

Utah's Hotspots for Birds in Early Spring

By Ian Butterman, Fieldtrip Coordinator

The transition between winter and spring tends to be an interesting time for birds. Many of the winter migrants start heading north, yet the mid-to-late spring migrants haven't shown up in full force. Fortunately, there are still birds to be found in Utah during these months. Early spring is a great time to see waterfowl, especially ducks in their breeding plumage. As waterways begin to thaw, we may see some early migrating shorebirds come through. Some songbird species also migrate early including flycatchers, gnatcatchers, and blackbirds. Occasionally, some winter migrants and vagrants may linger as well to surprise birders.

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge

Where: East of Brigham City off of I-15 exit 363. Both the Bird Refuge Road leading up to the refuge and the Auto Tour loop are great areas for hundreds of bird species. It is certainly one of the greatest hotspots in the state.

What: Snow Geese, Tundra Swans, ducks, grebes, gulls, Bald Eagle, Red-tail Hawk, American Kestrel, shrikes, Short-eared Owls, sparrows, Marsh Wren, blackbirds, pelicans, cormorants.

Yellow Fork Canyon

Where: In Herriman off of Rosecrest Road. There are a few different hiking trails off of the main trail which might be a bit quieter as this is a great place for horseback riding and biking.

What: Common Raven, Cooper's Hawk, Juniper Titmouse, finches, woodpeckers, Wild Turkey, sparrows.

Antelope Island

Where: Antelope Island State Park, off Antelope Island Drive in Syracuse, UT (I-15 exit 332). There is a \$15 fee per vehicle to get onto the Island. The entire island is a bird paradise as well as a great place for other animals like Pronghorn, Coyote, and American Bison. The best areas for birds are the causeway and Fielding Garr Ranch.

What: Northern Shoveler, American Avocet, falcons, gulls, ducks, Eared Grebe, hawks, Great Horned Owl, Horned Lark, Northern Harrier, sparrows, Ring-necked Pheasant, shrike, Virginia Rail.

Henefer Lek

Where: This is one of the most famous lekking sites in Utah for the Greater Sage-Grouse. If you wish to visit to see the grouse, make sure you go EARLY (arrive before sunrise, around 6:30 AM) and follow proper car-blind etiquette (stay in your vehicle, stay quiet, turn engine and lights off, don't leave the area until the grouse are done displaying). After the grouse are finished, you can continue onward to East Canyon Reservoir to see Bald Eagle and Common Loon. Due to the sensitivity of the area, contact Ian Batterman if you would like directions; imbatterman@gmail.com

What: Greater Sage-Grouse, Golden Eagle, Western Meadowlark, Red-tailed Hawk, Sandhill Crane, Horned Lark.

Utah Lake

Where: Provo, UT, and surrounding areas. The wetlands on the outskirts of the lake as well as the state park are the best places to see birds.

What: Ducks, gulls, grebes, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, plovers, shorebirds, pelican, sparrows, blackbirds, herons.

South Shore Great Salt Lake

Where: Along the frontage road of I-80 going along the southern shore of the Great Salt Lake (heading towards Great Salt Lake Marina State Park & Lee Creek).

What: Snowy Plover, shorebirds, gulls, hawks, ducks, blackbirds, sparrows, swallows.