

## Birding Locations

### BIRDING LOCATIONS ACCESSIBLE BY CAR AND FOOT

#### *Escatawpa Trail*

Access to this portion of the Grand Bay NWR is at the Mississippi Welcome Center on westbound I-10, just west of exit 75. The trail begins on the west side of the Welcome Center and makes a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile loop through pine savanna and along a hardwood tree-lined bank of the Escatawpa River.

The savanna here is the only known location at Grand Bay that hosts Bachman's Sparrows. Other savanna birds include: Summer Tanagers, House and Sedge Wrens, Henslow's and Swamp Sparrows, Blue Grosbeaks, Loggerhead Shrikes, and many woodpeckers. The hardwoods along the river can be productive during migration.

#### *Pecan Road*

Pecan Road is a loop that both ends and begins on Hwy 90. We refer to the part of the road located to the east of the road's intersection with Bayou Heron Road as East Pecan Road, while the part of the road to the west of the intersection is referred to as West Pecan Road.

Northern Parulas have nested along West Pecan Road, and the oaks can be good for migrants. East Pecan Road has nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers in the dead trees near the train tracks, and hosts the following species in season: Northern Bobwhite, Northern Harrier, Barn Owl, Common Nighthawk, Sedge Wren, Henslow's Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and Yellow-breasted Chat.

#### *Bayou Heron Road*

From the train tracks to the boat launch, Bayou Heron Road passes through a number of habitats, including: pine flatwoods, pine savanna, maritime forest, and salt marsh.

In winter, American Robins line the roadsides. Look for Northern Mockingbirds, Gray Catbirds, Hermit Thrushes, Eastern Bluebirds,



Hawkes' Marsh – Photo courtesy of Gretchen Grammer ©

and Palm Warblers flying across the road. Wilson's Snipe frequent the roadside ditches when they hold water. Orange-crowned Warblers are most easily observed in shrubs along the edge of this road.

### *Power Line Right-of-Way*

Just north of the Coastal Resources Center lies the Power Line Right-of-Way. Follow this corridor west to Hawkes' Marsh, or travel along it eastward through savanna maintained by periodic mowing. The habitat is mowed pine savanna, and is often wet, so wear your boots.

Osprey nest overhead on the towers during spring. In winter, the Right-of-Way is an easily accessible place to find Henslow's Sparrows. Because the vegetation is mowed, the sparrows often perch higher up at the edge of the right-of-way, offering excellent views. Yellow and Virginia Rails have been flushed out of wetter sections.

### *Hawkes' Marsh*

Access the marsh from the power line right-of-way or walk the old road across from the rifle range. Where the right-of-way intersects the marsh, the area to the right is public land, but the area to the left is privately-owned and should be avoided.

The birds using Hawkes' Marsh vary depending on recent rainfall. When it is wet, expect a lot of birds. Wood and Mottled Ducks are usually present, and both teal can be found in season. White Ibises, Anhingas, Bald Eagles, Eastern Kingbirds, and Gull-billed Terns are often seen.



South Rigolets – Photo courtesy of Christina Mohrman ©

### *Coastal Resources Center Savannas*

The pine savannas at Grand Bay are currently burned on an irregular schedule, and the birdlife varies accordingly. Prescribed fire helps keep these savannas open and grassy as they were historically. The most recently burned savannas will look the most open, and should be the most productive bird-wise. Inquire in the Coastal Resources Center to see which savannas you may walk through.

In winter, look for Henslow's, Savannah, and Swamp Sparrows; House and Sedge Wrens; Yellow and Virginia Rails, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and Loggerhead Shrikes. In summer, look for Indigo Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks, Yellow-breasted Chats, Northern Bobwhites, and Summer Tanagers.

### *Oak Grove Birding Trail*

The birding trail starts at the gravel parking lot and heads back along an old driveway towards a grove of oaks. The oaks here are remnants of an old homestead. Side loops venture off the gravel path on both sides near the end, and lead through more hardwood forest.

The birding trail can provide excellent birding for warblers and other migrants during April, May, September, and October. The passage of cold fronts and inclement weather usually bring the most birds. In winter, look for Brown Creepers, both kinglets, Blue-headed Vireos, Hermit Thrushes, and wintering warblers.



Bayou Heron Boat Launch – Photo courtesy of Jake Walker ©

### *Goat Farm*

The Goat Farm is the next pull-off on Bayou Heron Road south of the Birding Trail, on the opposite side of the road. Here, there are two freshwater ponds, an old homestead, freshwater and brackish marshes, and maritime forest. A small manmade hill surrounded by fig trees is located in the center of this site. When the figs are ripe, birds flock to these trees to feed on the delicate fruits.

Olive-sided Flycatchers sometimes sit atop the trees here during fall migration. Look for Sedge Wrens during winter, and try for King, Clapper, Virginia, and Yellow Rails along the marsh edges.

### *Middle Bayou*

This is a small bayou through the salt marsh, accessible by foot via the Goat Farm, or by boat from the north end of Middle Bay. Salt pannes flank both sides where the bayou reaches the tree-line.

Least Bitterns seem to prefer this bayou to other locations at Grand Bay. This could be because it is seldom visited, even by Reserve staff. Shorebirds may use these salt pannes, and the habitat where the forest meets the marsh appears suitable for Black and Yellow Rails.

### *Bayou Heron Boat Launch*

The public boat launch at the end of Bayou Heron Road offers a view of extensive salt marsh, maritime forest and salt pannes. Ospreys and Bald Eagles are often seen from this site.



Grand Bay – Photo courtesy of Jake Walker ©

Pied-billed Grebes and Brown Pelicans roam the bayous. A walk up the road from the launch to the edge of the forest may yield views of Clapper Rails, Marsh and Sedge Wrens, Seaside and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows, and Northern Harriers. Brewer's Blackbirds often roost on the wires in winter. Both Black and Yellow Rails have been observed crossing the road where the marsh meets the maritime forest.

### *Point O' Pines Boat Launch*

The Point O' Pines Boat Launch is located on Grand Batture Road, and provides access to Bayou Cumbest. To reach the launch, turn south on Orange Grove Road from Hwy 90 and continue until you reach Grand Batture Road, and take a left. The boat launch is at the end of the road.

The boat launch is privately owned, and a small fee is requested to launch a vessel. Purple Martins nest in the houses here. Eastern Bluebirds and Orchard Orioles nest here as well. This ramp provides access to the western half of the Reserve, and Bayou Cumbest is more canoe- and kayak-friendly than Bayou Heron.

Many areas of the Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge may be closed to the public, except along public roads and marked trails. Please check at the Grand Bay Coastal Resources Center for a copy of current Refuge rules and regulations.



Bangs Island – Photo courtesy of Jennifer Buchanan ©

## BIRDING LOCATIONS ACCESSIBLE BY CANOE OR KAYAK

The locations listed in this section can be reached easily with a canoe or kayak. Overall, launching at Point O' Pines lets you reach a greater variety of habitats over a shorter distance. Some of the locations in the following section can be reached in a canoe or kayak as well, but all involve paddling long distances over great expanses of open water.

### *Bayou Cumbest*

Bayou Cumbest runs from the community of Orange Grove down through maritime forest, salt marsh, and salt pannes, before emptying into Point aux Chenes Bay at Bangs Island. Waterbirds are somewhat scarce, except at the mouth, but this bayou provides access to all the habitats mentioned above and to Kenny's and Bangs Islands.

### *Kenny's Island*

This island is only an island in the sense that it is higher ground than the marsh around it. It was created in part by the activities of American Indians, who piled up vast quantities of discarded oyster shells. Now the island is half-covered by oaks, and the other half by pines. The northwestern half of the island is privately owned, but the large patches of oaks are public.

Kenny's Island can be spectacular during spring and fall migrations, when warblers, vireos, flycatchers, thrushes, and buntings stop to refuel. Inclement weather often brings the most birds in spring.



Bayou Heron – Photo courtesy of Jennifer Buchanan ©

### *Bangs Island*

Bangs Island is another shell midden, but has little vegetation due to recent hurricanes. Many ducks and other diving birds can be observed from the island. Bangs Island is privately owned, but the shoreline below mean high tide is public.

The island is a great place to look for roosting terns and shorebirds, such as oystercatchers, Willets, Black-bellied Plovers, Marbled Godwits, Black-necked Stilts, and Gull-billed and Least Terns. Least Terns and Wilson's Plovers sometimes nest on the island.

### *Bayou Heron*

Bayou Heron is a fairly deep bayou overall, and many diving birds, pelicans and Ospreys can be found throughout, particularly at the mouth. The shores are lined with black needlerush and smooth cordgrass. Rails, herons, and marsh sparrows are often observed along the edge or in small tidal creeks. A small shell midden south of the boat launch is worth checking for spring migrants. However, this island is privately owned so bird only from your boat.

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Point aux Chenes Bay – Photo courtesy of Gretchen Grammer ©

## BIRDING LOCATIONS ACCESSIBLE BY MOTORBOAT

Overall, Grand Bay is a very shallow system. At low tide, the water at the mouth of Bayou Heron may be only six inches deep. Please watch the tides carefully, and feel free to ask in the Coastal Resources Center about shallow spots around the Reserve. Fiberglass boats over 16' long typically do not do well unless they are built specifically to run in shallow water. Rubber knee boots or hip waders are necessary to land at most locations other than shell middens.

### *Bangs Lake*

Bangs Lake is a large, mostly shallow body of water on the west side of the Reserve. In the winter the lake can be full of ducks, loons, and grebes. Tremendous rafts of Buffleheads, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Loons, and Horned Grebes can be found here.

### *Point aux Chenes*

Point aux Chenes is a large, seldom-visited expanse of marsh and salt pannes in the southwestern corner of the Reserve. The marsh here is very different from the rest of the reserve and resembles a giant dune swale. The marshes are thick with Marsh Wrens, Seaside and Sharp-tailed Sparrows, Clapper Rails, Wilson's Snipe, and Boat-tailed Grackles. The habitat also looks good for Black and Yellow Rails.

The salt pannes at Point aux Chenes are the largest at Grand Bay, and they attract thousands of roosting shorebirds at high tide. During



Point aux Chenes Salt Pannes – Photo courtesy of Gretchen Grammer ©

migration, these groups may include American Golden Plovers, Whimbrels, Long-billed Curlews, Pectoral Sandpipers, and probably Buff-breasted, Upland, and Baird's Sandpipers. Wilson's Plovers, Willets, and Gull-billed Terns nest on the pannes.

Several small ridges run through the marsh where taller, woody vegetation persists. These areas are great for observing raptors, such as Peregrine Falcons, Merlins, Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, and Red-tailed Hawks. Barn Owls roost in this woody vegetation at times, and Short-eared Owls may be sighted as well.

### *Point aux Chenes Bay*

The easiest way to bird Point aux Chenes Bay is to set up a telescope on the shore at Point aux Chenes. Birding the bay is best in winter, when scaup, Redheads, Buffleheads, Common Loons, Northern Gannets, and Horned Grebes are all common. Other winter birds may include all three scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Canvasbacks, and Common Goldeneyes.

### *Jose Bay*

Jose Bay is a small bay on the east side of Point aux Chenes Bay. A large seagrass bed attracts diving ducks to the area. Scaup, Redheads, Red-breasted Mergansers, and scoters are often seen here. At low tide, a small mud island becomes exposed; when it does, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and pelicans flock to it.



Catch 'em All Bar – Photo courtesy of Jake Walker ©

### *Grand Battures Washover*

The Grand Battures is the outer edge of the peninsula separating Point aux Chenes Bay from Grand Bay. The Washover is a mudflat on the west side of the Grand Battures joining the peninsula to a small island. Sand and shell beaches line the outer shore of the Grand Battures; the interior is vegetated with smooth cordgrass and black needlerush.

The Washover is arguably the best birding spot at the Reserve for water birds. Several hundred White Pelicans roost here most of the year, as do thousands of shorebirds. Gulls and terns may be here by the hundreds. Reddish Egrets are almost always present. Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles frequent the area looking for easy targets. If any unusual shorebirds, gulls, terns, or other vagrants find their way to Grand Bay, they are likely to wind up at this location.

In the spring and summer, Least Terns, Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers, Wilson's Plovers, Gull-billed Terns, Willets, Seaside Sparrows, and Mottled Ducks have all nested on the small island. Please do not disturb any nesting birds.

### *Catch 'em All Bar*

This mud bank is located in the North Rigolets, a bayou connecting Grand Bay to Point aux Chenes Bay. When the tide is halfway between low and high, hundreds of shorebirds, gulls, and terns come here to roost. At high tide, the water may be too deep for the birds to stand, while at low tide, the birds are usually out feeding elsewhere.



Freshwater Wetlands – Photo courtesy of Jennifer Buchanan ©

In winter, expect to see Willets, dowitchers, Dunlins, Ruddy Turnstones, Black-bellied Plovers, and both yellowlegs. In spring and fall, add Pectoral Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Gull-billed Tern, and Least Bittern to the list. Seaside Sparrows are abundant in the marshes bordering the bayou here.

### *Grand Bay*

The western side of Grand Bay boasts very high numbers of diving ducks, most likely because of the extensive submerged seagrass beds. Large flocks of 500-1000 scaup and Redheads are regular during winter. Large rafts of Common Loons and Horned Grebes patrol the bay, especially by the small island straight out from the mouth of Bayou Heron.

### *Middle Bay*

Middle Bay extends off the northwest side of Grand Bay. The bay is very shallow and filled with seagrass. The area is a bit more enclosed than Grand Bay and often hosts a number of different dabbling ducks in addition to the divers, such as Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails, Gadwalls, and American Wigeons.

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