

SPRING BIRD MIGRATION ON THE UPPER TEXAS COAST

Houston and the Upper Texas Coast are critical resting spots for birds on the Central Flyway, a migratory route that generally follows the Great Plains northward from the Gulf Coast through the U.S. and Canada. One out of every three birds migrating through the U.S. in the spring passes through Texas, relying on the diverse and rich habitats, particularly along the Gulf of Mexico's coastal plain which is prime real estate for resident coastal birds and long-distance migrants.



Each spring, millions of birds are driven north by the urge to establish breeding territories and select mates. Many species of these migratory birds, often referred to as neotropical migrants, nest in North America and spend winter in Latin America. Twice each year, these birds migrate the long distances between wintering grounds and spring nesting locations.



Beginning in early March, migrants reach the tip of the Yucatan peninsula and if the weather conditions are favorable, just after sunset, migrants leave Mexico and head north across the Gulf of Mexico. The trip across the Gulf is 600 miles and with good weather takes about 18 hours. Arriving on the Texas coast midday, some of these birds stop on the coast; but most will fly inland until nightfall. If these birds do hit bad weather on their journey, the Houston-Galveston region acts as a “fire escape,” providing the perfect habitat to rest and refuel until the weather passes and they can continue their journey.

By mid-April spring migration is in full swing with the possibility of great birding throughout the Upper Texas Coast. To many, spring migration on the Upper Texas Coast is synonymous with Houston Audubon's sanctuaries at High Island. Birders from all over the world return to High Island each spring to participate in the unique experience of Smith Oaks Rookery, Boys Scout Woods, and other sanctuaries. Our Horseshoe Marsh and Bolivar Flats shorebird sanctuaries on the Bolivar Peninsula are equally famous. Among the many other excellent coastal locations for spring migrants on the coast are Dos Vacas Muertas Sanctuary on Galveston Island and Anahuac NWR.