

Alabama's Dauphin Island

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



August 22 – 27, 2021

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Join us to learn about shorebirds and terns on Dauphin Island, one of North America's top birding destinations, on this summer beach bird workshop and fall migrant tour. We spend time on the beach to see and learn both shorebirds and terns in the field, as well as a couple of classroom sessions to add more depth to our identification skills. Many of the shorebirds and terns still retain breeding plumage into August, helping us to distinguish between similar species. Songbird migration is already underway in late August, and we also look for these in Dauphin Island's famous migration hotspots.

Beach birds on the island include American Oystercatcher, all three peeps—a great opportunity for learning—Ruddy Turnstone, Piping, Snowy, Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers, the latter sporting their breeding plumage black bellies, up to eight species of terns, Black Skimmer, Reddish Egret, and others. Early songbirds can include Hooded, Kentucky and Cerulean Warblers, Olive-sided, Acadian and Great-crested Flycatchers, Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks, and many others.

Indulge on fresh seafood and visit several prime birding spots, hand-picked by your local guide. Cruise the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, aptly called America's Amazon, at the height of the American Lotus blooming season. Both Common and Purple Gallinules take advantage of these extensive wading platforms.

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy beach bird workshops both in the field and in a classroom setting with guide Andrew Haffenden, who has been studying these birds on Dauphin Island for both novel, easier ID methods, and to track the movements of banded plovers for over nine years
- Spot up to eight species of tern, including the often confusing juveniles, Black Skimmers, Reddish Egret, four species of plovers, Summer Tanager, several vireos, orioles, and Indigo Bunting
- Explore the Dauphin Island Sea Lab
- Embark an eco-boat swamp cruise of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta and see Bald Eagle, American Alligator, Osprey, gallinules, herons and Prothonotary Warbler

Tour Summary

6-Day / 5-Night Migration Birding Tour w/
Andrew Haffenden
\$1995, from Mobile, Alabama
Airport is Mobile Regional (MOB)

Itinerary



Sun., Aug. 22 Arrive in Mobile | Travel to Dauphin Island

Welcome to Alabama! As our journey begins, you quickly realize why August 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 check a small Winged Pitcher Plant bog. Once on Dauphin we check in and then go out birding for fall migrants and local residents.

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

Mon., Aug. 23 Dauphin Island

This morning we hit the beach early, before many beachgoers head out, though the main season is over and the beach won't be busy. Although Dauphin Island is well known for Neotropical 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; Short-billed Dowitchers; American Oystercatcher; Ruddy Turnstone; and up to eight species of terns, including the smallest, Least, and the largest, Caspian. Black Skimmers breed just offshore, and we hope to see the distinctive brown juveniles as well during our time here. After lunch, during the heat of the day, we do an indoor workshop, using photos to go over what we saw this morning and more to reinforce our field session. There is plenty of time for questions, and we can follow up on any difficulties that our field session brought out. Later in the afternoon we check some of the island hotspots for migrants. Since we're on the Gulf, seafood is popular for dinner tonight—and if experience counts, other nights as well! (B,L,D)

Tues., Aug. 24 Dauphin Island

Today we start early, looking for migrants at the Shell Mounds, then move to the beach for what is largely a repeat of yesterday, weather allowing, which we always monitor and change the itinerary around as necessary. Something we look for each day is banded birds, especially and most likely banded plovers. Dauphin Island is an important wintering ground for Piping Plover—important enough for the island to be declared a Globally Important Bird Area by Birdlife International—and we check each one we see for the tell-tale color bands some wear. Over the last nine years your guide Andrew has been doing just this, and has been relaying resights to the banders in the Great Plains, Canada, and Great Lakes. So depending on who we see we both add ongoing information to the database, and Andrew can also tell us where the bird was banded and when—unless it's a new one, when banding locality is all we can tell until the bander is contacted. We also look for banded Snowy Plover, which breed both on Dauphin and across the bay as well, and any other banded birds, of which a number of species have been recorded here. We test out our new ID knowledge on the shorebirds, and then spend time on the terns as well. We pay special attention to juvenile terns, which with their varying plumages at this age



can be very confusing. One of the wonderful things about Dauphin Island is how close we can usually get to both the shorebirds and the terns. The tides are good for us every day, with no very low tides revealing shoals offshore, where birds like to roost, so they should be on the main beach area. After lunch we once again do some indoor workshopping, especially on terns, then spend the late afternoon looking for migrants. (B,L,D)

Wed., Aug. 25 Mobile-Tensaw Delta

This morning we head off island for a private small boat tour of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. The Mobile-Tensaw Delta is Mobile's greatest biological jewel, and an area many think deserves National Park status; it is increasingly referred to Alabama's Amazon. We float through the open marsh, watching for a variety of wildlife, including American Alligator, Bald Eagle, Osprey, herons, cormorants, both Common and Purple Gallinules, Least Bittern and Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler, and others. The aquatic vegetation also amazes us, especially since we visit at the height of blooming for American Lotus, which can blanket parts of the Delta at this time. Our boat guide, Ben Raines, knows the area intimately, and has produced both an award-winning video and a book about it. We enjoy a late-ish lunch, then return to the island for late afternoon birding. (B,L,D)

Thurs., Aug. 26 Dauphin Island

This morning's activity depend on the last few days—what we've covered and what participants feel is most useful and enjoyable for them. As it's summer, and rain is likely at least once, we have today to also cover anything we missed. Most likely though we start at the tiny airport, in search of accommodating Clapper Rails, if we haven't already been here and had good views one evening. We also likely see a couple of young Osprey annoying their parents for more food, and we may be able to entice a Seaside Sparrow to pop up and show itself. We do also expect to spend some time on the beach, especially to reinforce our knowledge of the terns. After lunch we visit the Estuarium. 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. (B,L,D)

Fri., Aug. 27 Dauphin Island | Mobile Airport

Today we depart from the island, but check key spots for final birding before heading to the airport. Early afternoon flights are best, allowing for more time this morning. Please plan flights out after NOON. (B)

Guide Andrew Haffenden



Andrew started in the tourist industry in 1968 on Australia's Dunk Island, then worked in the Melbourne Zoo's reptile department, followed by a stint at the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. Here he did field work, supported by captive studies, on Brolgas, Sarus Cranes, Magpie Geese, Herbert River Ringtail Possums, Longtailed Pygmy Possums and a few others. He also participated in captive studies of tree kangaroos, antechinuses and leatherback turtles. In 1986 he started a small eco-tour company in North Queensland, which grew into a nature and adventure company. Once Andrew moved to the US, he was responsible for tours to the Pacific, Southeast Asia, Chile and Alaska, before starting Nature Travel Specialists in 2003. He resides in the peaceful birding haven of Dauphin Island where he developed his interest in shorebirds and started monitoring banded plovers. For the last several years he has been part of Alabama Audubon's beach bird nesting studies, searching for nest

Oystercatchers, Least Terns, Black Skimmers, Snowy Plovers and Wilson's Plovers, nest monitoring and protection, banding and following the growth of chicks. Helping out with turtle nest searches and occasional stranded or dead marine mammals, and rescuing injured birds are also part of his life on the island.

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.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Mobile Regional Airport (MOB) by 2:00 PM on August 22. Please book departure flights from 12:00 PM onward on August 27.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$1995 DBL / \$2395 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 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, portorage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages.

Photo Credits

Black Skimmers, Carlos Sanchez (CS) Tricolored Heron, Mike Boyce; Roseate Spoonbill, Betty Andres; American Alligator, PA; Ruddy Turnstone, CS; Group Birding, NJ Stock; Snowy Egrets, Noel Snyder; Royal Terns, Paul Roberts; Pitcher Plants, NJ Stock; Semipalmated Plover, NJ Stock; Tricolored Heron, CS; Willet, CS.

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