

BIRDING AREAS FOUND ON THE MAP

1 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, wetlands, mature trees and a walking/biking trail through mixed riparian habitats along the Stillwater River.

Directions: From downtown Kalispell, follow Highway 93 North (Main Street) across Highway 2; in about 1/4 mile bear right on Main Street where Highway 93 veers left (notice public golf course signs). The entrance to Lawrence Park is on the right, just before the road heads uphill to the golf course. There are several parking areas.

Habitat: This area along the Stillwater River has birch, large cottonwoods, and dense dogwood understory. There are also cattail wetlands associated with a backwater slough of the Stillwater. If you park at the farthest (east) end of the road, you can walk on the bike trail to the original waterworks for Kalispell, with a mixture of thinned forest and dense riparian shrubs.

Birds: A variety of woodpeckers nest here,

from Downy up to Pileated. Wood Ducks are easily found. Black-chinned Hummingbird and Lazuli Bunting are among the more interesting breeding birds and Cooper's Hawk have also nested in the past. At the south end of the park, near the playground and pavilion, is the most natural area. This swampy tangle supports Red-eyed Vireo and Black-headed Grosbeak in the overstory, Northern Waterthrush and Yellow Warbler in the understory. Blue Jays are common in the neighborhoods surrounding the park. Listen for them here.

Seasons: Open year-round.

2 OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA

This gem is an outstanding 442 acres of undisturbed riparian bottomland located along the eastern outskirts of Kalispell and is Montana's only state designated Natural Area. Flathead Audubon and Montana Audubon manage this special birding hotspot. Most of the Natural Area lies on the east side of the Stillwater River, accessible primarily by boat. There is a network of maintained trails on the west side of the Natural Area and the first 600 feet of the main trail is ADA accessible.



Harlequin Duck



Spruce Grouse



Red-naped Sapsucker



Chestnut-backed Chickadee



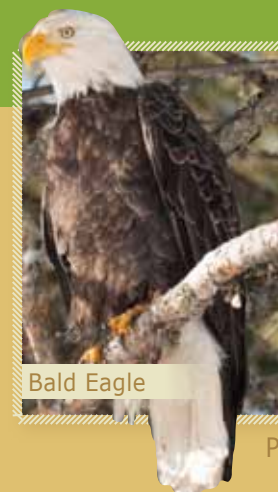
American Dipper

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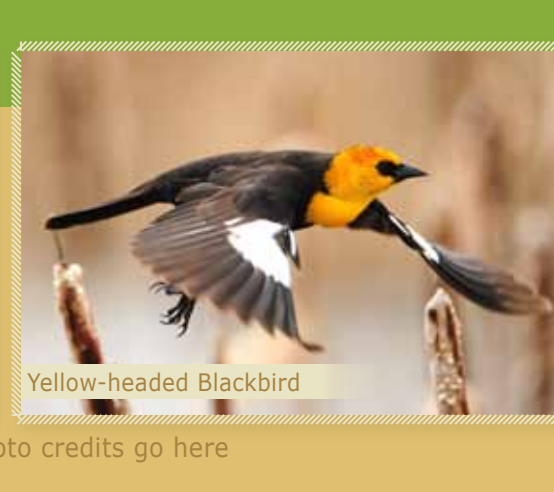
To access by boat: Float about a mile downstream from the Conrad Drive bridge over the Stillwater River located just east of intersection with Willow Glen. Or, paddle up river (it is very slow in the summer) from 2 miles downstream via the county river access located at the end of Leisure Lane (off Willow Glen). 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 these islands, please use caution in the dense understory.

Directions for hiking: From downtown Kalispell, take 2nd Street east towards Woodland Park. Continue about a mile on Conrad Drive to the flashing light. Turn right on Willow Glen and continue 0.9 miles south; turn left onto Treasure Lane. Limited parking is located at the end of Treasure Lane; please do not block any driveways. From Highway 93 heading north to Kalispell, access Willow Glen from the Toyota dealership (Four Corners) intersection, about 3 miles south of town. Treasure Lane is 1.7 miles north of Four Corners.

Habitat: The Natural Area consists of mature cottonwood gallery forests with dense understory, riparian shrubs, backwater channels and the Stillwater River. Birch, spruce and forest openings add diversity.



Bald Eagle



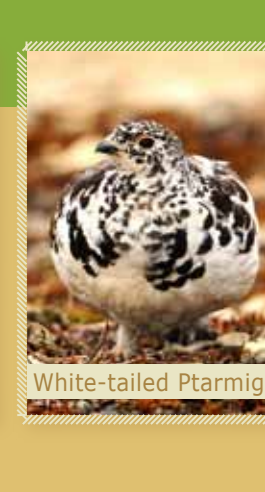
Yellow-headed Blackbird



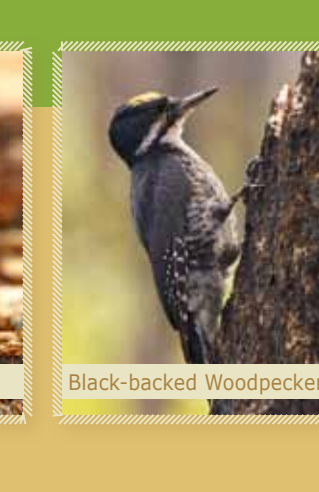
Hooded Merganser



Gray-crowned Rosy Finch



White-tailed Ptarmigan



Black-backed Woodpecker

Photo credits go here

Birds: Over 100 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, as this is one of the best local areas for both. Along the river you will find Common Goldeneye, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Wood Ducks, Osprey and Great Blue Heron (there is a heronry on the north end of Leisure Island). There is also a small resident flock of Wild Turkey.

Seasons: Year-round but trail may be icy and slick in winter.

3 LOWER VALLEY (ROAD)

The area known as "Lower Valley" to locals includes the Flathead Valley 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 between the Flathead River and the lake. The entire area offers interesting birding in all seasons.

Directions: Lower Valley Road is accessible from Highway 93 (along with Willow Glen) at the Toyoto Dealership (Four Corners) south of Kalispell; turn east and immediately southeast again onto Lower Valley Road. Continue on Lower Valley or other farm roads south and east toward Bigfork (about 15 miles) where you will end up on the cutoff road (Highway 82) between Bigfork and Somers.

Habitat: Agricultural lands, homesteads, and some developments, interspersed with riparian forests, creeks, sloughs, upland shrub (hawthorn, rose and snowberry) and grassland areas. Notable pothole wetlands are located on North Somers and Farm Roads. Some of these wetlands may be dry in drought years.

Birds: The pothole wetlands support breeding Eared Grebe, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Common Goldeneye, other ducks and small numbers of Black Tern. Sora, Virginia Rail and Wilson's Phalarope families can be seen in summer, followed by a wide variety of sandpipers (mid-August is best). The agricultural lands are interspersed with riparian and upland shrub areas where Clay-colored Sparrows breed, Savannah Sparrows are abundant also. Common breeding raptors include Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle and Northern Harrier. Church Slough, about 5 miles from

Highway 93 just east of the Ashley Creek bridge, is one of the best places for migratory waterfowl in early spring, with thousands of Tundra Swan, geese, and a wide variety of duck 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 (WPA) on North Somers Road is the only sizeable piece of public land here, and offers grassland, shrub and wetland birds such as Short-eared Owl, Northern Harrier, Marsh Wren and several sparrow species. The WPA is closed from March 1st through July 1st to protect nesting birds.

Seasons: Year-round. Some roads are gravel and can be dusty in summer and slick in winter.

4 SMITH LAKE

A short drive west from Kalispell takes you to this complex of large, shallow wetlands and marsh scattered, among agricultural lands, ringed by productive stands of willow and other shrubs and a few stands of dry coniferous forest.

NEARBY OPPORTUNITIES

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

No visit to the Flathead Valley 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.

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

Habitat: Glacier National Park includes habitats from wet cedar-hemlock forests to alpine. Historic Going-to-the-Sun Road crosses all of these habitats. The entrance area includes good viewing of the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, McDonald Creek and Lake McDonald.

Birds: Going-to-the-Sun Road is a good place to start, where you can often get close-up views of the Harlequin Duck 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 Creek is often best. American Dipper are all along this reach and the lower portions of Avalanch Creek 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-Finch and American Pipit, 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. In winter near entrance and Apgar, you can often see American Dipper, Bald Eagle, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, various woodpeckers and occasionally observe Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Trumpeter Swan, Common Redpoll, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Northern Shrike.

Seasons: Glacier National Park is open year-round, however the main roads are not plowed in winter except in and around Park Headquarters and the Apgar area on Lake McDonald.

SWAN LAKE

A visit to Swan Lake always produces some birding rewards, especially in spring and summer. Start at the Forest Service boat ramp and swimming area at the southeast end of the lake, a mile before the Swan Lake townsite and then continue to the Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge just south of the townsite where there is a public viewing platform. After that, head to Porcupine Creek Road a few miles south, stopping at the Porcupine Creek bridge. You can also then following signs to The Nature Conservancy's Swan Oxbow Preserve.

Directions: Drive south from the Flathead Valley (Bigfork) about 30 miles along Highway 83. The Forest Service boat ramp is located west of the highway while the camping area is on east side; both

include generous parking. The Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge access is a dirt road (Bog Road) located another 2.2 miles south of the boat ramp access and is marked with "binoculars" sign. Porcupine Creek is off the west side of Highway 83 another 1.6 miles south of the refuge. The Nature Conservancy owns the "Swan Oxbow Preserve" off Porcupine Road (see signs) that offers several hiking trails.

Habitat: Trails from Swan Lake boat access wind through a stand of cottonwood, dogwood and other shrubs. There is also excellent birding both along the lake and the dense shrubs and forest in the swampy tributary just east of the highway towards the camping area. The Refuge observation tower overlooks vast wetlands and marsh that are seasonally flooded. Porcupine Creek Road and the Swan River Oxbow Preserve trails intersect the Swan River mainstem, with numerous backwater channels and wetlands, including a large oxbow lake, and wind through mature coniferous and cottonwood forests.

Birds: At the Forest Service boat access look for Red-naped Sapsucker, Hammond's Flycatcher, American Redstart, 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 Vireo. The refuge viewing platform often yields views of Wilson's Snipe, American Bittern, Black Tern and other marsh residents. Less common recent visitors have included Bobolink, 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 Pocupine Creek Road with the Fox Sparrow, MacGillivray's Warblers, Ruffed Grouse, Varied Thrush and Chestnut-backed Chickadee that nest there.

Seasons: The boat ramp and camping areas are closed in the late fall and winter so parking is not

available. If there is a couple of feet of snow, you can ski on the refuge in the winter and observe not only hardy wintering resident birds but observe tracks of many other wildlife species. Porcupine Creek Road is only open via snowmobile or skiing in the winter.

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, waterbirds and grassland species. The refuge lies along the bottom of a picturesque east-west valley composed of lakes, wetlands and grasslands that transition to conifer forests. There are no entrance fees. The headquarters is located at the western end and is open most weekdays between 7:30 am to 3:30 pm. A portion of the refuge valley is closed in the fall for all public uses.

Directions: Lost Trail NWR can be reached via Highway 2 by traveling west from Kalispell approximately 20 miles to Marion. Turn north at Marion onto Pleasant Valley Road. After approximately 1.3 miles, take the right fork and continue on the blacktop past Little Bitterroot Lake until reaching the graveled road. Continue on the gravel road for approximately 13 miles over Haskill Pass dropping into Pleasant Valley. This road is not well-maintained in winter.

Habitat: This grassland area supports Vesper and Savannah Sparrows, Mountain Bluebird and Long-billed Curlew in summer. The wet meadows and Dahl Lake provide habitat for migrant and breeding waterfowl and Sandhill Crane. Bald Eagle and Black Tern nest here, and thousands of duck, geese and swan can be seen in spring (late March - early May).

Seasons: Best spring, summer, and early fall.





Northern hawk owl

DIRECTIONS

HABITAT

BIRDS

SEASONS

CONTRIBUTORS: FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERS (DAN CASEY, DENNY OLSON, GAEL BISSELL)

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Directions: From the intersection of Highway 93 and Highway 2 in Kalispell, 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 and continuing to the public fishing access. From here you can continue driving on gravel roads around Smith Lake, past the Batavia Waterfowl Production Area back to Kalispell.

Habitat: Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area is a large shallow wetland and extensive peat marsh that supports bull rush, cattails, and tall impenetrable grasses. This area can flood dramatically in the spring but will dry out considerably in hot summers. The Smith Lake Road that goes along the back side of the lake borders upland grasslands and Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir stands as well as some rocky cliffs. Ashley Creek is lined with riparian shrubs such as willow, red-osier dogwood and Douglas hawthorn.

5 WEST VALLEY

The area known locally as “West Valley” lies between Kalispell and Whitefish west of Highway 93 and offers a variety of habitats from lakes and wetlands to agricultural fields and conifer forests. This birding loop can start at either Whitefish or Kalispell with a return via Highway 93. Many of the roads are not paved and can be muddy in the spring or after rains; in winter some roads may be drifted over. On your return, you can turn west into the county sanitary landfill and observe a number of gull species that often concentrate there. The length is about 20 miles one way.

Directions: From Highway 2 west of Kalispell, head north for 3/4 mile on North Meridian 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 to 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, passing 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 near 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 Lodgepole Road, which becomes Twin Bridges 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: This loop includes a mix of grain fields, haylands, spring creeks small shallow pothole wetlands, and low elevation Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine stands. The route passes by or through several patches of coniferous forest where you can find a variety of woodland species. Near Whitfish, the route passes by Spencer Lake, a nesting lake for Common Loon, usually there from ice-out in early April through 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 (July-October) including Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-bellied and American Golden Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, and Long-billed Dowitchers Raptors are abundant along the rural roads year-round, but this is one of the best areas of the valley for observing high density of wintering raptors such as Red-tailed (including Harlan’s) and Rough-legged Hawk, Bald Eagle and Prairie Falcon, and in some winters, Snowy Owl. This entire area is private land, but offers great viewing from the roadsides. 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 while the surrounding fields usually support a few pairs of Sandhill Crane, which 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 (October-March).

Seasons: Year-round with some roads being icy, snow-covered or drifted in winter and muddy in spring.

6 TALLY LAKE CAMPGROUND

This Forest Service Road heads to a popular large lake within the Tally Lake Ranger District northwest of Kalispell and southwest of Whitefish. It offers a pleasant (though sometimes bumpy and dusty) drive through forested streambeds and mature mixed larch forest. The Tally Lake Road eventually 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 and proceed north 9 miles to the Tally Lake Road (FS 913), where you turn left. From here it is about 7 miles on dirt road to the campground. From Whitefish, take Highway 93 west 4 miles to Twin Bridges Road, proceeding just over 2 miles west to Farm to Market Road. Turn left (south) on Farm to Market Road, and proceed 2 miles to the Tally Lake Road (FS 913) and proceed west about 7 miles to the campground.

Habitat: Low elevation mixed mature larch and Douglas fir forests, streamside willow, alder, and cottonwood forest habitats, and lakeshore.

Birds: Beginning from the start at Farm to Market Road, look for Northern Waterthrush and

more around milepost 3 in the roadside willow/alder habitats. Townsend’s Warbler can be heard and seen in the mature larch near milepost 4. At Tally Lake where Logan Creek enters the lake (north shore), you can find Wilson’s, MacGillivray’s and Yellow Warblers during the nesting season. Watch also for American Redstart, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Willow Flycatcher, Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds, Gray Catbird and Cedar Waxwing. Both Common Loon and Bald Eagle 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.

Seasons: Best in late spring, summer and fall.

7 DANNY ON TRAIL

Named for a favorite local outdoor enthusiast and naturalist from Whitefish, this trail starts from the base of the Whitefish Mountain Ski Resort and ends at the Summit House on the top of Big Mountain. Between Memorial and Labor Days, the resort offers chair and gondola rides for a fee both up and down the mountain so that you have the option of hiking just up or down the trail rather than a round trip. The trail gains about 2,000 feet vertically passing through some wonderful birding habitat. Plan at least 2 - 4 hours going up depending on your fitness and how many bird stops you make. 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. The road will continue climbing for 4 miles, ending at the Whitefish Mountain Resort. Follow signs to the public parking area, Birch Lot, located just below the upper village area. You can access the lift next to the lot or head to the trailhead by hiking up the stairs to the left of the quad lift (to the upper access road) and turning right to find the start of the trail.

Habitat: The trail winds through mid-elevation forests, open meadows, and numerous ephemeral streams, up to subalpine and exposed near-timberline habitats on the very top.

Birds: 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 Kinglet. 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, particularly Olive-sided Flycatcher. About half way up, the trail turns north up the left side of a deep draw. After the next ski run the habitat becomes wet subalpine forest and brushfields. Here you will find Pacific 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.

Seasons: Best Memorial Day through late July. Late summer can be ideal for hiking, but birding conditions do slow by August. The lift is open daily for sight-seeing mid-June through Labor Day and then weekends through the end of September.



Rough-legged Hawk



Common Yellowthroat



Western Tanager

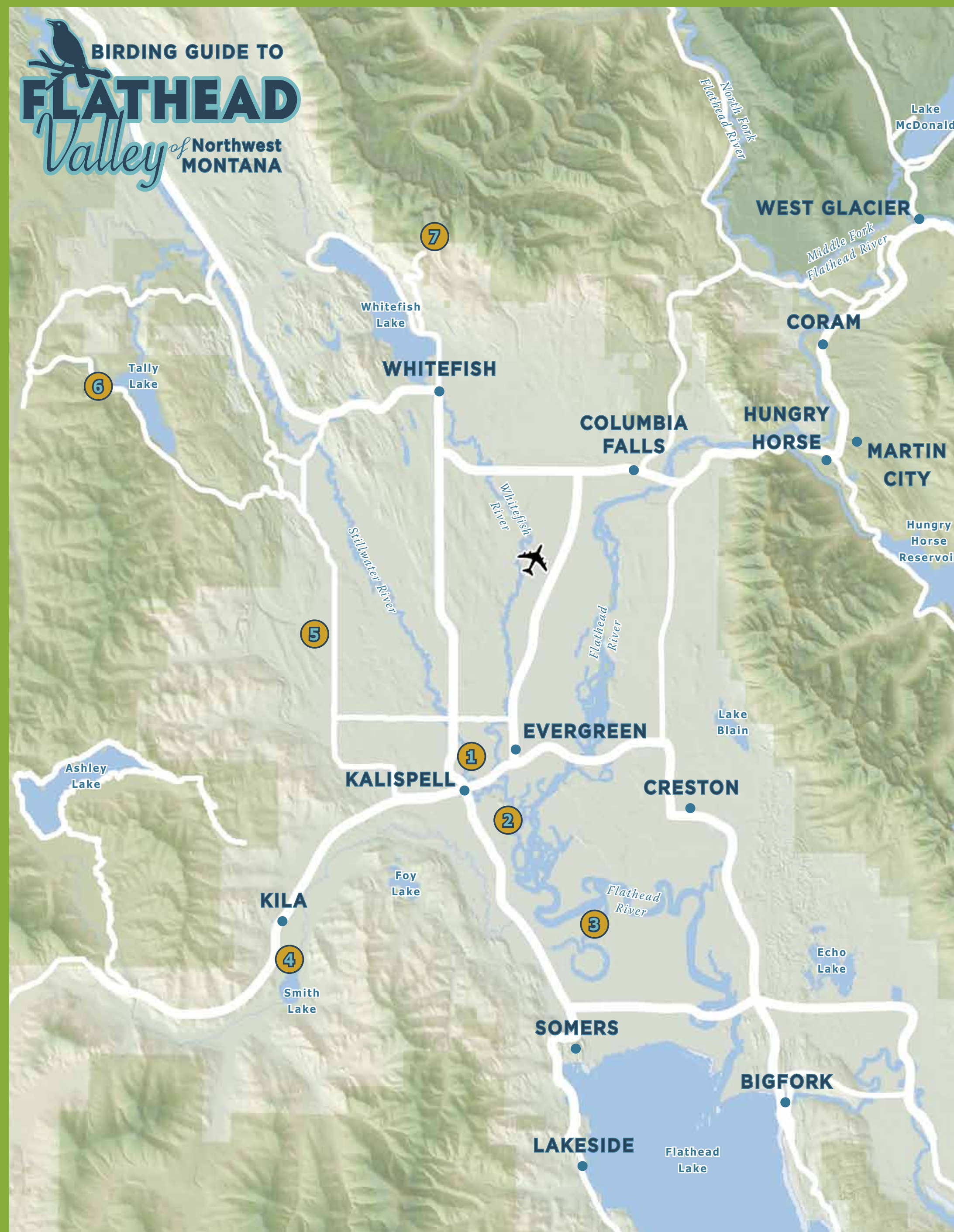


Mountain Bluebird



Rufous Hummingbird

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Red Crossbill



Black-headed Grosbeak



Northern Pygmy Owl



Red-necked Grebe



Wilson's Snipe

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