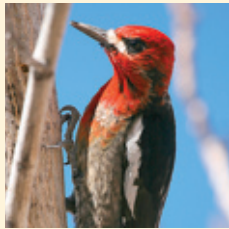


# AUDUBON'S FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDING TRAILS

Visit [audubonmagazine.org](http://audubonmagazine.org) for more western birding trails, and keep coming back in the months ahead for additional regional guides and further updates. BY KENN KAUFMAN

## GREAT WASHINGTON STATE BIRDING TRAIL



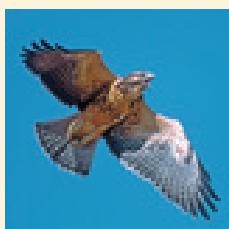
The great state of Washington is too diverse to be encompassed by one birding trail, which explains why Audubon Washington has established a series of looping trails and mapped them independently. Seven proposed loops will cover the entire state. Four are already completed, and they furnish a spectacular cross-section of a remarkable set of landscapes. The outer coast of Washington hosts a wide array of migrating shorebirds, including huge flocks of western sandpipers and lesser numbers of Pacific Coast exclusives like surfbirds and black turnstones. Fog-shrouded forests that cover the coastal slope and the Olympic Peninsula echo with the ethereal whistles of varied thrushes, while richly colored birds like **red-breasted sapsuckers**, Townsend's warblers, and chestnut-backed chickadees hide in the shadows. Ascending toward the high peaks of the Cascades, you'll find black-backed woodpeckers, gray jays, and many other birds of northern affinities lurking in the forest. East of the mountains, the landscape changes abruptly to drier settings, with different birds. Rock wrens bounce and chatter along the edges of craggy arroyos, while long-billed curlews stalk over the open grasslands. Sage thrashers and Brewer's sparrows, plain but tuneful birds, sing surprising melodies from the sagebrush flats, and golden eagles wheel overhead. **For more information:** [http://wa.audubon.org/birds\\_GreatWABirdingTrail.html](http://wa.audubon.org/birds_GreatWABirdingTrail.html) or contact Audubon Washington (866-WA-BIRDS) to order maps.

## OREGON CASCADES BIRDING TRAIL



The mighty Cascade Range stretches the length of Oregon, from north to south, separating the interior's arid country from the coast's rains and lush forests. These mountains are rightly famous as a place of awe-inspiring scenery, from the deep-blue Crater Lake to the towering snowcapped Mount Hood. Follow the Oregon Cascades Birding Trail and you will get to enjoy both the amazing scenery and a brilliant bevy of colorful birds. The trail, designed by a consortium of groups including the Audubon Society of Portland, features nearly 200 stops. Some are in the lowlands at the base of the mountains, such as along the edge of the Columbia River, where bald eagles and ospreys are celebrities. But most of the real stars are at higher elevations. Brushy thickets may hold bright golden Wilson's and MacGillivray's warblers and the elusive but smartly patterned mountain quail. The tall conifer forests are home to the hermit warbler, a striking bird with its center of distribution in the Oregon Cascades. Up at treeline, you may have to search carefully to find the gray-crowned rosy-finch, but the brash, noisy **Clark's nutcracker** is more likely to find you. **For more information:** [www.oregonbirdingtrails.org/cascades.htm](http://www.oregonbirdingtrails.org/cascades.htm) or contact the Audubon Society of Portland (503-292-6855).

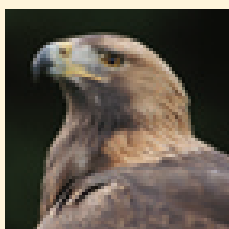
## MONTANA BIRDING AND NATURE TRAIL



In Big Sky Country big plans are afoot to provide birding trails throughout six major regions of the state. Routes are already completed for the northwestern and northeastern sections, and more are coming. In the northwest, where the Bitterroot and Missoula loops are finished, magnificent forests and meadows along clear streams are inhabited by everything from massive pileated woodpeckers to tiny Calliope hummingbirds. Brilliantly colored western tanagers flash through the pines, and violet-green swallows circle overhead. In open forest stands you might spot both Lewis's woodpeckers and Clark's nutcrackers, named for the intrepid explorers who passed this way two centuries ago.

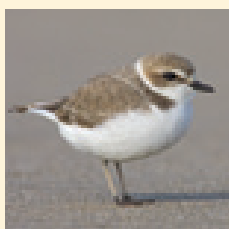
In northeastern Montana's high plains, the surroundings and the birds are completely different. **Swainson's hawks** in summer and rough-legged hawks in winter soar and hunt in the prairies. The wide-open sagebrush flats here are among the last strongholds of the greater sage-grouse, and if you visit in spring, you may get to watch the bizarre courtship dances of the males on their traditional lekking grounds. **For more information:** [www.montanabirdingtrail.org](http://www.montanabirdingtrail.org) or contact the Montana Natural History Center (406-327-0405).

## IDAHO BIRDING TRAIL



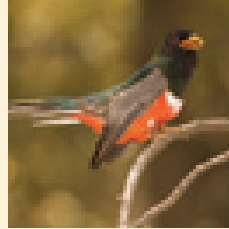
Its license plates may still talk about famous potatoes, but Idaho is a place where birders should keep their eyes on the skies (and leave the fries for later). The plains and canyons along the Snake River are renowned for their concentrations of birds of prey, making Idaho a mecca for raptor biologists and birders from around the world who are drawn to the state's hawks, eagles, and falcons, and hundreds of other bird species. The Idaho Birding Trail features 173 sites in four sections of the state, from north to south. If you hike through the forests of northern Idaho, you're sure to notice many of the smaller songbirds, from hyperactive mountain chickadees to Townsend's warblers and Cassin's finches, all adding their sparks of color to the dark conifers. Get out into more open areas, though, and chances are you will be distracted by the big birds. Powerful **golden eagles** and ferruginous hawks, dashing peregrine falcons and prairie falcons, and more than a dozen other raptors are the star attractions here. Water birds abound as well. Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge hosts trumpeter swans and one of the largest nesting concentrations of sandhill cranes, as well as Franklin's gulls, ducks, and geese. **For more information:** [www.idahobirdingtrail.org](http://www.idahobirdingtrail.org) or contact the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (208-334-3700).

## UTAH'S GREAT SALT LAKE BIRDING TRAIL



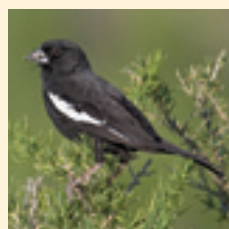
The Bonneville Salt Flats of northwest Utah may be some of the most lifeless acres on the continent, but the nearby Great Salt Lake and the mountains to the east are teeming with life, including more than 200 species of birds. The Wasatch Audubon Society created a partnership that assembled a set of birding trails that encompass more than 50 of the best sites in this region. A number of the richest sites are on the Great Salt Lake itself, including the marshes of the fabled Bear River Refuge, where great flocks of white pelicans, marbled godwits, yellow-headed blackbirds, western grebes, and numerous other birds swarm in the shallows, vying for your attention. Even on the lakeshore's more open or barren parts, you can find pale little **snowy plovers**, elegant American avocets and black-necked stilts, and other shorebirds. The mountains that rise to the east of the lake, famed for their skiing in winter, offer an array of different habitats for birds in all seasons. Shady canyons filled with cottonwoods give way to spruce forest, with typical montane birds such as the elegantly patterned Williamson's sapsucker and Cassin's finch. At the highest levels, patches of tundra above treeline are among the likeliest places in the world for you to find the rare black rosy-finch. **For more information:** [www.wasatchaudubon.org/map\\_birding\\_trails.htm](http://www.wasatchaudubon.org/map_birding_trails.htm) or call the Wasatch Audubon Society (801-621-7595).

## SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA BIRDING TRAIL



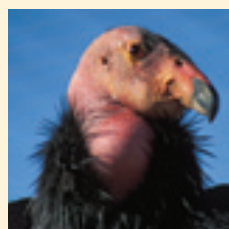
Southeastern Arizona, where isolated mountain ranges rear up like islands in a sea of desert grassland, lures you with more than 400 bird species, including dozens that spill across the border from Mexico. This birding trail, sponsored by the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory with help from the Tucson Audubon Society, identifies 52 key sites for finding those birds. If you go expecting to find only desert, you'll be in for a shock. Magnificent desert vistas are here, of course, but the lowlands also have riverside forests, home to specialty birds like sleek gray hawks and noisy Abert's towhees. The mountain summits are draped in pine and fir forests, habitat for stunning red-faced warblers, Mexican chickadees, and other prized finds. Many of the sites on the birding trail are noted for hummingbirds; more than a dozen species occur here—the highest concentration in the United States—from the minuscule Calliope hummingbird to the blue-throated hummingbird, which is as big as a sparrow. Some of the most exciting birding awaits you in rocky tree-lined canyons that snake through the foothills. These are the haunts of such Mexican-border rarities as the sulphur-bellied flycatcher, the buff-collared nightjar, the thick-billed kingbird, and the fabulously colorful **elegant trogon**, the northernmost member of a purely tropical family of birds. **For more information:** [www.seazbirdingtrail.com/sabtsite.htm](http://www.seazbirdingtrail.com/sabtsite.htm) or contact the Tucson Audubon Society (520-622-5622).

## COLORADO BIRDING TRAIL



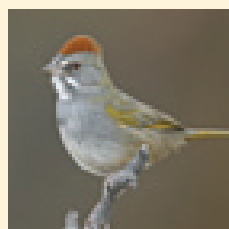
You may be lured to Colorado by the high peaks of the Rockies, which dominate the state, dividing the mesas of the west from the short-grass prairies to the east. But you won't be able to avoid falling in love with other landscapes along the Colorado Birding Trail. In the treeless terrain of the prairies, many songbirds take to the sky to sing, and the air is often filled with the flight-songs of **lark buntings** and chestnut-collared and McCown's longspurs. These short-grass plains are also the haunt of the rare mountain plover, a poorly named bird that sees mountains only from a distance. When you wind into the mountains you can discover red-naped sapsuckers and sky-blue mountain bluebirds in the aspen groves, and pine grosbeaks and red crossbills chattering in the conifer forests. At the high summits, where the open tundra comes alive with wildflowers in summer, you may be lucky enough to find the white-tailed ptarmigan, a master of camouflage, which is near its southernmost limits here. Everywhere in Colorado, from mountains to plains, you'll find peak experiences. **For more information:** [www.coloradobirdingtrail.com](http://www.coloradobirdingtrail.com) or contact Audubon Colorado (303-415-0130).

## CALIFORNIA CENTRAL COAST BIRDING TRAIL



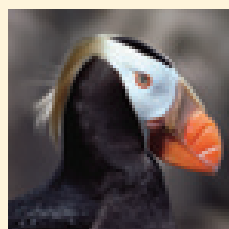
Some of the most beautiful coastline on earth lies between San Francisco Bay and the Los Angeles basin. Not so well known—except among serious birders—is the fact that these four counties also hold hundreds of avian species. This trail, sponsored by Audubon California, leads to 83 prime birding locations. The sites are scattered through an incredible array of landscapes, from the coast to redwood forests and marshes. And this trail doesn't end at the ocean's edge; it leads you to explore offshore waters as well as the Channel Islands, where you'll find the island scrub-jay's entire world population. Back on the mainland you will see other treasures, including the flashy yellow-billed magpie, found nowhere in the world but California. A high point—literally—is the top of Mount Pinos, at almost 9,000 feet; this was one of the best places to see wild **California condors** before the last ones were captured for captive breeding in 1987. Today the program's offspring have been reintroduced to the wild and can be seen at other sites along the trail. **For more information:** <http://ca-cbct.info> or call Audubon California (916-649-7600).

## CALIFORNIA'S EASTERN SIERRA BIRDING TRAIL



Less than a generation has passed since heroic birder-conservationists, led by the late David Gaines, won the fight to save Mono Lake from being drained. Mono Lake remains a mecca for birders because of this proud chapter in conservation history, as well as for the abundance of birds found here. About 50,000 California gulls nest on its islands, but they are outnumbered by the concentrations of eared grebes (close to a million) and Wilson's and red-necked phalaropes (tens of thousands) that stop over during their annual migrations. Mono Lake is just one of the attractions in this region, where the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada meets the edge of the Great Basin. Thickets in the foothills are home to **green-tailed towhees**, lazuli buntings, black-headed grosbeaks, and other colorful songbirds. In open pine groves you may chance upon a roving flock of pinyon jays, harsh-voiced birds named for their taste for pinyon seeds, while at higher elevations you could find the soft-voiced Townsend's solitaire or the flashy western tanager. Along rushing streams you might even be lucky enough to spot the American dipper, an odd aquatic songbird that once captivated John Muir. **For more information:** [www.monolake.org/trailmap/index.html](http://www.monolake.org/trailmap/index.html) or contact the Eastern Sierra Audubon Society ([info@esaudubon.org](mailto:info@esaudubon.org) or P.O. Box 624, Bishop, CA 93515).

## ALASKA COASTAL WILDLIFE VIEWING TRAIL



Sites on most birding trails are linked mainly by paved roads, but the Inside Passage segment of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Trail offers a special treat because its sites are connected by ferries traveling the Alaska Marine Highway System. In this setting of forested islands and spectacular fjords, stretching from Skagway to Ketchikan, it's not surprising that water birds provide much of the excitement, with loons, cormorants, ducks, gulls, terns, and others passing in a constant parade. Horned and **tufted puffins** nest on the islands and fish in the surrounding waters. Pairs of marbled murrelets are everywhere, but their rarer cousins, Kittlitz's murrelets, are likely to be seen only where huge glaciers come down to the ocean's edge, as in Glacier Bay National Park. Of course, there are plenty of land birds in this region as well, and nine communities along the trail offer detailed information on birding sites in the forests, rivers, and marshes nearby. Highlights include flocks of migrating sandpipers on the Stikine River near Wrangell, and the world's largest concentrations of bald eagles, on the Chilkat River near Haines. And you can take non-birding companions along, too, for the chance of spectacular sightings of bears, whales, and other megafauna. **For more information:** [www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=trails\\_coastal\\_trail](http://www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=trails_coastal_trail) or contact the Alaska Division of Wildlife Conservation (907-465-4190).

