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TRAVEL & LIFE

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# FLY TO A BIRDING HOTSPOT THIS SPRING

BY SUSIE WALL

There is no better season to go birding in the Northwest than in the spring. From the Pacific Coast to the arid inland grasslands, this is the time when resident species are joined by migrants traveling along the Pacific Flyway from their wintering grounds in the south to their summer homes in the north. It is also when waterfowl and shorebirds begin looking for a place to nest and raise their young. For the best chance to see this eruption of winged creatures, strap on your binoculars and head to these birding hotspots across the Northwest.

Northern Harrier

© Reed Lane Photography



© Travis Salem



© Greg Thompson - Oregon State Parks



Golden-Crowned Kinglet

© Barbara Scheele CC BY-SA



Calliope Hummingbird

© Glacier NPS - Public domain



Great Blue Heron

© Reed Lane Photography

## OREGON

Birders visiting Oregon's capital city will flock to Salem's **Minto-Brown Island Park**. This massive city park hugs the banks of the Willamette River and extends over 1,200 acres into the woodlands and grassy meadows that surround it. Twenty-nine miles of paved and unpaved walking and biking trails allow access to most of these ecosystems. Follow the Orange Turtle Loop to see great blue heron stalking their

prey along the banks of the river. Watch as osprey zero in on a fish from high above, then shoot like arrows into the water. Stroll tree-line trails for migrating songbirds and resident woodland birds like Bewick's wren, Steller's jay and brown creeper.

**Shore Acres State Park** sits high on the rocks overlooking the Pacific Ocean along the southern Oregon coast. The site where the park now sits was once the estate of timber baron, Louis J.



1 Minto Brown Island Park

2 Shore Acres State Park

Simpson. The lush gardens planted by Simpson combined with the proximity to the coastline make Shore Acres the ideal place to view a wide range of bird species. Sit a spell on one of the many benches around the gardens to listen for the accelerating high-pitched tsee of the golden-crowned kinglet and look for calliope hummingbirds flitting among the blooming flowers. Seek shelter from the unsettled spring weather in the comfort of the observation building while still getting a great view of white-winged scoter and marbled murrelet riding the ocean waves.

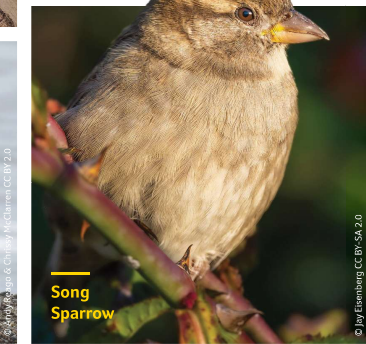


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Harlequin Duck



Song Sparrow

© Jay Eisenberg CC BY-SA 2.0



Marsh Wren

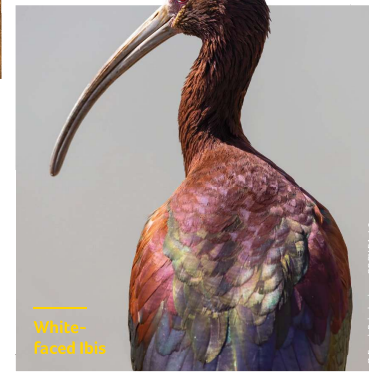
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White-faced Ibis

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Blue-winged Teal

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## WASHINGTON

The Semiahmoo Spit wraps around Drayton Harbor in Blaine, Washington, offering magnificent birdwatching opportunities on both land and sea. This area has earned its distinction as an “Important Bird Area of Washington” for good reason. Follow the Semiahmoo Parkway to the end of the spit to see shorebirds like black oystercatcher, red knot and western sandpiper taking advantage of the incoming tides to feed. Scan the waters of the protected harbor for surf scoter, harlequin duck and long-tailed duck. If possible, time your visit to coincide with the Wings Over Water NW Birding Festival held every March. Participants take part in a

variety of field trips led by expert guides on foot and by boat for a wonderful introduction to the local bird life.

Travel inland to the Chamma Natural Preserve in Richland along the banks of the Yakima River. The preserve is small compared to many birding hotspots at just 276 acres, but despite its size, Chamma’s combination of tree-lined riparian habitat, wetlands and fields of



1 Semiahmoo Spit 2 Chamma Natural Preserve

open sagebrush attract a variety of both native and migrating bird species. Follow the extensive trail network spanning 11 miles of these habitats. Look for waterfowl like gadwall, bufflehead and horned grebe along the River Trail. Link up to the Peninsula Loop and Sage Trail to see marsh wren, orange-crowned warbler and warbling vireo fitting among the abundance of sagebrush and stands of deciduous trees.

## MONTANA

The diverse ecosystems found across the 8,000 acres of Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge in the mountains of Northwest Montana attract a staggering array of birdlife. Relish the opportunity to observe young great-horned owls as they prepare to leave their nests in the dense forests. Test your bird identification skills on the shores of Dahl Lake to see if you can distinguish between blue-winged teal and green-winged teal navigating the still-frigid waters. Listen for the eerie winnowing sounds of Wilson’s snipe at the edge of a meadow dotted with patches of late winter snow. The snipe’s distinctive,

high-pitched, rapid-fire “whoops” originate from the rush of wind through its tail feathers as it repeatedly dives in the hope of attracting a mate.

Four hundred miles away in northeastern Montana, Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge offers up completely different birding opportunities exchanging mountains and forests for sprawling wetlands and native prairie grasslands. Thousands of migrating waterfowl like northern pintail pass through here each spring mingling with year-round residents like the American white pelican. Drive



1 Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge 2 Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge

the 15-mile self-guided auto tour that encircles the refuge’s 15,000 acres for the best chance to see shorebirds like white-faced ibis and Wilson’s phalarope as they use their long legs and beaks to feed along the shorelines of the many ponds. Be sure to look to the skies for bald eagle and American kestrel hunting above swaying blades of grass.

## IDAHO

Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge lies in southeast Idaho about an hour east of Twin Falls. The refuge runs for 25 miles along the Snake River and borders Lake Walcott State Park with its own 80 miles of shoreline giving birders a wide range of habitats to explore. Make your first stop the refuge headquarters located within the state park to get your bearings and determine where to go based on your time. One choice is the 1.2-mile walking trail that takes you to the shore of Lake Walcott to look for common loon nesting in the hidden pockets of the lake and migrating snow geese finding respite during their long spring migration. Scan the large islands on the reservoir for great blue heron and black-crowned heron in the large rookeries or communal nesting areas, which dot the treetops.

Enjoy birding with a dose of history at Virgil Phillips Farm located five miles north of Moscow. This 160-acre park was once the property of Virgil Edemoss Phillips who farmed the land until he donated it to the City of Moscow in the early 1970s. Thanks to Virgil's generosity, visitors can now explore the park on two hiking trails that lead along streams and through forests and open fields. The forest edges are a boon for enthusiasts of passerines, or perching birds, like varied thrush and red crossbill. Listen for the sweet wavering call of western meadowlark, a sure sign of warmer days to come. All these small birds in turn attract stealth predators like great-horned owl and Cooper's hawk.



American White Pelicans



1 Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge

2 Virgil Phillips Farm



Black-crowned Heron



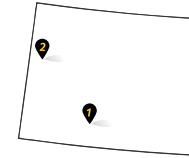
Greater Sage-grouse

## WYOMING

At first glance, the Red Desert is a stark place devoid of life, but look closer and discover that the badlands, sand dunes, and canyons found here act as magnets for a unique variety of birds. This remote landscape is found roughly halfway between Rock Springs and Rawlins in southeast Wyoming where snowmelt from the last remnants of winter create temporary ponds in the spring providing habitat for trumpeter

swan and mountain plover. Scan the dry open landscape for ground-dwelling birds like burrowing owl and sagebrush sparrow. Fortunate spring birders may even witness the elaborate courtship displays of male greater sage-grouse.

A certain four-legged creature is the main draw at the National Elk Refuge in Jackson, but visitors hoping to see birds among the 24,000 acres of grasslands, wetlands and forest will not be disappointed.



1 Red Desert

2 National Elk Refuge

The refuge is tucked between the Teton and Gros Ventre mountains and is part of the enormous Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Choose from a variety of viewing spots based on your interests and level of activity. Settle in at Flat Creek Overlook to look for flocks of waterfowl such as ring-necked duck, cinnamon teal and hooded merganser. Walk or bike along the paved pathway that runs along the wetlands keeping an eye out for greater yellowlegs picking along the water's edge. Drive Refuge Road into the heart of the sanctuary where long-billed curlew build their nests on the ground within the sweeping grasslands. 📍

### Plan your visit to these and other birding hotspots:

- ▶ Oregon [traveloregon.com](http://traveloregon.com)
- ▶ Washington [stateofwashington.com](http://stateofwashington.com)
- ▶ Montana [visitmt.com](http://visitmt.com)
- ▶ Idaho [visitidaho.org](http://visitidaho.org)
- ▶ Wyoming [travelywyoming.com](http://travelywyoming.com)

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