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Nature's Best

Whether it's the serenity of the woods you seek, or observing animals in their habitats, Shelby County has all kinds of offerings. With easy access through Interstate I-65 or Highway 280, you are only minutes away from rural settings serene settings.

From the forested hills of the Ridge and Valley region to the rich pastures and farmlands of its river-carved valleys, the Appalachian Highlands Birding Trail provides a wide diversity of habitats for birds, including the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Especially noteworthy for bird-lovers are the many rivers that flow through this region, including the Cahaba, and the Coosa.

Limestone Park – Birding

2400 Hwy 31 South
Alabaster, AL

Limestone Park, in Alabaster, has long been a favorite birding site for Birmingham Audubon Society, but most of the choice wetland areas, where the birds are most prevalent, were out of sight and inaccessible from the road. To transform this site into a Magnet Site on the AHBT, Birmingham Audubon partnered with David Frings, one of the area's leading naturalists, to build a handicapped-accessible Birding Observation Deck overlooking the extensive wetlands in the Park. Funds for materials were donated by Birmingham Audubon, and were matched with high-quality construction work by staff of the City of Alabaster Parks Department. Other park amenities include a mowed walking trail to the back of the park, and plans for a birding tower overlooking the entire swamp. This location is now extremely 'birder-friendly', and deserves a visit!

Limestone Park's interesting combination of wetlands, grasslands, and Tupelo Gum swamp is good for wading birds, swamp and marsh birds, grassland species, and some waterfowl in winter. You will also find songbirds and shorebirds in migration. Best birds are Anhinga (breeds), and Bobolinks, Dickcissels, and Grasshopper Sparrows (late spring). A Roseate Spoonbill is sometimes spotted here in summer. The City of Alabaster has recently added a handicapped-accessible Birding Observation Deck overlooking the wetlands on the North-western side of the park, with adjacent parking for all. Located in a rural industrial area in southern Shelby County, this park preserves a rich remnant of the habitat mosaic that makes this area especially attractive to birds.



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University of Montevallo's Ebenezer Swamp Ecological Preserve

Spring Creek, approximately 6 mi. NE of Univ. of Montevallo
(corner of CR 24 & Stagecoach Rd.)
Montevallo, AL

The **Ebenezer Swamp Ecological Preserve**, located about six miles from campus, is home to a myriad of plant and animal species. Among the sycamore and Tupelo gum trees, you'll spot beavers and turkeys as well as a rare species of coneflower.

"The Swamp" is host to a number of biology and environmental science classes, so if you're looking for a hands-on component to your education, look no further.

Tucked in among the natural flora are a number of abstract animal sculptures, created from recycled steel by UM art students.

Oak Mountain State Park

200 Terrace Drive
Pelham, Alabama 35124

From its humble beginning as a 940-acre park atop Double Oak Mountain established by the Alabama State Lands Act of 1927, **Oak Mountain State Park** has grown to 9,940 acres of pine-studded ridges and lush green hardwood bottoms, making it Alabama's largest state park. With the largest land-area, one of the widest varieties of outdoor activities of any state park, and its proximity to Birmingham, Oak Mountain is a perfect stop while traveling to and from the state's largest city. Topping it all off is the park's stunning physical landscape, which alone makes for an unforgettable experience.

Oak Mountain State Park has once again been awarded the coveted "Certificate of Excellence" from Tripadvisor!

Whether its outdoor activities you see, or trails for exploring, **Oak Mountain State Park** has it all. The park offers vacation cottages, golf, pro shop with snack bar, improved camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, hiking, mountain bike trails, backpacking, a demonstration farm and horseback riding and equestrian campground facilities.



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Education and wildlife rehabilitation are major components of the park as well. The Alabama Wildlife Center provides rehabilitation services to injured native birds each year in order to return them to the wild. The resident birds can be viewed from the Tree Top Nature Trail, an elevated boardwalk winding through a secluded woodland valley. Adjacent to the Wildlife Center is the Oak Mountain Interpretive Center, a 2,500 square foot interactive exhibit space, meeting room, and teaching laboratory.

Alabama's largest state park, Oak Mountain offers a rich variety of good birding spots. The fishing lakes at the northeast end of the park, especially the woods around the lower fishing lake, can be amazingly productive. Allot a good portion of your time in the park to this area. Peavine Falls Road is also quite good. Concentrate on the picnic area on the ridgeline on the brow of the mountain, and on the trails at the end of the Falls Road.

Oak Mountain State Park has 97 miles of trails for all ages and skill levels including:

- 27 miles of equestrian trails exclusively for horses (no foot traffic or mountain bikes except for segments of a few multi-use trails)
- 32 miles of hiking trails exclusively for foot traffic (no horses or mountain bikes)
- 38 miles of mountain bike trails (the only OMSP trails that allow mountain bikes - however foot traffic is allowed - no horses)

Cahaba River Park

2793 River Rd - Main Parking / Restrooms / Picnic Pavillion
2011 River Rd - Trailhead Parking - West
2105 River Rd - Trailhead Parking – East

The **Cahaba River Park** is a joint venture between the Alabama Forever Wild Land Trust and Shelby County with the County taking the lead on development of outdoor amenities at the park. This scenic park is located at the confluence of the Cahaba River and Shades Creek with 1,527 acres including a combined 1,339 acres in the North Sector (1,212 acres Forever Wild Property and 127 acres of Shelby County) on River Road (County Road 251) off County Road 13 west of Helena and 188 acres located in the South Sector at the end of County Road 251 off of County Road 10 in the west of Montevallo. There is no access for motorized vehicles across the river from North Sector to the South Sector. There are several river miles of canoeing to be enjoyed or a great place to enjoy swimming or fishing when the water levels safely permit.



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The 1,339 acre north sector features 17 miles of professionally designed and constructed trails for hiking, mountain biking and trail running enthusiasts. Other recreation activities are available to the public such as open space relaxing, viewing scenery, wildlife, birding and picnicking. There are currently three parking areas, a pavilion with restrooms and an outdoor shower, and a second pavilion to be completed late Fall 2018. A caretaker house is also on the property to facilitate maintenance and safety within the park.

Several canoe/kayak launch sites, additional single-track trails, a primitive canoe-in/hike-in camping area, and a second caretaker's home on the South Sector are among future planned improvements.

Buck Creek Park and Trail

701 6th Ave SW
Alabaster, AL 35007

Buck Creek Trail contains approximately 3 miles of walking and biking paths with a 1.5 mile linear main trail. It connects two major parks: **Buck Creek Park** and Warrior Park. There are three trail heads to access the nature trail. Two are located at the existing parks (701 Sixth Avenue South and 100 Depot Street). The third trail head parking lot is near the YMCA and old Buck Creek Mill site. The Alabaster Senior Center is near this site. The linear trail topography is user friendly and consists of natural surfacing. This segment will easily accommodate strollers, bikes, pets, and seniors. There are five bridges on the trail with the associated handrails and approach ramps.

Points of interest along the trail include a water fall behind the Buck Creek Mill property. A replica Pavilion close to the water fall on an island. Other points of interest are the Blue Hole and an underground spring that flows constantly.

Dunnavant Valley Greenway

1150 Dunnavant Valley Rd
Birmingham, AL 35242

The **Dunnavant Valley Greenway** runs approximately 1.8 miles one way along the North Fork of Yellow Leaf Creek between two trailheads. The southern trailhead is located within the



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SportsBlast 1996 Fields Complex adjacent to Hwy 280. After exiting the highway, continue past the BlackWatch Sports Performance facility (19220 Hwy 280 East, Birmingham, AL 35242). Prior to entering the main parking lot for the soccer fields, take a right and head south along the western side of soccer fields. Continue around the soccer fields until it ends in a small parking lot. A bridge leads from the parking lot to the greenway. The northern trailhead is located on Dunning Valley Road (Hwy 41) between Birch Creek Drive and River Birch Way but has limited parking and may fill up on nice weekends.

The North Fork of Yellow Leaf Creek has water year round but is mainly feed from rainfall. The best chance to see water flowing in the creek is between November and June when the greatest rainfall occurs. The greenway has a natural surface. If beginning at the northern trailhead, hikers descend a small hill into a valley where the greenway parallels the creek. There are two foot bridges that are crossed. As you hike through the pine and hardwood forest, it is easy to hear a variety of birds. The greenway passes a number of rapids and cascades. The greenway ascends and descends a number of small hills, most of which are covered in large rocks. Then the greenway follows an old roadbed to a bridge to the southern trailhead. Diverse flora is abundant during the Spring and Summer. Rock formations and rock gardens can easily be seen in the Fall and Winter.