

Baytown Nature Center: A Jewel in the Texas Coastal Birding Trail

David Dauphin

David T. Dauphin is President of Texas Ornithological Society. He has served on the boards of Houston Audubon Society, Houston Outdoor Nature Club, Texas Ornithological Society, Houston Ornithology Group, Friends of the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, and the Lower Trinity Valley Bird Club. He is past-president of the Houston Ornithology Group, and has spent over 30 years in the study of birds. A member of the Baytown Nature Center Subcommittee, he is co-author of "A Birder's Checklist of the Upper Texas Coast". He is licensed by USFWS as a bird bander. He is the upper coast field host for the new PBS television series, "On the Birding Trail", which is being shown on public television throughout the U.S. He has a B.A. from Sam Houston State University and is employed at Exxon Chemical Company in Baytown.

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David T. Dauphin, Texas Ornithological Society, Baytown, Texas

The Baytown Nature Center, approximately 410 acres, has the potential to be the jewel in the Upper Texas Coast portion of Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept./Texas Department of Transportation's Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. Currently containing over 200 acres of 30+ years old mixed hardwood forest, over 60 acres of created wetlands, over 10 acres of meadow, and 140 acres of lowlands, this site is surrounded of three sides by upper Galveston system nursery bays and contains fresh water ponds and inflow.

The unique combination of varying habitats with salt, brackish, and fresh marshes, fields, and woods attracts a tremendous amount of diverse bird species. Few preserves within the Metroplex and none within 50 miles of the Galveston Bay system can boast the 315 species of birds that have been recorded, here. Several endangered and threatened species of birds utilize this site, either seasonally or annually.

The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, stretching within 50 miles of the coast and running from the Rio Grande to the Sabine River, was established to attract birders, particularly out-of-state birders to Texas. The Upper Texas Coast checklist lists over 475 species of the 613 species of birds that have been found in Texas. Having more than half of Texas bird species, the Baytown Nature Center can boast more species of birds than are on most state's entire lists.

When fully developed for wildlife and wildlife viewing, the Baytown Nature Center will attract a large number of eco-tourists, who will spend their dollars in the nearby area, thus attracting the attention of local officials and businessmen even further.