated agricultural fields are usually filled with waterfowl during the winter months. After 2.5 miles, go left (north) on Fruge Road for 3 miles and take a left (west) on LA14. Follow LA14 for about 3 miles back to its intersection with LA27E.

Go right (north) and turn right (north) onto LA397, which intersects with I-10. If your tour takes place around March or April, around 2.8 miles after turning onto LA397, take a close look around the big grain-drying complex on the right (east) side fo the road for Yellow-headed blackbirds, which are often mixed in with the large flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds that frequent the driers. From this area, the intersection with I-10 lies about 2 miles to the north.









## Summary of highlighted birding sites

### 1. Grout's Bayou Marina/Parish Boat Launch – Habitat types:

Upland mixed pine-hardwood forest, riparian hardwood forest, backwater swamp, open river. **Featured Birds:** no specialties; look for waterbirds (waterfowl and allies, herons/egrets and allies) and riparian woodland songbirds such as wrens, chickadee/titmouse, vireos, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, finches. **Drive time:** 15 minutes from Lake Charles.

**2. Bagdad Road – Habitat types:** Riparian hardwood forest, backwater swamp. **Featured Birds:** See #1, plus, American White Pelicans in winter. **Note:** This road runs through a quiet residential neighborhood, and dead ends. **Drive time:** 20 minutes from Lake Charles.

**3. Sam Houston Jones State Park – Habitat Types:** See #1 **Featured Birds:** See #1 **Note:** There is a nominal entry fee to the park which is well worth the price of admission. **Drive Time:** 15 minutes from Lake Charles,

**4. Holbrook Park - Habitat Types:** See #1. **Featured Birds:** See #1. **Drive Time:** 20 minutes from Lake Charles.

**5. Niblett's Bluff – Habitat Types:** Mature loblolly pine forest, riparian hardwood forest, open river. **Featured birds:** See #1. **Drive time:** 40 minutes from Lake Charles.

**6. Old Highway 90 Road – Habitat Types:** Oak ridge, freshwater marsh, open river. **Featured Birds:** See #1. **Note:** The oak ridge can be excellent for neotropical migrants during spring, especially the month of April. Likewise, April is an excellent month for blooming native irises. **Drive Time:** 30 minutes from Lake Charles.

**7. Fabacher Road – Habitat Types:** Primarily grassland, hedgerow/scrub thickets, occasional woodland clumps. **Featured Birds:** Crested Caracara and other assorted diurnal raptors (western species such as Swainson's Hawk and Ferruginous Hawk have been observed here.), flycatchers (on utility lines), sparrows/finches/allies (winter/spring-fall migration). **Note:** Roadside birding here is excellent to outstanding, particularly for intermediate to advanced birders. **Drive Time:** 40 minutes from Lake Charles

**8. Intracoastal Park – Habitat Types:** Some scrub, open water (both shallow and deep sites). **Featured Birds:** Gulls, terns, herons/egrets/allies, waterfowl (winter), sandpipers and allies (shallow

winter marsh, especially spring and fall, occasionally winter).

**Note:** restrooms available. **Drive time:** 45 minutes from Lake Charles.

**9. Hackberry, LA – Habitat Types:** Some scrub, some open water, some riparian hardwoods. **Featured Birds:** See # 8. **Note:** Look for nice small heron/egret rookery behind the ambulance terminal March-July. **Drive Time:** 45 minutes from Lake Charles.

**10. Sabine National Wildlife Refuge – Habitat Types:** Live oak grove, freshwater marsh, some scrub, some open water. **Featured Birds:** Can be excellent for neotropical migrants March-May and September-October. Regional rarities such as Townsend's Solitaire have been recorded here. Look for King Rail and other rails where marsh grasses meet open water. **Note:** Restrooms available at Wetland Walkway. **Drive time:** 1 hour from Lake Charles.

**11. Holly Beach - Habitat Types:** Beach, open gulf. **Featured Birds:** Gulls, terns, sandpipers, including occasional rarities such as Glaucous Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Little Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Pomarine Jaeger, Arctic Tern, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Black-shouldered Kite, Crested Caracara, and Peregrine Falcon. **Drive time:** 1.25 hours from Lake Charles.

**12. Peveto Woods Sanctuary - Habitat Types:** Coastal woodland, freshwater pool, beach, open gulf. **Featured Birds:** Rare Neotropical migrants are often observed during spring and fall migration periods (March-May; August-October), including Mexican/western U.S. species such as the Groove-billed Ani, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Townsend's Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Hermit Warbler, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, and others. Note: During peak spring migration (April), 7+ species of Vireos, 20+ species of warblers, and numerous tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles per day are often recorded here. A bona fide migration stop-over hotspot! **Drive time:** 1.5 hours from Lake Charles.

**13. Mae's Beach – Habitat Types:** Beach, open gulf, some freshwater pools. **Featured Birds:** Gulls, terns, sandpipers, scoters and other sea ducks, particularly during December-June. **Drive time:** 1.45 hours from Lake Charles.

**14. Sabine Pass Bridge - Habitat Types:** Open water, sand/gravel bars. **Featured Birds:** Known for the only nesting colony of Cave Swallows in Louisiana. Waterfowl, sandpipers, and water birds of all sorts also frequent the site. **Drive time:** Just over 2 hours from Lake Charles.

**15. Cameron, LA Courthouse Area - Habitat Type:** Urban forest of live oaks, other trees. **Featured Birds:** Can provide excellent neotropical birding during migration periods (March-May; Aug-Oct), especially vireos, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles. Additionally, Cameron holds the distinction of hosting the most diverse dove community in Louisiana, with Mourning, White-winged, Inca, and Eurasian-collared all common to abundant, particularly around the courthouse area. **Note:** Food, fuel, and restrooms are available. **Drive time:** 1.5 hours from Lake Charles.

**16. Davis Road - Habitat Types:** salt marsh. **Featured Birds:** Clapper Rail and Seaside Sparrow. **Drive time:** 1.5 hours from Lake Charles.

**17. Rutherford Beach - Habitat Type:** Extensive freshwater marsh and associated pools, scrubby open woods, beach, open gulf. **Featured Birds:** Almost everything is possible here. Of course, waterfowl, gulls, terns, pelicans, and other seabirds are quite common; but also look for flycatchers and neotropical songbirds (including sparrows) during spring, fall, and winter months. One of the best places in Southwest Louisiana for Common Loon in winter. **Drive time:** 1 hour (via LA27E) from Lake Charles.

**18. Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge's Price Lake Drive - Habitat Types:** Extensive brackish marsh, pools, coastal woodlands. **Featured Birds:** Price Lake Road, located 1 mile west of the refuge's headquarters facility, is one of the best winter waterfowl-watching roads in the nation! Herons, egrets, and other wading birds are also abundant on a year-round basis. **Note:** Open March 1-December 1. **Drive time:** 1 hour 30 minutes from Lake Charles.

**19. Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge - Habitat Types:** Fresh and brackish marshes, bayous, pools, other open water, scrub/open woods. **Featured Birds:** Rails, raptors, waterfowl, and some songbirds. **Note:** Pintail Wildlife Drive, a 3-mile roadway loop located on the refuge, provides an excellent opportunity to get off the busy roadways and watch birds at a leisurely pace. **Drive time:** 1 hour from Lake Charles.

**20. Lionel Derouen Road - Habitat Types:** Agricultural lands, canals, hedgerows. **Featured Birds:** Raptors, waterfowl, and one of the best places in Southwest Louisiana to view Sandhill Cranes during the winter months. **Note:** This is a quiet, well-maintained agricultural road with few residents. Excellent opportunity for leisurely birding. Check out the roadside hedgerows which abound with songbirds on a near-year-round basis. The duck and goose population here during the winter can be spectacular. **Drive time:** 30 minutes from Lake Charles.



Marie Pitre Johnson







VISIT LAKE CHARLES  
LOUISIANA'S PLAYGROUND



[VisitLakeCharles.org](http://VisitLakeCharles.org)

[CreoleNatureTrail.org](http://CreoleNatureTrail.org)