



# Nature Tourism Initiative

## Along Alabama's Gulf Coast

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### **Calling All Citizen Scientists for Great Backyard Bird Count**

**GULF SHORES and ORANGE BEACH, Ala.** – Looking for a Common Loon? Join your fellow birds of feather, and flock to the **Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)**, which is set for February 12 – 15. Entering its 13<sup>th</sup> year, this nationally organized event in the United States and Canada helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society gather a large snapshot of bird populations that will be used to see how the birds are doing and how to protect them.

Locally, both novices and avid bird watchers have several options to participate.

“This project is a fun way to learn about the birds of coastal Alabama while being part of a very important study that helps with bird conservation efforts,” said Joanne McDonough of the Nature Tourism Initiative. “You can even go beyond the backyard and explore the Alabama Coastal Birding Trail that spans two counties and is enhanced by directional and interpretive signage, offering enthusiasts endless opportunities to count birds and explore their habitats.

Also the Five Rivers Delta Resource Center has several opportunities according to Shonda Borden, assistant manager: “Delta Safaris will have an eco-tour on Friday and Saturday from noon to 2:00 p.m., and on Sunday have a wildlife photography tour set for 10:00 a.m. to noon and a birding boat tour from noon to 2:00 p.m. Participants on these tours will see a sample of the delta’s diverse ecosystem, which includes both coastal and inland species of birds. A visitor may see everything from bluebirds and warblers, to wading birds like herons and egrets, and raptors such as ospreys and red-tailed hawks. It isn’t all that unusual to see bald eagles or swallow-tailed kites from our back porch. The Apalachee Exhibit Hall houses an osprey nest display, complete with shells, scales and fish bones, giving visitors a peek into the lives of the family of osprey that once lived there.”

Regardless of where individuals choose to count birds, participation in the GBBC is simple. Visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) to gather some helpful charts and tips for identifying birds, and then report bird sighting on this website.

Last year, over 94,000 checklists were submitted, and these participants in United States and Canada counted 11.5 million birds.

For more information on the birding trail, visit [www.alabamacoastalbirdingtrail.com](http://www.alabamacoastalbirdingtrail.com). Also for more information on the Five Rivers tours, [www.alabama5rivers.com](http://www.alabama5rivers.com), or call 251-625-0814.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by generous support from [Wild Birds Unlimited](#).

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**About the Nature Tourism Initiative:**

*In 2007, the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and the Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center joined forces to oversee the development of the Nature Tourism Initiative. This project is designed to evaluate the nature-based businesses in Baldwin and Mobile Counties (in Alabama) and provide resources to meet their needs. Charged with this mission, Joanne McDonough's task is two-fold: (1) to work with local businesses and communities to provide a quality nature experience for the guests (2) while also encouraging good stewardship and sustainability of the area's natural resources. Current partners include the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau and the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration. For more information, visit [www.agccvb.org/business-of-nature](http://www.agccvb.org/business-of-nature).*