

## Area Wildlife Viewing

With some background on area wildlife, I'm Calhoun County Game Warden Mike Mitchell.

Whether it's fishing, bird watching or wildlife watching, the Indianola and Magnolia Beach areas have a tremendous amount to offer. Some people love to get out into the water and enjoy this aspect of nature, while others want to see it all from shore. Either way, this area has a terrific variety of wildlife.

This county is blessed with rich wildlife and birdlife, due to its unique position on the Gulf Coast. That mix between salt water and freshwater, that brackish blend, creates a veritable smorgasbord of food for living creatures.

As for fishing, well this is the place, especially if you have the advantage of a quiet kayak. But then again, boat and shore fishing are often successful as well. Look for redfish and trout in shallow waters, but the area also offers catfish, black drum, sand trout, flounder, sheepshead and a myriad of other fish.

Generally speaking, being successful at fishing is observing several factors, then choosing the right combination. These factors include, amongst others, tide, moon phase, wind, water temperature, bait selection, tackle and underwater structure. It is quite a difficult task to give general information that would have everyone catch fish. Very generally speaking, I'd fish weekday mornings before the full moon on non-windy days in three or less feet of water, using a rod and reel and casting in and around underwater structure. But then again, I'll never claim to be the best fisherman!

Regardless, anglers need a fishing license and need to be aware of state fishing regulations regarding bag limits, possession limits, applicable means and methods, and length limits, including minimum length requirements. All the rules may be found online at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department website, or in the free "Outdoor Annual," available from area fishing license vendors. A purchase is not required to obtain a copy of the rulebook.

Bird watching is very good in this area. Several hundred birds can be seen living in or passing through our area, mostly due to our unique estuary or wetland environment.

Look for rails, roseate spoonbills, herons and egrets. Check for pelicans, waders, terns, migrant shorebirds, lesser golden plovers and pectoral sandpipers. You may also see ibis, gulls, snipes, wintering geese, sandhill cranes and white-tailed hawks. This is only the beginning, and repeated visits, especially if spread out between summer and winter seasons, should enable you to check off literally hundreds of species on your viewing lists.

But the list continues. Amphibians, reptiles, and land-based mammals also abound. Look for rabbits, coyotes, bobcats, grey fox, rattlesnakes and white-tailed deer. Check also for American Alligators, hermit crabs, blue crabs and more. Seashells are available, especially in early mornings after storms or high tides. Snails, clams, oysters, cockles, scallops and, if you're especially lucky, the Mitchell's Wentletrap are all here somewhere, awaiting your discovery.

Calhoun County boasts a temperate climate with hundreds of miles of beaches and shallow water. Be mindful not to trespass, but know you are encouraged to let your imagination be the limit when it comes to discovering our bountiful wildlife, including bird life in this beautiful area.

Some folks get so excited by this discussion that they wish to create or enhance a habitat that is welcoming to wildlife around their homes. This way, you may become a birder, for example, without even leaving your home. Consider examining the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Texas Wildscapes program, which offers tips on providing food and water, and restoring native backyard habitat. To learn more, see the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's website and type "Wildscapes" into the search box.

I often meet birders who are excited about identifying and recording which birds they see. A few develop a list of all the birds they have seen in their lifetimes, known as a "lifetime list." Little gets birders more excited than asking to see their list and hear their tales of seeing that unusual or rare bird for the first time. Want an example? Go to our website and type "Checklists and Identification" into the search box.

Of course identifying the area's vast array of birds can be a challenge. Honestly, few people can identify more than half the birds they see, but taking notes and referring to guides can be a great challenge and a lot of fun.

Texas Parks and Wildlife encourages you to enjoy the great outdoors and all the opportunities it has to offer. For more information, see our website at [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us). With some background on area wildlife, this has been Calhoun County Game Warden Mike Mitchell.

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