



*Flock to the River Valley*

# North Alabama Birding Trail



Fifty bird watching  
sites in eleven  
Alabama counties

## Visitor Guide



For millions of years, the Tennessee River has cut its way through the Cumberland Plateau, carving the Tennessee Valley, one of the most diverse and beautiful landscapes in the south. Dense woodlands and rich waters originally attracted prehistoric peoples and started the long history of the area as a commercial and cultural crossroads. Civil War battles, engineering breakthroughs, and trading links throughout the Mississippi Basin have all contributed to a cultural richness which is complemented by a natural diversity of birds and other wildlife. Numerous eastern woodland birds and waterfowl occur in abundance, joined by uncommon visitors such as nesting Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, vagrant gulls, sea ducks, grebes, loons, shorebirds, and late fall vagrants en route to the Gulf Coast.

Whether interested in a quiet morning walk or weeks of exploration, North Alabama is sure to please. Landscapes in the region range from tupelo swamps to blazing fields of wildflowers, and towering forests of oak and hickory to vast sheets of open water replete with loafing waterfowl. As the habitats vary through the valley, so do the seasons. Spring is heralded by the return of neotropical songbirds that stop in while on their journey northward. Summer is filled with breeding woodland species such as flashy Pileated and Red-headed woodpeckers, boisterous Great-crested Flycatchers and Carolina Wrens, and skulking Kentucky and Swainson's warblers. In the fall, migrant waterfowl, Sandhill Cranes, and a variety of raptors return to spend the winter in the valley, or at least pass through on their way farther south. Once winter's chill is in the air, large roosts of Bald Eagles form and stragglers from farther north can be found with the abundant waterfowl and gulls.



Information



Restrooms



Handicap Access



Food



Parking



Canoeing



Boat Access



Fishing



Camping



Cabins/Lodge



Picnic Area



Hiking



Swimming



Beach Area



Visitors Center



Driving Trail



Viewing Area



Lookout Tower



Biking



Water

The symbols used here are those of the various signing (official and unofficial) used by the Forest Service in marking recreation and other accommodations throughout the national forests.

Photo credits: Canal at Wheeler NWR/ADCNR, Keith Hudson. Cover images: Left column, (top) Birdwatching/Sumita Prasad, FERMATA, Inc.; (middle) Snow Geese/USFWS, Gary M. Stolz; (bottom) Bald Eagle/Walt Burch; (right) Belted Kingfisher/Alan Murphy. All plant line art: Mark Mohlenbrock/NRCS.





# Northwest Loop



For tourist information contact:

**C** **Colbert County Tourism & Convention Bureau**  
719 US Hwy 72 West  
PO Box 740425  
Tuscumbia, AL 35674  
Phone: (256) 383-0783  
(800) 344-0783  
Fax: (256) 383-2080  
[www.colbertcountytourism.org](http://www.colbertcountytourism.org)

**G** **Florence/Lauderdale Tourism**  
One Hightower Place  
Florence, AL 35630  
Phone: (256) 740-4141  
(888) 356-8687  
Fax: (256) 740-4142  
[www.flo-tour.org](http://www.flo-tour.org)

**J** **Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce**  
12001 AL Hwy 157  
PO Box 325  
Moulton, AL 35650  
Phone: (256) 974-1658  
Fax: (256) 974-2400  
[www.lawrencealabama.com](http://www.lawrencealabama.com)

*Note: Icons correspond to "local tourist info" sites shown on map on pages 16 & 17.*

The Northwest Loop of the North Alabama Birding Trail winds its way back and forth across Wheeler, Wilson, and Pickwick Lakes, as it takes in an impressive variety of habitats and leads visitors to some great birding. A main focus of the loop is three large reservoirs along the Tennessee River. Wilson Dam and Waterloo, in particular, have been noted across the state for impressive congregations of winter birds such as waterfowl, eagles, and gulls, as well as a long list of rare or vagrant species to the state.

Another site along this loop noted by avid birders is Leighton Ponds. This assemblage of flooded sinkholes is one of the best sites for shorebird migration anywhere in interior Alabama. Farther downstream the historic Natchez Trace crosses through the far northwestern corner of Alabama offering a wooded scenic byway complete with Barred Owls and Wild Turkeys. The nearby Rock Springs Nature Trail is renowned for its concentrations of fall migrating hummingbirds. Each year, hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are joined by rare visitors from farther west.

If all this were not enough, Bankhead National Forest hosts some of Alabama's last great wilderness areas providing extensive forested habitats for migratory and resident birds. Habitats in the national forest range from hemlock-cove hardwoods in lush canyons to fire maintained pine and oak woodlands. Visitors can look forward to concentrations of wood warblers, including Cerulean, as well as numerous vireos, nuthatches, and woodpeckers.

Add to these incredible avian attractions an area rich in history and culture. From the early Native Americans who left us their mysterious mounds to the trials and tribulations of the Civil War, this area has a great deal to offer. Enjoy world-renowned southern hospitality, and be sure to drop by the Coon Dog Cemetery for a bit of local flavor impossible to find anywhere else.



*Photo credits: (left) Wood Duck/Quincey Banks; (right) Cypress Swamp/ADCNR Photos; (bottom) water/Jeff Nadler*

# Give and Take

Hunters and anglers contribute millions of dollars annually to the protection and management of wildlife habitat. These consumptive users of wildlife have long accepted the need to pay for the privilege of using wildlife resources. The obvious example of this is hunting and fishing licenses that must be acquired annually. They also pay an excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment that provides funds for wildlife conservation and habitat management.

Current trends in our society show that more people are enjoying non-consumptive uses of wildlife, like birdwatching and photography.

One of the many challenges facing wildlife managers in the 21st century is securing continued funding for important projects to meet the needs of all users. One way non-hunters can support conservation in Alabama in the short term is to purchase a hunting and fishing license. These funds will be used to continue to conserve Alabama's precious wildlife resources.

ADCNR Photos



Great Blue Heron/William Gates

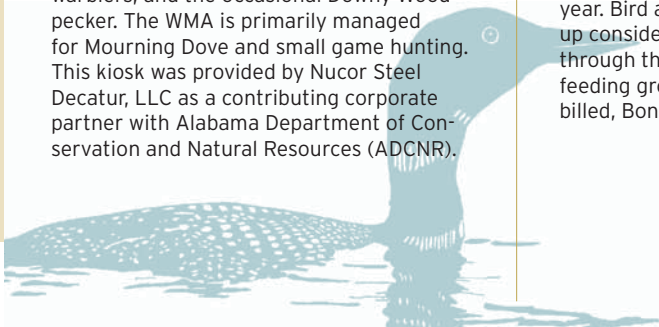


Osprey/William Gates

## Site 1: Mallard Fox Creek Wildlife Management Area - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** In north Decatur, AL at the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 20/Alternate US Hwy 72 (this is at the south end of the Hudson Bridge just before it crosses the Tennessee River), take Hwy 20/Alternate Hwy 72 west for 8.0 miles to CR 579. Turn right and drive 1.0 mile into the WMA. Follow the gravel road through the WMA about a mile to the kiosk.

**Description:** A 1,483-acre Wildlife Management Area (WMA) along the southern shore of Wheeler Lake that provides access to a number of habitats including grasslands, agricultural fields, wildlife openings, and hardwood forest. This site offers numerous opportunities for viewing waterfowl, wading birds, woodland, and grassland songbirds. Scan the water for Wood Ducks and check the woodlands for mixed flocks of Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice, migrant warblers, and the occasional Downy Woodpecker. The WMA is primarily managed for Mourning Dove and small game hunting. This kiosk was provided by Nucor Steel Decatur, LLC as a contributing corporate partner with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR).



**Site 1 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.6594, W 87.1104  
**Contact:** ADCNR: Area Biologist  
21438 Harris Station Road  
Tanner, AL 35671  
**Phone:** (256) 353-2634



## Site 2: Wheeler Dam South Landing

**Directions:** TVA's Wheeler Dam crosses the river on AL Hwy 101. This site is the recreation area on the south side of the dam. Turn west off Hwy 101 and follow the road 0.5 mile to the boat landing.

**Description:** Completed in 1936, Wheeler Dam was the first Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) hydroelectric dam on the Tennessee River. This dam impounds the 67,100 acre Wheeler Lake, creating a pool of abundant habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and gulls. Scan the water for Double-crested Cormorants and Common Loons, as well as a variety of wintering waterfowl during the colder months of the year. Bird activity below the TVA dam picks up considerably when TVA moves water through the dam's turbines, producing rich feeding grounds for opportunistic Ring-billed, Bonaparte's, and Herring gulls.

**Site 2 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.7940, W 87.3872  
**Contact:** Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)  
TVA, SB 1H, PO Box 1010  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35662-1010  
**Phone:** (256) 386-2543







Red-eyed Vireo/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Mike Hopiak

## Site 3: Joe Wheeler State Park

**Directions:** AL Hwy 101 crosses the river on Wheeler Dam. From the north end of the dam go north 3.0 miles, turn right (east) on US Hwy 72 and drive 4.3 miles. The entrance to the park is on the right.

**Description:** This resort park is complete with extensive facilities, including a resort lodge, restaurant, and marina. The park provides access to the north side of Wheeler Lake and associated backwaters, which are often good for waterbirds. The park also holds several patches of deciduous hardwoods crisscrossed by marked forest trails for woodland birding. As you walk the trails, enjoy the cheery call-and-answer song of Red-eyed Vireos and the endless *hiccoughs* of Summer Tanagers. Along quiet backwaters look for Wood Ducks and Canada Geese with their downy young in the summer. In the winter, when the water dramatically recedes, these same areas are filled with shorebirds probing the mud for tasty snacks.



Common Yellowthroat/USFWS, Dave Menke

## Site 4: Town Creek Marsh

**Directions:** From the south side of Wheeler Dam on AL Hwy 101, continue south 2.9 miles. Turn right (west) onto Fosters Mill Road, cross Town Creek and drive 2.1 miles to the bend in the road. The marsh is on the right.

**Description:** This site is a small marsh in the bend of Fosters Mill Road, overlooking Town Creek. It is an excellent place to see rails feeding on the mudflats during appropriate times of year. The marsh also supports a variety of wading birds and waterfowl, especially during the winter months. From the roadside, scan the edges of the numerous reed beds for Virginia Rails. They can sometimes be seen wandering away from these thick reed beds, although they are often seen probing along the edges or wading quietly from just inside the edge. The area beyond the marsh is also good for loafing wading birds like Great Blue Herons and many species of waterfowl in the winter.



Green Heron/Ted Lee Eubanks, FERMA, Inc.

## Site 5: Leighton Ponds

**Directions:** From the intersection of CR 22 and CR 48 in Leighton, southeast of Muscle Shoals, AL go 3 miles east on CR 22. Turn north (left) onto CR 69 (Fennell Road) and travel 1.8 miles. Site is on the shoulder of the road with ponds and sinks on either side of the road. Just north of this area, Fennell Road intersects with CR 24. Go west on CR 24 for 6 miles to Gnat Pond - another series of roadside sinkhole ponds. Visitors should note - birding at these stops will be from public right-of-way roadside only, with viewing overlooking private lands. As the land is private, appropriate courtesy should be given for low visitor impact and no trespass. There is no onsite interpretation.

**Description:** The Leighton ponds sites are a series of sinkholes and semi-flooded agricultural fields, which are excellent for wading and shorebirds. Scan the muddier areas for resident Killdeer alongside migrants such as Semipalmated Plover and Least Sandpiper. In larger sinkholes, search for Green Herons, American Coots, and perhaps a Common Moorhen. Each pond can vary greatly in the amount of water it holds, and therefore, the types of micro-habitats could range from mudflats to deep water. Regular checking of this area is sure to turn up some real surprises.

**Site 3 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.8360, W 87.3680  
**Contact:** ADCNR - Joe Wheeler State Park  
 201 McLean Drive  
 Rogersville, AL 35652  
 Phone: (256) 247-5466

**Site 4 Access:** Free, parking on the shoulder of the road, no amenities  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.7700, W 87.4410  
**Site:** Town Creek Marsh  
**Contact:** Unmanaged site with no contact  
 Phone: None

**Site 5 Access:** Free, roadside viewing, parking shoulder of road only, no amenities  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.7230, W 87.4770  
**Contact:** Unmanaged site with no contact  
 Phone: None





Adult Bonaparte's Gull/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, J. Surman

## Site 6: Wilson Dam Visitor Center - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** TVA's Wilson Dam crosses the Tennessee River between Florence and Muscle Shoals, AL. The Wilson Dam Visitor Center is on the Muscle Shoals side of the river at the dam's southern end. The kiosk at the Visitor Center will orient and guide visitors to nearby trails and sites available for birding.

**Description:** This site is where TVA's hydro-electric dam impounds the 15,500-acre Wilson Reservoir. This was the first dam constructed on the Tennessee River in Alabama. Construction began on the dam in 1918, was completed in 1924, and acquired by TVA in 1933. Together with Pickwick and Wheeler reservoirs, this dam made the treacherous Muscle Shoals navigable for river trade and transport. As with the other dams in northern Alabama, this site is excellent for gulls, as thousands of Ring-billed, Herring, and Bonaparte's gulls are found regularly. Birders should study these gulls carefully and look for a surprise or two such as a Laughing or Great Black-backed gull, or even a Black-legged Kittiwake. In late summer, scan the wooded islands for Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons amongst the more common Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets.



Great Blue Heron with chicks/Quincey Banks

## Site 7: Wilson Dam Rockpile Recreation Area

**Directions:** From the Wilson Dam Visitor Center (see directions Site 6), take Reservation Road west for 0.3 mile. Turn right (north) at the TVA Rockpile Recreation Area sign. Follow this road to the recreation area below the dam.

**Description:** The Rockpile Recreation Area sits at the base of Wilson Dam. This area provides basic camping and picnicking facilities in a wooded setting along the edge of Pickwick Reservoir. Woodlands in the park are attractive to numerous songbirds, while the reservoir attracts a variety of waterfowl, wading birds, gulls, and raptors. Check around the campground for nesting Great-crested Flycatchers, while a flash of orange/red may announce the arrival of a Baltimore or Orchard Oriole. Visitors may want to bring a spotting scope to scan the numerous gulls that line the rocky islands below the dam.



Acadian Flycatcher/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Greg W. Lasley

## Site 8: Tennessee Valley Authority Reservation

**Directions:** From the Wilson Dam Visitors Center (see directions Site 6), take Reservation Road west for 2.2 miles. Turn right (north) at the TVA Nature Trails sign.

**Description:** The TVA Reservation hosts a number of walking trails that meander through woodland, fields, and along the Tennessee River. This is one of the few reliable areas in northern Alabama for Swainson's Warblers, which nest near the end of the 2.6-mile bicycle/jogging trail. Other species to look and listen for in summer include Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Acadian Flycatcher, and Wood Thrush. Follow the trail to the reservoir, and in the winter, look for Pied-billed and Horned grebes alongside Buffleheads and Common Goldeneye.

### Site 6 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.7934, W 87.6262  
Contact: Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)  
TVA, SB 1H, PO Box 1010  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35662-1010  
Phone: (256) 386-2543



### Site 7 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.7930, W 87.6320  
Contact: Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)  
TVA, SB 1H, PO Box 1010  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35662-1010  
Phone: (256) 386-2543



### Site 8 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.7803, W 87.6546  
Contact: Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)  
TVA, SB 1H, PO Box 1010  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35662-1010  
Phone: (256) 386-2543







Northern Harrier/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Robert E. Barber

## Site 9: Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 20 in Florence, AL, travel west on Hwy 20 for 2.0 miles to CR 2/ Gunwaleford Road. Turn left and continue west on CR 2/Gunwaleford Road for 4.0 miles to CR 223. Turn left onto this gravel road and head south for 1.5 miles until its intersection with a second gravel road. Turn right and drive for 0.6 miles to the refuge on your left. Look for the concrete parking site and the birding trail kiosk.

**Description:** Key Cave National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) has large open fields managed for warm season native grasses interspersed with small patches of deciduous woodland and a seasonal sinkhole wetland. The refuge is gradually being converted from crops to native warm season grasslands. The benefit of this restoration is immediately apparent from the dozens of singing Grasshopper Sparrows and Dickcissels that can be heard calling across the refuge. The refuge's primary purpose is to protect Key Cave (not open to the public), which is home to the endangered Alabama Cavefish. This fish's global distribution is limited to this one cave where it is closely linked to the unique ecology of seasonally flooded waters beneath an active Gray Bat roost. The Gray Bat droppings make a nutrient rich soup that supports the Alabama Cavefish as well as several endangered cave crayfish and other invertebrates.



Kentucky Warbler/Bob Sargent

## Site 10: Natchez Trace Parkway Rock Springs Nature Trail

**Directions:** From Cherokee, AL, at the junction of US Hwy 72 and Natchez Trace Parkway, go north on the Natchez Trace Parkway for 9.8 miles to the parking area for Rock Springs Nature Trail on the right.

**Description:** Situated along the Natchez Trace Parkway just north of the Tennessee River, this idyllic wooded area holds a 20-minute nature trail that follows Colbert Creek to Rock Springs. The creek is intermittently dammed by Beavers, creating an impressive wetland abounding with a variety of resident and wintering birds. The edges of the wetland hold an abundance of orange jewelweed, which attracts hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds each fall. Careful inspection of the area has turned up several species that are only vagrants to Alabama including Black-chinned and Rufous hummingbirds. Check the Natchez Trace Parkway in spring and early summer for neotropical migrants including White-eyed, Yellow-throated, and Red-eyed Vireos as well as several breeding wood warblers such as Hooded and Kentucky warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush. These waters also support the huge, but rarely seen Hellbender - the largest species of salamander in North America.



## The Karst Landscape at Key Cave NWR - Dissolving Bedrock and Collapsing Soil

The term 'karst' refers to a landscape that is pockmarked with sinkholes and numerous caves. Karst areas usually host abundant springs. These landscapes are formed when water seeps through a thin layer of soil into fractured bedrock, usually made of limestone. Water moves through fractured bedrock, and over tens of thousands of years it dissolves and enlarges pathways through the rock. Once formed, these pathways act as drains, diverting water underground.

### Where are all the streams?

In karst landscapes, water flows beneath the soil through underground streams in the limestone. When these underground pathways are large enough for a human to crawl through, they are characterized as caves. As the water continues to travel through the rock, it will eventually reappear at lower elevations as a spring.

Sinkhole at Fern Cave National Wildlife Refuge/USFWS, Steve Seibert



### Site 9 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.7630, W 87.7818

Contact: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.  
Decatur, AL 35603  
Phone: (256) 353-7243



### Site 10 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.8580, W 87.9060

Contact: National Park Service (NPS)  
Natchez Trace Parkway Headquarters  
2680 Natchez Trace Parkway, Tupelo, MS 38804  
Phone: (800) 305-7417





Bald Eagles/USFWS

## Site 11: Waterloo

**Directions:** From the junction of CR 14 and CR 1, just east of the town of Waterloo, go 1.5 north on CR 1 to a TVA picnic area along the lakeshore on the left.

**Description:** The town of Waterloo sits a few miles west of the Natchez Trace Parkway in northwestern Alabama. The area is renowned for its concentration of Bald Eagles that congregate here in the winter months. Sightings of half a dozen eagles are quite common, and at times over twenty have been seen on a single gravel bank! The eagles also nest in the area, so while they can be seen year-round, their concentrations are most impressive in the winter. Winter is also the best time for viewing waterfowl. All three species of mergansers occur regularly, with Red-breasted being the most numerous. During spring and summer, listen for woodland species along the lake edge.



Common Goldeneye/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Mike Hopiak

## Site 12: Natchez Trace Parkway Colbert Ferry

**Directions:** From Cherokee, AL, at the junction of US Hwy 72 and Natchez Trace Parkway go north on the Natchez Trace Parkway for 7 miles. Turn left at the Colbert Ferry sign and follow the signs to the picnic area and boat launch.

**Description:** Colbert Ferry provides access to a number of wooded habitats, including a Beaver pond with lots of standing dead timber. Check this area for Red-headed and other woodpeckers. Closer to the shore, search the trees for White-breasted Nuthatches year-round and Orchard Orioles and Eastern Kingbirds in the summer. The park also provides excellent views of Pickwick Reservoir; in summer, watch for Cliff and Barn Swallows foraging over open water. In winter, scan the open water of the reservoir for Double-crested Cormorants and Common Loons among the numerous diving ducks. Scan the trees along the shoreline for perched Bald Eagles. An evening stroll is usually accompanied by the calls of Barred Owls and Eastern Screech Owls. The Natchez Trace Parkway stretches 444 miles from Natchez, MS to Nashville, TN with 33 miles of this National Scenic Byway and All American Road in NW Alabama.



Freedom Hills Wildlife Management Area/ADCNR Photos

## Site 13: Freedom Hills Wildlife Management Area Walking Trail

**Directions:** From Cherokee, AL, at the junction of US Hwy 72 and Natchez Trace Parkway, go east on Hwy 72 for 2.4 miles to CR 21/White Pike Rd. Turn right onto White Pike Rd. and head south 8.5 miles into the WMA to the site marker. Continue on CR 21 for another 2.5 miles to visit the famous Coon Dog Cemetery.

**Description:** This walking trail is one of many numerous gravel and dirt hunter access roads on the WMA, which leads visitors into a variety of productive habitats ranging from old fields to mature hardwood forest. These habitats are interspersed with wildlife openings planted for deer, turkey, and other game species. Search the scrubby fields for Yellow-breasted Chats and Indigo Buntings, which can be heard much more easily than seen. In the forest, listen for the insect-like buzzes and croaks of Northern Parulas and Yellow-billed Cuckoos. A nocturnal visit should turn up Chuck-will's-widows as well as Barred Owls and Eastern Screech-Owls.

Just down the road lies the famous Key Underwood Memorial Coon Dog Cemetery. These hallowed grounds have become the final resting place for raccoon hunting dogs from all across the South. Stop by and pay your respects to these great hounds and admire the creative tombstones raised to remember them. The grounds of the cemetery are also a good spot to listen for Summer Tanagers and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, joined in migration by a variety of vireos and warblers.



**Site 11 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.9310, W 88.0391  
**Contact:** ADCNR  
 PO Box 1314  
 Florence, AL 35630  
 Phone: (256) 760-8670



**Site 12 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.8400, W 87.9452  
**Contact:** National Park Service (NPS)  
 Natchez Trace Parkway Headquarters  
 2680 Natchez Trace Parkway, Tupelo, MS 38804  
 Phone: (800) 305-7417



**Site 13 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.6480, W 87.9902  
**Contact:** ADCNR: Area Biologist  
 4200 White Pike  
 Cherokee, AL 35616  
 Phone: (256) 359-6208







Barred Owl/Walt Burch

## Site 14: Bankhead National Forest - Central Firetower - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** From the intersection of AL Hwy 24 and AL Hwy 33 in Moulton, head south on Hwy 33 for 11.4 miles into Bankhead National Forest. The orientation kiosk is located by the firetower.

**Description:** Bankhead National Forest encompasses 180,000 acres of public land crisscrossed with hundreds of miles of deep canyons, providing an adventurous environment for hours or days of exploration. Habitats in the national forest range from old fields to mature pine and hardwood forests. The area is renowned for its breeding Cerulean Warblers, which can be found in several of the heavily wooded canyon bottoms. Check amongst the pines for resident Pine Warblers and Brown-headed Nuthatches and explore the trails at night for Chuck-will's-widows and Barred Owls. With so many impressive waterfalls, clear streams, and deep verdant forests to explore, Bankhead National Forest is sure to be a favorite for many visits to come.



Cerulean Warbler/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bill Dyer

## Site 15: Bankhead National Forest Sipsey Wilderness Trailhead

**Directions:** From the Central Firetower Kiosk (see site 14), go 2.5 miles south on AL Hwy 33. Turn right onto CR 60/Cranal Road and follow it for 3.9 miles to the Sipsey Wilderness Trailhead, located near the Sipsey River Picnic Area.

**Description:** Step back into primordial times with tinkling waterfalls and moss-covered stones decorating one of the finest forests Alabama has to offer. This verdant forest trail rings each spring with the songs of Cerulean and Black-throated Green warblers, the cheery sounds of Summer and Scarlet tanagers and the strident calls of Ovenbirds as they forage about on the forest floor. As you explore this area, search the moist leaf litter for American Woodcock and Chuck-will's-widows, birds with such incredible camouflage that you may only notice them as they explode from under your feet!

## Endangered Species?

Many of the birds in Bankhead National Forest are only temporary visitors who come here to breed and raise their young each summer, when the weather is warm and the insects are abundant. They head south each fall when the woods become too chilly to supply ample food. On their journey, these birds, known as neotropical migrants, may fly over a thousand miles to seek refuge in the warm, tropical climate of Central and South America.

Each year, Cerulean Warblers breed in the forest canopy along the Sipsey River. Male Cerulean Warblers are a real crowd-pleaser, with their 'cerulean' blue head, back, and wings that contrast with a bright white belly and throat. The females are less flashy, with the same pattern repeated in muted greenish-blue tones.

Bankhead National Forest is one of the few places in Alabama that the Cerulean Warbler can still call home. Although these neotropical migrants once flourished, studies indicate that Cerulean Warblers have declined at an alarming rate over the last forty years. Researchers suggest over 70% of the population of this handsome bird has disappeared due to habitat loss in both North and South America.

**Site 14 Access:** Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.3452, W 87.3393

**Contact:** U.S. Forest Service

District Ranger, Bankhead National Forest

PO Box 278, Double Springs, AL 35553

Phone: (205) 489-5111, [www.fs.fed.us/r8/alabama](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/alabama)



**Site 15 Access:** Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.2854, W 87.3986

**Contact:** U.S. Forest Service

District Ranger, Bankhead National Forest

PO Box 278, Double Springs, AL 35553

(205) 489-5111, [www.fs.fed.us/r8/alabama](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/alabama)











# Central Loop



For tourist information contact:

**B**

**Athens/Limestone County  
Chamber of Commerce**  
101 Beaty St.  
PO Box 150  
Athens, AL 35612  
Phone: (256) 232-2600  
Fax: (256) 232-2609  
[www.tourathens.com](http://www.tourathens.com)

**D**

**Cullman Area Chamber of  
Commerce**  
301 2nd Ave. SW  
PO Box 1104  
Cullman, AL 35056  
Phone: (256) 734-0454  
(800) 313-5114  
Fax: (256) 737-7443  
[www.visitcullman.org](http://www.visitcullman.org)

**E**

**Decatur/Morgan County  
Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
719 6th Ave. SE  
PO Box 2349  
Decatur, AL 35601  
Phone: (256) 350-2028  
(800) 524-6181  
Fax: (256) 350-2054  
[www.decaturcvb.org](http://www.decaturcvb.org)

**I**

**Huntsville/Madison County  
Convention & Visitors Bureau**  
500 Church St., Suite 1  
Huntsville, AL 35801  
Phone: (256) 551-2230  
(800) space-4-U  
Fax: (256) 551-2324  
[www.huntsville.org](http://www.huntsville.org)

*Note: Icons correspond to "local  
tourist info" sites shown on map  
on pages 16 & 17.*

Located in the heart of Alabama's Tennessee River Valley, the Central portion of the North Alabama Birding Trail provides incredible birding for longtime residents or short-term visitors. With the presence of Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge running between Decatur and Huntsville, birds and other wildlife are guaranteed on any visit. The habitat diversity on Wheeler and this region should provide the visitor with an astounding diversity of bird species as well.

Wheeler NWR is well-known for its impressive concentrations and diversity of waterfowl each winter. The refuge has raised waterfowl-watching to an art form with its impressive interpretive facilities and improved wetlands. Add to this, flocks of wintering Sandhill Cranes, Tupelo Swamps ringing with the songs of Prothonotary Warblers, and Ospreys fishing right next to the road. You'll soon extend your stay.

Spring is, perhaps, the best time to visit, for wintering birds are about to leave and the summer residents have just arrived. This is the time to carefully check sites like Dancy Bottoms and Monte Sano State Park for concentrations of wood warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles as they head north to nest and raise their young. It is not unusual to record over 100 species of birds in a single morning at this time of year, including some of the state's most uncommon species.

A break from the water and the woods is available at the 3M Wildlife Area and the Winfred Thomas Agriculture Research Station where grassland and open country species including Dickcissel, Grass-hopper Sparrow, and Northern Bobwhite dominate the landscape. With a little luck, visitors might even spy a few Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.



*Photo credits: (left) Yellow Warbler/Bob Sargent; (right) Swamp Sparrow/USFWS, John and Karen Hollingsworth; (bottom) grass/ADCNR Photos*

# History of a River Crossing

The city of Decatur began as a simple Cherokee river-crossing. Over time, more people learned of the beauty of the Tennessee Valley, and the river-crossing became a ferry-crossing. Known first as McDaniel's Ferry, and then Rhodes Ferry, Decatur was named after Commodore Stephen Decatur in 1820 and officially incorporated in 1826.

The town grew and prospered with the increase of the railroad industry. Decatur became the eastern terminus of the first railroad west of the Appalachians, the Decatur to Tuscumbia line. The rail line carried goods around the infamous Muscle Shoals, but the presence of the railway led to a dark time in the town's history, as both the North and the South fought for control of the line. At the end of the Civil War, all but four of the town's buildings had been destroyed.

Once rebuilt, the town prospered post-Civil War, and the Tennessee River became a major artery for trade in the area. The taming of the Muscle Shoals and the development of TVA's network of dams laid the way for even more trade, as navigation was made easier. Decatur is now linked to over 650 miles of navigable waterways, stretching from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.



Sandhill Cranes/Walt Burch

## Site 16: Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center

**Directions:** If approaching the refuge from the west from the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 67 in southern Decatur, AL, travel east 1.9 miles to the entrance of the Visitor Center on the right. If approaching the refuge from the east and I-65 from the intersection of Hwy 67 and I-65, take Hwy 67 and travel 2.8 miles west to the Visitor Center on the left.

**Description:** Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge's (NWR's) showpiece Visitor Center serves as the gateway to the North Alabama Birding Trail. The Visitor Center hosts a series of interpretive exhibits that explain the refuge's numerous residents, the ecology of these organisms, as well as information on the early human residents of the Tennessee River Valley. After visiting the Center, explore the short trails in the area that lead to an impressive observation building. This temperature-controlled facility is ideal for watching the hundreds of geese, ducks, and Sandhill Cranes that spend the winter on the refuge. With two stories and several spotting scopes for visitors' use, the building is perfect for large groups or introducing new birders to the wonders of northern Alabama's birdlife.

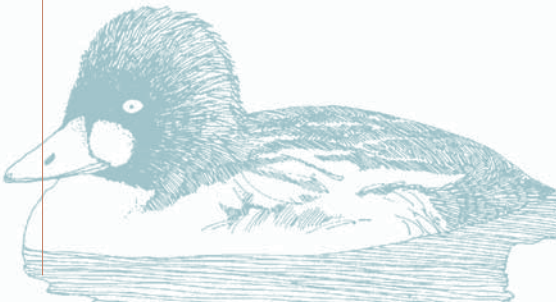


American Coots/USFWS

## Site 17: Decatur Hospitality Nature Park - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** In north Decatur, AL at the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 20/Alternate US Hwy 72 (this is at the south end of the Hudson Bridge just before it crosses the Tennessee River), take US Hwy 31 north across the river for 1.7 miles. The park is on the left (west) at the north end of the causeway.

**Description:** The Decatur Hospitality Nature Park, and nearby US Hwy 31 Causeway and Decatur Boat Harbor provide a great opportunity to scan the waters of the Tennessee River for winter waterfowl and shorebirds. This area is one of the first sites to develop mudflats in the fall as water levels begin to drop. Scan any suitable perches for Ospreys which prey on the abundant fish. In years past, this area has turned up some exciting rarities for Alabama; be sure and carefully scan the rafts of Canvasbacks, Common Goldeneyes, and mergansers for Greater Scaup, Long-tailed Ducks, scoters, and other surprises. At the day use park, be sure to check out the walking trail which winds through an impressive bottomland hardwood forest.



**Site 16 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.5480, W 86.9505  
**Contact:** U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.  
Decatur, AL 35603  
**Phone:** (256) 353-7243

**Site 17 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.6277, W 86.9580  
**Contact:** City of Decatur  
Decatur CVB  
**Phone:** (256) 350-2028







Red-wing Blackbird/Ted Lee Eubanks, FERMATA, Inc.

## Site 18: BP-Amoco Environmental Trail

**Directions:** In north Decatur, AL at the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 20/Alternate US Hwy 72 (this is at the south end of the Hudson Bridge just before it crosses the Tennessee River), take Hwy 20/Alternate 72 west 4.7 miles to Finley Island Road. Turn right onto Finley Island Rd. and go 0.9 mile to the signboard and marsh overlook on the left (west) side.

**Description:** In the middle of the extensive agricultural fields that lie just west of Decatur, BP-Amoco has preserved a corner of prime woodland and marsh habitat. This area is worth stopping to check for marshland residents such as Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Yellowthroats during spring and summer months. At other times of the year, the marsh could produce a variety of waterfowl including Wood Duck and American Coots. Some careful searching could also turn up a Virginia Rail or Sora. The neighboring woodlands host a variety of nesting songbirds, and the fields should be checked for wintering sparrows. While not open to the general public, the nearby Wetland's Edge Learning Center is available for school groups.

**Site 18 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.6300, W 87.0525  
**Contact:** BP-Amoco Companies  
 PO Box 2215  
 Decatur, AL 25609  
 Phone: (256) 340-5356



Grasshopper Sparrow/Walt Burch

## Site 19: 3M Wildlife Area - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** In north Decatur, AL at the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 20/Alternate US Hwy 72 (this is at the south end of the Hudson Bridge just before it crosses the Tennessee River), take Hwy 20/Alternate 72 west 4.7 miles to Finley Island Road. Turn right onto Finley Island Rd, and go 0.9 mile to the parking area and grassland trails on the right (east) side.

**Description:** This large open grassy area is currently owned by 3M and is a great example of early agricultural field succession. The company has plans to manage this area for native warm season grasses that will enhance the area's value for wildlife. Visitors should follow the trails through the grassland, and look and listen for Dickcissels and Grasshopper Sparrows amongst the numerous Eastern Meadowlarks. Overhead, Purple Martins can be seen searching for insects, and Loggerhead Shrikes may be seen flashing over grasses before dive-bombing for prey. Some of the rarer species that occasionally visit the area include Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Henslow's Sparrow, and Bobolink.

**Site 19 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.6329, W 87.0516  
**Contact:** 3M Company  
 1400 State Docks Rd., PO Box 2206  
 Decatur, AL 25609  
 Phone: (256) 552-6631



## Industrial Cooperation

Since the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority, industrial companies have been attracted to Northern Alabama for a number of reasons, including affordable electricity. Over the years, a large portion of Wheeler Reservoir's shoreline was purchased by these industries. Abundant water supply and access to barge transport provide added incentives for these industries as they continue to grow in this area.

In an attempt to give back to the valley they now occupy, many industrial giants are cooperating with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to employ new conservation strategies to manage current land holdings for wildlife.

3M Corporation has shown stewardship by planting over 200 acres in native warm season grasses on their NABT site. Also, Nucor Steel Decatur, LLC has been a valuable partner with ADCNR providing funding and materials for Mallard-Fox Creek WMA site.

Wildlife habitat along the Tennessee River/ADCNR, Keith Hudson





American Bittern/Ted Lee Eubanks, FERMATA, Inc.

## Site 20: Wheeler NWR - White Springs Dike

**Directions:** In north Decatur, AL at the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 20/Alternate US Hwy 72 (this is at the south end of the Hudson Bridge just before it crosses the Tennessee River), take Hwy 20/Alternate 72 north across the river 2.0 miles to the pull-out on the right (east) side of the road.

**Description:** White Spring Dike on Wheeler NWR is one of the premier birding sites of the Tennessee River Valley in Alabama. The dike runs between a dewatering area on the north side and the Tennessee River on the south. Intrepid birders can walk for over 8 miles along the dike, getting excellent views of waterfowl and shorebirds on either side. Search for neotropical migrants in the woodland bordering the dike and listen for Yellow and Prothonotary warblers which nest in the area. Other surprises that turn up on occasion include American Bittern and Sora. Birders should note - it requires extensive walking to access the best birding; however, the diversity of species that can be seen is well worth the hike.



Greater Yellowlegs/Jeff Nadler

## Site 21: Swan Creek Wildlife Management Area

**Directions:** In north Decatur, AL at the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 20/Alternate US Hwy 72 (this is at the south end of the Hudson Bridge just before it crosses the Tennessee River), take US Hwy 31 north for 4.0 miles. Turn left (west) onto the Thomas L. Hammons/Harris Station Road. Follow this road for 4.6 miles. Turn left (south) onto Dairy Road and go 0.7 mile to the boat landing.

**Description:** This state wildlife management area on the Tennessee River is managed for waterfowl and small game although it supports many more species. Mudflats can be covered with shorebirds, serving as a key attraction to this area in the fall. Search among the typical yellowlegs and Killdeer for unusual species such as American Avocet, Black-bellied Plover, or Baird's Sandpiper. The area is also good for migrant passerines in spring and fall when birds traveling to their winter and summer grounds stop over for a rest. During this time, shorebirds and waterfowl can also attract hungry raptors such as Bald Eagles.



Double-crested Cormorant/Walt Burch

## Site 22: Round Island Recreation Area

**Directions:** In north Decatur, AL at the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 20/Alternate US Hwy 72 (this is at the south end of the Hudson Bridge just before it crosses the Tennessee River), take US Hwy 31 north for 8.1 miles. Turn left onto CR 25/Nuclear Plant Road and go 6.8 miles. At CR 41/Cowford Rd., turn left and drive south 2 miles into the park.

**Description:** The Round Island Recreation Area provides access to the north side of the Tennessee River and an excellent vantage point for viewing winter waterfowl as well as cormorants, loons, and grebes. The pine woodland that surrounds the camping area is scattered with songbirds such as Red-breasted Nuthatches and numerous kinglets in winter. In summer, explore the river and its numerous inhabitants via a canoe or just pick a quiet place under one of the many trees to peruse the water.



### Site 20 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.6290, W 86.9520

Contact: US Fish & Wildlife (USFWS)

Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.

Decatur, AL 35603

Phone: (256) 353-7243

### Site 21 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.6780, W 87.0033

Contact: ADCNR

21438 Harris Station Road

Tanner, AL 35671

Phone: (256) 353-2634

### Site 22 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.6850, W 87.0705

Contact: Tennessee Valley Authority

TVA, SB 1H, PO Box 1010

Muscle Shoals, AL 35662-1010

Phone: (256) 386-2543







Great Egret/Ted Lee Eubanks, FERMATA, Inc.

## Site 23: Wheeler NWR - Arrowhead Landing

**Directions:** From I-565 west of Huntsville take Exit 2 and travel south .1 mile to the Old AL Hwy 20. Turn right and go 0.7 mile. Turn left (south) on a gravel road and follow this road for 1.6 miles. Take the left fork at the Wheeler NWR entrance sign and travel another 0.4 mile to the landing.

**Description:** Located just off I-565, this site provides access to another corner of the fertile Wheeler Reservoir and the Tennessee River. Watch the open water for rafts of Lesser Scaup, Red-breasted Mergansers, Green-winged Teal, Common Loons, and perhaps some surprises. At times of low water, check the mudflats for migrant shorebirds and the shallows for wading birds such as Great Blue Heron and Great Egret. There is always the chance that you will hear the loud rattle of a Belted Kingfisher as it announces its presence and darts on by.



Snow Geese/William Gates

## Site 24: Wheeler NWR - Beaverdam Peninsula Tower

**Directions:** From the intersection of I-565 and Greenbrier Road, near Greenbrier, AL, take Exit 3 onto Greenbrier Road. Travel 1.8 miles south to the road fork. Take the right fork and travel 0.6 mile until the road turns sharply to the right, but continue straight ahead onto the gravel road and take an immediate left. Tower will be visible a couple hundred yards farther along the gravel refuge road on the right.

**Description:** A visit to the Beaverdam Peninsula Tower in the summer may make visitors wonder why the tower is even mentioned. This broad observation platform sits in wheat and corn fields dotted with a few Red-winged Blackbirds. While a visit in the summer might not impress, once the winds of fall are in the air, this drastically changes. During the colder months, the broad observation platform is situated right in the center of an "all-the-birds-can-eat" buffet. Every morning and evening, hundreds of Sandhill Cranes and Snow Geese fill the fields, loafing about or picking at the seeds from last summer's crop. This wonderful concentration of bird life should be checked carefully for unusual "hangers-on" such as Greater White-fronted and Ross' geese.



Tupelo Swamp/ADCNR Photos

## Site 25: Wheeler NWR - Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk

**Directions:** From intersection of I-65 and I-565 drive east towards Huntsville for 6.6 miles. Take Exit 5 and travel on the overpass north back over I-565, and continue on this road east paralleling I-565 on your right. Continue for 0.4 miles until you reach County Line Road where you can turn right and take another overpass back over I-565 to the south side again. Take the first road to your right after crossing over I-565 and continue back west for 2 miles until it dead ends at the site.

**Description:** The Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk leads the visitor into the heart of the largest Tupelo Swamp in Alabama. While exploring the boardwalk, watch the canopy for active flocks of Tufted Titmice, Red-eyed Vireos, and a variety of warblers. The swamp usually rings with the songs of frogs, insects, and numerous birds including Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great-crested Flycatcher, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. At times, the abundant standing dead timber attracts a variety of woodpeckers including Pileated, Red-bellied, and Downy. Later in the day, there is a chance for the stately Barred Owl, whose distinct hooting is more often heard deep inside the swamp.

### Site 23 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.6050, W 86.8922

Contact: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.  
Decatur, AL 35603

Phone: (256) 353-7243



### Site 24 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.6110, W 86.8537

Contact: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.  
Decatur, AL 35603

Phone: (256) 353-7243



### Site 25 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.6490, W 86.8190

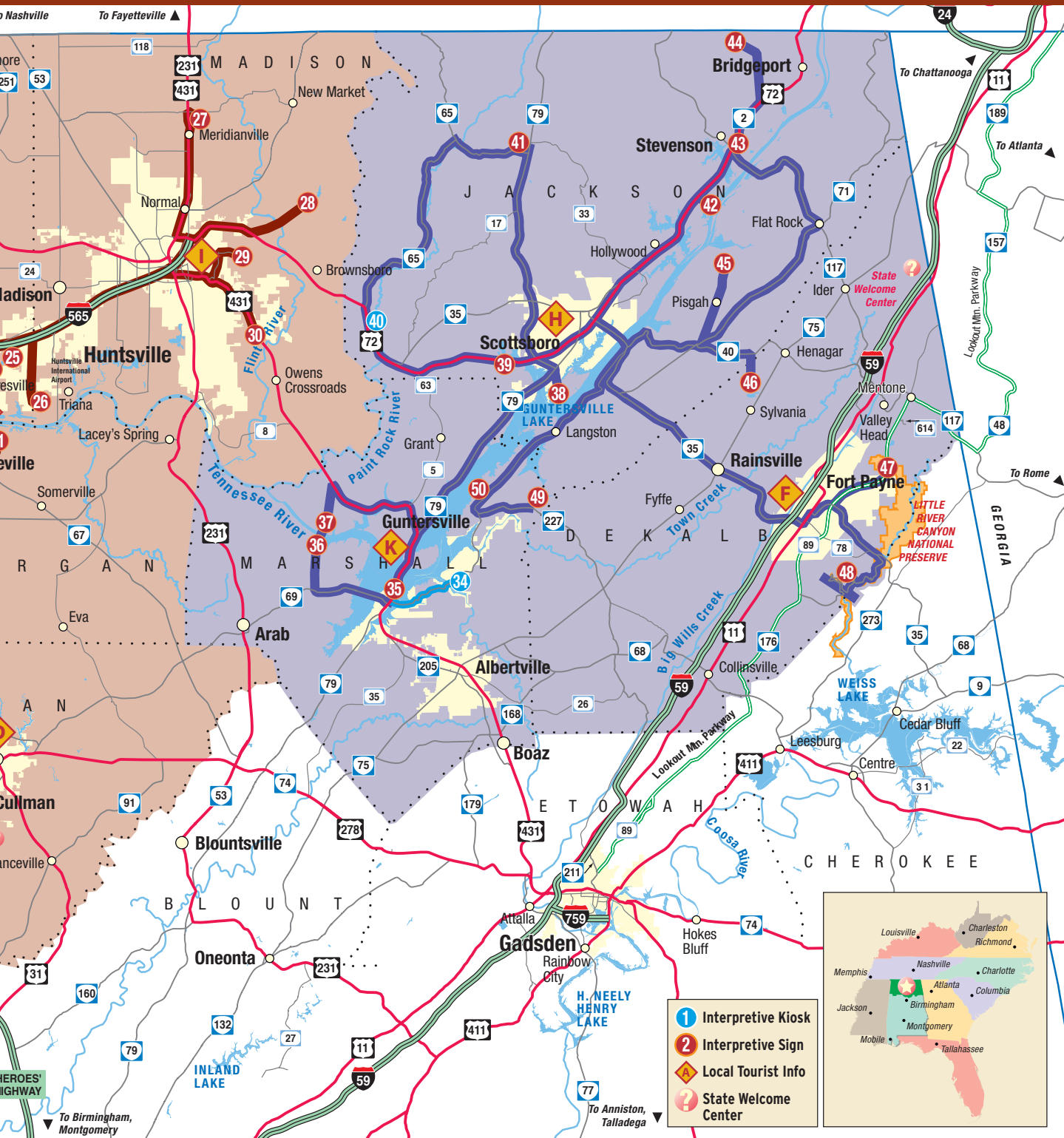
Contact: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.  
Decatur, AL 35603

Phone: (256) 353-7243









# Sweet as Tupelo Honey

The Water Tupelo, or Swamp Tupelo, as some call it, is one of the few trees in North America specially adapted to grow in a constantly flooded environment. These flooded conditions create one of the most distinctive habitats in northern Alabama, the Tupelo Swamp. The continuous flow of water brings a steady stream of nutrients directly to the roots of the tupelo. Leaves and fruit that fall from the trees absorb the water. In exchange, these leaves and fruits release tannins that color the water brown and nutrients that continue to feed the trees. The small dark blue fruits are a favorite of Wood Ducks and Wild Turkey, and they make an energy-rich contribution to their diet.

# Grassland Birds are Declining

Across North America, grassland bird species are declining. Although not fully understood, in many cases, these declines are due to loss of breeding habitat. As more open fields are paved or as invasive species choke out native ones, these birds are losing their homes. In an attempt to reverse this trend, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is working with numerous partners to manage the remaining grasslands primarily for native birds.



Pileated Woodpecker/Perry C. Covington

## Site 26: Wheeler NWR - Blackwell Swamp

**Directions:** The intersection of County Line Road and I-565 west of Huntsville, AL, lies between I-565 Exits 5 and 7. Note: There is no interstate exit at the intersection, as here US Hwy 72 parallels I-565. County Line Road may be accessed from I-565 Exit 7 by traveling west on Hwy 72, or from I-565 Exit 5 by traveling east on Hwy 72 for a short distance. From the intersection, go south on County Line Road for 5.9 miles. Turn left (east) on Jolly B. Road. To access the west side of Blackwell Swamp, continue on Jolly B. Road 0.6 mile to the Wheeler NWR sign and continue on the refuge access road for another 0.8 mile to a small canoe landing. To access the east side of the swamp, turn left (east) on another refuge access road off Jolly B. Road a few hundred yards before the Wheeler NWR sign. This road will carry you to the north and east sides of the swamp. An eastern viewing and canoe access point is 1.7 miles down this road.

**Description:** The flooded woodland and marsh of Blackwell Swamp can be explored by car, on foot, or by canoe. This extensive area hosts a variety of wetland species including Great Blue and Green herons and Great Egret. The striking Prothonotary Warbler can be plentiful in the spring when the males are actively singing from every feasible vantage point, in hopes of courting a mate. With numerous dead trees in the area, look for Red-headed and Pileated woodpeckers as they flash their red, white, and black colors in this sea of green.

**Site 26 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.5770, W 86.7822  
**Contact:** U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.  
Decatur, AL 35603  
**Phone:** (256) 353-7243



Dickcissel/USFWS, Steve Maslowski

## Site 27: Winfred Thomas Agricultural Research Station

**Directions:** From the intersection of I-565 and US 231/431 (Memorial Parkway) in Huntsville, AL, take Exit 19B onto US 231/431 and drive 12.5 miles north. Turn right (east) onto Walker Lane and go 0.6 mile to the ARS sign and gate on the right. Visitors should note that the gate into the field station is periodically closed, at which time only walk-in birding is allowed.

**Description:** The extensive grasslands and agricultural fields associated with Alabama A&M's field station provide a rare area of open country filled with native birds. Bird the area by making frequent stops, and look for Grasshopper Sparrows, Dickcissel, and Eastern Meadowlarks. Scan the open agriculture fields for other sparrows such as Chipping and Field. In winter, these fields host Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls, which can be seen patrolling over the extensive grasslands. The star attraction at the research station are the Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, which can be found in spring and early summer perched on small trees and fences across the area.

**Site 27 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.9025, W 86.5596  
**Contact:** Alabama A&M Research Station  
372 Walker Lane  
Hazel Green, AL 35762  
**Phone:** (256) 372-4248







Blue Jay/USFWS, Dave Menke

## Site 28: Madison County Public Lake

**Directions:** In Huntsville, AL, from the intersection of I-565 and US 431/231 (Memorial Parkway), take I-565 east (it soon becomes US Hwy 72) for 7.5 miles to Ryland Pike Road. Turn left on Ryland Pike Road for 6.5 miles (through Maysville where it becomes Hurricane Creek Road) to County Lake Road. At County Lake Road turn right and drive 1.0 mile to Madison County Lake. After turning off US 72 it is also possible to follow the Madison County Public Lake highway directional signs.

**Description:** Madison County Public Lake is best known for its fishing, but it also serves as an excellent introduction to northern Alabama's birdlife. Scan the lake for wintering waterfowl or perhaps a family of resident Canada Geese and their downy young. The woods around the lake host a variety of warblers and vireos during migration while resident favorites include Northern Cardinal and Blue Jay. From time to time, Ospreys may drop in for some fishing, and you never know when a vagrant gull or tern may turn up unexpectedly.



Indigo Bunting/Walt Burch

## Site 29: Monte Sano State Park

**Directions:** In Huntsville, AL, from the intersection of I-565 and US Hwy 431/231 (Memorial Parkway), take Hwy 431 south for 4.5 miles. Turn left on Monte Sano Blvd. and travel 2.6 miles to Nolen Ave. Turn right on Nolen Ave. and stay on Nolen until you enter the park. Follow the state park signs to the Scenic Overlook.

**Description:** Monte Sano State Park sits atop a remnant ridge of the Cumberland Plateau, giving a fantastic view of the surrounding valleys and plateaus that cover northeastern Alabama. These islands in the sky are covered in thick hardwood forest, which is home to a number of neotropical migrants. As you explore the trails in the park, look and listen for Indigo Buntings, Great-crested Flycatchers, and Red-eyed Vireos. During migration, these can be augmented with species that nest farther north. Raptors can be seen gliding past at eye level, soaring on warm air currents rising from the valley below.



Flint River and bottomland forest/ADCNR Photos

## Site 30: Hays Nature Preserve

**Directions:** In Huntsville, AL, from the intersection of I-565 and US Hwy 431/231 (Memorial Parkway), take Hwy 431 south for 10.7 miles. The Hays Preserve is on the left (north) side of the road just after mile marker #324. Turn off just before crossing the Flint River.

**Description:** The Hays Nature Preserve hosts several miles of paved trails that follow the Flint River and its associated oxbow lakes through low riparian habitat, old fields, and a golf course. This is an incredible area, easily accessible for birders near the large metropolitan area of Huntsville. Species to look for along the river include Great Blue and Green herons, Belted Kingfisher, and in winter, Wilson's Snipe. The edges of woodland host Eastern Bluebirds, Song Sparrows, and numerous other resident and migrant species.

### Site 28 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.8111, W 86.3940

Contact: ADCNR

2501 County Lake Road

Gurley, AL 35748

Phone: (256) 776-4905



### Site 29 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.7470, W 86.5104

Contact: ADCNR

Monte Sano St. Park, 5105 Nolen Avenue

Huntsville, AL 35801

Phone: (256) 534-3757



### Site 30 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.6420, W 86.4706

Contact: City of Huntsville Rec'al. Services

308 Fountain Circle

Huntsville, AL 35801

Phone: (256) 427-5116





*Prothonotary Warbler/Walt Burch*

## Site 31: Wheeler NWR - Cave Springs

**Directions:** From the intersection of I-65 and AL Hwy 67 (Exit 334) near Priceville, AL, go west on Hwy 67 for 0.5 mile. Turn right (north) onto Deere Road and go 0.5 mile. Turn right (east) onto Upper River Road and go 3.5 miles to a paved road on the left (north). Turn left onto the paved road and go 0.1 mile. Cave Springs Swamp is to the right. Cave Springs Cave is located about 100 yards to the southeast.

**Description:** The Cave Springs Cave has been popular for thousands of years. The combination of shelter, fresh water, and abundant food has attracted humans and other wildlife to its safety. The cave's current residents include several thousand Gray Bats, an endangered species whose population stronghold is in northeastern Alabama. Where the springs emerge from the cave, a family of Beavers has built a substantial dam, creating an area of flooded woodland and marsh, perfect for birding. Check this area for Red-headed and Red-bellied woodpeckers, as well as Prothonotary Warblers and the occasional Belted Kingfisher. The deeper water can attract Wood Duck and other waterfowl, especially in the winter.

**Site 31 Access:** Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.5470, W 86.8510

**Contact:** U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.

Decatur, AL 35603

**Phone:** (256) 353-7243







Northern Cardinal/Dave Menke

## Site 32: Hurricane Creek Park - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** From the intersection of I-65 and US Hwy 31 near Lacon, AL, take Exit 318 and drive south on Hwy 31 South for 2.2 miles to the park on the left.

**Description:** Hurricane Creek Park is known for its scenic deep canyon, which is heavily wooded with mature hardwoods. The park offers a number of trails, leading birders through a landscape crisscrossed by streams and waterfalls. As you walk the trails, listen for Red-eyed Vireos and Great Crested Flycatchers among the numerous Northern Cardinals and Carolina Chickadees. Peer through the canopy for Red-tailed and Red-shouldered hawks soaring high overhead. During the winter, White-breasted Nuthatches and Yellow-rumped Warblers join the cardinals and chickadees, while almost anything could appear during migration.



Wood Thrush/Walt Burch

## Site 33: Wheeler NWR - Dancy Bottoms Nature Trail

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 31 and AL Hwy 67 in Decatur, AL, drive south on Hwy 31 3.5 miles through Flint City to Red Bank Road. Turn left onto Red Bank Road, just before the railroad overpass, and drive 1.0 mile east on Red Bank Road, cross Flint Creek on Red Bank Bridge, then immediately turn left into the Dancy Bottoms access area. The walking trail begins at the small parking area aside Flint Creek.

**Description:** Dancy Bottoms is an excellent area to visit during spring migration when dozens of warblers, vireos, tanagers, thrushes, orioles, and grosbeaks fill the trees. The area is also good for breeding species, including Barred Owl and Red-headed Woodpecker. Louisiana Waterthrush can be heard singing along the trail as early as March, and Kentucky Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Acadian Flycatcher soon join them. The potential for this area to turn up unexpected species is very high with Lincoln's Sparrows, Mourning and Connecticut Warblers all recorded recently. Warbler enthusiasts should check close to the ground late in the spring.

## Forest Elders

### Escape to an earlier time

Throughout generations, the colossal trees of Northern Alabama's mature hardwood forests have stood through considerable natural, historical, and cultural changes. Some of these giants are old enough to have witnessed the Civil War, while others only date back to the taming of Muscle Shoals. Because of the rich habitat they provide, these elders of the forest host special birds that don't venture far from ancient limbs.

### Listen before you look

Because the forest's extensive canopy creates a deep shade, spotting birds can be difficult. Birders should listen carefully to the variety of sounds the forest's residents make. Familiarity with bird song will reveal a bird's identity quicker than trying to discern it in a thick canopy of green. Many birds are quiet in the middle of the day, as they forage for food or tend to their young. However, a visit early in the morning or at the end of the day will ensure a fantastic chorus of bird song.

Great Crested Flycatcher/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Isidor Jeklin



**Site 32 Access: Modest Access Fee**  
**GPS Coordinates: N 34.2860, W 86.8950**  
**Contact: Cullman City Parks and Recreation**  
**PO Box 788, Cullman, AL 35056**  
**Phone: (256) 734-9157**

**Site 33 Access: Free**  
**GPS Coordinates: N 34.5070, W 86.9552**  
**Contact: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)**  
**Wheeler NWR, 2700 Refuge Headquarters Rd.**  
**Decatur, AL 35603**  
**Phone: (256) 353-7243**









# Northeast Loop



For tourist information contact:

**F**

**DeKalb County  
Tourist Association**  
1503 Glenn Blvd. SW  
PO Box 681165  
Fort Payne, AL 35968  
Phone: (256) 845-3957  
(888) 805-4740  
Fax: (256) 845-3946  
[www.tourdekalb.com](http://www.tourdekalb.com)

**H**

**Greater Jackson County  
Chamber of Commerce**  
407 E. Willow St.  
PO Box 973  
Scottsboro, AL 35768  
Phone: (256) 259-5500  
(800) 259-5508  
Fax: (256) 259-4447  
[www.jacksoncountychamber.com](http://www.jacksoncountychamber.com)

**K**

**Marshall County Convention  
& Visitors Bureau**  
200 Gunter Ave.  
PO Box 711  
Guntersville, AL 35976  
Phone: (256) 582-7015  
(800) 582-6282  
Fax: (256) 582-3682  
[www.marshallcountycvb.com](http://www.marshallcountycvb.com)

*Note: Icons correspond to "local  
tourist info" sites shown on map  
on pages 16 & 17.*

Alabama's northeastern corner has a wilder, more primitive side than much of the state, with the Appalachian chain rising in the east. Birds known for their vulnerability to disturbance thrive in this corner of the state, with Cerulean Warblers nesting in remote valleys, Ruffed Grouse drumming from wooded draws, and some incredibly endangered aquatic life hanging on in the Paint Rock River Valley.

This unique landscape is pock-marked with some of the most environmentally important cave systems east of the Mississippi. These caves hold almost all of the hibernating Gray Bats in the world. Visitors are drawn to the caves each summer when hundreds of thousands of these rare mammals can be seen leaving their roosts to start their evening hunt. Although their numbers once declined dramatically, careful management is bringing them back from the brink.

Beneath the towering Cumberland Plateau, Guntersville Lake extends its thin arms up steep valleys, forming even more habitat for winter waterfowl. You may see numerous Bald Eagles, some of which have taken up residence around the lake - due to the assistance from ADCNR. Each year, Guntersville Peninsula, which lies at the heart of the Northeast Loop, provides some exciting rare birds for the state. Previous celebrities have included Glaucous Gull, Pacific Loon, Red-necked Grebe.

Whether you are just looking to escape to the outdoors or looking for rare birds, this out-of-the-way corner of the state is well worth exploring over and over again.



*Photo credits: (left) American Redstart/USFWS, Steve Maslowski; (right) Gorham's Bluff/ADCNR Photos; (bottom) grasses/ADCNR Photos*

# Return of a Native

When the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) began a Bald Eagle Restoration Project in 1984, Bald Eagles had not successfully nested in Alabama since 1949.

Historically, Bald Eagles nested in Alabama's Tennessee River Valley. The population dwindled in the 1950's and 1960's due mainly to the devastating effects of DDT poisoning. This chemical passes through the food chain by accumulating in fish, which in turn are eaten by eagles. DDT in the eagles caused eggshells to thin so that they broke during incubation and failed to hatch. The population plummeted, wintering eagles in Alabama became rare, and the breeding population completely died out.

Thanks to ADCNR's restoration efforts, Bald Eagle populations have increased, and now these majestic birds nest throughout the state. In the fall, there is an influx of Bald Eagles into Alabama from northern states and Canada. These migrants winter in Alabama, enjoying moderate temperatures before returning north in the spring. Once in danger of extinction, Bald Eagles have made a tremendous comeback, not only in Alabama, but across the country.



Guntersville State Park/Teaming with Wildlife

## Site 34: Guntersville State Park, Town Creek and Drive - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 431 and AL Hwy 227 in Guntersville, AL, take Hwy 227 east for 5.6 miles to the birding trail orientation kiosk at the state park.

**Description:** Guntersville State Park is one of the premiere birding areas in northeastern Alabama. Renowned for its Eagle Awareness Weekends, the park is best visited in the winter. During this time, look for dense populations of waterfowl, and the chance to spy a vagrant such as Red-necked Grebe or an unusual gull. The woodlands through the park should be checked during migration for a variety of warblers, vireos, tanagers and grosbeaks. Migration is also the best time to search for shorebirds on any exposed mudflats. Wading birds such as Great Blue Heron and Great Egret occur year-round and nest on islands in Guntersville Lake.



**Site 34 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.3697, W 86.2169  
**Contact:** ADCNR, Lake Guntersville State Park  
7966 Alabama Hwy 227  
Guntersville, AL 35976  
**Phone:** (256) 571-5444



Laughing Gull/Rob Tizard, FERMATA, Inc.

## Site 35: Guntersville Peninsula

**Directions:** This site refers to the walking trails along the edges of Guntersville Peninsula. Good places to access the trail include the corner of AL Hwy 69/Henry Street and Sunset Drive in western Guntersville, AL or the intersection of Sunset Drive and US Hwy 431 in northern Guntersville, AL. Visitors should check the orientation map on the birding trail interpretive sign located at the Marshall County Convention and Visitors Bureau building at the southern end of the US Hwy 431 River Bridge.

**Description:** The city of Guntersville sits on a peninsula that juts into Guntersville Reservoir. The city has developed walking trails along the shoreline of the peninsula, providing public access to innumerable vantage points to search the water for bird life. The reservoir is at its best in winter, when waterfowl is plentiful, often supporting rafts of Red-breasted Mergansers, Lesser Scaup, Gadwalls, as well as Common Loons and Hooded Grebes. The former marina area on the northeast side of the peninsula has supported a number of unusual gulls and Red-necked Grebes have been recorded there as well. Other species to look for during the year include Double-crested Cormorant, Osprey, and Bald Eagle, all of which nest nearby.

**Site 35 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.3630, W 86.2916  
**Contact:** Marshall County CVB  
200 Gunter Avenue  
Guntersville, AL 35976  
**Phone:** (256) 582-7015, (800) 582-6282







Peregrine Falcon/USFWS, Craig Kopple

## Site 36: Guntersville Dam South

**Directions:** From the intersection of US 431 and AL Hwy 69 in Guntersville, AL go west on Hwy 69 for 6.2 miles to CR-240/Union Grove Rd. Turn right on CR-240/Union Grove Rd. and travel 2.3 miles to CR-50/Snow Point Rd. Turn right and drive 3.4 miles to the southern side of Guntersville Dam. Note: this is for south dam access only - there is no vehicular traffic allowed across the dam.

**Description:** Guntersville Dam impounds the 67,900-acre Guntersville Reservoir in north-eastern Alabama. The Tennessee Valley Authority manages the dam for electricity production and flood control. The dam makes an excellent vantage point to scan the waters of the reservoir for waterfowl, wading birds, and gulls. Numerous Great Blue Herons fish here, unaffected by the close proximity to the dozens of anglers. The park below the dam also offers a boat ramp where boats can be launched to visit Painted Bluff, a few miles downstream. This impressive red sandstone bluff is the premier observation site for migratory raptors, which are attracted to the hot air thermals that are pushed off the water and over the bluff, providing ideal soaring conditions. This area can be comfortably scanned from a boat below the bluff. The area is especially good for Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles, which have historically nested nearby.



Bald Eagle/USFWS

## Site 37: Guntersville Dam North

**Directions:** From the intersection of US 431 and AL Hwy 69 in Guntersville, go north on US 431 for 14.9 miles to Guntersville Dam Rd. (Guntersville Dam Sign). Turn left onto Guntersville Dam Rd. and go 3.8 miles to the dam. Note: this is for north dam access only - there is no vehicular traffic allowed across the dam.

**Description:** The north side of Guntersville Dam is similar to the south side and also provides boat access to Painted Bluff a few miles downstream. However, the north side of the dam is usually better for viewing Bald Eagles. Active eagle nests have been seen on the ridge just northeast of the dam and in a small wet area northwest of the dam. Look for adult parents from January - April and for recently-fledged juveniles in April and May. Sometimes, juvenile birds will stay in the area for several years, and many more birds can often be seen during the winter when resident eagles are joined by migrants from farther north.



Male Hooded Merganser, foreground/Quincey Banks

## Site 38: Goose Pond Colony

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 279 in south Scottsboro, AL, head southeast on Hwy 279 (it will become Hwy 79 south) for 3.2 miles to Ed Hembree Drive. Turn left at Goosepond Dr. and the Goose Pond Colony sign. Follow the GPC signs 1.5 miles to the amphitheater. Park in the parking lot just south of the amphitheater.

**Description:** Goose Pond Colony is a public recreational development, built on a peninsula on the northern side of Guntersville Lake south of Scottsboro. This location makes for some excellent birding especially during the winter. Stop at one of the numerous viewing points to search the rafts of waterfowl for Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, and Canvasback. At times, loons, grebes, and cormorants can be seen on the water, and a Bald Eagle may drop by for a meal now and again. Explore the nature trails in the area to see some of the numerous migrant and nesting songbirds ranging from Indigo Buntings to Eastern Kingbirds.

### Site 36 Access: Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.4250, W 86.3930  
**Contact:** Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)  
 3696 Alabama Hwy 60  
 Guntersville, AL 35976  
 Phone: (256) 571-4280



### Site 37 Access: Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.4250, W 86.3930  
**Contact:** Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)  
 3696 Alabama Hwy 60  
 Guntersville, AL 35976  
 Phone: (256) 571-4280



### Site 38 Access: Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.5743, W 86.0807  
**Contact:** Goose Pond Colony  
 417 Ed Hembree  
 Scottsboro, AL 35769  
 Phone: (256) 259-2884



## Welcome to the Nursery

Just inside this cave, thousands of mammals are sleeping. Each summer, the cave is home to hundreds of thousands of endangered Gray Bats. In the evenings, their dusk emergence is awe-inspiring as the mass of bats emerge from the cave and head for the Tennessee River for an all-night insect buffet. Sauta Cave National Wildlife Refuge was established to preserve this magnificent spectacle. A few bats use the cave throughout the year, but in the summer months after the young are born, the population hits its peak.

## Diverse Ecosystems & Species

The Paint Rock River is one of the most pristine rivers in the southeastern US. It flows unhindered from Franklin County, Tennessee, through landscapes of porous limestone. One scenic watershed creek that feeds the river is known locally as "The Walls of Jericho." Eventually, the river empties into the Tennessee River upstream from Huntsville.

This river is home to an amazing diversity of freshwater creatures with over 100 species of fish and about 45 species of mussels, several of which are found nowhere else in the world. In order to preserve this great river, The Nature Conservancy and ADCNR are working together to manage a significant portion of the 318-square mile watershed.



Hibernating Indiana bats/ADCNR, Keith Hudson

### Site 39: North Sauty Creek WMA/ Sauta Cave NWR

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 279 in southern Scottsboro, AL, travel west on Hwy 72 5.9 miles. For Sauta Cave NWR access, park adjacent to the metal gate at the small highway pull off on the south side of Hwy 72 and walk the road 300 yards to the cave. Continuing west on Hwy 72 for another 0.7 mile is a separate off-highway parking area for North Sauty Creek WMA with birding trail interpretation and a short walking trail to the west side of North Sauty Creek.

**Description:** Birders will revel in the excellent display of waterfowl and wading birds that occupy the area, especially North Sauty Creek. Park on the roadside and scan the creek for waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds especially during migration or in the winter. A small heron rookery is located on one of the small islands. However, **exercise extreme caution** when viewing from the road shoulder since US Hwy 72 can be very busy.

Just across the highway is Sauta Cave National Wildlife Refuge. Sauta Cave has the largest concentration of endangered Gray Bats in the world, and during the summer, dusk emergences can total a quarter million bats. This is the largest emergence of bats east of the Mississippi River, a spectacular sight that must be seen to be believed. Visitors who bird for songbirds on this small 264-acre refuge might find summer residents like Summer Tanager and Prothonotary Warbler.

**Site 39 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.6190, W 86.1312  
**Contact:** North Sauty Creek WMA  
ADCNR: Area Biologist  
234 County Road 141  
Hollywood, AL 35752  
(for Sauta Cave NWR contact info see Site 16)



Paint Rock River/ADCNR Photos

### Site 40: Roy B. Whitaker Paint Rock River Preserve - Kiosk Site

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 65 between the towns of Gurley and Paint Rock, AL, drive 0.3 mile to the Roy B. Whitaker Paint Rock River Preserve on the north (left) side of the road. Turn north (left), at the preserve sign, and carefully cross the railroad tracks to the parking area.

**Description:** Roy B. Whitaker once farmed these fields along the Paint Rock River. In order for future generations to be able to enjoy the farm he enjoyed so much, Whitaker sold it to The Nature Conservancy who now manages it for conservation. These rolling fields sit alongside one of the most diverse freshwater ecosystems east of the Mississippi, and the healthy riparian forest along its banks helps to maintain that diversity. For the visiting birder, the excitement is all in the grasslands where Grasshopper Sparrows buzz and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers perform their aerial acrobatics. Exploring deeper into the woodland should produce Great-crowned Flycatchers and Red-eyed Vireos, both of which nest in the area. Of course almost anything could turn up during migration, so it's worth investigating all habitats during spring and fall.

**Site 40 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.6725, W 86.3282  
**Contact:** The Nature Conservancy  
2100 1st Ave. North, Suite 500  
Birmingham, Alabama 35203  
Phone: (205) 251-1155 Ext. 104







Ruffed Grouse/USFWS

## Site 41: Skyline Wildlife Management Area

**Directions:** The directions and GPS below guide visitors to the Skyline WMA birding drive, however birding may be done throughout this extensive WMA. From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 65, between the towns of Gurley and Paint Rock, AL, drive north through the Paint Rock Valley 17.6 miles to AL Hwy 146. Turn right onto Hwy 146 and drive 4.7 miles. This will take visitors into the western side of the WMA and to the south entrance (gravel road) of the approximately 3-mile birding drive. For directions to other parts of the WMA, visitors should consult the area's permit map - available from the area biologist and from various WMA self-serve stations.

**Description:** Skyline Wildlife Management Area is an extensive tract of wild lands in northeastern Alabama, which hosts the state's only population of Ruffed Grouse. This carefully managed area also supports older hardwood forests utilized by nesting Cerulean Warblers. A visit to the WMA is most rewarding in spring when Yellow-breasted Chats, Field Sparrows, Indigo Buntings and Prairie Warblers can be heard singing throughout. With careful exploration and a little luck, spring visitors might also hear the drumming of the male Ruffed Grouse, although Wild Turkey and Northern Bobwhite are much easier to find. This mosaic of regenerating habitats provides a tremendous diversity of bird species, making it a special treat for birders.

**Site 41 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.8534, W 86.1310  
**Contact:** ADCNR: Area Biologist  
 37 County Road 243  
 Scottsboro, AL 35768  
 Phone: (256) 435-5422

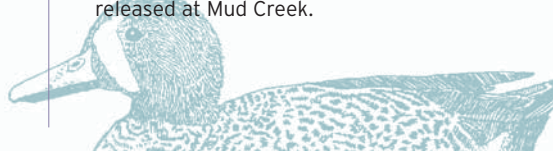


Bald Eagle Hacking Tower/ADCNR, Keith Hudson

## Site 42: Mud Creek Wildlife Management Area

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 279 in southern Scottsboro, AL, travel east on US Hwy 72 for 12.4 miles to CR 116. Turn right onto CR 116 and drive 1.1 miles to CR 141. Turn left onto CR 141 and go 0.2 miles and turn right onto a gravel road. Follow the gravel road for 1.4 miles to the pumping station.

**Description:** Managed for wintering waterfowl and small-game hunting, Mud Creek Wildlife Management Area has numerous impoundments which are likely to turn up a great variety of species. Access roads leading into the area also make Mud Creek easily birded. Check the ponds in fall and winter for dabbling ducks such as Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal. Blue-winged Teal are more likely found during migration periods, while American Coots and Common Moorhens can be seen at any time. The area is also a favorite for wading birds with Great Blue and Green herons being especially numerous. Mud Creek was the hacking site from which Bald Eagles were first reintroduced to Alabama's Tennessee River Valley. Many of the eagles now seen throughout the area are the descendents of the original birds released at Mud Creek.



**Site 42 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.7768, W 85.8593  
**Contact:** ADCNR: Area Biologist  
 4101 Ala. Hwy 21 N.  
 Jacksonville, AL 36265  
 Phone: (256) 435-5422

## Water for Wildlife

The Tennessee River Valley is renowned for the impressive flocks of waterfowl that visit the valley each winter. The hard work and management that goes on during the rest of the year to support those waterfowl is less well known. While an unmanaged wetland can produce an average of 200 pounds of plant seeds per acre, one actively planted wetland with seed-producing crops and carefully managed water levels can produce over 1,000 pounds of seed per acre. These seasonally flooded wetlands can support substantially more waterfowl than those left wild.

Certain species of waterfowl, especially geese, will feed directly off of waste grain in agricultural fields. These flooded fields also provide important habitat for wintering and migrant shorebirds, such as Greater Yellowlegs and Wilson's Snipe. In summer, wetlands experience reduced water levels, but retain more vegetation, providing cover for nesting songbirds. These wetlands also support frogs, crayfish, fish, and insects that, in turn, attract predators such as Great Blue Heron and Raccoon. Managed water levels and enhanced food sources benefit all wildlife.



Common Loon/USFWS, Lee Karney

## Site 43: Stevenson Town Park

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 279 in southern Scottsboro, AL, travel east on Hwy 72 for 19 miles to AL Hwy 117. Turn left onto Hwy 117 just south of Stevenson, AL. Drive 0.6 miles and turn left at the park sign.

**Description:** Stevenson Town Park sits on the east side of Crow Creek. The park provides an excellent vantage to scan the open water of the reservoir for Common Loons and Horned Grebes, as well as a variety of waterfowl. During times of low water, look for shorebirds and herons hunting in the shallows. Just down the road from the park is historic Fort Harker. This Union fort was where General Ulysses S. Grant plotted his invasion of Stevenson. The fort now stands as a quiet reminder of an incredible time of turmoil. Birding can also be done at the fort.



**Site 43 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.8502 W 85.8342  
**Contact:** City Hall  
 104 Kentucky Ave  
 Stevenson, AL 35772  
**Phone:** (256) 437-4330



Indigo Bunting/USFWS, Dave Menke

## Site 44: Russell Cave National Monument

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 279 in southern Scottsboro, AL, travel east on Hwy 72 23.7 miles to CR 69. Turn left onto CR 69 and drive north for 1 mile to CR 75. Turn right onto CR 75 and follow it north for 5.2 miles to the National Monument on the left.

**Description:** Russell Cave has been home to wildlife and man for thousands of years. This peaceful setting combines food, water and shelter with tranquility and beauty. Following the elevated boardwalks and nature trails could lead to eastern woodland species such as Summer and Scarlet tanagers, whose song is accompanied by the insect-like croaking of Yellow-billed Cuckoos. During migration, almost any eastern warbler or vireo is likely to make an appearance. In addition to its extensive birding, the national monument also offers an excellent interpretive facility detailing the lives of northern Alabama's early human inhabitants.

**Site 44 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.9770, W 85.8056  
**Contact:** National Park Service  
 Russell Cave NM  
 2141 Gault Ave. N., Ft. Payne, AL 35967  
**Phone:** (256) 845-9605



Gorham's Bluff/ADCNR Photos

## Site 45: Gorham's Bluff/Coon Gulf

**Directions:** From Scottsboro, AL, at the junction of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 35, take Hwy 35 south for 3.2 miles until just across the Tennessee River. Turn left (east) onto AL Hwy 40 and go 6.8 miles to a 4-way stop. Turn left onto AL Hwy 71 and go north for 2.3 miles. Turn left onto CR 58 and go 5.5 miles. Turn left onto CR 357 and go 1.2 miles. Turn left on CR 457 and drive 0.8 miles. Turn right into the Gorham's Bluff community and follow the signs to the lodge.

**Description:** Raccoon Creek is a very scenic arm of Guntersville Reservoir. The planned community of Gorham's Bluff rises on the southern side of Raccoon Creek, providing an incredible vista of the creek and the surrounding area, as well as exemplifying how the Tennessee River has cut through the Cumberland Plateau over millennia. Birds to look for in the area include Bald Eagles, which nest nearby. Other raptors can be seen soaring in the air currents along the bluff. On the northern side, explore areas within the valley by boat so you can visit the numerous small bays and inlets in the area. Waterfowl can be numerous in winter, and Canada Geese and Wood Duck both nest along the creek. Quiet exploration by boat could lead to close encounters with Green Herons, Great Egrets, and other wildlife.

**Site 45 Access:** Free  
**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.7350, W 85.8347  
**Contact:** 101 Gorham's Drive  
 Gorham's Bluff  
 Pisgah, AL 35765-6891  
**Phone:** (256) 451-VIEW (8439)







Canada Geese/USFWS

## Site 46: DeKalb County Public Lake

**Directions:** From the intersection of US Hwy 72 and AL Hwy 279 in southern Scottsboro, AL, travel east on Hwy 72 1.7 miles to Hwy 35. Turn right onto AL Hwy 35 and drive south for 3.3 miles to AL Hwy 40. Turn left onto Hwy 40 and head northeast for 10.6 miles to CR 162. Turn right onto CR 162 and drive 3.9 miles to CR 194. Turn right onto CR 194 and drive 0.2 miles to the public lake on the left.

**Description:** DeKalb County Lake is a popular fishing spot that also serves as an excellent introduction to northern Alabama's bird life. Check the open waters of the lake for wintering waterfowl or a family of resident Canada Geese with their downy young. Wooded areas and the larger trees around the lake may produce a variety of warblers and vireos during migration. Keep checking overhead for a fly-by Osprey or Bald Eagle, and perhaps, a vagrant gull or tern may put in an appearance.



Yellow-throated Vireo/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Mike Hopiak

## Site 47: DeSoto State Park - Azalea Cascade Trail

**Directions:** From Interstate I-59, take Exit 218 and travel south on AL Hwy 35 for 1.2 miles to US Hwy 11. Turn left onto Hwy 11 and head north for 1.2 miles to Hwy 35/5th St. Turn right onto Hwy 35/5th St. and drive south 2.3 miles to the DeSoto Parkway. Turn left onto the parkway and drive north 5.5 miles into the park. The Azalea Cascade Trail is just a bit farther along the parkway.

**Description:** DeSoto State Park offers an unequalled display of multiple woodland bird species found in the southeastern United States as well as a staff naturalist and great trails to lead you to them. Species to look for include Pileated, Red-headed, Red-bellied, Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, as well as White-breasted and Brown-headed nuthatches. This mosaic of habitats is home to a great variety of warblers including Hooded, Kentucky, Black-and-White, Blue-winged and even Golden-winged on occasion. In spring and early summer, the forest resounds with the calls of Scarlet Tanagers, Wood Thrushes, and Yellow-throated Vireos, while winter brings flocks of American Goldfinches and Purple Finches from farther north. A clear view of the sky could reveal migrating raptors in spring and fall, such as Red-tailed and Broad-winged hawks, and perhaps even Golden Eagles in winter.



Prairie Warbler/USFWS, Steve Maslowski

## Site 48: Little River Canyon National Preserve Drive

**Directions:** From Interstate I-59, take Exit 218 and travel south on AL Hwy 35 for 1.2 miles to US Hwy 11. Turn left onto Hwy 11 and head north for 1.2 miles to Hwy 35/5th St. Turn right onto Hwy 35/5th St. and drive south 8.6 miles to AL Hwy 176. Turn right onto Hwy 176/Little River Canyon Parkway and follow the northern rim of the canyon for 11 miles to the pull out on the left.

**Description:** As you drive along the rim of this incredibly scenic canyon, listen in the open fields for Yellow-breasted Chats and Prairie Warblers. Farther down in the canyon, Yellow-throated Warblers and Red-eyed Vireos can be heard calling from below while Rough-winged Swallows and Chimney Swifts carouse overhead. The canyon is at its best during fall migration when numerous migrating raptors soar along its rim. Red-tailed and Broad-winged hawks are the most likely candidates, but Peregrine Falcons and Golden Eagles have also been known to grace the canyon with their presence.



### Site 46 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.5764, W 85.8060  
Contact: ADCNR: DeKalb County Public Lake  
720 Co. Rd. 194  
Sylvania, AL 35988  
Phone: (256) 657-3000



### Site 47 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.4990 W 85.6178  
Contact: ADCNR, Desoto State Park  
13883 County Road 89  
Fort Payne, AL 35967  
Phone: (256) 845-0051



### Site 48 Access: Free

GPS Coordinates: N 34.3510, W 85.6752  
Contact: National Park Service: Manager  
2141 Gault Ave. N.  
Fort Payne, AL 35967  
Phone: (256) 845-9605





Belted Kingfisher/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Johann Schumacher



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher/Terry Hartley

## Site 49: Buck's Pocket State Park, Morgan's Cove, and South Sauty Creek

**Directions:** From the intersection of AL Hwy 227 and AL Hwy 62 just north of Guntersville State Park, go 4.4 miles east on Hwy 227. Turn left at the Morgan's Cove Park Sign and go 1.1 miles down the hill to the cove.

**Description:** The region around Buck's Pocket State Park, South Sauty Creek, and Morgan's Cove provides a number of habitats worthy of exploration. The waters of South Sauty Creek are attractive to numerous migratory waterfowl, as well as Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets. Just downstream from the boat landing at Morgan's Cove, Bald Eagles are known to nest on the forested slopes above the creek. Buck's Pocket State Park's wooded pocket canyon is complete with singing Red-eyed Vireo, Wood Thrush, and Scarlet Tanagers. The park can also host some interesting surprises during migration. Morgan's Cove is also part of the state park. This secluded cove is the perfect spot to watch Belted Kingfishers diving for their dinner or to launch a canoe and paddle your day away.



**Site 49 Access:** Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.4648, W 86.0918

**Contact:** ADCNR: Buck's Pocket State Park  
393 County Road 174

Grove Oak, Alabama 35975

**Phone:** (256) 659-2000



## Site 50: Murphy Hill

**Directions:** From the intersection of AL Hwys 227, 62, and CR 67, at the north entrance to Guntersville State Park, go east on CR 67 for 0.6 mile. Turn left (north) at Five Points (CR 582 continues ahead) at the Mountain Lakes Resort Sign staying on CR 67 and go 2.1 miles. Turn left onto a gravel road and go 0.2 mile to the parking lot. Murphy Hill is the extensive area and trails behind the gate.

**Description:** Murphy Hill was once proposed to be developed as a power plant. Fortunately for both birds and birders, these plans fell through and the area now hosts a huge variety of habitats ripe for exploration. As you walk through open areas, listen for Yellow-breasted Chats and Indigo Buntings. Once the woods get a little thicker, check the flocks of Tufted Titmice and Carolina Chickadees for migrant warblers and vireos, along with Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and White-breasted Nuthatches. Upon reaching the water's edge, check the shallows for Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons and scan the open water for Hooded Mergansers and Common Loons. Overhead, look for soaring Ospreys or Bald Eagles. Both of these birds of prey nest nearby, and one might drop by and impress you with its expert fishing technique. Without a doubt, Murphy Hill could have a few surprises in store, which is why more birders are enjoying this great site.

**Site 50 Access:** Free

**GPS Coordinates:** N 34.4729, W 86.1722

**Contact:** Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

3696 Alabama Hwy 60

Guntersville, AL 35976

**Phone:** (256) 571-4280



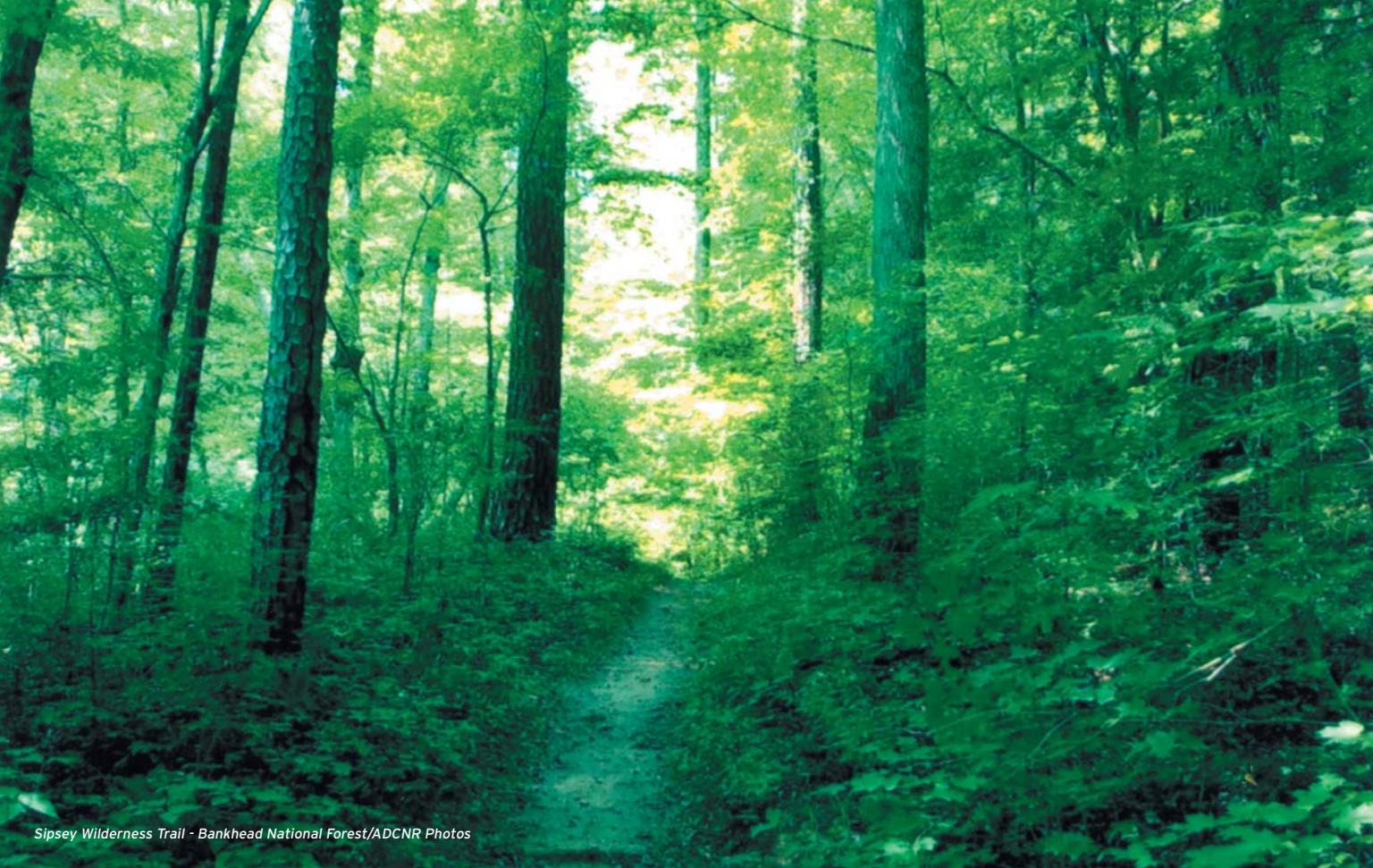


## Season Guide For Major Bird Groups

Site Name	Wading Birds				Waterfowl				Birds of Prey				Shorebirds				Songbirds			
1. Mallard Fox Creek WMA																				
2. Wheeler Dam South Landing																				
3. Joe Wheeler State Park																				
4. Town Creek Marsh																				
5. Leighton Ponds																				
6. Wilson Dam Visitor Center																				
7. Wilson Dam Rockpile Recreation Area																				
8. TVA Reservation																				
9. Key Cave NWR																				
10. Natchez Trace Parkway Rock Springs Trail																				
11. Waterloo																				
12. Natchez Trace Parkway Colbert Ferry																				
13. Freedom Hills WMA Walking Trail																				
14. Bankhead National Forest																				
15. Bankhead National Forest Sipsey River Trailhead																				
16. Wheeler NWR Visitor Center																				
17. Decatur Hospitality Nature Park																				
18. BP-Amoco																				
19. 3-M Wildlife Area																				
20. Wheeler NWR White Springs Dike																				
21. Swan Creek WMA																				
22. Round Island Recreation Area																				
23. Wheeler NWR Arrowhead Landing																				
24. Wheeler NWR Beaverdam Peninsula Tower																				
25. Wheeler NWR Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk																				
26. Wheeler NWR Blackwell Swamp																				
27. Winfred Thomas Agricultural Research Station																				
28. Madison County Public Lake																				
29. Monte Sano State Park																				
30. Hays Nature Preserve																				
31. Wheeler NWR Cave Springs																				
32. Hurricane Creek Park																				
33. Wheeler NWR Dancy Bottoms																				
34. Guntersville State Park Town Creek and Drive																				
35. Guntersville Peninsula																				
36. Guntersville Dam South																				
37. Guntersville Dam North																				
38. Goose Pond Colony																				
39. North Sauty Creek WMA/Sauta Cave NWR																				
40. Roy B. Whitaker Paint Rock River Preserve																				
41. Skyline WMA																				
42. Mud Creek WMA																				
43. Stevenson Town Park																				
44. Russell Cave National Monument																				
45. Gorham's Bluff/Coon Gulf																				
46. DeKalb County Public Lake																				
47. DeSoto State Park Azalea Cascade Trail																				
48. Little River Canyon National Preserve Drive																				
49. Buck's Pocket SP, Morgan's Cove, and South Sauty Creek																				
50. Murphy Hill																				

This checklist highlights the best times to search for major groups of birds at certain sites along the North Alabama Birding Trail.

Spring Summer Fall Winter 1 Interpretive Kiosk \* Sandhill Cranes \*\* Snow Geese \*\*\* Coon Gulf section on water



Sipsey Wilderness Trail - Bankhead National Forest/ADCNR Photos

**(866) 238-4748 or (866) 23VISIT, [www.northalabamabirdingtrail.com](http://www.northalabamabirdingtrail.com)**



**Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries**  
**Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources**  
 64 North Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36130  
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