

Birding Hotspots in the Flathead Basin

and neighboring areas



The **Flathead Audubon Society** is a volunteer, non-profit organization associated with Montana Audubon and the National Audubon Society. Our membership area ranges from the Idaho border to the continental divide, and from the Canadian border to the southern portion of Flathead Lake. We promote awareness and appreciation of the natural world through education and advocacy, and work to conserve birds, wildlife habit and ecosystem diversity in northwest Montana, and to protect our natural environment and all its inhabitants.

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Birds of the Flathead Basin and neighboring areas

Relative abundance in suitable habitat by season are:

c - common to abundant, usually found on every visit in moderate to large numbers

u - uncommon, usually present in low numbers but may be missed

o - occasional, seen only a few times during the season, not present in all suitable habitat

r - rare, low numbers occur, but not every year (birds in *italics* have occurred <5 times locally)

Status:

B - Direct evidence of breeding

b - Indirect evidence of breeding

t - No evidence of breeding

Season of occurrence:

W - Winter, mid-November to mid-February

Sp - Spring, mid-February to mid-May

Su - Summer, mid-May to mid-August

F - Fall, mid-August to mid-November

This list follows the seventh edition of the AOU checklist.

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
– Greater White-fronted Goose	t		r		r
– Snow Goose	t		o		r
– Ross's Goose	t		o		r
– <i>Brant</i>	t				r
– Canada Goose	B	c	c	c	c
– Cackling Goose	t	o	o		r
– Trumpeter Swan	t		o	o	o
– Tundra Swan	t	u	c		c
– Wood Duck	B	r	u	u	o
– Gadwall	B	r	c	c	c
– Eurasian Wigeon	t		u		r
– American Wigeon	B	r	c	u	c
– Mallard	B	c	c	c	c
– Blue-winged Teal	B		u	u	o
– Cinnamon Teal	B		u	u	o
– Northern Shoveler	B	r	c	c	u
– Northern Pintail	B		c	u	c
– <i>Garganey</i>	t		r		
– Green-winged Teal	B	r	c	u	u
– Canvasback	B	o	u	u	u
– Redhead	B	o	c	u	c
– Ring-necked Duck	B	o	c	u	c
– Greater Scaup	t	o	u		u
– Lesser Scaup	B	o	c	c	c
– Harlequin Duck	B		u	u	r
– Surf Scoter	t				r
– White-winged Scoter	t				r
– <i>Black Scoter</i>	t				r
– Long-tailed Duck	t		r	r	r
– Bufflehead	B	c	c	c	c
– Common Goldeneye	B	c	c	c	c
– Barrow's Goldeneye	B	u	u	u	u
– Hooded Merganser	B	u	u	u	u
– Common Merganser	B	c	c	c	c
– Red-breasted Merganser	t	r	o		o
– Ruddy Duck	B		c	c	u

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
– Gray Partridge	B	u	u	u	u
– Ring-necked Pheasant	B	c	c	c	c
– Ruffed Grouse	B	c	c	c	c
– Spruce Grouse	B	u	u	u	u
– White-tailed Ptarmigan	B	u	u	u	u
– Dusky Grouse	B	u	u	u	u
– Wild Turkey	B	c	c	c	c
– <i>Red-throated Loon</i>	t				r
– Pacific Loon	t				r
– Common Loon	B	r	c	u	c
– <i>Yellow-billed Loon</i>	t		r		
– Pied-billed Grebe	B	o	c	c	u
– Horned Grebe	B	o	u	u	u
– Red-necked Grebe	B	o	c	c	c
– Eared Grebe	B	r	c	c	u
– Western Grebe	B	r	c	c	u
– Clark's Grebe	b		r	r	r
– <i>Manx Shearwater</i>	t			r	
– American White Pelican	t		o	o	o
– Double-crested Cormorant	B	r	c	c	c
– American Bittern	b		u	u	r
– Great Blue Heron	B	u	c	c	c
– <i>Great Egret</i>	t				r
– Cattle Egret	t		r		r
– Black-crowned Night-Heron	t		r	r	
– <i>Yellow-crowned Night-Heron</i>	t		r		
– White-faced Ibis	t		r		
– Turkey Vulture	b		u	u	u
– Osprey	B		c	c	c
– Bald Eagle	B	c	c	c	c
– Northern Harrier	B	o	c	c	u
– Sharp-shinned Hawk	b	u	u	u	u
– Cooper's Hawk	B	o	o	o	o
– Northern Goshawk	B	u	u	u	u
– <i>Red-shouldered Hawk</i>	t				t
– Swainson's Hawk	t		o	r	r
– Red-tailed Hawk	B	c	c	c	c
– Ferruginous Hawk	t	r	r	r	r
– Rough-legged Hawk	t	c	r		u
– Golden Eagle	B	o	u	u	u
– American Kestrel	B	o	c	c	c
– Merlin	b	u	o	r	u
– Gyrfalcon	t	r			r
– Peregrine Falcon	B	r	r	r	r
– Prairie Falcon	t	r	r	r	r
– <i>Yellow Rail</i>	t				r
– Virginia Rail	B	r	u	u	u
– Sora	B		c	c	c
– American Coot	B	c	c	c	c
– Sandhill Crane	B		u	u	u
– Black-bellied Plover	t		r	r	o
– American Golden-Plover	t		r	r	r
– <i>Snowy Plover</i>	t			r	
– Semipalmated Plover	t		u	r	u
– Killdeer	B	o	c	c	c
– Black-necked Stilt	B		r	r	r
– American Avocet	B		c	u	u
– Greater Yellowlegs	t		c	o	c
– Lesser Yellowlegs	t		c	o	c
– Solitary Sandpiper	t		u	r	u
– Willet	t		r	r	r

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
– Spotted Sandpiper	B		c	c	u
– Upland Sandpiper	t		r	r	
– Whimbrel	t		r		
– Long-billed Curlew	B		u	u	o
– Marbled Godwit	t		r	r	
– <i>Black Turnstone</i>	t				r
– Sanderling	t		o	o	r
– Semipalmated Sandpiper	t		u	u	o
– Western Sandpiper	t		c	c	u
– Least Sandpiper	t		c	c	u
– Baird's Sandpiper	t		c	c	c
– Pectoral Sandpiper	t		u	c	c
– <i>Sharp-tailed Sandpiper</i>	t				r
– Dunlin	t	r			r
– Stilt Sandpiper	t		o	u	
– Short-billed Dowitcher	t			r	
– Long-billed Dowitcher	t	r	c	c	u
– Wilson's Snipe	b	o	c	c	c
– American Woodcock	t		r		
– Wilson's Phalarope	B		c	c	u
– Red-necked Phalarope	t		u	u	o
– <i>Red Phalarope</i>	t			r	
– <i>Pomarine Jaeger</i>	t				r
– <i>Parasitic Jaeger</i>	t				r
– <i>Long-tailed Jaeger</i>	t				r
– Franklin's Gull	t		u	u	
– <i>Little Gull</i>	t				r
– Bonaparte's Gull	t	r	u	u	o
– Mew Gull	t	r	r	r	r
– Ring-billed Gull	B	c	c	c	c
– California Gull	B	u	c	c	c
– Herring Gull	t	u	u	r	u
– Thayer's Gull	t	r			r
– Glaucous-winged Gull	t	r			r
– Glaucous Gull	t	r	r		r
– Sabine's Gull	t				r
– Caspian Tern	b		o	u	
– Common Tern	B		u	u	u
– <i>Arctic Tern</i>	t		r		
– Forster's Tern	b		u	u	o
– Black Tern	B		c	c	u
– <i>Ancient Murrelet</i>	t				r
– Rock Pigeon	B	c	c	c	c
– Band-tailed Pigeon	t		r	r	r
– Eurasian Collared-Dove	b	o	o	o	o
– Mourning Dove	B	u	c	c	c
– Barn Owl	t	r	r	r	r
– Flammulated Owl	b		o	o	
– Western Screech-Owl	B	u	u	u	u
– Great Horned Owl	B	c	c	c	c
– Snowy Owl	t	o			o
– Northern Hawk Owl	B	r	r	r	r
– Northern Pygmy-Owl	B	u	u	u	u
– Burrowing Owl	b		r	r	
– Barred Owl	b	u	u	u	u
– Great Gray Owl	B	u	u	u	u
– Long-eared Owl	B	u	u	u	u
– Short-eared Owl	B	u	u	u	u
– Boreal Owl	b	u	u	u	u
– Northern Saw-whet Owl	b	r	c	c	c
– Common Nighthawk	b		c	c	

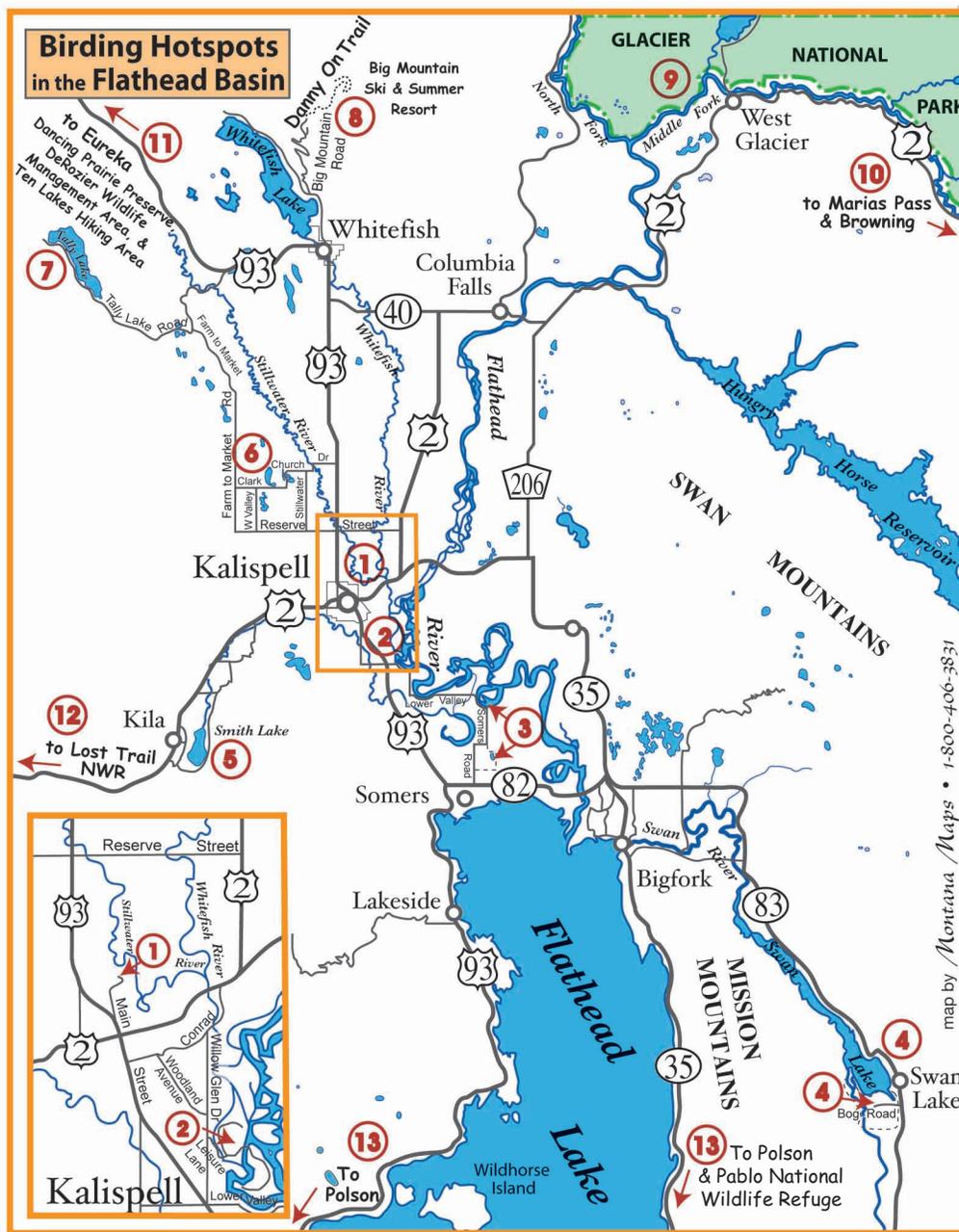
	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
– Common Poorwill	b	r	o	o	o
– Black Swift	B	r	r	r	r
– Vaux's Swift	B		c	c	u
– White-throated Swift	b		o	o	r
– <i>Ruby-throated Hummingbird</i>	t		r	r	
– Black-chinned Hummingbird	b		u	u	r
– <i>Anna's Hummingbird</i>	t		r	r	r
– Calliope Hummingbird	B		c	c	u
– <i>Broad-tailed Hummingbird</i>	t			r	
– Rufous Hummingbird	B		c	c	u
– Belted Kingfisher	B	u	c	c	c
– Lewis's Woodpecker	B	r	o	o	r
– Williamson's Sapsucker	b	r	u	u	u
– Red-naped Sapsucker	B	r	c	c	u
– Downy Woodpecker	B	c	c	c	c
– Hairy Woodpecker	B	c	c	c	c
– <i>White-headed Woodpecker</i>	t		r		
– American Three-toed Woodpecker	B	u	u	u	u
– Black-backed Woodpecker	B	o	o	o	o
– Northern Flicker	B	c	c	c	c
– Pileated Woodpecker	B	c	c	c	c
– Olive-sided Flycatcher	B		u	u	r
– Western Wood-Pewee	B		c	c	u
– Alder Flycatcher	t		r	r	
– Willow Flycatcher	B		u	u	u
– Least Flycatcher	b		u	u	r
– Hammond's Flycatcher	B		c	c	u
– Dusky Flycatcher	B		u	u	u
– Cordilleran Flycatcher	b		o	o	
– <i>Eastern Phoebe</i>	t		r		
– Say's Phoebe	t	r	o	o	
– Western Kingbird	B		u	u	r
– Eastern Kingbird	B		c	c	c
– Loggerhead Shrike	t		o	o	o
– Northern Shrike	t	u			u
– Cassin's Vireo	B		c	c	u
– Warbling Vireo	B		c	c	u
– <i>Philadelphia Vireo</i>	t			r	
– Red-eyed Vireo	b		c	c	o
– Gray Jay	B	c	c	c	c
– Steller's Jay	b	c	c	c	c
– Blue Jay	B	u	u	u	c
– Clark's Nutcracker	b	u	u	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	t	r	u	o	u
– <i>Purple Martin</i>	t			r	
– Tree Swallow	B		c	c	u
– Violet-green Swallow	B		c	c	u
– Northern Rough-winged Swallow	B		c	c	u
– Bank Swallow	B		u	u	u
– Cliff Swallow	B		c	c	u
– Barn Swallow	B		c	c	c
– Black-capped Chickadee	B	c	c	c	c
– Mountain Chickadee	B	c	c	c	c
– Chestnut-backed Chickadee	B	u	u	u	u
– Boreal Chickadee	b	r	r	r	r
– Red-breasted Nuthatch	B	c	c	c	c
– White-breasted Nuthatch	B	u	u	u	u
– Pygmy Nuthatch	B	c	c	c	c

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
– Brown Creeper	b	u	u	u	u
– Rock Wren	b		o	o	
– Canyon Wren	b		r	r	
– <i>Bewick's Wren</i>	t	r			
– House Wren	B	r	u	u	o
– Winter Wren	b	u	u	u	u
– Marsh Wren	B	o	c	c	u
– American Dipper	B	u	u	u	u
– Golden-crowned Kinglet	b	c	c	c	c
– Ruby-crowned Kinglet	b	r	c	c	u
– Western Bluebird	B	r	u	u	o
– Mountain Bluebird	B		c	c	u
– Townsend's Solitaire	B	c	u	u	c
– Veery	b		u	u	r
– Swainson's Thrush	B		u	c	u
– Hermit Thrush	B		u	u	u
– American Robin	B	u	c	c	c
– Varied Thrush	b	r	u	u	u
– Gray Catbird	b	r	u	u	o
– <i>Northern Mockingbird</i>	t	r	r		r
– <i>Sage Thrasher</i>	t			r	
– European Starling	B	u	c	c	c
– American Pipit	b		c	u	c
– Bohemian Waxwing	t	c	u	r	c
– Cedar Waxwing	B	u	c	c	u
– Tennessee Warbler	b		r	r	
– Orange-crowned Warbler	b		u	u	c
– Nashville Warbler	b		o	o	o
– <i>Northern Parula</i>	t		r	r	
– Yellow Warbler	B		c	c	u
– <i>Chestnut-sided Warbler</i>	t			r	
– <i>Black-throated Blue Warbler</i>	t				r
– Yellow-rumped Warbler	B	r	c	c	c
– Townsend's Warbler	b		u	c	u
– <i>Prairie Warbler</i>	t	r			
– <i>Bay-breasted Warbler</i>	t			r	
– Blackpoll Warbler	t			r	
– Black-and-white Warbler	t		r	r	
– American Redstart	b		c	c	o
– Ovenbird	t		r	r	
– Northern Waterthrush	b		c	c	o
– MacGillivray's Warbler	B		c	c	u
– Common Yellowthroat	B		c	c	u
– Wilson's Warbler	b		u	u	u
– <i>Canada Warbler</i>	t			r	
– Yellow-breasted Chat	t		r	r	
– <i>Scarlet Tanager</i>	t			r	
– Western Tanager	b		c	c	u
– Spotted Towhee	b	o	u	u	u
– American Tree Sparrow	t	u	o		u
– Chipping Sparrow	B		c	c	c
– Clay-colored Sparrow	b		u	u	u
– Brewer's Sparrow	b		o	u	o
– Vesper Sparrow	b		c	c	u
– Lark Sparrow	b		u	u	r
– <i>Black-throated Sparrow</i>	t		r		
– <i>Lark Bunting</i>	t				r
– Savannah Sparrow	B	r	c	c	u
– Grasshopper Sparrow	b		r	r	
– Le Conte's Sparrow	b		r	r	
– Fox Sparrow	b	r	c	c	u

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
– Song Sparrow	B	u	c	c	c
– Lincoln's Sparrow	b	r	u	u	u
– Swamp Sparrow	t				r
– White-throated Sparrow	t	o	r	r	o
– Harris's Sparrow	t	o			o
– White-crowned Sparrow	b	o	c	u	u
– <i>Golden-crowned Sparrow</i>	t	r			
– Dark-eyed Junco	B	c	c	c	c
– Lapland Longspur	t	o	r		u
– <i>Chestnut-collared Longspur</i>	t		r		
– Snow Bunting	t	u	r		o
– Rose-breasted Grosbeak	t		r	r	
– Black-headed Grosbeak	b		c	c	u
– Lazuli Bunting	B		u	c	u
– <i>Indigo Bunting</i>	t			r	
– Bobolink	b		u	u	r
– Red-winged Blackbird	B	u	c	c	c
– Western Meadowlark	b	r	c	c	c
– Yellow-headed Blackbird	B	r	c	c	u
– Rusty Blackbird	t	r			
– Brewer's Blackbird	B	o	c	c	c
– Common Grackle	b	r	o	o	o
– Brown-headed Cowbird	B	r	c	c	c
– Bullock's Oriole	B		u	u	u
– <i>Brambling</i>	t	r			r
– Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	b	o	r	r	r
– Black Rosy-Finch	b	r			
– Pine Grosbeak	b	o	o	u	u
– Purple Finch	t	r			r
– Cassin's Finch	b	u	u	u	u
– House Finch	B	c	c	c	c
– Red Crossbill	B	u	u	u	u
– White-winged Crossbill	b	o	r	r	o
– Common Redpoll	t	u	r		u
– Hoary Redpoll	t	r			r
– Pine Siskin	B	c	c	c	c
– American Goldfinch	b	u	c	c	c
– Evening Grosbeak	B	c	u	u	c
– House Sparrow	B	c	c	c	c

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Lane, and accessible also from the east end of Leisure Lane; both are short dead end roads off Willowglen Drive on the east side of town. Over 80 species of birds have been recorded in this designated Important Bird Area. A spring hike on the unimproved trails will provide Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Gray Catbird, Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak, White-breasted Nuthatch, Least and Willow Flycatcher, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Yellow Warbler. Look around the huge cottonwood snags for Pileated Woodpecker and Vaux's Swift; this is one of the best local areas for both. Along the river you will find Common Goldeneyes, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Wood Ducks, Osprey and Great Blue Herons (there is a heronry on the north end of Leisure Island). There is a small resident flock of Wild Turkeys. The area is also accessible from the Stillwater River via canoe or raft, with access from Conrad Drive, and 2 miles downstream at Leisure Lane. Floaters get a chance to explore the islands that comprise the bulk of the area and the highest quality habitat. There are no maintained trails on the islands; use caution hiking in the dense understory. A map showing the main trails is available on the Flathead Audubon website.

3 Lower Valley

Lower Valley Road leaves Highway 93 at Four Corners south of Kalispell, heading east and south through farmland between the Flathead River and Flathead Lake. This entire area is known as "Lower Valley" to locals and offers interesting birding at all seasons. Farm Road and North Somers Road are productive side routes and cross pothole wetlands that support breeding Eared Grebes, Redheads, Ruddy Ducks, Common Goldeneyes, and other ducks, and small numbers of Black Terns. Sora, Virginia Rail and Wilson's Phalarope families can be seen in summer, followed by a wide variety of sandpipers in dry years (mid-August is best). The agricultural lands are interspersed with

1 Lawrence Park

At the north end of Main Street in Kalispell lies this wonderful park with shrubby habitat, riparian forest trails, and a large natural river oxbow area. Park at the farthest (east) end of the road and walk in past the original waterworks for Kalispell. This area along the Stillwater River has lots of birch, large cottonwoods, and dense dogwood understory. A variety of woodpeckers nest here, from Downy up to Pileated. Wood Ducks are easily found. Black-chinned Hummingbirds and Lazuli Buntings are among the more interesting breeding birds; Cooper's Hawks have also nested in the past. At the south end of the park, near the playground and pavilion, is the natural area. This swampy tangle supports Red-eyed Vireos and Black-headed Grosbeaks in the overstory, Northern Waterthrushes and Yellow Warblers in the understory. Blue Jays are common in the neighborhoods surrounding the park. Listen for them here.

2 Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

This gem is an outstanding 442 acres of undisturbed riparian bottomland on the outskirts of Kalispell, easily accessible from the east end of Treasure

riparian and upland shrub areas where Clay-colored Sparrows breed; Savannah Sparrows are abundant also. **Church Slough**, just east of the Ashley Creek bridge, is one of the best places for migratory waterfowl in early spring, with thousands of Tundra Swans, geese, and a wide variety of ducks in late March and Early April. It is the most reliable place in the Flathead Valley to find Greater Scaup and Eurasian Wigeon. Rough-legged and Red-tailed (including Harlan's) Hawks, falcons, and even the occasional Snowy Owl hunt the lower valley fields in winter. The **Blasdel Waterfowl Production Area**, on North Somers Road, offers grassland, shrub and wetland birds such as Short-eared Owl, Northern Harrier, Marsh Wren and several sparrow species. The **Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area**, which encompasses most of the north shore of Flathead Lake, has several public access points that can be used to view shorebirds, waterfowl, gulls, and other marsh and upland birds. Both WPA's are closed March 1 through July 1 to protect nesting birds.

4 Swan Lake Area

A visit to these sites about 38 miles southeast of Kalispell along Highway 83 on

the southeast shore of Swan Lake always produces some birding rewards, especially in spring and summer. Start at the **boat ramp** and swimming area, at the base of the hill before the Swan Lake townsite. Trails from the generous parking available here wind through a stand of cottonwoods, dogwood and other shrubs. Red-naped Sapsucker, Hammond's Flycatcher, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush, and Black-headed Grosbeak are easily found. The swampy area across the highway at the entrance to the campground, also with parking, offers Vaux's Swift, Rufous Hummingbird, and Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos. Next visit **Bog Road**, part of the Swan River National Wildlife Refuge. This is a small dirt road to the right 2.2 miles south of the boat ramp area, marked with a Watchable Wildlife sign. A viewing platform here helps yield views of Common Snipe, American Bittern, Black Tern, and other marsh residents. Less common visitors have included Bobolink, Loggerhead Shrike, Lark Sparrow and even an Eastern Phoebe. Watch for Vaux's and Black Swifts overhead on overcast summer days. Check the area around the Swan River bridge on the Porcupine Creek Road, which heads west 1.6 miles further south on Highway 83, and round out your day's list with Fox Sparrow, MacGillivray's Warbler, Ruffed Grouse and Varied Thrush. The Nature Conservancy owns the **Swan Oxbow Preserve** off Porcupine Road (see signs) that offers several hiking trails. Chestnut-backed Chickadees nest here.

5) Smith Lake

A short drive west from Kalispell takes you to this complex of large, shallow wetlands and marsh, ringed by productive stands of willow and other shrubs. Head west on Highway 2 for 9 miles, turning left at the fishing access sign toward the town of Kila. Continue around the lake by bearing left across the Ashley Creek bridge. Red-necked, Eared and Pied-billed Grebes breed in numbers here, as do Black Terns. Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, and Bald Eagles loaf on pilings in the marsh, and thousands of waterfowl occur during migration. Several pairs of Sandhill Cranes nest most years, and a wide variety of other specialties 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 Mountain and Western Bluebirds. During early fall migration, the chokecherry and other shrub stands around the boat ramp can be remarkable for mixed flocks of migrants: warblers, vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, sparrows, and thrushes in profusion. It is not unusual to find >20 species using the same patch of berries at this time of year. Recent rarities here include Yellow-breasted Chat and Alder Flycatcher.

6) West Valley Ponds

These pothole wetlands northwest of Kalispell offer the best local diversity of shorebirds during fall migration (July-Oct.); over 20 species can be seen, including Pectoral Sandpipers, Black-bellied and American Golden Plovers, Stilt Sandpipers, and lots of Long-billed Dowitchers. This entire area is private land, but offers great viewing from the roadsides. The best route is to head west from Highway 93 on Reserve Drive (about 3 miles north of Highway 2), go 3 miles west to West Valley Drive, and north 2 miles to Clark Road (dirt). Turn right (east), and then bear left on Spring Creek, to Church Road (paved). Turning right takes you back to Highway 93, or you can turn south on Stillwater Road back to Reserve Drive. Look for Eared and Horned Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and Cinnamon Teal in spring and summer. Many species of ducks breed here, and the surrounding fields usually support a few pairs of Sandhill Cranes. Less common, but regular migrants include Snow and Ross's Geese, and Bonaparte's Gulls. Savannah and Vesper Sparrows, Western Meadowlarks, and Gray Partridge can be found along the roadsides. Watch for flocks of American Pipits, Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs and/or Snow Buntings in winter (Oct.-Mar.) when this is also one of the best areas of the valley for raptors (Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Bald Eagle, Prairie Falcon.) Eurasian Collared Doves have been sighted in this area.

7) Tally Lake Campground

From Kalispell, go north on Highway 93 to Reserve Drive, and continue west 4 miles to Farm to Market Road. Turn right and proceed north 9 miles to the Tally Lake Road, where you turn left. This forest road (FS 913) offers pleasant (though sometimes bumpy and dusty) drive through forested streambeds

(Northern Waterthrush, milepost 3) and mature mixed larch forest (Townsend's Warblers, milepost 4). The road eventually brings you to a Forest Service campground (follow signs) with parking, swimming and trails through great streamside birding habitat. Wilson's, MacGillivray's and Yellow Warblers all breed here, where Logan Creek enters the lake. Watch also for Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds, Gray Catbirds, and Cedar Waxwings. Both Common Loons and Bald Eagles breed along the lakeshore. Late evenings along Logan Creek upstream of the lake might yield Great Horned, Northern Saw-whet, Barred or even Great Gray Owls.

8) Danny On Trail

This trail starts from the upper parking lot of the Whitefish Mountain Ski area and ends at the summit house on the top of Big Mountain. The trail gains about 2000 feet elevation passing through some wonderful birding habitat. You should park in the Birch Lot at the bottom of the quad lift. Hike the stairs to the upper lot and turn right to find the start of the trail. The hike up will take 2 – 4 hours depending on your fitness and how many birds stop you. During late May and early June on the lower part of the trail you will hear Townsend's Warbler. Watch the tops of the trees for this exceptionally beautiful bird. The trail is also an excellent place to see Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and MacGillivray's Warbler 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 Vireo and Warbling Vireo. Most of the flycatchers can be seen here. It is a reliable place to see and hear Olive-sided Flycatchers. About half way up, the trail turns north up the left side of a deep draw. After the next ski run the habitat turns quite subalpine and wet. Here you will find Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush and Varied Thrush as well as Fox Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow near the top of the mountain. The deck of the Summit house is a good place to relax and enjoy a stunning view as well as watch for raptors. A lift ride down will save your knees and take you back to your car.

9) Glacier National Park

No visit to the Flathead is complete without a trip to Glacier National Park, and indeed this is often where visitors focus their time. Pick up a park map at the entrance. Some of our most unique and rewarding birding opportunities are found in the park, which is about 35 miles northeast of Kalispell off Highway 2. Foremost among these are close-up views of the Harlequin Ducks that breed along **McDonald Creek**. Look for them in May and June along the upper reaches, from Avalanche Creek to Logan Creek along the roadside. The "Red Rocks" pullout above Avalanche is often best. American Dippers are all along this reach as well. **Logan Pass** is the place for White-tailed Ptarmigan, one of our most sought-after birds. Look along the trail (boardwalk) to Hidden Lake, especially right after daybreak. The tundra here also supports Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches and American Pipits, and check the surrounding low spruce for White-crowned Sparrow and Hermit Thrush. The rustic **Inside North Fork Road** offers the best chances in the region to find Spruce Grouse, Great Gray Owl, Three-toed Woodpecker, LeConte's Sparrow and a host of other forest and meadow species. Check the meadow edges, burned stands and small lakes (Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe) especially, along this 30 mile route from Apgar to Polebridge. Black-backed Woodpecker and Northern Hawk-Owl have nested in the burned areas here in recent years. A more vehicle-friendly option is to check the **Fish Creek Campground** first for such cedar specialties as Varied Thrush; then take the **Camas loop** to the North Fork, stopping at **McGee Meadows** for Common Snipe and LeConte's Sparrow. Watch for Boreal Chickadee in these areas as well.

• Nearby Opportunities off the Map •

10) Marias Pass to Browning

Marias Pass (90 miles east of Kalispell on Highway 2) offers some of the most accessible higher elevation wetlands in this portion of the state. The ponds, streams and willow flats (e.g. along the **Firebrand Pass Trail**) support Willow Flycatcher, Wilson's and MacGillivray's Warbler, Lincoln's and Fox Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, Common Snipe, Ring-necked Duck, and Barrow's

Goldeneye. Continuing east toward Browning you pass through marshy potholes in grassland, with nesting Horned Grebes, Black Terns, many duck species, and even a few pairs of Trumpeter Swans. Watch here also for Golden Eagles and migrant shorebirds. Pull well off the road when viewing here; the highway traffic is fast-paced.

11 Eureka and vicinity

70 miles northwest of Kalispell and just 7 miles south of the Canadian border, the town of Eureka sits on the edge of the Tobacco Plains, an area of remnant Palouse Prairie with some pothole lakes. The Dancing Prairie Preserve near the airport north of town (owned by The Nature Conservancy) offers the best remaining example of this habitat and supports Grasshopper, Vesper and Savannah Sparrows, Long-billed Curlew, Mountain and Western (rarer) Bluebirds. About 4 miles north of town on Highway 93, Burma Road heads east up onto the foothills through irrigated hayfields (Bobolink), natural shrubfields (Clay-colored Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, Lazuli Bunting, MacGillivray's Warbler), and aspen groves (Red-naped Sapsucker, Warbling Vireo), ending at the DeRozier Wildlife Management Area. This state-owned area is managed as winter range for elk, and offers great birding for all the above species and more (e.g. Blue Grouse). For the more adventuresome, the Ten Lakes Hiking Area on the Kootenai National Forest above and to the east of Eureka is accessible by trails from the valley or from the end of the Grave Creek Road south of town. Hikes to Bluebird and Wolverine Lakes pass through spruce-fir forest with nesting Boreal Chickadees and White-winged Crossbills.

12 Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge

Thirty miles west of Kalispell is one of the newest additions to the National Wildlife Refuge system. It is most easily reached by turning north off Highway 2 on the Pleasant Valley Road at Marion, which passes by Bitterroot Lake and goes over Haskill Pass before dropping into the Pleasant Valley. During the summer months this intermountain grassland supports Vesper and Savannah Sparrows, Mountain Bluebirds and Western Meadowlarks. Bald Eagles, Sandhill Cranes, Black Terns, Horned, Eared and Red-necked Grebes, among others, nest around the shores of Dahl Lake. In the spring and fall the lake hosts thousands of migrating waterfowl. Pleasant Valley Road passes through wet meadows (look for Common Snipe) and along Pleasant Valley Creek. In the bushes and trees beside the road look for Willow Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Warbling Vireo, Yellow Warbler and Red-naped Sapsucker. The refuge headquarters are at the western end of the refuge off Lost Prairie Road.

13 Polson

Fifty miles south of Kalispell at the outlet of Flathead Lake, Polson provides the best local opportunity to find rare gulls and serves as the gateway to the Mission Valley, one of the best winter raptor areas in the western U.S. Stop at **Boettcher Park**, along the lakeshore behind (north of) the golf course east of town, to scan the lake for migrant loons and waterfowl. Pacific Loons occur annually here among the migrant flocks (Nov.). Pygmy Nuthatches are common in the ponderosa pines here. The waterfront along downtown is often good for gulls; Mew, Glaucous, Glaucous-winged, and Thayer's occur most years among the larger flocks of common species (mostly Ring-billed). The **Polson sewer ponds** often host these species as well and are a great place to find Barrow's Goldeneye. Take 7th Avenue west off Main, which becomes Kerr Dam Road. Montana's only Little Gull was sighted here in November of 1999. The river below has yielded Pomarine Jaeger, White-winged and Surf Scoter, Dunlin, and Rusty Blackbird in recent years (in fall). Continuing south from here past the **Pablo National Wildlife Refuge** into the open habitats of the Mission Valley provides extraordinary opportunity to study the various plumages of wintering Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks, as well as Prairie Falcons (common) and Gyrfalcons (rare but regular).