

# Birding Hotspots of the Gallatin Valley



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# Bird Species of Gallatin, Madison, and Park Counties

## Status

B - breeding, direct evidence

b - breeding, indirect evidence

t - transient, no evidence of breeding

## Seasons of Occurrence

SP- March-May

S - June-July

F - August-November

W - December-February

## Relative Abundance

c - common to abundant, easily found in suitable habitat

u - uncommon to fairly common, present in suitable habitat, but may be missed

o - occasional, seen only a few times during a season

r - rare, known to be present, but not every year

(birds in italics have occurred 5 or less times locally)

This list follows the seventh edition of the A.O.U. checklist

	Status	SP	S	F	W
Greater White-fronted Goose	t	r		r	
Snow Goose	t	o		u	
Ross's Goose	t	o		o	
<i>Brant</i>	t (2)	r		r	
Cackling Goose	t	r		o	
Canada Goose	B	c	c	c	c
Trumpeter Swan	B	u	o	u	o
Tundra Swan	t	u		u	r
Wood Duck	B	o	o	o	o
Gadwall	B	c	u	c	r
Eurasian Wigeon	t	r		r	
American Wigeon	B	c	u	c	r
<i>American Black Duck</i>	t (2)	r			
Mallard	B	c	c	c	c
Blue-winged Teal	B	u	u	u	
Cinnamon Teal	B	u	u	u	
Northern Shoveler	B	c	u	c	r
Northern Pintail	B	c	r	c	r
Green-winged Teal	B	c	u	c	o
Canvasback	b	u	r	u	r
Redhead	B	c	u	c	r
Ring-necked Duck	b	u	r	u	r
Greater Scaup	t	r		r	
Lesser Scaup	b	c	o	c	r
Harlequin Duck	b	r	r	r	
Surf Scoter	t			r	
White-winged Scoter	t			r	
<i>Black Scoter</i>	t (2)			r	
Long-tailed Duck	t			r	
Bufflehead	t	u	u	u	r
Common Goldeneye	t	c	u	c	c
Barrow's Goldeneye	b	o	o	o	u
Hooded Merganser	B	o	o	o	r
Common Merganser	B	u	u	u	o
Red-breasted Merganser	t	u	r	o	
Ruddy Duck	B	c	u	c	r
Gray Partridge	B	u	u	u	u
Ring-necked Pheasant	B	u	u	u	u
Ruffed Grouse	B	u	o	u	o
Dusky Grouse	B	o	o	o	o
Sharp-tailed Grouse	B	r	r	r	r

	Status	SP	S	F	W
Wild Turkey	B	o	o	o	o
<i>Red-throated Loon</i>	t (5)			r	
Pacific Loon	t			r	
Common Loon	t	u	r	u	
Pied-billed Grebe	B	u	u	u	r
Horned Grebe	t	o		o	
Red-necked Grebe	B	o	o	o	
Eared Grebe	B	c	u	c	
Western Grebe	B	u	o	u	
Clark's Grebe	b	o	r	o	
Double-crested Cormorant	B	u	u	u	
American White Pelican	t	u	u	u	
<i>American Bittern</i>	t (2)	r	r		
Great Blue Heron	B	u	u	u	o
Great Egret	t	r	r	r	
Snowy Egret	t	r	r	r	
<i>Little Blue Heron</i>	t (1)	r			
<i>Cattle Egret</i>	t (2)			r	
Black-crowned Night-Heron	t	r		r	
<i>Yellow-crowned Night-Heron</i>	t (1)			r	
White-faced Ibis	t	o	r	o	
Turkey Vulture	t	u	u	u	
Osprey	B	c	c	u	
<i>Mississippi Kite</i>	t (1)		r		
Bald Eagle	B	c	u	c	c
Northern Harrier	B	u	u	u	o
Sharp-shinned Hawk	B	u	u	u	u
Cooper's Hawk	B	u	u	u	u
Northern Goshawk	B	o	o	o	o
Broad-winged Hawk	t			r	
Swainson's Hawk	B	u	u	u	
Red-tailed Hawk	B	c	c	c	u
Ferruginous Hawk	B	o	u	u	r
Rough-legged Hawk	t	o		u	c
Golden Eagle	B	u	u	u	u
American Kestrel	B	u	u	u	o
Merlin	B	u	o	u	u
Gyrfalcon	t			r	r
Peregrine Falcon	B	r	o	o	r
Prairie Falcon	B	u	u	u	u
Virginia Rail	B	o	u	o	r
Sora	B	u	u	u	r
American Coot	B	c	u	c	r
Sandhill Crane	B	u	u	u	
Black-bellied Plover	t	r		r	
American Golden-Plover	t			r	
Semipalmated Plover	t			o	
Killdeer	B	c	c	c	o
<i>Mountain Plover</i>	t (1)		r		
Black-necked Stilt	t	o	r	o	
American Avocet	B	u	o	u	
Spotted Sandpiper	B	u	u	u	
Solitary Sandpiper	t	o	r	o	
Greater Yellowlegs	t	o	r	u	
Willet	B	o	r	o	
Lesser Yellowlegs	t	o	r	u	
<i>Upland Sandpiper</i>	t (4)		r	r	
<i>Whimbrel</i>	t (1)	r			
Long-billed Curlew	B	u	u	r	
Marbled Godwit	b	o	r	o	



	Status	SP	S	F	W
Red Knot	t (1)	r			
Sanderling	t			r	
Semipalmated Sandpiper	t	o	o	u	
Western Sandpiper	t	o	o	u	
Least Sandpiper	t	r	o	o	
White-rumped Sandpiper	t (1)	r			
Baird's Sandpiper	t	o	u	u	
Pectoral Sandpiper	t		r	o	
Dunlin	t	r		r	
Stilt Sandpiper	t	r		r	
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	t (1)			r	
Short-billed Dowitcher	t (3)	r		r	
Long-billed Dowitcher	t	o	o	u	
Wilson's Snipe	B	u	c	u	o
Wilson's Phalarope	B	u	c	u	
Red-necked Phalarope	t	u	o	u	
Red Phalarope	t (1)			r	
Black-legged Kittiwake	t (2)			r	
Sabine's Gull	t			r	
Bonaparte's Gull	t	o		o	
Franklin's Gull	t	u	o	u	
Mew Gull	t (2)			r	
Ring-billed Gull	t	c	u	c	r
California Gull	t	u	o	u	
Herring Gull	t	o	r	o	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	t (1)			r	
Glaucous Gull	t (4)			r	r
Caspian Tern	t	o	o	r	
Black Tern	t	r	o	o	
Common Tern	t	o	r	o	
Forster's Tern	t	o	r	o	
Parasitic Jaeger	t			r	
Long-tailed Jaeger	t (2)			r	
Ancient Murrelet	t (1)			r	
Rock Pigeon	B	c	c	c	c
Band-tailed Pigeon	t (2)		r		
Eurasian Collared-Dove	B	c	c	c	c
White-winged Dove	t (2)	r			
Mourning Dove	B	c	c	c	o
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	t (3)		r		
Black-billed Cuckoo	B		r	r	
Barn Owl	t (1)				r
Western Screech-Owl	b	r	r	r	r
Great Horned Owl	B	u	u	u	u
Snowy Owl	t			r	r
Northern Pygmy-Owl	b	o	o	o	o
Burrowing Owl	B	r	r	r	
Barred Owl	t (4)	r		r	
Great Gray Owl	B	r	r	r	o
Long-eared Owl	B	r	r	r	r
Short-eared Owl	B	r	r	r	r
Boreal Owl	b	r		r	r
Northern Saw-whet Owl	B	o	o	o	o
Common Nighthawk	B	r	u	u	
Common Poorwill	b	r	r		
Black Swift	t (1)	r			
Chimney Swift	t (3)	r	r		
Vaux's Swift	t (2)	r		r	
White-throated Swift	B	u	u	o	
Black-chinned Hummingbird	t	r	r	r	

	Status	SP	S	F	W
Anna's Hummingbird	t (1)			r	
Calliope Hummingbird	B	u	u	u	
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	b	r	r	r	
Rufous Hummingbird	b	o	u	u	
Belted Kingfisher	B	u	u	u	o
Lewis's Woodpecker	t	r		r	
Red-headed Woodpecker	t (2)	r			
Williamson's Sapsucker	B	o	o	o	
Red-naped Sapsucker	B	u	c	u	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	t (1)			r	
Downy Woodpecker	B	c	c	c	c
Hairy Woodpecker	B	u	u	u	u
American Three-toed Woodpecker	B	o	o	o	o
Black-backed Woodpecker	B	r	r	r	r
Northern Flicker	B	c	c	c	c
Pileated Woodpecker	b	r	r	r	r
Olive-sided Flycatcher	B	r	u	o	
Western Wood-Pewee	B	r	c	u	
Willow Flycatcher	B	r	u	o	
Least Flycatcher	B	r	u	o	
Hammond's Flycatcher	B	r	u	o	
Dusky Flycatcher	B	r	c	o	
Cordilleran Flycatcher	B	r	o	r	
Eastern Phoebe	t (1)			r	
Say's Phoebe	B	r	r	r	
Western Kingbird	B	u	u	u	
Eastern Kingbird	B	u	u	u	
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	t (1)		r		
Loggerhead Shrike	B	o	o	o	
Northern Shrike	t	r		o	u
Plumbeous Vireo	t			r	
Cassin's Vireo	B	r	o	r	
Warbling Vireo	B	o	c	u	
Red-eyed Vireo	B	o	r	o	
Gray Jay	B	u	o	u	o
Pinyon Jay	B	o	o	u	o
Steller's Jay	B	u	u	u	u
Blue Jay	b	r	r	o	o
Clark's Nutcracker	B	u	o	u	u
Black-billed Magpie	B	c	c	c	c
American Crow	B	c	c	c	c
Common Raven	B	c	c	c	c
Horned Lark	B	u	o	u	u
Purple Martin	t (3)	r		r	
Tree Swallow	B	c	c	o	
Violet-green Swallow	B	c	c	o	
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	B	c	c	o	
Bank Swallow	B	c	c	o	
Cliff Swallow	B	c	c	u	
Barn Swallow	B	c	c	u	
Black-capped Chickadee	B	c	c	c	c
Mountain Chickadee	B	c	c	c	c
Red-breasted Nuthatch	B	u	u	u	u
White-breasted Nuthatch	B	o	r	o	o
Brown Creeper	B	u	u	u	u
Rock Wren	B	o	c	u	
Canyon Wren	B	o	u	o	r
Bewick's Wren	t (1)			r	
House Wren	B	u	c	o	
Pacific Wren	B	o	o	r	r



	Status	SP	S	F	W
Marsh Wren	B	o	u	o	r
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	b (1)		r		
American Dipper	B	u	u	u	u
Golden-crowned Kinglet	B	o	u	o	r
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	B	c	c	u	r
Western Bluebird	t (3)	r			
Mountain Bluebird	B	c	c	c	r
Townsend's Solitaire	B	c	u	c	
Veery	B	o	u	u	
Gray-cheeked Thrush	t (1)	r			
Swainson's Thrush	B	o	c	u	
Hermit Thrush	B	o	u	u	r
Wood Thrush	t (1)			r	
American Robin	B	c	c	c	o
Varied Thrush	b	r	r	r	r
Gray Catbird	B	o	c	u	r
Northern Mockingbird	t	r	r	r	r
Sage Thrasher	B	o	u	r	
Brown Thrasher	t (1)			r	
European Starling	B	c	c	c	c
Siberian Accentor	t (1)				r
American Pipit	B	o	o	u	
Sprague's Pipit	b	r	r		
Bohemian Waxwing	t	o		c	c
Cedar Waxwing	B	u	u	u	r
Lapland Longspur	t	r		r	o
Chestnut-collared Longspur	t	r	r		
McCown's Longspur	b	r	r	r	
Snow Bunting	t	r		o	o
Ovenbird	b	r	r	r	
Northern Waterthrush	B	o	u	o	
Black-and-white Warbler	t (4)	r		r	
Tennessee Warbler	t	r	r	r	
Orange-crowned Warbler	B	o	u	u	
Nashville Warbler	t	r		o	
MacGillivray's Warbler	B	u	u	u	
Common Yellowthroat	B	o	u	u	
Hooded Warbler	t (3)	r		r	
American Redstart	B	o	u	u	
Northern Parula	t (3)		r	r	
Bay-breasted Warbler	t (2)		r	r	
Blackburnian Warbler	t (2)	r	r		
Yellow Warbler	B	u	c	c	
Chestnut-sided Warbler	t	r	r	r	
Blackpoll Warbler	t	r		r	
Pine Warbler	t (1)			r	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	B	u	c	c	r
Black-throated Gray Warbler	t (2)	r			r
Townsend's Warbler	t	r		o	
Black-throated Green Warbler	t (3)	r		r	
Wilson's Warbler	B	o	u	u	
Yellow-breasted Chat	b	r	o		
Green-tailed Towhee	B	o	u	o	
Spotted Towhee	B	u	c	u	r
American Tree Sparrow	t	o		u	u
Chipping Sparrow	B	u	c	c	r
Clay-colored Sparrow	B	o	u	o	
Brewer's Sparrow	B	o	u	o	
Field Sparrow	t (1)		r		
Vesper Sparrow	B	c	c	c	

	Status	SP	S	F	W
Lark Sparrow	B	o	u	o	
Sagebrush Sparrow	t (2)	r		r	
Lark Bunting	b	r	r	r	
Savannah Sparrow	B	c	c	u	
Grasshopper Sparrow	b	r	o		
Baird's Sparrow	b (2)		r		
Le Conte's Sparrow	t (1)	r			
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow	t (2)			r	
Fox Sparrow	b	r	r	r	
Song Sparrow	B	c	c	c	o
Lincoln's Sparrow	B	u	c	u	r
Swamp Sparrow	t (3)			r	
White-throated Sparrow	t	r		o	r
Harris's Sparrow	t	r	r	r	r
White-crowned Sparrow	B	u	c	c	r
Dark-eyed Junco	B	c	c	c	o
Summer Tanager	t (1)	r			
Western Tanager	B	o	u	u	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	B	o	r	r	
Black-headed Grosbeak	B	o	u	o	
Lazuli Bunting	B	u	c	o	
Indigo Bunting	t (5)	r	r		
Bobolink	b	o	o	r	
Red-winged Blackbird	B	c	c	c	o
Eastern Meadowlark	t (1)		r		
Western Meadowlark	B	c	c	c	r
Yellow-headed Blackbird	B	u	u	o	
Rusty Blackbird	t			r	r
Brewer's Blackbird	B	c	c	c	r
Common Grackle	B	u	c	c	r
Great-tailed Grackle	t (1)	r	r	r	r
Brown-headed Cowbird	B	u	c	o	
Bullock's Oriole	B	o	u	r	
Baltimore Oriole	t (2)	r			
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	t	o		u	u
Black Rosy-Finch	B	o	o	r	r
Pine Grosbeak	b	u	o	u	u
Purple Finch	t	r		r	r
Cassin's Finch	B	u	u	u	r
House Finch	B	c	c	c	c
Red Crossbill	B	u	o	u	o
White-winged Crossbill	b	o	r	o	o
Common Redpoll	t	r		r	r
Hoary Redpoll	t			r	r
Pine Siskin	B	c	c	c	u
Lesser Goldfinch	t (3)	r	r	r	
American Goldfinch	B	u	u	u	o
Evening Grosbeak	B	u	u	u	o
House Sparrow	B	c	c	c	c

## Acknowledgements

The checklist is based on P.D. Skaar's *Birds of the Bozeman Latilong*, John Parker's personal records for the period 1985-2014, and P.D. Skaar's *Montana Bird Distribution* (7th edition).

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**1 Lindley Park and Sunset Hills Cemetery**

At the east end of downtown on Main Street, this oasis of trees offers a bit of quiet in the city and good birding nearly any time of the year.

During the spring listen for Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Yellow-rumped Warbler, while looking for other migrants. Most of the year Black-billed Magpie, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown Creeper are present. In the winter the extensive plantings of spruce and fir in the cemetery may attract Dark-eyed Junco, Pine Grosbeak, Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbill, and Pine Siskin. In turn, the songbirds draw in Cooper's Hawk, Merlin, and Great Horned Owl.

**2 Linear Park/Gallagher Trail**

This trail is part of an expanding network of trails around Bozeman that extends to the foothills. This old railroad right-of-way, which runs from the Bozeman Public Library (below Sunset Hills Cemetery) to the Museum of the Rockies on Kagy Boulevard, is the core of that network.

You should see birds that do well in an urban setting, such as Mallard, Downy Woodpecker, and Black-capped Chickadee. The September migration can be quite good with numbers of warblers and sparrows moving through the brushy areas. During the winter look for Sharp-shinned Hawk, Merlin, and flocks of Bohemian Waxwings.

**3 Cherry River Fishing Access**

Conveniently located along the frontage road between the 19th and 7th Avenue interchanges, the fishing access includes a nice stretch of the East Gallatin River, which is great for a quick getaway. Belted Kingfisher, Gray Catbird, Song Sparrow, and other birds common to riparian areas can be found here. This site also features a couple of ponds surrounded by cattail marshes, where you can find various ducks, Marsh Wren, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

From the 19th Avenue and I-90 interchange head east on the Frontage Road (Highway 205) for .9 miles, then turn left into the parking area. From the 7th Avenue and I-90 interchange head west on the Frontage Road (Highway 205) for .9 miles, then turn right into the parking area.

**4 East Gallatin Recreation Area**

This park on the north side of town includes Glen Lake, some grassy areas, and a willow/cottonwood riparian corridor along the East Gallatin River. The lake is a popular spot for swimming, but the spring and fall migrations can produce some interesting birds. Between the lake and the river, Western Meadowlark and Savannah Sparrow are possible. Along the trails on the east side of the river, look for Willow Flycatcher and Gray Catbird.

From Main Street, take North 7th Avenue to Griffin Drive, turn right and continue across the railroad tracks and take the first left onto Manley Road. The entrance is at the far side of the lake.

**5 Bozeman Fish Technology Center / "M" Trail / Drinking Horse Mountain Trail**

The fish hatchery next to Bridger Creek is five miles from downtown Bozeman. The mix of cottonwood, willow, dogwood, and Douglas fir at the mouth of Bridger Canyon is a magnet for many types of birds. Some of the birds you might see along



the short nature trail include Calliope Hummingbird, Yellow Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and American Goldfinch.

Across Bridger Canyon Drive from the fish hatchery is the trailhead for both the "M" trail and the Foothills trail. Juniper, chokecherry, and hawthorn grow along these trails. Frequenting these slopes are Townsend's Solitaire, Lazuli Bunting, Green-tailed Towhee, and Chipping Sparrow.

The Drinking Horse Mountain trail, a two mile loop, begins off of Fish Hatchery Road, next to Bridger Creek. This is a good spot to watch for Belted Kingfisher and American Dipper. As the trail climbs through the Douglas fir forest, you will have good opportunities to listen and watch for montane birds such as Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. While enjoying the view from the top of the mountain, be sure to watch for a variety of raptors.

#### **6 Sourdough Nature Trail**

This trail parallels Bozeman (Sourdough) Creek through some of the most diverse deciduous habitat in the valley. Spring through fall, listen and watch for an excellent variety of breeding and migrating passerines. American Redstart, Veery, Warbling Vireo, and Black-headed Grosbeak are some of the birds that nest here.

The easiest way to access this trail is from Goldenstein Lane. From Main Street take South Church (which becomes Sourdough Road) 3.2 miles to Goldenstein Lane. Turn right onto Goldenstein Lane and continue .6 miles to the far side of the Sourdough Creek bridge. The trailhead and Tuckerman Park entrance is on the right.

#### **7 Kirk Hill Trail**

This is one of the most accessible spots near Bozeman to bird the foothills transition zone. There is a system of trails that climb through willow, aspen, and Douglas fir habitats. As you make your way up the hill you may encounter Ruffed Grouse, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, MacGillivray's Warbler, Western Tanager.

From Main Street take South 19th Street five miles south to where the road curves to the west. The entrance to the preserve is on the left.

#### **8 Triple Tree Trail**

In the foothills of the Gallatin Mountains south of Bozeman, this trail passes through a number of habitats, and the transitional edges between them. Along the lower reaches of the trail, grasslands give way to brushy deciduous areas which follow Limestone Creek, where Ruffed Grouse, Calliope Hummingbird, Veery, and Lincoln's Sparrow are some of the birds to expect. The trail then ascends through Douglas fir and lodgepole pine forests, with a wide variety of nesting birds including Cassin's Vireo, Swainson's Thrush, and Western Tanager. This trail features perhaps the greatest bird diversity of any short hike in the Gallatin Valley.

From Kagy Boulevard in Bozeman, turn south onto Sourdough Road, and continue on Sourdough Rd. for 3.2 miles, until you see the parking area and trailhead on the left.

#### **9 Mount Ellis State Land**

This section of State land abuts Forest Service land on the north flank of Mount Ellis. The trail gently climbs through grassland, hawthorn scrub, aspen meadow, and finally into the conifers as the slope rises to the mountain. As you move upslope from one habitat type to another, listen and watch for various sparrows, including Savannah, Vesper, White-crowned, and Chipping. In the deciduous zone between the grasslands and conifers, a few of the nesting birds include Ruffed Grouse, Red-naped Sapsucker, Dusky Flycatcher, and Orange-crowned Warbler. Once you are into the conifers there is a new suite of species to look for, such as Northern Goshawk, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

Along with terrific views of the Gallatin Valley, this is an exceptional location to enjoy a multitude of wildflowers through the seasons.

From the East Main Street exit, take I-90 east for 3.7 miles to the Bear Canyon exit. After exiting, turn right onto Bozeman Trail and continue .8 miles to Mount Ellis Lane, then turn left and drive 1.8 miles to the trailhead at the end of the road. There is a recreational use fee for State Lands.

#### **10 Bridger Bowl/Ridge**

In terms of birding, Bridger Bowl ski area is best known for the fall raptor migration and is a Hawk Watch site. From late August through October as many as seventeen species of raptors have been seen gliding south along the spine of the Bridger Mountain Range. Peak numbers of migrating raptors (mostly Golden Eagle) usually occur the first two weeks of October. Over 200 Golden Eagles may be observed in a single day. Year-round residents of the mountain such as Dusky Grouse, Gray Jay, and Steller's Jay are possible while climbing the Ridge.

To get to Bridger Bowl from Bozeman, follow the ski area signs north on highway 86 (Bridger Canyon Drive). Once at the ski area, follow the main road to the right of the base lodge until you get to the gate and small parking lot. From here it is a strenuous 2,100 foot climb to the top of the ridge.

#### **11 Springhill/Dry Creek Loop**

This nearly 50 mile loop, with spectacular views, takes you through pasture

lands, wheat fields, juniper scrub, and cottonwood riparian habitats. In the winter and spring this trip can be exceptional for viewing raptors, with Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk, and Prairie Falcon likely. During the winter, also look for birds of the north, like Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting. In the summer you'll see birds of the open country such as Horned Lark, Mountain Bluebird, and Western Meadowlark.

To reach the beginning of this loop, from Bozeman take 19th Ave. north, cross over I-90 and turn right onto Springhill Road.

#### **12 Central Park Pond**

This spring-fed pond is an old gravel pit, which even in winter has open water. The pond is a designated waterfowl protection enclosure, so there is no hunting here. This 16 acre pond is the best spot in Gallatin Valley for viewing waterfowl. It is not uncommon during migration periods or winter to see more than ten species of waterfowl. In the late fall, Tundra Swans may be side by side with Trumpeter Swans for good comparisons. Up to 3,000 Common Goldeneye and a number of Barrow's Goldeneye have been seen on the pond in winter.

From Bozeman, take Interstate 90 west to the Belgrade exit, turn right on route 85, then turn left on route 205. Travel west on route 205 (frontage road) for six miles and then turn left on Heeb Road. The pond is on the left immediately after you pass under the Interstate.

#### **13 Headwaters State Park**

Encompassing the confluence of the Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin Rivers, this park hosts many breeding birds in addition to being a major travel corridor for birds during migration. In the summer look overhead for soaring American White Pelican and Turkey Vulture, and remember to scan the cliffs above the Gallatin and Missouri Rivers for Peregrine Falcon, White-throated Swift, and Canyon Wren. Around Fort Rock there are Western and Eastern Kingbirds, as well as Rock Wrens. A mile beyond the Fort Rock picnic area, the old townsite of Trident is also a good spot during spring and fall to look for migrating passerines.

From I-90, take the Three Forks exit, then turn right and follow the signs to the park. After two miles take Hwy 286 to the left. Fort Rock picnic area is three miles down the road with several points of interest along the way.

#### **14 Three Forks Ponds/Old Town Road**

These ponds often have interesting waterfowl and are a favored stop-over for a variety of terns. You can also see Osprey nesting nearby.

Old Town Road traverses two very different habitats in four miles: the cottonwood bottomland of the Jefferson River and the sage scrub along Mud Springs Gulch. During the summer listen for Western Wood-Pewee and Bullock's Oriole in the cottonwoods and Sage Thrasher and Brewer's Sparrow in the sage.

For both of these spots take the Three Forks I-90 exit, thirty miles west of Bozeman. To reach the ponds, turn left toward Three Forks and then take the first left (Talc Road). For Old Town Road, turn right after leaving the Interstate, away from Three Forks, and take the first immediate left.

#### **15 Bench Road**

Located between the Madison and Jefferson River Valleys, this scenic road traverses grasslands and wheat fields south of Three Forks. Drier than the Gallatin Valley, this route through open country showcases birds such as Ferruginous Hawk, Long-billed Curlew, Western Kingbird, and Grasshopper Sparrow during the breeding season. One mile after turning onto Bench Road, be sure to scan the cattails and pond for a variety of ducks, and other wetland birds. In the winter months, this is a good area to look for Prairie Falcon, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting.

To get to Bench Road take the Three Forks exit, thirty miles west of Bozeman on I-90. Turn left toward Three Forks and then take the first left (Talc Road). Continue on Talc Road for 1.6 miles to the stop sign, then go straight .2 miles, and then turn left onto Bench Road.

#### **16 Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park**

Less than an hour's drive from Bozeman, the Lewis and Clark Caverns area offers a number of birding opportunities. The combination of massive limestone cliffs, Douglas fir forest, Great Basin scrub, and isolated springs attracts a diverse range of species like Peregrine Falcon, Common Poorwill, Cassin's Vireo, Hermit Thrush, and Lark Sparrow. Birding along the park road can be excellent, and the extensive trail system winds through many different small pockets of habitat. Drier than areas farther to the east and with many south-facing aspects, the park is an excellent location for winter and early spring birding.

The Jefferson River, flowing alongside State Highway 2, is a good place to watch for Common Merganser, White-throated Swift, and is one of the few spots in southwestern Montana that you can find Yellow-breasted Chat.

About 35 miles west of Bozeman on I-90, take exit 274, to US Highway 287 south. From the exit it is 17 miles to the park entrance. After 11.5 miles veer right on State Highway 2, then drive for 5.5 miles to the entrance.



## Beyond Gallatin Valley

### Cottonwood Reservoir

Allow at least half a day to make this trip, as there are many birding opportunities along the way. Take State Route 86 for thirty-eight miles north up Bridger Canyon. At the junction of Route 86 and Hwy 89, turn left and travel two miles; the reservoir will be on your left.

On your way to the reservoir, about halfway to US Hwy 89, you'll cross Battle Ridge. On either side of the Ridge, there is excellent willow riparian habitat with a mix of coniferous forest as you travel over the divide. Throughout this area look for Willow Flycatcher. The Battle Ridge campground area is a good location for Williamson's Sapsucker and other mountain forest species.

As you leave the forest for the open country you may see Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Bluebird, and Lazuli Bunting. The stretch of road running down the Flathead Creek drainage toward the Shields River Valley is outstanding raptor country at any time of the year.

At times the reservoir can be difficult to bird with distance, lighting, and the wind adding to the challenge, but the rewards can be great with many species of waterfowl, shorebirds, and possible rare species. A scope is highly recommended.

### Willow Creek/Harrison Reservoir

This lake and its mud flats attract many different types of waterfowl and shorebirds, and is a staging area for Sandhill Cranes in the fall. It is the premier spot in our area for shorebirds—late summer and fall being especially notable for numbers and variety. Many state and local rarities have been documented here.

Most birds congregate on the mud flats on the south end of the lake, where access is limited (private property). Boaters and skiers use the reservoir heavily during summer weekends and holidays. A scope is very useful here.

Approximately 50 miles from Bozeman, this trip requires at least four hours. Head west from Bozeman on Hwy 191 and at "Four Corners" continue straight on Hwy 84 to Norris. At Norris turn right on Hwy 287 and go 10 miles to Harrison. At Harrison look for the fishing access sign to Willow Creek Reservoir, which lies 4 miles to the east, on Lake Road.

### Ennis Lake

This lake is a major stop-over and staging area during spring and fall migrations for thousands of birds, including Common Loon, Eared and Western Grebe, Trumpeter Swan, and Tundra Swans. As with the other reservoirs, a scope is a necessity for the best birding. On this trip you pass through arid grasslands, as well as along the Madison River for several miles, with opportunities for side trips along the way.

This is the same route as if you were going to Willow Creek Reservoir, until you reach Norris. At Norris turn left on Hwy 287; at McAllister turn left onto Ennis Lake Road. After two miles pull into the Meadow Lake Fishing Access. This is the best area on the lake to search for shorebirds. Continue along the north shore, cross the bridge and turn right. At the top of the hill is a good vantage point to scan the deeper water for loons. Often, large numbers of waterfowl will shelter in the southeastern corner of the lake. Look for Sandhill Crane, Marsh Wren, and Yellow-headed Blackbird in the marshes. At this point the road leaves the lake and after about 6.5 miles returns to Hwy 287 south of the town of Ennis. Five miles north of Ennis, on Hwy 287, turn right onto Jordan Lane (the Clute's Landing Fishing Access site), for good views of the southwest corner of the lake and sometimes great numbers of waterfowl.