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*Creole Nature Trail
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337-436-9588

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On Louisiana's

Great Gulf Coast



Part of The Great American Trails Network

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SABINE LOOP

The Sabine Loop traverses the largest diversity of habitats of the Louisiana Great Gulf Coast Birding Trail's 12 loops, taking visitors through the heart of Louisiana's Outback. This loop begins in the mixed hardwood-pine bluff land forests and cypress-tupelo gum swamps associated with the Sabine and Calcasieu (pronounced "Kal-kuh-shoe") Rivers in Calcasieu Parish. Moving south of Interstate 10, the loop breaks out into the isolated prairie and brush lands southwest of Lake Charles and Sulphur where raptors, flycatchers, sparrows, and other open country birds abound.

Dipping still further south, the Sabine Loop crosses the Intracoastal Waterway into Cameron Parish, and a huge complex of fresh, brackish, and salt marshes most of which are associated with the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. Raptors are abundant here, particularly during the spring, fall, and winter months, as are waterfowl, wading birds, and other water birds. The loop terminates along the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico, visiting the live oak-dominated "cheniers" (pronounced "shin-ear," French for "oak-grove") which are coastal forests built upon ancient beach ridges which have become "stranded" over thousands of years of land accretion to the south.

The beaches of Cameron Parish host a stunning array of birdlife which changes dramatically with the seasons, harboring plovers, sandpipers, gulls, terns, and other seabirds. Just offshore, marine waterfowl, pelicans, and miscellaneous seabirds can be viewed in conjunction with oil production platforms and shrimp boats. Bring your spotting scope and tripod!



Niblett's Bluff Park

Site I-1



Site access: Free, Daily, Fee for camping

GPS: N 30.19997; W 93.67373

Site contact: Linda Mott; 337-589-7117

Owner: Calcasieu Parish Government

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27 and I 10 (Exit 20) in Sulphur, go west on I 10 for 16.0 miles to Exit 4/ US 90. Go right (north) on US 90 for 0.1 miles to LA 109. Continue north on LA 109 for 2.5 miles to Niblett's Bluff Road. Turn left (west) and go 2.5 miles to the park entrance.

Description: With an interesting past that includes serving as a Civil War fort and housing a semi-pro baseball team, Niblett's Bluff Park exists today as a public park owned and operated by Calcasieu Parish government. The majority of the site is maintained in an open, park-like setting which features a contiguous canopy of mature loblolly pines; a situation which proves very inviting for species such as Redbellied and Downy woodpeckers, Eastern Bluebird, and on occasion, Brown-headed Nuthatch.

The narrow Sabine River forms the western boundary of the park, as well as the boundary between Louisiana and Texas. Prior to the 19th century, the Sabine River also served as an international boundary between the U.S. and Mexico.

Today, park visitors may select one of several scenic overlooks along the east bank of the Sabine River to study birds to their hearts' content. Look for Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, and other year-round residents. Keep your ears open for the reverberating, "jungle-like" cries of the Pileated Woodpecker. This crow-sized bird is the largest woodpecker species in North America.

Louisiana Welcome Center

Site I-2



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 30.13709; W 093.67782

Site contact: Welcome Center; 337-589-7774

Owner: State of Louisiana

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27 and I 10 (Exit 20) at Sulphur, travel 20 miles west on I 10 to the Sabine River Turnaround Exit. Follow the exit roadway southward beneath I 10 and back east onto eastbound I 10. Take the first exit, "I 10 Welcome Center," and follow the roadway to the facility.

Description: The I 10 Welcome Center provides comfort and refreshment to human travelers, as well as birds and other interesting creatures. Landscaped with native trees such as coast live oak, American sycamore, silver maple, and baldcypress, the center attracts a variety of year-round bird species including Blue Jay, Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, and Carolina Chickadee.

Directly behind the Visitor's Center is Lake Bienvenu, a substantial water body which grades into an expansive freshwater marsh at its southern end. The lake and marsh are lined with aquatic plants such as duck-potato, which draw various waterfowl including Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged Teal, American Coot, and others in the winter months. Check the shoreline for damselflies such as Rambur's Forktail; and an amazing variety of dragonflies, most notably the Great Blue Skimmer.

The "crown jewel" of the site is the elevated walkway which skirts a baldcypress-tupelo gum swamp, and terminates at a small pavilion overlooking the lake's eastern edge. Here, year round residents such as Pileated Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse are joined in spring and summer by neotropical breeders like Prothonotary and Northern Parula warblers, and in winter by American Robin and Yellow-rumped Warbler.





Fabacher Road

Site I-3



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 30.16877; W 93.50231

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27 (Exit 20) and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for 5.3 miles to LA 108. Turn right (west) and go 8.1 miles to Fabacher Road. Take a right (north) onto Fabacher Road, driving slowly for the next 2 miles.

Description: Along its 6 miles, Fabacher Road winds through unmarred habitat that is predominately remnants of coastal tallgrass prairie, occasionally dotted with shrubs like marsh elder, groundsel, and wax myrtle, furnishing a perfect home for Northern Bobwhite, Dickcissel, and Blue Grosbeak. From late July through the winter, flycatchers make substantial use of the hedgerows, prairie shrubs, and utility lines. In August and September, loom for Eastern Wood-Pewee; Least, Alder, Ash-throated and Scissor-tailed flycatchers; and Eastern and Western Kingbird.

During the winter months, this area is nearly unparalleled for its sparrows and raptors. At this time, Chipping, Field, Savannah, Song, Swamp, White-throated, and White-crowned sparrows are all abundant. During migration, additional sparrow species such as Clay-colored, Vesper, Lark, Grasshopper, Fox, Lincoln's, and Harris's sparrows often turn up. Eastern, Western, and Fuertes' of Red-tailed Hawks are common here between September and March. Check the horizons, power lines, and shrub tops for rare species such as Swainson's and Ferruginous hawks.

Fabacher Road's main claim to fame, however, is the secreted one of Louisiana's two known Crested Caracara breeding sites. Remember that the caracara site is located on private property, so do not trespass. Fortunately, the birds can often be seen from the road.

Intracoastal Park

Site I-4



Site access: Free, Daily, Fee for camping

GPS coordinates: N 30.06659; W 93.34471

Site contact: Parish Parks; 337-721-3700

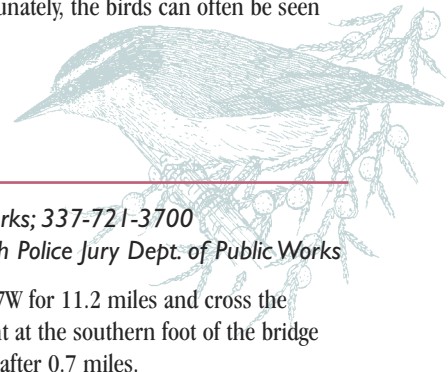
Owner: Calcasieu Parish Police Jury Dept. of Public Works

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27W and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for 11.2 miles and cross the bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway. Immediately after crossing the bridge, take a right at the southern foot of the bridge onto the access road which curls back to the north and terminates at Intracoastal Park after 0.7 miles.

Description: The Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) is an inland channel stretching the entire rim of the U.S. Gulf Coast. Both the bird life and "boat life" plying the waters of the ICW prove to be diverse and interesting. At the overlook near the boat landing at Intracoastal Park, look for Ringbilled Gull, Laughing Gull, Forster's Tern, Caspian Tern, and Osprey tailing low over the numerous boats and other water craft parading across the waterway each day.

During the winter months, Peregrine Falcons and Merlins station themselves upon the utility line supports positioned parallel to the bridge. Endless supplies of wading birds (ibis, herons, and egrets) move along and across the canal on a year round basis.

Upon leaving the park and approaching LA 27W on the access road, stop at the complex of freshwater marsh and shallow open water to the immediate west of the road's juncture with LA 27W. Oftentimes, this area is filled with shorebirds such as Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet (during winter and migration), Greater Yellowlegs, and Long-billed Dowitcher. During the winter months, look also for Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, and Ruddy Duck.



Volunteer Lane Rookery, Hackberry, LA

Site 1–5



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 29.99619; W 93.34245

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27W and I 10 (exit 20) in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for 15.2 miles and go left (east) onto Old Town Road. Follow Old Town Road 0.2 miles and take a left onto Volunteer Lane. Follow this road about 50 yards to where it terminates in a small parking area beside the lake/rookery.

Description: The small town of Hackberry's "Volunteer Lane Rookery" is comprised of a small willow-lined lake containing a substantial wading bird rookery in the center. From mid-spring through mid-summer Roseate Spoonbills and Tricolored Herons, along with Great, Snowy, and Cattle egrets maintain active nests filled with squawking chicks. During the off months (August-February), wading birds continue to use the site for roosting, foraging, and loafing purposes.

A small deciduous woodland borders the northern edge of the site. Look for Carolina Chickadees, Downy and Red-bellied woodpeckers, and Carolina Wrens here during the breeding season. During fall migration (August-October), many species of flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, and warblers utilize this quiet locale to drink, forage, and rest. During the winter months, American Robin, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow, among others, are added to the mix.



Sabine National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters & Visitors Center

Site 1–6



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 29.88993; W 93.40340

Site contact: Refuge Manager; 337-762-3816

Website: <http://sabine.fws.gov>

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27W (Exit 20) and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for 24.8 miles. The Refuge Visitor Center is located on the left (east) side of LA 27W.

Description: The Sabine National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters and Visitors Center serves as a gateway and informational clearinghouse for the 220,000-acre refuge. The scenic overlook at the facility provides visitors with a leisurely introduction to the vast belt of fresh, brackish, and salt marshes that dominate Louisiana's coastal zone. Great and Snowy egrets are common year round at the overlook. Check the edges of the Spartina grass clumps for another year round resident, King Rail, which is joined by Sora and Virginia rails during the winter months.

The moss-draped Live Oaks that surround the visitor's center and parking area should be carefully perused, especially during spring and fall migration periods when all manner of neotropical songbirds—particularly warblers—may be encountered within these massive canopies.

During the winter months, one or more Merlin habitually adopts these oaks to serve as their own headquarters. With a little patience, you should be able to detect these birds as they flit in and out of the live oaks. Check also for over wintering or "lingering" warblers which are rare waifs from the western U.S. In the late winter of 2003, for example, a Townsend's Solitaire spent several weeks here.



Cultural/Historical Attractions

BRIMSTONE MUSEUM

In between explorations to southwest Louisiana's spectacular natural attractions, don't forget to take in a little of the state's cultural history and stop at the Brimstone Museum in Sulphur, Louisiana. Housed in the Old Southern Pacific Railway Depot, the museum commemorates the development of the Frasch process of mining sulfur at the turn of the century. (337-527-6100)



Sabine National Wildlife Refuge Wetland Walkway

Site I-7



Site Access: Free, Daily

Site contact: Refuge Manager; 337-762-3816

GPS Coordinates: N 29.86639; W 93.45570

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27W (Exit 20) and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for 28.2 miles. The facility is on the right side of the road.

Description: Sabine National Refuge's Wetland Walkway features a 1.0-mile cement "sidewalk" loop through an extensive freshwater marsh. During summer, local breeding birds include Marsh Wren, Barn Swallow, Eastern Kingbird, Common Yellowthroat, Orchard Oriole, and the gaudy Purple Gallinule. Look year round for wading birds, especially Little Blue and Tricolored herons, as well as Roseate Spoonbills. Although White-faced Ibis is the "default" ibis here, Glossy Ibis also occur with some frequency, especially during the fall, winter, and spring months.

From April-May check the red mulberry trees along the marsh ridges for numerous neotropical songbirds such as Red-eyed Vireo, Swainson's, Wood, and Gray-cheeked thrushes, Summer and Scarlet tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Baltimore Oriole.

As fall bleeds into winter, notice the interesting birds brought to the site. One or two Osprey generally migrates in by October and overwinters here. During the latter half of October, a surprising number of warbler species, such as Nashville Warbler, move through the refuge. From November-February, look for waterfowl along the edges of the many quiet pools dotting the marsh.

Beyond the bird life, American Alligators are a big draw to this site and are easily observed on a year round basis. Please refer to the written precautions (located on outdoor information panels at the head of the walkway) regarding visitor behavior around alligators.

Holly Beach

Site I-8



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 29.76997; W 93.47244

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27W (Exit 20) and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for approximately 36.2 miles to Holly Beach. In Holly Beach go right on LA 82 and follow it west along the beach for the next 7.0 miles.

Description: Holly Beach stretches 7 miles along the south side of LA 82 which lines the Gulf of Mexico. Approximately 1.3 miles into the stretch, you will pass a collection of granite rubble breakwaters which have been installed in the water a short distance from the beach. These breakwaters serve as outstanding loafing points for the many species of gulls and terns which frequent the beach. Commonly encountered species include Laughing, Ring-billed,

Herring, and Bonaparte's gulls, and Royal, Caspian, Forster's, Least (summer only), and Sandwich (summer only) terns. Look for Black Tern during migrations periods and from mid through late summer. Common Terns occur during migration periods as well as winter.

Some of Louisiana's rarest bird species including Glaucous, Thayer's, and Little gulls, along with Black-legged Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, and Yellow-nosed Albatross have been observed along Holly Beach. Too, Lesser Black-backed Gulls are occasionally found here between September-April.

While heading west the north side of LA 82 parallels a complex of prairie and brackish marsh habitats which hold an impressive array of birds, particularly during migration periods and the winter months. Look here for Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Crested Caracara, White-tailed Kite, Western Kingbird, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Western Tanager, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.



Peveo Woods Bird & Butterfly Sanctuary

Site I-9



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 29.76110; W 93.60496

Site contact: Victoria Moseley Bayless; 225-757-1769

Website: www.braudubon.org/sanctuaries.asp

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27 (Exit 20) and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for 36.2 miles to Hwy 82 at Holly Beach. Turn right and go west 8.5 miles to Gulfview Avenue. Turn left (south) and follow 0.2 miles to PR 556. Go left (east) 0.1 miles to its terminus at the sanctuary's parking area.

Description: One of the most storied birding sites in Louisiana, Peveo Woods Sanctuary, although a relatively small coastal woodland, has served as a "migrant trap" from time immemorial. Peveo Woods is most actively birded from March-May and August-October when large numbers of neotropical songbirds visit the sanctuary.

During spring migration, periods of stormy weather associated with the passage of Canadian cool fronts can ground thousands of individual birds representing 40 or more species at a time. During these "fall-outs," 20 or more species of warblers alone are often tallied in a single day.

In both migration periods, numerous species of western U.S. birds such as Lesser Nighthawk, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Western Tanager are occasionally seen each year. Likewise, eastern species such as Cape May and Black-throated Blue warblers occur often. Watch also for possible tropical species such as Groove-billed Ani, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Black-whiskered Vireo, and Yellow-green Vireo.

During October, follow the informal trails through woods dominated by both Monarch and Gulf Fritillary butterflies. These same areas are also filled with wildflowers such as spotted horsemint, Indian blanket, coreopsis, tropical sage, marsh pink, salt-marsh mallow, West Indian lantana, and others.

Martin Beach

Site I-10



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 29.75043; W 93.66382

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27 (Exit 20) and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for 36.2 miles to LA 82 at Holly Beach. Turn right and go west on LA 82 for 11.4 miles to Jim Erbeling Lane. Turn left (south) on Jim Erbeling Lane and follow 0.7 miles to its terminus at Martin Beach.

Description: Martin Beach is the region's quietest and most accessible beach. En route, be sure to look on the south side of LA 82 for gorgeous stands of *Canna flaccida*, an uncommon, yellow-blooming native canna species.

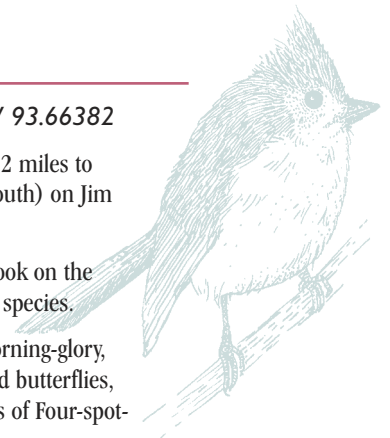
Once at the beach, the back-beach dune area supports numerous wildflower species including beach morning-glory, evening primrose, coreopsis, day flower, and others. These flowers serve as tasty treats for dragonflies and butterflies, which thickly populate the dune area on a near year round basis. During the summer months, hundreds of Four-spotted Pennant dragonflies and dozens of Pearly Crescent butterflies are almost always in view.

Local breeding birds such as Common Nighthawks and Purple Martins summer here in large numbers. The beach and near-shore waters hold substantial numbers of gulls, terns, and shorebirds. The rare Snowy and Piping plovers can sometimes be found on the beach along with Semipalmated and Wilson's plovers, especially during the fall months. American Avocet, Sanderling, and other sandpipers are commonly found in fall, winter, and spring.

Winter and spring are excellent times for finding interesting waterfowl species such as Surf Scoter, Lesser Scaup, and Red-breasted Merganser flying and foraging just offshore.



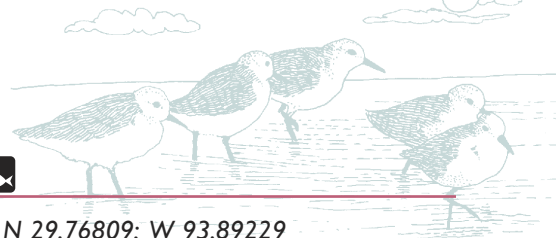
The Holly Beach Sand Management restoration project plans to place approximately 1.7 million cubic yards of high quality sand on the beach to reestablish a more historic shoreline.





Sabine Pass Swing Bridge

Site I-11



Site access: Free, Daily

GPS coordinates: N 29.76809; W 93.89229

Directions: From the intersection of LA 27W (Exit 20) and I 10 in Sulphur, go south on LA 27W for approximately 36.2 miles to LA 82. Turn right (west) and go about 25.5 miles to the Louisiana portion (eastern foot) of the bridge which connects Louisiana and Texas. The parking area is located on the right (north) side of LA 82 at the foot of the bridge.

Description: The eastern end of the Sabine Pass Swing Bridge is the only place in Louisiana where Cave Swallows are routinely observed. Simply park, walk to the bridge and watch as they fly in and out of the bridge undergirding, often within 30-50 feet or less. Keep in mind that Barn Swallows and Cliff Swallows also nest beneath the bridge, so refer to your field guide for a refresher on how to distinguish between these 3 tawny-breasted swallow species.

The winter and early spring months offer excellent opportunities to observe unusual water birds such as Common Loon, Horned and Eared grebes, Redhead, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, and Surf Scoter – especially for viewers equipped with spotting scopes.

During warm weather, look for butterflies such as the Gulf Fritillary sipping on the nectar from the abundant wildflowers that cover the road embankment. Dragonflies like the Seaside Dragonlet are also abundantly distributed here.

For those with an engineering bent, the Sabine Pass area commonly harbors numerous “stacked” (inactive) oil rigs, production platforms, and other oil-related vessels and equipment.

Convention and Visitors Bureaus and Chambers of Commerce

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<http://user.camtel.net/cameron/public/index.html>

Cameron Parish Tourist Commission
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Sulphur, Louisiana Chamber of Commerce
West Calcasieu Association of Commerce
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Creole Nature Trail All-American Road

The more than 180-mile Creole Nature Trail was the first National Scenic Byway in the Gulf South, and the only one to be named solely for its natural intrinsic qualities. It has just recently been designated as an All-American Road by the Federal Highway Administration, one of only 20 in the United States. Located halfway between New Orleans and Houston off I-10, this distinctive corridor through Louisiana's Outback is a journey through a wild and rugged terrain unique to Louisiana, America, and the world. In this fertile world where land and water merge and diverge, the notorious pirate Jean Lafitte hid treasure, and French explorers traded with the Attakapas Indians and created colonial Louisiana. In this world, Louisiana's Cajun and Creole cultures took root and grew in harmony with abundant life—a life you can share on the Creole Nature Trail All-American Road.