

Dauphin Island, Alabama



Getting Around the Island

Dauphin Island is a 6.5 mile long barrier island located three miles southwest of the mouth of Mobile Bay in the Gulf of Mexico. Alabama Highway 193 (LeMoyne Dr.) connects it to the mainland and the remainder of Mobile County to the north via a causeway and high-rise bridge. LeMoyne Dr. intersects Bienville Blvd. (Mobile County Road 2) at the water tower (a useful landmark). Bienville Blvd. is the main east-west thoroughfare, extending from one end of the island to the other.

Parking can be problematic on weekends during the peak of migration so careful attention to No Parking signs is a good way to avoid conflicts with private land-owners and parking tickets. Do not block private driveways. At this time, visitors are allowed to park temporarily in the grassy medium on Bienville Blvd. if the vehicle is completely off the pavement.

A **bicycle path** parallels LeMoyne Dr. and Bienville Blvd. from one end of the island to the other. It's an ecofriendly way to get around, there are no hills to climb, and parking is never a problem! Bicycles and street legal golf carts are available for rent from several businesses near the main T-intersection under the water tower.

Public restrooms are located at the ferry landing (upstairs on the north side of the concession west of the ferry), Cadillac Square, the parking area at the Public Beach and Fishing Pier, and West End Park (closed in the fall and winter).

The free **Town of Dauphin Island app** provides the most up-to-date information about restaurants, lodging, shopping, beach access, parking, and directions on the island. This is a good resource when you are on the island as events and businesses may be impacted seasonally by storms and the occasional hurricane.

The **Little Red School House**, 1016 Bienville Boulevard, is the Welcome Center, Museum, Community Center, and Lending Library for the island. The schoolhouse is a must-stop for visitors as there are exhibits on the history of Dauphin Island in addition to information and pictures of interest to bird watchers. Free internet access is provided and there is a well-stocked gift shop for the visitor who wants to take home an island souvenir T-shirt or cap!

Bird Watching Locales on Dauphin Island

Spring and fall migration on Dauphin Island, a Globally Important Bird Area, are the stuff of birding legend and hotspots like Pelican Point, the Audubon Bird Sanctuary, Cadillac Square, the Goat Tree Reserve, the Shell Mounds, the Airport Marsh, and the West End are stops on the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail (ACBT) and well known to the bird watching community. Dauphin Island also has a number of smaller, less well-known locales that can provide excellent bird watching opportunities. In fact, rare and vagrant birds can appear at any place on the island! Descriptions of the bird watching locales that follow are organized from east to west.

East End Locales



Map of the east end of Dauphin Island

1. PELICAN POINT AND EAST END PARK

Eastern terminus of Bienville Blvd, south and east of Fort Gaines (ACBT #43)

In early morning and late afternoon, a variety of seabirds may be found either flying through Mobile Pass or loafing on the rock jetties located just offshore to the southwest of the parking area or foraging in Mobile Pass and offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. The field and underbrush between the parking area at Pelican Point and Fort Gaines often contain interesting passerines and the occasional western vagrant. A spotting scope is recommended to take full advantage of the bird watching opportunities at this locale. Additional facilities in the East End Park include three picnic pavilions and a 250-foot fishing pier located adjacent to the public boat launch north of Fort Gaines.



Beach and jetties southwest of the Pelican Point parking area where large numbers of seabirds and shorebirds congregate



The field and underbrush between Fort Gaines and Pelican Point often harbor species that prefer a short-grass prairie environment.

For the history buff, Fort Gaines is open 9:00 am until 5:00 pm daily. Admission by age is: 5-12 = \$5.00 and 13 and over = \$9.00. <https://www.dauphinisland.org/fort-gaines/>

2. ESTUARIUM AT THE SEA LAB LIVING MARSH AND BOARDWALK

101 Bienville Blvd (north side)

The living marsh boardwalk located between the Estuarium parking area and the ferry inlet (Pass Drury) is an excellent vantage point to observe the southern end of Little Dauphin Island and the area around the ferry landing for a variety of wading birds, seabirds and shorebirds. The small patches of grasses and sea oats adjacent to the boardwalk shouldn't be overlooked as they sometimes contain migrant species that prefer short-grass habitat.

The Estuarium, the public aquarium of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 am until 5:00 pm. Tickets should be purchased prior to arriving as there are designated ticket times. Admission by age is: under 5 = free, 5-18 = \$6.00, 19-59 = \$12.00, and 60 and over = \$10.00. For those interested in learning how Mobile Bay feeds the Gulf of Mexico, there is a two-hour boat excursion in the waters surrounding the island. Tickets are \$30 per person, space is limited, and reservations are required. <https://disl.yapsody.com>

3. MAGNOLIA PARK

Bienville Blvd (north side) between the ferry landing and the Estuarium

Accessible to pedestrians only, this small town park has picnic tables for those walking between the ferry and the Estuarium and Fort Gaines.

4. SEA POINT SAW GRASS SALT MARSH

North of Bienville Blvd, east of Albright Dr.

The marsh and the southern end of Little Dauphin Island are best viewed from the elevated interpretive boardwalk located west of the ferry and BGH Concession at Alonzo Landing (aka Billy Goat Hole). A spotting scope is recommended. **Public restrooms** are located upstairs on the north side of the concession.



One of the interpretive panels on the elevated boardwalk at Sea Point Saw Grass Salt Marsh.

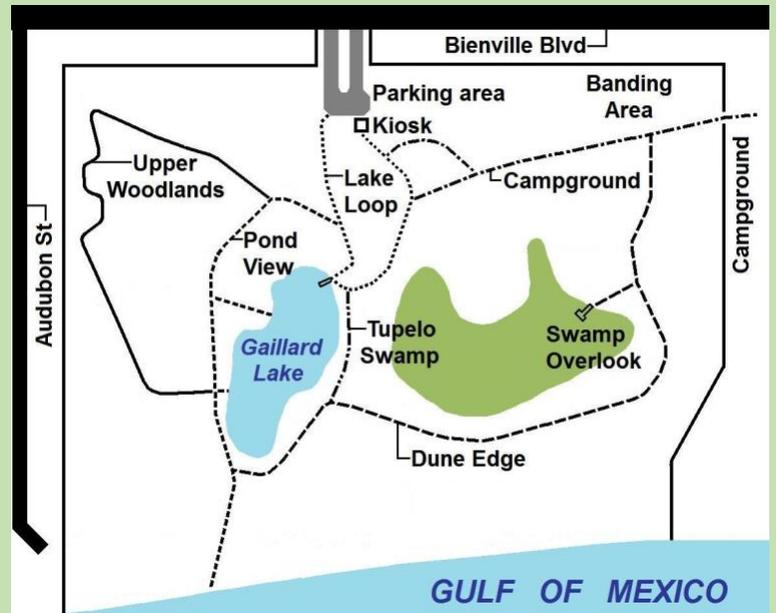


The trailhead in the parking area of the Audubon Sanctuary

5. AUDUBON SANCTUARY

South of Bienville Blvd between Albright and Audubon Sts (ACBT #42)

The northern two-thirds of this 164-acre sanctuary is maritime forest consisting of Loblolly and Slash Pine, Live Oak, Southern Magnolia, and Tupelo Gum. The southern one-third is a large dune field that parallels the Gulf. The sanctuary has several miles of trails and a handicapped-accessible boardwalk that leads to Gaillard Lake from the parking area. Check the information box at the parking area for a Trail Guide and recent sightings. Migrating passerines seem to prefer the oak grove at the "Banding Area" at the east end of the Campground Trail. A careful examination of the trees surrounding Gaillard Lake often reveals several species of herons. There are also resident alligators. The Tupelo swamp area may be dry in late summer and fall. **Parking space is limited and can be a problem at the height of migration!**



Map of Audubon Sanctuary

Note: On August 27-28, 2011, the area east of Gaillard Lake and the Campground and Dune Edge Trails burned. The boardwalks and swamp overlook in that area were destroyed. AOS made a substantial contribution toward the repair of the damaged boardwalk and swamp overlook.

East-central Locales



Map of east-central Dauphin Island

6. CADILLAC SQUARE

South side of Bienville Blvd between Hernando St and Fort Charlotte Ave (ACBT #41)

Site of Governor Cadillac's home and capitol of the Louisiana Territory from 1713 to 1717, the park's old Live Oaks and Pines and underbrush on its periphery attract migrant passerines. Picnic tables and **public restrooms** are available here.



Cadillac Square's canopy of mature live oaks and pines



The Goat Tree Reserve viewed from Cadillac Ave

7. GOAT TREE RESERVE

Northwest corner of Grant St and Cadillac Ave, one block north of Bienville Blvd (ACBT # 40)

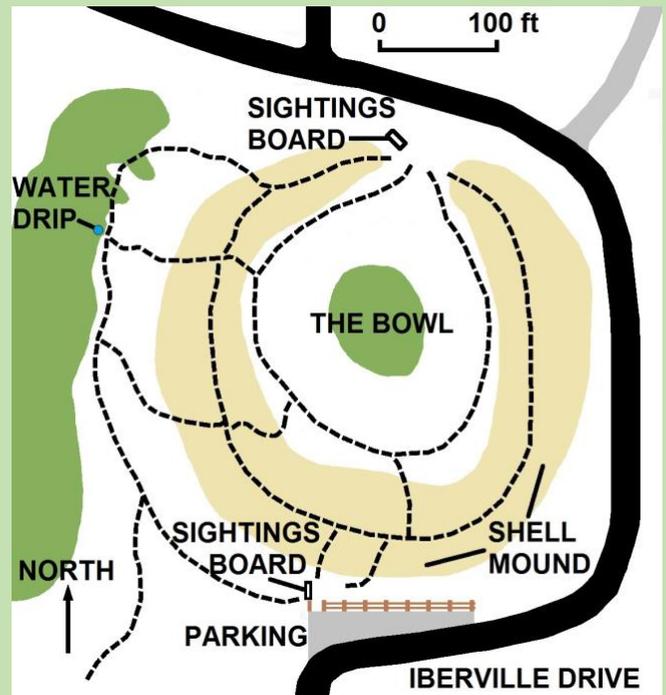
This small park's Live Oak forest and dense undergrowth provide ideal habitat for migrant passerines to rest and refuel. Walk slowly along the trails, sit on one of the benches or walk along the perimeter fence on the south and east sides of the park. **To avoid conflict with other property owners, please park on either Grant St. or on the north side only of Cadillac Ave.**

8. SHELL MOUND PARK

West of Iberville Dr, north of Cadillac Ave, one block north of Bienville Blvd (ACBT #39)

This is the premier bird watching spot for passerines on the island. Walk very slowly along one of the foot paths through the Live Oaks and Cedars or along Iberville Drive or better yet, sit on one of the benches in the "bowl" of the mound or at the water drip west of the mound. Bird watching is typically best in early morning or late afternoon, but during migration, the species change from hour to hour!

During wet periods, the footing in some areas is rather marshy and boots are the suggested footwear. Mosquitoes can be annoying at times but remember that they are food for some bird species! Lastly, due to the wet nature of the park, there are cotton mouth snakes which share the environment, and a watchful eye should be kept on all trails.



Sketch map of the Shell Mound Park



South entrance to the Shell Mounds Park



Birding "the bowl," the marshy depression in the middle of the shell middens

9. ALOE BAY LANDING PARK

North side of Desoto Ave

This small town park offers an excellent opportunity to observe shorebirds and wading birds at rest on the sandbar to the north. There are picnic tables in the park. A spotting scope is recommended to take full advantage of the bird watching at this locale.



Aloe Bay Park looking north towards Mississippi Sound



Map of west-central Dauphin Island

West-central Locales

10. AIRPORT MARSH

Western end of Chaumont Ave (ACBT #44)

Please obey the no trespassing signs and stay off of airport property (Pink areas on the map). Do not walk in the marsh (damage caused by previous visitors is all too obvious). Park at the airport parking area and scan the inlet and pond north of the road and the marsh to the south for wading birds. The scrub at the east end of the pond should be examined for migrant passerines.



Airport Marsh looking southwest from the parking area



Bayou Heron Park looking north toward Mississippi Sound

11. BAYOU HERON PARK

Corner of Cadillac Ave and Penalver St, one block north of Bienville Blvd

At first glance, this small town park may not look like much, but examine the trees and undergrowth at the water's edge and pay particular attention to the small trees in the salt marsh to the north.



The Public Fishing Pier now provides an excellent elevated position from which to watch shorebirds and access to the beach beyond



Marsh vegetation has begun to colonize the spit

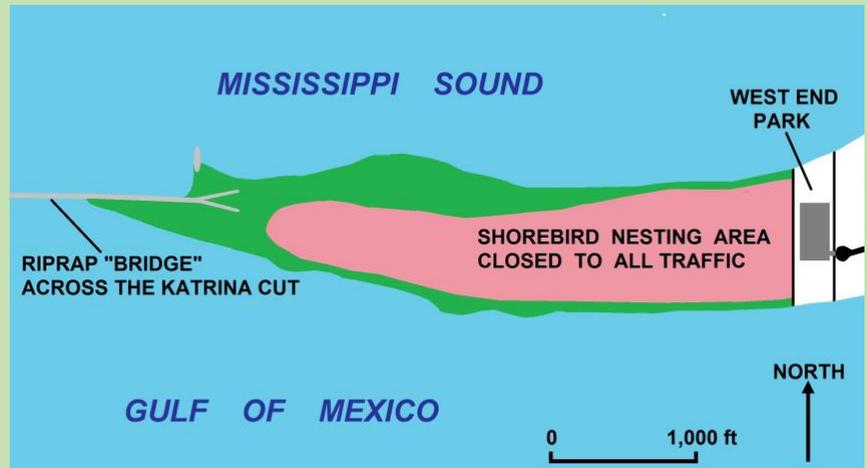
12. PELICAN/SAND ISLAND SPIT (PUBLIC BEACH AND FISHING PIER)

South of Bienville Blvd just west of Dauphin Island Elementary School

As Pelican/Sand Island constantly shifts to the west, it recently joined Dauphin Island at the Public Fishing Pier. Park in the large parking area and follow the boardwalk over the dunes to the 850-foot long pier. The Beach Environmental Fee may be collected during the spring and summer months (car \$6.00, walk-ins \$2.00, RVs, buses, or trailers \$20.00).

During the late fall and winter months, the park gates are open from 8:00 am until 6:00 pm and there is no admission charge. Take a short stroll or a long hike along the margin of the spit or use the pier as an elevated vantage point. Watch for gulls, terns, shorebirds and wading birds resting and feeding along the water's edge near the southern tip. Watch offshore for seabirds and waterfowl. And watch overhead for raptors. Picnic tables and **public restrooms** are available here. A spotting scope is recommended to take full advantage of the bird watching at this locale.

West End Locales



Map of West end of Dauphin Island

13. WEST END PARK

Western terminus of Bienville Blvd (ACBT #45)

Walk the shore between the water and the high-tide line to avoid disturbing nesting habitat for plovers. Large numbers of gulls, terns, shorebirds and wading birds often congregate along the water's edge on the sound side of the west end. Watch for seabirds and waterfowl offshore, shorebirds in the dunes and raptors overhead. Picnic tables and **public restrooms (closed in winter)** are available here. The Beach Environmental Fee may be collected during the spring and summer months when the beach concessions are open (car \$6.00, walk-ins \$2.00, RVs, buses, or trailers \$20.00). During the winter months, the park gates are open from 8:00 am until 6:00 pm and there is no admission charge. A spotting scope is recommended to take full advantage of the bird watching opportunities at this locale. **Roadside parking is not allowed along or at the western terminus of Bienville Blvd. Do not park in driveways.**



The beach west of the concession and parking area in West End Park



The shorebird nesting area is closed to all traffic.



Looking west at the Gulf side of the riprap breakwater/“bridge” across the Katrina Cut



Shorebirds congregate on the Sound side of the west end of Dauphin Island.

Installation of the riprap breakwater across Katrina Cut has altered the landscape of the west end. On the Gulf side of the feature, sand deposition up to the top of the “bridge” is rapidly extending the beach to the west. The Sound side on the other hand has been starved of its supply of sand and has become a broad expanse of tidal flats that attract large numbers of shorebirds at low tide or with a strong south wind.

This document was graciously provided by Alabama Ornithological Society (AOS) to Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuaries, Inc. (DIBS) September 2021. It was slightly updated by DIBS to reflect some pricing increases and location information. All maps, sketches, photographs, and site descriptions were provided by Alabama Ornithological Society.