Birding in the Missoula and Bitterroot Valleys

Five Valleys and Bitterroot Audubon Society Chapters are grassroots volunteer organizations of Montana Audubon and the National Audubon Society. We promote understanding, respect, and enjoyment of birds and the natural world through education, habitat protection, and environmental advocacy.

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Bird Species of West-central Montana (most vagrants excluded)

Relative abundance in suitable habitat by season are:

c - common to abundant, usually found on every visit in moderate to large numbers

u - uncommon, usually present in low numbers but may be missed

o - occasional, seen only a few times during the season, not present in all suitable habitat

r - rare, one to low numbers occur but not every year

Status:

B - Direct evidence of breeding

b - Indirect evidence of breeding

t - No evidence of breeding

Season of occurrence:

W - Winter, mid-November to mid-February

Sp - Spring, mid-February to mid-May

Su - Summer, mid-May to mid-August

F - Fall, mid-August to mid-November

This list follows the seventh edition of the AOU check-list.

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
_ Common Loon	B	r	c	u	c
_ Pied-billed Grebe	B	r	c	c	u
_ Horned Grebe	B	r	c	c	u
_ Red-necked Grebe	B	r	c	c	u
_ Eared Grebe	B	r	c	u	u
_ Western Grebe	B	r	c	c	c
_ Clark's Grebe	t	r	o	o	r
_ American White Pelican	t		o	r	o
_ Double-crested Cormorant	B	r	c	c	u
_ American Bittern	B	r	u	u	u
_ Great Blue Heron	B	c	c	c	c
_ Great Egret	t		r	r	
_ Black-crowned Night-Heron	t		r	r	
_ White-faced Ibis	t		o		
_ Turkey Vulture	B		c	c	u
_ Tundra Swan	t	r	c	r	u
_ Trumpeter Swan	t	r	o		r
_ Greater White-fronted Goose	t		r		r
_ Snow Goose	t	r	u		u
_ Ross's Goose	t		o		o
_ Canada Goose	B	c	c	c	c
_ Wood Duck	B	r	c	c	c
_ Green-winged Teal	B	u	c	c	c
_ Mallard	B	c	c	c	c
_ Northern Pintail	B	u	c	c	c
_ Blue-winged Teal	B	r	c	c	o
_ Cinnamon Teal	B	o	c	c	o
_ Northern Shoveler	B	o	c	c	c
_ Gadwall	B	u	c	c	c
_ Eurasian Wigeon	t		o		
_ American Wigeon	B	u	c	c	c
_ Canvasback	B	o	c	c	c
_ Redhead	B	o	c	c	c
_ Ring-necked Duck	B	o	c	u	c
_ Greater Scaup	t	o	o		o
_ Lesser Scaup	B	o	c	c	c
_ Harlequin Duck	B		r	r	r
_ Long-tailed Duck	t	r			r
_ Surf Scoter	t	r	r		r
_ White-winged Scoter	t	r	r		r
_ Common Goldeneye	B	c	c	c	c
_ Barrow's Goldeneye	B	u	c	c	c
_ Bufflehead	B	o	c	u	c
_ Hooded Merganser	B	o	c	c	c
_ Common Merganser	B	c	c	c	c
_ Red-breasted Merganser	t		o		o
_ Ruddy Duck	B		c	c	c
_ Osprey	B		c	c	c
_ Bald Eagle	B	c	c	c	c
_ Northern Harrier	B	u	c	c	c
_ Sharp-shinned Hawk	B	u	u	u	u
_ Cooper's Hawk	B	u	u	u	u
_ Northern Goshawk	B	u	u	u	u
_ Swainson's Hawk	B		u	u	u
_ Red-tailed Hawk	B	c	c	c	c
_ Ferruginous Hawk	t	r	r		r
_ Rough-legged Hawk	t	c	c		c
_ Golden Eagle	B	u	u	u	u
_ American Kestrel	B	c	c	c	c
_ Merlin	B	u	u	r	u
_ Peregrine Falcon	B	o	o	o	o
_ Gyrfalcon	t	r			r
_ Prairie Falcon	B	u	u	u	u
_ Gray Partridge	B	c	c	c	c
_ Chukar	B	r	r	r	r
_ Ring-necked Pheasant	B	c	c	c	c
_ Spruce Grouse	B	o	o	o	o
_ Blue Grouse	B	c	c	c	c
_ White-tailed Ptarmigan	B	r	r	r	r
_ Ruffed Grouse	B	c	c	c	c
_ Sharp-tailed Grouse	B	r	r	r	r
_ Wild Turkey	B	u	u	u	u
_ Virginia Rail	B	u	u	u	u
_ Sora	B	r	c	c	c
_ American Coot	B	u	c	c	c
_ Sandhill Crane	B		u	u	u
_ Black-bellied Plover	t		o		o
_ American Golden-Plover	t				r
_ Semipalmated Plover	t		u		u
_ Killdeer	B	u	c	c	c
_ Black-necked Stilt	b		o	o	
_ American Avocet	B		c	c	c
_ Greater Yellowlegs	t		c	c	c
_ Lesser Yellowlegs	t		c	c	c
_ Solitary Sandpiper	t		u	u	u
_ Willet	t		r		r
_ Spotted Sandpiper	B		c	c	c
_ Upland Sandpiper	B			r	
_ Long-billed Curlew	B		u	u	u
_ Marbled Godwit	t		o	r	r
_ Sanderling	t		r		r
_ Semipalmated Sandpiper	t		u	c	c
_ Western Sandpiper	t		u	u	u
_ Least Sandpiper	t		c	c	u
_ Baird's Sandpiper	t		u	c	c
_ Pectoral Sandpiper	t		o	u	u
_ Dunlin	t		r		r

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
_ Stilt Sandpiper	t			o	o
_ Short-billed Dowitcher	t		r		r
_ Long-billed Dowitcher	t		u	c	c
_ Common Snipe	B	c	c	c	c
_ Wilson's Phalarope	B		c	c	c
_ Red-necked Phalarope	t		u		u
_ Red Phalarope	t				r
_ Franklin's Gull	t		r	r	
_ Bonaparte's Gull	t		u		u
_ Mew Gull	t	r			
_ Ring-billed Gull	B	c	c	c	c
_ California Gull	B	u	c	c	u
_ Herring Gull	t	u	r		r
_ Thayer's Gull	t	r			
_ Glaucous Gull	t	r			
_ Sabine's Gull	t				r
_ Caspian Tern	B		u	o	u
_ Common Tern	B		u	u	
_ Forster's Tern	B		u	u	
_ Black Tern	B		c	c	
_ Rock Dove	B	c	c	c	c
_ Band-tailed Pigeon	t		r	r	
_ Mourning Dove	B	u	c	c	c
_ Black-billed Cuckoo	t			r	
_ Barn Owl	B	r	r	r	r
_ Flammulated Owl	B			u	u
_ Western Screech-Owl	B	u	u	u	u
_ Great Horned Owl	B	c	c	c	c
_ Snowy Owl	t	o			
_ Northern Hawk Owl	t	r			
_ Northern Pygmy-Owl	B	u	u	u	u
_ Burrowing Owl	t		r		r
_ Barred Owl	B	u	u	u	u
_ Great Gray Owl	B	o	o	o	o
_ Long-eared Owl	B	u	u	u	u
_ Short-eared Owl	B	u	u	u	u
_ Boreal Owl	B	o	o	o	o
_ Northern Saw-whet Owl	B	u	u	u	u
_ Common Nighthawk	B			c	
_ Common Poorwill	b			r	
_ Black Swift	B			u	r
_ Vaux's Swift	B		c	c	u
_ White-throated Swift	B		c	c	u
_ Black-chinned Hummingbird	B		u	u	
_ Anna's Hummingbird	t	r			r
_ Calliope Hummingbird	B		c	c	
_ Broad-tailed Hummingbird	t			r	
_ Rufous Hummingbird	B		c	c	
_ Belted Kingfisher	B	u	c	c	c
_ Lewis's Woodpecker	B	r	c	c	c
_ Red-naped Sapsucker	B		c	c	c
_ Williamson's Sapsucker	B		u	u	u
_ Downy Woodpecker	B	c	c	c	c
_ Hairy Woodpecker	B	c	c	c	c
_ Three-toed Woodpecker	B	u	u	u	u
_ Black-backed Woodpecker	B	u	u	u	u
_ Northern Flicker	B	c	c	c	c
_ Pileated Woodpecker	B	u	u	u	u
_ Olive-sided Flycatcher	B			u	
_ Western Wood-Pewee	B			c	u
_ Willow Flycatcher	B			c	u

	Status	W	Sp	Su	F
_ Least Flycatcher	B			u	
_ Hammond's Flycatcher	B			c	u
_ Dusky Flycatcher	B			c	u
_ Cordilleran Flycatcher	B			c	u
_ Say's Phoebe	B		o	o	o
_ Western Kingbird	B		c	c	c
_ Eastern Kingbird	B		c	c	c
_ Horned Lark	B	u	c	c	c
_ Tree Swallow	B		c	c	c
_ Violet-green Swallow	B		c	c	c
_ N. Rough-winged Swallow	B		c	c	u
_ Bank Swallow	B		c	c	u
_ Cliff Swallow	B		c	c	u
_ Barn Swallow	B		c	c	u
_ Gray Jay	B	c	c	c	c
_ Steller's Jay	B	c	c	c	c
_ Blue Jay	t	o	o	r	o
_ Clark's Nutcracker	B	u	u	u	u
_ Black-billed Magpie	B	c	c	c	c
_ American Crow	B	c	c	c	c
_ Common Raven	B	c	c	c	c
_ Black-capped Chickadee	B	c	c	c	c
_ Mountain Chickadee	B	c	c	c	c
_ Chestnut-backed Chickadee	B	o	o	o	o
_ Red-breasted Nuthatch	B	c	c	c	c
_ White-breasted Nuthatch	B	u	u	u	u
_ Pygmy Nuthatch	B	c	c	c	c
_ Brown Creeper	B	u	u	u	u
_ Rock Wren	B		u	u	u
_ Canyon Wren	B	r	o	o	r
_ House Wren	B		c	c	u
_ Winter Wren	B	u	c	c	u
_ Marsh Wren	B	u	c	c	c
_ American Dipper	B	c	c	c	c
_ Golden-crowned Kinglet	B	c	c	c	c
_ Ruby-crowned Kinglet	B	r	c	c	c
_ Western Bluebird	B		u	u	u
_ Mountain Bluebird	B	r	c	c	c
_ Townsend's Solitaire	B	c	c	c	c
_ Veery	B			u	u
_ Swainson's Thrush	B			c	c
_ Hermit Thrush	B			u	u
_ American Robin	B	u	c	c	c
_ Varied Thrush	B	r	c	c	u
_ Gray Catbird	B			c	c
_ Sage Thrasher	t		r		r
_ American Pipit	B	r	c	c	c
_ Bohemian Waxwing	t	c	c		c
_ Cedar Waxwing	B	u	u	c	c
_ Northern Shrike	t	u	u		u
_ Loggerhead Shrike	B		r	r	r
_ European Starling	B	c	c	c	c
_ Cassin's Vireo	B		c	c	c
_ Warbling Vireo	B		c	c	c
_ Red-eyed Vireo	B		u	u	u
_ Tennessee Warbler	t		r		r
_ Orange-crowned Warbler	B		c	c	c
_ Nashville Warbler	B		u	u	u
_ Yellow Warbler	B		c	c	c
_ Yellow-rumped Warbler	B	r	c	c	c
_ Townsend's Warbler	B			c	u

		Status	W	Sp	Su	F
_	American Redstart	B			c	c
_	Northern Waterthrush	B			c	c
_	MacGillivray's Warbler	B			c	u
_	Common Yellowthroat	B		c	c	c
_	Wilson's Warbler	B			c	c
_	Yellow-breasted Chat	B			o	
_	Western Tanager	B			c	c
_	Black-headed Grosbeak	B			c	u
_	Lazuli Bunting	B		c	c	u
_	Spotted Towhee	B	r	c	c	u
_	American Tree Sparrow	t	c	c		c
_	Chipping Sparrow	B		c	c	c
_	Clay-colored Sparrow	B		o	o	
_	Brewer's Sparrow	B		u	u	
_	Vesper Sparrow	B		c	c	c
_	Lark Sparrow	B		u	u	u
_	Savannah Sparrow	B		c	c	c
_	Grasshopper Sparrow	B		o	o	
_	Fox Sparrow	B		u	u	u
_	Song Sparrow	B	c	c	c	c
_	Lincoln's Sparrow	B		u	u	u
_	White-throated Sparrow	t	r	r		o
_	White-crowned Sparrow	B	r	c	c	u
_	Harris's Sparrow	t	o	o		o
_	Dark-eyed Junco	B	c	c	c	c
_	Lapland Longspur	t	r	r		r
_	Snow Bunting	t	o	o		o
_	Bobolink	B			c	u
_	Red-winged Blackbird	B	u	c	c	c
_	Western Meadowlark	B	u	c	c	c
_	Yellow-headed Blackbird	B	o	c	c	c
_	Brewer's Blackbird	B	u	c	c	c
_	Common Grackle	B		r	r	r
_	Brown-headed Cowbird	B		c	c	u
_	Bullock's Oriole	B			c	
_	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	B	u	u	u	u
_	Black Rosy-Finch	B	o	o	o	o
_	Pine Grosbeak	B	u	u	u	u
_	Purple Finch	t	r			
_	Cassin's Finch	B	u	u	u	u
_	House Finch	B	c	c	c	c
_	Red Crossbill	B	c	c	c	c
_	White-winged Crossbill	b	o	o	o	o
_	Common Redpoll	t	u	u		u
_	Pine Siskin	B	c	c	c	c
_	American Goldfinch	B	c	c	c	c
_	Evening Grosbeak	B	u	u	u	u
_	House Sparrow	B	c	c	c	c

Acknowledgments

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Birding Hotspots Compilers

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Birding Spots Outside the Map Area

Browns Lake

Excellent birding occurs at Browns Lake and surrounding areas that lie south of Hwy 200 about 60 miles east of Missoula. Exit Hwy 200 either at Ovando or farther east on the road marked "fishing access" to reach Browns Lake. A good loop is to enter on one of these roads and leave on the other. Many species of waterbirds occur in the area. In spring, look for all species of grebes, the Red-necked Grebe being especially common. Look for Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, falcons, accipiters, Turkey Vulture, Sandhill Crane, Mountain Bluebird, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and Savannah Sparrow. In the sagebrush areas, listen and watch for Clay-colored Sparrow and Brewer's Sparrow. This area is one of the few spots in the state where Loggerhead Shrikes are seen west of the continental divide. The Blackfoot WPA ponds, with two pullouts along Hwy 200 (1 mile beyond the Browns Lake access road), provide good viewing of waterfowl (especially diving ducks), Sandhill Cranes, Black Terns, and other marsh species.

Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA)

The BCWMA is 40 miles east of Missoula on Hwy 200. As you enter the Ovando valley, watch for a dirt road on your left with a sign for Upsata Lake. Follow the dirt road about 2 miles and watch for signs on your left. The BCWMA consists of a diverse blend of habitats: coniferous forest, irrigated hayfields, native bunchgrass, lush creek bottoms, ponds, and areas of burned standing trees. Look for flycatchers, swallows, and warblers along Cottonwood Creek, which parallels the dirt road. A good variety of waterfowl occurs on the ponds and streams, and nine species of woodpeckers have been recorded in the burn. Sandhill Cranes, Long-billed Curlews, Western Bluebirds, and Vesper Sparrows occur in the grasslands. Nearby Upsata Lake is a good place to find Common Loons and Red-necked Grebes. The BCWMA is closed to the public from 15 November to 15 May.

Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge

This refuge (administered by the National Bison Range) and the surrounding wildlife management area (Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks) is a popular destination for birding, especially for waterbirds and raptors. Drive about 10 miles west of Missoula on I-90, then go north on Hwy 93 into the Mission Valley about 8 miles beyond St. Ignatius. The refuge lies primarily west of Hwy 93. The road around the refuge offers several good viewing spots including the dike. The wildlife management area is open to hiking year-round. From 15 July until October, the south side and parts of the north side of Ninepipe Refuge are open to fishing and birding. Species to look for include Western Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Eared Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, many ducks, Black Tern, Forster's Tern, Caspian Tern, loons and shorebirds during migration, Short-eared Owl, and Northern Harrier. During fall, winter, and spring in some years, it is possible to see many raptor species, including Gyrfalcons, Harlan's Hawks, and Snowy Owls. The world's largest known roost of Rough-legged Hawks occurs in the forest near Ronan during winters when vole numbers are high; these hawks occur throughout the Mission Valley during daytime, where they can be seen hunting voles from power poles and other conspicuous perches.

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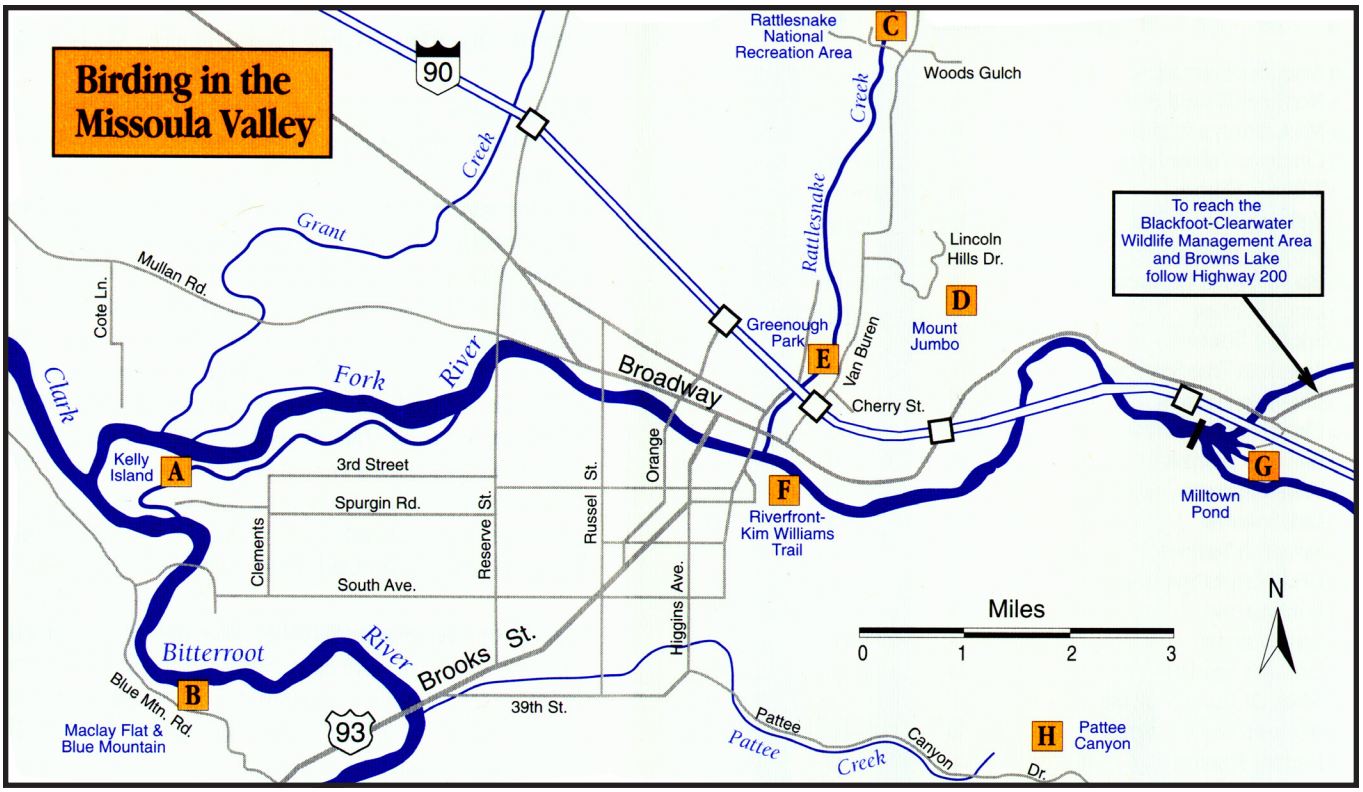
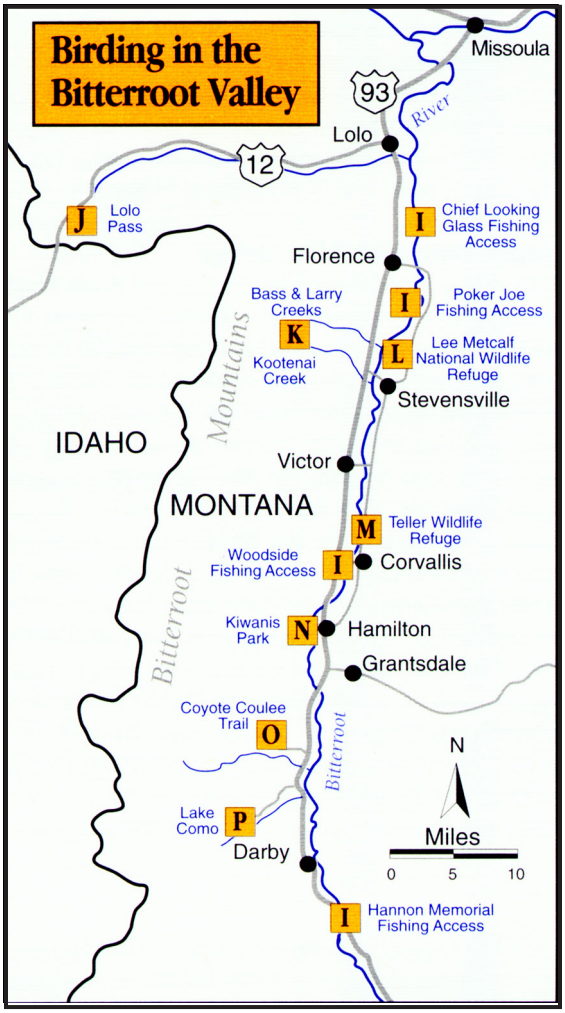
Contact information updated in 2014.





A Kelly Island Fishing Access

This large undeveloped island at the confluence of the Bitterroot and Clark Fork rivers is a 631-acre parcel owned by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. It consists of cottonwood bottoms, large meadows, and ponderosa pine forests. Much of the land is on an island accessible by boat, or at low water, the river can be forded. However, birding is good at the access points. From Reserve St. south of the river, turn west on Spurgin Road and go to the end. The 2nd access is one block north of Spurgin at the end of N. 7th St. West. The 3rd access is north of the river off Reserve St. Turn west on Mullan Road up the hill, past the cemetery to Cote Lane, and follow the signs. Expected birds are Bald Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Pileated Woodpecker, Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Vaux's Swift, Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow Warbler, and Black-headed Grosbeak.

B Maclay Flat and Blue Mountain Road

The Maclay Flat trail is reached by going south from Missoula on Hwy 93. Turn right on Blue Mountain Road at traffic light near the Fitness Center and follow it two miles to a signed parking area. The trail is a 2-mile loop that includes a riparian zone along the Bitterroot River, a ponderosa pine plantation, and several small marshes. Common spring and summer birds include Wood Duck, Cinnamon Teal, American Kestrel, Pileated Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, nuthatches, Warbling Vireo, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Chipping Sparrow. Winter birds include Great Horned Owl, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, woodpeckers, Clark's Nutcracker, chickadees, nuthatches, and Red Crossbill. Before reaching Maclay Flat, you pass the Forest Service road to Blue Mountain 1.5 miles from Hwy 93. Turn left on this road, which quickly elevates to more than 2,000 feet above the valley floor and passes through Douglas-fir and western larch forest. Watch for Dusky Flycatcher, Hammond's Flycatcher, Clark's Nutcracker, Townsend's Solitaire, Western Tanager, kinglets, warblers, chickadees, and nuthatches.

C Rattlesnake National Recreation Area

To reach the main trailhead, travel 4.5 miles north of Broadway on Van Buren St. and Rattlesnake Dr. Turn west at the trailhead sign and drive across Rattlesnake Cr. to the parking lot. Along the cliffs about 1/4 mile past

the parking lot, look for Cordilleran Flycatcher. Along the riparian areas of Rattlesnake Creek and Spring Gulch, look for American Dipper, Warbling Vireo, and a variety of warblers. In the surrounding meadows and forest, look for Ruffed Grouse, Pileated Woodpecker, Vaux's Swift, Hammond's Flycatcher, chickadees, kinglets, Cassin's Vireo, Western Tanager, and Spotted Towhee. The less-used Sawmill Gulch trailhead is 1.5 miles west of the main parking lot where a large meadow is bordered by forest. Most of the same species can be found there. The large meadow is good for spotting raptors. The Woods Gulch trailhead to Sheep Mountain is 1/2 mile east of Rattlesnake Dr. on Woods Gulch Rd. Stay right all the way to the trailhead. The first mile is a narrow, brushy riparian area that is good for many species of the conifer forest including Ruffed Grouse, Rufous Hummingbird, Western Tanager, and Townsend's Warbler. Flammulated Owls occur on the ridge overlooking Marshall Canyon to the southeast.

D Mount Jumbo

This city-owned open space area provides grassland, shrub, and dry-forest habitats. Access the south end above Hellgate Canyon and the southwest face that parallels the Rattlesnake valley by driving to the east end of Cherry St. or Poplar St. just north of I-90. Follow the trails up to the "L" or along the base of the hill through the shrubs on the southwest face. Look for Calliope Hummingbird, Nashville Warbler, Spotted Towhee, and Lazuli Bunting. The summit ridge is a good place for migrating raptors in spring and fall. Access the saddle, which leads to varied habitats, by following Lincoln Hills Dr. through the housing area to the trailhead. Look for Western and Mountain bluebirds, Cassin's Vireo, Western Tanager, Vesper Sparrow, and Cassin's Finch.

E Greenough Park

This 42-acre city park is located in a riparian woodland along Rattlesnake Creek. Although easily accessible from town and heavily used by pedestrians, the minimally developed park maintains a high diversity of bird life. Pedestrians may enter from the corner of Vine St. and Greenough Dr. A parking lot is located on Monroe St., from which the entire park can be visited by taking the loop trail to the right. Resident species include Western Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, American Dipper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Song Sparrow. Northern Pygmy-Owls, Bohemian Waxwings, and Varied Thrushes visit in winter. Summer residents include House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Red-eyed Vireo, warblers, Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, and Spotted Towhee.

F Riverfront-Kim Williams Trail

This area is an old railroad bed that starts at the Orange St. Bridge in downtown Missoula and follows the south bank of the Clark Fork River upstream through the University and beyond for about three miles. The habitat includes several islands, riparian trees and shrubs, and nearby Douglas-fir forest. Common birds in spring and summer include Osprey, Calliope Hummingbird, Vaux's Swift, Willow Flycatcher, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, swallows, warblers, Gray Catbird, Bullock's Oriole, Western Tanager, and Lazuli Bunting. Winter birds include Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Bald Eagle, Bohemian Waxwing, and Song Sparrow. Look for American Dippers where Rattlesnake Creek enters the Clark Fork. Mountain habitat can be reached by taking the Hellgate Canyon Trail marked by a sign 1.5 miles from the start.

G Clark Fork River, I-90 East

Following I-90 east of Missoula provides interesting birding along the Clark Fork River. **Milltown Pond**: Take exit 110 on I-90 to Bonner. Where Hwy 200 turns north into Bonner, go east 0.2 miles on the frontage road to the orange Milwaukee Railroad Caboose. Park there and follow the trails down to the river for good riparian birding. **Rock Creek**: take exit 125. The slough on the north side of I-90 is good for Wood Ducks, Lazuli Buntings, and warblers. On the south side, follow Rock Creek several miles to Valley of the Moon Campground. Look for bighorn sheep, Wood Ducks, hummingbirds, and other mountain species. **Beavertail Hill State Park**: take exit 130 and turn south. Go one or two miles past the park to a good area for Wild Turkeys. At the park, look for American Dippers, five species of swallows, woodpeckers, Cedar Waxwing, warblers, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Also check the ponds north of I-90. **Bearmouth Canyon**: exit at the rest area (near mile 144) and look for White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows that nest on the cliffs just east of the rest area. Parking is illegal along I-90. However, you can take exit 138 to the Bearmouth Chalet and follow the frontage road north of the river into Bearmouth Canyon and on to Drummond for some interesting birding.

H Pattee Canyon

Pattee Canyon has miles of trails through mature ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas-fir forest. Take Higgins Ave. south past Dornblazer Field. Turn east on Pattee Canyon Dr. and go 4.5 miles to the Pattee Canyon Trailhead. Try the Sam Braxton and Accipiter trails (all trails are good). Other birding areas include the Crazy Creek trail (3.7 miles) and the Picnic Area. This area is good habitat for Northern Goshawk, several owl species, Pileated Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, warblers, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, and Red Crossbill. Continuing past Pattee Canyon Trailhead, the road becomes Deer Creek, which takes you above Milltown Dam and down to East Missoula.

I Bitterroot River Fishing Access Sites

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks manages nine fishing access sites along the Bitterroot River between Lolo and Conner (see map). Signs on Hwy 93 mark roads to each site. The amount and quality of habitats vary; most provide a mix of cottonwood and ponderosa pine with a shrubby understory that holds many birds. Expect typical bottomland and riverine species such as Spotted Sandpiper, Osprey, Belted Kingfisher, woodpeckers, Dusky Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Gray Catbird, warblers, Bullock's Oriole, Song Sparrow, and Black-headed Grosbeak. American Dippers occur during winter.

J Lolo Pass

Drive south of Missoula to Lolo, then go west on Hwy 12 for 33 miles. Watch for American Dippers along Lolo Creek, especially in winter. At the pass take the Packer Meadow Road, which winds into Idaho and back to Montana and Hwy 12. A Lolo Forest map would be helpful if you drive the loop. In Packer Meadow and the surrounding spruce-fir forest, look for Three-toed Woodpecker, Rufous Hummingbird, Hammond's Flycatcher, Steller's Jay, Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Winter Wren, Chestnut-sided Chickadee, Townsend's Warbler, Varied Thrush, Lincoln's and White-crowned sparrows. In early summer, Packer Meadow and forest openings are good for viewing wildflowers. Boreal Owls can be heard at night in late winter along the cross-country ski trails.

K Bitterroot Canyons

Going south on Hwy 93, the Bitterroot Mountains rise to the west, where swift mountain streams have carved numerous dramatic canyons. Many of these have good trails that afford excellent birding such as Bass and Larry creeks (20 miles south of Missoula) and Kootenai Creek (23 miles from Missoula). American Dippers are common along these streams. The canyons are good for Winter Wren and Rock Wren; if lucky, you might hear the beautifully cascading song of the Canyon Wren. The canyon walls provide excellent nesting sites for Peregrine and Prairie falcons, Golden Eagles, Turkey Vultures, and White-throated Swifts. Western Screech-Owls and Pileated Woodpeckers nest in the cottonwood trees along the streams. Larry Creek has an especially nice riparian zone where you can find Red-naped Sapsuckers, Red-eyed Vireos, and warblers.

L Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

This 2,700-acre refuge is located 25 miles south of Missoula and is composed of a series of ponds and sloughs as well as an extensive riparian area along the Bitterroot River. At either Florence or Stevensville, take the highway east of the river to the refuge entrance. More than 225 species of birds have been recorded on the refuge, including 98 species of confirmed nesters. This refuge is an important stop for migrating waterfowl. March

and April witness the full contingent of grebes, ducks, geese, and swans, including the occassional Eurasian Widgeon and Ross's Goose. Soras and Virginia Rails, and occasionally American Bitterns, are heard in the marsh areas. Marsh Wrens are common in the cattails. Bald Eagles and Ospreys can be seen from the road that winds through the refuge. In riparian areas, look for Great Horned Owls and Pileated Woodpeckers. In summer, especially when cloudy, look high over the ponds for Black Swifts.

M Teller Wildlife Refuge

Public access is permitted from the Woodside Fishing Access (east side of the bridge across the Bitterroot River on the Corvallis Cutoff Road between Hwy 93 and Corvallis). Please stay on the main trail to the north or to the river side (west) of the trail. Access to the area east of the trail requires permission from the refuge manager (phone: 961-3507). The accessible area provides typical bottomland habitat dominated by black cottonwoods and ponderosa pines over a dense understory of shrubs. Typical species include Great Blue Heron (a heronry south of the Woodside Bridge is visible until leaf-out in April), Osprey, Long-eared Owl, woodpeckers, Gray Catbird, Warbling Vireo, warblers, and White-breasted Nuthatch. The birding is best in spring and summer.

N Kiwanis Park, Hamilton

The main access is behind Westview Junior High on Main St. west of downtown Hamilton. This small area offers a variety of habitats including young and old cottonwood forest, a cattail marsh, shrublands, the Bitterroot River, and associated sloughs. Expect to see typical river-bottom species including Wood Duck, Osprey, Spotted Sandpiper, Great Horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Lewis's Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee, Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, and Bullock's Oriole. Vagrants sometimes show up here. Birding is good year-round, but spring and summer are best.

O Coyote Coulee Trail

Follow Lost Horse Creek Road west 2.5 miles from its junction with Hwy 93 about 9 miles south of Hamilton. Turn right on Forest Road 496 at the school bus turnaround where the pavement ends and follow the road for 1/2 mile to the parking lot. The trail crosses several small creeks and goes through a mix of aspen-dominated riparian areas and second-growth ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir before it reaches the coniferous riparian zone along Camas Creek. Expect birds typical of all these habitat types, such as woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, kinglets, warblers, Warbling Vireo, Cassin's Vireo, Western Tanager, Chipping Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco. This trail opens up early due to the low elevation, and deer and elk are often seen here.

P Lake Como

Find this large, beautiful mountain-ringed lake by following the paved Lake Como Road west from its junction with Hwy 93 about five miles north of Darby. Follow signs past the beach area to the campground and the Lake Como National Recreation Trail. The trail passes through old-growth ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir for much of the seven-mile trip that circles the lake. Expect typical forest birds such as Pileated Woodpecker, chickadees, nuthatches, kinglets, Western Tanager, Cassin's Vireo, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Near the head of the lake the trail bisects a 1988 fire that resulted in hundreds of snags that attract woodpeckers, Olive-sided Flycatchers, and Mountain Bluebirds. American Dippers nest above the bridge over Rock Creek at the head of the lake. Ospreys and Bald Eagles are possible.

Five Valleys Audubon

Bitterroot Audubon