



Alabama's Dauphin Island: Migration!
Trip Report
April 17 - 22, 2016
With Guides Andrew Haffenden & Dodie Logue, and 8 Participants Diane, Debbie, Gay, John, Judy, Regina, Marilyn & Maria



Sun., Apr. 17 Arrivals in Mobile / Travel to Dauphin Island



The adventure begins! Around 1:00 PM three participants were picked up at the airport and the rest at the Hilton Homewood Suites Hotel since they had arrived the day before. We headed to the island, making a quick stop at the local Greer's Market to get some provisions and by 3:00 we were by the coast at the Gulf Breeze Motel.

Our local guide, Andrew, was there to meet us and we got checked into our rooms. By 3:30 we were out birding; we first stopped at Cadillac Park where we had Indigo and

Painted Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, Wood Thrush, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Next we stopped at the Cemetery where we had Chuck-will's-widow on a branch in a tall tree — we needed the scope to see it well.



Next we were off to the island's main hot-spot, the Shell Mounds. Here we had looks at Yellow-throated Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Bobolink, and Scarlet and Summer Tanagers — a good start!

Tonight's dinner was at Islanders — close enough to walk back to our motel, which was nice. Local seafood was a hit. We did the day's checklist before heading back to our rooms; some had started the day very early and it had been a long one.

Mon., Apr. 18 Dauphin Island Hot Spots

This morning we had the first of many breakfasts at Pirates Pleasure, a café at a funky Art-Deco Golf Course on the water. They were nice enough to open early for us so we can get out for the birds.



After breakfast we went to the Shell Mounds where we highlights included seeing Veery, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Blackpoll Warbler. The weather was beautiful — good for our comfort, but sometimes this means the birds fly by without stopping at the island. Still, the birding was quite good. Next we hit the Audubon Sanctuary. This is a large, preserved track of land that includes a freshwater pond, on the southeast side of the island. Here we saw Mottled Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Eastern Kingbird, Osprey, and heard a small group of Brown-headed Nuthatch that we could never see.



We next drove to the eastern end of the island and scoped a spit of land across from the Fort Morgan Ferry launch. On the sandy shore were Skimmer and Gull-billed, Royal, and Sandwich Terns, as well as Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling. It was time for lunch, and we headed to JT's on the Water, where we watched Brown Pelican and gulls while we enjoyed seafood fare.

After a short break, we checked out various Bottle-brush bushes — the blooming-spangly red flowers are very attractive to a wide variety of birds. We all enjoyed seeing Cape May Warbler in a spectrum of plumage.



A little local drama ensued. We came upon a local guy who had a Sora that his cat had caught and injured; Andrew took it and after assessing it, discovered it was actually just fine and he let it go by a marsh. A joyful turn of events we could celebrate over dinner which was at a good Italian restaurant right down the road.



Today we needed to get an early start so we had pre-breakfast at our hotel before setting off for Splinter Hill. We stopped to get gas and check the station walls for moths, of which there were two: a lovely Rosy Maple Moth and a Southern Pine Sphinx. Some had a second breakfast here or a snack.

In another 20 minutes we were at Splinter Hill Bog, home to a variety of habitats, from sandy upland longleaf pine forests to seepage bogs to inundated small stream swamp forests. Much of the site is covered by some of the largest

and most visually impressive white-topped pitcher plant bogs in the world. Bachman's Sparrow was heard singing right off the bat, perched in a nearby pine. We had good looks in the scope as it continued throwing back its little head to belt out its song. Along the pathway we enjoyed the lovely pitcher plants, as well as Sundews, another carnivorous plant, and lots of birdsong but only a few sightings. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Eastern Towhee were seen. After a leisurely stroll out to the end of the boardwalk and back we loaded up and went back over the Dolly Parton Bridge on our way to Bayou La Batre for lunch. We stopped at Leroy Hill's farm pond where we had many Whimbrel, Canada Geese, terns, and an Eastern Meadowlark.



Next we went to Bayou La Batre, home of Forrest Gump, for a fusion lunch at Phenom Phen. After lunch we drove the Codon Road, along the coast, where we had great looks and comparisons of a variety of terns on the pilings. We also pulled over at a farm where we had fly-over White Ibis, and a white-faced Fox Squirrel.

It had been a long day, and we went back to our motel for a break. Some of us went out for a bit before dinner, stopping at a home on the east end of the golf course that had feeders. Here we saw Bobolink, Lark Sparrow, and Chipping Sparrow, and were treated to some southern hospitality as the owner welcomed us into her home and up to her deck, which afford a great view of the feeding station!

Dinner tonight was at Barnacle Bills, where most of us enjoyed seafood and desert, including Key Lime Pie.



Wed., Apr. 20 Pelican Spit Shorebirds / Fort Morgan / Airport

This morning we had our usual Pirates Pleasure Golf Course breakfast. Afterwards we all headed out to Pelican Spit for a beach/shorebird walk and tutorial by Andrew. It was a perfect day, overcast with just a slight breeze to keep us comfortable. On our walk we saw and studied Piping, Semipalmated, Wilson's, and Black-bellied Plovers; Caspian, Royal, and Least Terns, and other sandpipers, gulls, and egrets. It was a beautiful day and we all appreciated Andrew's knowledge and patience. I think we all learned something about how to start deciphering the variety of birds along the beaches.



After our morning walk we took a short break, then had lunch at Islanders. In the afternoon we headed to the far east side of the island and took the ferry across to Fort Morgan. We didn't have much time on the island since we needed to catch the ferry back in an hour and a half. We used the rest rooms right as we debarked the ferry, and in the tall pines here we heard, then saw a Pine Warbler. Next we drove through the fort compound and scanned the grasses; there wasn't much around but we saw some Killdeer and Bobolink. We drove around the backside and took a short walk where we flushed a Common Nighthawk — it landed on a wire and we had good looks. On the way back to our motel

to get cleaned up for dinner we stopped by some Bottlebrush and had the usual warblers, (I won't mention the stuck van). Next we checked out the airport, where we had amazing views of Clapper Rail and Sora.

Tonight as everyone enjoyed the fresh seafood, we dined at Barnacle Bill's again.

Thurs., Apr. 21 Five Rivers Delta / Dauphin Island

Once again our usual breakfast at Pirates, really the only place on the Island to have an early group breakfast. Afterwards we went to check out the island's airport, where we saw an Osprey on the ground — it was there when we arrived, and still there 20 minutes later when we left ... we hope it was okay. Some also saw, and most heard, Marsh Wren, and Clapper Rail and Sora were heard as well.

Today we planned to be on the water, exploring the "Amazon of North America". We made a brief pit stop at the Circle K for water, then we drove towards Mobile to the top of the Delta for our Five Rivers Boat Tour. We stopped at the gift shop, and some of us birded the tall pines next to the parking lot. Here we saw Carolina Chickadee and Eastern Towhee, and saw an Eastern Bluebird using a nest box. On our tour we saw Alligators, herons, Delta Lily flowers, and Cliff Swallow. It was an enjoyable time, with perfect overcast weather.



Next we went to the Oyster House for lunch, where most of us enjoyed a seafood meal. Portions were large, enough that many took it

easy that night on dinner!

After the hour drive back to the island, we stopped at the Estuarium. We were just in time for the feeding of the rays, where we were able to reach into the water and touch the passing creatures. We looked at the displays and some browsed the gift shop.

We passed by some Bottlebrush on the way home to have a last look and saw a male Baltimore Oriole, Orchard Oriole, and the usual warblers. We took a short break and enjoyed our last night's dinner at the Italian restaurant, just a few blocks from our motel, so we were able to enjoy an evening walk home.

Fri., Apr. 22 Dauphin Island / Departures

This morning we were once again up and at Pirates by 7:00 AM. En-route we saw a Virginia Rail leave one of the ditches, and some saw a Red Fox as we arrived at the airport.

After our usual breakfast we went off to the Audubon Sanctuary. It had rained the previous night and there were puddles and much moisture — the mosquitos were out! But we made our way to the dock overlooking a small pond and we had great looks at a Least Bittern. It was birdy this morning; we saw Northern Waterthrush and Blackpoll, Pine, Prothonotary, and Hooded Warblers. We next made our way to the Shell Mounds, where we had looks at some of the usual suspects: Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting, and Orchard Oriole. We checked out some Bottlebrush, which were quiet, and made our way to our lodgings to clean up and finish packing.



After check-out at 11:00 AM, some went their separate ways — John and Judy headed off in their car. The rest of us took a last look at the Bottlebrush right down the road, where we finally had great looks at Brown-headed Nuthatch, going in a nest hole! Gay and Andrew went off for a bit more birding, and Dodie took the rest of the group to the airport for their departures or rental cars.

While we didn't experience a migration "fallout," we had lots of great birds — 142 species total and 18 Warblers — good food and company, and a fun time. Thank you all for joining us on this trip!

Photo Credits: Hooded Warbler, Tom Dove (TD); Summer Tanager (TD); Andrew Haffenden, Peg Abbott (PA); Blue-winged Teal, TD; Royal Tern, Greg Smith (GS); Cape May Warbler, PA; Bachman's Sparrow, PA; Whimbrel, GS; Snowy Egret, PA; Sora, DP; Mobile Delta Scenic, PA; Prothonotary Warbler, Doug Pratt (DP), Indigo Bunting, DP.

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