

Amazing Migrations

By Rebecca Bracken

If you had an upcoming trip to Brazil, you could hop on a plane and arrive there in less than a day. That's pretty amazing given how far you have to travel. But what if you were a bird? You would have to fly that distance and use a bunch of energy doing it. Do you think you'd make it?

Thousands of birds do just that! While some travel "short" distances, from the northern US states down to Texas, others travel the expanse of the earth. Take the Arctic Tern for example. This bird is the migration champion. After nesting in Arctic Circle, the tern will fly more than 22,000 miles south to the Antarctic Circle in search of warmer temperatures and food. This is one of the longest migration routes found anywhere on the planet.

Birds are not the only animals to migrate. There are many species of mammals, fish, insects, amphibians, and reptiles that also follow yearly migration routes. In Africa, herds of wildebeest, zebras, and gazelles travel around the Serengeti searching for fresh grass and water. In the Americas, monarch butterflies migrate from portions of Canada and the northern US to Mexico because they cannot survive the freezing winter temperatures. And across the globe, whales migrate to follow seasonal food supplies and in search of warm waters to raise their calves.

Here in the Houston area, we are fortunate to be in a prime place to experience bird migration. Right now, hundreds of shorebirds that nest in the Midwest and Great Plains are spending their days feeding along our beaches.

We also routinely see hummingbirds at our Gulf Coast Bird Observatory office in Lake Jackson. One hummingbird species, the Rufous Hummingbird, has the longest migration of any hummingbird species. They take a one-way trip of 3,000 miles between their breeding grounds in Alaska to their winter range in Mexico. Some Rufous Hummingbirds have deviated from this typical pattern and now spend the winter in the southeastern U.S. Many spend the winter on the Texas coast and this species has become a regular and expected winter resident. We usually have one that spends the winter here at GCBO.

Pretty soon, our wintering birds will migrate back up north for the summer, and we'll get to experience spring migration. It's one of our favorite times of the year. If you haven't checked out Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary during spring migration, plan a day this spring to join us during Spring Fling. Stop by to learn about the amazing migratory habitats of North America's birds, both big and small!

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arctic_tern_\(Sterna_paradisaea\)_attacking_Amsterdam_island,_Svalbard.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arctic_tern_(Sterna_paradisaea)_attacking_Amsterdam_island,_Svalbard.jpg)

Photo caption: Arctic Terns have one of the longest migration routes on the planet.

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