

Utah's Winter Hotspots for Birds

Winter may have sent many Utah bird species southward, but that doesn't mean that there are fewer birds to be seen. Winter brings about a new group of migrants that call Utah "warm" such as Rough-legged Hawks, Tundra Swans, and a slew of many duck species. Also, depending on the year, some of the mountain species come down into the valley to find food and warmth such as Hairy Woodpeckers, Evening Grosbeaks, and Steller's Jays. So bring your binoculars, a warm jacket, and some hot cocoa to enjoy the "new birds".

Farmington Bay

Where: At the Southeastern corner of the Great Salt Lake lies one of the most famous areas to see waterfowl in Utah, for both birders and hunters alike. Almost every Western US duck species can be seen here, as well as many other water-loving birds (and waterfowl-eating birds).

What: Bald Eagle, American White Pelican, Tundra Swan, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, American Coot, Eared Grebe, Barn Owl, Song Sparrow, Marsh Wren, Great Blue Heron, Peregrine Falcon, Killdeer, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier. (If you go early enough, you may even find some Short-eared Owls.)

Oquirrh Lake

Where: In the Subdivision of Daybreak along the western end of 11400S in South Jordan lies a great place to see plenty of waterfowl, gulls, and raptors. There are walking trails galore around the labyrinth of interconnected ponds as well as some bare fields and marsh reeds for the occasional songbird.

What: Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, California Gull, Herring Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Canvasback, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Canada Goose, Mallard, Pied-billed Grebe, Say's Phoebe, Red-winged Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Common Merganser. (There were scoters and Long-tailed Ducks seen here back in November.)

Willard Bay

Where: On the southern outskirts of Box Elder County before you get to Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (also a great place to go any time of year) is another wetland hideaway known as Willard Bay. During the winter, Bald Eagles tend to congregate in large numbers here. Like other state parks, a fee is required.

What: White-crowned Sparrow, Bald Eagle, Tundra Swan, Red-breasted Merganser, Rough-legged Hawk, plenty of gulls and other waterfowl. (Recent rarities include White-winged Scoter, Yellow-billed Loon, and Red-throated Loon.)

Big Cottonwood Park

Where: At 1500E & Murray-Holladay Rd lies a lovely suburban park that holds many bird species anytime of year, but winter is where this park shines thanks to a mix of wetland and riparian habitat.

What: Evening Grosbeak, Spotted Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, American Robin, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Merlin, Black-capped Chickadee, Brown Creeper. (A Harris' Sparrow has been seen here in recent weeks.)

Lee Kay Ponds

Where: Near the Salt Lake County Landfill lies a wonderful oasis for many species of birds...especially gulls. Though you may not always be able to get close to the birds, you can get a great view from the backroads; just be mindful of all the trucks and landfill traffic.

What: Bald Eagle, Canvasback, Double-crested Cormorant, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Red-winged

Blackbird, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Iceland Gull, and hundreds of California and Ring-billed Gulls. (Glaucous, Glaucous-winged, and Western Gulls are sometimes seen here in winter.)

Jordan River Trail

Where: Anywhere the Jordan River runs is a great place to see different bird species as the water and the riparian habitat are ripe with birds. Though walking/biking trails are present for most of the river, there are certain areas to focus on as they are more popular for birds and bird watchers such as the areas near 2100S in West Valley, 4800S in Murray, 7800S in Midvale, 12600S in Riverton, Powell Lake in Lehi, and near the river mouth that leads into Utah Lake.

What: American Robin, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Evening Grosbeak, Barrow's Goldeneye, White-crowned Sparrow, Double-crested Cormorant, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-tailed Hawk, California Quail, Wilson's Snipe, American Coot. (Snow Geese and Ross' Geese are sometimes seen mingling with the Canada Geese.)