

Interpretive Guide to:

BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK



- You are visiting a nature preserve as well as a recreation area. Help us protect the park's wildlife diversity and ensure your safety by observing park rules.
- Stay on designated trails. Keep a safe distance from alligators. Be sure your pets remain on a leash.
- Call the park to schedule your school, scout or youth group for programs of wildlife discovery.
- Visit the park nature center to learn more about the plants and animals that make their homes here. Check with the nature center to participate in one of the park's free interpretive programs. The park offers at least six programs each weekend. The nature center is open 9-5 weekends and most holidays, and 11-3 Monday through Friday.

Join or donate to the Brazos Bend Volunteer Organization and help us preserve and interpret the park's natural resources for others!

Brazos Bend State Park
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www.tpwd.state.tx.us/brazosbend
www.brazosbend.org



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Great Blue Heron

BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK INCLUDES 5,000 ACRES OF BOTTOM-LAND AND UPLAND COASTAL PRAIRIE JUST SOUTHWEST OF THE RAPIDLY EXPANDING HOUSTON METRO AREA. THE PARK'S WETLANDS, PRAIRIES AND FORESTS BUSTLE WITH BIRDS, RACCOONS, WHITE-TAILED DEER AND

ALLIGATORS. THE PARK MARKS A CONVERGENCE ZONE FOR A VARIETY OF HABITATS WITH OVER 300 SPECIES OF BIRDS, 21 SPECIES OF REPTILES AND 23 SPECIES OF MAMMALS. PARK VISITORS ENJOY CAMPING, BIRD WATCHING, HIKING, MOUNTAIN BIKING, FISHING, PICNICKING AND HORSEBACK RIDING. IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING LANDSCAPE, THE PARK ENDURES AS AN ISLAND OF NATURAL DIVERSITY.





Bluegill
© USFWS

WETLANDS of many kinds enhance species diversity at the park. Brazos Bend wetlands include swamps, lakes and marshes. Herons, egrets and ibis find homes in the plants that make up the park's marshes. In the lakes, grebes and anhinga locate the deep water they need to hunt bluegill and other sunfish. Meanwhile, the swamps provide shelter for migratory water birds, including least bitterns, mallards, green herons and purple gallinules. For woodpeckers and songbirds, dead trees transform into shelter like that of the



forest. But the swamp waters also give the birds protection unavailable in the forest by keeping land predators away. This attracts a greater variety of birds to the park.

Across the wetlands, visitors encounter the American Alligator, our last ruling reptile. Over 300 adult alligators make their homes in the park. Their keen senses and camouflage enable them to remain at the top of the food chain. In the spring, the alligators' mating calls can be heard up to a half mile away. Their relaxed demeanor allows for safe observation. But these animals can also become aggressive if provoked and move very quickly over short distances.

TALL GRASS PRAIRIE once covered much of North America. Today little of it remains. But within the park, visitors still explore small communities of native grasses that remind us of the grass prairies.

Long ago, the Brazos River brought sediment into a shallow ocean, providing a foundation for the park's prairie land. After the waters receded, a great grassland grew in their place. The grass provided home to millions of buffalo. In time, cattle replaced buffalo. But the surviving prairie remained a place of diversity, in part because of undulations in the land. Deposits in the prairie



WOODLANDS at Brazos Bend include live-oak gallery forests and mixed bottomland hardwood forest. In places, a mature forest canopy reaches for the sky above the park. The trees provide refueling stops for migratory birds and sanctuary for native wildlife species.

In the springtime during bird migrations, insect reproduction supplies the necessary food for the hungry travelers. While they eat, the birds rest in the treetops to evade predators.

Native wildlife species that make their homes in the forests include white-tailed deer, gray fox, bobcats and the nine-banded armadillo, the official small mammal of Texas. Signs of armadillo digging border almost every trail throughout the forests. Above the trails, squirrels mine the trees of both gallery and mixed hardwood forests for the nuts that make up their diet. In the spring, white-tailed deer gather in the park's forests to eat the tender shoots of trees and shrubs.

called pimple mounds dotted the ground, creating an environment attractive to pocket gophers and other burrowing animals. Today, little bluestem, big bluestem, Indian grass and switch grass still grow together here.

Much has changed since buffalo grazed at Brazos Bend, but the prairie remains more diverse than it appears. A quiet, subtle place, the prairie rewards those who pause and look carefully. Park staff now work to conserve and restore for future generations what is left of this once-vast ecosystem.

GEORGE OBSERVATORY

The George Observatory opens a pathway to the stars. Operated by the Houston Museum of Natural Science and located within the park, the observatory features three domed telescopes and the Challenger Learning Center.

The telescopes carry observatory staff, volunteers and visitors on journeys across the night sky where faint echoes of stellar history unfold. Here, the stories told by the stars and distant galaxies become the pages of our knowledge about the universe. Meanwhile, the Challenger Learning Center calls on young people to work together to solve problems of space travel. Teamwork and science skills guide participants to success.

As the park provides sanctuary for many kinds of life, the observatory functions only while surrounding light remains dim. When you help preserve the park, you help maintain this passageway to the heavens.

