



SOUTHERN ALABAMA IN SPRING

Dauphin Island and Mobile Bay

April 23 - 29, 2027



Summer Tanager. Photo Kevin Burke

Dotted with Globally Important Bird Areas comprising a spectacular variety of habitats, Alabama's Gulf Coast is among the very best places on the continent to witness first-hand the northbound movement of millions of birds each spring. While a few species prefer a land route up the coast, many others, from Chimney Swifts and Golden-winged Warblers to Chuck-will's-widows and Bobolinks, throw caution to the literal wind and set out across the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. On April mornings, flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers, and tanagers make landfall on the Alabama coast, where an archipelago of sandy barrier islands welcomes them with an opportunity to feed and rest as they prepare for the next stage of migration.

Our tour, based on Dauphin Island, places us right in the middle of the best sites to encounter these weary migrants. Mid-April is the peak season here, and we can hope for steady numbers of birds arriving every day—this is the time for “fallouts,” too, when winds and weather change late in the

night, forcing innumerable birds to set down and wait out the adverse conditions. Such events are unpredictable, of course, but if a cold front passes during our visit, the next day may find us stupefied by the sheer number and diversity of birds seeking shelter and relief in every bit of available vegetation.



A White-eyed Vireo rests after the long crossing. Photo Kevin Burke

In addition to the annual migration spectacle, Alabama's Gulf Coast is also home to an impressive range of nesting birds. Least Terns and Piping Plovers occupy sandy beaches, while Clapper Rails, an entire range of herons and egrets, and even a few Seaside Sparrows can be found in the marshes. Pine forests on the nearby mainland harbor Great Crested Flycatchers, Summer Tanagers, Indigo and sometimes a few Painted Buntings.



Reddish Egret. Photo Kevin Burke

Sunrise at this season is shortly after 6:00 am, sunset about 7:30 pm. Unlike some other localities along the Gulf of Mexico, northbound migrant birds do not typically reach the Alabama coast before midday, leaving us time most mornings for the relaxed enjoyment of the diverse breeding residents as we make our leisurely way to the famous migration hotspots.



Friday, April 23, Day 1: Arrival in Mobile

Participants should plan to arrive at Mobile Regional Airport today (airport code MOB). A room will be reserved in your name at our downtown hotel. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 5:00 p.m. for an early dinner in one of this charming city's best restaurants, a chance to get to know each other and to talk about our hopes and plans for the days to follow.

NIGHT: Candlewood Suites, Mobile



Piping Plover. Photo by Kevin Burke

Saturday, April 24, Day 2: Upper Mobile Bay to Dauphin Island

After breakfast, we will make a quick visit to Meaher State Park at the upper end of Mobile Bay. Meaher is situated right in the wetlands of North Mobile Bay. It boasts a long boardwalk into the marsh where we will be able to see our first Common Gallinule, Black-crowned Night Herons, Prothonotary Warblers, and even American Alligators. We will get to study firsthand what makes the Mobile-Tensaw Delta so special.

Next, we will make our way South to Bellingrath Gardens, where we will have lunch in the park café, but not before striking out on the trails to visit the bird-rich fields, marshes, and formal gardens on the banks of the well-named Fowl River. The woodland edges of this 900-acre property crawl with

birds on a good day, with Summer Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, and Yellow-throated Warblers singing their cheerful songs. Here we will do some pre-lunch birding on the bird-rich trails and fields.

After lunch we will drive along the western shore of Mobile Bay to one of the continent's great migration sites, Dauphin Island. Dauphin—named in the eighteenth century for the future Louis XV of France—is a long, narrow barrier island at the mouth of the bay, some six square miles of beach, dune, and forest. This is the first landfall for many migrants crossing the Gulf of Mexico in spring, and on days when weather conditions are just right, tremendous numbers of warblers, thrushes, vireos, orioles, buntings, tanagers, and catbirds “fall out” of the sky, their northward progress blocked by the passage of a spring cold front. Even on a less dramatic day, the numbers and variety of birds concentrated on the island can range from impressive to dazzling.

Compact as it is, Dauphin Island holds any number of discrete hotspots. The choice is an invidious one, but we'll try to visit representatives of all of the island's habitats, from sandy beaches with their Piping Plovers and Least Terns to tiny woodlots full of warblers and vireos, from tidal marshes with their Clapper Rails and Sedge Wrens to jetties and piers with their Royal Terns and Sanderlings. Virtually anything is possible here, and the combinations of species can be startling—there are few places anywhere else where a Magnificent Frigatebird may soar over a lawn covered with Blue Grosbeaks, or where Dickcissels and Reddish Egrets may fill the same binocular field.



Birders are welcome on Dauphin Island. Photo Rick Wright

After a full day of birding, we will check into our quaint little hotel on the island and enjoy a nice seafood dinner nearby.

NIGHT: Gulf Breeze Motel, Dauphin Island



Hooded Warbler at Shell Mounds Park. Photo Kevin Burke

Sunday, April 25, Day 3: Dauphin Island

This morning we will take a leisurely walk from the hotel before breakfast to see if any new birds have dropped in overnight. Most of the active migration on the island takes place in the afternoon, but one never knows what will turn up overnight. Our little hotel is situated right on the marsh, so Clapper Rails will be an everyday occurrence from the parking lot! We will have breakfast and then head out on a short beach walk to search for shorebirds, in particular Snowy and Piping Plovers. Gull-billed and Sandwich Terns will also be a target, and we will always keep a keen eye out for Magnificent Frigatebird.

Since all the birding locations are so close we will have ample birding time today. We may head to the hotel for a quick break, or we could rush to a newly found rarity. We will for sure visit Shell Mounds Park at least once today, but probably multiple times. Shell Mounds Park is a small, protected area where Native Americans roasted oysters and fish for several thousand years. The mounds of oyster shells have created a ridge with a freshwater spring running through it. These mounds are probably the birdiest place on the island. We will look for any number of wood warblers, Tanagers, Thrushes, and Flycatchers in this small sanctuary. Other stops today will include the far Western Side of the island and the Dauphin Island Audubon Sanctuary. We will finish up with another nice dinner on the island.

NIGHT: Gulf Breeze Hotel, Dauphin Island



Blue Grosbeak and Indigo Buntings on the ground near the hotel Photo Kevin Burke



Birding beneath a live oak festooned with resurrection ferns. Photo Joe Watts



Clapper Rail behind the hotel Photo Kevin Burke

Monday, April 26 Day 4: Desoto National Forest, Mississippi Carne National Wildlife Refuge and dauphin Island

This will be a fun day chasing U.S. endemics. We will begin our day by driving for about an hour into Mississippi. Here we will visit Desoto National Forest. These large tracks of Long-leaf Pine are home to Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Bachman's Sparrow, and Brown-headed Nuthatch, all three U.S. endemics! We will wander the dirt tracks until we find our targets. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. They use the trees that have been weakened by Red Pine Fungus as nest cavities. They live in small cluster groups and are often very active and vocal at the nesting trees right at dawn, so we will try to get to an optimal site early this morning. While searching for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers we will most definitely hear the sweet melodical song of the Bachman's Sparrow. These skulky sparrows are easiest to see when they are in the breeding season, often perched up on a palmetto singing away. Pine Warbler and Brown-headed Nuthatches should be abundant here too. Before leaving Mississippi, we will make a quick stop at Mississippi Carane National Wildlife Refuge to see nesting "Mississippi" Sandhill Cranes, which breed here on the unique wet pine savanna habitat.

We will have lunch near the coastal town of Biloxi, most likely trying to get our fill of Crawfish.

After lunch we will head back to Dauphin Island and check a few of the areas we may not have visited yet, such as the eastern end of the island. This will be a full fun day of birding the greater gulf region. We will finish the day with dinner nearby.

NIGHT: Gulf Breeze Motel, Dauphin Island



Brown-headed Nuthatch photo Kevin Burke



Red-cockaded Woodpecker Photo Michael O'Brien

Tuesday, April 27, Day 5: Fort Morgan Bird Banding and Dauphin Island

This morning we will take another leisurely walk from the hotel after, or before breakfast to see if there are any new birds in the vicinity. Then we will be off to visit historic Fort Morgan via a short ferry ride from the east end of the island. The area of the fort, now a state historic park, are just as attractive to migrants as Dauphin itself, and we will check the compact grounds for Cattle Egrets, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, or even a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher or two before paying a visit to Alabama Audubon's bird banding station.



An Indigo Bunting at the Alabama Audubon Fort Morgan banding station. Photo Sanford M. Sorkin

We can talk to the scientists tending the nets and processing the birds about what their decades-long migration studies on the Alabama coast have revealed, and unless the weather is inclement, we should get in-hand views of a variety of migrants such as Indigo Buntings, Black-and-white Warblers, or Acadian Flycatchers.

We will have lunch overlooking the bay, then take the ferry back across Dauphin Island. Brown Pelicans, Royal and Sandwich Terns, and Laughing Gulls should accompany us on the 35-minute ride, and as we near our landing on Dauphin, we will look for Dunlin, Sanderling, and Ruddy Turnstones on the rocky jetties and breakwaters.

Once ashore, we will spend the rest of the afternoon checking Dauphin Island hotspots for newly arrived migrants. Much of the time, given the distances involved, some cross-Gulf migrants may not arrive until after midday, and we have a good chance at witnessing such an arrival—or simply enjoying the rich diversity of migrant and resident birds that can always be counted on here.

NIGHT: Gulf Breeze Motel Dauphin Island



American Alligator. Photo Rick Wright

Wednesday, April 28, Day 6: Dauphin Island to Mobile

With the numbers and variety of northbound migrants in constant flux, we will spend today mixing new sites with localities we've already visited. We plan to spend most of our time on Dauphin Island, but we'll keep our schedule sufficiently flexible so that we can change destinations at the very last minute should news come in of an exciting rarity in easy reach of Mobile. We will end up in Mobile for the night to make easy departures the next morning. We'll end the day celebrating a fine meal in one of Mobile's most sophisticated restaurants, a short drive from our hotel.

NIGHT: Candlewood Suites, Mobile

Sunday, April 29, Day 7: Departures

Participants will depart for home today.



Dauphin Island. Photo Rick Wright

ESSENTIAL TOUR INFORMATION

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 7 tour participants.

TOUR LEADER(s): This tour is led by **Kevin Burke**.



Kevin Burke’s lifelong passion for nature began in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, where he grew up exploring the forests and rivers of Shenandoah National Park. Known in childhood as the “Hellgrammite Kid” for his curiosity about the creatures beneath river rocks, Kevin developed an early fascination with the natural world. Summers spent in Rhode Island with his grandmother—who taught him to identify feeder birds—sparked a love for birding that never faded.

Kevin studied Ecotourism and Conservation Ecology at the University of Idaho, where he built on his early experience and formalized his path in conservation and guiding. For nearly 20 years, he has led birding trips across the United States, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic, and has birded in many other countries including Portugal, Colombia, The Bahamas, and Canada. His tours reflect not only expertise but also an infectious enthusiasm that connects people to nature.

Now based in Hendersonville, North Carolina, Kevin enjoys kayaking, hiking, and birding with his wife and two children in the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains—often paddling the French Broad River together near their home.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: **\$3,295** per person based on double occupancy or **\$3,820** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 7, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the “TIPPING” sub-section below.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. We accept MasterCard and Visa

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days (December 24, 2026) prior to the tour departure date.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can handle the hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

FUEL SURCHARGES: Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other

support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit.
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours. Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

CANCELLATION BY VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A ***“Force Majeure”*** event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide

medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [Ripcord Travel Insurance](#); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The "pay as you go" approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to "pay as you go," you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website

that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

About Medjet's MedjetAssist Plan

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company's primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per-person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is

subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from **is not** required.

VISAs: Visas are not required for U.S. citizens traveling to this destination. If you hold a passport from another country, please check with your consulate or embassy for the most accurate guidance.

IMPORTANT: The visa details above are current for U.S. citizens as of July 31, 2026. Because entry requirements can change without notice, we kindly remind all participants to double-check the latest information before traveling. Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: General clothing information

- **Layers:** Long sleeves and pants
- **Waterproof Jacket**
- **Causal Dress:** For dinner on evenings

FOOTWEAR: Waterproof hiking boots or heavy-duty trail shoes

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well prepared:

- **Sunglasses**
- **Sunscreen**
- **Reusable Water Bottle**
- **Daypack**
- **Camera**

Binoculars: We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes: Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & TOUR CONDITIONS

CLIMATE & WEATHER: Mid-April's weather on Alabama's Gulf Coast is usually very pleasant, though there is always the chance of rain or even a thunderstorm. Typical daytime highs are in the 70s F, usually with a refreshingly cool breeze; breakfast-time temperatures are usually around 50° F. Remember that at any time of day, the air can feel cooler right on the beach and on board a boat or ferry. There is a possibility of showers at any time, but our itinerary is flexible enough that we can easily adjust our schedule to recover from being rained out from any given destination or activity.

CONDITIONS: The physical demands posed by our itinerary are modest, but you will benefit most from our birding if you are able to walk a mile at a normally slow birding pace and to stand in place for several minutes at a time. Most of our birding will be on foot, with easy, slow-paced walks along level roadsides and on wide trails; some of our destinations can also be birded from

the vehicle, an important consideration should the weather turn cold or rainy. It is possible to sit some walks out at the vehicle. Our days will start at around 6:00 am with breakfast, followed by a full morning in the field before stopping for lunch in a casual restaurant.

CURRENCY & SPENDING: You will want to bring enough cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as taxi rides, gifts, laundry, gratuities, and personal items. It is best to carry cash in small denominations, as many places we visit may be unable to provide change for large bills.

INTERNET ACCESS: Wi-Fi is available at all our hotels.

TIME: Mobile is 1 hour behind Eastern Standard Time.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at an extra charge in our Mobile Hotel, but it is a far better idea to simply bring enough clothing to see you through the tour.

HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for

those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance for avoiding COVID-19.

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

INSECTS & OTHER HAZARDS: Mosquitoes are rarely a significant annoyance at this time of year, but if you are sensitive to their bites, you should consider bringing insect repellent. Ticks and chiggers are present at most of our sites; they are easily avoided by keeping to the trails and out of tall grass. Similarly, poisonous snakes occur in small numbers in some of the habitats we will be visiting, but they are very rarely encountered, especially on the trails and paths we will be using. Poison ivy is common and widespread, and there are a few other plants that can cause a mild rash in some people on contact.

INSECT REPELLENTS: There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- **DEET:** (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- **Picaridin:** A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.

- **Herbal insect repellents:** Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

Insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- **Permanone® (Permethrin):** is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- **Insect Shield® apparel:** Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION

A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which

specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

Birds

Dunn, J., and J. Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to North American Birds*. 7th ed. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2017.

Sibley, D. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. 2nd ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. The smaller volume covering eastern North America is also usable, though its portability comes at the expense of the ingenious and informative layout of the large single-volume edition.

Duncan, R. S. *Southern Wonder: Alabama's Surprising Biodiversity*. University of Alabama Press, 2013.

Imhof, T. A. *Alabama Birds*. Second ed. University of Alabama Press, 1976.

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CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY APPS & ONLINE RESOURCES:

eBird: Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

MERLIN BIRD ID: Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which

the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack."

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VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

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VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion.

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Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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