

Places to Go Birding Near Port St. Joe and Apalachicola, Florida

Port St. Joe and Cape San Blas

Frank Pate Park in Port St. Joe is situated near the lighthouse. This park features a boat ramp and several ponds. A variety of species can be observed at the ramp, along the paths, and around the ponds near the lighthouse.

Heading west from the park on Hwy 98, it is advisable to check the bay flats for shorebirds. Turn right onto Hwy 30A, approximately two miles west of Port St. Joe. This route parallels St. Joe Bay. It is recommended to stop at various locations where marshes are visible to look for bald eagles, waders, and shorebirds. After about six miles, turn right (west) toward *Cape San Blas and the St. Joseph Peninsula*.

Salinas Park

On the way, stop at *Salinas Park*, located on both sides of the road shortly after turning. The park on the left features a boardwalk to the beach, where Piping and Snowy plovers, Gannets, Gulls, shorebirds, and various Tern species may be seen. On the right side of the road is a county park with two lengthy boardwalks into the bay. Depending on the season, white pelicans, Bald Eagles, various Herons, and other shorebirds-including Rails in the marsh-may be observed.

The St. Joe Buffer Preserve and St. Joseph Peninsula

This area provides multiple birding opportunities. If you prefer scenic trails, the Buffer Preserve Deal Tract leads through pine scrub to a serene bayfront. St. Joseph Peninsula State Park offers Indian middens, wetlands, and a bay beach for birding enthusiasts.

Continue heading west. There is a narrow area with large boulders on the left and another marsh on the right, where different waders and ducks are visible. This is also a good area for observing raptors, which tend to follow the coast during migration. Peregrine falcons and merlins are often seen in winter and during migration.

The Buffer Preserve *Deal Tract* offers a half-mile scenic trail through pine scrub habitat, ending at the bay. Along the way, a side trail leads to an oak hammock. After birding along the shoreline of the bay, turn around and return.

St. Joseph Peninsula State Park

Proceed west to St. Joseph Peninsula State Park. Inside the outer gate, there is a small parking lot adjacent to a walking path that traverses wetlands, old Indian middens, and hardwoods to the bay beach. Maps are available at the pay station.

Indian Pass and Beyond

After birding in the state park, it might be beneficial to take a brief detour to Indian Pass by traveling east on 30E and making a right turn at the pass. Survey the area for American Oystercatchers and other birds. A private boat service is available for a fee to transport visitors across the pass to [St. Vincent Island](#), which is also an excellent birding spot. However, the island extends about eight miles and lacks facilities.

Returning to 30E, head east back to Hwy 98 toward Apalachicola, crossing the extensive bridge over the river. Immediately beyond the bridge is the road leading to another bridge to St. George Island. [The St. George Island State Park](#), on the eastern end of the island, is optimal for birding, but it is generally worthwhile to make frequent stops at other locations along the way.

Within the state park, there is a road on the left leading to the youth camping and picnic area, an excellent site for migrants in spring and fall seeking food and rest in the numerous small oak trees. This location is listed on [eBird](#), and there are usually fellow birders present who can provide guidance. Upon returning over the bridge, it is recommended to visit the [Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) (ANERR) to walk the nature trail and view the impressive exhibits in the headquarters building.

Continuing Eastward

Continuing eastward on Hwy 98 along the Gulf, oystercatchers are occasionally spotted on the oyster bars within the fishing villages. [Bald Point State Park](#) near Panacea offers opportunities to observe various bird species. In Panacea, Mashers Island Road, just after crossing the bridge into town, and Bottoms Road, shortly past town on the right, should be explored. Both roads lead to dead ends but are ideal for birdwatching along the way.

Mashers Island Road

Mashers Island Road has a park on the right where one can drive down and park, then walk along the boardwalk. The Gulf is located on one side of the boardwalk and the marshlands on the other.

St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

If time permits, it is worth visiting [St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge](#), popular for birding, especially in winter months. Stop at the visitor center to review the log for recent bird sightings and their locations. Groups of birders are frequently present and very welcoming, offering advice to newcomers.

Birders commonly spend the night in nearby Crawfordville or at the historic lodge at [Wakulla Springs State Park](#), a few miles north of St. Marks. If you stay the night or have additional time on a very busy day trip, consider taking the jungle boat tour at Wakulla Springs State Park. Manatees are commonly sighted, and the birdlife is abundant, with limpkins making a return to the area after years of absence following the decline in apple snails.