

# Shorebird School on Alabama's Dauphin Island with Naturalist Journeys



**April 23 – 28, 2024**

866.900.1146

520.558.1146

[travel@naturalistjourneys.com](mailto:travel@naturalistjourneys.com)

[www.naturalistjourneys.com](http://www.naturalistjourneys.com)

or find us on Facebook & Instagram  
at Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Naturalist Journeys, LLC PO Box 16545 Portal, AZ 85632 PH: 520.558.1146 | 866.900.1146

[naturalistjourneys.com](http://naturalistjourneys.com) | [travel@naturalistjourneys.com](mailto:travel@naturalistjourneys.com)

Join us to learn about shorebirds and terns on Dauphin Island, one of North America's top birding destinations, on this spring beach bird workshop and spring 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. Shorebirds and terns are in breeding plumage, helping us to distinguish between similar species. Songbird migration is already underway, 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. 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 start 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 Shorebird Workshop

\$2290 DBL / \$2690 SGL, from Mobile, Alabama

Airport is Mobile Regional (MOB)

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Tues., Apr. 23 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 check a small Winged Pitcher Plant bog. Once on Dauphin we check in and then go out birding for spring migrants and local residents.

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

### Wed., Apr. 24 Dauphin Island

This morning we hit the beach early, before many beachgoers head out. 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. 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)*

### **Thurs., Apr. 25 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 workshoping, especially on terns, then spend the late afternoon looking for migrants. *(B,L,D)*

### **Fri., Apr. 26 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; American Lotus can blanket parts of the Delta at times. 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)*

### **Sat., Apr. 27 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. Most likely though we start at the tiny airport, in search of accommodating Clapper Rail, if we haven't already been here and had good views one evening. 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)*

## **Sun., Apr. 28 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)

## **Tour Details**

### **Plan Ahead!**

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance.

### **Cost of the Journey**

Cost of the journey is \$2290 DBL / \$2690 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, portage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages.

### **Travel Information**

Please plan to arrive at Mobile Regional Airport (MOB) by 2:00 PM on April 23. Please book departure flights from 12:00 PM onward on April 28.

### **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;

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