

Audubon's Field Guide to Birding Trails

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Delaware Birding Trail



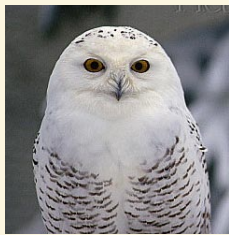
Despite its small size, Delaware encompasses six well-defined ecological regions. This trail takes in all of them, showing their contrasts and providing an education in ecology even as it entertains with great birding. Many of the trail's 27 sites are along the coastline, where beaches, tidal flats, and marshes offer an exciting diversity of birds year-round. Pale little **piping plovers** nest on the beaches, joined in spring and fall by busy flocks of other plovers and sandpipers, while migrating black terns, yellowlegs, stilts, and rails gather in the marshes. In winter great flocks of snow geese and ducks shelter in these same wetlands, and their thundering flights at dawn are reason enough for a cold-weather visit. If you can tear yourself away from the coast, Delaware's interior has stunning meadows and forests with their own treasures. The low hills along the state's northwestern edge contain songbirds typical of more northerly climes, like the soft-voiced veery and the sharply patterned blue-winged warbler. Southern tier pine flats are enlivened by gangs of spunky little brown-headed nuthatches, which reach the northernmost edge of their range here. For more information: www.delawarebirdingtrail.org or call (302-739-9912).

Maine Birding Trail



Anchoring the northern end of our Atlantic Coast, Maine is almost as large as all the rest of the New England states combined, with miles of wild coastline and vast tracts of wilderness offering plenty of room to roam. The state's birding trail is divided into 14 separate loops, showcasing the wide range of natural habitats. Many visitors will be eager to explore the north woods, looking for creatures more typical in Canadian boreal zones. Here you can find husky-voiced boreal chickadees, colorful pine grosbeaks, nomadic white-winged crossbills, and more. Those who are lucky enough to spot a famous spruce grouse will delight in how astonishingly tame this little forest chicken can be. Other trail loops weave through hardwood forests, wild rivers, blueberry barrens, beaver ponds, and coastal marshes. Of course, prominent among Maine's main attractions are the offshore islands, and this trail includes multiple departure points for boat trips heading out to seek seabirds like terns, guillemots, and the celebrated **Atlantic puffin**. Audubon scientists have succeeded in reintroducing puffins to several islands where they had vanished, so your chances of seeing this comical bird have improved in recent years. For more information: www.mainebirdingtrail.com or call (207-827-3782). www.projectpuffin.org

Essex National Heritage Area Birding Trail, Massachusetts



Essex County, Massachusetts, is not a huge tract of land, but it encompasses some of the country's most renowned birding spots. Inland forests and grasslands support a wide variety of nesting birds in summer, as well as long-distance migrants like brilliant scarlet tanagers and flashy black-and-buff bobolinks. Nearby, the coastal regions come into their own during spring and fall migration seasons and especially in winter. The riverfront at Newburyport is thronged with gulls and waterfowl during the colder months, while nearby Plum Island's dunes, fields, and marshes often play host to **snowy owls**, ghostly visitors from the Arctic. Rockport's stony coast offers superlative birding in winter: Little flocks of intricately patterned harlequin ducks hug the shoreline and seabirds like razorbills, kittiwakes, and gannets come in close to shore when the wind is right. For those who wish to pursue seabirds in their own element, this trail includes information on boat trips out to Stellwagen Bank, a marine sanctuary frequented by deep-water birds like shearwaters or storm-petrels (as well as whales). For more information: www.essexheritage.org/birding or contact the Essex National Heritage Commission (978-740-0444).

Connecticut River Birding Trail, New Hampshire And Vermont



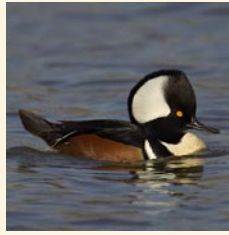
The Connecticut River's upper stretch marks the meandering border between these two New England states, and it also links a series of more than 120 fine birding sites on this trail. Many featured locations are in beautiful forests, and a visit in spring or summer will give you a chance to glimpse such colorful songbirds as rose-breasted grosbeaks, tiger-striped Cape May warblers, and fiery orange Blackburnian warblers. Away from the river, some upland forests are home to birds more typical of the far north. The bold, cheeky gray jays, sometimes called "camp robbers," are fearless birds that may fly up to greet you, but you'll probably have to search to find the quiet and elusive black-backed woodpecker. The region also features many pristine wetlands. In addition to the Connecticut River itself, a favored migratory route for various waterfowl, there are marshes where chunky American bitterns stalk among the reeds and ponds that also host great flocks of ducks during their migrations in spring and fall. Worth seeking out on a special trip are those larger lakes where **common loons** come to spend the nesting season, filling the summer nights with their wild mournful yodeling. For more information: www.ctriverbirdingtrail.org or call (802) 785-2855

New Jersey Birding and Wildlife Trails



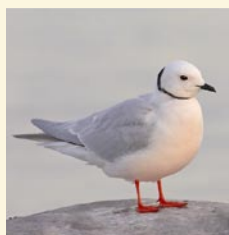
Developed by the New Jersey Audubon Society, these trails reveal the Garden State's remarkably rich birdlife. One completed route winds through Cape May and the southern Delaware Bay shore, comprising one of the continent's most famous regions for observing migratory birds. The massive flocks of **red knots** and other shorebirds that gather here in spring have drawn both international acclaim and focused conservation concern. The autumn flights of raptors at Cape May are world-class, offering glimpses of everything from speedy little sharp-shinned hawks to powerful peregrine falcons and huge golden eagles. Farther north, another completed trail shines a spotlight on a very different region, the Meadowlands in northeastern New Jersey. Just a few miles from the heart of New York City, the Meadowlands play host to more than 200 bird species, from great blue herons and bald eagles to colorful little warblers and goldfinches. Other trails are in the works. Almost ready for launch are the Skylands Trails in New Jersey's northwestern highlands. Here cool evergreen forests cradle nesting birds of northern affinities, like blue-headed vireo singing their short whistled phrases and northern waterthrushes teetering back and forth alongside creeks. For more information: www.njwildlifetrails.org or contact New Jersey Audubon Society www.njaudubon.org (908-204-8998).

Lake Champlain Birding Trail, New York And Vermont



At more than 100 miles long, and once briefly classified as one of the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain is an impressive body of water separating Vermont from northern New York. Local opinion is divided as to whether it really has its own Loch Ness-type monster—named "Champ"—but it does have a mammoth birding trail, identifying 88 superb spots near the shoreline and uplands on both sides of the lake. Visit in summer and you'll find sky-blue eastern bluebirds along the fencerows, sharply patterned bobolinks singing their bubbling songs over the meadows, and wood thrushes delivering their haunting flute solos from deep in the forest shadows. Hooded mergansers, small ducks with elegant crests, nest in the wooded swamps in summer and gather on the open lake during migration seasons, when they are joined by flocks of snow geese, goldeneyes, and many more waterfowl. Winter brings a different set of birds to the Champlain Valley, and if you come here for a cold-weather adventure you may get to enjoy such northern creatures as snowy owls, snow buntings, and rough-legged hawks— even if Champ fails to surface. For more information: www.lakechamplainbirding.org or contact Lake Champlain Birding Trail (802-747-7900).

Audubon Niagara Birding Trail, New York



Tourists and honeymooners descend on Niagara Falls mostly during the warm seasons, but birders flock here in late fall and winter for the gulls. Near the end of November more than 100,000 gulls representing in excess of a dozen species may be present simultaneously on the Niagara river near the falls. Most will be common species, such as boisterous herring gulls and dainty little Bonaparte's gulls, but there is usually a scattering of uncommon birds like pale Iceland gulls or even mega-rarities like the pinkish Ross's gull from Siberia. After donning your parka and gloves, you will also be rewarded with thousands of ducks, such as canvasbacks, scaup, red-heads, goldeneyes, and mergansers. And the good birding carries over into spring, because the Audubon Niagara Birding Trail takes in a variety of sites away from the falls, including forests, meadows, and swamps— all with a rich variety of nesting birds. A focal point is the steep-sided canyon at Letchworth State Park, where birds of the far north can be found living in this cool and shady microclimate. For more information: www.buffaloudubon.com/publications/BuffaloAudubonNatureTourism.pdf or contact Buffalo Audubon Society (585-457-3228).

Susquehanna River Birding & Wildlife Trail, Pennsylvania



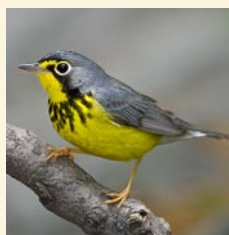
Developed by Audubon Pennsylvania, this ambitious trail is centered on the mighty Susquehanna River but it spreads out to take in more than 200 sites in 39 counties, with detailed directions and bird-finding information. Much of central Pennsylvania is covered with extensive and magnificent forestland, a stronghold for such spectacular birds as richly hued scarlet tanagers, flashy rose-breasted grosbeaks, and big, bold pileated woodpeckers. Ridges that run from northeast to southwest through Pennsylvania serve as a migratory route for birds of prey in fall, and this trail will lead you to some of the best vantage points, such as the world-famous Hawk Mountain Sanctuary. Hit this ridge on the right day in fall and you might see sharp-shinned hawks by the hundreds or broad-winged hawks by the thousands sailing by on updrafts from the valleys below. Of course, many water birds follow the Susquehanna itself during migration, stopping over on the river or on nearby marshes and lakes. Shorebirds, gulls, terns, herons, and egrets are all regular visitors. Great noisy flights of tundra swans furnish a major annual spectacle here in late fall and early spring as they follow the river to and from wintering grounds on Chesapeake Bay. For more information: <http://web1.audubon.org/trailMaps/> or contact Audubon Pennsylvania (717-213-6880).

Rhode Island Coastal Birding Trail



Rhode Islanders have heard every cliché about their state's small size, but they know they can find big numbers of birds without venturing beyond their borders. This trail features seven prime sites, including two National Wildlife Refuges, as well as a number of parks and wildlife management areas. In salt marshes near the beach, seaside sparrows and clapper rails are among the prized finds for keen birders, and even a casual observer can appreciate the northern harriers that might be seen in low, slow flight as they hunt over the coastal marshes at any time of year. Along the shoreline the birding may be at its best in winter. On rocky headlands you might spot the dark silhouettes of so-called purple sandpipers, while gulls of several species wheel overhead. Just off the coast you'll enjoy wintering flocks of common eiders, big hardy sea-ducks famed for the insulating properties of their down feathers. Not so famous but also present are other kinds of seafaring ducks, such as white-winged scoters and common mergansers, while clusters of black-and-white patterned long-tailed ducks may be on display flying farther offshore. Travel this trail and experience its birds and you'll agree that good things do come in small packages. For more information: http://friendsnwr-ri.org/birding_trail/ricat_description.pdf (401-364-9124).

Virginia Birding And Wildlife Trail



One of the first states to develop a statewide birding trail, Virginia set a model for others by dividing its natural riches into three distinct regions, each with its own loop. The coastal section has a southern climate and a southern flavor to its birdlife. Along the beaches and barrier islands, stocky brown Wilson's plovers run across the sand, shrill-voiced royal terns circle overhead, and squadrons of brown pelicans glide above the waves, just as they would along a beach in Florida. There's a completely different feel to the state's western mountains, where you may find nesting birds typical of farther north, such as the colorful Canada warbler singing from the rhododendron thickets and the shy brown veery giving its spiraling airy whistles from moist ravines among the maples. Between the mountains and the coast, the rivers, meadows, and great forests of oak and pine will produce a plethora of colorful birds in all seasons, from eastern bluebirds and red-bellied woodpeckers to rich fox-colored brown thrashers. Wild turkeys have become numerous again, and small groups of them may be seen stalking along the edges of woodlots and fields, just as they did when the first colonists arrived. For more information: www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt or contact Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries (804-367-1000).