

## BILOXI BACK BAY BIRDING

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One of my favorite birding spots on the Mississippi Coast, when most other areas are quiet and I really need a bird fix, is Biloxi Back Bay. Here, Back Bay Blvd. is well known as an eBird Hotspot. Another great route is the nearby Bayview Avenue. These roads run east and west along the southern part of the Biloxi Bay and hold their prime birding between the east side of I-110 and the Biloxi-Ocean Springs bridge. A particularly good birding spot within the area, which has flats along the bay edges at low tide, is on Bayview Avenue. This area can be accessed by going west at the north end of Oak Street, where a dirt turnaround north of a seafood factory provides parking. From here, you can scope the bay or walk west along the road to an old abandoned bridge overlooking the marsh.

Other key areas of interest can be found near the seafood factories that front the bay. If you can handle the occasional smells, you might just happen upon a few fun bird sightings. Some of these seafood processing plants have pipes that empty the seafood spoils into the bay, where a variety of birds hold their feeding frenzies. The spoils also draw in a lot of fish, which the Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) and Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) enjoy.

No matter the season, great birding awaits. While most places might be slow during the summer, I often see a Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) circling high above the bay when that random squall line blows through along the Coast. The Biloxi Back Bay is also an annual summer nesting area for both Barn and Cliff swallows (*Hirundo rustica* and *Petrochelidon*

*pyrrhonota*, respectively). Late summer and fall usually bring in large numbers of White Ibises (*Eudocimus albus*), egrets, herons, pelicans and terns. During the winter months, a good variety of waterfowl show up eagerly waiting for the daily flow of seafood. Some of them have included Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*), Lesser and Greater scaup (*Aythya affinis* and *A. marila*, respectively), Ring-necked Ducks (*Aythya collaris*), Redheads (*Aythya americana*), Northern Shovelers (*Spatula clypeata*), Mottled Ducks (*Anas fulvigula*), Buffleheads (*Bucephala albeola*), Common Loons (*Gavia immer*), grebes, and Hooded and Red-breasted mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus* and *Mergus serrator*, respectively). Bald Eagles are also on the scene during this time looking for any opportunity to prey on either fish or waterfowl, so you never know what encounters await you. Also during winter, Herring, Franklin's and Bonaparte's gulls (*Larus argentatus*, *Leucophaeus pipixcan*, and *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*, respectively) may stop by to enjoy this secret Back Bay buffet. Along the edges of the bay where spoiled water has settled in the grassy areas around the factories, it is often very buggy. In these spots I have found a variety of shorebirds feeding, some of which included Baird's, Buff-breasted and Least sandpipers (*Calidris bairdii*, *C. subruficollis*, and *C. minutilla*, respectively), and both yellowlegs. Be sure to check the skies for raptors that frequent the area. Tall grasses along the roads are also great places to find sparrows.

If you are visiting or live near the Mississippi Coast, a birding trip to Biloxi Back Bay is well worth the stop.