

Hancock County Marshes Coastal Preserve

The Hancock County Marshes Coastal Preserve, located in extreme southwest Mississippi, is one of the most unique, continuous estuarine wetland systems along the Gulf of Mexico. The site contains a wide range of habitats, and is located on the north-central Gulf of Mexico, next to a critical migration pathway through the Pearl River Basin. The wide variety of habitats provide haven for many migrants, including shorebirds, waterfowl, and neotropical landbirds.



HOODED WARBLER

WAYNE NICHOLAS



LOCATION: Extreme southwest Mississippi, Hancock County, adjacent to the Mississippi Sound, between Bayou Caddy and the Pearl River.

SIZE: 8,468 ha (20,909 acres)

HABITAT: The Hancock County Marshes are part of an estuarine system bordering the Mississippi Sound from the Pearl River to Point Clear. Included within the marshes are several low ridges and small hummocks that are above mean high tide. Most important of these areas are Point Clear Island and Campbell Island,

which are sandy areas with characteristics similar to the barrier islands. The islands of this marsh support several rare plant species including one of the rarest shrubs in the United States, the tiny-leaved buckthorn *Sageretia minutiflora*, found on the shell midden. The Pearl River and associated river swamp are tidally influenced with bald-cypress and blackgum balancing the swamp canopy. The shallow areas of the swamp are comprised of dense stands of southern wild-rice and the deeper (10-20 m) pools are vegetated largely by pickerelweed.

BIRDS: The preserve is a unique coastal ecosystem comprised of an estuarine marsh surrounding two well-defined relic barrier islands, the state's only significant chenier ecosystems. These cheniers are critical stopover locations for neotropical bird species on their trans-Gulf migrations. The area also hosts Brown Pelican, Mottled Duck, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon. Although Bald Eagles haven't been recorded nesting, platforms have been installed, and the species is known to nest in the marshes just west of the Pearl River.

CONSERVATION: The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources has acquired a large amount of land along the coast to protect this sensitive habitat. Like all coastal areas, Mississippi has undergone significant development in recent years, and development pressures will continue. Significant erosion has also taken place, and having an important site like Hancock County Marshes under the auspices of the Department of Marine Resources ensures that protection and restoration will continue to occur.



Site Partner:

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

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