

Birding In Alabama

Birmingham Zoo
by James V. Peavy

If you want to see birds, go to the zoo. The Birmingham Zoo is located on the south side of town and is marked on most road maps. There is a fine collection of captive exotic birds in the zoo; thousands of people come every year to look at these and other animals. Few people however realize that the zoo is also a haven for many species of wild native birds. Birding in the zoo and surrounding park is always rewarding and occasionally spectacular. I attribute the zoo's abundance of wild birds to two major factors: First, there are over 100 acres of heavily wooded land around the zoo, surrounded by extensive urban development; and second, the great abundance of food. Food is placed in pens outside daily for captive animals and wild birds fly into them to help themselves. It's sort of like birding in an 85 acre bird feeder. For persons interested in birding in the zoo I am dividing it into two major sections, inside the perimeter fence and outside the perimeter fence.

To bird inside the zoo fence you must enter by way of the main gate which opens at 9:30 A.M., and pay the admission charge. The charge is \$1.00 for adults and \$.25 for children 2-18 years old. Children under 2 are admitted free. Once inside the zoo all visitors must obey signs which restrict certain areas, generally however all areas of interest are accessible.

Birding inside the zoo is best in spring, winter and fall. In the spring and fall numerous species of warblers pass through. The best area in spring is the large wooded area north of the hoofed animal inclosure. There is a trail which follows the perimeter fence and allows access to these woods. This trail is seldom traveled, but is a fairly easy walk. You must however cross a ditch which has about two inches of water most of the time. Along this walk in spring and fall look for Ovenbird, Kentucky, Hooded, Black-throated Green, Swainson's, Worm-eating, Myrtle and Palm Warblers, and also various vireos.

The trail terminates into a service road near the old zoo service gate. In this area look for Veery, Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes, Catbird, Red-headed Woodpecker and nuthatches. In spring many Palm Warblers feed here. In the picnic area just east of the hoofed animals look for Chipping Sparrows, and in tall sweetgums Golden-winged and Prothonotary Warblers. In winter this is a good area for all finches and Rusty Blackbirds.

South of the zoo perimeter road is a large wooded picnic area. Directly across from Monkey Island is a very good place in winter for Purple Finches, Pine Siskins and White-throated Sparrows. In spring check water oaks for passing warblers such as Blackpoll, Black-throated Green and Myrtle. In the center of the zoo the ponds regularly attract Rough-winged Swallows, kingfishers, Green Herons and in fall immature Yellow-crowned Night Herons. Gangs of blackbirds settle on the Bison and deer lots in winter. In fall migrating hawks may be seen from the parking lot as they fly along Red Mountain.

If you wish to bird outside the zoo fence you do not have to pay any admission charge. As you enter the park area the admission booth is on a spur road to your left; continue right, follow the road until a dirt road enters from your right; stop here and check creek crossing. If you are very early you may find a gate blocking this road, if so, park near gate and walk the road, it is quite good throughout in early morning. In spring almost all woodpeckers can be seen, also Kentucky, Canada, Pine, Palm, Hooded, Black-and-White, Blackpoll, Myrtle and other warblers. Drive or walk to service gate, take dirt road right to picnic shelter. With the shelter on your left

there is a good trail on your right. Walk along this trail for all thrushes in the spring and also for good warblers.

In addition to these sites there are many other trails and wooded areas around the zoo. On the Mountain Brook side (near U.S. 280 access ramp) there is a wild, tangled area in which Black-billed Cuckoo, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Solitary Vireo and Winter Wren have been seen.

If you come to the zoo plan to look at the animal exhibits and please drop by the office to say hello.

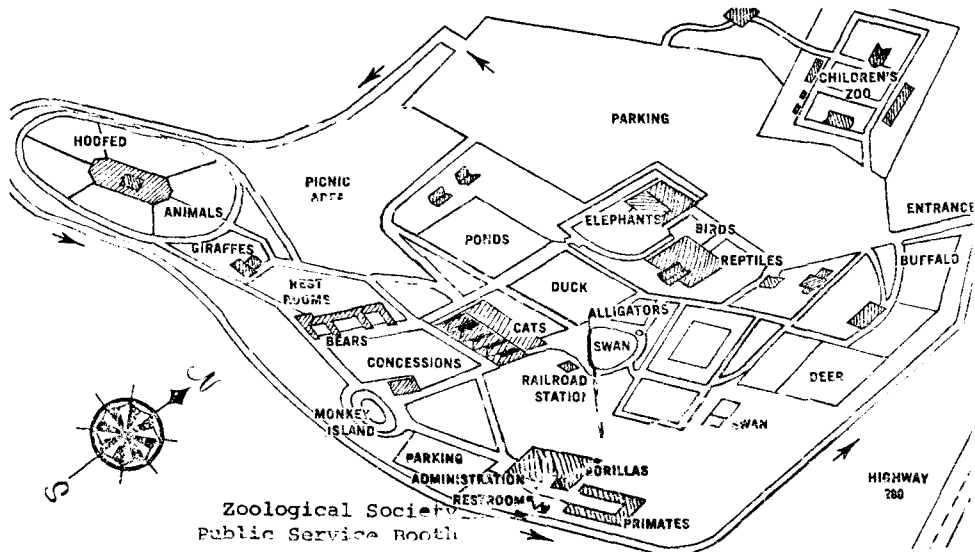


Figure 1. General layout of Birmingham Zoo. Some birding areas are not pictured, but can be located from the descriptive detail in the text.

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Species for Dauphin Island meeting, April 28-30, 1972 totaled 147. The area includes the Dauphin Island area south of the Intracoastal Waterway and the strip of land on either side of Ala. 163 to the edge of the marsh $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Heron Bay Cutoff. An additional 30 species were seen in nearby coastal Alabama during the same period. Details published in "The Season". Complete species list can be obtained from editor upon request.

Thomas A. Imhof, compiler.