

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Central Montana
Great Falls, MT
800-527-5348
centralmontana.com

Montana Office of Tourism
Helena, MT
800-VISITMT (847-4868)
visitmt.com

Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, MT
406-727-7400
fws.gov/bentonlake/index.htm

Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 4
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT
406-454-5840
stateparks.gov

Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest
1220 38th Street North
Great Falls, MT
406-791-7700
fs.fed.us/r1/lewisclark/

Belt Creek Ranger District
US Highway 89
Neihart, MT
406-236-5511

White Sulphur Springs Ranger District
204 W. Folsom
White Sulphur Springs, MT
406-547-3361

Rocky Mountain Ranger District
1102 Main Ave. NW
Choteau, MT
406-466-5341

Judith Basin County Library
109 Central Ave.
Stanford, MT
406-566-2277, ext. 8

Beaver Creek Park
Havre, MT
406-395-4565
havremt.com

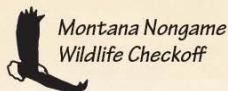
Bear Paw Battlefield
Nez Perce National Historic Park
National Park Service
301 Ohio St.
Chinook, MT
406-357-3130
nps.gov/biho

Tiber Field Office
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Chester, MT
406-456-3226
usbr.gov

Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center
Bureau of Land Management
701 7th Street
Fort Benton, MT
877-256-3252
blm.gov/mt

Rocky Boy Indian Reservation
Natural Resources Dept.
Agency Road
Box Elder, MT
406-395-4207

First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park
342 Ulm Vaughn Rd.
Ulm, MT
406-866-2217



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birding trails in central MONTANA



BEAVER CREEK PARK

Directions: From Havre, take County Road 234 south to Beaver Creek Park (milepost 10).

General info: Lush streamside pull in birds at Hill County's Beaver Creek Park, largest county park in the U.S. Park is a mile-wide strip following creek 17 miles in Bear Paw Mountains, an island range rising from a sea of grass. Day use fee.

Habitats: Rolling grasslands, lakes, brushy stream, aspen/cottonwood groves, cliffs

Highlighted species: Western/Clark's grebe, American white pelican (Beaver Creek Reservoir); long-billed curlew, mountain bluebird, Swainson's and ferruginous hawks (grasslands); yellow-breasted chat, Wilson's warbler, sora, Wilson's snipe, Lazuli bunting (streamside); Baltimore and Bullock's orioles, ovenbird, American redstart (aspen/cottonwood); rock wren, golden eagle (cliffs).

Facilities/services: Camping, toilets, trails. All services in Havre.

Contact: Beaver Creek Park

CHIPPEWA CREE RECREATIONAL PARK

Directions: From Havre, take County Road 234 south to Beaver Creek Park. Follow paved road for 17 miles, cross a cattle guard and enter Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation.

General info: 7,400 acres montane habitat. (Pay fee at Natural Resources Office 9.5 miles east from US 87 on Agency Road).

Habitats: Montane

Highlighted species: Swainson's thrush, red crossbill, pine grosbeak, Cooper's hawk (fir/pine).

Facilities/services: Camping, toilets, trails. Food, gas at Box Elder.

Contact: Natural Resources Dept./Rocky Boy

CHINOOK/LLOYD LOOP

Directions: From Chinook on US 2, go south on Cleveland Road (County Road 240) following it through Y intersection near town to Bear Paw Battlefield in 15 miles. Continue 5 miles to Crown Butte Road, then west 8.6 miles to Lloyd. Go north 18.3 miles to complete loop back to Cleveland Road (left to Chinook).

General info: Lightly traveled roads south of Chinook are prime places to see grasslands birds, raptors. Stops at Bear Paw Battlefield, where flight of Nez Perce ended tragically, and Lloyd. Best viewing June - August. No fees.

Habitats: Alfalfa, grassy foothills, streams with cottonwoods and heavy brush, pine, sage, cliffs

Highlighted species: Sprague's pipit (grassy hillsides), clay-colored sparrow, Baird's sparrow (less common), ferruginous hawk, long-billed curlew at battleground and along route; also along route, chestnut-collared and McCown's longspurs, mountain bluebird, Swainson's hawk, golden eagle, lark bunting (many in some years), sharp-tailed grouse (dance April/May); bobolink, Wilson's snipe (Crown Butte Road); at Lloyd's south end, walk road for brown thrasher, least flycatcher.

Facilities/services: Vault toilet, loop trail (battlefield). All services Chinook.

Contact: Bear Paw Battlefield

STANFORD BLUEBIRDS

Directions: On US 87 in Stanford, turn south at Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest access for Dry Wolf; first bluebird box 2 miles. At 4.2 miles follow signs to Dry Wolf Campground. Retrace route 6.3 miles, turn east on gravel road 5 miles. Turn right at T intersection, following widest, best-graveled roads at any junction until you reach bluebird box #91 in 10.7 miles. Retrace route to sign for Stanford. Follow signs down Running Wolf drainage to starting point in 11.7 miles.

General Info: This high-occupancy trail has fledged more than 7,000 bluebirds since 1992. Best bluebird viewing April through August.

Habitats: Grasslands, coniferous woods, aspen, streamside, burned forest, wetland

Highlighted Species: Mountain bluebird, mountain chickadee, hairy woodpecker, gray catbird, western tanager, Lazuli bunting, sharp-tailed grouse (perhaps); American dipper (Dry Wolf Campground).

Facilities/services: Camping, vault toilets, trails Dry Wolf; food, gas, lodging Stanford.

Contact: Judith Basin County Library

UPPER MISSOURI NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

Directions: Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center (fee): from US 87 exit east towards Fort Benton, follow signs (river, cultural and natural history displays, float information and regs). Two birding areas reached from land as well as water: 3,300-acre Wood Bottom Recreation Area (north on US 87 to mile marker 51 near Loma, east on graveled Loma Bridge Road 0.8 miles, right at Wood Bottom Boat Launch sign, to campground road past boat launch—road impassable when wet); 40-acre James Kipp Recreation Area (60 miles northeast of Lewistown on US 191).

General info: Float from Fort Benton to James Kipp Recreation Area passes through 149 miles of scenic, remote lands in 7-10 days, including spectacular White Cliffs. Basic canoeing skills; shorter floats possible. Bighorn sheep and elk below Judith Landing. Best traveled May through September. Advanced planning essential.

Habitats: Cottonwood, shrubs, sagebrush, short grass prairie, cliffs

Highlighted species: Yellow-breasted chat, spotted towhee, brown thrasher (Wood Bottom); common poorwill (listen at Eagle Creek); white-throated swifts, rock wrens (Hole in the Wall); prairie falcons (cliffs); green-tailed towhee (McClelland); burrowing owl (Holmes Rapids, south bank prairie dog town); red-eyed vireo, brown thrasher, mountain bluebird, common nighthawk, yellow-headed blackbird, great horned owl, sometimes long-eared owl at Kipp, American white pelican, bald eagle, osprey, western kingbird, Bullock's oriole.

Facilities/services: Camping along river, vault toilets some sites; all services Fort Benton, Lewistown; lodging Virgelle. Canoe/kayak rental, shuttle services, guided floats available Fort Benton, Virgelle, Loma. Bird list at James Kipp Recreation Area.

Contact: Upper Missouri Breaks Interpretive Center

KINGS HILL SCENIC BYWAY

Directions: From junction US 87/89 east of Belt, take US 89 south. Stops: Sluice Boxes State Park (mile marker 62, follow signs 0.3 miles); Dry Fork Road, 11 miles to fork, then back (mile marker 50, turn east onto gravel road); Memorial Falls (mile marker 35); Winter Recreation Parking Area (mile 30); Kings Hill Campground/Porphry Peak Lookout (campground at pass, lookout accessed from campground by 1.5-mile road for high-clearance vehicle); Jumping Creek Campground; at milepost 8 leave byway, drive west to Newlan Reservoir, making looping route over dam on Road 259, then left (east) onto Highway 360 to White Sulphur Springs, returning to byway north on US 89. Forest Service Travel Map.

General Info: Byway travels up to 7,393 feet elevation, through 71 miles of forests, limestone canyons in Little Belt Mountains, an island range. Stops, detours on less-traveled roads allow for bird watching at different habitats, elevations. Best viewing mid-May through July, with spring arriving latest at highest elevations. No fee.

Habitats: Streamside, cliffs, aspen, shrub, forest, grassland, sagebrush

Highlighted species: Calliope hummingbird, white-throated swift, mountain chickadee on 3/4-mile trail to creek crossing at Sluice Boxes (at trail fork 50 yards from outset, go right to avoid trespassing); red-naped sapsucker, mountain chickadee, drumming ruffed grouse in aspen along Dry Fork Road (be careful not to trespass on private in-holdings miles 3-7. See Travel Map and note orange paint sometimes on posts.) Possible northern pygmy-owl last couple miles before turnaround. American dipper (Memorial Falls); willow flycatcher, dusky flycatcher, MacGillivray's warbler (winter parking); Clark's nutcracker, Steller's jay, Cassin's finch, pine grosbeak at King's Hill/Porphry Peak; possibly ruffed grouse near campground, dusky grouse (formerly blue grouse) near lookout, hovering rufous or calliope hummingbird near anyone wearing red. At Jumping Creek American dipper, Steller's and gray jays, Swainson's and hermit thrush, sandhill crane. Sandhill crane, common nighthawk east of Newlan Reservoir; spotted sandpiper, western grebe at reservoir; sandhill crane, mountain bluebird, golden and bald eagles, red-tailed hawk, maybe northern goshawk along drive to White Sulphur Springs. Brewer's and vesper sparrows in sagebrush.

Facilities/services: Vault toilet Sluice Boxes, all 4 campgrounds along byway. All services along byway.

Contact: FWP Region 4; Helena-Lewis & Clark NF (Great Falls, Belt Creek RD, White Sulphur Springs RD)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

Georgia Miller



ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT

Directions: At ranger station in Choteau (Rocky Mountain R.S.) or Augusta, check grizzly bear reports, road and trail conditions, closures. Buy Forest Service Travel Map, topo maps for hiking here or locally.

Choteau loop: From US 89 in Choteau, drive 5 miles north, turn west on Teton Canyon Road towards Eureka Reservoir. Drive 17 miles, turn at South Fork Teton sign, cross bridge. Turn right shortly onto FR 109, driving 10 miles to end, with stop on road at Nature Conservancy bridge. Backtrack to Bellview Cutacross. Continue 4.5 miles to Pine Butte Swamp. At next T intersection, turn left (Bellview Road) go 19 miles to US 287, then left to Choteau.

Augusta loop: From US 287 in Augusta follow signs towards Benchmark, taking FR 235 past Nilan Reservoir, Double Falls, Wood Lake, Benchmark air strip, Benchmark Campground, to S. Fork Campground. Retrace to Beaver/Willow Road, drive north (passing McCarty Hill) 13 miles, then follow signs to Gibson Reservoir. Follow signs to campground, boat launch parking and North Fork Trail. Leave Gibson Dam, turn towards Augusta; right at T in 15 miles; 4.8 miles to second entrance on south edge of Sun River Wildlife Management Area (open May 15 - Dec. 1.) Retrace to last T intersection, drive 6 miles to Augusta.

General info: Routes cross grasslands with curlews, then move into rugged canyons, more open on Augusta loop than Choteau's. The Front, a wilderness gateway, supports game populations including the nation's largest herd of bighorn sheep. Birds thrive as well. Best viewing depends on elevation, mid-May to mid-July at lowest, early July to mid-August at highest. No fees.

Habitats: Prairie, cliff, streamside, wetlands, forests (limber pine, lodgepole/Douglas fir, spruce/pine)

Highlighted species:

Choteau loop: Waterfowl, red-necked grebe, occasionally Caspian tern, (Eureka Reservoir); mountain bluebird, prairie falcon (Teton Canyon Road); veery (dense cottonwoods); calliope and rufous hummingbirds, fair chance of Lazuli bunting (near Pine Butte GR along S. Fork Teton); cordilleran flycatcher, dipper, sometimes varied thrush (Mill Falls); western tanager, Cassin's finch, Steller's jay (forest). On hike to Our Lake (opens early July) Swainson's thrush, three-toed woodpecker, Townsend's warbler, Townsend's solitaire, Clark's nutcracker, gray jay, winter wren, pine grosbeak, golden-crowned kinglet, yellow-rumped warbler, fox sparrow, Cassin's finch, warbling and red-eyed vireos; possibly boreal chickadee, red crossbill, spruce grouse (in dense forest), hermit thrush. If lucky, olive-sided flycatcher on trail or gray-crowned rosy finch at lake. From road at Pine Butte Swamp, sandhill crane, Lazuli bunting, merlin, prairie falcon, clay-colored sparrow, long-billed curlew, marbled godwit, and willow, Hammond, dusky, least flycatcher; perhaps alder flycatcher, sharp-tailed grouse. On Bellview Road, ferruginous hawk, golden eagle, McCown's longspur; MacGillivray's warbler (in wet spots), Wilson's snipe, bobolink; perhaps Sprague's pipit at Peeble's Cutacross (listen, look high), upland sandpiper.

Augusta loop: Ferruginous hawk, golden eagle, bobolink, long-billed curlew, marbled godwit, perhaps upland sandpiper (grassland); ring-necked duck (potholes); prairie falcon; mountain bluebird, dusky flycatcher, dusky grouse, merlin (limber pine); Townsend's solitaire, red crossbill, gray jay, Clark's nutcracker (lodgepole/Douglas fir); American dipper, golden-crowned kinglet (Double Falls). Osprey, Barrow's and common goldeneyes, wood duck, yellow-rumped warbler, great gray owl (hear), great horned owl, bald eagle (Wood Lake campground, trail); Swainson's thrush, olive-sided flycatcher, hermit thrush, western tanager, varied thrush, Townsend's warbler; spruce grouse, northern three-toed woodpecker (Benchmark), great horned owl, saw-whet owl (S. Fork Sun campground); nuthatches (red-breasted, white-breasted, occasionally pygmy) near air strip. Harlequin duck (long shot, short hike from S. Fork Campground to pack bridge), Rufous, calliope hummingbird (Fairview Creek Trail, Benchmark to Willow Creek). Beaver/Willow Road: peregrine and prairie falcon (McCarty Hill), red-naped sapsucker (aspen), Lazuli bunting (scrubby south-facing slopes); western tanager, Clark's nutcracker (Gibson); MacGillivray's warbler, orange-crowned warbler (brushy streamside areas).

Facilities/services: Vault toilets at campgrounds; all services Choteau, Augusta.

Contact: Helena-Lewis & Clark NF (Rocky Mountain Ranger District, Choteau; Augusta Information Station, Augusta); FWP Region 4 (WMA)



WHITE-FACED IBIS
Craig Miller

FREEZOUT LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Directions: From Fairfield, four miles north on US 89.

General info: Grasslands, marsh bursting with birds. An Important Bird Area and Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site. Bird watching highlight at 11,000-acre Freezout is migrating flocks of up to 100,000 snow and Ross's geese, moving through in bunches from mid-March to mid-April. For waterfowl and songbirds, best viewing is mid-May to mid-July. No fee. Hunting in fall. Commercial use, including guided tours, prohibited.

Habitats: Marsh, grasslands, shelterbelt

Highlighted species: Eared grebe, Franklin's gull, common tern, Forster's tern, black tern, cinnamon teal, tundra swan (spring, fall migrant), sora, Wilson's phalarope, American avocet, black-necked stilt, marbled godwit, willet, Eastern kingbird, yellow-headed blackbird, vesper sparrow, savannah sparrow, clay-colored sparrow, common yellowthroat, American pipit (migrant), marsh wren.

At Freezout, western grebe, Clark's grebe, red-necked grebe, American white pelican, snow goose (feed in area fields much of day), Ross's goose, Eurasian wigeon (migrant with American wigeon flocks), green-winged teal, red-breasted merganser (migrant), bald eagle, Swainson's hawk, upland sandpiper (north end), great horned owl, Say's phoebe (north end), western kingbird.

Migrating shorebirds (mid-April to mid-May, mid-July through August): greater and lesser yellowlegs, sanderling, semipalmated sandpiper, least sandpiper, Baird's sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, long-billed dowitcher, common snipe and red-necked phalarope.

Winter: northern shrike, rough-legged hawk; sharp-tailed grouse visible (shelterbelts); gyrfalcon (long shot); snow buntings, Lapland longspurs may mingle with horned larks.

Facilities/services: Vault toilets, camping, excellent birding brochure. Interior roads all-weather, but county roads to west impassable when wet. All services Fairfield.

Contact: FWP Region 4

SNOW GEESE AT FREEZOUT LAKE

Craig Miller



FIRST PEOPLES BUFFALO JUMP STATE PARK

Directions: From Ulm, 3.5 miles northwest on Ulm-Vaughn road.

General info: This location is one of the longest prehistoric bison kill sites in North America and is preserved in a 1600-acre park. Sandstone cliffs, accessed by trail from above and below, bring soaring raptors and nesting cliff swallows. Western meadowlarks lead chorus on grasslands. Open year round; migratory birds most visible mid-May through mid-July, though present into September. Free entry for Montana residents.

Habitats: Grasslands, cliffs

Highlighted species: Rock wren (cliffs); burrowing owl (prairie dog town, best chances before 9 am), long-billed curlew; grasshopper sparrow (prairie below); Swainson's hawk, ferruginous hawk (sometimes), golden eagle; Say's phoebe may nest on visitor center; short-eared owls dawn and dusk; gray partridge, sharp-tailed grouse sometimes visible.

Facilities/services: Visitor center, flush toilets, trail; food, gas at Ulm.

Contact: First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park

GIANT SPRINGS STATE PARK

Directions: In Great Falls, take US 87 to River Road, then 1.8 miles east to Giant Springs Road. Main entrance 2.2 miles.

General info: Springs here flow 156 million gallons of water a day into the Missouri, flowing via very short Roe River. From platform, watch trout swimming below. Mowed lawns, non-native trees surround springs; undeveloped portions upstream. Drive downstream along Missouri, especially in winter when springs keep water open for assorted waterfowl. Good viewing year round. Fee. Free entry for Montana residents.

Habitat: River, streamside, lawn, shrubs

Highlighted species: Bullock's oriole high in trees, great horned owl, willow flycatcher; American white pelican, bald eagle, belted kingfisher; house wren, gray catbird, western kingbird, black-billed magpie upriver. Park attracts migrants (yellow-rumped warbler, Swainson's thrush, brown thrasher, Wilson's warbler, common loon), vagrant birds.

Facilities/services: Hatchery with self-guided tour, flush toilets, trails, links to River's Edge Trail.

Contact: FWP Region 4

BENTON LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Directions: From Great Falls north 1 mile on US 87, then Bootlegger Trail 9 miles to large sign.

General info: Not to be confused with Fort Benton, a town 40 miles away, this 12,383-acre prairie and marsh refuge is designated a Globally Important Bird Area and a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site. Though much of the area is closed, excellent bird watching features many species of limited range, some best found here. Hunting in fall. Winter access often limited by snow. No fee.

Habitats: Prairie marsh, grasslands, shelterbelts

Highlighted species: Eared grebe; Franklin's gull; common, Forster's and black terns; cinnamon teal; tundra swan (migrant early March); sora; Wilson's phalarope; American avocet; black-necked stilt; marbled godwit; willet; eastern kingbird; yellow-headed blackbird; vesper, savannah, and clay-colored sparrows; common yellowthroat; American pipit (migrant); marsh wren; white-faced ibis, black-crowned night-heron, sharp-tailed grouse, long-billed curlew, chestnut-collared longspur (especially near entrance), short-eared owl, perhaps burrowing owl, loggerhead shrike (direct scope along tops of shelterbelts).

Facilities/services: Visitor center with flush toilets (week days, 7:30 am to 4 pm), portable toilets 24/7; self-guided auto tour, short hike on accessible boardwalk, wildlife list.

Contact: Benton Lake NWR

KINGSBURY LAKE WATERFOWL PRODUCTION AREA

Directions: From Main Street in Geraldine, turn west onto Kingsbury Road, left onto Geyser Road, then 4 miles to parking area southeast of lake.

General info: Cliffs, prairie, shallow marsh that vanishes with low rainfall, make up little-known 3,733 acres at foot of Highwoods. Grassland birds join raptors and, on migration, shorebirds. Watch for rattlesnakes. No fee.

Habitats: Native grassland, marsh, cliffs, shrubby coulees

Highlighted species: Sprague's pipit, grasshopper sparrow, vesper's sparrow, clay-colored sparrow, lark sparrow, bobolink (grasslands); perhaps gray partridge, sharp-tailed grouse; golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, prairie falcon, along with short-eared owls at dawn, dusk; rock wrens (cliffs); prairie dog town with burrowing owls well down east side of lake. Long-billed curlews, avocets, upland sandpiper, willet, Wilson's phalarope, marbled godwits, Wilson's snipe breed; migrating shorebirds mid-April to mid-May, and July through mid-September as water level allows. Open year round (hunting in fall); songbirds most visible mid-May through mid-July.

Facilities/services: Parking lot, no trails, no toilet. Food, gas, lodging Geraldine, Fort Benton; camping Belt.

Contact: Benton Lake NWR

SANFORD PARK

Directions: From US 2 in Chester, take South Tiber Road 14 miles, follow Bureau of Reclamation signs above Tiber Dam.

General info: "East meets West" plays out at park below reservoir on Marias River. Brown thrashers reach western edge of range, Bullock's and Baltimore orioles flit in treetops. Five swallow species glide – barn, tree, northern rough-winged, cliff, bank – while cedar waxwing, spotted sandpiper, belted kingfisher, spotted towhee move below. Best viewing late May to mid-July. In winter, check Tiber Road and Lake Elwell for snowy owl (fields, power poles).

Habitats: Streamside, grassland, sagebrush, lake, cliffs

Highlighted species: Say's phoebe, mountain bluebird, black-headed grosbeak, brown thrasher, yellow-breasted chat, prairie falcon, merlin, bald eagle, golden eagle, ferruginous and Swainson's hawks, Caspian tern; Brewer's sparrow (sagebrush by park); lark sparrow (dry hillsides by park). Great horned owl, eastern screech-owl sometimes nest.

Facilities/services: Vault toilet, year-round camping. Food, gas Tiber Marina on Lake Elwell (summer). Lodging food, gas Chester.

Contact: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Tiber Field Office

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE DANCE

Craig Miller



From the frenzy of a marsh in June to the chorus of grassland birds at dawn; from the bright colors of a mountain bluebird in the foothills to a Clark's nutcracker flapping across breathtaking mountains, the birding trails in Central Montana are packed with amazing sights and sounds for bird lovers.

In a place where fewer than 30 miles stand between the prairies and the continental divide, the Rocky Mountains truly earn their name. Dramatic cliffs provide an abundance of secure nesting sites for raptors, which feed on the nearby plains. Life zones march up the mountains as the forests change, featuring birds from Lazuli bunting and red-naped sapsucker to Townsend's warbler and pine grosbeak. Island mountain ranges, scattered on the sea of grass to the east, add even more forested land to explore.

Grasslands along the Rocky Mountain Front are some of the largest expanses of unbroken prairie in Montana, supporting outstanding populations of long-billed curlews, chestnut-collared

longspurs, Sprague's pipits and ferruginous hawks. The grasslands, a mixture of private cattle ranches and public lands, are a high conservation priority. Agencies, nonprofit organizations and local citizens are working to protect this national treasure.

Lakes, prairie marshes, fens and rivers all act as bird magnets in this water-limited area. The cottonwoods that grow along the rivers don't occupy much of the landscape, but they support an exceptionally high diversity of bird species.

All this varied habitat creates a special place for birders who keep a life list. Specialties include chestnut-collared and McCown's longspurs, sharp-tailed grouse, long-billed curlew, Sprague's pipit, Baird's sparrow, Say's phoebe, calliope hummingbird, Lazuli bunting, red-naped sapsucker, cordilleran flycatcher, Steller's jay, gray jay, Clark's nutcracker, pine grosbeak, Cassin's finch, spruce grouse, varied thrush, Townsend's solitaire, Townsend's warbler, mountain chickadee, western tanager, American three-toed woodpecker, ferruginous hawk, golden eagle, Swainson's hawk, bald eagle, prairie falcon, peregrine falcon, white-throated swift, burrowing owl, great gray owl, northern pygmy-owl, Barrow's goldeneye, eared grebe, white-faced ibis, Wilson's phalarope, yellow-headed blackbird, American avocet, black-necked stilt, Franklin's gull, black tern and gray partridge.

East and West mix here, so bird watchers from both sides of the country find something new—like American dipper and rock wren for Easterners, brown thrasher, upland sandpiper, ovenbird and alder flycatcher for Westerners.

Don't overlook the various owl species. You'll have a good chance of sighting burrowing owl, short-eared owl and great horned owl. Chances of finding other owls are slim, even with our information, but eastern and western screech-owl, northern pygmy-owl, long-eared owl, snowy owl, northern saw-whet owl and great gray owl are all possibilities.



Timing is important to view two bird-watching treats. During the spring migration, tens of thousands of snow geese visit Freezeout Lake Wildlife Management Area. While they wait for Canadian wetlands to thaw, the snow geese fill the skies with goose music when they lift off in awesome flocks to feed in nearby grain fields. Also in spring, birders can view the courtship dance of the sharp-tailed grouse from a blind at Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Yes, the males really do raise an orange eyebrow and puff out a violet neck sac as they dance their mincing steps!

Finally, we've got fascinating creatures without feathers, too. Pronghorn, white-tailed deer and mule deer abound. The Rocky Mountain Front, famed for its big game, may bring you a view of bighorn sheep, mountain goat or elk. Grizzly bears, much less common, live here too, along with black bears and small creatures like butterflies and pikas.

Fact is, Montana has more bird watchers per capita than any other state. Come to the 13 counties known as Central Montana and find out why!



POINTERS FOR WILDLIFE WATCHERS

- Keep the welfare of wildlife first. Stand well back, especially around nests and dens, feeding and display areas.
- Don't attract threatened, endangered or otherwise sensitive species with recordings.
- Don't walk through prairie dog towns.
- Be mindful of grizzly bears along the Rocky Mountain Front. Keep your food in a vehicle or bear-proof container. Refrain from hanging out seed or hummingbird feeders. If you intend to hike, learn about grizzlies and carry bear spray in a holster.
- When bird watching from a road, pull safely to the side or use a gate approach when you stop. Make sure hills and curves don't hide you from behind.
- Don't enter private property without permission.
- Be courteous to other recreationists.
- Follow agency regulations for each site, including leash rules for dogs.
- Stay on roads and trails.
- Dispose of waste properly.
- Leave what you find so others can enjoy it.
- If you camp, use established fire rings or a lightweight stove for cooking.





FERRUGINOUS HAWK
Bob Martinka



Osprey
Craig Miller



GREAT BLUE HERON
Elizabeth Moore



YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD
Craig Miller



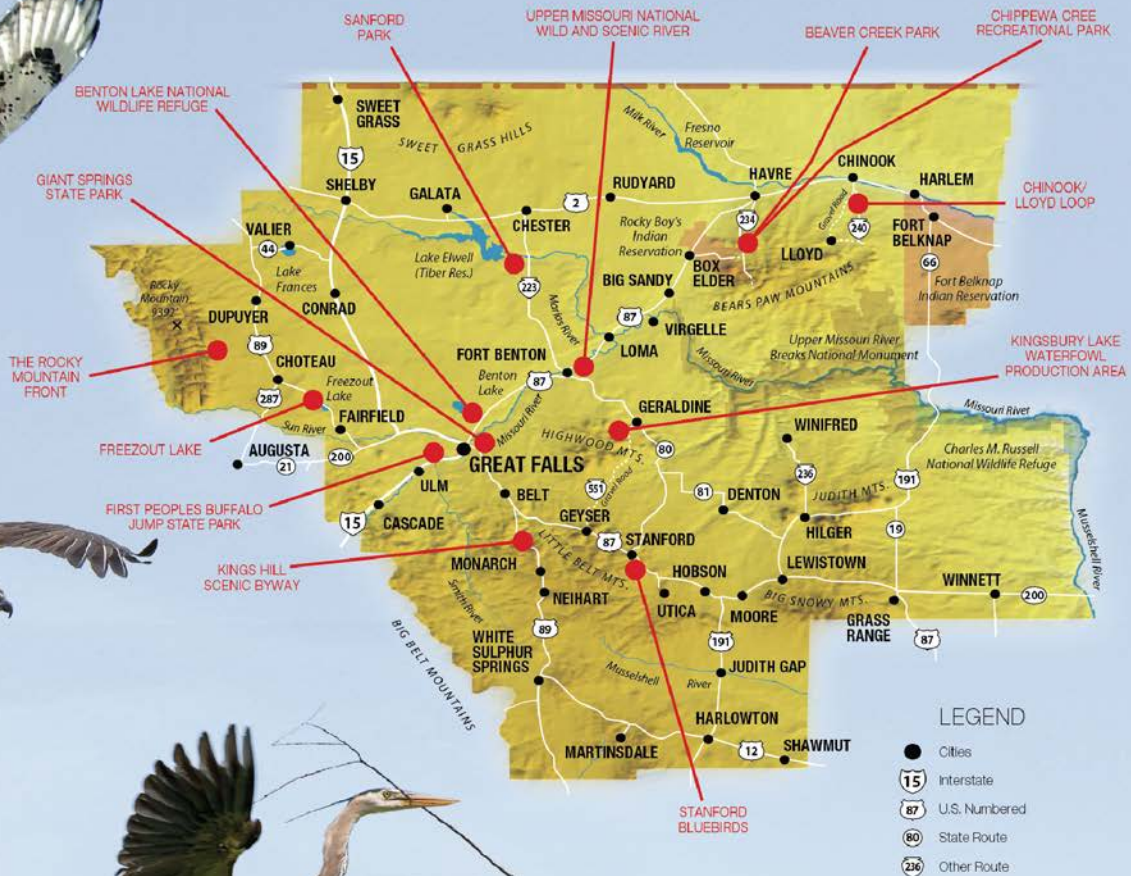
MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR
Bob Martinka



WESTERN KINGBIRD
Bob Martinka



SWAINSON'S HAWK
Bob Martinka



birding trails in central MONTANA

