

GEORGIA BIRDING ON MY MIND!

Spring Migration in the Land of Peaches, Peanuts, and Pecans

April 24-May 1, 2027

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center* and *Patrick Maurice*

There is far more to Georgia than what you see from I-75 on the way to Florida! Join us as we explore the beaches, saltmarshes, estuaries, swamps, deciduous and coniferous forests, and mountains that make Georgia truly special. Much of Georgia's Atlantic coastline remains undeveloped, free of houses and hotels, home to shorebirds, songbirds, and waders. Famed Okefenokee Swamp beckons from its still waters and cypress trees draped in Spanish moss. Kennesaw Mountain is a major stopover location for several species of migrating songbirds, including more than 25 species of warblers. And in between all that is 24 million acres of forest, which makes up 67% of the state's land mass. Let's go adventure Georgia!



TOUR ITINERARY

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we've seen to date and recent bird reports, but the following daily outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days. Our plans are subject to change based on weather conditions and road closures. Note: the birds listed are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

DAY 1 – Saturday, April 24 – Arrival in Savannah. Plan your arrival in Savannah by early-afternoon. Take the complimentary hotel shuttle from the airport to our hotel (check in at 3:00). We'll meet in the lobby at 4:00 and then enjoy our first dinner together. After dinner we'll head out to Tybee Island to search for birds on the beach, and we'll take a walk out on the Tybee Beach Pier. *Night in Savannah.*



DAY 2 – Sunday, April 25 – Coastal Birding. We'll pack up early and head out, with our first stop of the morning at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge. This refuge is a good spot for migrant warblers, Great Crested Flycatcher, Painted Bunting, Tricolored Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, and Wood Stork. In fact, Harris Neck has the largest Wood Stork rookery in Georgia. Next up we'll hit Gould's Inlet on St. Simon's Island for shorebirds and more, with our targets including Red Knot, Willet (both eastern and western subspecies), Piping Plover, Wilson's Plover, Black Skimmer, and several tern species (Sandwich, Royal, Caspian, Forster's, and Least). Causeways

in the Brunswick area will likely have Hudsonian Whimbrels feeding on fiddler crabs in the saltmarsh and Gull-billed Terns flying over. Gray Kingbirds breed near the pier on St. Simon's Island, so we'll look for them while we're there. After checking into our hotel, we'll take an afternoon siesta before dinner if time permits, then head out to Altamaha Wildlife Management Area in the evening for Sora, King Rail, Clapper Rail, along with Purple Gallinule, Least Bittern, Mottled Duck, and Black-bellied Whistling Duck – all of which breed here. The long grasses should be full of migrating Bobolinks pausing to rest and refuel on their journey north (to Michigan!). High Tide: 12:45 PM, Low Tide: 7:00 PM. *Night in Brunswick.*

DAY 3 – Monday, April 26 – Coastal Birding. We'll spend today on St. Catherine's Island, a private barrier island that we have exclusive access to. St. Catherine's Island is one of Georgia's natural treasures and listed in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Based on archaeological investigations, the island has been inhabited for at least 5,000 years with ceramic shards and copper artifacts left behind. Spanish Missions have also been found on the island that date back to 1576 and Ring-tailed Lemurs were introduced to the island by the New York Zoological Society in the 1980s – and if we're lucky, we might come across a troupe. The birding on the island is excellent, with a variety of habitats ranging from grassland to forest to saltmarsh to the beach and we can easily find 70+ species on our day of birding there. Target birds on the island are similar to Harris Neck and Gould's Inlet, as well as Brown-headed Nuthatch, Yellow-throated Warbler, Summer Tanager, migrant falcons, Common Ground Dove, Laughing Gull, and Marsh Wren. *Night in Brunswick.*





DAY 4 – Tuesday, April 27 – Okefenokee Swamp Birding.

The name Okefenokee directly translates to “Land of Trembling Earth,” and was well-named because it’s a peat-filled swamp where you can sink several feet in the mud if you step into it. It is the largest blackwater swamp in the U.S., and it’s full of life, with incredible orchids, bears, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. Specialty birds here include a small breeding population of Sandhill Cranes, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman’s Sparrow, and a chance to find Swallow-tailed Kites flying overhead while being serenaded by Northern Parulas, Yellow-throated Warblers, and Great Crested Flycatchers. Red-shouldered Hawks are also common here and we might be lucky and find a Barred Owl hunting for crayfish or a juicy frog. After a picnic lunch, we’ll explore the swamp further by heading out in canoes for a few hours. We’ll then head north to Macon for dinner and overnight. *Night in Macon.*

DAY 5 – Wednesday, April 28 – Macon area birding. If we miss Red-cockaded Woodpecker in the swamp, we can go to Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge outside of Macon to try for them there. Otherwise, we’ll start our day at Rum Creek Wildlife Management Area where we should find breeding Swainson’s Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Acadian Flycatcher, and migrant warblers like Blackpoll and American Redstart. There will also be lots of swallows in the area, including Cliff, Barn, Tree, and Northern Rough-winged. On our way north to Marietta we may hit Lake Blalock (south of Atlanta), which has a resident breeding population of Limpkin. We may also hit an Atlanta-area hotspot on the drive up like the Chattahoochee River--East Palisades Unit, which would be good for stretching our legs and looking for neotropical migrants. *Night in Marietta.*



DAY 6 – Thursday, April 29 – Birding north of Atlanta. We’ll start our morning on Kennesaw Mountain,



one of the best places to find migrant songbirds in the Atlanta area. Kennesaw Mountain is a National Battlefield Park and was designated as such because it is where General William Tecumseh Sherman brought his men in June of 1864 for a two-week battle with the Confederate Army that was led by General Joseph E. Johnston. Army reenactments are common here on the weekends, but they are limited to the grasslands at the base of the mountain while the best birding is found on the mountain. Good numbers of warblers can be found here

with the scarce Cerulean and Blackburnian warblers being the main highlights. Ovenbird, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Bay-breasted, and Black-throated Green warblers are also possible. Other neotropical migrants such as Scarlet and Summer tanagers, Baltimore Oriole, Indigo Bunting, and Wood Thrush are also likely. We'll then continue northwest to the agricultural fields of Bartow County, where we'll look for open-country birds such as Loggerhead Shrike, Grasshopper Sparrow, Dickcissel, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Kingbird, Purple Martin, and Brown Thrasher (Georgia's state bird!). We'll also check several sod farms for potential migrant shorebirds such as Pectoral Sandpipers, both yellowlegs, and maybe a Horned Lark or two. *Night in Marietta.*

DAY 7 – Friday, April 30 – Birding north of Atlanta. On our final day in the Peach State, we'll head into the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Monument Road is known for Georgia's southernmost breeding population of Blackburnian Warblers. The woods along the road will be full of bird song with breeding Wood Thrush, Indigo Bunting, Blue-headed, Red-eyed, and Yellow-throated vireos, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Ovenbird, Chestnut-sided, Worm-eating, and Hooded warblers. Black Bears are occasionally seen up here, so we'll keep an eye out for those, too! We'll then head to Amicalola Falls State Park, which is known for its magnificent waterfall but also has breeding warblers such as Louisiana Waterthrush, Northern Parula, and Black-and-white Warbler. Time permitting, we may stop at an Atlanta-area park in the afternoon to search for any birds we have yet to find. Then we'll head to our hotel and our final dinner together. *Night in Atlanta.*



DAY 8 – Saturday, May 1 – Departure from Atlanta. Plan your departure for anytime today. Enjoy breakfast at the hotel and take the hotel shuttle to the airport to catch your flight. Hotel checkout is 11:00 AM.



TOUR LEADERS

Patrick Maurice was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia and graduated from the University of Georgia with a Wildlife Science degree in 2021. Patrick is a lifelong birder, thanks to his mother, and has birded extensively across the United States and around the world. He also works as a guide for Naturalist Journeys and regularly guides for other birding festivals such as *The Biggest Week in American Birding*, *Georgia Birdfest*, and the *Southeast Arizona Birding Festival*. He is intimately familiar with Georgia's diverse ecoregions and birdlife and has spent countless hours birding across the state. When he isn't traveling or guiding, Patrick can be found back home in Athens, Georgia, playing soccer, cheering on the Dawgs, or enjoying a refreshing sour beer.



Daryl Bernard is a long-time birder and amateur naturalist who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. He enjoys organizing and leading trips and tours and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly memorable experience. Daryl has organized and led numerous birding field tours throughout North America, many local birding trips in Michigan, and bird walks for Seven Ponds as well as birding festivals. Daryl is the Birding Field Tour Leader for Seven Ponds Nature Center in southeast Michigan.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Lodging for this tour will be in a few different locations:

- Night 1 – hotel in Savannah
- Nights 2-3 – hotel in Brunswick
- Night 4 – hotel in Macon
- Nights 5-6 - hotel in Marietta
- Night 7 – hotel in Atlanta

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

We will travel in a single 12 or 15-passenger van. Since we will be packing up a few times throughout the tour, we ask that you travel as lightly as is practical, as this will help maximize space in the van.

FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Tour Fee: \$2,800 per person in double occupancy
- Single Supplement: \$550 (upon request, subject to availability)
- 50% Deposit: \$1,400 (due during online registration)
- Final Payment Due: April 1, 2027
- Small group size is limited to **8 individuals** and early registration is encouraged

WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:

- full expert guide service – Patrick will be with us every step of the way
- hotel accommodations for seven nights
- all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8 of the tour
- ground transportation in a single 15-passenger van
- all park entrance fees, parking fees, bridge tolls, highway tolls
- pre-tour information and a post-tour trip report
- eBird checklist sharing (for those using eBird)

WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- Your airfare to Savannah and from Atlanta
- Alcoholic beverages
- Laundry
- Other items of a personal nature
- Gratuity for birding guide services (optional)

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR SEVEN PONDS MEMBERS ON
TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2027 at 9:00 AM**

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC ON
TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2027 at 9:00 AM (if space remains)**

Registration for this tour will take place online at www.sevenponds.org with a \$1400 deposit due at the time of registration. At the Seven Ponds home page, go to Programs then Seven Ponds Field Tours and select the Georgia Birding Field Tour registration button. Upon successfully completing your online registration you should receive an email confirmation immediately. Participants will be sent a registration form to complete and return.

For more information, contact Daryl Bernard at (810) 796-3200 or (989) 513-5195 (cell)
or via e-mail at dbernard@sevenponds.org