

# Colonial Coast Birding Itinerary

---



## Looking for the best birding locations along the Georgia Coast?

### Colonial Coast Birding Trail

Georgia's vast network of rivers, marshes, and barrier islands provides ideal habitat for hundreds of species of birds, from nesting wood storks to painted buntings. This "trail" is a string of numerous sites along the Georgia coast straddling U.S. 17 and Interstate 95. Four of the sites (Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Jekyll Island, Cumberland Island, and the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge) have been designated Important Birding Areas (IBAs) by the Georgia Audubon Society. With more than 330 species of birds to watch for, the staffs of visitor centers along the way have maps and plenty of bird-

watching suggestions for both skilled and novice birders. Each site along the Colonial Coast Birding Trail is unique. Many sites offer visitors the opportunity to watch birds and visit 18th and 19th Century historic places. Other sites are located on lands and waters that were once part of early plantations dedicated to growing rice, indigo and cotton. So whether you want to see a bald eagle soaring over a coastal river, an endangered wood stork feeding its gawky young, sanderlings chasing the waves on a sandy beach, or a great egret standing motionless in a placid pond, the Colonial Coast Birding Trail has something for you.

### North to South

#### Tybee Island - North Beach

Description: Tybee Island is the northernmost barrier island on the Georgia coast. This popular vacation destination offers great birding opportunities. One of the best birding spots is located along the beach at the north end of the island.

Types of Birds: Shorebirds, gull-like birds

Best Birding Seasons: Shorebirds (fall, winter, spring), gull-like birds (all)

Specialties: Purple sandpiper, piping plover, northern gannets

#### Skidaway Island State Park

Description: This state park is an island separated from the Atlantic Ocean by salt marsh and Wassaw Island. Skidaway Island State Park is characterized by tidal estuaries, salt marshes, salt flats, tidal rivers and mature maritime forests.

Types of Birds: Songbirds, shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), shorebirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter) Specialties: Osprey, painted bunting, pileated woodpecker, bald eagle

Tips: Warbler watching can be spectacular during spring and fall migrations. Look for nesting osprey in spring and summer. Listen and look for marsh wrens and clapper rails in salt marshes. Look for painted buntings during the spring and summer.

### **Savannah-Ogeechee Canal Museum & Nature Center**

Description: This site contains remnants of an extensive canal system that linked the Savannah and Ogeechee rivers during the 1800s. Today the area is a recreational facility that highlights the natural history of this rich floodplain forest while preserving the historic relics associated with a once-thriving artery of commerce.

Types of Birds: Birds of prey, songbirds, wading birds

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), birds of prey (all), wading birds (all)

Specialties: Prothonotary warbler, northern parula, Swainson's warbler, wood duck, Mississippi kite, swallow-tailed kite

### **Fort McAllister State Historic Park**

Description: Fort McAllister saw considerable Civil War action during General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea. Located on the banks of the Ogeechee River, the site contains a mix of salt marsh and forested habitats.

Types of Birds: Songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter)

Specialties: Painted bunting, wood duck, northern harrier, bald eagle, osprey

### **Richmond Hill J.F. Gregory Park**

Description: This unique park is operated by the City of Richmond Hill. The area is dominated by a 300-acre rice field that predates the Civil War. A three-mile walking trail runs along the top of a dike that encompasses the field, which today is a wooded wetland.

Types of Birds: Songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter)

Specialties: Prothonotary warbler, wood duck, barred owl

Tips: Look for warblers during spring and fall migrations. Prothonotary warblers are best seen from April to June.

### **Fort Morris State Historic Site**

Description: Originally a Guale Indian village, Fort Morris has a fascinating history. The site became the seaport town of Sunbury (one of several "dead towns" in Georgia) before becoming Fort Morris in 1776. The fort helped protect Georgia's coast during both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. The site is approximately 70 acres in size and is composed primarily of salt marsh and forested upland.

Types of Birds: Songbirds, wading birds

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), wading birds (all)

Specialties: Yellow-throated warbler, marsh wren, clapper rail, painted bunting

### **Melon Bluff Nature Preserve**

Description: This 3,000-acre privately-owned nature preserve is located on lands that were once part of an old rice plantation. The area offers opportunities to view birds in saltmarsh, woodland and creek swamp habitats.

Types of Birds: Songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl, shorebirds, birds of prey, marsh birds

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), wading birds (all), marsh birds (all), waterfowl (winter), birds of prey (winter)

Specialties: Wild turkey, wood stork, clapper rail, roseate spoonbill, painted bunting

Tips: Look for warblers during spring and fall migrations. Listen for marsh wrens and clapper rails.

### **Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge**

Description: This refuge is located on an abandoned World War II Army airfield. There are more than 2,700 acres of saltwater marsh, freshwater impoundments, mixed deciduous forests and open fields. These habitats support an amazing array of bird. Types of Birds: Songbirds, birds of prey, wading birds, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), birds of prey (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (all)

Specialties: Wood stork, white ibis, painted bunting

### **Sapelo Island Visitor Center**

Song birds, painted buntings, wading birds and birds of prey provide regular sightings along the nature trails that weave through the maritime forest and along the marsh and salt pans surrounding the facility. Stop by for a quick hike through our nature trail and to visit our interpretative center.

### **Blue Heron Inn**

A privately owned property welcomes birders and nature photographers. One and two seat blinds are available for use. Extensive marsh, tidal creeks and a vibrant fresh water pond provide for excellent birding year round. Innkeepers at Blue Heron in addition to sharing their birding knowledge are happy to arrange private tours of Sapelo Island.

### **Sapelo Island**

A variety of shore and marsh birds will greet you by the ferry landing. On your ferry ride to Sapelo shorebirds and birds of prey are commonly spied. Oyster catchers can be found on the oyster beds. The island itself with a myriad of eco systems provides for a diverse bird population.

### **Tolomato Island**

Salt marsh, fresh water pond with rookery along a quiet nature trail offer abundant birding opportunities. Roseate spoonbills, snowy egrets and many more wading birds abound.

### **Anslay Hodges M.A.R.S.H. Project (Altamaha Wildlife Management Area)**

Description: This viewing area is situated on the Altamaha Wildlife Management Area where an impoundment was constructed as part of Ducks Unlimited's M.A.R.S.H. (Matching Aid to Restore States' Habitat) program. The impoundment is located on the remains of an old rice plantation. Many of the rice fields are managed to benefit waterfowl and other wildlife species.

Types of Birds: Birds of prey, shorebirds, songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl, raptors Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (all), shorebirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (fall and winter), raptors (fall and winter) Specialties: Wood stork, swallow-tailed kite, bald eagle, king rail, painted bunting, mottled duck, wood duck, white ibis, glossy ibis

### **Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation State Historic Site**

Description: From 1800 to 1915 this site was a thriving rice plantation. Today the 1,268-acre historic site is a mix of saltmarsh, pasture and flatwoods.

Types of Birds: Birds of prey, songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Birds of prey (winter), songbirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter)

Specialties: Wood stork, bald eagle, osprey, glossy ibis, painted bunting, yellow-throated warbler, sharp-tailed sparrow, northern parula.

Tips: Ospreys are most common spring to summer. Look for warblers during spring and fall migrations. Northern parulas and yellow-throated warblers can be found in spring and summer. Clapper rails and marsh wrens can be seen and/or heard in the marshes throughout the year.

Fee: Museum and picnic areas free. For tour of grounds and plantation house: \$5 per adult, \$4.50 per senior (62 and older), \$2.50 for children ages 6-18.

### **Saint Simons Island - Gould's Inlet & East Beach**

Description: East Beach, which includes Gould's Inlet, is a residential area of St. Simons Island. The area includes some county-owned lands.

Types of Birds: Birds of prey, shorebirds, songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Birds of prey (all), shorebirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter)

Specialties: American oystercatcher, black skimmer, painted bunting, bald eagle, least tern, northern gannet

### **Jekyll Island - Causeway**

Description: The Jekyll Island Causeway cuts across the marshes of Glynn County, made famous by the poet Sidney Lanier. These rich salt marshes are home to an amazing array of birds and other wildlife. Two different sites along the causeway are identified as being great places to watch birds.

Types of Birds: Shorebirds, wading birds, birds of prey, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Shorebirds (all), wading birds (all), birds of prey (all) waterfowl (winter)

Specialties: Osprey, bald eagle, clapper rail, northern harrier, roseate spoonbill, red knot, black-necked stilt, white ibis, wood stork

Tips: Shorebirds are best seen at low tide from mid-summer through spring. Look for nesting ospreys in spring and summer. Listen for clapper rails and marsh wrens in the salt marshes. Watch for northern harriers flying low over the marsh in winter. Look for roseate spoonbills in summer.

#### **Jekyll Island - North End Beach**

Description: This site is situated at the northern end of Jekyll Island at the mouth of St. Simons Sound. Although the beach is more limited than at the south end, the mix of beach, forest and saltwater habitats provides excellent birding opportunities.

Types of Birds: Songbirds, shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl, gull-like birds

#### **Jekyll Island - South End Beach**

Description: This birding site is located on the beach at the southern tip of Jekyll Island.

Types of Birds: Shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl, gull-like birds

Best Birding Seasons: Shorebirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter), gull-like birds (all)

Specialties: Black skimmer, American oystercatcher, marbled godwit, jaegers, south polar skua, northern gannet, piping plover, glaucous gull

#### **Crooked River State Park**

Description: This 500-acre state park is located on the banks of Crooked River. The area is blanketed with several habitats including pine flatwoods, salt marsh and maritime forest.

Types of Birds: Birds of prey, shorebirds, wading birds, songbirds, waterfowl

Best Birding Seasons: Birds of prey (all), shorebirds (fall and winter), songbirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter)

Specialties: Osprey, bald eagle, wood stork, painted bunting

#### **Cumberland Island National Seashore**

Description: Cumberland Island National Seashore is a beautiful, largely undeveloped 36,000-acre barrier island. Access is by ferry or private boat. Extensive salt marshes border the island to the west, and 16 miles of pristine, white-sand beaches border Cumberland on the east. The island hosts an amazing variety of wildlife and plant communities. A total of 322 species of birds have been seen on the island.

Types of Birds: Songbirds, shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl, gull-like birds

Best Birding Seasons: Songbirds (spring and fall), shorebirds (all), wading birds (all), waterfowl (winter), gull-like birds (all)

Specialties: Peregrine falcon, painted bunting, red knot, black skimmer, warblers