

# American Birds

# WINTER

# GUIDE

January-March 1994

Patience is the key word in winter. Birding may be slow in some areas, but if you pick your spot wisely, there is a lot to see out there. Check reservoirs, inland waterways, backyard feeders, or sewage treatment plants. This is the time of year to hone gull and seabird identification skills, or to scan rafts of ducks to find that one rarity. Watch for invasions of northern species, or monitor the numbers of usual winter residents. In the south, songbirds may not yet be singing, so birders have to work a little harder—but the rewards can be great. And despite the record cold some parts of North America have experienced this winter, don't forget that spring is just around the corner! Watch for raptors as early as February.

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

## 1. PASSAMAQUODDY BAY AREA New Brunswick

The area from St. Andrews to Blacks Harbour is productive for winter water-birding. Diving ducks such as Oldsquaw, Common Eider, and all three scoters are numerous offshore, along with Horned and Red-necked grebes, Great Cormorant, Black Guillemot, and others. Purple Sandpipers are regular on the rocky shorelines. Also see: *Birding in Atlantic Canada: Acadia*, Roger Burrows, publ. 1992; *Birds of Canada*,

W. Earl Godfrey, rev. 1987.

## 2. FIRST ENCOUNTER BEACH Massachusetts

One of the better vantage points on Cape Cod from which to watch for seabirds. Kittiwakes are often seen offshore in winter, as are alcids such as Razorbills and sometimes Dovekies. During stormy weather the birds are often very close to shore, allowing hardy observers to watch for rarities among them. Also see: *Birding Cape Cod*, Cape Cod Bird Club &

Massachusetts Audubon Society, publ. 1990; *Birds of Massachusetts*, Wayne Peterson & Richard Veit, publ. 1993.

## 3. MANASQUAN INLET New Jersey

Easily accessible, this coastal inlet is always worth checking for a variety of gulls and ducks, as well as interesting possibilities among loons, grebes, and alcids. During one recent winter, the inlet hosted up to four Razorbills. Also see: *Bird-finding in New Jersey*, William J. Boyle, Jr., rev. 1989.

## 4. JORDAN LAKE North Carolina

A deep reservoir may be a poor substitute for the bottomland forest that once existed here; but local birders, making the best of a bad situation, have found many interesting species on Jordan Lake. Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Bonaparte's Gull, and many diving ducks are now regular here, and surprising visitors like scoters and Oldsquaws sometimes drop in. Also see: *Birds of the Carolinas*, E. F. Potter, J. F. Parnell & R. F. Teulings, publ. 1980.

## 5. HARRIS NECK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Georgia

This refuge in the Atlantic coastal marsh region is productive at all seasons. Clapper Rails and several species of herons and egrets are common residents, while wintering birds include many ducks and shorebirds. Woods and fields in the area add a wide variety of wintering sparrows and other land birds. Also see: *A Birder's Guide to Georgia*, 3rd edition, Terry Chesser, ed., rev. 1988; *Guide to the National Wildlife Refuges*, Laura and William Riley, rev. 1992.

## 6. BIG PINE KEY Florida

While searching for the puppy-sized Key Deer here, you can also enjoy fine birding. The many wintering songbirds from farther north include Yellow-throated, Black-throated Green, Prairie, Palm, and Black-and-white warblers, among others. White-crowned Pigeons occur at all seasons, and the "Great White" form of Great Blue Heron is quite numerous. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Florida* (Lane Series), James A. Lane & Harold R. Holt, rev. 1989; *Birds of South Florida*, Connie Toops & Willard E. Dilley, publ. 1986.

## 7. DERBY HILL New York

Spring arrives at this lake-shore site in late February, with the advent of the hawk migration. Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks are usually first, but by early March there are many others, including Sharp-shinned Hawks and Northern Harriers. Days with southwest winds seem most productive. Also see: *Where to Find Birds in New York State: Top 500 Sites*, Susan Roney Drennan, publ. 1981.

## 8. ST. GEORGE ISLAND Florida

The state park at the east end is a good place for Snowy Plover and American Oystercatcher, and for seeing Northern Gannets offshore. Patches of woods farther west on the island may hold a variety of wintering land birds. For references, see above. Also see: *Florida Bird Species: An Annotated List*, William B. Robertson, Jr. & Glen E. Woolfenden, publ. 1992.

## 9. OTTER CREEK PARK Kentucky

This wooded park is a



favored destination for birders from Louisville and elsewhere. Wild Turkeys are present year-round, and there is a good population of Eastern Bluebirds. Among the wintering species are Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, and Fox Sparrow. Also see: *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Kentucky*, Burt L. Monroe, A. L. Stamm & B. L. Palmer-Ball, Jr., publ. 1988.

#### 10. FOREST GLEN PRESERVE Illinois

In a region of the Midwest largely given over to agriculture, this protected area of forest and natural habitats hosts a wide variety of birds. Red-headed and Pileated woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadee, and Carolina Wren are among the species present all year. Winter brings American

Tree Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, and many others. Also see: *The Birds of Illinois*, H. David Bohlen, publ. 1989; *Bird-finding in Illinois*, Elton Fawks & Paul H. Lobik, publ. 1975.

#### 11. SAM HOUSTON JONES STATE PARK Louisiana

This park just north of Lake Charles has an excellent selection of wintering land birds. Pine Warbler, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Red-headed Woodpecker are among the species in the forest, while nearby meadows have Le Conte's Sparrows and others. Birders who make a careful search of the forest under-story may turn up the elusive Bachman's Sparrow. Also see: *A Bird Finder's Guide to SE Louisiana*, Dan Purrington et al, publ. 1987

#### 12. DESOTO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Iowa/Nebraska

Depending on the severity of the season, the refuge can be fairly quiet in midwinter, although it remains a good area to find Bald Eagles and Harris' Sparrows. By late winter, however, an influx of early migrants (especially Snow, Greater White-fronted, and Canada geese) makes this an exciting birding spot. Also see: *Guide to the National Wildlife Refuges*, Laura and William Riley, rev. 1992.

#### 13. SEQUOYAH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Oklahoma

This refuge lies in far eastern Oklahoma, in an area with enough forest to support Barred Owls, Pileated Woodpeckers, and many other woodland birds. However, water birds are

the focus of the refuge. Wintering concentrations of Snow Geese (including the blue morph) run into the thousands, and they are joined by many ducks, grebes, cormorants, and others. Also see: *Guide to Birding in Oklahoma*, Tulsa Audubon Society, rev. 1986; *Oklahoma Bird Life*, Frederick M. & Marguerite Baumgartner, publ. 1992.

#### 14. CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK Texas

The rocky canyons and mesquite-juniper flats here have many typical southwestern birds in winter, including Rock and Canyon wrens, Greater Roadrunner, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and Townsend's Solitaire. Some winters have yielded invasions of Mountain Bluebirds. Also see: *Birders' Guide to Texas*, Edward A

Kutac, rev. 1989; *The Birds of North Central Texas*, Warren M. Pulich, publ. 1988.

**15. SALINEÑO AND VICINITY**  
**Texas**

Along the Rio Grande just downstream from Falcon Dam, many tropical birds are found near their northern limits. Brown Jay, Audubon's and Altamira orioles, and Red-billed Pigeon are all regular here. Both Green and Ringed kingfishers hunt along the river, and Hook-billed Kite is sometimes found. See: *Birder's Guide to Rio Grande Valley* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt, rev. 1992.

**16. FORT PECK**  
**Montana**

Open water can be hard to find in a Montana winter, so the river below the Fort Peck Dam is a magnet for lingering birds during the cold months. Bald Eagles concentrate here, along with Common Mergansers and other hardy ducks. The surrounding countryside has Gray Partridge and Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Gyrfalcons are often seen in winter. Also see: *The Birder's Guide to Montana*, Terry McEaney, publ. 1993; *Birds of West-Central Montana*, Richard L. Hutto, ed., publ. 1986.

**17. CURECANTI NATIONAL RECREATION AREA**  
**Colorado**

Easily accessible by road just west of Gunnison, this area offers good cold-weather birding. There is a regular wintering concentration of eagles around the Blue Mesa Reservoir, many waterfowl stay through the season, and American Dippers remain on open creeks year-round. A special winter feature is the presence of rosy finches, often in large flocks. Also see: *Birder's Guide to*

*Colorado* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt & James A. Lane, rev. 1988; *Colorado Birds, A Reference to Their Distribution and Habitat*, Robert Andrews & Robert Righter, publ. 1992.

**18. CABALLO LAKE**  
**New Mexico**

This large reservoir is favored by Double-crested and Neotropic cormorants, as well as Western and Clark's grebes. Bald Eagles and many ducks spend the winter here, and gull concentrations often turn up a few surprising species. The surrounding country has Gambel's Quail, Greater Roadrunner, and other typical southwestern birds. Also see: *New Mexico Bird-finding Guide*, edited by Dale A. Zimmerman, Marian A. Zimmerman, & John N. Durrie, publ. 1992.

**19. C. J. STRIKE RESERVOIR**  
**Idaho**

The waters behind the C.J. Strike dam on the Snake River are particularly good for diving ducks, such as Redhead, Common Merganser, and Common and Barrow's goldeneyes. Other divers, such as Common Loons and Horned Grebes, are also often found. The wintering flock of Ring-billed Gulls is sometimes joined by other species. Take a close look!

**20. OPHIR CANYON**  
**Utah**

This foothills canyon is a good place to seek wintering birds such as Townsend's Solitaire, Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Clark's Nutcracker, and American Dipper. Lucky birders might find Northern Pygmy-Owl or Northern Saw-whet Owl. Nearby open country may produce a Northern Shrike. Also see: *Utah Birds*, William H



**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.

<b>Arizona</b> Phoenix (602) 832-8745	<b>Idaho</b> (208) 236-3337	<b>New Jersey</b> (908) 766-2661
<b>British Columbia</b> Vancouver (604) 737-9910 Victoria (604) 592-3381	<b>Illinois</b> Central (217) 785-1083	<b>New York</b> Syracuse (315) 682-7039
<b>California</b> Sacramento (916) 481-0118 San Diego (619) 479-3400	<b>Iowa</b> (319) 338-9881	<b>North Carolina</b> (704) 332-2473
<b>Colorado</b> (303) 279-3076	<b>Kentucky</b> (502) 894-9538	<b>Oklahoma</b> (918) 669-6646
<b>Florida</b> Lower Keys (305) 294-3438 Statewide (813) 984-4444	<b>Louisiana</b> New Orleans (504) 246-2473	<b>Oregon</b> (503) 292-0661
<b>Georgia</b> (404) 509-0204	<b>Massachusetts</b> (617) 259-8805	<b>Texas</b> Northcentral (817) 261-6792 Lower Rio Grande Valley (512) 565-6773
	<b>Montana</b> (406) 721-2935	<b>Utah</b> (801) 538-4730
	<b>New Brunswick</b> (506) 382-3825	
	<b>New Mexico</b> (505) 662-2101	

Behle & Michael L. Perry, publ. 1975.

**21. HASSAYAMPA RIVER PRESERVE**  
**Arizona**

Administered by The Nature Conservancy, this sanctuary protects an outstanding stretch of riparian habitat. Permanent resident birds include Gila Woodpecker, Abert's Towhee, and Vermilion Flycatcher. Large numbers of songbirds spend the winter here. By late February, spring activity begins to pick up with arriving swallows, Costa's Hummingbirds, and others. Also

see: *Birder's Guide to South-eastern Arizona* (Lane Series), Harold R. Holt, rev. 1989; *Birds in Southeastern Arizona*, William A. Davis & Stephen M. Russell, rev. 1990.

**22. VICTORIA—**  
**VANCOUVER FERRY**  
**British Columbia**

Besides providing transportation between these two major cities, the hour-and-a-half ferry ride is also a great way to see birds of inland coastal waters. Among the common winter birds here are Pacific Loon, Brandt's and Pelagic cor-

morants, Pigeon Guillemot, and Marbled Murrelet. Ancient Murrelet and Rhinoceros Auklet are sometimes seen. Also see: *A Birder's Guide to British Columbia*, Keith Taylor, publ. 1993; *A Birder's Guide to Vancouver Island*, Keith Taylor, publ. 1990.

**23. FINLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**  
**Oregon**

This refuge was established mainly to protect the wintering area of the (Dusky) Canada Goose (a fairly large, dark subspecies). But

it supports many other wintering waterfowl as well. Birds of interest in the cold months include Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, and a good variety of wintering sparrows. Also see: *The Birder's Guide to Oregon*, Joseph E. Evanich, Jr., publ. 1990; *Birding Oregon*, Fred L. Ramsey, publ. 1981.

**24. PANOCH VALLEY**  
**California**

With farmland, grassland, and brushy hills, the Panoche Valley is excellent

for open-country birds. Mountain Bluebird and Mountain Plover are among the winter specialties. Birds of prey are often numerous, including Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, White-tailed Kite, and Prairie Falcon. Also see: *Birder's Guide to Northern California*, LoLo Westrich & Jim Westrich, publ. 1991; *Birding Northern California*, Jean Richmond, publ. 1985.

**25. SOUTH SAN DIEGO BAY**  
**California**

The south end of the bay is

a prime wintering area for large shorebirds, such as Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Willet, Red Knot, Short-billed Dowitcher, American Avocet, and Black-necked Stilt. A good variety of gull species can be found. In recent years, Black Skimmers have become year-round residents. 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.

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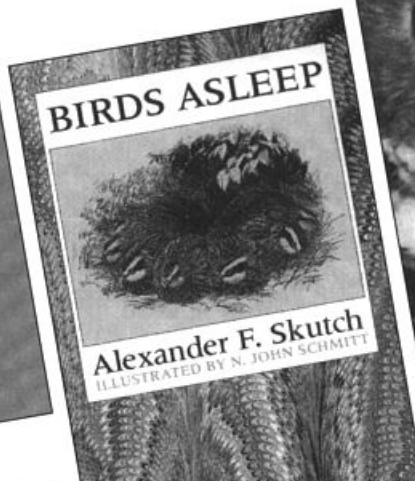
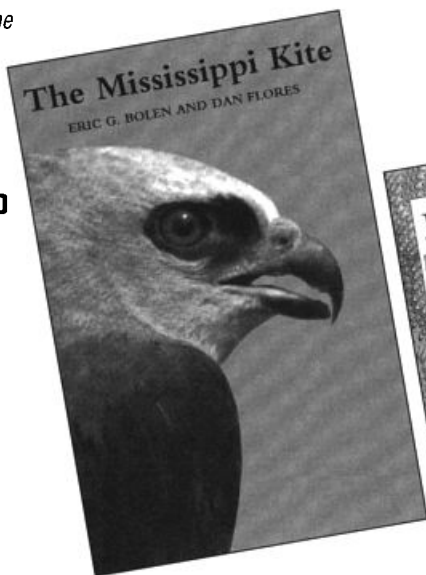
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