

# Houston Audubon Society's High Island Sanctuary Complex



SCARLET TANAGER

This site has gained national and international recognition as a premiere location to witness the phenomenon of migration. During certain parts of the migration seasons, thousands of colorful migrants can be viewed seeking food and shelter in this habitat oasis.

**LOCATION:** Northeast Galveston County on the upper Texas Coast. The four sanctuaries that make up the sanctuary complex are located in the town of High Island, about a mile from the Gulf of Mexico. The largest and most visited sanctuaries are Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks. The other two are Eubanks Woods Bird Sanctuary and S.E. Gast Red Bay Sanctuary.

**SIZE:** 99.6 ha (246 acres)

**HABITAT:** High Island is the highest point on the coast between the mouth of the Mississippi River and the Rio Grande. It is the surface expression of an underground salt dome, and thus it is an elevated island of wooded habitat surrounded by coastal wetlands. The sanctuary system consists of a variety of habitat types including woodlots, ponds, coastal prairie, brushy areas, and freshwater marshes. Wooded habitat is predominantly composed of oaks and hackberries. The understory is yaupon and invasive Chinese privet.

**BIRDS:** During the spring and fall migration seasons, this island of diverse upland habitat amidst a sea of prairie and marshes provides a critical resting and feeding area for many thousands of migratory birds. When stormy weather brings contrary winds, these woods often give refuge to a great abundance and diversity of weary migrants, providing an amazing spectacle to visitors. Additionally, Claybottom Pond in Smith Oaks sanctuary has a waterbird colony that provides nesting sites for over 1,000 pairs of birds. These include Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, White Ibis, and Neotropic Cormorant. It is also an important roosting site during the nonbreeding season.

**CONSERVATION:** The sanctuaries at High Island are a favorite destination for thousands of birdwatchers and nature-lovers each year, especially during spring migration. Habitat has been enhanced to provide high quality habitat for migrating birds. Visitor access includes trails, boardwalks, and other visitor facilities.

Ecotourism dollars generated by visitors to the sanctuaries gives local communities an incentive to protect bird habitat. There is concern over the future of coastal habitat in and around High Island making the potential for urban development. Also, structures such as communication towers and wind turbines in this area have the potential to kill large numbers of migrants.



## Site Partner:

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