

The Site Guide

Dauphin Island, Alabama

Location In the Gulf of Mexico 4 m. south of mainland Alabama, w. of entrance to Mobile Bay.

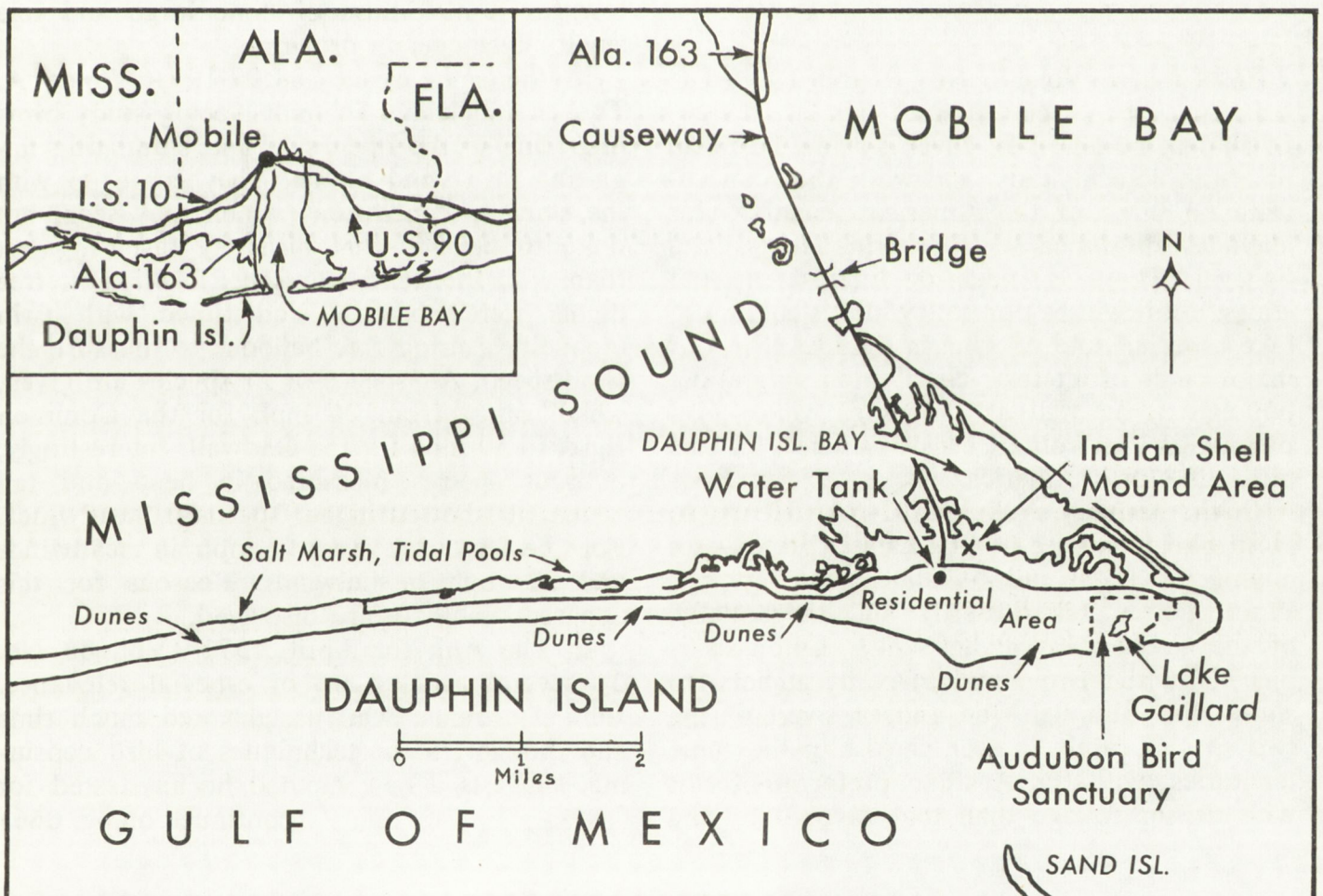
Description A barrier beach island, fish-hook shaped, 14 m. from e. to w., widening at its e. end, but less than 1 mi. wide. Western 10 m. typical sandy strip with beach and dunes facing the Gulf, salt marsh, tide pools, and flats on bay side. E. end of island is mixed habitat: live oak, mixed deciduous and loblolly pine forests, open meadows, copses, thickets, residential, fresh water ponds. E. end of island has 164-acre sanctuary, with grain-planted fields, minnow-stocked pond, caterpillar-stocked persimmon trees; it is the site of an active banding station.

Access Nearest major airport Mobile; the island has an airstrip. By car from Mobile: Route 163 s. From Mississippi and Florida, U.S. 90 to Mobile (Interstate 10 when completed).

Accommodations All-year motels, guest houses, rental cottages and apartments, restaurants, food market. Others on mainland nearby. Offshore charter boats available.

Birdwatching Like other barrier beach islands that rim the n. shore of the Gulf, Dauphin is a first landfall sighted by trans-Gulf migrants in spring, flying northward from Yucatan. If the winds are favorable in the morning, the birds will continue inland before they alight. If they have been delayed by headwinds, or if they meet an advancing cold front or rains over the coast, they will precipitate out of the sky at the coast—on Dauphin Island. Such weather conditions make for spectacular concentrations of birds along this narrow beach island, and unlike most areas in Spring, birds are found in increasing numbers after mid-day, and their numbers mount during the afternoon.

Participants in the recent meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society experienced a phenomenon on the afternoon of April 24, when, beginning about 1 p.m., birds were dropping from the skies in flocks. Observers at the lush Shell Mounds area watched as one live oak filled in rapid succes-



sion with 25 Scarlet Tanagers, a dozen Red-eyed Vireos, a flock of Indigo Buntings, a flock of orioles, a host of warblers, and a flock of waxwings. The area bird list in the first three days of the meeting was 190+ species, including Alabama's first Glaucous Gull (causeway) both Brown and Blue-faced Boobies (offshore), Swallow-tailed Kite, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Sandwich Tern, and multitudes of water birds, and landbirds.

Over the years the island has produced in all seasons: regularly seen are Magnificent Frigatebird, Gannet, Cattle Egret, Am. Oystercatcher, Wilson's Plover, Gull-billed Tern, Royal Tern, Gray Kingbird (nests), Blue Grosbeak and Painted Bunting. The list of rarities is long and has provided a number of first records for the state list. Seen at least once here are Red-throated Loon, Glossy Ibis, Surf Scoter, Purple Gallinule, and Long-billed Curlew. Mottled Duck nests here, as does the Fulvous

Tree Duck. Mississippi Kite is occasionally seen (more often inland), but such birds as Eared Grebe, Reddish Egret, Bell's Vireo, Black-whiskered Vireo, and Black-throated Gray Warbler have all been recorded.

Spring is the most interesting season (late March to mid-May, best mid-late April) but Dauphin Island is excellent in fall and good in every season, as readers of the Southern Region reports in AMERICAN BIRDS have discovered.

Best sites Causeway for waterfowl, rails, gallinules, gulls, terns, shorebirds. Sanctuary, Shell Mounds area, residential lanes for migrant and nesting landbirds. Ocean beach for pelagics. Salt marshes, tide pools and bay flats for herons, rails, marsh wrens, shorebirds, sparrows. Sand Island (rental boat) or beach strip for Snowy Plover.

Rating Spring ★★★★★, Summer ★★, Autumn ★★★★★, Winter ★★★.

—Adapted from M. Wilson Gaillard