Grand Teton

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Teton National Park
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Memorial Parkway

Bird Finding Guide

The mountains, rivers and lakes of Grand Teton National Park provide a picturesque backdrop for bird watching. Over 330 species of birds live in the various park communities including alpine, forests, meadows, sagebrush flats and riparian. Use this guide to learn about the communities found here, places to look for birds and some of the inhabitants. Pick up a park map and bird checklist at a visitor center to assist your search. Please report any sightings of birds listed as rare or accidental on the checklist. With a keen eye, you can discover some of the birds that grace this landscape.

Communities

Birds inhabit a variety of communities throughout the park and parkway. They are searching for food, water, shelter and nesting sites. Some birds frequent only one community while others occupy a variety.

Alpine
Elevation, harsh winters and brief summers limit vegetation to low-growing forms. Birds that nest above treeline migrate south or to lower elevations for winter. Watch for golden eagles, ravens, Clark's nutcrackers, rosy finches, white-crowned sparrows and water pipits.

Lodgepole Pine Forests
Dense lodgepole pine forests cover glacial moraines on the valley floor and the lower mountain slopes. Look for olive-sided flycatchers, yellow-rumped warblers, ruby-crowned kinglets, mountain chickadees, white-crowned and chipping sparrows and dark-eyed juncos.

Aspen Forests
Aspens often occur in pure stands on hillsides. Trees with rotting trunks attract woodpeckers. Later, abandoned woodpecker cavities provide nesting opportunities for saw-whet owls, house wrens, mountain and black-capped chickadees, tree swallows and violet-green swallows.

Sagebrush Flats
Sagebrush thrives in rocky, well-drained soils in a semi-arid environment covering much of the valley floor. Despite these harsh conditions many species flourish. Look for sage grouse, vesper sparrows, western meadowlark, mountain bluebird, Brewer's sparrows and sage thrashers.

Aquatic and Riparian
Numerous rivers, creeks, lakes and ponds provide habitats where Canada geese and other waterfowl nest, while osprey and bald eagles hunt for fish. Common snipe, white-crowned and Lincoln sparrows, yellow and MacGillivray's warblers, and common yellowthroats nest in adjacent wet meadows. American dippers search for insects in fast-moving mountain streams. Look for common mergansers, Barrow's goldeneyes and mallards in small ponds and rivers and American white pelicans on Jackson Lake and the Snake River.

Bird Notes

Just a note about a few interesting species adapted to thrive here.

- **Greater Sage Grouse:** In early spring, sage grouse gather for courtship in areas called "leks." Males display for females at dawn. This species is in decline due to habitat loss.
- **Trumpeter Swans:** The largest waterfowl in North America is making a comeback after near extinction in the early 1900s. Look for these birds in ponds and rivers.
- **Barrow's Goldeneye:** A cavity-nesting duck that lives here year-round in rivers and lakes.
- **Great Gray Owl:** The tallest owl in North America with the largest wingspan. Males hunt during daylight making them visible in the lodgepole forest.
- **Bald Eagle and Osprey:** Fish loving raptors thrive along the Snake and Gros Ventre rivers and the valley lakes.
- **American Dipper:** A small aquatic songbird that frequents cascading streams. Known for its up and down bobbing motion as it forages for aquatic insects.
- **Clark's Nutcracker:** Both males and females tend a high-elevation nest. They gather large conifer seeds from whitebark and limber pines and cache them for later.
- **Red Crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks:** Large red finches that inhabit mature, open pine forests. The crossbill beak prys apart pinecone scales for the bird to gather the seeds.
- **Western Tanager:** These colorful birds winter in southern Central America and nests in the lodgepole forests. The redder the male's feathers, the more fit he is.
- **Calliope Hummingbird:** The smallest bird north of Mexico feeds on nectar from tubular wildflowers.

Birding Hot Spots

Grand View Point
Old growth Douglas firs support Williamson's and red-naped sapsuckers. Songbirds include mountain chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches, western tanagers, Townsend's solitaires, and dark-eyed juncos. Dusky and ruffed grouse nest here.

Christian Pond
Look for waterfowl such as ruddy ducks, ring-necked ducks, American wigeon, American coots, and the occasional Trumpeter swan.

Willow Flats
Extensive willow thickets merge with wet grassy meadows crossed by small creeks and beaver dams. Cinnamon teal, green-winged teal and American wigeon frequent ponds and creeks. Sandhill cranes, northern harriers, American bitterns, common snipes and soras nest here. Calliope hummingbirds feed on scarlet gilia. Red-naped sapsuckers and other woodpeckers abound. Frequent songbirds include willow flycatchers; cliff swallows; yellow, MacGillivray's and Wilson's warblers; common yellowthroats; fox and white-crowned sparrows; pine siskins; and yellow-headed blackbirds. Lazuli buntings and green-tailed towhees use the drier hillsides adjacent to Willow Flats.

Oxbow Bend
A meander of the Snake River, Oxbow Bend provides lush underwater plant growth and abundant fish for aquatic birds. Look for great blue herons, osprey, American white pelicans, double-crested cormorants, common mergansers and bald eagles.

Two Ocean Lake
Western grebes, trumpeter swans, common mergansers and common loons summer on the lake. Western tanagers, pine grosbeaks, Cassin's finches abound in the open forests nearby.

North Jenny Lake Trail
In 1999 a lightning-caused wildland fire burned the area north and west of Jenny Lake. Insects feeding on decaying trees attract black-backed and three-toed woodpeckers. Insects also attract mountain bluebirds, tree swallows, olive-sided and dusky flycatchers, western wood-pewees and yellow-rumped warblers.

Cascade Canyon
Cascade Creek carries snow melt through forests and meadows of wildflowers. American dippers bob in the creek and secretive harlequin ducks sometimes nest nearby. Western tanagers, ruby-crowned kinglets and yellow-rumped warblers nest near the trail. Look for golden eagles, Steller's jays, gray jays, golden-crowned kinglets, dark-eyed juncos and occasional Townsend's warblers.

Antelope Flats – Kelly Road
Large hayfields attract raptors such as American kestrels, prairie falcons, red-tailed and Swainson's hawks and northern harriers hunting small rodents. Check fence posts for western meadowlarks, western and eastern kingbirds and mountain bluebirds. Scan the old pastures for long-billed curlews and savannah sparrows.

Menors Ferry at Moose
Follow the pathway to homesteader cabins along the Snake River. Violet-green, tree, cliff and barn swallows scoop insects out of the air as western wood-pewees, dusky flycatchers and mountain bluebirds hawk for flying insects. Yellow warblers glean insects from cottonwood trees and shrubs. Calliope, broad-tailed and rufous hummingbirds seek wildflower nectar. Kingfishers, common mergansers, ospreys and bald eagles catch fish.

Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve
Several trails follow creeks and traverse a glacial moraine with mixed conifers and aspens. Look for western tanagers, MacGillivray's warblers, northern flickers, Lazuli buntings, ruby-crowned kinglets and green-tailed towhees. Listen for the sweet songs of hermit and Swainson's thrushes. Calliope and broad-tailed hummingbirds feed on scarlet gilia.

Blacktail Ponds Overlook
From this overlook north of Moose Junction view many different communities. Wetlands are home to American wigeons, blue-winged teal, mallards, and goldeneyes. Up to six species of swallows zip by catching insects. Bald eagles and osprey roost in the cottonwoods. Yellow warblers, song sparrows and willow flycatchers frequent the willows.

Bird Watching Etiquette

Birding is a popular activity. In national parks, you have the opportunity to observe birds in their natural environment. Enjoy birds but be a responsible birder.

- **Nesting birds are easily disturbed. If an adult on a nest flies off at your approach or circles you and screams an alarm, you are too close. Unattended nestlings quickly succumb to predation or exposure to the elements.**
- **Do not feed birds or any wildlife.**
- **Do not play bird songs or use bird calls. Such sounds disturb territorial males and nesting pairs.**
- **Stay on trails to preserve delicate habitat.**
- **Obey all wildlife closures.**
- **Good birding areas often attract other wildlife. Maintain a distance of at least 100 yards from wolves and bears and 25 yards from other animals. Do not position yourself between a female and her offspring.**