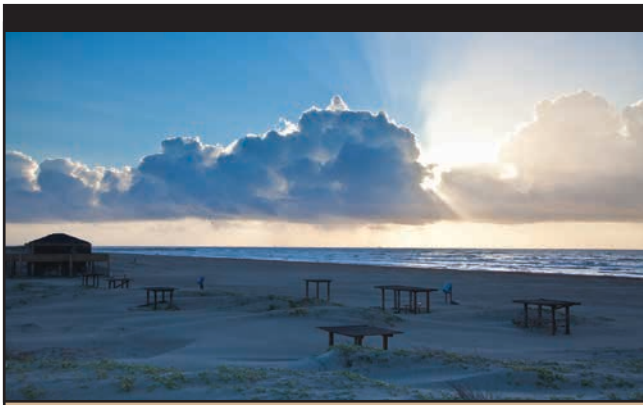


Interpretive Guide to:

MUSTANG ISLAND

STATE PARK



MUSTANG ISLAND STATE PARK IS ONE OF THE FEW UNDEVELOPED BARRIER ISLAND HABITATS ON THE ENTIRE TEXAS GULF COAST. SPANIARDS EXPLORING THE GULF OF MEXICO LANDED ON HER BEACHES. THE NOMADIC KARANKAWA INDIANS FISHED THE LAGOONS AND HUNTED THE PLAINS WHERE WILD MUSTANGS ROAMED. THIS LONG THIN STRAND OF LAND WITH THE GULF OF MEXICO ON ONE SIDE AND CORPUS CHRISTI BAY ON THE OTHER PROTECTS THE MAINLAND FROM HURRICANES, AS WELL AS NURTURES PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE. IT HAS SHAPED TEXAS HISTORY AND IT CONTINUES TO INFLUENCE HUMAN ACTIVITY. THE ISLAND'S BEAUTY AND THE MYSTERY OF ITS NATURAL AND CULTURAL WORLDS ARE WOVEN TOGETHER FOR YOU TO EXPERIENCE.



Whatever your pleasure in visiting here – surf fun, fishing, boating, basking on the beach, birdwatching, camping or exploring – your respect for the web of island life is your honor to the future. Enjoy ... responsibly!

- ✦ Drive and hike only in designated areas to avoid disrupting or destroying the homes of wildlife.
- ✦ Put trash in a designated bin. Trash is often deadly to wildlife.
- ✦ Dispose used fishing line in trash bins, because it can become a deathtrap for birds and wildlife.
- ✦ Glass containers are not allowed on the beach. If broken they are dangerous to both people and animals.

FURTHER READING

William Allen and Sue Hastings Taylor, *Aransas: The Life of a Texas Coastal County*.

Jay A. Raney and William A. White, *Down to Earth at Mustang Island, Texas*.

NEARBY POINTS OF INTEREST

Padre Island National Seashore (361) 949-8068

Port Aransas Birding Center Chamber of Commerce (361) 749-5919

Mustang Island State Park

P.O. Box 326, Port Aransas, TX 78373 • (361) 749-5246

www.tpwd.texas.gov/mustangisland



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Barrier islands are living natural systems, constantly moving, re-forming, expanding and contracting, responding to the winds, waves and storms.

Mustang and its sister barrier islands appeared only in the last five thousand years or so as the oceans reached their present sea level. They serve as buffers between the open gulf and the mainland.

On the gulf side, rows of sand dunes often rise thirty feet or more. The lee side of the dunes provides protection from wind and salt spray, creating a more sheltered environment for vegetation and wildlife. This makes it possible for tenacious vines and deep rooted coastal grasses to maintain dune integrity. Without the protection of the dunes, island meadows, freshwater potholes, tidal inlets and coastal lagoons would vanish.

Dunes rise in two tiers. Seaward primary dunes are often tallest and become more sparsely vegetated as sands constantly sculpt their faces. Grasses and shrubs begin to catch hold behind the crest of the dunes, extending as a carpet of vegetation over secondary dunes.

Beaches are constantly exposed to the relentless pounding of the surf. The lee side of barrier islands including Mustang Island opens to placid lagoons and small shallow bays. Here the chain of sea life breeds and grows in nursery habitats provided by grassy wetlands, oyster reefs and brackish estuaries. Infant shrimp, crabs and fish of all kinds grow in these protective waters before migrating to the open gulf.

Over this island background, hawks soar in search of pocket gophers, ground squirrels, mice, snakes, and cotton rats. Coyotes and bobcats stalk the brambles for cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, opossums and skunks.

Lagoons that catch and hold the rain provide a source of freshwater for these creatures. Surrounded by bulrushes, cattails and sedges, the ponds attract migratory waterfowl, songbirds and wading birds (over 400 bird species), seeking forage and refuge. Whitetail deer gather around to drink and browse. Raccoons feast on pond crustaceans.

Between the dunes and tidal flats, patient wildlife watchers can get an eyeful, especially at dusk when island creatures begin to stir, or around dawn when animals return after their nocturnal rounds. However, if you miss the live show, it's almost as fun to look for and identify the tracks and other signs that nighttime critters have left behind.



THE ISLAND'S DIVERSE HISTORY

Hundreds of mustangs once roamed this island. When and how the mustangs became residents is a mystery. Perhaps a stallion that roamed the South Texas plains caught the scent of island grasses and freshwater ponds and splashed across shallow tidewaters to reach the barrier island. Or perhaps the horses descended from animals left on the island by Spanish explorers. The horses vanished by the late 1800s, but the island is their namesake.

Jean Béranger, a member of a French expedition exploring the Texas coast, first recorded the Karankawa Indians around 1720. Other Europeans are believed to have traversed the island at an earlier time. By the 1850s the Karankawa population had all but vanished.

Over the centuries the island's natural resources have survived many dreams and schemes. Horse and cattle ranching started on the island as early as 1838. But disputes among *empresarios* and political uncertainty during the Texas Revolution, made it impossible to enter valid land claims. Later, the Civil War interrupted land transactions. And as recently as 1944 developers planned an "exclusive and beautiful playground that would surpass the European Riviera" on the Island.

