

Clive Runnells Family Mad Island Marsh Preserve

Mad Island Marsh Preserve is part of a network of coastal wetlands that once stretched from the mid-coast of Texas to the central Louisiana coast. The preserve is an integral part of maintaining a healthy, functioning ecosystem in Matagorda Bay. The combination of fresh and saltwater wetlands, along with thousands of acres of native prairie act as a nursery for thousands of species of plants and animals.

LOCATION: Situated around Mad Island Lake on West Matagorda Bay, the preserve is located off FM 1095 in Matagorda County, southeast of Collegeport.

SIZE: 2,860 ha (7,063 acres)

HABITAT: Mad Island Marsh is a mosaic of habitats. Upland native coastal prairies are crisscrossed with freshwater wetlands on the north end of the preserve. As one moves toward the south end, the wetlands become more brackish, finally terminating into Mad Island Lake, a tidal saltwater lake fringed with saltmarsh vegetation. A corridor of native shrub-land growing atop an ancient shell ridge is also found on the south end of the preserve. This rare strip of trees, shrubs, vines and flowers is especially attractive to songbirds.

BIRDS: Over 300 species of birds have been found at the preserve. During the winter months large numbers of Sandhill Cranes flock to the site along with numerous waterfowl including: Cinnamon Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Canada Goose and Snow Goose. Winter also brings various birds of prey such as White-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, White-tailed Kite and Bald Eagle. During the spring, Mad Island is a primary stopover point for neotropical songbird migration. The heat of the summer slows down the species count, but it is the time to find Wood Stork and several species of nesting waterbirds, including Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Great Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Mottled Duck and Black-bellied Whistling Duck.

CONSERVATION: Mad Island Marsh Preserve is always undergoing habitat restoration or enhancement. Prescribed fire is used during the summer and winter to keep the coastal prairies healthy and productive. Freshwater wetlands are managed to suppress invasive species such as cattail, Chinese tallow trees and giant cane. Erosion control keeps salt

marshes from being inundated from the neighboring bay. This site also serves as a demonstration for combining compatible agriculture with conservation. Cattle are raised on native prairie using a rotational grazing program and about 400 acres of rice are grown each year. The rice fields are left flooded during the winter to provide additional wetland habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl and shorebirds.



Site Partner:

The Nature
Conservancy of Texas

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