

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

Interpretive Guide to:

GALVESTON ISLAND

STATE PARK





GALVESTON ISLAND STATE PARK FEATURES 2,000 ACRES OF AN UPPER GULF COAST BARRIER ISLAND ECOSYSTEM. BARRIER ISLANDS MOVE AND CHANGE CONSTANTLY THROUGH THE ACTION OF WAVES, WINDS AND TIDES. BECAUSE BARRIER ISLANDS LIKE GALVESTON SERVE AS TRANSITION ZONES BETWEEN LAND AND OCEAN, THEY SUPPORT A VARIETY OF DISTINCT ECO-REGIONS, INCLUDING BEACHES, PRAIRIES AND WETLANDS.



RICH IN DIVERSITY

Each eco-region supports a diverse array of life. The beaches also protect the mainland from storms, while the lagoons, bay and salt marshes serve crucial functions in the life cycles of many ocean species. Many of these organisms once sustained Karankawa Indians who foraged Galveston Island centuries ago. Spanish explorers later found refuge on the island.

Although more recent development has brought many changes to the land known to the Karankawa, the park site still provides shelter for both people and wildlife.



CHANGING LANDSCAPE



Beaches change constantly. Wind and water continually reshape the island's shores.

At Galveston Island State Park, beach plants and animals must be well adapted to survive in the harsh conditions that result from these changes.

Beach life includes the laughing gulls, snowy plovers, sanderlings and willets that feed eagerly along the shoreline. Nearby panicum, morning glory and primrose plants decorate the beach while helping to stabilize the dunes. The dunes in turn shield the rest of the island from wind and waves.

While the dunes protect the island, the beach helps the island shelter the mainland. The beach allows the island to absorb and dissipate storms, reducing damage to our coastal homes. Sargassum seaweed plays a vital role in maintaining the island's ability to shield the mainland by preserving the beach. It washes ashore beginning around April and usually ending by August. Sargassum preserves the beach by reducing erosion and by providing structure that helps dunes form.



Roseate Spoonbill

Prairies define the land past the beach and dunes. Once prairie habitat dominated the island; today very little remains.

The native grasses that prairie birds depend on have largely disappeared under assault from invasive plants that carpet much of the island today. However, TPWD now works to bring the exotic plants under control and restore native species, including gulf cordgrass and switchgrass.

Despite loss of habitat, birds, coyotes, opossums, rabbits and snakes still find homes in the Galveston Island Prairie. These animals depend on the small rain-filled lagoons that dot the prairie along the high points of the island.



◀ Sargassum seaweed plays a vital role in maintaining the island's ability to shield the mainland by preserving the beach.



Great Blue Heron

Salt Marsh Wetlands beyond the prairie on the bay side of the island form a transition zone where land gradually gives way to water. In this murky world, many fish and marine animals begin their lives. Spotted seatrout, red drum, flounder, blue crab and shrimp all depend on the shallow waters and tangles of cordgrass at waters edge for refuge and a place to lay their eggs. Great blue herons, snowy egrets and roseate spoonbills gather in the salt marshes to feed on fish and crustaceans. If you're a wildlife watcher, it's a show you won't want to miss.

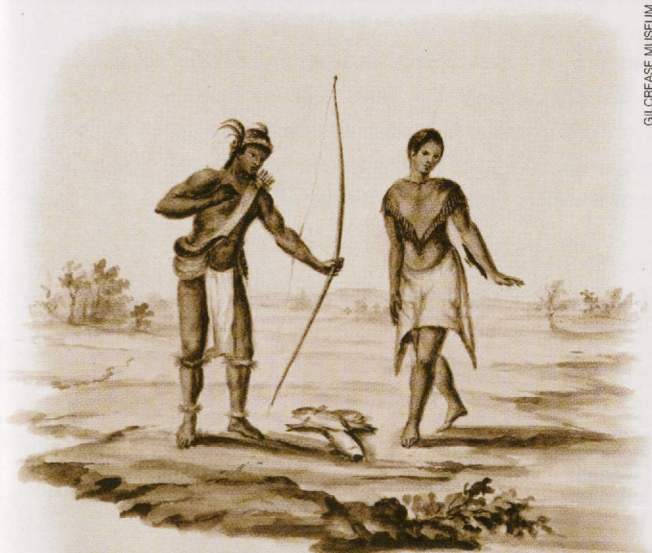
The wetlands protect the environment by filtering impurities from the water and soaking up excess water from storms. To protect these wetlands and halt their erosion, TPWD built marsh terraces in 2000 and installed large hollow, fabric cylinders filled with sand called geotextile tubes along the northern edges of the bay. This effort dramatically improved the health and diversity of the wetland ecosystem to the lasting benefit of us all.



Reddish Egret

THE ISLAND'S PAST

Nomadic Karankawa Indians hunted and fished on Galveston Island for generations before European explorers discovered the island in the sixteenth-century. Spaniard Cabeza de Vaca found himself shipwrecked on Galveston Island in 1528. His journals provide our earliest record of the now extinct Karankawa and their culture. Pirates later used the island as both refuge and base of operations. In 1817, Jean Lafitte built outposts on Galveston Island after first securing permission from the Mexican revolutionary authorities. Mexico's revolutionary struggle with Spain (1810-1821) allowed Lafitte to raid Spanish ships and keep what he took with Mexican permission. At the end of its marathon flight from the Mexican army in 1836, the first government of the Republic of Texas found refuge on Galveston Island. In the twentieth-century, the island became a different kind of retreat for affluent vacationers who built a community that once featured a city park and race track. Although the storm of 1900 destroyed much of that community, today Galveston Island continues to endure as a place of refuge.



Carancabucses

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Please keep in mind that this is a nature preserve. Help us protect the plants and animals that live here by planning activities to minimize your impact on the environment.

- To protect native plants, please walk only on designated footpaths.
- All trash should be removed before you leave.



Please join us for interpretive programs presented at many locations throughout the park. The park offers programs year-round. Check at the office and visit our nature center for information. We also encourage you to discover the park's natural wonders firsthand by hiking our trails.

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