

The massive fort and surrounding trails offer a great vantage point for viewing sentinel flycatchers, gray kingbirds, Tennessee, Cape May and magnolia warblers. Fallouts can be seen in April as migrants reach land for the first time. 8 a.m. to sunset. Far western end of Fort Pickens Rd. (850) 934-2600, nps.org/guis



Photo by David Moynahan

12. Gulf Islands National Seashore: Naval Live Oaks. The national park's visitor center on Santa Rosa Sound is also a prime spot

for sighting goldeneye, scaup, ducks, black-and-white warblers. 8 a.m. to sunset. 1801 Gulf Breeze Pkwy., (850) 934-2600, nps.org/guis

13. Garcon Point. A 1.5-mile loop trail runs through live oaks and picturesque wetland. Wet prairie sparrows such as Henslow's and LeConte's can be seen along with pine warblers and Cooper's hawks. Dawn to dusk. 1-10 South of Milton to SR 281/CR191. (Trailhead on east side). (850) 484-5125



Photo by David Moynahan

14. Blackwater River State Park. The Blackwater River is one of the purest in the country and the woods that surround

are ideal for birdwatching. Birders can see broad-winged, red-tailed and re-shouldered hawks along with brown-headed nuthatches, low-billed

cuckoos and hairy woodpeckers along the Chain of Lakes Trail. The Hutton Unit nearby is worth a stop to hear the song of Bachman's sparrows, and the Three Notch Road site is perfect for sighting a red-headed woodpecker. Free binoculars and field guides are available. Dawn to dusk. 7720 Deaton Bridge Rd., (850) 983-5363, floridastateparks.org

Feathery Finds

Osprey: Known as Florida's fishing eagles, osprey have a distinct M wing shape and make their habitat near brackish estuaries where they can scan the surface for fish. Osprey mate for life – birds of a feather really do stay together!



Photo by David Moynahan

Brown Pelican: A symbol of the Gulf Coast, the brown pelican is making a comeback. These water birds weigh 6-7 pounds and have a 7-foot wingspan. The pelicans can fly as fast as 30 miles per hour and can often be seen perched on a piling in the bay.

Blue Heron: These graceful natives can be found along the shoreline hunting for fish. The birds have long legs and a long, S-shaped neck.

What to Bring:

- Binoculars
- Walking Shoes
- Sunscreen
- Bottled Water
- Insect Repellant



Birding in the Pensacola Bay Area

Photo by David Moynahan



Photo by Jim Roberts



Birding in the Pensacola Bay Area

The Pensacola Bay Area is a birder's paradise. Located between two major fly zones, Gulf Islands National Seashore, the longest stretch of protected seashore in the country, is the first stop for hundreds of migrating birds and monarch butterflies flying north in the spring. The Pensacola Bay Area also features bays, bayous, beaches, rivers and woodlands, where more than 300 species of birds call home. So pick up those binoculars and come experience our great outdoors.

1. Gulf Islands National Seashore: Johnson Beach.

Perdido Key is a hotspot for migrating birds in the spring and fall. Watch for pine warblers, towhees, clapper rails, spotted sandpipers and wintering ducks. Fallouts can be seen in April as migrants reach land for the first time. 8 a.m. to sunset. Eastern end of Johnson Beach Rd., (850) 934-2600, nps.org/guis

2. Big Lagoon State Park. Acting as a gateway for the Great Florida Birding Trail, this 600-acre park along the Intracoastal Waterway is home to shorebirds; wintering ducks; dunlin; redhead, bufflehead and red-breasted mergansers; black-bellied plovers, yellow-billed cuckoos and flickers. The park offers five miles of nature trails and a 40-foot observation tower with stunning views. Birders can even stop at the visitor center and borrow a free pair of binoculars. 8 a.m. to sunset. 12301 Gulf Beach Hwy., (850) 492-1595, floridastateparks.org

3. Tarkiln Bayou Reserve State Park.

The 4,200-acre preserve protects rare and endangered plant species such as white-topped pitcher plants, one of two carnivorous plants in the world. The half-mile trail and elevated boardwalk lead to an observation area at the bayou, while the 6.5-mile Perdido Bay Trail leads to the beach. Listen for brown-headed nuthatches, white-eyed vireos, pine warblers and bobwhites. 8 a.m. to sunset. 1.5 miles south of U.S. 98 and County Rd. 293. (850) 492-1595, floridastateparks.org

4. Trout Point. The half-mile boardwalk at NAS Pensacola winds through the interdune area with sandy shore on one side and freshwater marsh on the other. Visitors can find herons, snowy egrets, shorebirds, terns and gulls. Nearby pines are home to songbirds and brown-headed nuthatches. 6 a.m. to dusk. The trail is located a half-mile from the Radford Blvd., security gate. (850) 452-4611

5. ECUA Bayou Marcus Wetlands.

Take the boardwalk through wetlands created by the wastewater treatment facility to see blue-winged teal, hooded merganser, bufflehead and goldeneye. Swamp, song and white-throated sparrows can also be spotted along with the grove-billed ani. 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. 3050 Fayal Dr., (850) 458-1658

6. Edward Ball Nature Trail. The small site on the University of West Florida's campus features a boardwalk through the swamp where birders can spot egrets, northern parulas, summer tanagers and great crested flycatches. Dawn to dusk. 11000 University Pkwy., Building 13, (850) 474-3000, uwf.edu

7. Project GreenShores and Hawkshaw Lagoon Memorial Park. The award-winning restoration project runs along Pensacola Bay downtown, stabilizing

the shoreline and providing essential habitat for wildlife propagation and conservation. The oyster reef and seagrass habitat has attracted as many as 300 water birds, including osprey, pelicans, herons, semipalmated plover and black-necked stilts. Dawn to dusk. Bayfront Pkwy. and 14th Ave. (850) 436-5655

8. Wayside Park.

The waterfront park at Bayou Texar and Pensacola Bay is home to herring, ring-billed and laughing gulls as well as Forster's and royal terns. Birders can also spot loons, osprey and pelicans.

Stop by the Visitor Information Center for more birding and travel resources. 1401 E. Gregory St., (850) 434-1234



Photo by Blair Witherington

9. Shoreline Park South. The small site on Santa Rosa Sound in Gulf Breeze is on the path of migrating birds, perfect for viewing grebes and loons, lesser scaup, bufflehead, goldeneye, Carolina chickadees, orchard orioles, Swainson's thrushes, pileated woodpeckers, black-throated blue and worm-eating warblers. Shoreline Dr. to Colley Dr. (850) 934-5140

10. Pensacola Beach Fishing Pier. From one of the longest piers in the Gulf of Mexico, birders can spot loons, plunging gannets, bridled and sooty terns along with sooty shearwaters. 41 Ft. Pickens Rd., (850) 934-7200, fishpensacolabeachpier.com

11. Gulf Islands National Seashore: Fort Pickens. The island is a hotspot for migrating birds in the spring and fall.



Special thanks to the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission