

Lake Champlain Birding Trail

Where: Vermont and New York. **What:** The first birding trail to cross state lines, the Lake Champlain trail loops for 300 miles to 87 birding sites in Vermont and New York. Besides tracing the 110-mile-long lake and its islands, dunes, and cliffs, this trail crosses a mosaic of dairy farms, marshes, grasslands, and woodlands as well, showcasing the trail's northeasterly location as a magnet for wayfaring birds. **Look for:** Pileated woodpecker. **Contact:** Ghostwriters Communications, 802-287-4284, www.lakechamplainbirding.org.

Audubon Niagara Birding Trail

Where: New York. **What:** The Niagara trail stretches 115 miles from the long, sandy expanses of Woodlawn Beach State Park on Lake Erie past the historic lighthouse of Four Mile Creek State Park on Lake Ontario. The trail, which follows the Niagara River corridor—the first binationally designated Important Bird Area in North America—includes a stop to observe birds above and below the great waterfall itself. **Look for:** Bonaparte's gull. **Contact:** Buffalo Audubon, 585-457-3228, www.buffaloaudubon.org.

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail

Where: Virginia. **What:** The first functioning leg of the statewide Virginia trail extends along the coastal plain—tying together more than 225 birding sites through a series of 18 driving loops that also take in the region's rich culture and history. Site assessments for a Mountain trail will wrap up this fall, as nominations for a Central trail spanning Virginia's Piedmont area begin. **Look for:** Osprey. **Contact:** Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, 804-367-4335, www.dgif.state.va.us.

Colonial Coast Birding Trail

Where: Georgia. **What:** The Colonial Coast trail aptly weaves birdwatching into the state's historical roots, encouraging visitors to stop at Civil War forts and plantations, as well as at freshwater wetlands, woodlands, and tidal rivers. Though the driving route parallels Interstate 95, the staffs of visitors' centers along the way can offer plenty of birdwatching suggestions that will get both skilled birders and novices off the beaten path. **Look for:** Painted bunting. **Contact:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 478-994-1438, www.state.ga.us/dnr/wild/.

Great Florida Birding Trail

Where: Florida. **What:** The eastern section of the soon-to-be-statewide Florida trail is a network of 135 sites spread throughout 18 counties, grouped into clusters within an hour's drive of one another. The layout highlights many sites all but lost among Florida's vast tourist industry, making many of the state's 470 species, from roseate spoonbills to endangered scrub jays, a cinch to find. **Look for:** Swallow-tailed kite. **Contact:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 850-488-8755, www.floridabirdingtrail.com.

Alabama Coastal Birding Trail

Where: Alabama. **What:** This trail, a series of six loops, represents a variety of ecosystems, from the beach and sea-oat habitat of Gulf State Park near Perdido Bay to the largely maritime pine forest of the Dauphin Island Audubon Sanctuary, a hot spot during spring migration. Up in the Mobile Tensaw delta, you can abandon your car in favor of a guided swamp tour up Chickasabogue Creek aboard Wildland Expeditions' *Gator Bait*. **Look for:** Reddish egret. **Contact:** Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, 877-226-9089, www.alabamacoastalbirdingtrail.com.

John James Audubon Birding Trail

Where: Kentucky. **What:** The first, 35-mile segment of trail starts at John James Audubon State Park in western Kentucky and boasts a 1,775-acre waterfowl refuge along the route. Three more driving tours lead birders through agricultural fields, small caves, and reclaimed mining sites, where they can check off the more than 200 species on the trail's checklist. **Look for:** Prothonotary warbler. **Contact:** West Kentucky Corporation, 270-781-6858, www.thinkwestkentucky.com.

Southern Ohio Birding and Heritage Trail

Where: Ohio and Kentucky. **What:** The Meledahl Dam in Cincinnati is the starting point for this trail, which winds through four counties in southwestern Ohio before looping by ferry into Augusta, Kentucky. The Adams County "barn sampler" is woven into the Ohio portion of the route as well; quilt patterns that have been painted on barns throughout the county hark back to the state's unique heritage. **Look for:** Chuck-will's-widow. **Contact:** Planning Adams County's Tomorrow, 937-549-8384.



backseat birder

BIRDING TRAILS HAVE EMERGED ALONG THOUSANDS OF MILES OF HIGHWAY, LEADING ANYONE WITH A SET OF WHEELS AND A PAIR OF BINOCULARS TO WILDLIFE HOT SPOTS, BIG AND SMALL. MANY MAPS ARE FRESH OFF THE PRESSES. GRAB ONE, AND COME ALONG FOR THE RIDE!

Oak Leaf Birding Trail

Where: Wisconsin. **What:** The first complete leg of the Great Wisconsin Birding Trail includes more than 35 stops in the Milwaukee County Parks system, covering territory from well-groomed botanical gardens to untamed preserves. An excellent introduction to birding for urban residents, the trail boasts many sites with playgrounds, picnic areas, and opportunities for hiking and biking. **Look for:** Yellow warbler. **Contact:** Wehr Nature Center, 414-425-8550.

Minnesota's Pine to Prairie Birding Trail

Where: Minnesota. **What:** Minnesota's first birding trail consists of 43 sites spanning more than 200 miles from pine to prairie in the northwestern part of the state—through pine forests, deciduous woodlands, tallgrass prairie, aspen parklands, calcareous fens, bogs, and marshes. The greater prairie chicken and the three-toed woodpecker are just a few of the numerous species that can be seen along the way. **Look for:** Greater prairie chicken. **Contact:** Fergus Falls Convention and Visitor's Bureau, 800-726-8959, www.mnbirdtrail.com.

Minnesota River Valley Birding Trail

Where: Minnesota. **What:** This river-valley trail, a project of Audubon Minnesota, encompasses the Minnesota River watershed from its headwaters near the South Dakota border to its confluence with the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities. Prairie species dominate this area, where eastern woodlands meet grasslands, but wintering Arctic birds and nesting neotropical migrants can be seen as well. **Look for:** Western kingbird. **Contact:** Audubon Minnesota, 651-739-9332, www.birdingtrail.org/.

Great River Birding Trail

Where: Mississippi River basin states. **What:** More than a dozen maps have been produced to illustrate the parks, overlooks, and other spots where birders can search out wildlife along both sides of the 1,366-mile Upper Mississippi River in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri. Sites are now being selected in the five Lower Mississippi River valley states to connect the trail to the Gulf of Mexico. **Look for:** Tundra swan. **Contact:** Upper Mississippi River Campaign, 651-290-1695, www.audubon.org/campaign/umr.

Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail

Where: Texas. **What:** Often called the great-granddaddy of birding trails, the Texas coastal trail was the first—and at approximately 2,110 miles, it's still the biggest—birding trail around. It links more than 300 sites and 41 counties along Texas's Gulf Coast, providing a colorful road map to well over half of the 600 species found in the state. The Heart of Texas and High Plains Wildlife Trails will debut in 2003. **Look for:** Black skimmer. **Contact:** Texas Parks and Wildlife, 888-892-4737, www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

Great Pikes Peak Birding Trail

Where: Colorado. **What:** A project of the Aiken Audubon Society, the Great Pikes Peak Birding Trail will ultimately stretch for hundreds of miles, in El Paso and four other Colorado counties, unifying new and established birding sites throughout the Pikes Peak region. This trail is an impressive prelude to the soon-to-come Great Colorado Birding Trail. **Look for:** Lark bunting. **Contact:** Great Pikes Peak Birding Trail, 719-683-7955, www.greatpikespeakbirdingtrail.org.

Great Salt Lake Birding Trails

Where: Utah. **What:** Millions of birds use the Great Salt Lake, a vital part of the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network, during their annual migrations. Habitats along the Great Salt Lake trails range from the lake itself, where birders can enjoy avocets, phalaropes, and other waterbirds, to the Wasatch Mountains, the summer home of the western tanager and the white-throated swift. **Look for:** Snowy plover. **Contact:** Wasatch Audubon, 801-621-7595, www.wasatchaudubon.org.

Southeastern Arizona Birding Trail

Where: Arizona. **What:** The convergence of four distinct bioregions—the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, and the Sierra Madre and the Rocky Mountains—provides a prime mix of habitats for more than 400 species of birds. Summer is the richest viewing season, with highlights including elegant trogons, painted redstarts, and more than a dozen species of hummingbirds, but the birding is superior at any time of year. **Look for:** Broad-billed hummingbird. **Contact:** Southeastern Area Bird Observatory, 520-432-1388, www.seazbirding.com.

Eastern Sierra Birding Trail

Where: California. **What:** This trail, designed by a partnership including Eastern Sierra Audubon, extends 170 miles along the east side of the Sierra Nevada range, from south of the Owens Lake Nationally Significant Important Bird Area to Bridgeport, California, north of Mono Lake. Maps to more than 40 sites describe birds by location and season and identify land ownership and access. **Look for:** American avocet. **Contact:** Mono Lake Committee, 760-647-6595.

Central Coast Birding Trail

Where: California. **What:** This beautiful coastal region provides superb birding in all seasons and is especially noted for its resident land birds and migratory waterbirds. Fully exploring this trail requires traveling to sites in four counties; the sites include Pinnacles National Monument in Monterey, La Jolla Canyon in Ventura, Barka Slough in Santa Barbara, and Machesna Wilderness in San Luis Obispo. **Look for:** Wilson's warbler. **Contact:** Audubon California, 916-481-5332, http://home.att.net/~aibragg/CentralCoastTrail/btmas.htm.

Great Washington Birding Trail

Where: Washington State. **What:** The first loop of the Great Washington Birding Trail, the Cascade Loop, covers much of northwestern and north-central Washington, leading birders from western farmlands and alpine peaks to sweeping beaches and maple woodlands. Audubon Washington is planning to have Important Bird Areas and nature centers grace each developing loop of trail. **Look for:** Trumpeter swan. **Contact:** Audubon Washington, 866-922-4737, http://wa.audubon.org.

BLAZING TRAILS

Here's your chance to help build three new birding trails.

Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail

Where: Pennsylvania. **What:** Audubon Pennsylvania is accepting site nominations for the Susquehanna River trail, which will highlight the state's important role in history as well as its wildlife as it connects 27 counties from the border of Maryland to that of New York. **Look for:** Belted kingfisher. **Contact:** Audubon Pennsylvania, 717-213-6880, http://pa.audubon.org.

Kansas Birding and Prairie Flora Trails

Where: Kansas. **What:** Once completed, four new trails in Kansas will encourage birders to look down as well as up, at prairie grasses underfoot and at the migratory species wetlands-hopping overhead. Site nominations will be accepted until May 2003. **Look for:** Upland sandpiper. **Contact:** Audubon of Kansas, 785-537-4385, www.kansasaudubon.org.

Oregon Cascade Birding Trail

Where: Oregon. **What:** Suggestions are welcome this fall for the Cascade trail, the first leg of what will eventually be Oregon's statewide birding-trail system. This trail will trace the dense forests and alpine meadows of the mountain range from the Columbia River Gorge to the California border. **Look for:** White-headed woodpecker. **Contact:** Audubon Society of Portland, 503-292-6855.

A BIRDER AND PROUD OF IT

When on the trail, don't forget to "flex your birding muscles," says Julie Brashears, coordinator for the Great Florida Birding Trail. "Traditional birders outnumber hunters 17 to 1; freshwater anglers, 5 to 1; and saltwater anglers, 2 to 1," she says, "but they're so incognito that communities don't recognize their economic impact." Distinguishing yourself from conventional tourists is even more important, says Brashears, or you run the risk of encouraging Wal-Mart construction on the very wetlands you've come to see. Here are some specific ways to make your purpose known.

- Wear a T-shirt that celebrates birding and nature.
- Ask people in town—your waiter, for instance—about good birding sites.
- Put birding bumper stickers on your (fuel-efficient!) car.
- Carry birding calling cards, and leave one every time you eat out, buy gas, or sleep at a hotel.