Wisconsin Birding Hotspots


**Wisconsin’s Top 10 Birding Sites**

**Wisconsin Point – Superior: Migration**
During migration, bad weather can ground hundreds, even thousands, of migrant birds on this two-mile-long peninsula that juts into Lake Superior. Loons, ducks, grebes, gulls, terns and shorebirds use the lake and Allouez Bay, while hawks, flycatchers, vireos, warblers, sparrows and finches are found in the wooded and grassy sections.

**Crex Meadows Wildlife Area: Nesting**
Located just north of Grantsburg in western Burnett County, Crex Meadows comprises over 30,000 acres. It is known not only for its nesting species and rarities, but also for its accessibility – two county highways and over 40 miles of town roads allow access to many of the dikes and flowages. Habitat includes wetlands and brush-prairie. Highly recommended stops include Phantom Lake Flowage for Trumpeter Swans, Ospreys, Common Loons, Soras, Virginia Rails, Red-necked Grebes and Black Terns; the refuge, located in the center of the area, for Sharp-tailed Grouse and Bald Eagles; and, from mid-May to early July, the pumphouse section of Reed’s Lake sedge marsh for Yellow Rails, Le Conte’s Sparrows, Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrows, American Bitterns and Sandhill Cranes. Nearby Fish Lake Wildlife Area, three miles south of Grantsburg, has similar habitats, birds and accessibility.

**Nicolet National Forest – Three Lakes: Year Round**
In addition to the forest itself, numerous lakes, swamps, bogs and marshes dot the landscape. Some of these wet areas are thickly overgrown with black spruce, cedar, tamarack, alder and willow. During summer, more than 20 warbler species are present. Other interesting resident birds include Black-backed Woodpeckers, Spruce Grouse, Boreal Chickadees, Gray Jays and varying numbers of winter finches. “Must-stops” in this extensive area include Thunder Lake Marsh; Three Lakes (Old A) Bog; Pine, Shelp and Scott lakes; and various forestry roads (2174, 2178, 2182, 2183, 2414) that bisect the forest to the north of Hiles and east of Three Lakes.

**Green Bay Area: Year Round**
The location of the city of Green Bay at the end of the bay makes it a migrant trap. The diversity of habitat – open water, marshes, swamps, woods and fields – ensures an excellent variety of birds. Depending on the season, expect to see Snowy Owls, Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, Gray Partridges, Peregrine Falcons, American White Pelicans, egrets, shorebirds, gulls, terns and songbirds. Recommended stops include the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary, the mouth of the Fox River, Ken Euers Natural Area, L. H. Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve and the Sensiba Wildlife Area.

**Horicon Marsh: Year Round**
The largest cattail wetland in the country, Horicon Marsh comprises 32,000 acres. The southern third is managed by the state, while the remainder is a national wildlife refuge. The marsh is most famous for its fall concentration of Canada Geese, numbering over 200,000 birds, but it is also famous for its diversity of migrant and nesting bird species. Breeding species include bitterns, herons, waterfowl, rails, pelicans, cormorants, terns and various songbirds. When water levels are controlled for shorebirds, the number and variety can be outstanding. Accessibility is limited in the wildlife refuge, and some areas are closed or designated for restricted use only. Birding sites include the Auto Tour Route and hiking trails, Old Marsh Road (open only on summer weekends at this writing), Ledge Road, the main dike, the DNR Field Office and trails, and points along Highway 49, which cuts across the northern part of the marsh. The Auto Tour Route and main dike are scheduled to be closed from September 15 to April 15, but check for accessibility during those times. Visit also nearby Ledge Park.

**Wyalusing State Park: Migration, Nesting**
Overlooking the confluence of the Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers, Wyalusing encompasses nearly 2,700 acres of hardwood forests, pine plantations and wetlands. Nesting species include Kentucky, Cerulean, Hooded, Prothonotary, Yellow-throated and Worm-eating warblers, Louisiana Waterthrushes, Acadian Flycatchers, Red-shouldered Hawks, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Pileated Woodpeckers and Bell’s Vireos. The songbird migration can be outstanding, especially during May, with lesser numbers in September, and the hawk migration is often quite good during September and October. All roads and trails are potentially good for birding, but the Homestead and Wisconsin Ridge campgrounds and Long Valley Road to the boat landing should be checked out. Drive the latter slowly or, even better, walk its length to truly enjoy the May chorus of migrants or the summer serenade of nesting species.

**Baraboo Hills Area: Year Round**
Nestled in the Baraboo Range, Devil’s Lake State Park and the adjacent gorge contain a blend of southern and northern nesters. The park is mainly oak forest with a red maple understory, but because of the bluffs that abut Devil’s Lake there are also sugar maple forest interspersed with birch, pine and cedar groves, areas of dry prairie on the bluff tops, and marshes and abandoned farmlands. Summer residents include Broad-winged Hawks, Turkey Vultures, Wood Thrushes, Yellow-throated Vireos, Winter Wrens and Scarlet Tanagers. Migrations can produce excellent songbird waves. During almost every winter it is possible to find Townsend’s Solitaires along the eastern bluff.
Baxter’s Hollow is a wooded, rocky gorge that follows Otter Creek, with a deciduous forest on its northern edge. A narrow paved road provides access to most of the area, although it is best to walk the entire length (the road is not maintained in winter). Summer residents include Acadian Flycatchers, Louisiana Waterthrushes, Pileated Woodpeckers, Yellow-throated Warblers, Worm-eating Warblers and Winter Wrens. The gorge is best birded between May and September.

**Madison Area: Migration**

Birding is excellent at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum, which borders Lake Mendota – in particular Picnic Point, which extends out into the lake. Visit also University Bay and Marshall Park, Lake Monona, the Yahara River flowing into Lower Mud Lake, Nine Springs sewage ponds and Cherokee Marsh. Migration is the optimum time for viewing waterfowl and songbirds, especially during spring.

**Eastern Ozaukee County: Migration, Winter**

Bordering Lake Michigan, eastern Ozaukee County has excellent areas for watching migrants and wintering birds. Songbirds can be found in the wooded areas, while waterfowl, gulls and terns use the lake. During fall, the hawk flight along the bluffs that border the lake can be impressive. Important birding sites include Virmond Park for waterfowl and songbirds, Concordia University for hawks and waterfowl, Port Washington Harbor for waterfowl and gulls, and Harrington Beach State Park for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns and songbirds.

**Milwaukee Area: Migration, Winter**

Most of the best birding sites are along or near Lake Michigan. During migration, waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns and songbirds often rest in the area during their treks. In winter the lake harbor and breakwalls hold varying numbers of waterfowl and gulls. Excellent sites include the 225-acre Schlitz Audubon Nature Center and adjacent Doctor’s Park, Lake and South Shore parks, Bradford Beach, North Point, McKinley Marina, and Milwaukee Harbor and Coast Guard Impoundment.

**Wisconsin’s Top 50 Birding Sites**

1. Wisconsin Point – Superior
2. Brule River
3. Port Wing – Herbst – Cornucopia
4. Ashland – Fish Creek
5. Crex Meadows Wildlife Area and Fish
   Lake Wildlife Area
   Lakes
7. Seagull Bar – Red Arrow Park
8. Northern Door County
9. Meridean area
10. Eau Claire area
11. Lake Wissota State Park
12. Wausau area
13. Mead Wildlife Area
14. Stockbridge-Munsee and Menominee
    reservations
15. Green Bay area
16. Eastern Kewaunee County
17. Western Buffalo County
18. Bear Bluff area
19. Stevens Point area
20. Baena Vista Grasslands
21. Shiocton – Black Creek – New London
22. Rat River Wildlife Area
23. Fox Cities area
24. High Cliff State Park
25. Manitowoc and Two Rivers area
26. Cleveland – Fischer Creek County Park
27. Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge
28. La Crosse area
29. Upper Mississippi National Wildlife
    Refuge
30. Necedah National Wildlife Refuge
31. Green Lake County
32. Kettle Moraine State Forest, North Unit
33. Sheboygan area
34. Spring Green Reserve
35. Devil’s Lake State Park and Baxter’s
    Hollow
36. Mud Lake Wildlife Area and Grassy Lake
    Wildlife Area
37. Arlington ponds
38. Beaver Dam ponds
39. Horicon Marsh
40. Theresa Marsh
41. Eastern Ozaukee County
42. Wyalusing State Park
43. Governor Dodge State Park
44. Madison area
45. Brooklyn Wildlife Area
46. Sugar River – Beloit – Janesville
47. Kettle Moraine State Forest, South Unit
48. Vernon Marsh
49. Milwaukee area
50. Racine area

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