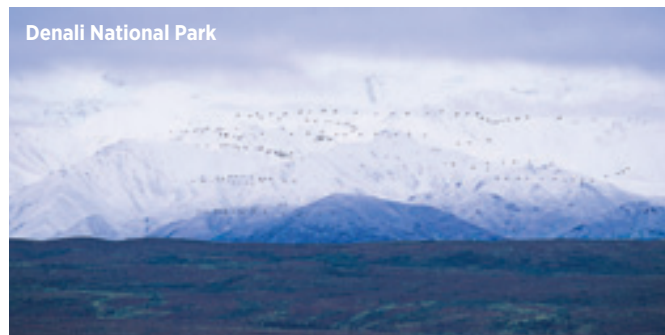


Of all the innovations the United States has given to the world, few have been so universally inspiring as the concept of our national parks. These are protected places where the public is not just welcome but actually encouraged to visit. The national park designation tells us we should treasure these lands. And we do.

These vast tracts hold obvious scenic wonders. It may be less obvious that they also hold habitat that is vital for the survival of bird populations. When I started traveling as a bird-crazed teenager, I gravitated to the national parks. Besides America's most magnificent landscapes, I found birds galore; from the eiders of Acadia to the owls of Yosemite, from lordly wood storks in the Everglades to tiny Arctic warblers in Denali, I was never disappointed. And you won't be either. Here are a dozen of my personal favorite parks for birding.—KENN KAUFMAN



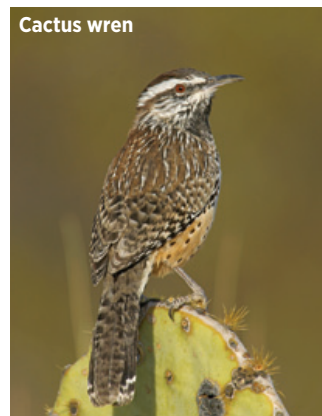
### DENALI NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE ALASKA

You'll likely be distracted by larger things, like moose, grizzlies, and herds of caribou—not to mention looming, cloud-shrouded Denali itself, also called Mount McKinley, this continent's highest peak. But if you can tear your gaze away from the obvious attractions, you will be rewarded with many smaller gems of the feathered variety. Wooded areas near the park's eastern edge host a full complement of boreal forest birds, and a search might turn up sleek Bohemian waxwings, active small gangs of boreal chickadees, or even the fast-flying, fierce-looking northern hawk owl. Dense thickets of willow and alder along streams, such as Sanctuary River or Igloo Creek, provide a summer home for the plain-looking but loud-voiced Arctic warbler. The road through the park's center crosses long stretches of tundra habitat, with a whole set of special birds. Long-tailed jaegers, graceful seabirds that seem oddly out of place so far from the ocean, nest on the open hills, and chunky rock ptarmigans lurk in rocky patches. Denali's tundra is the most accessible spot for Americans to see the northern wheatear, a dapper little Old World thrush that nests here. You might spot a golden eagle or even the mighty gyrfalcon, putting the focus back on larger things after all. For more information: [nps.gov/dena/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/dena/naturescience/birds.htm); call 907-683-9532 for general park information.

### SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK ARIZONA

Two major sections of this park flank Tucson. The eastern part includes most of the higher slopes of the Rincon Mountains, with cool pine forests accessible only to sturdy hikers. The lowlands in the park's eastern and western sections—magnificent examples of Sonoran Desert—will enthrall less intrepid visitors. The desert's plant diversity is astonishing, and it supports a remarkable variety of birdlife. Boldly patterned gilded flickers and Gila wood-

peckers excavate their nesting cavities in tall saguaro cacti. Many other birds, from tiny elf owls to noisy brown-crested flycatchers, take up residence in these natural birdhouses once the primary occupants move out. Despite their prickly exterior, many other kinds of cacti sustain birds. Curve-billed thrashers and big, boldly spotted cactus wrens, Arizona's state bird, nest in spiny, low-growing chollas. Groves of thorny mesquite trees and green-barked paloverdes grow along desert arroyos, where pallid diminutive Lucy's warblers live in spring and summer



and sleek, glossy phainopeplas all year-round. The American Southwest's emblematic bird, the dapper little Old World thrush that nests here, is common throughout the park's lower elevations. You can see it streaking across open flats or pausing at the edge of a thicket to raise and lower its shaggy crest. For more information: [nps.gov/sagu/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/sagu/naturescience/birds.htm); call 520-733-5153 for general park information.



Rocky Mountain National Park

### YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK CALIFORNIA

A place of jaw-dropping grandeur, Yosemite was designated a national park in 1890, making it one of the first, and it remains among the most heavily visited. Yosemite icons like El Capitan, Half Dome, and the giant sequoias have been pictured millions of times on postcards and picture books. What goes less noticed are the park's birds. Within Yosemite Valley, the yellow-and-black western tanager is common in summer among the oaks, pines, and firs—contrasting with big, dark Steller's jays, which are present all year. Northern pygmy-owls, small but fierce, range through the forest day and night, their presence often revealed by the alarm calls of cacti sustain birds. Curve-billed thrashers and big, boldly spotted cactus wrens, Arizona's state bird, nest in spiny, low-growing chollas. Groves of thorny mesquite trees and green-barked paloverdes grow along desert arroyos, where pallid diminutive Lucy's warblers live in spring and summer

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### ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK COLORADO

This park, appropriately enough, has a higher average elevation than any other, with heights ranging from 7,800 feet to more than 14,250 feet, and more than one-third of the park is above treeline. Trail Ridge Road, which crosses the park from east to west (and is closed by snow from mid-fall to early summer), passes through many miles of alpine tundra, affording visitors an unparalleled view of this treeless, hummocky habitat. Come in summer to seek

the elusive white-tailed ptarmigan, a master of camouflage that hides in plain sight on the tundra, as well as brown-capped rosy-finches and a number of other mountaintop birds. Be sure to make multiple stops at lower elevations after birding at these dizzying heights. At roadside pullouts surrounded by spruces and firs, flashy Clark's nutcrackers give harsh calls from exposed snags, while little flocks of gray jays go trooping through the trees. In the lower elevations on the park's eastern side, birds abound in the lush habitats of spots like Endoavally, Sheep Lakes, and Beaver Meadow. Strikingly patterned Williamson's sapsuckers and red-naped sapsuckers nest in the sun-washed aspen groves, while broad-tailed hummingbirds stop among riotous displays of flowers in the open meadows. For more information: [nps.gov/romo/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/romo/naturescience/birds.htm); call 970-586-1206 for general park information.

### EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK FLORIDA

Many national parks were designated because of their spectacular scenery, but Everglades was the first set aside, in 1947, specifically to protect unique natural habitats and wildlife. Vast, shallow, slow-moving sheets of water occupy Florida's southern tip, flowing gradually southward through plains of sawgrass. Breaking the flow are islands of higher ground supporting cypress stands, pine groves with dense palmetto understory, or tangles of tropical hardwood trees known locally as "hammocks." Begin your Everglades experience at the Royal Palm Hammock. Here, at the

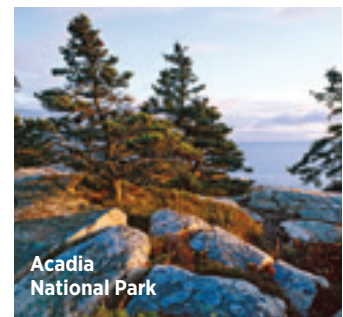


Anhinga Trail, a boardwalk bisects an open marsh where wildlife has become accustomed to human crowds and birds have taken center stage, luring generations of watchers. The trail's namesake anhingas twist and turn their snaky necks to peer at visitors, while purple gallinules, looking outlandish with their gaudy colors and big yellow feet, go tromping around on lily pads. Egrets and other wading birds are abundant here and all along the park road, down to its end, where the road cuts through dense tangled stands of mangroves

before reaching the Flamingo Visitor Center. Pelicans and shorebirds—but surprisingly not flamingoes—cruise over the bay just offshore. Overhead in early spring, you might spot the swallow-tailed kite, whose elegant shape and pattern may well make it the world's most beautiful raptor, as it swoops and soars over the 'glades. For more information: [nps.gov/ever/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/ever/naturescience/birds.htm); call 305-242-7700 for general park information.

### ACADIA NATIONAL PARK MAINE

Some of the most spectacularly scenic stretches of the cool, salty Maine coastline—from the waves



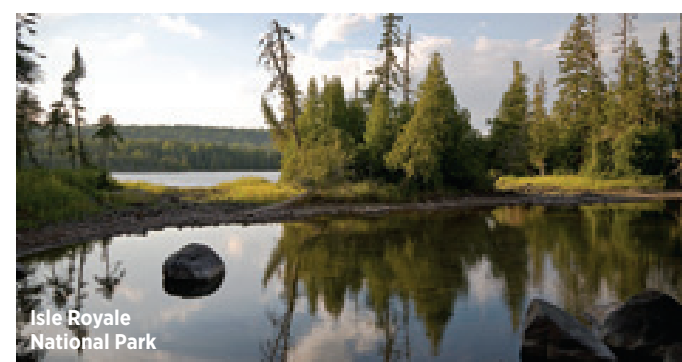
Acadia National Park

that crash on rockbound shores to the Bay of Fundy's dramatic tides rushing in and out of inlets and bays—are protected in Acadia. Sites like Otter Point, the Seawall, and the Schoodic Peninsula provide wonderful views of big cold-water sea-ducks like common eiders that loaf just offshore. Small black guillemots, dark with white wing patches, pop to the surface and then dive again. Bald eagles might glide overhead at any time, and sometimes huge northern gannets, long-winged birds with spearlike bills, come winging in from the outer bay close to shore. In summer the best birding is in Acadia's forests. Southern hardwoods like oak and maple mix with habitats more typical of the far north, such as spruce-fir forest and birch groves, supporting a rich variety of nesting songbirds. More than 20 warbler species nest there, and birders hiking the trails at Sieur de Monts Spring or Cadillac Mountain are likely to be serenaded by the buzzy cadences of black-throated green and black-throated blue warblers, the snappy melodies of chestnut-sided, Nashville, or magnolia warblers, and many, many others. For more information: [nps.gov/acad/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/acad/naturescience/birds.htm); call 207-288-3338 for general park information.

### GLACIER NATIONAL PARK MONTANA

This park's namesake glaciers are now only remnants, but evidence of their mighty sculpting powers is everywhere, with craggy ridges, deep valleys, and jumbled moraines reflecting the work done in eons past. The most fascinating sights can be found along streams that rush down steep, shady gorges through the forest, such as along

McDonald Creek. Our only aquatic songbird, the slaty, chunky American dipper, thrives in these turbulent waters, plunging into the torrent and then popping out to bob up and down on rocks. Tough, strikingly patterned harlequin ducks live in the same rushing streams, swimming against the current or twirling on backwater eddies. Where streams plunge over cliffs, the rare black swift may build its nest behind the waterfall, sites that are inaccessible to ordinary mortals. Near their nests, watch the swifts speed high over the valleys or swoop low over lakes. The main highway across the park's high central crest, the Going-to-the-Sun Road, is named for a local peak, but the title seems appropriate where the road breaks out of the forest to the tundra above treeline. Find rare specialties such as the chunky little gray-crowned rosy-finch among the spectacular vistas. For more information: [nps.gov/glac/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/glac/naturescience/birds.htm); call 406-888-7800 for general park information.



Isle Royale National Park

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### CUYAHOGA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK OHIO

Practically an urban park sandwiched between Cleveland and Akron, Cuyahoga Valley offers a touch of wilderness experience close to millions of people. The Cuyahoga River winds through the park's center for 22 miles, bounded by steep valley walls and fed by springs and streams, some of which cascade into the river over sandstone ledges. Spring and summer are the best times to visit. Magnificent forests that line the river and stand atop the surrounding ledges supply the perfect breeding habitat for many migratory birds. In forest dominated by stately oaks and hickories, lucky observers may

spot brilliant scarlet tanagers in the treetops, or broad-winged hawks wheeling ever higher overhead, while the rich fluting songs of wood thrushes come from the undergrowth. Sycamore and maple stands along the streams furnish a stronghold for the sky-blue cerulean warbler, a threatened species throughout its range, and for the more widespread yellow-throated warbler. Areas of second-growth support buzzy-voiced blue-winged warblers, while open meadows hold grasshopper sparrows and



bobolinks. Great blue herons have nesting colonies along the river, their rickety stick nests balanced precariously in the treetops. Bald eagles recently have begun to nest in the park as well. For more information: [nps.gov/cuva/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/cuva/naturescience/birds.htm); call 216-524-1497 for general park information.

### GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK TENNESSEE / NORTH CAROLINA

The Smokies hold some of the largest virgin forest tracts in the eastern United States, and some of the richest in botanical terms: More than 100 species of trees and a great variety of shrubs, ferns, and other plants fill the landscape. Walking among towering hem-



locks, beeches, and tulip trees is like stepping back two centuries to glimpse the primeval American wilderness that existed during Daniel Boone's time. In the park's higher elevations, you'll see habitats and birds typical of more northerly climates. This is especially true in the mix of breeding birds in summer. Along the crest of the Smokies, spruce and fir forests contain a

whole suite of nesting birds with Canadian connections, such as tiny golden-crowned kinglets, red-breasted nuthatches, and the fiery orange-and-black Blackburnian warbler. The heights are covered in rhododendron thickets, home to secretive black-throated blue warblers. Middle-elevation maple, beech, and oak forests support populations of brilliant scarlet tanagers and soft-voiced veeries. Among the hardwoods and along creeks in the lower valleys, southern birds like dapper hooded warblers and Kentucky warblers sing from the undergrowth. For more information: [nps.gov/grsm/naturescience/birds.htm](http://nps.gov/grsm/naturescience/birds.htm); call 865-436-1200 for general park information.

### BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK TEXAS

Serious birders visiting Big Bend in summer have one bird at the top of their "most wanted" lists: the Colima warbler, a subtle gray-and-



yellow gem that reaches the United States only in this park. Pursuing this species requires a long hike to high elevations of the Chisos Mountains, but the payoff includes inspiring vistas of this rugged range. Other summer visitors to the cool woods include flashy big blue-throated hummingbirds, raucous acorn woodpeckers, and brick-red hepatic tanagers. For more casual hikers, trails among the Chisos Basin's scrubby oaks offer looks at big blue Mexican jays, Scott's orioles with their rich yellow tones and varied whistles, and spotted towhees scratching in dry leaves under the thickets. A careful search may turn up a black-capped vireo chortling in the scrub or a rare Lucifer hummingbird zooming about the flowering agaves. In winter, bird the park's lower elevations. Sharply patterned black-throated sparrows and pyrrhuloxias are common in the open desert scrub, while Cottonwood Campground, Rio Grande Village, and other areas on the river at the park's southern boundary host a rich variety of wintering songbirds. For more information: [nps.gov/bibe/playyourvisit/birding.htm](http://nps.gov/bibe/playyourvisit/birding.htm); call 432-477-2251 for general park information.

### GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK WYOMING

This park is somewhat overshadowed by Yellowstone, its famous neighbor, but it provides a vast array of birdlife, not to mention the stunning peaks it's named for. Concentrate on the lowland valleys east of the mountains, where rivers, lakes, and marshy ponds comprise a refuge for a plethora of nesting waterfowl, including the magnificent trumpeter swan, one of North America's largest native birds, measuring five feet from bill to tail, and a lot of ducks, such as wigwag, teal, gadwalls, and mallards. Extensive lodgepole pine forests make for fine hiking and some birding. But there is more action in open sites. Willow thickets, such as those at Willow Flats or Oxbow Bend, ring with birdsong in summer, from the rich whistles of fox sparrows to the quick chants of MacGillivray and Wilson's warblers. In nearby meadows the sky-blue mountain bluebird may be seen perched on weed stalks.



In hillside stands of chalky-barked quaking aspen, tree swallows and violet-green swallows flutter in and out of nest sites in old woodpecker holes, while western wood-pewees give nasal whistles from among the foliage. Ambitious birders may hike to the high tundra home of the rare black rosy-finch, as beautiful as its name would imply. For more information: [nps.gov/grte/playyourvisit/birding.htm](http://nps.gov/grte/playyourvisit/birding.htm); call 307-739-3300 for general park information.

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Trumpeter swan