

# American Birds

# WINTER

# GUIDE

January—March 1992

The time has come to pull on your gloves, scarf and hat, bundle up in a warm coat and step out into the blasting cold of winter. On the way to your favorite open water or marsh, don't forget your spotting scope—all the better to bird with from the warmth of your car!

Nonbirders may wonder at the dedication of birders in the winter, but we know that come February, we'll be able to watch sea ducks do their courtship displays in fresh winter plumage; and what better time than winter to practice gull identification skills, watch for the glorious Snowy Owl, Gyrfalcon, or see winter finches? Below, we've listed 25 of the best places for you to go birding this season, spots where you will not only see the species named here but many more. So have fun in the winter wonderland of avian life!

**Recommended location guides and further references are included at the end of each site description.**

## 1. L'ANSE-AUX-MEADOWS, NEWFOUNDLAND

Northern Newfoundland in January? It might seem unlikely, but for the well-prepared birder, L'Anse-Aux-Meadows can be very exciting in winter. Dovekies are abundant offshore, Ivory Gulls are almost guaranteed, and such Arctic birds as Gyrfalcons and Snowy Owls may appear. Also see: *Birding in Atlantic Canada: Newfoundland*, Roger Burrows, publ. 1989; *Bird-finding in Canada*, J. Cam Finlay, publ. 1984.

## 2. PROVINCETOWN, CAPE COD, MASSACHUSETTS

In midwinter, when vacationers are scarce on the Cape, birding can be excellent. In the currents that sweep past Provincetown, Thick-billed Murres and other alcids often come close to shore. Gannets, kittiwakes, Iceland and Glaucous gulls, sea ducks, and other waterbirds add spice to the seawatching here, while stray landbirds may wind up on the Cape at any season. Also see: *Birding Cape Cod*, Cape Cod Bird Club & Massachusetts Audubon Society,

publ. 1990; *Bird Finding in New England*, Richard K. Walton, publ. 1988.

## 3. SANDY HOOK, NEW JERSEY

This peninsular park in the shadow of New York City is productive all winter for sea ducks, gulls, loons, and grebes offshore, and for wintering sparrows and other birds in the brushy thickets. The peninsula is a natural concentration point for northbound birds, and early migrants may be in evidence by March. Also see: *Bird-finding Guide to New Jersey*, William J. Boyle, Jr., rev. 1989.

## 4. BLACKWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, MARYLAND

In the quiet open country of eastern Maryland, Blackwater is excellent for marsh birds at all seasons. It is particularly known for its wintering Bald Eagles (and sometimes a Golden Eagle, as well as other birds of prey) and Snow Geese (sometimes accompanied by Ross' or Greater White-fronted geese). Brown-headed Nuthatches are fairly common in the pinewoods. Also see: *Finding Birds in the National Capital Area*, Claudia Wilds, publ. 1983.

## 5. BODIE ISLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

At the northern end of the Outer Banks, the pond behind the Bodie Island Lighthouse hosts a variety of waterbirds all year. Nearby thickets hold thousands of Yellow-rumped Warblers in winter. Just to the south, Oregon Inlet often lures odd gulls and other waterbirds in winter, while the ponds of Pea Island refuge may have Eurasian Wigeon among other birds. Also see: *Birds of the Carolinas*, E.F. Potter, J.F. Parnell, & R.F. Teulings, publ. 1980.

## 6. MERRITT ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, FLORIDA

Next door to the Kennedy Space Center is one of the best winter birding areas in

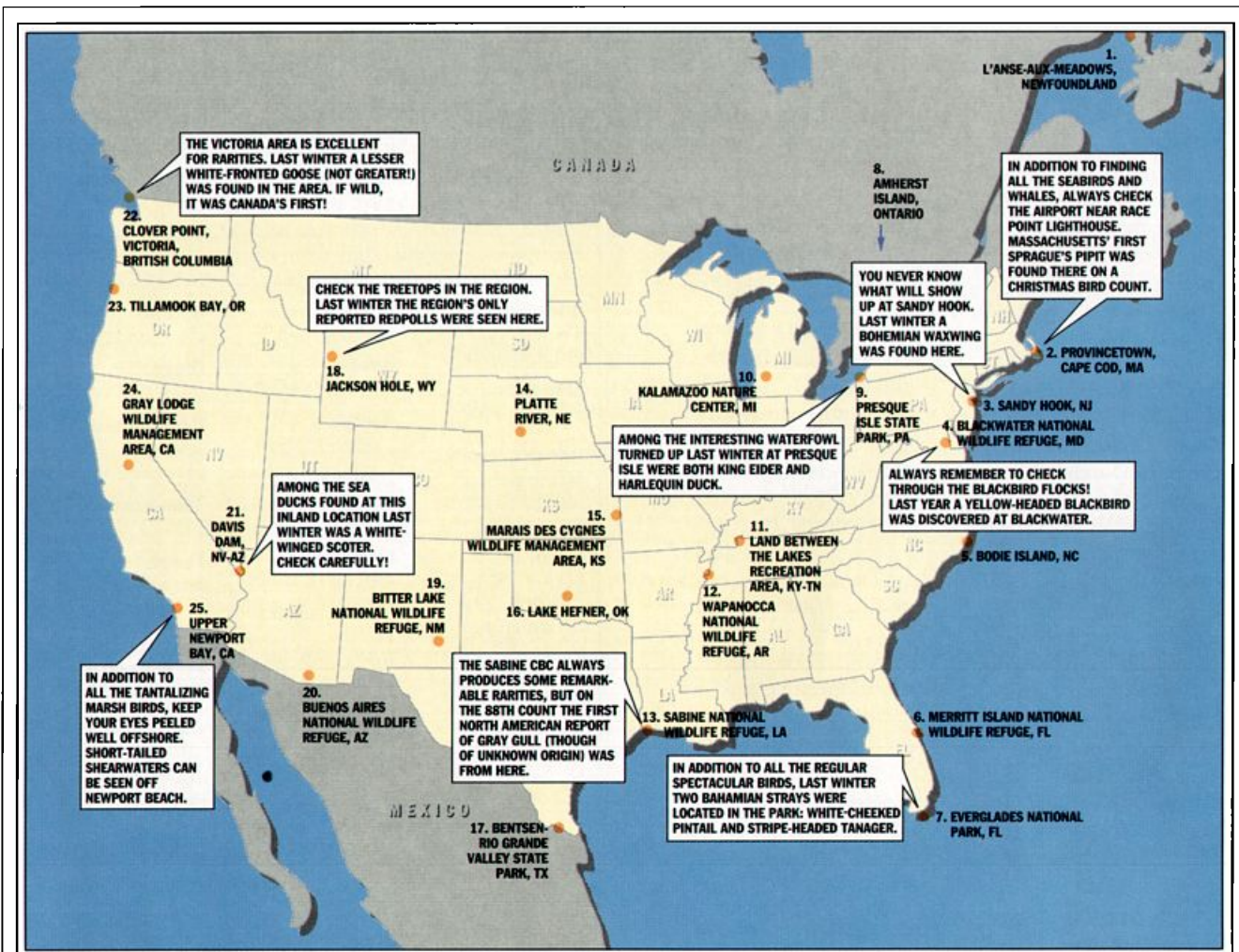
Florida. Merritt Island has habitat for a wide variety of wading birds, waterfowl, shorebirds, terns, gulls, and landbirds (including several species of wintering warblers). Ospreys, Anhingas, and pelicans are numerous. An energetic birder can often find 100 species in a day here in winter. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Florida* (Lane Series), James A. Lane, rev. 1989; *Florida's Birds: A Handbook and Reference*, Herbert W. Kale II & David S. Maehr, publ. 1990.

## 7. EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK, FLORIDA

Despite problems created by water mismanagement upstream, the National Park remains a wonderful birding spot in winter. A day spent working from Anhinga Trail down to Flamingo should produce pelicans, Ospreys, eagles, Anhingas, and a plethora of herons, egrets, ibises, spoonbills, shorebirds, and others. Winter is the best time for Short-tailed Hawks here, and there is always a chance for some rare stray. See above; plus *Birds of South Florida*, Connie Toops & Willard E. Dilley, publ. 1986.

## 8. AMHERST ISLAND, ONTARIO

This island in the northeast corner of Lake Ontario in winter can play host to an incredible density of raptors. It is especially famous for its owls. In years of low food supply to the north, up to eleven species of owls may be found roosting in the evergreens, including Great Gray, Boreal, and Northern Hawk owls. Many Northern Shrikes and a variety of hawks concentrate here to feed on the resident population of meadow voles. Also see: *Bird-finding Guide to Ontario*, Clive E. Goodwin, publ. 1982.



**9. PRESQUE ISLE STATE PARK, PENNSYLVANIA**

This peninsula on Lake Erie is one of the best birding sites in Pennsylvania at any season. Rare gulls often turn up during the colder months, while early spring may bring impressive flights of waterfowl and a good variety of other waterbirds. Also see: *Birds of Erie County*, Jean Stull, James A. Stull & Gerald M. McWilliams, publ. 1985.

**10. KALAMAZOO NATURE CENTER, MICHIGAN**

A network of trails allows easy access to this well-studied and productive tract of forest, with good numbers of woodland birds at all seasons. If the weather turns bad, the observer can spend a rewarding and educational time inside the interpretive center. Also see: *Enjoying Birds in Michigan*, Michigan Audubon Society, rev. 1989.

**11. LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES RECREATION AREA, KENTUCKY-TENNESSEE**

The main attraction here is a wintering population of Bald Eagles. Large flocks of Canada Geese, various ducks, and often an assortment of gulls and other waterbirds can also be found. Wooded habitats and open country in the recreation area support good numbers of Wild Turkeys and other birds. Also see: *Bird-finding in Tennessee*, Michael Lee Bierly, publ. 1980.

**12. WAPANOCCA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, ARKANSAS**

Extensive forest and swampland make Wapanocca a worthwhile birding area at any season, with good resident populations of Barred Owls, Pileated Woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, and others.

Winter visitors like Rusty Blackbirds and various ducks add to the diversity in the colder months.

**13. SABINE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, LOUISIANA**

The main purpose of the refuge is to protect the large wintering flocks of Snow Geese, but visiting birders may be more impressed by the sheer variety of wintering birds. Wading birds, ducks, shorebirds, terns, hawks, rails, sparrows, and woodland birds all combine to make this a favorite winter birding site.

**14. PLATTE RIVER, NEBRASKA**

One of the great ornithological spectacles of the continent is enacted every March on the Platte, near Grand Island, when nearly half a million Sandhill Cranes stop over on their way north. Migrant ducks

and geese, resident prairie-chickens, and the chance for a Whooping Crane all add to the birding possibilities.

**15. MARAIS DES CYGNES WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA, KANSAS**

Rough-legged Hawks, Bald Eagles, and Snow Geese are among the winter residents of interest in the more open areas of this refuge, but the extensive woodlands are also worth surveying for Pileated Woodpeckers, Harris' Sparrows, and other birds. Also see: *A Guide to Bird Finding in Kansas and Western Missouri*, John L. Zimmerman & Sebastian T. Patti, publ. 1988.

**16. LAKE HEFNER, OKLAHOMA**

This reservoir near Oklahoma City, like other similar bodies of water remaining unfrozen in the

(Continued on next page)



lower Great Plains, can attract an array of interesting lingering or vagrant species. Last winter both Little and Lesser Black-backed gulls were found here. Also see: *Guide to Birding in Oklahoma*, Tulsa Audubon Society, rev. 1986; *Distribution of Oklahoma Birds*, D. Scott Wood & Gary D. Schnell, publ. 1984.

**17. BENTSEN-RIO GRANDE VALLEY STATE PARK, TEXAS**

One of the best spots north of Mexico (barely!) for seeing tropical birds is the trailer loop at Bentsen. Green Jays, orioles, chachalacas, and a host of others come readily to be fed here, and rarities like Clay-colored Robin and Blue Bunting are sometimes present. Trails nearer the Rio Grande may produce Ringed or Green kingfishers or the elusive Hook-billed Kite. Also see: *Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley* (Lane Series), James A. Lane & Harold R. Holt, rev. 1988; *Birder's Guide to Texas*, Edward A. Kutac, rev. 1989.

**18. JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING**

For good cold-weather birding, the Jackson area is ideal. Some waters on the adjacent National Elk Refuge stay open through the season, hosting concentrations of Trumpeter Swans, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and other waterfowl. Sage Grouse are resident, and Rosy Finches are often numerous in winter. Also see: *Wyoming Birds*, Jane L. Dorn & Robert D. Dorn, publ. 1990; *Birds of Grand Teton National Park and Area*, Bert Raynes, publ. 1984.

**19. BITTER LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NEW MEXICO**

This Pecos Valley refuge is reliable in winter for grassland birds, hawks, and large concentrations of waterfowl. Ross' Geese and Sandhill Cranes are numerous, and Snow Geese are

abundant. Isolated patches of trees often produce surprising visitors. Also see: *New Mexico Bird-finding Guide*, Dustin Huntington & Dale A. Zimmerman, publ. 1984; *Birds of New Mexico's National Parklands*, John P. Hubbard & Claudia L. Hubbard, publ. 1979.

**20. BUENOS AIRES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, ARIZONA**

This relatively new refuge is excellent in winter for hawks, sparrows, and other grassland birds, and several ponds contribute a variety of waterbirds. By late February, migrant ducks, swallows, and shorebirds are arriving. Visitors might encounter the rare Masked Bobwhite, now being reintroduced here. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Southeastern Arizona* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt, rev. 1988; *Birds in Southeastern Arizona*, William A. Davis & Stephen M. Russell, rev. 1990.

**21. DAVIS DAM, NEVADA-ARIZONA**

The large reservoir behind the dam, and the cold waters below the spillway, attract many birds that would seem unexpected in this desert region. Loons, grebes, and diving ducks are regular, rare gulls often turn up, and Barrow's Goldeneyes winter in small numbers. By February, huge numbers of north-bound swallows flock over the river. Also see: *Birds of the Lower Colorado River Valley*, K.V. Rosenberg *et al.*, publ. 1991.

**22. CLOVER POINT, VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

At the southern tip of Vancouver Island, this is a superb vantage point for viewing birds of the sea and of rocky shorelines. Winter possibilities include Rhinoceros Auklet, Ancient Murrelet, Black Oystercatcher, Rock Sandpiper, Surf-bird, Thayer's Gull, and

**INVALUABLE TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

Although coverage and information varies from place to place, rare bird alert telephone services that use taped messages are a real boon for peregrinating birders. These detail current rare or unusual birds sighted and how to get to the place where last reported. Use this listing when visiting the places on our winter birding map.

- Arizona**  
Tucson (602) 798-1005
- Arkansas**  
(501) 753-5853
- British Columbia**  
Vancouver (604) 737-9910
- California**  
Northern (415) 528-0288 or 524-5592  
Sacramento (916) 481-0118  
Los Angeles (213) 874-1318
- Florida**  
Statewide (813) 984-4444
- Miami**  
(305) 667-7337
- Kansas**  
(913) 329-4499
- Kentucky**  
(502) 894-9538
- Loisiana**  
Baton Rouge (504) 293-2476
- Maryland**  
(301) 652-1088
- Massachusetts**  
Eastern (617) 259-8805
- Michigan**  
(616) 471-4919
- Nebraska**  
(402) 292-5325

- New Jersey**  
(201) 766-2661
- New Mexico**  
(505) 662-2101
- North Carolina**  
(704) 332-2473
- Oklahoma**  
Oklahoma City (405) 373-4531
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(519) 586-3959
- Oregon**  
(503) 292-0661
- Pennsylvania**  
Western (412) 963-0650
- Tennessee**  
(315) 356-7637
- Texas**  
Statewide (713) 992-2757  
Lower Rio Grande Valley (512) 565-6773
- Wyoming**  
(307) 265-2473

Harlequin Duck. The adjacent woods in Beacon Hill Park are excellent for landbirds like Bushtit and Hutton's Vireo. Also see: *A Birder's Guide to Vancouver Island*, Keith Taylor, publ. 1990.

**23. TILLAMOOK BAY, OREGON**

One of the most productive winter birding sites in Oregon, this coastal area has big numbers of loons, grebes, sea ducks (including all three scoter species), gulls, alcids, and shorebirds. Among landbirds, "southern" species like Wrentit and Black-shouldered Kite overlap here with "northerners" like Gray Jay and Rough-legged Hawk. Also see: *The Birder's Guide to Oregon*, Joseph E. Evanich, publ. 1990.

**24. GRAY LODGE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA, CALIFORNIA**

Among the several fine waterfowl refuges in California's central valleys, Gray Lodge occupies one of the most scenic settings.

Winter and early spring visits here should produce large numbers of geese (including Ross' Geese), Tundra Swans, ducks (often including Eurasian Wigeon), grebes, American White Pelicans, and other waterbirds. Also see: *Birding Northern California*, Jean Richmond, publ. 1985; *Birder's Guide to Northern California*, Lolo Westrich & Jim Westrich, publ. 1991.

**25. UPPER NEWPORT BAY, CALIFORNIA**

The largest estuary in southern California, Newport Bay is also one of the best birding areas. The endangered Light-footed Clapper Rail and the uncommon Belding's Savannah Sparrow are two notable subspecies that are hard to miss, but the great wintering numbers of shorebirds, gulls, and ducks are also worth mentioning. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Southern California* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt, rev. 1990.

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Boreal Owl

**BOREAL OWLS FOUND**

There's good news, and not-so-good news for the Boreal Owl. The good news is that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has announced the discovery of 15 of the owls in the northeastern part of the state. One of the rarest owls in the United States, the Boreal lives mostly in deep conifer forests. The bad news is that officials also announced the finding of 146 Boreal bodies, believed to have starved to death in deep snows.

**LOST AND FOUND—  
AVIAN LIFE IN HAWAII**

Scientists from the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History have discovered the bones of 32 extinct Hawaiian birds. The husband-and-wife research team of Storrs Olson and Helen James has named and documented these species, and expects to describe at least 20 more.

The couple has spent the last 15 years scrounging for bird bones—uncovering hawks, owls, dozens of honeycreepers (each with their own habitat), eagles and at least 9 flightless species. Scientists have determined the birds were definitely alive 1600 years ago when humans first colonized the islands. Olson and James believe that the species became extinct due to hunting, predation by imported animals, disease and the habitat alteration.

Olson and James believe that similar evidence on other islands in the Pacific Ocean indicates that the total number of extinct bird species in the Pacific could run to several hundred.

**ADOPT A POTHOLE**

Prairie potholes are now for sale. No, of course you can't bring them home, but you can spend \$100 to sponsor a one-acre pothole, thus pro-

viding a nesting spot for more than 10 ducklings.

The "Adopt-A-Pothole" program was launched by the North American Wildlife Foundation to preserve these precious waterholes which are often drained and tilled by farmers. For waterfowl migrating across North America, potholes are often the only open water offering rest and shelter for miles around. And while these potholes are small individually, they can add up to 35 or 40 acres on a 1500-acre farm.

Participants receive a photograph of their pothole and two annual status reports. As an extra incentive, their names will appear on the designated farmer's gatepost. So adopt a pothole and save some birds.

**KIRTLAND'S WARBLER IS REBOUNDING**

The endangered Kirtland's Warbler is making a significant comeback within the jackpine stands of northern lower Michigan. In the first substantial increase in the last two decades, the summer's population index (a count of singing males) rose 31%, increasing to 347, the highest total since 1961. "It's the best news we've had in more than 20 years," observed Harold Mayfield, the ornithologist who had listed 500 singing males back in the 1961 seminal census.

According to Gary Boushelle, a Michigan regional wildlife biologist, the boost in population may have occurred due to the infamous Mack Lake fire south of Mio, Michigan in 1980. The fire burned over 25,000 acres, destroying everything in its path. However, as Boushelle

notes, it also created perfect conditions for the regeneration of jackpines which are the primary breeding habitat for the Kirtland's. This year, 60% of the warblers were heard there.

Since the fire, a state-federal-private Kirtland's Warbler program has gone into effect. The results: 1.3 million jackpines have been planted, plantations have been increasingly used by the Kirtland's, and almost 25% of the birds appear to be nesting in areas specifically made, and managed, for the species. The long-term goal is to reach an index of 1000 singing males.



Kirtland's Warbler

**WILDLIFE REFUGES AREN'T ALWAYS**

More than 60 percent of all wildlife refuges are being disturbed by mining, jet-skiing, joy-riding, cattle grazing, and even military bombing runs, according to a recent study by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service. To counter this mayhem, Democratic Congressman Gerry Studds (D-Mass.) has introduced the National Wildlife Refuge System Act of 1991, which would curtail harmful activities on refuges. The Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of federal lands without such a policy in place.