



Matagorda Island: A Naturalist's Guide

Wayne H. McAlister, Martha K. McAlister

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Once, all barrier islands were natural places where sand dunes and sea grasses, waterbirds and beach creatures flourished, undisturbed by human development. Matagorda Island still is. Part of a chain of five major barrier islands that shelter the Texas coastline from the Gulf of Mexico, Matagorda Island is the only one completely under public ownership--the only one with a fate entirely in the hands of the people.

This guide to the island seeks to acquaint first-time visitors and seasoned naturalists alike with the natural wealth and ecological fragility of Matagorda. In chapters on geology, history, ecology, vegetation, mammals, birds, herptiles, fish, and invertebrates, the authors show how the island is a living ecosystem, where every plant, animal, and sand dune has a role to play in maintaining the balance of nature. They also discuss the human history of Matagorda--the Karankawa Indians, European explorers, Civil War-era settlers, lighthouse keepers, and the U.S. Air Force, which used Matagorda for a bombing range during the 1940s and 1950s. Useful appendices on plants, wildflowers, and birds; maps; and line drawings amplify the text.

This unique combination of human and natural history gives a full sense of what the island's past has been and what its future can be. It offers hope that on this one island, at least, humans can learn to enjoy a natural environment nondestructively, respecting the intricate web of relationships that connects the land and all living creatures.

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