

Great Places to Go Birding in Hillsborough County

Since we can't get to every good spot in just three days, here is a short list of good spots, not all of which were on the Festival schedule. If you have some extra time, visit a few of them too!

Apollo Beach ELAPP 6760 Surfside Blvd, Apollo Beach. No entrance fee. Bayside end of the Manatee Viewing Center. Oystercatchers, shorebirds, raptors, shrikes. Look for manatees, ducks in the winter, dolphins in the bay all year. Take Apollo Beach Blvd to the end, turn right, go to the end.

Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve 3839 Gulf City Rd, Ruskin. No entrance fee. There's a parking area on Gulf City Road to walk the trails or climb Mt. Cockroach for waterbirds and passerines, park along Cockroach Bay Road to scan the ponds for winter ducks, the sod farms for migrating plovers, or park at the end of the road near the boat ramp and walk the edges.

Cypress Point Park, end of West Cypress St. Tampa. No entrance fee. Small park with great views of the upper bay and a shallow lagoon on the south, great for winter ducks, waders, terns and more. Restrooms and picnic tables.

Edward Medard County Park, Turkey Creek Road just south of Rt 60, east of Brandon. \$2 entrance fee. Short walking trails, observation tower. Waterbirds, passerines, raptors. Fishing, picnic tables, restrooms.

Flatwoods Wilderness Park. 14302 Morris Bridge Road, Thonotosassa. Ten miles east of I-75 and Fletcher Ave. Seven mile paved loop, lots of unpaved trails. Bluebird boxes and nest cam in season, passerines, turkey, bobwhite.

Golden Aster Scrub 12121 East Bay Rd, Gibsonton. No fees. Loop trail is soft sand. One of the very few places in Hillsborough County to find scrub jays. Eagles and owls nest here too, ducks on the small lake.

Lettuce Lake Park 6920 E Fletcher Ave, Tampa. \$2 entrance fee. Boardwalk along the river and oxbow lake, woodlands trail. 2 miles total. Herons, egrets, ducks, warblers, vireos, raptors. Picnic tables, restrooms.

Lower Green Swamp Preserve, 3540 East Knights Griffin Rd, Plant City. No fees. Pine flatwoods, a lovely stream, palmetto. There are several loop paths to walk, from half a mile to several miles. Bachman's sparrow, turkeys, bobwhites, raptors, the birds change with the seasons.

Picnic Island Park. 7409 Picnic Island Boulevard, Tampa. No entrance fee. Views of the bay, ducks in winter. Go to south tip, walk to observation deck looking at back lagoon for spoonbills, waders, shorebirds, at low tide sandbars south in bay can be full of waders, gulls, terns. Passerines in migration, gray kingbirds breed in summer. Restrooms, picnic tables, trail along lagoon accessible at low tide, can be buggy in mangroves.

Riverhills Park. 405 S Riverhills Dr, Temple Terrace. No entrance fee. Small park, boardwalk, connects to trails along the river. Winter dusk has huge roost on islands in river. Wood ducks, owls, winter passerines. Park by boat ramp, or go further east to Broxburn Ave. parking area and trails through cypress along river.

Triple Creek ELAPP, 13305 Balm-Boyette Rd, Riverview. No fees. Pine and scrub flatwoods. Bluebirds, tanagers, raptors. Loop trail, might be wet.

Trout Creek Park 12550 Morris Bridge Rd, Thonotosassa. \$2 Entrance fee. Stop just after the bridge to scan the wetlands for waders. Walk south along the canal for passerines, kestrels. Then proceed to parking area for trails along the river, through the woods to several ponds, or cross the dam and take the trail along the dike that connects through the woods to Flatwoods. Bluebirds, passerines, raptors, nesting bald eagles in area.