

PELAGIC TRIP PREPARATIONS

Preparing for a Pelagic Birding Trip:

Pelagic birding is much different than any type of land birding. It offers a chance to find birds you would otherwise never see from land. It also offers a chance to see and discover birds that may be rarely seen in Texas or the Gulf of Mexico. In addition to the bird life there are cetaceans and other marine life that most people would never realize are possible to see in Texas. I'll try to give you a good idea of what to expect so you can be prepared both mentally and physically.

Preparation:

- **Learn the Birds:** Well before the day of the trip review field guides to familiarize yourself with the birds you may hope to encounter. Check out Brad McKinney's Annotated checklist (found on this website) and review the ID field marks of the birds listed. Even if you've seen them before this helps because more than likely it may have been last year or longer since you've seen these birds. Aside from that there is usually not time to refer to the field guide when your trying to stay on the bird from the boat so it helps to know what to look for.
- **Check with your doctor for seasickness prescriptions:** More about this below.
- **Watch the weather forecast the week before.** There are two good NOAA websites I always start checking the week ahead of departure. Here are the links. The first one offers a detailed marine forecast for a week out.
<http://www.srh.noaa.gov/bro/marine.htm>
The second one offers current sea observation data an offshore buoy. I find the graphs of wave height and wind speed trends for the past week, the most fun to watch.
http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/station_page.php?station=42020
- **Call ahead the day before departure.** The Osprey captain will decide if conditions warrant cancelling the trip the afternoon before departure. The trip organizers usually recommend calling them or the Osprey dock to get the trip status around noon on the day before. This could save you a long drive and a lot of trouble if weather conditions are lousy and the trip is cancelled ahead of time. Below is a link to the Osprey Boats.
<http://ospreyfishingtrips.com/>
- **Be well rested:** If you've been driving all night from a distant point somewhere in Texas and arrive at the dock a couple hours before the boat sails you are likely to have a miserable pelagic trip. Arrive early the day before and sleep well at a local motel.
- **Eat a good Breakfast:** You know what keeps your stomach settled. Pancakes, toast, oatmeal, granola, muffins,, yogurt and bagels may work.
- **Keep a positive outlook:** We never know what the day will bring in bird and wildlife sightings. Help yourself and everyone else out by constantly scanning the horizon for birds. The more eyes that are on the lookout the less likely we are to miss something. Plus staying engaged and scanning the horizon helps you keep your balance and may help to avert seasickness.

Equipment to Bring:

- **Waterproof Binoculars:** 7x or 8x may prove easier to hold steady on a rocking boat, yet some people do use 10x anyway. Bring a lens wipe as they will get wet from sea spray.

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- Cameras are always good for documenting birds or marine mammals, but take precautions to protect your camera gear from highly corrosive salt spray.
- A small bag or daypack for stuff.
- Field Guides.
- Leave the scope and tripod behind onshore; it will be useless at sea even in the calmest conditions.

Food and Beverages:

- A small cooler.
- Plenty of water and/or your favorite drinks.
- The difference between feeling good or getting sea sick may be what you eat or drink. Here is a list of items that may help you avoid feeling nauseous:
 - Pretzels
 - Plain Crackers
 - Rice Cakes
 - Bagels
 - Plain sandwiches
 - Ginger Ale
 - Cola

Keep well hydrated during the day. Drink small sips constantly. Also nibbling constantly on crackers or other safe items may help keep your stomach settled.

You may want to avoid these items:

- Potato Chips
- Sandwiches with salami, Oil, Mayo, onions, peppers
- Corn chips
- Chocolate
- Other fatty or greasy foods.
- Canned anchovies. (they do make good chum)

What to wear and Avoiding Sun overexposure:

In July, August and September it's likely to be very warm or hot offshore.

- Light quick drying clothing that offers full sun protection is best. I prefer shorts but judge for yourself.
- Light weight shoes that dry quickly if soaked, work well. I sometimes wear sandals but watch your toes on the anchor chain or for another birders off balance stomp.
- A hat that affords good sun protection. Think about rigging up a lanyard with a clip to your shirt to keep your hat from blowing overboard. I have seen a few hats lost overboard. It's always windy when the boat is cruising.
- Sunglasses. With UVA / UVB protection. Also polarized lenses help in spotting fish below the sea surface.
- Sunscreen: Apply early and often. When reflected off the water the sun can be brutal.
- Lip balm with high SPF.

Seasickness prevention:

- Over-the-Counter Meds: There are a number of motion sickness medications available at a drug store. They have different active ingredients and be aware that some of these

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may make you drowsy, which isn't as bad as being sea sick but you may miss some birds if you're asleep all day in the cabin.

- Prescription Meds: Check with your doctor. Many people use the "patch" and I've had good luck with it but it too has side effects.
- Both over-the counter and prescription meds need to be started the evening before departure to be effective.
- Wrist Bands. I've seen people use wrist bands with a little marble on the pressure point that's supposed to reduce nausea. That may work for some people but I've also seen a few people wearing these wrist bands still get sea sick.
- Other remedies: Follow the earlier advice. Get a good nights sleep. Don't be hung over from partying or a lack of sleep.
- Eat a decent breakfast.
- Watch what you eat and drink during the trip.
- Stay out in the fresh air and avoid the stuffy cabin.
- Avoid the stern where diesel fumes are wafting by and the fish oil chum is being prepared.
- Stay engaged and scan the horizon.
- Try sitting in the middle of the boat near the railing when the rocking and rolling is less pronounced.

Finally if all this fails and you must succumb to chumming, deliberately head for the stern (back) of the boat with the wind at your back so the barf goes overboard (where you may actually do some good). Never loose it in the head (toilet) or you and everyone else on board will be very sorry you did.

Safety onboard:

A rocking boat far offshore has inherent dangers that you need to be aware of for your own safety. On the morning before departure the boat crew reviews safety procedures including the location of life vests, rafts and etc and be sure to pay attention.. The trip leaders will also review most of the information I've prepared here and probably a few things I forgot. One day at sea is not long enough to acquire good sea legs so be careful when you walk about and hang on to the railings or seat backs.

One more thing is to watch the cabin hatch doors. These heavy watertight metal doors can swing wildly if left unsecured and could easily smash your fingers or ring your gong. Always hang on tight to them when passing in or out of the cabin and be sure to latch them behind you.

What to expect during the Trip:

No two Texas pelagic trips are alike. On some trips we may experience calm seas and have fantastic close up views of many birds, marine mammals and fish. However there may also be long and boring periods where nothing is seen, not a single bird or marine animal of any kind. Other trips may have more challenging, rougher sea conditions where it is difficult to hold your binoculars steady enough to see anything very well. Pelagic birding can be challenging and admittedly it is not for everyone.