

# Promoting Birding-Based Tourism in Coastal Harrison County, Mississippi



Sometimes called “The Secret Coast”, Mississippi’s coast offers an incredible but under-appreciated mix of outdoor recreational activities and natural resources to visitors and locals alike. Increasing nature-based tourism in Mississippi will require improvements in marketing strategies and advertisement, construction of physical infrastructure along the coast, and development of new programs and events for visitors. These investments have the potential to bring significant financial benefits to the region, as nature-based tourism and birding are strong economic drivers in many areas across the country.

**Audubon worked with stakeholders to develop the following strategies to guide future actions by agencies with an interest in promoting birding-based tourism.**

## 1 Improve the reach and consistency of messaging to increase awareness of bird watching opportunities

Consistent messaging about birding opportunities is currently hard to find, scant, or lacking from many websites or other information sources that visitors to Mississippi might search. Specific improvements might include distributing updated and standardized messaging about birding opportunities to welcome centers, nature centers, and local hotels.

## 2 Highlight and promote existing locations as “birding spots”

Many of the best birding locations in Harrison County are not widely known outside of a core set of local birders. The Mississippi Coast Birding Trail needs to be updated to reflect this information, and public lands should be highlighted using improved website language and on-the-ground signage.

## 3 Conduct a survey to assess the needs and interests of local and visiting birders

A formal survey process will help prioritize actions to improve accessibility and quality of birding locations in coastal Harrison County.

## 4 Work with partners to plan and seek funding for improved accessibility and infrastructure of existing sites

Improved accessibility may encourage more frequent or longer visits to desirable birding locations on public lands, such as public parking, walking trails, boardwalks, or viewing blinds.

## 5 Promote the development of new parks and green spaces in Harrison County

There are many small green spaces along the Harrison County coast that are abandoned or unmaintained, but that have potential for holding migrant songbirds or rare strays. Engaging with city planning commissions would identify upcoming opportunities to support bird-friendly development and habitat restoration.

## 6 Conduct a socioeconomic analysis to investigate feasibility of developing an annual Coastal Birding festival

Birding festivals have the potential to draw in visitors from outside the state and provide an opportunity to showcase local birding and natural resources. A socioeconomic analysis should be conducted first to determine the ideal timing and location for such a festival to achieve these goals.

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**FULL PAPER LINK:** [MS.AUDUBON.ORG/WHITEPAPERS](https://www.audubon.org/whitepapers)

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Least Terns. Photo: Collin Stempien/Audubon Delta



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