

American Birds

AUTUMN GUIDE

October-December 1993

Autumn birding is a favorite season for students of birds. Those "CFWs" (confusing fall warblers) challenge our identification skills, and delight us with their beauty. Equally fun are the late fall and early winter specialties—raptors, intriguing gulls, migrating waterfowl, and hardy shorebirds. Again, study is everything in fall. There is a lot to be learned looking at plumage now. If you haven't quite mastered raptors, here is a chance to practice, practice, practice. Fall is also a good time to read up on bird behavior during migration. Keep a sharp eye out!

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

1. ST. JOHN'S Newfoundland

In late fall, some of the best birding here is within the city. The harbor and lakes have many gulls, including Common Black-headed and Iceland gulls. Residential plantings often support stray landbird migrants in late fall, including a surprising variety of warblers. Also see: *Birding in Atlantic Canada: Newfoundland*, Roger Burrows, publ. 1989; *Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Maritime Provinces*, Anthony J. Erskine, publ. 1992.

2. BEAUHARNOIS POWER STATION Quebec

In late fall this is an excellent gull-watching site, with thousands of the more com-

mon species, and a scattering of rarities such as Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Diving ducks also congregate here late, Purple Sandpipers may linger on the rocks, and predators like Snowy Owl or Gyrfalcon sometimes appear. Also see: *Birdfinding in the Montreal Area*, Pierre Bannon, Publ. 1991

3. IPSWICH RIVER WILDLIFE SANCTUARY Massachusetts

Owned by Massachusetts Audubon Society, this tract of woodlands, old fields, and wooded swamp is a fine place to see land birds at all seasons. A network of trails makes for easy birding. In late fall, watch for Winter Wrens and for wandering

flocks of finches. Also see: *Birds of Essex County, Massachusetts*, Essex Ornithological Club, rev. 1988.

4. HAWK MOUNTAIN SANCTUARY Pennsylvania

Famous for decades, Hawk Mountain remains one of the premier vantage points for watching the south-bound parade of raptors. Early fall brings the largest numbers, but the late season is best for Golden Eagles, Northern Goshawks, and the biggest flight of Red-tailed Hawks. Also see: *Birding the Delaware Valley Region*, John J. Harding & Justin J. Harding, publ. 1980; *Birds of the Lehigh Valley Area*, Bernard L. Morris et al, publ. 1984.

5. CONOWINGO DAM Maryland

Bald Eagles are among the biggest birds in late fall, but the biggest attraction is the chance to study gull plumages. The spillway area can come alive with thousands of gulls, including rare visitors. Even when gull numbers are low, the area has waterbirds and visiting birds of prey. Also see: *Finding Birds in the National Capital Area*, Claudia Wilds, rev. 1992.

6. SAVANNAH RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE South Carolina

Set back a few miles from the coast, this refuge has tidal creeks and hardwood swamps; but its main habitat is freshwater marsh in impoundments from old rice plantations. Large numbers of herons, egrets, and ibises are present all year, and fall brings good duck numbers. Also see: *Finding Birds in South Carolina*, Robin M. Carter, publ. 1992

7. Ocala NATIONAL FOREST Florida

The remaining tracts of

long-leaf pine are good for pinewoods birds, such as Pine Warbler, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and a few colonies of Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Florida Scrub Jays can be found in brushy areas. The Alexander Springs vicinity may produce a Limpkin. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Florida* (Lane Series), James A. Lane & Harold R. Holt, rev. 1989; *Florida Bird Species: An Annotated List*, William B. Robertson, Jr. & Glen E. Woolfenden, publ. 1992.

8. HAMILTON HARBOUR Ontario

The western end of Lake Ontario is a concentration site for waterbirds in late fall, such as loons, grebes, swans, geese, and various kinds of diving ducks, including all three scoters. Many of these birds will remain into winter around Hamilton. Autumn days may bring good flights of hawks, and an assortment of gulls is usually present by late fall. Also See: *Bird-finding Guide to Ontario*, Clive E. Goodwin, publ. 1982.

9. CHAUTAUQUA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Illinois

This is one of the better all-around birding sites in central Illinois. Late fall brings Rough-legged Hawks to the uplands, waterfowl and gulls to the impoundments, and flocks of sparrows and juncos to the brushy areas. Pileated Woodpeckers can be found all year, and Bald Eagles are regular in winter. Also see: *The Birds of Illinois*, H. David Bohlen, publ. 1989; *Bird-finding in Illinois*, Elton Fawks & Paul H. Lobik, publ. 1975.

10. CEDARS OF LEBANON STATE PARK Tennessee

Cedar glades, deciduous woods, and old fields pro-



vide a great mix of habitats for land birds, with good hiking trails to provide easy access. Lingering vireos, warblers, or sparrows may visit in late fall, while wintering species include Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, Purple Finch, and both kinglets. Also see: *Bird-finding in Tennessee*, Michael Lee Bierly, publ. 1980.

11. FOURCHON BEACH Louisiana

One of the few accessible areas of outer beach near New Orleans, Fourchon hosts good numbers of Piping, Snowy, and Semipalmated plovers in late fall. Northern Gannets are often seen offshore in colder months. Ponds and lagoons just inland have herons, ibises, and waterfowl. Also see: *A Bird Finder's Guide to SE Louisiana*, Dan Purrington et al, publ. 1987.

12. BLUE MOUNDS STATE PARK Minnesota

Located in the extreme southwest corner of the state, this park has a variety of brushy upland habitats for land birds. Birders stop here to check for unusual visitors—for example, the state's first Curve-billed Thrasher was found here a few years ago. Also see: *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota*, Kim R. Eckert, rev. 1983.

13. BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK South Dakota

Best known for stark land forms, the Badlands offer a fine experience in minimalist birding. Explore the most arid zones for Rock Wrens, Horned Larks, and Say's Phoebes; then go to wooded areas for a variety of birds such as Black-billed Magpie, Mountain Bluebird, and others. Also see: *The Birds of South Dakota*, South Dakota

Ornithologists' Union, publ. 1991; *A Birdwatcher's Guide to the Black Hills*, Richard A. Peterson, publ. 1990.

14. LYON STATE FISHING LAKE Kansas

This small lake attracts ducks, grebes, and gulls during migration, while brushy woodlands nearby are good for land birds. In late fall, mowed hayfields near the lake offer the best chance for finding Smith's Longspur. Short-eared Owl and Greater Prairie-Chicken also occur in the area. Also see: *A Guide to Bird Finding in Kansas and Western Missouri*, John L. Zimmerman & Sebastian T. Patti, publ. 1988.

15. MULESHOE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Texas

The big attraction here is provided by big numbers of wintering Sandhill Cranes—

thousands of them arriving in force in November. Fall also brings the arrival of birds like Ferruginous Hawk and McCown's Longspur, while Scaled Quail can be found at all seasons. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Texas*, Edward A. Kutac, rev. 1989; *The Birds of North Central Texas*, Warren M. Pulich, publ. 1988.

16. SABAL PALM SANCTUARY Texas

Administered by the National Audubon Society, this sanctuary protects the best remaining tract of the native Sabal Palm. The habitat is excellent for south Texas specialty birds, like Plain Chachalaca, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Olive Sparrow, and Altamira Oriole. Also see: *Birder's Guide to the Texas Coast* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt, rev. 1993.

17. FLATHEAD LAKE**Montana**

This big lake offers good birding all fall. Mergansers, Common and Barrow's goldeneyes, and other waterfowl are common, while the surrounding forests have such birds as Northern Goshawk, Ruffed Grouse, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Also see: *The Birder's Guide to Montana*, Terry McEneaney, publ. 1993

18. OURAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
Utah

The marshes along the tour loop yield migrating waterfowl, terns, rails, and American Bitterns. Nearby Pelican Lake is also good, with concentrations of Western and Clark's grebes, American White Pelicans, and more. In late fall, watch for Prairie Falcons and Bald Eagles. Also see: *Utah Birds*, William H. Behle & Michael L. Perry, publ. 1975.

19. RIO GRANDE NATURE CENTER
New Mexico

Located within Albuquerque, this area has fine cottonwood groves that support woodland birds, from Great Horned Owls to White-breasted Nuthatches. Gambel's Quail are common in brushy spots, while the pond behind the visitor center often has Wood Ducks and other species. Also see: *New Mexico Bird-finding Guide*, edited by Dale A. Zimmerman, Marian A. Zimmerman, & John N. Durrie, publ. 1992.

20. PARKER DAM
Arizona-California

In late fall the spillway here attracts birds that are otherwise scarce in the desert southwest—mergansers, Greater Scaup, loons, Western and Clark's grebes, odd gulls, Common Goldeneyes, and even Barrow's Golden-

eyes. Brushy areas along the river hold Abert's Towhees and other species. Also see: *Birds of the Lower Colorado River Valley*, K. V. Rosenberg et al, publ. 1991.

21. LIGHTHOUSE PARK, VANCOUVER
British Columbia

This is the best place in the Vancouver area to find birds of rocky shoreline habitat, such as Black Oystercatcher, Surf-bird, Black Turnstone, or Rock Sandpiper might be seen here in late fall. The tall forest in the park's interior supports Blue Grouse, Pileated Woodpecker, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. Also see: *Bird-finding Guide to Canada*, J. Cam Finlay, publ. 1984; *Birds of Canada*, W. Earl Godfrey, rev. 1987

22. DISCOVERY PARK
Washington

One of Seattle best birding areas, Discovery Park's shoreline is particularly good in late fall, when Heermann's Gulls and Ancient Murrelets might be seen offshore. More usual are loons, grebes, scoters, and Pigeon Guillemots. Anna's Hummingbirds and Hutton's Vireos are found all year in wooded areas of the park. Also see: *Guide to Bird-finding in Washington*, Terrence R. Wahl & Dennis R. Paulson, rev. 1991; *Birding in Seattle and King County*, Eugene S. Hunn, publ. 1982.

23. BANDON
Oregon

The coastline in this region offers several easily accessible birding spots. Mudflats just north of the Coquille River mouth are good for migrating godwits and other shorebirds. The rocks near area lighthouse and jetties may host Black Oystercatchers, Harlequin Ducks, Surf-birds, and others. Also see: *The Birder's Guide to Oregon*, Joseph E. Evanich, Jr., publ.

**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 Phoenix (602) 832-8745	Maryland (301) 652-1088	Pennsylvania Allentown (215) 252-3455
British Columbia Vancouver (604) 737-9910	Massachusetts (617) 259-8805	Quebec Montreal (514) 355-6549
California Morro Bay (805) 528-7182	Minnesota (612) 827-3161	South Carolina (704) 332-2473
Florida (813) 984-4444	Montana (406) 721-2935	Tennessee (615) 356-7636
Illinois Central (217) 785-1083	New Mexico (505) 662-2101	Texas Northcentral (817) 261-6792 Lower Rio Grande Valley (210) 565-6773
Kansas (913) 372-5499	Ontario Hamilton (416) 648-9537	Utah (801) 538-4630
Louisiana New Orleans (504) 246-2473	Oregon Southern Oregon (503) 826-7011 (10 p.m.-6 a.m. weekdays only)	Washington (206) 526-8266

1990; *Birding Oregon*, Fred L. Ramsey, publ. 1981.

24. LOS BAÑOS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
California

This area in the Central Valley is productive throughout the fall and winter. Impoundments along the roads have herons, egrets, bitterns, White-faced Ibis, Common Moorhens, and large numbers of many shorebird species. Black-shouldered Kites and Burrowing Owls are often seen in the surrounding country. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Southern California* (Lane Series), Harold R.

Holt, rev. 1990; *Where Birders Go in Southern California*, Henry E. Childs, Jr., publ. 1990.

25. MORRO BAY
California

Some of the finest birding on the California coast at any season can be found at Morro Bay. Thousands of shorebirds gather on the marshes at the south end, while the open bay holds loons, cormorants, Brown Pelicans, Brant, terns, and gulls. Fall migrant land birds often gather in the woods of the state park next to the bay. For references, see above.