

# Alabama's Dauphin Island: Migration! With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



**April 14 – 19, 2018**

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



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Join us to discover Dauphin Island, one of North America's top spring migration destinations, on this spring bird migration tour. Of Alabama's 445 bird species, 95% have been seen here. This is where migrants first see land after crossing the Gulf; a critical rest and rejuvenation stop.

Spot Neo-tropical migrants; 25 or more species of warblers, including Worm-eating, Swainson's, Cape May, Kentucky, and Prothonotary; and see water, sea, and shorebirds, including Reddish Egret, Magnificent Frigatebird, Roseate Spoonbill, Tricolored Heron, and Snowy, Wilson's, and Piping Plovers.

Indulge on fresh seafood and visit several prime birding spots, hand-picked by your local guide. Take a ferry to Fort Morgan for a history lesson, then cruise the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, aptly called America's Amazon. We also take time to explore a rare pitcher plant bog and search for Swallow-tailed Kite.

## Tour Highlights

- Bird Dauphin Island's migration hotspots, including Shell Mounds Park, The Goat Tree Reserve, Cadillac Square, the East End, Audubon Bird Sanctuary, and Airport Marsh
- Spot 20+ species of warblers, both Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, several vireos, orioles, and both Painted and Indigo Buntings
- Off-Island, explore Grand Bay, and Splinter Hill Bog — one of the largest pitcher plant bogs in the world
- Explore the Dauphin Island Sea Lab
- Enjoy an eco-boat swamp cruise of the lower Mobile-Tensaw Delta and see Bald Eagle, American Alligator, Osprey, cormorants, herons, Brown Pelican, and Nutria

## Tour Summary

6-Day / 5-Night Migration Birding Tour with Andrew Haffenden

\$1,895, from Mobile, Alabama

Airport is Mobile Regional (MOB)



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**Sat., Apr. 14**

## **Arrive in Mobile / Travel to Dauphin Island**

Welcome to Alabama! As our journey begins, you quickly realize why April is the perfect time to be on Dauphin Island. On the way down to the Dauphin Island, we make a quick stop for snacks and supplies, and perhaps pop in to Bayfront Park for Least Bittern, Common Yellowthroat, and Spotted Sandpiper. Once on Dauphin, we bird if there's action, or check in and then go out. In contrast to most birding, the afternoons are often the best on the island; the fastest fliers start to arrive off the Gulf at about 2:00 PM.

From about 4:00 PM onward seems to be the busiest time, and depending on weather, the birds may touch and go, or stay until nightfall.

*Accommodations for the week at Gulf Breeze Motel or similar, Dauphin Island (D)*

## **Sun., Apr. 15 Dauphin Island**

Today is an island day; we hit the hotspots wherever the birds are. With big influxes, these hotspots can be all over the island, though often just one or two areas are birdy, while others are quieter. Our guide, Andrew Haffenden, lives on Dauphin and has been birding solidly over the last few days; his knowledge and networking should have us in the right spots at the right times. The biggest factor is the weather; our order of activities takes this into account. If a day looks slow for migrants, we travel off-island, swapping an activity later in the tour to leave that day open for island birding. Birds in areas like the Delta, Grand Bay, and Splinter Hill Bog are not subject to the same weather constraints as the migrants. The best migrant trap on the island is Shell Mounds Park, and we return repeatedly. Cadillac Square, The Goat Tree Reserve, Audubon Bird Sanctuary, and the East End all warrant stops, usually several times each, as does the Airport Marsh for rails, Seaside Sparrow, Marsh Wren, herons, and egrets. A good birding day on the island yields about 20 species of warblers, several vireos, both Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, orioles, and both Indigo and Painted Buntings. Excellent days can see many of these species number in the 20s and more. Since we're on the Gulf, seafood is popular for dinner tonight.

In addition to the migrants, a few winter birds should still be around, including both Snowy and Piping Plovers and Western Willet, as well as freshly-arrived Eastern Willet. *(B,L,D)*



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## **Mon., Apr. 16 Dauphin Island**

We check the Shell Mounds first thing this morning for lingerers or night arrivals, then head onto Pelican Spit beach. In addition to the well-known neo-tropical migrants, Dauphin offers a wide variety of beach birds, including Reddish Egret; Western, Semipalmated, and Least Sandpipers; Snowy, Piping, Semipalmated, Wilson's, and Black-bellied Plovers; both Eastern and Western Willets; Dunlin; dowitchers; American Oystercatcher; Ruddy Turnstone; a variety of terns, including Least and Gull-billed; and more. Less assured, but regular, are Black-necked Stilt and American Avocet. After Pelican Spit we have a break for lunch, then visit the Estuarium during the quiet part of the day. Part of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, the Estuarium is an exciting and educational aquarium, highlighting the four key habitats of coastal Alabama: The Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, Mobile Bay, the Barrier Islands, and the Northern Gulf of Mexico. The Estuarium showcases the plants, animals, and other natural resources found in the estuary and its surrounding marine habitats. There are exhibits with tanks of unusual ocean creatures, including tiny seahorses, skeletons in touch trays, eggs, and more. There's even a touch tank with rays and sharks. As mid-afternoon approaches, we start to check the warbler traps once again. *(B,L,D)*

## **Tues., Apr. 17 Splinter Hill Bog Preserve / Grand Bay**

This morning we venture off the island and head north to Splinter Hill Bog Preserve, home to a variety of habitats: sandy upland longleaf pine forests, seepage bogs, and inundated small stream swamp forests. Much of the site is covered by one of the largest and most visually-impressive white-topped pitcher plant bogs in the world. Here, we first listen, and then look for Bachman's Sparrow, a number of which should be singing loudly. With patience, they often give good views. Other pine forest birds like Brown-headed Nuthatch are also found here. We then return to the coast, watching for both Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites. After lunch in Forrest Gump's hometown, Bayou La Batre, we look for Whimbrel, snipes, Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers, and many other pine forest birds. We also check the Mississippi Sound for terns and ducks. We then head back to the Island for the afternoon arrival of migrants winging in from the Gulf. *(B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Apr. 18 Five Rivers Delta / Fort Morgan**

Today brings Bald Eagle, Osprey, Alligator, and herons on a Delta Boat Tour. We head off the Island and swing



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around the bay, making a stop at the Blakely Mud Lakes (if good reports have come from here), to catch our 11:00 AM eco-boat swamp tour of the lower Mobile-Tensaw Delta. This is a "must do" for avid nature lovers! The Mobile-Tensaw Delta is Mobile's greatest biological jewel, and an area many think deserves National Park status. We float through the open marsh, watching for a variety of wildlife, including American Alligator, Bald Eagle, Osprey, herons, cormorants, Brown Pelican, and the aquatic mammal, Nutria. Similar to Clapper Rail, we watch and listen for King Rail, found in small areas of habitat here. Our guides share interesting points on the history, geology, ecology, and biology of the Delta. Meagher Park, just across the road from Five Rivers, often turns up good birds, including Groove-billed Ani and Roseate Spoonbill in 2015, and is reliable for Boat-tailed Grackle. We then head down to Fort Morgan, at the end of the peninsula that marks the eastern edge of Mobile Bay. As well as the fort itself, part of Admiral Farragut's "Damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead" battle of Mobile Bay, the grounds are good for migrants in the woods and shorebirds like Golden Plover on the lawns if there's been rain. It's also Alabama's best rarity trap, so we look for surprises, too. We return to Dauphin Island across the mouth of the bay by ferry, sea watching as we go. (B,L,D)



## Thurs., Apr. 19 Dauphin Island / Mobile Airport

Today we depart from the island, but check key spots for a final migration experience before heading to the airport. Plan your flight for after 11:30 AM since we plan to arrive at the airport by 10:30 AM. (B)



## Cost of the Journey

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$1895 DBL / \$2200 SGL per person, based on double occupancy, from Mobile, Alabama. Cost includes five nights' accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground



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transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; and miscellaneous program expenses. Tour price does not include: roundtrip airfare to and from Mobile, Alabama, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages. Please note that the cost of the journey is based on a minimum of 6 participants, with a limit of 12 persons. With fewer than 6 participants, a small-group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per person) may apply, or we may request that you pick up the cost of a few additional dinners in lieu of this surcharge.

## Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Mobile Regional Airport (MOB) by 2:00 PM on April 14. Please book departure flights from 11:30 AM onward on April 19.

*Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.*

## Photo Credits

Cape May Warbler, Peg Abbott (PA); Tricolored Heron, Mike Boyce; Roseate Spoonbill, Betty Andres; American Alligator, PA; Ruby-throated Hummingbird, PA; Prothonotary Warbler, Doug Pratt; Snowy Egrets, Noel Snyder; Blackburnian Warbler, Tom Dove (TD); Least Bittern, TD; Spotted Sandpiper, Mahlon Hale; Great Blue Heron, Sandy Sorkin (SS); Summer Tanager, SS; Osprey with Nest Material, Bud Ferguson; Mississippi Kite, Steve Wolfe; Group Birding, PA; Mobile-Tensaw Delta, PA; Group Birding Dauphin Island Beach, PA; Fish Tacos, PA; White-topped Pitcher Plants, PA; Cerulean Warbler, TD; Bay-breasted Warbler, TD.

