BIRDING AREAS FOUND ON THE MAP

BIRDS

Black-backed Woodpecker and Chinned Hummingbird and Lazuli Bunting are among the more interesting breeding birds, and Cooper’s Hawks have also nested in the past. At the south end of the park the swampland tangles support Red-eyes and Black-headed Grosbeak in the cattails, Northern Waterthrush and Yellow Warbler in the understory. Listen for Blue Jay.

Seasons: Open year-round.

Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

This gem is an outstanding 424 acres of undisturbed riparian bottomland located along the banks of the Flathead River. Montana’s only state-designated Natural Area is managed by Flathead Audubon and Montana Audubon. Most of the Natural Area lies on the east side of the Flathead River, accessible primarily by boat. There is a network of marked trails through the midsection of the Area and the first 600 feet of the main trail is ADA accessible.

To access by boat: Float about a mile downstream from the Coral Ridge Drive bridge over the Flathead River located just east of intersection with Willow Glen Drive. Or, paddle up river (it is very slow in the summer) 2 miles from the county river access located at the end of Leisure Lane (off Willow Glen Drive). Explore the islands that comprise the bulk of the area, and the highest quality habitat. Trails are not maintained and the understory is dense.

Seasons: Open year-round.

Lawrence Park

The road heads uphill to the golf course. 93 veers left (follow public golf course signs). The 1/4 mile bear right on Main Street where Highway 93 North (Main Street) across Highway 2; 26 miles northeast of Whitefish off Highway 40. Routes birding opportunities are found in the park.

Remnant prairies

Alpine and subalpine habitats

Along the upper reaches from Avalanche Creek to Camas Loop to the North Fork, stopping at McKeen Meadows for Common Snipe and Le Conte’s Sparrow. Watch for Boreal Chickadee in these areas as well. In winter, near Agar entrance, look for often American Dipper, Bald Eagle, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, various waterfowl and occasionally Red-breasted Nuthatch. Golden-crowned Kinglet, Trumpeter Swan, Common Redpoll, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Northern Shrike.

Seasons: Glacier Natural Park is open year-round, however the main roads are not plowed in winter except in and around Park Headquarters and the Agar area to Lake McDonald Lodge.

Swan Lake

A visit to Swan Lake always provides some binding rewards, especially in spring and summer. Start at the Forest Service boat ramp and swimming area Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge. After that, head to Porcupine Creek Road, stopping at the Porcupine Creek bridge. Be sure to also visit The Nature Conservancy’s Swan River Observation Preserve, populated with many hiking trails.

Directions: Drive south from Bigfork about 10 miles along Highway 83 to the southeast end of Swan Lake—a mile before the town of Swan Lake. The Forest Service boat ramp is located west of the highway, the camping area is on east side. Access Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge via Bog Road, located another 2.2 miles south of the boat ramp (marked with a “bouyscage” sign). Porcupine Creek is west of Highway 93 another 1.6 miles south of the refuge. Follow signs to the Swan River Observation Preserve off Porcupine Creek Road.

Habitat

• Stands of cattail, dogwood and other shrubs along the trails located near the Swan Lake site

• Riparian tributary, dense shrubs, forest, and lake just east of the highway near the camping area

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Birds: At the Forest Service boat access look for Red-naped Sapsucker, Hammond’s Flycatcher, American Kestrel, Northern Waterthrush and Black-headed Grosbeak. In the swampy area across the highway you can find Vaux’s Swift, Rufous Hummingbird, and Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos. The refuge viewing platform often yachts views of Wilson’s Snipe, American Bittern, Black Tern and other marsh residents. Less common recent visitors have included Bubolins, Loggerhead Shrike and Lark Sparrow. Watch for Vaux’s and Black Swifts overhead on overcast summer days. Round out your day’s list by traveling down Rosson Creek Road with the Fox Sparrow, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Rufous Grouse, Varied Thrush and Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

Seasons: Best spring, summer, and early fall.

Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge

Located about 30 miles west of Kalispell, the nearly 8,000-acre Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is the newest local addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System and is important to elk, waterfowl and grassland species. The refuge lies along the bottom of a picturesque east-west valley composed of a series of pothole wetlands and broad upland grasslands that transition to conifer forests. The headquarters is located at the western end and is open most weekdays between 7:30 am to 5:00 pm.

Directions: From Kalispell, drive west approximately 20 miles along Highway 2 to Marion. Turn north at Marion onto Pleasant Valley Road. Take the right fork at 1.3 miles and continue on the Blacktop past Little Bitterroot Lake until reaching the gravel road. Turn left onto the gravel road for approximately 13 miles over Haskill Pass dropping into Pleasant Valley.

Habitat

Grassland, wet meadows and lake

Birds: This area supports Vesper and Savannah Sparrow, Mountain Bluebird and Long-billed Curlew in summer. The wet meadows and Daka Lake provide habitat for migrant and breeding waterfowl and Sandhill Crane. Bald Eagle and Black Tern nest here, and hundreds of ducks, geese and swan can be seen in spring.

Seasons: Best spring, summer, and early fall. A portion of the refuge valley is closed in the fall.

Smith Lake

A short drive west from Kalispell takes you to Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area—a complex of large, shallow wetlands, marsh peat, agricultural lands, willow and some dense conifer forest.

Directions: From the intersection of Highway 93 and Highway 2 in Kalispell, head west on Highway 2 for 9 miles. Turn left at the fishing access to Kila. Bear left across the Ashley Creek bridge and continue to the public fishing access. Drive on gravel roads around Smith Lake road, past the Battia Waterfowl Production Area back to Kalispel.

Habitat

Upland wetlands, Ponderosa pine, Douglas Fir stands, and rocky cliffs along the Smith Lake Road (back side of the lake)

Riparian shrubs such as willow, red-osier dogwood

Nearby Opportunities

Glacier National Park

No visit to the Flathead Valley is complete without a trip to Glacier National Park. Pick up a park map at the entrance. Some of our most rewarding birding opportunities are found in the park.

Directions: Glacier National Park is located about 35 miles north of Kalispell along Highway 2 and about 26 miles north of Whitefish off Highway 40. Routes from both Kalispell and Whitefish are well marked.

Habitat

Western cedar and hemlock forests on the West side

Alpine and subalpine habitats

Remnant prairies

Aspen parkland dominates the East side

Birds: Along Going-to-the-Sun Road you can often get close-up views of breeding Harlequin Duck in McDonald Creek. Look for them in May and June along the upper reaches from Avalanche Creek to Logan Creek along the roadway. American Dipper are often seen in the creek. Check the surrounding low spruce for White-crowned Sparrow and Merlin Thrush. The (rustic) Inside North Fork Park Road offers the quiet chance to find Spruce Grouse, Great Grey Owl, Three-toed Woodpecker, Callow’s Sparrow and a host of other forest and meadow species. Check the meadow edges, burned stands and small lakes for Common Loon and Red-necked Grebe. Black-backed Woodpecker and Northern Hawk-Owl have nested in the burned areas here in recent years. Check the Fish Creek Campground for such cedar specialties as Varied Thrush and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Seasons: Open year-round.

Lower Valley (Road)

The area known as “Lower Valley” extends from Kalispell to Flathead Lake. A number of farm roads, including Lower Valley Road, Farm Road, and N. Somers Road meander through farmlands and past pothole wetlands, oxbow sloughs, and riparian areas.

Directions: Lower Valley Road is accessible from Highway 93 (along with Willow Glen Drive) at the Toyota dealership intersection south of Kalispell. Turn east from Highway 93 and immediately southeast extends south to Highway 82.

Habitat

• Riparian forest

Birds: Over 100 species of birds have been recorded in this area. In spring look for Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Gray Catbird, Bull’s Island, Black-headed Grosbeak, White-breasted Nuthatch, Least Grebe, Common Yellowthroat, Red-naped Sapsucker, Red-winged Blackbird, and Yellow Warbler. Look around the huge cottonwood groves for Pincked Woodpecker and Vaux’s Swift. Along the river you will find Common Goldeneye, Common and Hooded Mergansers, Wood Duck, Dusky and Great Blue Heron. On the south end of Owen Sowerwine you can see a heronry across the river channel.

Seasons: Open year-round.

Lawrence Park

This city park is located below the Buffalo Hill Golf Course at the north end of Kalispell. Lawrence Park includes a developed park, meadows, mature trees and a walking/biking trail through mixed riparian habitats along the Flathead River.

Directions: From downtown Kalispell, follow Highway 93 North (Main Street) across Highway 2; 93 veers left (follow public golf course signs). The 1/4 mile bear right on Main Street where Highway 93 North (Main Street) across Highway 2; 26 miles northeast of Whitefish off Highway 40. Routes birding opportunities are found in the park.

Remnant prairies

Alpine and subalpine habitats

Along the road heads uphill to the golf course. At the south end of the park the swampland tangles support Red-eyes and Black-headed Grosbeak in the cattails, Northern Waterthrush and Yellow Warbler in the understory. Listen for Blue Jay.

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Seasons: Open year-round.
and Douglas hawthorn along Ashley Creek

BIRING AREAS FOUND ON THE MAP

| Birds: Red-necked, Eared and Pied-billed Grebes breed in numbers here, as do Black Tern. Double-crested Cormorant, Horned and Bald Eagle roost on pilings in the marsh, and thousands of waterfowl occur during migration. Several pairs of Snowy Owl can be found reliably on a drive around the south and east end of the area, including Wood Duck, American Bittern (at dawn), Willow Flycatcher, and both Mountain and Western Bluebirds. During early fall migration the chokokeberry and other shrubs around the boat ramp can be remarkable for mixed flocks of migrants: warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, sparrows and thrushes. It is not unusual to find more than 20 species using the same patch of berries at this time of year. Recent rarities here include Yellow-browed Chat and Alder Flycatcher.

Seasons: Spring, summer, and fall.

5 WEST VALLEY

The area known as “West Valley” lies between Kalispell and Whitefish west of Highway 93 and offers a variety of habitats from wetlands and agricultural fields and conifer forests. This birding loop can start at either Whitefish or Kalispell, with a return via Highway 93. On your return you can turn west into the county sanitary landfill and observe a number of gull species that frequent the area. The distance is about 20 miles one way.

Directions: From Highway 2 west of Kalispell, head north for 1/4 mile on North Mentor Road. Turn left on Three Mile Drive (which becomes Farm to Market Road) and continue about 4 miles north and west to West Valley Drive, passing farm land and spring creek habitats. Turn right (north) on West Valley Drive, go north 3 miles to Clark Drive looking for raptors and farmland species. Turn right onto Clark Drive, which soon turns into a gravel road. North of the road is a wetland and pasture complex that holds migratory waterfowl spring and fall, Sandhill Crane, Shorebirds and nesting grassland birds. Continue east on this gravel road up a hill and bear left (north) on West Spring Creek Road and continue north past other nice wetlands/ponds to Church Drive (paved). Go left on Church Drive for 1/4 mile along a large shrubby shelterbelt, and continue north on Fox Farm Road where Church Drive turns left. You will jog north and west from farmlands to patches of Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine, and crossing a spring creek. After 2 miles, Fox Farm Road joins West Valley Drive. Turn north to the intersection with the paved Spring Prairie Road continuing left (west) onto Kuhns Road passing the Kuhns Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is open for foot traffic from May 15th to November 30th each year. Continue on Kuhns Road for 2 miles to Farm to Market Road north of milepost 12. Turn right (north) on Farm to Market Road passing forested state lands on the west (parking areas are open for biking and hiking year-round) and Kuhns WMA on the right. After 1.7 miles, turn right (northeast) onto Judgepepe Road, which becomes Black Bridge Road, bear right as it approaches Whitefish. Where you intersect with Highway 93 west of Whitefish, you will be at the west end of Spencer Lake (a loon-nesting lake) where you can pull over and walk along part of the south shore (better views exist at a large pull-out off the highway above the lake). Head east 4 miles to Whitefish on Highway 93.

Habitat: Wooded, farm land, pastures • Spring creeks, small shallow pothole wetlands • Patches of coniferous forest including low elevation Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine stands

Near Whitefish, the route passes by Spencer Lake, a nesting lake for Common Loon—usually there from ice-out to early fall

Birds: These pothole wetlands offer great views of migratory waterfowl during spring and fall, as well as the best local diversity of shorebirds during fall migration including Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-bellied and American Golden Plover, Sst Sandpiper, and Long-billed Dowitchers. Raptors are abundant year-round (especially winter). Red-tailed Hawk (including Harlan’s) and Rough-legged Hawk, Bald Eagle and Prairie Falcon, and the spectacular Snowy Owl are found here. On the ponds look for Eared and Horned Grebes, Barrow’s Goldeneye, and Cinnamon Teal in spring and summer. Many species of ducks breed here. Sandhill Crane also gather here in large numbers in the fall. Less common, but regular migrants include Snow and Ross’s Geese (in spring) and Bonaparte’s Gull, Savannah and Vesper Sparrow, Western Meadowlark and Gray Partridge are common along the roadsides. Watch for flocks of American Pipit, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting in winter.

Seasons: Year-round.

10 TALLY LAKE CAMPGROUND

This Forest Service Road heads to a popular lake within the Tally Lake Ranger District northwest of Kalispell and southwest of Whitefish. It offers a pleasant drive through forested streamside and mature mixed larch forest. The Tally Lake Road brings you to a Forest Service campground (follow signs) with parking, swimming and walking trails through great streamside birding habitat.

Directions: From Kalispell, go north on Highway 93 to Reserve Drive, and continue west 4 miles to Farm to Market Road. Turn right on Farm to Market Road and proceed north 9 miles to the Tally Lake Road (PS 913), turn left and go about 7 miles on the gravel road to the campground. From Whitefish, take Highway 93 west 4 miles to Twin Bridges Drive and continue south 1 mile and go 2 miles west to Farm to Market Road. Turn left (south) on Farm to Market Road, proceed 2 miles to the Tally Lake Road (PS 913) and turn right (west) about 7 miles to the campground.

Habitat: Mixed forest • Streamside willow, alder, and cottonwood forests • Lakeshore

Seasons: Late spring and fall migration the chokecherry and other shrub stands become rich with berries at this time of year. Recent rarities here include Wilson’s, MacGillivray’s and Yellow Warbler during summer. Many species of ducks breed here. Sandhill Crane also gather here in large numbers in the fall. Less common, but regular migrants include Snow and Ross’s Geese (in spring) and Bonaparte’s Gull, Savannah and Vesper Sparrow, Western Meadowlark and Gray Partridge are common along the roadsides. Watch for flocks of American Pipit, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting in winter.

Seasons: Year-round.

Seasons: Spring, summer, and fall.

7 DANNY ON TRAIL

Named for a favorite local outdoor enthusiast and naturalist from Whitefish, this trail starts from the lake of the Whitefish Mountain Ski Resort and ends at the Summit House on the top of Big Mountain. During summer the resort offers chair and gondola rides up or down the mountain for a fee. The trail gains about 2,000 feet vertically, passing through some wonderful birding habitat. Ran at least 2-4 hours to hike up. Wear good hiking shoes and take a lot of water.

Directions: From Whitefish, follow the signs to Whitefish Mountain Resort by driving north on Wisconsin Avenue across the railroad tracks for a few miles, turning right on the Big Mountain Road, continue for 4 miles ending at the Whitefish Mountain Resort. Follow signs to the Danny On trailhead, located at the upper end of the village. From the village you can also access the chair lift. Trail maps are available at the resort.

Habitat: • Hill elevation forests • Open meadows • Numerous intermittent streams • Subalpine and exposed near-timberline habitats at the summit

Birds: During late May and early June on the lower part of the trail you will hear Townsend’s Warbler. The trail is also an excellent place to see Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and MacGillivray’s Warblers, as well as Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Other common birds on the lower part of the trail are Swainson’s Thrush, Townsend’s Solitaire, Cassin’s and Warbling Vireos. Most of the flycatchers can be seen here, particularly Olive-sided Flycatcher. About half way up the trail the habitat becomes wet subalpine forest and brushfields. Here you will find Pacific Wren, Harmit Thrush and Varied Thrush, as well as Fox and White-crowned Sparrows Look from raptors from the summit house deck.

Seasons: Best Memorial Day through late July.

BIRDING GUIDE TO NORTHWEST MONTANA

Map is not printed to scale. Not all roads, trails or places are shown on this map. Please obey all area closures and signage. Some roads are seasonal or weather dependent. Copyright © 2012 Old Town Creative Communications, LLC