

# AUDUBON'S FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDING TRAILS

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## THE ALABAMA COASTAL BIRDING TRAIL



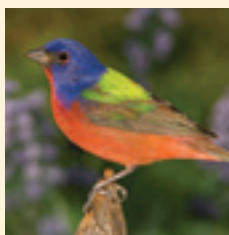
You could wander anywhere in Alabama and see rich natural habitats and beautiful birds, but when the wind shifts in spring or fall, it's time to head for the coast. The Gulf of Mexico exerts a powerful influence on migratory birds, and twice a year the tiny transients swarm by the thousands along its shores. The Alabama Coastal Birding Trail will lead you to the best of the migrant stopover sites, from legendary places like Fort Morgan and Dauphin Island to dozens of lesser-known gems. On big migration days the trees are alive with a kaleidoscopic swirl of brightly hued warblers, tanagers, orioles, buntings, and other songbirds, resting and refueling for the next leg of their journeys. Throngs of sandpipers and plovers march across the mudflats. Ibises and egrets pirouette in the shallows. On days when migration is slow, you can follow loops of the trail to inland woods, where you might hear the surprisingly sweet whistles of the elusive Bachman's sparrow or a **barred owl** belting out baritone hoots from the deep shadows of a cypress swamp. **For more information:** [www.alabamacoastalbirdingtrail.com](http://www.alabamacoastalbirdingtrail.com) or call 877-226-9089.

## GREAT FLORIDA BIRDING TRAIL



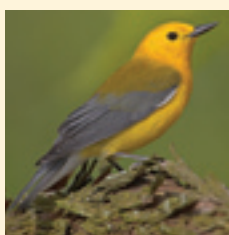
Linking the high points of the peninsula and the Florida Panhandle, the Great Florida Birding Trail lives up to its name with sheer magnitude—stretching some 2,000 miles and including almost 500 sites—and with the quality of the birding it offers. Be prepared to see huge concentrations of Florida's most famous water birds, including flocks of wintering teal, pintails, and other ducks in the marshes of the Panhandle, teeming colonies of sooty terns and brown noddies on the Dry Tortugas, and noisy treetop nesting groups of **wood storks** at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. If you're lucky, you might catch specialties, too, like the elegant white-crowned pigeon, the elusive buffy-toned mangrove cuckoo, and the black-whiskered vireo, all birds of Caribbean or tropical affinities. Droll burrowing owls blink beside their burrows, and graceful swallow-tailed kites swoop and circle above the cypress strands. This trail's biggest star by far, the Florida scrub-jay, is a striking blue bird found nowhere else in the world. These jays have a reputation for being practically fearless of humans, so your odds of seeing at least one—if not a constellation's worth—are quite good. **For more information:** [www.floridabirdingtrail.com](http://www.floridabirdingtrail.com) or call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 850-488-8755.

## GEORGIA'S COLONIAL COAST BIRDING TRAIL



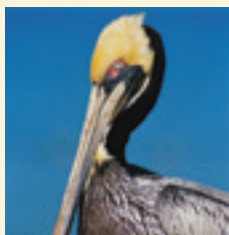
Some of the most splendid salt marshes left in the United States are on the Georgia coast, where they provide a year-round home for clapper rails, marsh wrens, and many other birds. Seasonal movements bring northern harriers, flocks of white ibises, and florid pink roseate spoonbills. Several of the barrier islands are easily reached by bridges and causeways. On the islands' protected beaches and tidal mudflats you'll come across impressive concentrations of birds year-round. American oystercatchers, black and white with long red bills, stalk across the flats, while black skimmers glide low over the shallows. Gulls and terns rest on the beaches at high tide, and piping plovers, red knots, and numerous other shorebirds gather in winter or during migration. Away from the water's edge, the woods of the islands and coast are alive with songbirds. In summertime spectacular **painted buntings** pop up in the thickets, especially in Cumberland Island's semi-wilderness, reached from the mainland only by ferry. At the trail's southwest end lies Okefenokee Swamp. This immense wetland is most easily traversed by canoe or kayak, and more than 100 miles of boat trails invite you to seek out the swamp's birds. **For more information:** <http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us/content/displaycontent.asp?txtDocument=85&txtPage=1> or call the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division at 770-761-3035.

## KENTUCKY'S AUDUBON BIRDING TRAIL



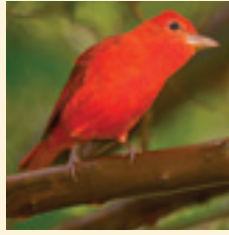
Taken by itself, this is one of the shortest birding trails on the continent, with only three major stops. But it is a must-see historical complement to the 20 wildlife trails that wind their way around the Bluegrass State. It features the area of Henderson, where John James Audubon lived for several years while beginning his epic *Birds of America*. By following the hiking paths in the state park here, you can almost literally walk in his footsteps and perhaps watch descendants of the very birds that inspired the artist two centuries ago: kingly wild turkeys, coveys of northern bobwhites, brilliant golden **prothonotary warblers**, and shaggy-headed belted kingfishers. Along forest streams you're pretty sure to see Louisiana waterthrushes bobbing and teetering at the water's edge and little green herons lurking in the shadows, and hear red-eyed vireos singing repetitive whistled phrases from the treetops. Farther along the trail, lakes and marshy sloughs provide a winter home for migratory waterfowl, including wigeons, American black ducks, mallards, teal, and impressive numbers of Canada geese. Great blue herons stand at attention along the shorelines and build bulky stick nests in colonies high in the trees, just as they did in Audubon's day. **For more information:** [www.trailsrus.com/wildlife/audubontrail.html](http://www.trailsrus.com/wildlife/audubontrail.html).

## AMERICA'S WETLAND BIRDING TRAIL, LOUISIANA



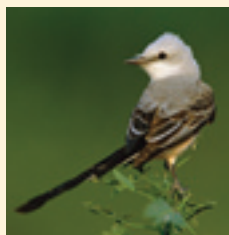
Louisiana's Gulf Coast region forms a generous jambalaya of all the ways that water and land can meet: lakes and rivers, cypress swamps, gum and tupelo bayous, flooded rice fields, freshwater marshes, salt marshes, mudflats, and sandy beaches. When locals say this birding trail crosses "America's wetland," it's no idle boast. But don't take my word for it; find out for yourself by visiting any of the 115 sites along the trail's 12 loops. On the outer coast, **brown pelicans** have recovered from their population crash of decades past, and passing flocks can be seen constantly. Shallow lakes and swamps support a wealth of waders, including snowy egrets, little blue herons, and tricolored herons. Elusive marsh birds are easier to see here than practically anywhere else, and you may get your best looks ever at buffy little least bitterns, rusty-red king rails, and other skulkers. Easier to spot are the flocks of ducks and geese that arrive for the winter, including major populations of greater white-fronted geese and snow geese. If you can tear yourself away from the water, the trail also offers concentrations of warblers, vireos, thrushes, and other migrating songbirds during spring and fall. **For more information:** [www.louisianatravel.com/explore/louisiana\\_birding\\_trails.cfm](http://www.louisianatravel.com/explore/louisiana_birding_trails.cfm) or call the Louisiana Office of Tourism at 225-342-8100.

## NORTH CAROLINA BIRDING TRAIL



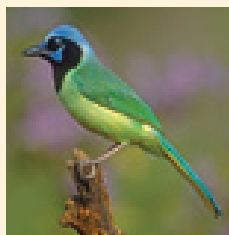
Natural features divide North Carolina neatly into thirds, with mountains in the west, the coastal plain in the east, and the Piedmont Plateau in between. Two sections of a statewide birding trail are finished, and the third, the mountain region, is scheduled to be ready for business by the summer of 2009. Travel this trio of trails for a cross section of some of the best birding on the continent. The coastal plain features the long sweep of the Outer Banks, where the Wright brothers made their first flight and where huge flocks of migratory shorebirds still gather in spring and fall. Waterfowl also abound, and wintering flocks of tundra swans provide a spectacle for winter trips. In the upper coastal plain and the Piedmont's tranquil pine forests, there are parties of brown-headed nuthatches chattering and clambering about the branches like little wind-up toys. Scarlet tanagers and rose-red **summer tanagers** sing from the woods, while indigo buntings and yellow-breasted chats add spots of color in the brushy edges. The western peaks have a Canadian flavor, with dark-eyed juncos and Blackburnian warblers singing from the spruces, a world away from the coast's subtropical feeling. **For more information:** [www.ncbirdingtrail.org](http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org) or call the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission at 866-945-3746.

## GREAT PLAINS TRAIL OF OKLAHOMA



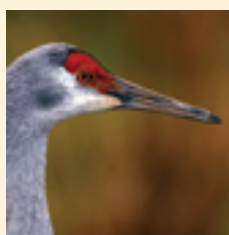
Comprising 13 separate loops in Oklahoma's western half, the trail calls for weeks of exploration. Prepare to be surprised by the diversity of landscapes and their associated birds. Flocks of blue-gray pinyon jays swarm across the slopes in the far west's rugged Black Mesa country; elusive black-capped vireos and rufous-crowned sparrows chatter from thickets in the southwestern Wichita Mountains; and snowy plovers and stately American avocets parade across the glistening flats of the Great Salt Plains. During spring and fall, clouds of Franklin's gulls circle over the fields en route to or from the northern prairies. Winter flocks of bold Harris's sparrows, black-faced and pink-billed, swarm through the riverside thickets. Come anytime in the warmer months and you'll be greeted by Oklahoma's state bird, the gorgeous **scissor-tailed flycatcher**, pale with salmon-pink tinges and streaming tail feathers. Summer is also the time for Mississippi kites, graceful acrobatic raptors that are perhaps more numerous here than anywhere else, wheeling and diving above cottonwood groves on the plains. **For more information:** [www.wildlifedepartment.com/wildlifetrails.htm](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/wildlifetrails.htm) or call the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department at 800-652-6552.

## THE GREAT TEXAS COASTAL BIRDING TRAIL



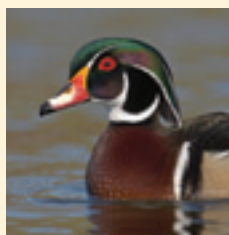
This is where it all started—where the birding trail concept was pioneered in the 1990s. Still luring birdwatchers from all over the world, the Great Texas Coastal Trail offers good birding throughout the year, but the upper coast is at its best in spring migration when songbirds crossing the Gulf of Mexico make landfall. When the timing is right, you'll find trees filled with colorful congregations of warblers, orioles, tanagers, and buntings. Most famous for water birds, the central coast is highlighted by the wintering population of whooping cranes centered in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Now readily seen from November to March, the cranes are not the only spectacles here; you might also encounter shaggy-plumed reddish egrets, blazing pink roseate spoonbills, and beautifully patterned white-tailed hawks. The lower coast trail takes in a magical region where dozens of species spill across the border from Mexico, enlivening the American landscape with a mosaic of surprises—noisy ringed kingfishers, like belted kingfishers on steroids; great kiskadees that seem too colorful for the flycatcher family; and **green jays**, which provide a shocking departure from their relatives' blue tones. **For more information:** [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife\\_trails/coastal/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_trails/coastal/) or call the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at 512-389-4800.

## PANHANDLE PLAINS WILDLIFE TRAIL, TEXAS



The Texas Panhandle's high plains might seem flat at first glance, but the endless horizons, hidden canyons, broad playa lakes, and rugged mesas create an indelible portrait of America's wide-open spaces. Shallow wetlands on the plains provide seasonal stopovers for migrating plovers and sandpipers, traveling between the Arctic and the South American pampas, while serving as winter quarters for noisy hordes of **sandhill cranes** by the tens of thousands. Here you can visit scenes straight out of the Old West, like big prairie dog towns, where you might spot a burrowing owl, a ferruginous hawk, or a flock of mountain plovers. In summer scaled quail give their hoarse scraping calls from fence posts, while brown-toned Cassin's sparrows and flashy lark buntings perform fluttering flight songs over the grasslands. In winter, flocks of longspurs swirl above the same flats—watch for a hunting prairie falcon in close pursuit. For some birders, the prize will be a lesser prairie-chicken. This rare grouse has vanished from some former haunts, but in the Panhandle you can still marvel at the males performing their bizarre stomping and hooting dances at dawn. **For more information:** [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife\\_trails/plains/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_trails/plains/) or call the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at 512-389-4800.

## GREAT RIVER BIRDING TRAIL



When fully completed by the end of this year, the Great River Birding Trail will follow the mighty Mississippi all the way from the Gulf of Mexico north to its headwaters in Minnesota. Detailed county-level maps already connect sites near the river in eastern Louisiana and Arkansas and in western Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Explore any portion of the vast route and you'll come to understand that the river is a vital corridor for birds, worth enjoying and protecting. In shaded backwaters and oxbows near the main river, flocks of rainbow-colored **wood ducks** thrive in all seasons, joined in winter by great flights of mallards and other ducks migrating from farther north. Seemingly endless streams of ospreys, eagles, sandpipers, and plovers participate in the year-round parade of wings overhead. Extensive forests on the riverbanks hold a wide variety of nesting birds, from colorful yellow-throated, hooded, and Kentucky warblers to big raptors like red-shouldered hawks and barred owls. In the maturing bottomland swamps of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, birders can thrill to frequent sightings of big, flashy pileated woodpeckers, while dreaming of the possibility that even bigger woodpeckers might still be lurking among the trees. **For more information:** [www.greatriverbirding.org/index2.php](http://www.greatriverbirding.org/index2.php).