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sPriNg 2008

Photography by Steph Abegg
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Photography, road trip, and book by Steph Abegg

Cover Art: Green Jay on my Subaru, Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Reserve, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas (Artistic filter applied in Photoshop)
Painted Bunting
Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina

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Birding Stop #6: Great Lakes Area
Yellow-rumped Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Swainson’s Hawk, Mountain Bluebird, Sandhill Crane, House Wren, Pine Siskin, Chipping Sparrow, Black-headed Grosbeak.

Birding Stop #7: North Dakota
In July 2006, my dad bought me a Canon Telephoto EF 400mm f/5.6L USM Lens, on the conditions that I "take a few bird photos so we can document the birds around where we live." After a few minutes stalking a friendly robin around our backyard, I was hooked. I soon discovered that there were many more kinds of birds than I would ever hope to see near Vancouver, British Columbia. I began dreaming of a trip across the country to find all these other (North American) birds.

In the Spring of 2008, I was accepted into the geotechnical engineering program at the University of Washington for the coming Fall. So, I quit my brief professional engineering career, threw my sleeping bag and camera gear into my Subaru, and set out on the road to pursue the songbirds (and non-songbirds too of course) across the country.

From mid-April to mid-June, my travels took me on a 14,908-mile round tour through many of the birding hotspots of the Lower 48—from the wet forests of the Pacific Northwest to the dry deserts of the Southwest, from the tropical Gulf Coast to the Atlantic views on the populated East Coast, from the sprawling pastures around the Great Lakes to the unique landscape of the Prairie Potholes, from the heights of the Tetons to the marsh oases at the foot of the southern Cascades. I focused my birding efforts to 10 major birding areas, spending 3-10 days photographing birds at various places within each area before continuing on to my next major birding destination. Each destination hosted a unique habitat and bird population. Although birds were my primary focus, over the course of my extensive travels I gained a new appreciation for the fascinating complexity of American culture and the stunning diversity of geologic landforms that make up this great country.

I tried to get a photo of every kind of bird that I saw at each of the 10 birding destinations—as a result, I not only amassed thousands of photos, but I often found myself stealthily stalking an American Robin or House Sparrow, just as eager to take its picture as I would be if it were a Kirtland's Warbler or Flame-colored Tanager. In all, I saw at least 370 different kinds of birds. Some of these birds I saw only at one location (like the Elegant Trogan) and others (like the Northern Mockingbird) I saw all over the country. I identified each new bird as I went, comparing my photos to my indispensable Sibley guide. I still find it tough to distinguish some of the flycatchers and peeps!

This book details my birding road trip of a lifetime—where I went, what birds I saw, and of course some of my favorite bird photos.
**Where I Went On My Birding Road Trip**

April 12-June 16, 2008

14,908 miles - $2299.28 spent on gas - over 370 bird species photographed

1. **SOUTHEAST ARIZONA** (April 16-19)
   1a. Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
   1b. Madera Canyon
   1c. Patagonia

2. **TEXAS** (April 20-30)
   2a. Big Bend National Park
   2b. Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Rio Grande Valley
   2c. Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Rio Grande Valley
   2d. Goose Island State Park, Gulf Coast
   2e. Bolivar Flats, Gulf Coast
   2f. High Island, Gulf Coast
   2g. Sabine Woods, Gulf Coast

3. **DAUPHIN ISLAND, Alabama** (May 1-4)

4. **HUNTINGTON BEACH STATE PARK, South Carolina** (May 5-7)

5. **CAPE MAY AREA, New Jersey** (May 9-14)
   5a. Cape May State Park & Higbee Beach WMA
   5b. Belleplain State Forest

6. **BIRDING HOTSPOTS AROUND THE GREAT LAKES** (May 15-28)
   6a. Magee Marsh Wildlife Area (Crane Creek), Ohio
   6b. Oak Openings Preserve Metropark, Ohio
   6c. Point Pelee, Ontario
   6d. Grayling, Michigan
   6e. Whitefish Point, Michigan
   6f. Seney National Wildlife Refuge, Michigan
   6g. Nicolet National Forest, Wisconsin
   6h. Fish Creek, Wisconsin
   6i. Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, Wisconsin

7. **NORTH DAKOTA** (May 30 - June 1)
   7a. Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Prairie Potholes Region
   7b. Theodore Roosevelt National Park (north unit), Badlands Region

8. **MALHEUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, Oregon** (June 4-6)

9. **NORTHWEST WYOMING** (June 7-10)
   9a. Grand Teton National Park
   9b. Yellowstone National Park

10. **SOUTHWEST BRITISH COLUMBIA** (June 12-16)
    10a. George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary
    10b. Saturna Island
sPriNg miGrAtiOn aNd fAlLoUtS

Most birds do not stay in the same location throughout the year. Many birds that breed and nest in North America migrate to areas south of the Tropic of Cancer (southern Mexico, Central and South America, and the Lesser and Greater Antilles in the Caribbean Sea) in the fall because of a decrease in their food supply (insects mostly). In the spring, these birds then migrate back to breed and nest. Migration distance depends on the bird species. The arctic tern, for example, flies an astounding 20,000 miles each year between its arctic breeding ground and non-breeding area in the Antarctic. On the other extreme, a backyard robin might never leave town if it has a sufficient supply of insects, seeds, and berries.

Birds usually follow a migration route or “flyway” specific to their species, navigating by visual landmarks as well as the sun, stars, and the Earth’s magnetic field. In North America, there are four major migration flyways - the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways - with much of the songbird migration occurring over the eastern half of the continent. Traveling at 20-30 mph and flying mostly during the night (soaring birds such as hawks, on the other hand, travel mostly during the day), migrating songbirds will take several days to fly the thousands of miles between their wintering grounds and nesting grounds. Around mid-April, northward migrating songbirds pass through the southern states, and by mid-May the birds have reached the northern states.

Along the way the birds stop a number of times to rest and feed, sometimes stopping for only a day, and other times remaining in an area for a few weeks. Some areas tend to attract birds more than others - these birding “hot spots” result from a combination of strategic location along the migration flyway, abundance of food, and safe places to rest. Not all birding hotspots are located along the main migration routes, as a protected pocket of woodland or a marshland with ample food can lead to a good selection of birds at a location.

Weather is one of the chief external influences on migration. Generally, fair weather and winds in the direction of migration encourage the birds to move, while rain or winds against the migration encourage them to stay grounded. In the spring, a low-pressure zone moving north over the Gulf of Mexico or eastern United States can start a wave of migrating birds to move northward from the American Tropics or southern United States. This is because the low-pressure zone spirals counterclockwise, generating favorable flying conditions in a mass of moist, warm northward moving air. At either edge of this “warm sector” is a front, characterized by rain and changing wind directions. So while birds enjoy the pleasant conditions between the fronts, when they enter the rain and headwinds at the edges of the warm sector, their journey becomes a battle for life, with wet feathers and a challenging headwind. As a result, the land along the edges of the fronts tends to collect the most birds. This can cause a spring “fallout” of migrants, particularly at locations on the edges of large bodies of water such as the Gulf or Atlantic Coast or even the Great Lakes, as these are often the first land the exhausted migrants find. Warblers, vireos, flycatchers, and other songbirds fall out of the sky in flocks. Famous fallout sites include High Island (Texas) and Dauphin Island (Alabama) along the Gulf Coast, Cape May (New Jersey) along the Atlantic Coast, and Magee Marsh (Ohio) and Point Pelee (Ontario) along the northern and southern edges of Lake Erie.

(Similarly, weather also plays an important role in fall migration, when northwest winds and clearing skies following the passage of a front trigger a southward migratory flight. If this front is over the eastern United States, a good number of birds will ride the winds too far, drifting east over the Atlantic Ocean and having to turn around into the wind and make their way back to the first spot they can find on the shore.)

Spring fallouts of migrating birds can result along the edges of fronts moving counterclockwise around a low pressure system. Here, northward-flying birds meet rain and wind, and are forced to land at the first location that provides adequate shelter and food. The “warm sector” between the fronts provides favorable flying conditions, and hence fewer birds coming down to the land. So a sunny day doesn’t always mean good birding on the ground!
American Avocets in breeding plumage
Bolivar Flats, Upper Texas Coast

© Steph Abegg
From the wet and cool early Spring weather of the Vancouver area, I beelined for the heat of the Southwest. On the way to my first birding destination in Southeast Arizona, I stopped briefly at Arches National Park in Utah (where I spent a night photographing stars streaking behind the spectacular sandstone arches, as well as snapped a few photos of an Oregon Dark-eyed Junco) and the Grand Canyon in northwest Arizona (where I watched sunrise illuminate the gaping canyon walls as I went on a morning jog along the rim, after which I ran back to my car to grab my camera to photograph a Mountain Bluebird I had seen).

Finally, I reached Southeast Arizona, one of the nation's top birding locations. With it's lush canyons, cottonwood-lined streams, refuges and reservoirs, and favorable weather and consistent food supply, Southeastern Arizona is home to an incredible variety and volume of birds. Moreover, due to its position on the Mexican border, several Mexican migrants can be found in Southeast Arizona.

I went to three birding hotspots in Southeast Arizona, all within a couple of hours drive of each other: the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (just outside of Tucson), Madera Canyon, and Patagonia. The aviaries and controlled natural environment at the extensive Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum host a wide selection of birds native to the area. Madera Canyon—where I did most of my birding near the feeders of the Santa Rita Lodge and on trails near the head of the canyon—provided a selection of birds from a mountain zone. Patagonia—where I spent a few hours each at Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, Patagonia Lake State Park, the popular Roadside Rest Area, and the feeders at Marion Paton’s House (a private residence whose bird feeders have become so successful that they've created a public viewing area)—rounded out my visit by providing a selection of birds from a riparian zone.

By mid-day temperatures were climbing towards the triple digits, but in the morning hours birds were everywhere, reveling the cooler morning temperatures. My birding adventure began with a flurry of new colorful birds. I saw many southeast Arizonan specialties, including an elusive Elegant Trogon (which I found by following its distinctive barking call), a Magnificent Hummingbird (one of the many hummingbirds southeast Arizona is known for), and a Flame-colored Tanager (many birders come to Madera Canyon in hopes of seeing this bird). The great birding in Southeast Arizona set the stage for my trip.
biRdS i sAw iN s OuTh EaSt aRiZoNa

(Birds highlighted in white were seen only in Southeast Arizona during my birding road trip.)

BLACKBIRD:
  Yellow-headed (DM)
BOBWHITE:
  Masked (DM)
BUNTING:
  Lazuli (MC, P)
CARDINAL:
  Northern (DM, P)
COOT:
  American (P)
DOVE:
  Inca (DM, P)
  Mourning (DM, MC)
  White-winged (DM)
DUCK:
  Black-bellied Whistling (DM)
FINCH:
  House (MC, P)
  House (yellow variant) (DM)
FLICKER:
  Gilded (DM)
FLYCATCHER:
  Brown-crested (MC)
  Vermilion (MC, P)
GOLDFINCH:
  Lesser (MC, P)
GROSBEAK:
  Black-headed (DM, MC)
  Hybrid Black-head x Yellow (DM)
HAWK:
  Gray (P)
HERON:
  Great Blue (P)
HUMMINGBIRD:
  Anna's (DM)
  Black-necked (MC)
  Black-chinned (MC)
  Broad-billed (DM, MC)
  Costa's (DM, MC, P)
  Magnificent (MC)
  Rufous (DM)
  Violet-crowned (P)
JAY:
  Mexican (MC)
JUNCO:
  Gray-headed Dark-eyed (MC)
  Oregon Dark-eyed (MC)
  Pink-sided Dark-eyed (MC)
KESTREL:
  American (MC)
KILLDEER (DM)
KINGBIRD:
  Cassin's (MC, P)
  Ruby-crowned (MC)
KINGLET:
  Northern (MC)
MOCKINGBIRD:
  Northern (MC)
  Black-throated (MC)
  Chipping (DM, MC, P)
  Lark (MC)
  White-crowned (DM, P)
NUTHATCH:
  White-breasted (MC)
ORIOLE:
  Hooded (DM)
  Scott's (MC)
PARROT:
  Lilac-crowned (DM)
PHOEBE:
  Say's (MC)
  Band-tailed (DM)
PYRRHULOXIA (DM)
QUAIL:
  Gambel's (DM)
REDSTART:
  Painted (MC)
  Roadrunner (Greater (DM)
  Sapsucker (Red-naped (MC)
SISKIN:
  Pine (MC, P)
SNIPE:
  Common (P)
SPARROW:
  Black-throated (MC)
  Chipping (DM, MC, P)
  Lark (MC)
  White-crowned (DM, P)
STILT:
  Western (MC)
TANAGER:
  Flame-colored (MC)
  Hepatic (MC)
  Summer (P)
TEAL:
  Blue-winged (DM)
  Cinnamon (P)
THRASHER:
  Curve-billed (DM)
TITMOUSE:
  Bridled (MC)
  Towhee (Canyon (MC)
  Trogon (Elegant (MC)
  Turkey (MC, P)
  Wild (MC)
TYRANNULET:
  Northern Beardless (P)
VERDIN (DM, MC)
VIREO:
  Bell's (P)
  Plumbeous ? (MC)
  Vulture (DM, MC)
  Western Bluebird (Grand Canyon)
  Scaled Quail (New Mexico)

NEARBY:
  Oregon Dark-eyed Junco (Arches)
  Northern Bearded (P)
Western Bluebird
Grand Canyon Village area, Arizona
© Steph Abegg

Lazuli Bunting
At the feeders of the Paton’s Home in Patagonia, Arizona
© Steph Abegg
Curve-billed Thrasher

Edge of parking lot at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Arizona

© Steph Abegg

Unidentified

Edge of parking lot at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Arizona

© Steph Abegg
Elegant Trogon

Just past the end of the road in Madera Canyon, Arizona

© Steph Abegg
House Finch, yellow variant
Aviary at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Arizona

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Band-tailed Pigeon
Aviary at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Arizona

© Steph Abegg
The second birding locale of my adventure was southern Texas. Due to its great size, this state encompasses many birding habitats. I went to three major birding regions along the southern border of the state: (1) **Big Bend National Park**, (2) the **Lower Rio Grande Valley** (where I went to Santa-Ana NWR and Laguna Atascosa NWR), and (3) the **Upper Gulf Coast** (where I went to Goose Island State Park, High Island and Bolivar Flats, and Sabine Woods). These three areas are so far apart and have their own distinct birds. I saw more species and area specialties in southern Texas than I saw at any other birding stop on my travels.

My first stop in Texas was **Big Bend National Park**, 800,000 acres of remote desert and mountains just north of the Mexican border. I spent an evening and morning enjoying an incredible variety of birds at the Rio Grande Village area on the east end of the park. I then went to Chisos Basin in the middle of the park, where I spent a day hiking the trails in hopes of finding a Coloma Warbler (the only place it is found in the US), but all I ended up with were many photos of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Hutton's Vireos in hopeful attempts that these small birds were actually the Coloma Warbler.

After Big Bend, I drove to the lower Rio Grande Valley, spending much of the drive distracted by the striking Scissor-tailed Flycatchers perched on the telephone wires along the road. I went to two well-known National Wildlife Refuges: **Santa-Ana NWR**, located along the banks of the Rio Grande, and **Laguna Atascosa NWR**, located about 40 miles to the east near where the Rio Grande meets the Gulf. Again, I racked up quite a list of different species including some southern Texan / Mexican specialties such as the Olive Sparrow, Green Jay, Groove-billed Ani, Crested Caracara, Great Kiskadee, Plain Chachalaca, Black-crested Tufted Titmouse, Altamira Oriole, White-tipped Dove, and Clay-colored Robin.

My next birding area was the Gulf Coast of Texas, a spring migration hotspot, particularly when unfavorable weather forces birds migrating across the Gulf of Mexico to seek refuge at the first land they encounter. I stayed a night at **Goose Island State Park**, where I saw my first pelicans and discovered a songbird hot-spot at the feeders in the campground. I then stopped for a few days to photograph the swarms of shorebirds at **Bolivar Flats** and the colorful variety of woodland birds and nesting egrets and spoonbills in the famed **Boy Scout Woods** and **Smith Oaks Wildlife Sanctuary** on High Island. There were about as many birders as birds at this well-known birding local. I heard of a Painted Bunting being sighted at **Sabine Woods** (1 hour further up the coast), so I headed there to try to find it. Unfortunately, by the time I got there, the Painted Bunting must have moved on to his nesting grounds further east. But this was where I was headed next!
Birds is a work in southern Texas

(BB = Big Bend NP, RG = Lower Rio Grande Valley, UC = Upper Gulf Coast)
(Birds highlighted in white were seen only in southern Texas during my birding road trip.)

ANHINGA (RG, UC)
ANI:
- Groove-billed (RG)
AVOCET:
- American (UC)
BLACKBIRD:
- Brewer’s (BB)
- Red-winged (RG, UC)
BUNTING:
- Indigo (RG, UC)
CARACARA:
- Crested (RG)
CARDINAL:
- Northern (BB, RG, UC)
CATBIRD:
- Gray (UC)
CHACHALACA:
- Plain (RG)
CHAT:
- Yellow-breasted (BB)
COOT:
- American (RG)
CORMORANT:
- Double-crested (RG)
- Neotropical (UC)
COWBIRD:
- Bronzed (BB, RG)
- Brown-headed (BB, UC)
CUCKOO:
- Yellow-billed (UC)
CURLEW:
- Long-billed (RG)
DICKCISSEL (UC)
DOVE:
- Eurasian-collared (UC)
- Inca (RG, UC)
- Mourning (BB, RG)
- White-tipped (RG)
- White-winged (BB, RG)
DOWITCHER:
- Long-billed (RG)
- Short-billed (UC)
DUCK:
- Black-bellied Whistling (RG)
DUNLIN (RG, UC)
EGRET:
- Cattle (RG)
- Great (RG, UC)
- Reddish (dark morph) (UC)
- Reddish (white morph) (UC)
- Snowy (RG, UC)
FLYCATCHER:
- Acadian (UC)
- Ash-throated (BB, RG)
- Fork-tailed (UC)
- Vermilion (BB)
FINCH:
- Scissor-tailed (RG, UC)
- House (BB)
- Gadwall (RG)
- Purple (UC)
- Blue-gray (BB)
- Common (UC)
- Great-tailed (BB, RG, UC)
GREBE:
- Least (RG)
- Pied-billed (BB)
GROSBEAK:
- Blue (UC)
- Rose-breasted (UC)
GULL:
- Laughing (RG, UC)
- Harris’s (RG)
HERON:
- Green (UC)
- Little Blue (RG, UC)
- Tricolored (RG, UC)
HUMMINGBIRD:
- Broad-tailed (BB)
- Ruby-throated (RG, UC)
IBIS:
- White (RG, UC)
- White-faced (RG)
JAY:
- Blue (UC)
- Green (RG)
- Mexican (BB)
KILLDEER:
- Couch’s (RG)
- Eastern (UC)
KISKADEE:
- Least (RG)
- Great (RG)
KNOT:
- Red (UC)
MALLARD (RG)
MARTIN:
- Purple (UC)
MEADOWLARK:
- Northern (BB, RG, UC)
- Common (RG)
MOCKINGBIRD:
- Northern (BB, RG, UC)
- Common (RG)
ORIOLE:
- Altamira (RG)
- Baltimore (UC)
- Bullock’s (BB)
PHEEBO:
- Orchard (BB, UC)
- Scott’s (BB)
OSPREY (BB)
OVENBIRD (UC)
PARULA:
- Northern (UC)
PELICAN:
POURC:
- Mourning (BB, RG)
GRACKLE:
- Brown (UC)
- Common (UC)
- Couch’s (RG)
GULL:
- Purple (UC)
PYRRHULOXIA (BB)
QUAIL:
- Ash-throated (BB, RG)
HUMMINGBIRD:
- Altamira (RG)
- Baltimore (UC)
- Bullock’s (BB)
REDSTART:
- American (UC)
ROADRUNNER:
- Greater (BB)
ROBIN:
- Clay-colored (RG)
SANDERLING (UC)
SANDPIPER:
- Purple (RG)
- Semipalmated (UC)
SHOVELER:  
Northern (RG)  
SHRIKE:  
Loggerhead (UC)  
SKIMMER:  
Black (UC)  
SPARROW:  
Chipping (BB)  
Lark (RG)  
Olive (RG)  
Rufous-crowned (BB)  
Savannah (? (UC)  
SPOONBILL:  
Roseate (UC)  
STARLING:  
European (UC)  
STILT:  
Black-necked (RG, UC)  
SWALLOW:  
Barn (RG, UC)  
Cliff (UC)  
Tree (RG, UC)  
N. Rough-winged (BB, RG)  
TANAGER:  
Scarlet (UC)  
Summer (BB, UC)  
TEAL:  
Blue-winged (UC)  
TERN:  
Caspian (RG)  
Common (UC)  
Forester’s (UC)  
Royal (RG, UC)  
Sandwich (RG)  
THRASHER:  
Brown (UC)  
Curve-billed (RG)  
Long-billed (RG)  
THRUSH:  
Gray-cheeked (UC)  
Hermit (BB, UC)  
Wood (UC)  
TITMOUSE:  
Black-crested tufted (RG, UC)  
TOWHEE:  
Canyon (BB)  
Spotted (BB)  
TURNSTONE:  
Ruddy (UC)  
TYRANNULET:  
Northern Beardless (BB)  
VEERY (UC)  
VIREO:  
Hutton’s (BB)  
Philadelphia (UC)  
Red-eyed (UC)  
VULTURE:  
Turkey (BB)  
WARBLER:  
Bay-breasted (UC)  
Black-and-white (RG, UC)  
Black-throated Green (UC)  
Blackburnian (UC)  
Blue-winged (UC)  
Cerulean (UC)  
Chestnut-sided (UC)  
Golden-winged (UC)  
Kentucky (UC)  
Magnolia (RG, UC)  
Prothonotary (UC)  
Tennessee (UC)  
Townsend’s (BB)  
Wilson’s (BB)  
Worm-eating (BB)  
Yellow (RG, UC)  
WATERTHRUSH:  
Northern (UC)  
WILLLET (RG, UC)  
WOOD-PEWEE:  
Eastern (RG, UC)  
WOODPECKER:  
Acorn (BB)  
Yellowlegs (UC)  
Rufous-crowned (BB)  
THRUSH:  
Cerulean (UC)  
Common (UC)  
Savannah ? (UC)  
Gray-cheeked (UC)  
Chestnut-sided (UC)  
Scarlet (UC)  
VIREO:  
Summer (BB, UC)  
Hutton’s (BB)  
Philadelphia (UC)  
Red-eyed (UC)  
Blue-winged (UC)  
Red-bellied (BB, UC)  
Common (UC)  
Acorn (BB)  
Cactus (BB)  
Canyon (BB)  
Carolina (RG)  
Loggerhead (UC)  
Logroño (UC)  
Red-bellied (BB, UC)  
Common (UC)
Scarlet Tanager
Boy Scout Woods, High Island, Upper Gulf Coast, Texas

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Vermilion Flycatcher
Rio Grande Village area, Big Bend National Park, Texas

© Steph Abegg
Northern Cardinal
Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
© Steph Abegg

Summer Tanager
Rio Grande Village area, Big Bend National Park, Texas
© Steph Abegg
Black Phoebe
Rio Grande Village area, Big Bend National Park, Texas
© Steph Abegg

Greater Roadrunner
Rio Grande Village area, Big Bend National Park, Texas
© Steph Abegg
Groove-billed Ani
Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
© Steph Abegg
Harris's Hawk
Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
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Crested Caracara
Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
© Steph Abegg
Couch's Kingbird
In the parking lot of Santa-Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
© Steph Abegg

Great Kiskadee
Santa-Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
© Steph Abegg
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
On the telephone wires just outside Goose Island State Park, Gulf Coast, Texas
© Steph Abegg

Ash-throated Flycatcher
In the parking lot of Santa-Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
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Hermit Thrush
Rio Grande Village area, Big Bend National Park, Texas

© Steph Abegg

Brown Thrasher
At the campground at Goose Island State Park, Gulf Coast, Texas

© Steph Abegg
Least Grebe
Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
© Steph Abegg

Black-necked Stilt
Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas
© Steph Abegg
Great Egret babies
Rookery at Smith Oaks Sanctuary, High Island, Upper Gulf Coast, Texas
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Roseate Spoonbill
Rookery at Smith Oaks Sanctuary, High Island, Upper Gulf Coast, Texas
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My travels next took me east along the Gulf of Mexico to Dauphin Island, Alabama. Like the Upper Gulf Coast of Texas, Dauphin Island is a well-known birding hotspot during spring migration, especially after a late-season cold front entering the Gulf of Mexico. Migrants that departed the previous evening from the Yucatan Peninsula or other sites in southern Mexico, Belize, Cuba, and possibly even points farther south on a tailwind may encounter heavy rain and a wind shift to the north or northwest as they near and cross the cold front. A journey that normally might be some 500 miles and take some 15 hours to complete has now become a battle for life, and birds will look for the first patch of trees or brush along the immediate coast.

When I arrived on Dauphin Island, the sunny weather made for favorable flying conditions, and as a result the songbirds stopped only briefly to refuel when they passed over Dauphin Island in the early afternoon (afternoon is the best time to find birds on this island due to its position along the migration flyway). So after finding empty trees at the popular Shell Mounds and the Audubon Bird Sanctuary on the east end of the island, I went to look for some shorebirds on the west end of the island (where I was happy to find some American Oystercatchers, as at home I had only seen Black Oystercatchers). The next day was a bit more productive for songbirds, as a thunder-shower generated a population boom of Red-eyed Vireos, and a small (but noticeable) increase in warblers, tanagers, hummingbirds, and grosbeaks.

All in all, my visit to Dauphin Island was a success, as I added several more birds to my growing road trip list: Black-billed Cuckoo, Bobolink, Common Loon, American Oystercatcher, Semipalmated Plover, Spotted Sandpiper, Bank Swallow, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Whimbrel. (However, by the end of my birding road trip, the only bird I had seen on Dauphin Island that I had not seen anywhere else on my travels was the American Oystercatcher.)
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Red-eyed Vireo
Audubon Bird Sanctuary, Dauphin Island, Alabama
© Steph Abegg

Black-billed Cuckoo
Shell Mounds, Dauphin Island, Alabama
© Steph Abegg
American Oystercatchers
Beach on west end of Dauphin Island

© Steph Abegg
Wood Thrush
Shell Mounds, Dauphin Island, Alabama
© Steph Abegg

Sanderling
West beaches of Dauphin Island
© Steph Abegg
Ruddy Turnstone
East end of Dauphin Island, Alabama
© Steph Abegg

Northern Mockingbird mother and toddler
North side of Dauphin Island, Alabama
© Steph Abegg
European Starling
Audubon Bird Sanctuary, Dauphin Island, Alabama
© Steph Abegg

Gray Catbird
Shell Mounds, Dauphin Island, Alabama
© Steph Abegg
Indigo Bunting
Shell Mounds, Dauphin Island, Alabama

© Steph Abegg

Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Shell Mounds, Dauphin Island, Alabama

© Steph Abegg
One of the birds I wanted to see (and photograph, of course) was a Painted Bunting. The males of this species look like they have bathed themselves on a paint pallet, first immersing themselves in the red paint, then rolling their backs around in the greens and yellows, and finishing off by dunking their head in the blue. When I was in Texas and on Dauphin Island, I seemed to be one step behind the migration of the Painted Buntings towards their nesting grounds in the southeast, so I called some of the parks and wildlife refuges on the southeast coast, and discovered that these beautiful birds had arrived at Huntington Beach State Park in South Carolina.

I enjoyed my stay at Huntington Beach State Park, where the nice—albeit expensive—camping facilities and wide range of habitats—marshland, beaches, and woodland—gave rise to comfortable and successful birding. I found herons, plovers, and sandpipers (as well as alligators) in the marshes; I found gulls, terns, and pelicans along the beach; and I found buntings, titmouse, warblers, and thrashers in the trees. One of the most reliable places for songbirds was around the feeders of the Education Center, which is where I planted myself when I arrived, determined to stay there until I saw a Painted Bunting. A few hours later, I not only had a photo of a Painted Bunting worthy of hanging on my wall, but I found myself holding one of the beautiful little birds in my hand (I was lucky enough to be there at the same time as a wildlife biologist who was trapping and banding the buntings).

I stayed at Huntington Beach State Park for a few days and even did a little birding at the lush Brookgreen Gardens across the street, where the prize photo was of a Yellow-throated Warbler posing for several minutes on a low branch. I moved on when the sunny skies were replaced with thundershowers, hoping for an unlikely chance that the long-term forecast of rain for the east coast would bypass my next stop at Cape May, New Jersey (or result in an incredible fallout).
Birds i saw at Huntington Beach State Park during my birding road trip.

BLACKBIRD:  Red-winged
BLUEBIRD:  Eastern
BOOBY:  Masked
BUNTING:  Painted
CARDINAL:  Northern
CATBIRD:  Gray
CHICKADEE:  Carolina
CHICKEN
CORMORANT:  Double-crested
COWBIRD:  Brown-headed
DOVE:  Mourning
DOWITCHER:  Long-billed
DUNLIN
EAGLE:  Bald
EGRET:  Cattle
FINCH:  House
FLYCATCHER:  Great Crested
GNATCATCHER:  Blue-gray
GOOSE:  Canada
GRACKLE:  Boat-tailed
GULL:  Laughing
HAWK:  Red-tailed
HERON:  Black Crowned Night
Great Blue
Green
Little Blue
IBIS:  White
JAY:  Blue
MERGANSER:  Red-breasted
MOCKINGBIRD:  Northern
NUTHATCH:  White-breasted
ORIOLE:  Orchard
OSPREY
OWL:  Barn
Barred
Great Horned
PELICAN:  Brown
PLOVER:  Black-bellied
Semipalmated
ROBIN:  American
SANDBERLING
SANDPIPER:  Semipalmated
SWALLOW:  Barn
Tree
SWAN:  Mute
TANAGER:  Summer
TERN:  Least
THRASHER:  Brown
TITMOUSE:  Northern Tufted
TURKEY:  Wild
TURNSTONE:  Ruddy
VULTURE:  Turkey
WARBLER:  Yellow throated
WHIMBREL
WILLET
WOOD-PEEWE:  Eastern
WOODPECKER:  Red-bellied
WREN:  Carolina
YELLOWLEGS:  Greater
Lesser
YELLOWTHROAT:  Common
Green Heron
Along entrance road to Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina
© Steph Abegg

Long-billed Dowitcher
Along entrance road to Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina
© Steph Abegg
Yellow-throated Warbler
Brookgreen Gardens near Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina
© Steph Abegg

White-breasted Nuthatch
Brookgreen Gardens near Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina
© Steph Abegg
Boat-tailed Grackle
Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina

© Steph Abegg

Snowy Egret
Along entrance road to Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina

© Steph Abegg
Brown Pelican

In marshes near the Education Center at Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina

© Steph Abegg
Eastern Wood-Pewee
Brookgreen Gardens near Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina
© Steph Abegg

Painted Bunting
Near feeders at Education Center at Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina
© Steph Abegg
Laughing Gull

In marshes near the Education Center at Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina

© Steph Abegg
From the warm beach and Painted Buntings of South Carolina, I headed north for Cape May, a well-known migration site on the southernmost tip of New Jersey. Cape May is especially famous for the volume and variety of birds that pass through during fall migration, usually stopping to refuel and rest before continuing southward over the Atlantic Ocean. Cape May can also be filled with birds during spring migration, especially when the conditions are right (southwesterly winds that trigger a migration over the region are ideal). In the Spring, birds that began their flight the evening before reach Cape May in the early morning and stop to refuel before continuing their northward migration.

I arrived at Cape May in a severe wind and rainstorm that lasted a couple of days. I enjoyed the nicer weather that followed the storm, but unfortunately there was a north wind over the East Coast that continued to put bird migration at a near standstill. Even so, I still managed to find a number of resident birds and migrating stragglers at the popular Cape May State Park and Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area as well as at Belleplain State Forest (which hosts more nesting birds) about an hour to the north of Cape May. I eagerly stalked some robins, starlings, and house finches around the parking lots, as these familiar and common birds had been relatively scarce in the southern states (and it was also my goal to get a decent photo of every kind of bird I saw at each location I went to on my travels). My camera seemed drawn to the yellow birds, as my favorite photos included a Yellow-breasted Chat, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Pine Warbler, and White-eyed Vireo. I also saw some waterbirds and shorebirds in the Cape May area that, although all of them are common, I did not see anywhere else during my travels, such as a Glossy Ibis, Domestic Muscovy, Least and Solitary Sandpipers, and Surf Scoter.
Birds I saw in the Cape May area are:

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(Birds highlighted in white were seen only in the Cape May area during my birding road trip.)
American Robin
Cape May State Park, Cape May, New Jersey

© Steph Abegg

Northern Tufted Titmouse
Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area, Cape May, New Jersey

© Steph Abegg
Mute Swan

Cape May State Park, Cape May, New Jersey

© Steph Abegg
Pine Warbler
Belleplain State Forest, New Jersey
© Steph Abegg

Common Yellowthroat
Cape May State Park, Cape May, New Jersey
© Steph Abegg
Prairie Warbler
Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area, Cape May, New Jersey
© Steph Abegg

Yellow-breasted Chat
Cape May State Park, Cape May, New Jersey
© Steph Abegg
Eastern Kingbird
Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area, Cape May, New Jersey
© Steph Abegg

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Belleplain State Forest, New Jersey
© Steph Abegg
The area around the Great Lakes sees birds travelling on both the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, and therefore has a spectacular volume and variety of birds passing through during migration. My primary destination in this area was the popular warbler hotspot at Magee Marsh Wildlife Area (also known as Crane Creek) on the southwest end of Lake Erie in Ohio. Birds often congregate at the lush forest and marshland here before continuing north across Lake Erie (or, if the winds are favorable for flight, they might instead continue over the lake and congregate at Point Pelee on the north side). I spent most of my time walking on the popular boardwalk in the patch of forest near the beach. Warblers (and warbler-watchers) were everywhere. Often the ever-constant warbling symphony would be interrupted by an enthusiastic stampede to a recently-sighted Mourning or Connecticut Warbler or a good-natured argument over the identification of a specific bird call or a nondescript juvenile. In the four days I was at Magee Marsh, I saw most of the 28 different warblers I saw around the Great Lakes (I saw 41 different warblers on my entire trip). One day, I found a particularly active tree along the edge of the parking lot; within the hour, I had spotted 17 different warblers in this tree—needless to say, that day I never left the parking lot! Of course, there were many other kinds of birds too, and I generated quite a species list while I was in the area. I also spent a day each at the nearby Oak Openings Preserve Metropark in Ohio (to find a red-headed woodpecker and hooded warbler) and Point Pelee in Ontario (another spring migration hotspot located just north of Magee Marsh, on the Canadian side of Lake Erie).

By the time I left the area around Magee Marsh, I had caught warbler fever. One of the few warblers I had yet to photograph was the Kirtland's Warbler. This is a rare bird that nests exclusively in jack pine forests of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. Fire suppression and nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds has led to a drastic decline in the species. Although recent habitat management has improved the bird's population, in 2007 it was estimated that there were no more than 5,000 Kirtland's Warblers. The best way to see it is on (free!) tours conducted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service or Forest Service out of Grayling or Mio, Michigan. An hour of standing in the rain and wind in a jack pine forest near Grayling, and I had my photo of Warbler #40!

As I continued my westward travels, I stopped briefly at a number of other great birding locals in the area around the Great Lakes. These included Whitefish Point in Michigan (known for its raptor and shorebird migration); Seney National Wildlife Refuge in Michigan (a nice midday stop to stretch the legs); Nicolet National Forest in Wisconsin (to find some rare Wisconsin specialties which I never found); Fish Creek in Wisconsin (where I stayed with my grandparents for a few days, and found plenty of birds at the nearby Peninsula State Park); and Crex Meadows Wildlife Area in northwest Wisconsin (to add some brush prairie and wetland birds to my growing road trip list). Overall, my species list for the Great Lakes was second only to my list for southern Texas.
(MM = Magee Marsh (OH), OO = Oak Openings Metropark (OH), PP = Point Pelee (Ontario), G = Grayling (MI), WP = Whitefish Point (MI), S = Seney NWR (MI), N = Nicolet National Forest (WI), FC=Fish Creek (WI), CM = Crex Meadows (WI))
(Birds highlighted in white were seen only in the area around the Great Lakes during my birding road trip.)

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  Pine (OO)
SPARROW:
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  Clay-colored (MM, CM)
  Field (OO, FC)
  House (MM, PP, CM)
  Lark (OO)
  Savannah (S)
  Song (MM, S, FC, CM)
  White-crowned (MM)
  White-throated (MM, N, FC)

STARLING:
  European (MM)

SWALLOW:
  Bank (MM)
  Barn (MM)
  Northern Rough-winged (PP, FC)
  Tree (MM, PP, FC, CM)

SWAN:
  Trumpeter (MM, S, CM)

TANAGER:
  Scarlet (MM, FC)

TEAL:
  Blue-winged (CM)
  Green-winged (CM)

TERN:
  Black (CM)
  Caspian (FC)
  Forester’s (PP)
  Blue-winged x Golden-winged (OO)
  Blackpoll (MM, FC)
  Red-headed (OO)

THRASHER:
  Brown (CM)
  Swainson’s (MM, OO)
  Hooded (OO)
  Common (MM, FC, CM)

TITMOUSE:
  Gray-cheeked (MM)
  Northern Tufted (MM, OO)
  Connecticut (MM)
  Swainson’s (MM, OO)
  Connecticut (MM)

TOWHEE:
  Cape May (MM)
  Yellow (MM, PP, FC, CM)
  Nashville (MM)
  Palm (MM)

VEERY (MM)
  Eastern (OO, FC, CM)
  Yellow-throated (CM)

VIPEO:
  Blue-headed (aka Solitary) (MM, FC)
  Philadelphia (MM)
  Wilson’s (MM, FC)
  Yellow (MM, PP, FC, CM)
  Yellow-rumped (myrtle) (MM, S, FC)

VULTURE:
  Turkey (OO)

WATERTHRUSH:
  Northern (MM, FC)

WAXWING:
  Cedar (MM)

WHIP-POOR-WILL (MM)

WOOD-PEWEE:
  Eastern (FC)

WOODPECKER:
  Downy (MM, PP)
  Red-bellied (PP)

YELLOWTHROAT:
  Common (MM, FC, CM)

BLUE-WINGED: (CM)
BLACK-WINGED (CM)
BAY-BREASTED (MM, FC)
BLACK-AND-WHITE (MM)
BLACKBURNIAN (MM, N)
 BLACK-THROATED BLUE (MM)
BLACK-THROATED GREEN (MM, FC)
American Redstart
Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Ohio

© Steph Abegg
White-eyed Vireo
Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Ohio
© Steph Abegg
Tree Swallows
Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Ohio
© Steph Abegg

Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Point Pelee, Ontario
© Steph Abegg
Blue Jay
Whitefish Point, Michigan
© Steph Abegg

Purple Finch
Whitefish Point, Michigan
© Steph Abegg
Black-capped Chickadee
Whitefish Point, Michigan
© Steph Abegg
Baltimore Oriole
Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Ohio
© Steph Abegg
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Point Pelee, Ontario
© Steph Abegg

Red-headed Woodpecker
Oak Openings Preserve Metropark, Ohio
© Steph Abegg
Eastern Phoebe
Seney National Wildlife Refuge, Michigan
© Steph Abegg

Olive-sided Flycatcher
Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, Wisconsin
© Steph Abegg
From the Warblerville around the Great Lakes, I headed west towards home. But I still had a number of birding stops on my itinerary, one of which was North Dakota. North Dakota is a little-known but great birding local, as it is representative of where east meets west in the Great Plains, and thus hosts a wide variety of both eastern and western species. I spent a couple of days each at Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge in south-central North Dakota and Theodore Roosevelt National Park on the west end of the state. I also had quite an adventure involving hitting a deer at 60mph, but that's another story.

Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge is set in the heart of the Prairie Pothole Region, where the open ranges, grassy fields, marshes, and lakes area home to several species of nesting ducks, shorebirds, raptors, and grassland songbirds. I chased the birds around for a couple of mornings (when bird activity was a constant serenade of clucks, whistles, songs, and cheeps), mostly driving around the Refuge roads and photographing birds out of my window. There were birds everywhere: grebes and teals in the lake, pelicans and terns in the sky, sandpipers and willets on the shore, blackbirds and wrens in the marshes, and meadowlarks, sparrows, and bobolinks in the surrounding grasslands. I saw a number of birds I saw no where else on my travels, such as the Marbled Godwit, Northern Goshawk, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Horned Lark, Short-eared Owl, Sprague's Pipit, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Grasshopper Sparrow.

While Long Lake and the surrounding area has an eastern plains feel, just 120 miles further west along I-94, Theodore Roosevelt National Park feels like the wild west. This park is located in the heart of the dry rolling mountains of the Badlands. I spent a full day in the more remote north unit of the park, where Lazuli Buntings, Yellow-breasted Chats, Common Yellowthroats, Spotted Towhees, and Mountain Bluebirds abounded. I also hiked to the Prairie Dog Town, in hopes of finding a Burrowing Owl; although I did not spot an owl, I enjoyed the cute Prairie Dogs. I would have liked to spend another day in the park, but unfortunately thundershowers and new headlights for my car drove me westward.
biRdS i sAw iN nOrTh dAkOtA

(LL = Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, TR = Theodore Roosevelt National Park)
(Birds highlighted in white were seen only in North Dakota during my birding road trip.)

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Western Grebe
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota

© Steph Abegg

Wilson's Phalarope
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota

© Steph Abegg
Willet

Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota

© Steph Abegg
Cliff Swallow
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota
© Steph Abegg

Yellow-headed Blackbird
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota
© Steph Abegg
Marsh Wren
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota

© Steph Abegg
Forester’s Tern
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota
© Steph Abegg

American White Pelicans
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota
© Steph Abegg
Sprague's Pipit
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota
© Steph Abegg

Field Sparrow
Theodore Roosevelt National Park (north unit), North Dakota
© Steph Abegg
From North Dakota, I drove west through Yellowstone, where I had planned to stop for a few days. However, it was snowing (in June!) and the lighting was abysmal for photography, so I continued onward to my next birding stop at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Oregon. I had always pictured southeastern Oregon as endless miles of dry desert. However, Malheur boasts the largest freshwater marsh in the western United States, surrounded by 187,000 acres of meadows, ponds, alkali flats, shrub uplands, and rimrocks. The Refuge is located on the Pacific Flyway, and is an important spring refueling point for migrant birds heading north to their nesting grounds. As a result, the Refuge is a regional center for species diversity and abundance of local and migrant birds. It also serves as an excellent vagrant trap.

Since Malheur is so large, I focused my efforts at certain locations, and drove slowly on the dirt roads in-between. Refuge Headquarters, Benson Pond, and P-Ranch were great for songbirds, and the marshes between were teeming with ducks, grebes, teals, herons, and more. I saw more species in my first day at Malheur than I had seen at any other single place on my travels. I enjoyed the constant serenade of swallows (at one point I saw four different kinds on one branch!), flycatchers (there were at least seven different kinds), blackbirds (three different kinds), and ducks (I stopped counting when I reached ten different kinds). I woke up before sunrise one morning in hopes of spotting a Virginia Rail, but although I heard their distinct metallic frog-like squeaking chirp, they remained hidden in the reeds.

I saw so many different birds on my trip, but I found a few at Malheur that I did not see anywhere else on my travels, such as the Canvasback, Horned Grebe, California Quail, and Western Tanager.
Birds I saw at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (Birds highlighted in white were seen only at Malheur NWR during my birding road trip.)

AVOCET: American
BLACKBIRD: Brewer’s
Red-winged
Yellow-headed
BOBOLINK
CANVASBACK
CHAT: Yellow-breasted
COOT: American
CORMORANT: Double-crested
COWBIRD: Brown-headed
CROW: American
CURLEW: Long-billed
DOVE: Mourning
DUCK: Ruddy
EGRET: Great
FLICKER: Northern
FLYCATCHER: Olive-sided
Willow?
Unidentified
GADWALL
GOLDFINCH: American
GOOSE: Canada
GREBE: Eared
Horned
Pied-billed
Western
GROSBEAK: Black-headed
GULL: Franklin’s
Ring-billed
HARRIER: Northern
HAWK: Red-tailed
HERON: Black-crowned Night
Great Blue
IBIS: White-faced
KILLEDEER
KINGBIRD: Eastern
Western
MAGPIE: Black-billed
MALLARD
MEADOWLARK: Western
NIGHTHAWK: Common
ORIOLE: Bullock’s
OWL: Great Horned
PELICAN: American White
PHALAROE: Wilson’s
PHOEBE: Say’s
QUAIL: California
RAVEN: Common
REDHEAD
ROBIN: American
SCAUP: Lesser
SHOVELER: Northern
SISKIN: Pine
SNIPES: Common
SPARROW: House
Song
STARLING: European
STILT: Black-necked
SWALLOW: Barn
Cliff
Northern Rough-winged
Tree
Violet-green
SWAN: Trumpeter
TANAGER: Western
TEAL: Cinnamon
TERN:

Black
Forester’s
VIREO: Warbling
VULTURE: Turkey
WARBLER: Townsend’s
Wilson’s
Yellow
WAXWING: Cedar
WILLET
WOOD-PEWEE: Western
WREN: House
Marsh
YELLOWTHROAT: Common
Bobolink
P-Ranch area, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon
© Steph Abegg

American Goldfinch
Benson Pond area, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon
© Steph Abegg
Bullock's Oriole
Benson Pond area, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon
© Steph Abegg

Western Tanager
Benson Pond area, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon
© Steph Abegg
California Quail

Near the campground at the south end of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon.

© Steph Abegg
Northern Flicker
Benson Pond area, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon

© Steph Abegg

Black-billed Magpie (juvenile)
Campground at south end of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon

© Steph Abegg
Yellow Warbler
Headquarters area, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon
© Steph Abegg
Common Nighthawk
Campground at south end of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon
© Steph Abegg

Turkey Vulture
Benson Pond area, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon
© Steph Abegg
After seeing a long list of birds at Malheur NWR in Oregon, I made the 10-hour drive back to northwest Wyoming, hoping for better weather than when I had passed through a few days earlier on my drive west from North Dakota. I spent a few days in Grand Teton National Park and then drove north through Yellowstone National Park, where I spent another day. Unfortunately, the weather was rather dreary while I was at these beautiful parks, but this only made the few sunny breaks more magical. I saw several birds, and my photos from the area depicted the special mountain lighting.

The jagged peaks, glacier-carved valleys, and tree-lined lakes of Grand Teton National Park make it a beautiful birding spot, and the diverse habitats—marshes and riparian vegetation along the Snake River, the surrounding sagebrush flats, and the spruce-fir forest and alpine tundra at the base of the towering peaks—make it a rewarding one. I noticed that the birds were more spread out and difficult to find than at any of my previous birding destinations, but nevertheless there was a great diversity of species throughout the park. Audubon’s Yellow-rumped Warbler and Pine Siskins were everywhere. Although the American Dipper, Three-toed Woodpecker, and Mountain Chickadee eluded me during my time in the shadow of the Grand Teton, I was happy to add some new birds to my road trip list: Bufflehead, Cassin’s Finch, Rosy Finch (although I didn’t get a photo, so it doesn’t actually count), Gray Flycatcher, Swainson’s Hawk, Calliope Hummingbird, and Townsend’s Solitaire.

Just north of Grand Teton National Park, in the northwest corner of Wyoming, lies 2.2 million acres of forest, grassland, and wetlands that makes up the beautiful Yellowstone National Park. Intermittent rain and snow (in June!) prevented any great photos, but I enjoyed watching the mud bubbles and geysers in the park and stopping for baby bison and elk on the road. Moreover, I was finally successful in my search for an American Dipper.
Birds saw at Grand Teton NP & Yellowstone NP

(GT = Grand Teton National Park, Y = Yellowstone National Park)
(Birds highlighted in white were seen only at Grand Teton NP or Yellowstone NP during my birding road trip.)

BLACKBIRD:
  - Northern (GT)
  - Brewer’s (GT, Y)
  - Red-winged (GT)
  - Yellow-headed (GT)

BLUEBIRD:
  - Mountain (GT, Y)

BUFFLEHEAD (GT)

CHICKADEE:
  - Black-capped (GT)

COOT:
  - American (GT, Y)

COWBIRD:
  - Brown-headed (GT)

CRANE:
  - Sandhill (GT, Y)

CROW:
  - American (GT)

CURLEW:
  - Long-billed (GT)

DIPPER:
  - American (Y)

Duck:
  - Ring-necked (GT, Y)
  - Ruddy (GT)

FINCH:
  - Cassin’s (GT)
  - Rosy (GT)

FLICKER:

FLYCATCHER:
  - Gray (GT)
  - Olive-sided (GT)

GOLDFINCH:
  - American (GT)

GREBE:
  - Western (GT)

GROSBEAK:
  - Black-headed (GT)

HAWK:
  - Red-tailed (Y)
  - Swainson’s (GT)

HERON:
  - Great Blue (GT)

HUMMINGBIRD:
  - Broad-tailed (GT)
  - Calliope (GT)

JUNCO:
  - Oregon Dark-eyed (GT, Y)

KESTREL:
  - American (GT, Y)

KINGLET:
  - Ruby-crowned (GT)

KINGBIRD:

MAGPIE:
  - Black-billed (GT)
  - Mallard (GT, Y)

MEADOWLARK:
  - Western (GT)

OSPREY (GT)

PELICAN:
  - American (GT, Y)

REDHEAD (GT)

RING-NECKED (GT, Y)

RING-NECKED (GT, Y)

ROBIN:
  - American (GT, Y)

SANDPIPER:
  - Spotted (GT, Y)

SAPSUCKER:
  - Red-naped (GT)

SCAUP:
  - Lesser (GT, Y)

SISKIN:
  - Pine (GT)

SOLITAIRE:
  - Townsend’s (GT)

SWALLOW:
  - Black-capped (GT)

TEAL:
  - Calliope (GT)
  - Red-naped (GT)

YELLOWTHROAT:
  - House (GT)
  - Yellow-rumped (Audubon’s) (GT, Y)

WREN:
  - House (GT)
  - Yellow-throat: (GT)

WARBLER:
  - American (Y)

WISTERIA:
  - Wilson’s (GT)

WHITE-THROATED (GT)

YELLOWWINGED (GT)

ZEBRA FINCH:

ZEBRA FINCH:

ZEBRA FINCH:

ZEBRA FINCH:
Yellow-Rumped Warbler (Audubon's)
Kelly Road area, Grand Teton National Park

© Steph Abegg
Savannah Sparrow
Kelly Road area, Grand Teton National Park
© Steph Abegg

Western Meadowlark
Kelly Road area, Grand Teton National Park
© Steph Abegg
Swainson's Hawk
Kelly Road area, Grand Teton National Park

© Steph Abegg
House Wren
Blacktail Ponds Overlook area, Grand Teton National Park
© Steph Abegg

Pine Siskin
Just south of Jackson, Wyoming at the south end of Grand Teton National Park
© Steph Abegg
Chipping Sparrow
Blacktail Ponds Overlook area, Grand Teton National Park
© Steph Abegg

Black-headed Grosbeak
Blacktail Ponds Overlook area, Grand Teton National Park
© Steph Abegg
When snow and rain pushed me out of Yellowstone, I headed towards home in southwestern British Columbia, where I made one more birding stop to draw my amazing birding road trip to a close. I spent a couple of days each at two of my favorite birding spots in the area: George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Saturna Island.

George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary is located on the western end of Westham Island just south of Vancouver. The sanctuary consists of nearly 3 square kilometers (1.2 square miles) of managed wetlands, natural marshes, and low dikes in the heart of the Fraser Valley Estuary. For millions of birds seeking feeding and resting areas during their annual migrations along the Pacific Coast, the sanctuary is ideally located. The sanctuary hosts a variety of wetland, woodland, and marsh birds, specializing in several species of waterfowl. When I arrived, I was welcomed back by a family of quacking baby Mallards and a pair of cute and colorful Wood Ducks. Due to a cool Spring, species diversity in the northwest was lower than usual, but I did add a few new ducks to my road trip list.

Next I took a ferry out to Saturna Island, tucked away at the southern end of the Gulf Island chain located southeast of Vancouver Island. A remote and sparsely populated rural hideaway with 31 square kilometers (12 square miles) of forests, rock bluffs, wetlands, mudflats, reefs, and beaches, Saturna Island is full of wildlife and tremendous natural beauty. Not only is Saturna a magical place to be, but the island also hosts a modest 200 species of birds. While I did not see anything I had not seen before on Saturna Island, I saw several west coast specialties I had not yet seen on my birding road trip: Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pelagic Cormorant, Brown Creeper, Northwestern Crow, Peregrine Falcon, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Pigeon Guillemot, Black Oystercatcher, Vesper Sparrow, Varied Thrush, Orange-crowned Warbler (which put my trip warbler count at 411), Pileated Woodpecker, Bewick’s Wren, and Winter Wren. The birds tend to stay higher up in the tall trees and make photography a bit more challenging, but there is an impressive west-coast species variety. Someday, perhaps, I will have seen all 200 species that pass over or around the island during various times of the year.
BLACKBIRD:  
Red-winged (R, S)  
KILLDEER (R)  
Peregrine (S)  
MALLARD:  
Mallard (R, S)  
DOMESTIC (R)  
NUTHATCH:  
Red-breasted (R, S)  
OWL:  
Great Horned (R)  
BORED  
Barn (R, S)  
Northern Rough-winged (S)  
WREN:  
House (R, S)  
Common (R)  
MALLARD:  
Mallard (R, S)  
DOMESTIC (R)  
NUTHATCH:  
Red-breasted (R, S)  
HOUSEWREN:  
Swainson's (S)  
THrush:  
Swainson's (S)  
VARIED (S)  
OWLET:  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)  
FINCH:  
House (R, S)  
Mallard (R, S)  
Tree (R)  
Northern Rough-winged (S)  
Red-winged (R, S)  
WREN:  
Swainson's (S)  
VARIED (S)  
HOUSEWREN:  
Swainson's (S)  
THrush:  
Swainson's (S)  
VARIED (S)  
OWLET:  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)  
CHICKADEE:  
Black-capped (R)  
Bewick's (R)  
HOUSEWREN:  
Swainson's (S)  
VARIED (S)  
OWLET:  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)  
COWBIRD:  
Brown-headed (R)  
American (R, S)  
BacGH (R, S)  
Marsh (R)  
CREEPER:  
Brown (S)  
OYSTERCATCHER:  
Barn (S)  
SWAINSON'S (S)  
Sparrow (R)  
WAXWING:  
Cedar (R, S)  
Downy (S)  
CROW:  
Canada (R, S)  
COMMON (S)  
OYSTER- 
CATCHER:  
Swainson's (S)  
VARIED (S)  
OWLET:  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)  
DOVE:  
Mourning (R)  
American (R, S)  
Black-headed (S)  
GROSBEAK:  
Great Blue (R, S)  
Siskin (S)  
HAWK:  
Red-tailed (R)  
SPARROW:  
House (R)  
HUMMINGBIRD:  
Rufous (R, S)  
SWALLOW:  
Oregon Dark-eyed (R, S)  
WAXWING:  
Cedar (R, S)  
WIDGEON:  
American (R)  
WOOD-PEWEE:  
Western (S)  
WREN:  
Bewick's (S)  
Marsh (R)  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)  
DUCK:  
Wood (R)  
Unidentified (R)  
Heron:  
Great Blue (R, S)  
SPARROW:  
House (R)  
HUMMINGBIRD:  
Rufous (R, S)  
SWALLOW:  
Oregon Dark-eyed (R, S)  
WAXWING:  
Cedar (R, S)  
WIDGEON:  
American (R)  
WOOD-PEWEE:  
Western (S)  
WREN:  
Bewick's (S)  
Marsh (R)  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)  
EAGLE:  
Bald (R, S)  
American (R, S)  
BARN:  
Northern Rough-winged (S)  
Bald (R, S)  
American (R, S)  
BARN:  
Northern Rough-winged (S)  
Bald (R, S)  
American (R, S)  
DUCK:  
Wood (R)  
Unidentified (R)  
Heron:  
Great Blue (R, S)  
SPARROW:  
House (R)  
HUMMINGBIRD:  
Rufous (R, S)  
SWALLOW:  
Oregon Dark-eyed (R, S)  
WAXWING:  
Cedar (R, S)  
WIDGEON:  
American (R)  
WOOD-PEWEE:  
Western (S)  
WREN:  
Bewick's (S)  
Marsh (R)  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)  
FALCON:  
Oregon Dark-eyed (R, S)  
WAXWING:  
Cedar (R, S)  
WIDGEON:  
American (R)  
WOOD-PEWEE:  
Western (S)  
WREN:  
Bewick's (S)  
Marsh (R)  
Green-winged (R)  
YELLOWTHROAT:  
Common (R)
Rock Dove (checkered adult)
Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg

Wood Duck
Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg
Barn Swallow
Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg

Spotted Towhee
Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg
Chestnut-backed Chickadee
Winter Cove, Saturna Island, British Columbia

© Steph Abegg

Red-breasted Nuthatch
Cliffside, Saturna Island, British Columbia

© Steph Abegg
White-crowned Sparrow
Winter Cove, Saturna Island, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg

House Sparrow
Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg
Young Vesper Sparrow
Winter Cove, Saturna Island, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg

Rufous Hummingbird
At the feeders at the entrance to Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg
Western Wood-Pewee
Winter Cove, Saturna Island, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg

Pacific-slope Flycatcher
Thomson Park, Saturna Island, British Columbia
© Steph Abegg
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Right: Ovenbird, Belleplain State Forest, New Jersey