

Birds are celebrities at Port Aransas centers

The birds who live at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center or at the Joan and Scott Holt Paradise Pond Birding Center are celebrities, although they might not know nor care.

The celebrity watchers (and in some cases, bird paparazzi) can be identified by the telltale pair of binoculars or cameras that are slung around their necks; they're called "birdwatchers."

Port Aransas has become a premier birding destination,



Great blue herons are year round residents.

especially during the migration seasons.

The city has made it easy with the above mentioned birding centers in addition to bird watching opportunities at the Wetlands Park Birding Site off State Hwy. 361, and on the beach or at the jetties.

With construction of the new Port Aransas Nature Preserve in Charlie's Pasture about to begin, there will soon be yet another attraction for birdwatchers on Mustang Island.

In the meantime, there are

several good places to do a little bit - or a lot - of birdwatching.

The Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center is off Ross Avenue behind the wastewater treatment plant and adjacent to the Corpus Christi Ship Channel.

The Joan and Scott Holt Paradise Pond Birding Center is off Cut-off Road near Avenue C.

The State Hwy. 361 Wetland Overlook is on State Hwy. 361 south of Avenue G and is a tidal flat habitat for shorebirds. These locations are sites on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, a \$1.5 million trail that ties together birding sites from Beaumont to Brownsville.



Skimmers 'skim' the shallows in search of food.

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Weekly guided nature tours, called Birding on the Boardwalk, are held each Wednesday at 9 a.m. at the Leonabelle Turnbull Center. Longtime birding expert Nan Dietert narrates the walks. Two free viewing scopes are available - one on the tower and a second ADA-accessible scope at a viewing stand along the boardwalk.

Landscaping at the entrance of the center was designed by the Port Aransas Garden Club, under the direction of Carolyn Chancellor, to attract birds, specifically hummingbirds.

Besides the birds that flock to the center, visitors may catch a glimpse of two alligators who call the place home. Boots is the larger of the two, and Bags is the smaller alligator, with a missing eye. They appear to live in harmony with the birding population and apparently help keep the population of nutria under control.

The nutria are rodent-like animals that were brought to this country in the 1800s to supplement the mink industry. As it turned out, they multiplied faster than rabbits, and parts of the country were soon over-run with the critters. They're not a real benefit for the center because they like to eat the roots of the grasses that grow out of the shallows and offer habitat for many birds.

Brochures that list the birds to see in Port Aransas are also available at the Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce Tourist Bureau office, 403 W. Cotter Ave.

