

Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau



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Nature Tourism Industry Converges on AL Gulf Coast For Two Nationally Acclaimed Meetings

Gulf Shores/Orange Beach, AL—Showcasing an incredibly diverse environment, the Alabama Gulf Coast has an emerging niche nature tourism market that is strengthening itself through numerous upcoming workshops and conferences. Local nature tourism operators are gathering for the October 6 **Dolphin SMART** training workshop and will then join others for the **2008 Watchable Wildlife Conference**, which is set for October 7-9.

First on the agenda is the Dolphin SMART training on Monday morning at The Sea, Sand and Stars Center in Orange Beach. Dolphin SMART began in the Florida Keys as a voluntary participation program for businesses that seeks to educate people about responsible viewing of wild dolphin. It was developed by [NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary](#) and [National Marine Fisheries Service](#), the [Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society](#) and the [Dolphin Ecology Project](#).

The training is the first step to becoming Dolphin SMART. Participants will receive an overview of the program's voluntary requirements and background information on how participating helps promote stewardship and conservation of wild dolphins as required under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Educational information will be provided, including presentations on local research and how to recognize natural, wild dolphin behaviors versus those indicating disturbance. Following the training, participants who would like to become Dolphin SMART undergo an initial evaluation. Upon successful completion, they receive a Dolphin SMART flag and decal with the current year to display on their vessels, a logo and advertising statement to use in their promotion materials, public recognition on the Dolphin SMART Web site and local media publicity.

This program is one of many resources stemming from the Nature Tourism Initiative, which is a joint partnership funded by [Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center](#), [Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Extension](#) and the [Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau](#). For more information on Dolphin SMART or to register for this free training workshop, contact Joanne McDonough of the Nature Tourism Initiative at jmcdonough@gulfshores.com or 251-974-4634.

Then on Tuesday, wildlife professionals and experts from all 50 states will meet at the [Perdido Beach Resort](#) in Orange Beach, Ala., for the 2008 Watchable Wildlife Conference. This annual event is a three day meeting for Watchable Wildlife, Inc., a non-profit organization that promotes responsible wildlife viewing as a viable economic and conservation enterprise for communities throughout Canada, the United States and Mexico.

In addition to selecting one of three conference tracks (natural resource conservation and management, site development and management or wildlife/nature tourism), attendees will also enjoy morning birding trips, a tradeshow, an evening awards banquet, presentation from keynote speaker Al Batt, a writer, speaker, storyteller and humorist. General session speakers include Chris Heete, who will present “The Wild Within: Keeping nature close when you’re stuck behind a desk,” Carrol Henderson, who will discuss “Birds in Flight” and Trevor Needham, who will speak about “Building a Successful Friends Group.”

Organizations sponsoring the 2008 Watchable Wildlife Conference include the [Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Department](#), the [Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau](#), the [U.S. Forest Service Department of Agriculture](#), the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) and the [National Wildlife Refuge System](#).

Registration fees range from \$350.00 for the entire conference to \$175.00 for a single day. Special spouse and student rates are also available. For more information or to register for this conference, visit www.watchablewildlife.org.

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The Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) serves as the official destination marketing organization for the cities of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach in addition to the unincorporated area of Fort Morgan. To learn more about Alabama’s 32 miles of sugar white sand, visit either www.gulfshores.com or www.orangebeach.com. The CVB is an accredited Destination Marketing Organization, 2008-2012.