



FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

BIRDS OF THE FLATHEAD

A Beginners guide to what birds you can expect to see where – and when.

Seasonal Considerations

Many bird species are year-long residents of the Flathead Valley. Others spend only part of the year here, depending on their migrational patterns.

Spring *Migrating flocks stop in the Flathead and summer residents return.*

Flathead Valley lies in a migration corridor. Large flocks of waterfowl pass through in March, April and May. The first songbirds arrive in late February (!) and March – blackbirds, robins, Varied thrushes. Kestrels, and Tree and Violet-green Swallows show up in middle to late March. Osprey arrive early April, and begin building nests in May. Most insect eaters arrive in May or early June – warblers, vireos, nighthawk, and flycatchers.

Summer *Newly hatched young appear. Late in summer, southerly migration begins.*

Look for waterfowl broods along river- and lakeshores. Flocks of swallows and blackbirds begin staging in late June for southern flight. Southbound shorebirds start showing up in July. Calliope and Rufous Hummingbirds begin to move south in late July and August.

Fall *Summer birds are leaving, winter birds arriving.*

Most songbirds, Great Blue Heron and Osprey fly south by mid-September. Waterfowl return from the north and form flocks in pothole lakes and rivers. Rough-legged Hawks and Northern Shrikes return from their northern breeding areas November and December.

Winter *Many bird species over-winter in the Flathead. More than 80 species are regularly found on the Bigfork Christmas Bird Count, 60 or more on the Kalispell Christmas Count.*

Feeders attract a variety of birds, including chickadees, nuthatches, Evening Grosbeaks, woodpeckers and jays. Winter finches, waterfowl, Bald Eagles and Rough-legged Hawks are usually present in good numbers. Bohemian Waxwings fly about in large flocks, looking for winter berries. Merlins fly about too, looking for waxwings.



Common Flathead Birds – Where and When

On the back of this page, the Flathead's most common bird species are listed according to the type of habitat they frequent, and when they are present. Local spots where you can find these habitat types are also listed.

The seasonal breakdown used here:

All year – species that stay in the Flathead throughout the year;

Winter – species here for only the winter (they go north in the spring for breeding);

Spring Migration – species that pass through during migration, but generally are absent the rest of the year;

Spring & Summer – species that arrive in spring and stay the summer (they breed and produce young here).

Keep in mind:

- ◆ “Common” does not mean guaranteed. Spots of a given habitat type may not attract all of the species listed for that type.
- ◆ Look for the unexpected. Birds stray from their usual habitat. Also, though a species may be listed as common for a particular season, smaller numbers of that species may be found in the Valley during other seasons as well (e.g. an American Robin in winter).
- ◆ There are some species of special interest that are not really “common” but are usually seen at particular spots around the Flathead. These are listed in parentheses.

Common Bird Species of the Flathead Valley

Listed according to habitat type and seasonal presence

Found in a Wide Variety of Habitats

- All year** American Crow, Common Raven, Great Horned Owl, Black-capped Chickadee, Dark-eyed Junco, European Starling
- Spring Migration** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Spring & Summer** American Robin, Chipping Sparrow, Rufous Hummingbird, Calliope Hummingbird, Mourning Dove

Lakes, Ponds, Rivers, Sloughs

Bays of Flathead Lake (e.g. Somers Bay), Echo Lake, Tally Lake, Smith Lake, Church Ponds (West Valley), Flathead River (e.g. Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, the confluence of Flathead and Stillwater Rivers, Foy's Bend, mouth where it enters Flathead Lake), Swan River (e.g. stretches above mouth to Flathead Lake, Porcupine Creek Road bridge, Swan River National Wildlife Refuge), Ashley Creek near Flathead River, Logan Creek near Tally Lake, Flathead River Sloughs

Waterbirds

- All year** Mallard, Canada Goose, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, American Coot, Ring-billed Gull
(Some high mountain streams – American Dipper)
- Winter** Herring Gull
- Spring Migration** Tundra Swan, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon
- Spring & Summer** Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Redhead, Hooded Merganser, Green-winged Teal, Red-necked Grebe
(Some local lakes – Common Loon, Double-crested Cormorant)
(Some local ponds & marshes – Wood Duck)
(Some high mountain streams -- Harlequin Duck)

Birds that catch bugs over open water

- Spring & Summer** Violet-green Swallow, Cliff Swallow
(Some local lakes, e.g. Smith Lake – Black Terns)

Shorebirds

- All year** Killdeer (but only a small number in winter)
- Spring & Summer** Spotted Sandpiper

Riparian Areas

(brush and cottonwoods adjacent to water)

Waters listed under Lakes, etc., and Lawrence Park

- All year** Bald Eagle, Downy Woodpecker, Song Sparrow
- Spring & Summer** Osprey, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow Warbler, Western Tanager, Veery, Vaux's Swift, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Kingbird

Wet Meadows & Marshes

(boggy vegetation adjacent to lakes and sloughs)

Smith Lake, Flathead River Sloughs, Blasdel Waterfowl Production Area (Somers), north shore of Flathead Lake, Bog Road in Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge

- Spring & Summer** Red-winged Blackbird, Yellow-headed blackbird, Common Yellowthroat, Marsh Wren, Willow Flycatcher (listen for call), Wilson's Snipe, Sora, American Bittern
(usually won't see these last three, but can often hear them)

Forests

Tally Lake area, Lone Pine State Park, Jewel Basin, Swan Lake Recreation Area

- All year** Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Clark's Nutcracker, Gray Jay, Steller's Jay, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Ruffed Grouse
(Often can also see Pileated Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown Creeper)
- Spring & Summer** Red-naped Sapsucker, Western Tanager, Swainson's Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler

Open Grass & Shrub/Agricultural Fields

Smith Valley, West Valley, Lower Flathead Valley

- All year** Ring-necked Pheasant, Black-billed Magpie, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Gray Partridge, Wild Turkey, Rock Pigeon
- Winter** Rough-legged Hawk, Canada Goose, Northern Shrike
- Spring Migration** American Pipit
- Spring & Summer** Western Meadowlark, Mountain Bluebird, Eastern Kingbird, American Kestrel, Brewer's Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird
(In grasses near water, e.g. fields near Church Ponds, Smith Lake – Sandhill Crane)

Urban

Backyard and schoolyard feeders, Woodland Park

- All year** House Sparrow, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeak, Ring-billed Gull, Merlin, Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Winter** Bohemian Waxwing
- Spring Migration** White-crowned Sparrow
- Spring & Summer** Chipping Sparrow, Barn Swallow, Vaux's Swift, Common Nighthawk