

Birding Guide

*Beautiful, bountiful birding blends
with your Bay City area vacation*



Few places on earth enjoy the variety and splendor of birding that Matagorda County (MC) does. It has rated first in the nation since 1997 going by the North American Audubon Christmas Bird Count—with a total of 234 distinct species spotted during just that short period.

On an annual basis, the number of species seen rises to over 300 of the 664 species which the Lone Star State boasts.

This birding blessing comes from a varied combination of lush habitats: Bogs, fens,

marshes, beaches, forests, woodlands, grasslands (prairies), scrub/shrub and more, plus local parks and both urban and suburban areas.

Why this richness?

Overhead, a remarkable, but invisible, flyway brings a series of significant waves of migrating birds here each spring. It's a sort of avian interstate with MC as a full-service, initial rest stop for these exhausted, winged travelers. And this provides this wealth of opportunities for all levels of birding fans.



Getting Started

Whether you're a casual, new birdwatcher; a parent who longs to share nature with their kids; a serious, life-list-carrying-birder-of-record or an eco-tourist hoping to help preserve the planet for the next generations—you've come to a good place to start or to extend your love of birds and untouched nature.

In Matagorda County, you can walk paved trails at your own pace and observe varied and abundant fauna and over-the-top flora. Or, hire a guide and motor out to sandbars and islands to seek the even most exotic avian visitors.

Wherever you venture here, you're likely to run into an educator, historian or artificer. You might even pass by a nondescript member of our world-class Mad Island Birding Team.



Introducing the local levels

For convenience and safety, we'll suggest a broad selection of possible places to choose from.

LEVEL ONE: Local parks and the Center. Easy walking. Safe for kids, etc.

LEVEL TWO: Places you can bird by car or bicycle as well as other means.

LEVEL THREE: On your own and off the beaten track. Some normal wildlife risks and challenges will be in view.

LEVEL FOUR: For the most competitive. Perhaps, just a bit harder to find and to transit and not necessarily for the inexperienced.

LEVEL FIVE: Areas with additional wildlife which can be swampy or difficult to navigate on foot. Snakes and large alligators may be common, though manageable by those familiar with them. May have an admission fee or other cost.



Amistad Park is a good second choice, but generally has somewhat fewer birds due to its habitat. It's located at 1708 Ave. C in Bay City.

Directions: From Hwy 35 turn right on Avenue C. Go through the stop sign and it's two blocks down on your left side.

Both parks are free and open from dawn until dusk, Monday through Sunday. For details and additional sites, visit: cityofbaycity.org

LEVEL ONE:

LeTulle Park is a Bay City park with ponds, but safe for children under normal supervision. It's located at 1135 Hwy 35S in Bay City.

What to see: Mockingbirds, American Robins, Sparrows, various Finches, common Blackbirds, several types of Doves, Hummingbirds and other backyard birds which will be easy for kids to see and learn to identify. Some may nest here as well.

Directions: Take Hwy 35S past the Colorado River and canal. It's on the left about 3 miles from town and lies adjacent to the Bay City Country Club



LEVEL TWO:

Lookout Point offers well over 130 species each year including Diving Ducks and Loons, as well as Copious Shorebirds and Wading Birds thanks to its combination of exposed reefs and marshland.

Directions: From Bay City go west on Hwy 35S/7th St toward Palacios, continue to follow Hwy 35 S for 28 miles. Then continue straight onto 1st Street for about one mile, then Hwy 35 BUS W/Main Street. Finally, turn left onto Margerum Street, the Point will be on your right

Bayshore Drive promises a rich collection (depending on season) as you look out on Tres Palacios Bay and the adjacent marshes. Here you may spot Common Loons, Eared Grebes, Redhead, Common Goldeneye, and Red-breasted Merganser (all ducks) as well as Long-billed Curlews and the usual Gulf Coast collection of Gulls, Terns and Shorebirds.

Directions: From Bay City head west on Hwy 35S/7th Street toward Palacios, then continue to follow Hwy 35 S for approximately 27 miles. Turn left onto FM 2853 S, then turn right onto Bayshore Drive. Pass by the Prosperity Bank (on the left). Go another 2.7 miles, then turn left.



LEVEL THREE:

Oyster Lake Road and Park can be a magical place with over 200 species depending on the season. Moving off the beaten track or on a dirt road you'll often find Diving Ducks and Loons. In winters, look for American Oystercatchers, terns, gulls and shorebirds on both the bay and the lake. Countless Shorebirds and Wading Birds work the exposed reefs and in the salt marshes.

Directions: Beginning in Matagorda, use Highway 60N to FM 521, then turn left and head west to FM1095. Now turn left and go south to County Road 365. Then continue south on 365. The park lies at the end of the road.

CR383/CR381 Sod Farm Area are hideouts for the Upland and Buff-Bellied Sandpipers, American Golden-Plovers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Pipits, Horned Lark.

More, try for the occasional Peregrine Falcon as well as other shorebirds each Spring.

Directions: from Bay City take Hwy 35S/7th Street toward Markham and continue to follow Hwy 35S, then turn left onto FM1468, go 11 miles, then turn right onto FM521W, go four miles then turn left onto Henry Road. It's 1.6 miles to a left turn on Domorad Road. Sod Farm will be on your right.

Matagorda East Gulf Road

offers a mix of wetlands, pasture and thorn scrub which host Raptors in winter as well as Terns, Gulls and Shorebirds.

Directions: From Bay City, head south on Hwy60 S/Avenue F. Continue to follow Hwy 60 S for 3 miles.

When you reach the traffic circle, stay straight to stay on Hwy 60 S for another 17 miles. Then turn left onto S. Gulf Road and this birding site will be on your left.

Oyster Lake spot is magical when the legendary Sandhill Cranes roost in the marsh. "It is a lifetime experience to look up into the



red sunset as they fly low, necks extended with their friendly but rasping calls,” said one birding pro. Ever present are a good variety of Ducks, Wading Birds and Rails.

Directions: Go west on Hwy 35S/7th St toward Avenue F for about 12 miles, then turn left on FM1095 and go almost 15 miles. Then, turn left onto Oyster Lake Road and go about 9 miles. The site will then be on your left.

Port of Palacios starts with the parking lot between King of God statue and the turning basin. The Port side has Cormorants, Loons,

Ospreys, Gulls, Kingfishers and more. On the Statue side there is also a plentiful selection of Herons and Egrets.

Directions: First, go west on Hwy 35S/7th St toward Palacios for 28 miles. Then continue straight onto First Street for just under one mile. Then travel one-half mile on Main Street. Lastly, turn left onto 6th Street. The site will then be on your left.



LEVEL FOUR:

Riverside Park, at 7330 FM 2668 in Bay City, offers over 180 species of birds, featuring Bald Eagles, Caracaras, Vultures, Cardinals, Bluebirds, and more, plus a variety of non-avian wildlife to watch: White-tailed Deer, Bobcats, Foxes, Raccoons, Alligators, Turtles and Armadillos.

Directions: Take Hwy. 60 S. to the roundabout and take the first right, proceed for about 1.5 miles on FM 2668, look for the Riverside Park and Rio Colorado sign. Turn right and proceed for about 2 miles past the golf course, where the road curves, then over the railroad tracks and the canal into the park. It's some 7 miles from downtown Bay City.





LEVEL FIVE:

Most, if not all Level 5 sites currently have a fee or other restrictions—such as seasons—Matagorda Bay Birdfest offers rare access to some of these birding sites. Guided trips take you through marshes, prairies, beaches, and private preserves.

Not completely free, but worth a visit for all levels —The Matagorda County Birding Nature Center.

The Matagorda County Birding Nature Center (mcbnc.org) is located on 38 acres alongside the Colorado River just outside Bay City with two miles of trails which go through several habitats and gardens which have an abundance of large, mature old trees. The gardens are rose, pollinator, palm, hummingbird and butterfly—each focused on attracting something different.



There is also a pavilion along the river with tables and restrooms where you can picnic. At the water features you may see wading birds, turtles and the occasional alligator. Note too, that there is a photo blind at the rear area, on one of the water features.

The Birding Nature Center is involved in education as well. Each summer they do an Environmental Science Camp for youngsters aged 10 to 13.

They wrap up with a little time on the kid-centered zipline. It is their aim to encourage young people to get interested in science, nature and birding.

The Birding Nature Center is a major organizer of the Christmas Bird Count each December.





Matagorda County has led the nation in the number of species counted for 27 of the last 32 years. If you are interested in participating in the Count, contact the Birding Nature Center at: 979-245-3336

Directions: The address is 1025 Hwy 35 S. It is just before you get to LeTulle Park if coming from

Bay City and has a big gate with a yellow name Birding Nature Center over the gate.



Celebrating Birds:

Festival & Murals in Matagorda County

Discover Matagorda County's bird-inspired murals—vibrant works of public art that transform walls into canvases and celebrate the incredible wildlife that makes this the Birding Capital of Texas. Don't miss Wings by Zenaib and Bird of a Feather by the Art League of Bay City.



Bird of a Feather - Art League of Bay City



Wings - Zeinab Ghais, Owner of Art Hauz and Owner-Operator of Studio ZG.



Matagorda Bay BIRDFEST PALACIOS, TX



Birdfest is more than a celebration; it's an invitation to connect people with birds and the natural world. The festival highlights the remarkable diversity of bird species recorded through Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, while also inspiring participation in both science and art. At its heart, Birdfest encourages awareness and stewardship of the Matagorda Bay ecosystem, fostering a deeper appreciation for the wildlife and habitats that make this region so unique. | matagordabaybirdfest.org

MATAGORDA COUNTY: BIRDING CAPITAL OF TEXAS

Officially designated by Texas Senate Concurrent Resolution 30, Matagorda County proudly holds the title of Birding Capital of Texas—a recognition of its extraordinary bird diversity, prime coastal habitats, and growing reputation as one of the most rewarding birdwatching destinations in the state.



Located where river, bay, and prairie converge, Matagorda County provides critical habitats for hundreds of resident and migratory bird species. With more than 300 species recorded annually, birders of all levels flock here to experience the thrill of spotting everything from vibrant warblers and shorebirds to raptors and rare coastal visitors.

This designation isn't just a title—it's a celebration of the region's natural beauty, a commitment to conservation, and an invitation to birders, ecotourists, and nature lovers to experience one of Texas' most biologically rich landscapes.

Whether you're exploring the serene marshes of Mad Island, the coastal prairies, or the quiet backroads, every corner of Matagorda County offers a front-row seat to one of the most spectacular birding scenes in the state.

Welcome to the Birding Capital of Texas—where the wild truly takes flight.





Besides birding, Bay City offers plenty to explore.

Paddle or cast a line along the scenic Colorado River, with easy access from Riverside Park, perfect for kayaking, fishing, and watching wildlife.



Enjoy a walkable downtown filled with Texas charm, where family-owned shops, antique treasures, and artisan goods line the historic streets.

Step under the grand portico and open the doors of history at the Matagorda County Museum, located in Matagorda County's first federal building—a stately former post office now home to exhibits and hands-on learning for kids.



Outdoors, unwind at Matagorda Beach, hike local trails, or tee off at the Rio Colorado Golf Course. For more attractions, events, and travel tips, visit: visitbaycitytx.org

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Matagorda County is a part of two loops on the Central Texas Coast - Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail: the Tres Palacios Loop and the Rio Colorado Loop. For more information: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wildlife/wildlife-trails/ctc>





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