

## Spring Migration

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In the spring, hundreds of bird species begin their migration from southern regions to northern regions to prepare for the breeding season. Birds rely on a mix of instincts, environmental cues, and navigation mechanisms to know when and where to migrate, some of which still puzzle scientists to this day.

Birds have an internal circadian rhythm that helps them understand changes in daylight duration. They also use environmental cues like temperature, food availability, and wind/weather patterns. Additionally, birds use the sun, the stars, earth's magnetic field, and landmarks like coastlines and mountains to help guide them on their long journeys.

Another aspect of migration that might get overlooked by some, is the preparation birds partake in before leaving. If a bird is preparing to go on a long migration, they'll need to consume a lot of food and add fat beforehand. This is why you may observe birds foraging for food more often in the late winter/late summer months to prepare for spring and fall migrations. Many birds are also going through molt, which will give them new feathers that are ready for flight. This makes their journey easier because they gain a fresh new set of flight feathers that are stronger than their old feathers.

North America has four main flyways that birds utilize during migration. Flyways are the major routes that migratory birds, and sometimes other animals, follow during their seasonal migrations. These pathways are shaped by geography, climate, and the availability of food and resting sites. They often span continents and include breeding, stopover, and wintering locations. The four main flyways in North America are the Pacific Flyway, the Central Flyway, the Mississippi Flyway, and the Atlantic Flyway.

Brazoria County is located in the Central Flyway zone and we are right near the coastline, offering a plethora of different habitats. The Upper Texas Coast habitats include coastal prairies, hardwood forests, marshes, lakes, bayous, bays, and the gulf shoreline. This makes the Upper Texas Coast one of the most diverse and important regions for birds in North America.

If you're in the Brazoria area during April-May, I would strongly suggest you go birding for a chance to see a variety of neotropical birds and many more. Peak migration for our area is mid/late April to early May. Gulf Coast Bird Observatory celebrates spring migration with our annual event, Spring Fling. This event takes place at Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary in Quintana. We always have knowledgeable volunteers and staff on hand at Quintana to answer your questions, help identify species, keep a daily list, and sell water, snacks, and field guides.

Spring Fling takes place during April 5<sup>th</sup> through May 4th from 9am to 4pm. We know we're going to see some great birds and hopefully you will too!

Photo: Cape May Warbler, a songbird seen migrating along the Upper Texas Coast. Photo by Sheryl Travis.