

WEST YELLOWSTONE, MONTANA BIRDING TRAIL

WEST YELLOWSTONE BIRDING TRAIL

You are invited to enjoy the awesome scenery and natural diversity of the West Yellowstone area and the Hebgen Lake Basin. Sitting between 6,000 and 7,000 feet elevation, the area provides a stunning array of habitats for birding and watching many other forms of wildlife such as elk, moose, deer, and bison.

Springtime brings bird migrants – who can forget the raucous call of sandhill cranes flying overhead? Many species of ducks pass through the area, resting and feeding en route to nesting grounds further north. Summer days provide long hours of bird-watching enjoyment along the clear Madison River, the shores of Hebgen and Henry's Lakes, the aspen groves with their own special birds, and sagebrush hills and flats that are home to many kinds of birds. Osprey, bald eagles, and pelicans are common on the waterways. Fall brings bird migrants from the north amid golden-colored aspen and the bugle of not-so-distant elk. Ducks often collect in large rafts along the lakeshores, feeding before flying further south. Haunting calls of loons punctuate the air. Winter brings a soft whiteness as snow covers the landscape and frost covers the trees. Wintering trumpeter swans congregate and sound their distinctive call. Bald eagles frequent the snags along the open waters of the Madison River.

The birding trail guides you from the community of West Yellowstone, around the north shores of Hebgen Lake and Earthquake Lake, across the 6,836 foot elevation of Reynolds Pass, along the edge of Henry's Lake to the 7,072 foot Targhee Pass, across the South Fork of the Madison River, and back to West Yellowstone. Allow a full day to enjoy the 50 mile route, which has many stops along the way where you can walk along a trail or enjoy a vista. Several side trips from the main route are also described and can easily fill a second or third day of exploring.

We hope you will enjoy the vast diversity of the terrain and scenery along the West Yellowstone Birding Trail. During the Spring you can expect to see 50 or 60 different species of birds in a day – a persistent observer may see more. So, grab your binoculars and discover the birds of this unique high country of aspen groves, lakeshores, sagebrush, and riparian area.

BIRDING TRAIL ETHICS

Be a respectful and responsible birder. Although most people try to observe birds and other wildlife as unobtrusively as possible, we need to always be aware that our presence may disturb and disrupt their normal activities. There are many things we can do to respect these animals to assure their survival:

- To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, and sound recording or filming.
- Keep your distance and observe with binoculars and spotting scopes. This is especially important during nesting season. Stay away from nesting sites, feeding areas, and roost sites.
- Nesting birds of all species are easily disturbed. If an adult on a nest flies off when you approach or circles you or screams in alarm, you are too close to the nest. Unattended nestlings readily succumb to predation or exposure to heat, cold, and wet weather.

- Disturbing or harassing federally threatened or endangered species such as the bald eagle is illegal.
- Good birding areas often attract other wildlife. Maintain a safe distance from large mammals: 300 feet from bears and 75 feet from other large animals. Do not get between a female and her young.
- Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist and respect private property.

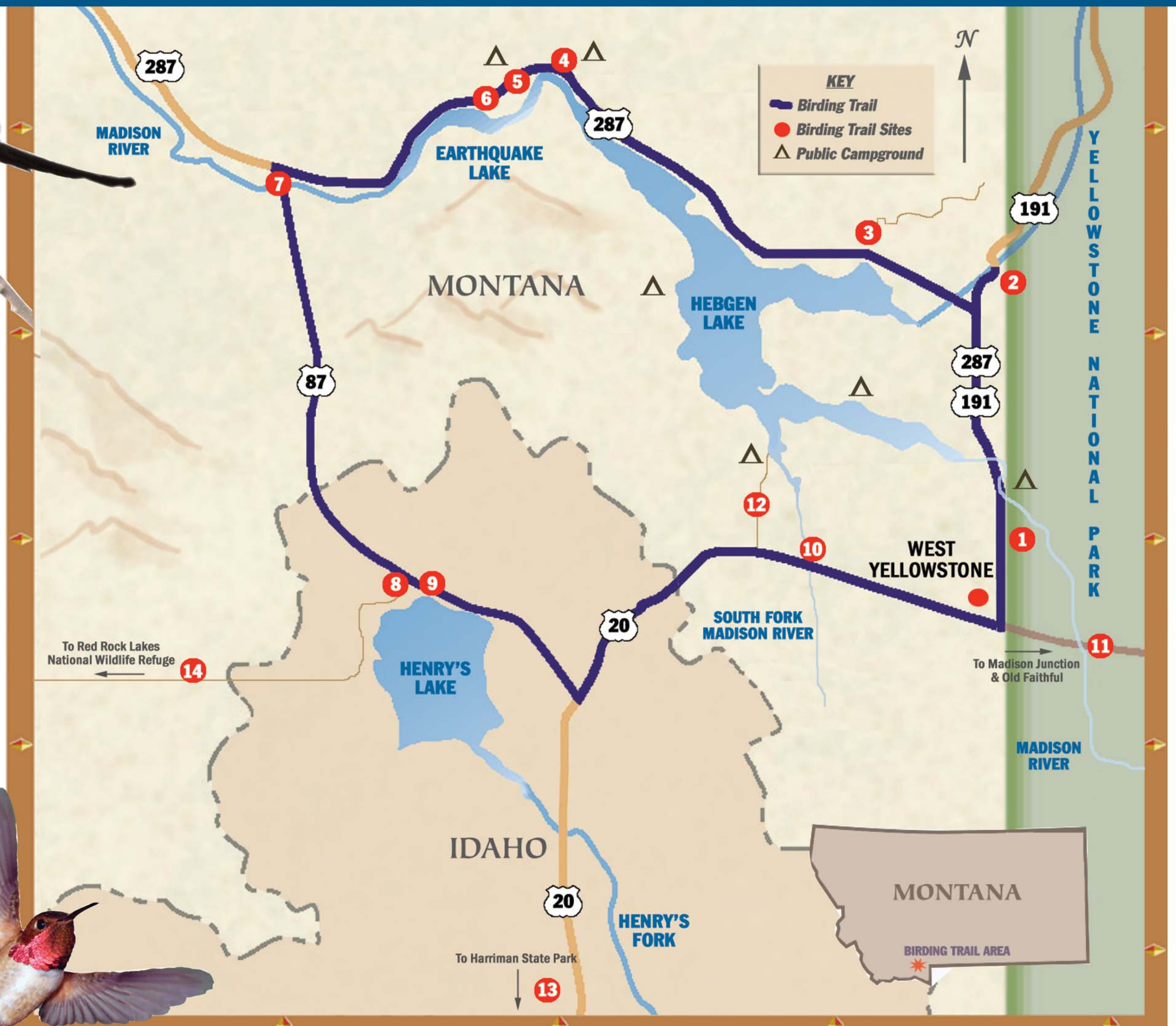
All sites listed in the West Yellowstone Birding Trail are public land. However, several are adjacent to private land, which should be respected. Stay on established roads and trails.

SAFETY IN BEAR COUNTRY

In addition to a wide variety of birds that frequent wild country, you may also expect to encounter numerous other forms of wildlife, such as moose, elk, deer, wolves, and both grizzly and black bear. That is part of what makes the area so special. Should you be fortunate enough to see a bear, there are a few things you can do to make the encounter a safe and pleasant one.

- If you are not sure whether it is a grizzly or black bear, remember that the grizzly is usually the more aggressive so treat it as if it were a grizzly.
- Has the bear noticed you? Is it occupied with eating or observing something else? If so, back up and leave quietly.
- Has the bear noticed you? Has it stood up on its hind legs? The bear will try to determine what you are. Stay alert, and talk in a firm voice so it can hear you.
- Let the bear react. Avoid any threatening actions such as quick movement or excited shouts.

- If the bear starts to bounce on its front feet, it is trying to scare you and may "bluff charge".
- If the bear moves toward you with its head down and gaining speed, you know it is charging. Often a charging bear will run past a person, especially if there is a route to escape. If the bear knocks you down, stay down until you are sure it has left the area.
- Remember, do NOT run. This will elicit a "chase" response because the bear will think you are prey running away.
- Travel in groups. Bears are not known to attack a group of 4 or more.
- Carry bear pepper spray as a safety precaution and know how to use it.



ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK



BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE



RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD



STELLER'S JAY

1 BAKER'S HOLE CAMPGROUND

Directions: The campground entrance is approximately 3 miles north of West Yellowstone on the east side of Highway 191/287.

General Information: This Gallatin National Forest campground is adjacent to the Madison River. Parking is available in the campground when it is open or at the campground entrance during other times of the year. Yellowstone National Park is immediately east of the campground. A Montana fishing license is required for fishing in the Gallatin National Forest, while a Yellowstone National Park fishing permit is required to fish in the national park.

Habitats: Grasses and shrubby willows line the river. The campground is set in a forest of lodgepole pine.

Highlighted Species: Great blue heron, mallard, cinnamon teal, Barrow's goldeneye, osprey, bald eagle, gray jay, Steller's jay, common raven, pine grosbeak, red-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, ruby-crowned kinglet. Wilson's snipe and sora rail may be seen in the marshland along the river.

Other Wildlife: Mammal species include elk, bison, moose, coyotes, grizzly and black bears. Amphibians include boreal chorus frogs and Columbian spotted frogs. Brown and rainbow trout inhabit the Madison River.

Best Viewing: May through October.

For More Information: Gallatin National Forest, Hebgen Lake Ranger District (406) 823-6961.



RED-NAPPED SAPSUCKER

2 FIR RIDGE

Directions: Fir Ridge Cemetery is 9 miles north of West Yellowstone on Highway 191 on the east side of the highway, 6 miles beyond Baker's Hole. Look for a pull-out signed for the Gneiss Creek Trail.

General Information: The trail starts in the Gallatin National Forest. At about ½ mile the Boundary Trail splits to the south and follows Yellowstone National Park's west boundary approximately 2 miles to Duck Creek. The Gneiss Creek trail enters Yellowstone National Park about 1 mile from the trailhead and continues another mile to Campanula Creek and a beaver pond before turning south-east. The trail is closed March 10 to June 30 to allow bears undisturbed access. There are no facilities at the trailhead.

Habitats: Towering Douglas firs line the first part of the trail, followed by extensive aspen stands. Grasslands and sagebrush meadows grow in large swaths along both the Gneiss Creek and Boundary trails. Wildflowers, especially arrowleaf balsamroot, bloom profusely during June and early July. Willows and wet meadows flank Duck Creek and Gneiss Creek.

Highlighted Species: Northern harrier, northern goshawk, Swainson's hawk, red-tailed hawk, turkey vulture, sandhill crane, long-billed curlew, red-naped sapsucker, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, Clark's nutcracker, green-tailed towhee, warbling vireo, mountain bluebird, yellow-rumped warbler, vesper sparrow, savannah sparrow, lazuli bunting and rufous hummingbird.

Other Wildlife: Mammal species include elk, bison, mule deer and black and grizzly bears. When wildflowers are blooming, expect to see numerous kinds of butterflies, including swallowtails, fritillaries and blues.

Best Viewing: May through September.

Contact: Gallatin National Forest, Hebgen Lake Ranger District (406) 823-6961 and Yellowstone National Park (307) 344-7381. From late April through early November, call West Contact Station at (406) 646-4403.

3 WHITS LAKE ROAD (FR 971)

Directions: Turn west onto U.S. 287 at its junction with U.S. 191 (8 miles north of West Yellowstone). Travel 2 ½ miles and turn right (north) on the Whits Lake Road.

General Information: This route is a gravel road approximately 2 ½ miles long, and is passable to passenger cars only during the summer. The road provides access to a large block of public land in the Gallatin National Forest, but be aware private lands are adjacent to the lower portion

of the road. Two trailheads along the road provide parking and access to backcountry trails.

Habitats: The Whits Lake road traverses rolling sagebrush hills and aspen stands in the lower portions, which give way to conifer forests dominated by Douglas fir and lodgepole pine as the elevation increases.

Highlighted species: Look for northern harrier, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel, ruffed grouse, blue grouse, sandhill crane, rufous hummingbird, red-naped sapsucker, hairy woodpecker, northern flicker, olive-sided flycatcher, Hammond's flycatcher, dusky flycatcher, tree swallow, house wren, mountain bluebird, yellow warbler, MacGillivray's warbler, orange-crowned warbler, chipping sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow, and black-headed grosbeak in the aspen stands or open meadows. At higher elevations, mountain chickadee, ruby-crowned kinglet, hermit thrush, warbling vireo, yellow-rumped warbler, and western tanager are all common.

Other Wildlife: Elk, mule deer, moose, and black bears are large mammals commonly seen here.

Best Viewing: Late May through early August.

Contact: USDA Forest Service, Gallatin National Forest, Hebgen Lake Ranger District (406) 823-6961.

4 GHOST VILLAGE ROAD (FR 989)

(Also known as the Campfire Lodge Road)

Directions: Continue west on U.S. 287 for 11 ½ miles past the Whits Lake Road. Turn left (south) onto a gravel road at the sign for the Campfire Lodge. Take the right fork of this road to its end about 1 mile past the highway turnoff.

General Information: This road is passable to passenger cars only during the summer. A parking area with a picnic table and outhouse mark the end of the road. A walking path about 1 mile long leaves from this site. In July bright fireweed covers the meadows and many kinds of wildflowers entice you to explore at will.

Habitats: The route closely parallels the Madison River, which is lined with willows and other wetland vegetation. Slopes covered with dry Douglas fir forest along with rolling sagebrush-grasslands hills are found above the waterway. Aspen stands can be found along the far end of the walking path.

Highlighted Species: Species commonly observed here in the summer include the American white pelican, American wigeon, Barrow's goldeneye, osprey, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Steller's jay, American dipper, willow flycatcher, yellow warbler, MacGillivray's warbler, vesper sparrow, savannah sparrow, song sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, lazuli bunting and more.

Other Wildlife: This area is very rich in wildlife. Large mammals commonly observed include moose, mule deer, elk, and occasionally even mountain goats on the cliffs opposite the river. Black or grizzly bears may sometimes be found foraging in the avalanche chutes and open areas across the river. River otters, beavers, and muskrats are often seen in the river and adjacent Earthquake Lake. Uinta ground squirrels are abundant throughout the area.

Best Viewing: June through early-August.

Contact: Gallatin National Forest, Hebgen Lake Ranger District (406) 823-6961.

5 BEAVER CREEK VIEWING SITE

Directions: Return to U.S. 287 and drive west for about 1½ miles to park in one of the large pull-outs located on either side of the highway.

General Information: This site within the Madison River Canyon offers easy summer access, and is near the Beaver Creek Campground.

Habitats: The primary habitats at this site are beaver-created ponds and wetlands. A lush growth of sedges, grasses, and willows surrounds the ponds. Douglas fir, aspen, and lodgepole pine forests occupy the higher ground.

Highlighted Species: Canada goose, mallard, green-winged teal, ring-necked duck, and Barrow's goldeneye are the most commonly observed waterfowl in this location. Sora, sandhill crane, olive-sided flycatcher, tree swallow, marsh wren, and red-winged blackbird are among the other species often present here. Listen for the raucous call of the Clark's nutcracker.

Other Wildlife: The beavers and muskrats inhabiting these ponds can sometimes be seen, especially in the early morning or evening hours. Moose are often found

feeding around the ponds. Look for mountain goats on the cliffs north and west of the site during the spring and early summer. For those interested in amphibians, boreal chorus frogs may be heard calling here in the spring while Columbian spotted frogs are abundant summer residents of the ponds.

Best viewing: Late May through early August.

Contact: Gallatin National Forest, Hebgen Lake Ranger District. (406) 823-6961.

6 EARTHQUAKE LAKE BOAT LAUNCH

Directions: Continue west on U.S. 287 for ½ mile to a short road on the left (south) that accesses the boat launch and Earthquake Lake.

General Information: This site within the Madison River Canyon offers easy access and great bird watching, but no other developments or trails. The relatively gentle terrain to the east of the boat launch offers opportunities for off-trail wandering with great views of Earthquake Lake and the surrounding mountains.

Habitats: The primary habitat is the open water of Earthquake Lake, which was formed after a landslide caused by a large earthquake in 1959 blocked the Madison River. Numerous trees were flooded in the process, and many of these snags still stand in the waters of the lake.

Species: Common loons are occasionally observed during spring and fall migration. Flocks of double-crested cormorants roost in the standing dead timber along the lake shore. Bald eagles nesting around the lake are frequently seen, as are other fish-eating species such as ospreys, American white pelicans, and common mergansers. Golden eagles can be seen soaring above the canyon.

Other Wildlife: Look for mountain goats and bighorn sheep on the cliffs on either side of the lake during the spring and early summer.

Best viewing: May through October.

Contact: Gallatin National Forest, Hebgen Lake Ranger District. (406) 823-6961.

7 RAYNOLD'S PASS BRIDGE

Directions: Continue on U.S. 287 for 5 miles around Earthquake Lake. During the summer, stop at the Earthquake Visitor Center to learn how the earthquake changed the Madison River valley. The highway passes through the narrow canyon that resulted after the 1959 earthquake, enters the broad Madison Valley and junctions with Highway 87. Turn left (south) onto Highway 87 and travel ½ mile to the bridge over the Madison River. Parking is available on the south side of the bridge; to reach the river, follow signs for Raynold's Pass fishing access on the north side of the bridge.

To continue on the birding trail loop go 12 miles south on Highway 87 to birding sites along Henry's Lake.

General Information: Birding from the bridge is not recommended due to fast-moving traffic. The Madison River is popular with anglers who fish with flies for rainbow and brown trout; a Montana fishing license is required.

Habitats: The fast-flowing Madison River is flanked by vast rolling sagebrush meadows.

Highlighted Species: Mallard, osprey, bald eagle, golden eagle, prairie falcon, spotted sandpiper, belted kingfisher, black-billed magpie, cliff swallow, and American dipper. Look under the bridge for cliff swallows. Vesper and Brewer's sparrows, horned larks, western meadowlarks, and mountain bluebirds frequent the sagebrush adjacent to the river.

Other Wildlife: Pronghorn antelope graze the sagebrush covered hillsides.

Best Viewing: Bald eagles, waterfowl and dippers may be viewed from the bridge area year-round. Ospreys inhabit the area from April through September.

8 BILL FROME COUNTY PARK

Directions: From the Junction of Highways 287 and 87, continue south on Highway 87 for 12 miles. Turn southwest (right) onto Henry's Lake Road. Bill Frome County Park is 2 ½ miles ahead on the left side of the road.

General Information: Frome Park contains a boat launch and a small campground with toilets and picnic tables.

The park affords easy access to the northwest corner of Henry's Lake, where waterfowl and other shore birds congregate during spring and fall. Use a spotting scope for easy waterfowl viewing.

Habitats: Henry's Lake is a large freshwater lake. Grasslands grow along the edge of the lake in the vicinity of Frome Park.

Highlighted Species: Common loon, red-necked grebe, western grebe, Clark's grebe, American white pelican, American wigeon, mallard, redhead, lesser scaup, bufflehead, osprey, bald eagle, Swainson's hawk, mountain bluebird, sage thrasher, Brewer's sparrow, vesper sparrow, savannah sparrow, song sparrow.

Other Wildlife: Fish inhabiting Henry's Lake include cutthroat, brook and rainbow-cutthroat hybrid trout. An Idaho license is required for fishing. Uinta ground squirrels flourish in adjacent grasslands.

Best Viewing: April through November. Spring (April and May) and fall (September to November) are best for large aggregations of waterfowl. Red-necked grebes may occasionally be seen in summer.

Contact: Fremont County Idaho Parks and Recreation Department. (208) 624-1545 ext 3010.

9 HENRY'S LAKE FISH HATCHERY

Directions: From the junction of Highway 87 and the Henry's Lake Road continue south for 2 miles. The Henry's Lake Fish Hatchery is located on the north shore of Henry's Lake.

General Information: Parking is available in the small parking lot next to the hatchery. Visitors are welcome. The fish hatchery is operated by Idaho Fish and Game mainly as an egg-taking station. Fingerling trout are later released back into Henry's Lake. Walk around the hatchery buildings to the shore of Henry's Lake.

Habitats: The hatchery affords access to the edge of Henry's Lake where extensive open water provides habitat for waterfowl and other water birds. Aspens, spruces, willows and alders grow adjacent to the lake in the vicinity of the hatchery.

Highlighted Species: American white pelican, double-crested cormorant, osprey, bald eagle, sharp-shinned hawk, ruffed grouse, American kestrel, California gull, Franklin's gull, ring-billed gull, black-billed magpie, gray jay, Steller's jay and a variety of songbirds are attracted to the lakeside vegetation during the migration and nesting periods.

Other Wildlife: The fish ladders provide a close-up look at trout behavior during spawning in spring. Moose are also occasionally found in the aspens and willows along the edge of Henry's Lake.

Best Viewing: Trout congregating in the hatchery's fish ladders in March and April attract a variety of predatory birds that prefer fish. April through June provide the best opportunities for viewing songbirds.

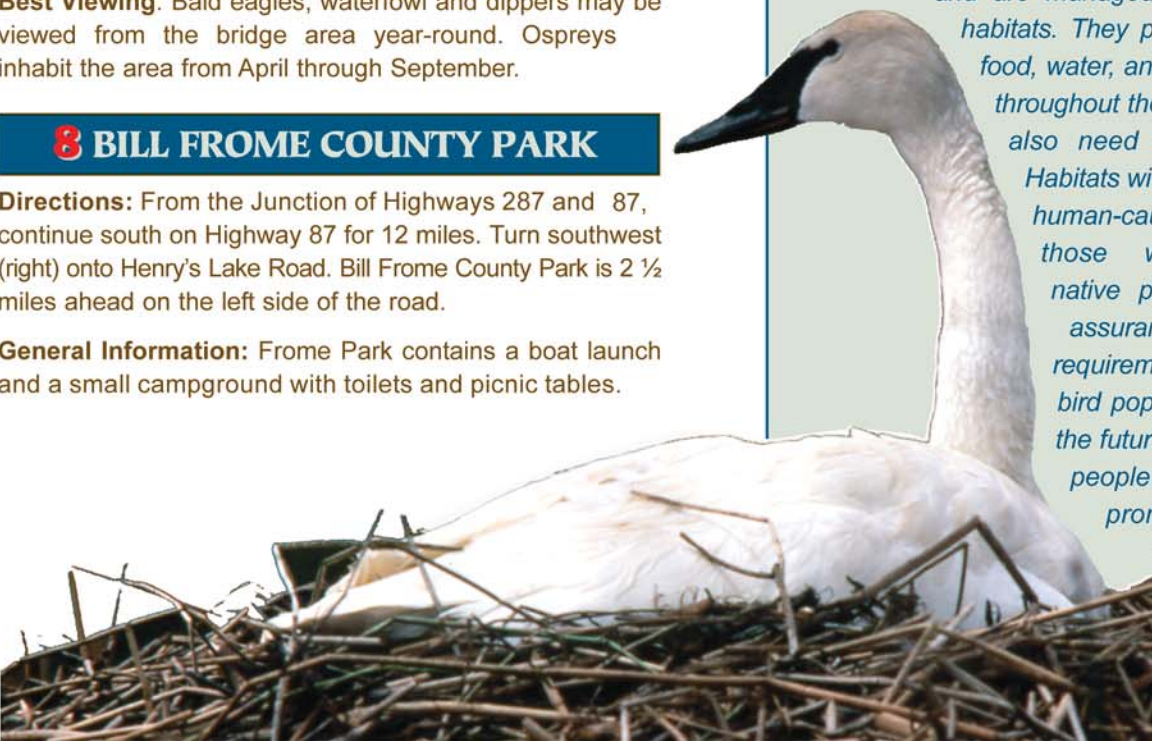
Contact: Henry's Lake Hatchery (208) 558-7202.

10 S. FORK OF THE MADISON RIVER

Directions: Continue south 4 miles on Highway 87 to U.S. Highway 20. Turn northeast (left) toward West Yellowstone on U.S. Highway 20. Drive approximately 8 miles, crossing Targhee Pass, to where the highway crosses the South Fork of the Madison River. There is a parking area on the left (north) side of the road just before the bridge. The Madison Arm Road (FR 291) parallels the South Fork of the Madison on a high bank above the river, and also provides good access for wildlife watchers in this area. To access this road, turn left off U.S. 20 about ½ mile beyond the highway bridge. This gravel road is open to passenger vehicles from May-November.

BIRD CONSERVATION

The birding sites described here are on public land and are managed to maintain natural habitats. They provide birds with the food, water, and shelter they require throughout the year. Summer birds also need safe nesting sites. Habitats with the least amount of human-caused disturbance and those with predominantly native plants offer the best assurance that birds' basic requirements will be met. For bird populations to flourish in the future, it is imperative that people interested in birds promote the protection and perpetuation of natural habitats.



TRUMPETER SWAN

General Information: You can either watch from your parked vehicle or walk the river corridor. Be aware that although there is plenty of access to the river from National Forest lands, there is also a considerable amount of private property along the river both upstream and downstream from the highway bridge. Hiking the river corridor is difficult due to the dense vegetation and wet ground. Additionally, take care not to surprise one of the moose or grizzly bears that frequent the thick willows!

Habitats: Tall stands of willows line the banks of the South Fork in this area. There are also numerous oxbow channels, beaver ponds, and wet sedge meadows along the river corridor.

Highlighted Species: The rich riparian habitat found here supports an array of migratory birds including yellow warbler, northern waterthrush, common yellowthroat, Wilson's warbler and fox sparrow. Canada geese, mallards, and Barrow's goldeneyes are some of the waterfowl nesting along the river. Lincoln's sparrow can be found in the willows. Great blue herons, osprey, sandhill cranes, spotted sandpipers, and American dippers are some of the other species commonly viewed here.

Other Wildlife: The stream corridor and its adjacent wetlands offer excellent habitat for water-loving mammals such as beavers, muskrats, mink, and otters. The dense willows provide prime moose habitat. White-tailed deer and grizzly bears are known to frequent the area.

Best viewing: Late-May through early-August

Contact: Gallatin National Forest, Hebgen Lake Ranger District (406)-823-6961.

Continue on U.S. 20 east for 4 miles to return to West Yellowstone.

SIDE TRIPS

There are several side trips from the West Yellowstone Birding Trail loop that will expose you to new habitats and more birding opportunities.

11 Seven-mile Bridge: Enter Yellowstone National Park by following Yellowstone Avenue in West Yellowstone east to the Park entrance (an entrance fee is charged). Follow the West Entrance Road for 7 miles to the aptly-named Seven-mile Bridge. Turnouts are located immediately east and

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Ashton/Island Park Ranger District 3726 Highway 20 Island Park, Idaho 83429 (208) 558-7301 www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/	Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge 27820 Southside Centennial Road Lima, MT 59739 (406) 276-3536 www.redrocks.fws.gov/
Fremont County Parks and Recreation Department 151 West 1 st North St. Anthony, Idaho 83445 (208) 624-1545 ext. 3010 www.co.fremont.id.us/	Yellowstone National Park P.O. Box 168 Yellowstone, WY 82190 or (307)344-7381 www.nps.gov/yell/
Gallatin National Forest Hebgen Lake Ranger District P.O. Box 520 West Yellowstone, MT 59758 (406) 823-6961 www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin/	Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center 201 South Canyon P.O. Box 996 West Yellowstone, MT 59758 (406) 646-7001 www.grizzlydiscoveryctr.org
Harriman State Park 3489 Green Canyon Road Island Park, ID 83429 (208) 558-7368 www.idahoparks.org/parks/	Bird checklists for their areas can be obtained from Red Rock Lakes, Harriman State Park, and Yellowstone National Park.
Henry's Lake Fish Hatchery HC66 Box 150 Idaho Fish and Game Island Park, ID 83429 (208) 558-7202 www.fishandgame.idaho.gov/	Additional information on birding and places to visit in the West Yellowstone area can be obtained from the local bookstores or from the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center in West Yellowstone.

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Brochure developed by West Yellowstone Birding Trail Committee: Gibson Bailey, Katy Duffy, John Heine, Beth Horn, Kirk Horn, Pierre Martineau, Susan Nesbitt, Andy Pils, The West Yellowstone Economic Development Council and Gallatin National Forest.

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Designed by Kathy Leehan-Pallach.

Text may be available in alternate format after giving two weeks notice.

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**Grizzly & Wolf
Discovery Center**



A NOT-FOR-PROFIT WILDLIFE PARK
AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITY



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**



west of the bridge. Birdwatching from the bridge is not recommended due to sometimes heavy vehicle traffic. This road is open to wheeled vehicles from late April through early November. From the large meadow at Seven-mile Bridge you can see occasional trumpeter swans, gadwall, American wigeon, osprey, bald eagle, sora, sandhill crane, and Wilson's snipe. The burned areas near Gneiss Creek host black-backed and three-toed woodpeckers. Cliff swallows and barn swallows nest under the bridge. Bison and elk are only a few of the larger animals you should see here.

12 Hebgen Lake Road #167 (Denny Creek Road): Located off of U.S. Highway 20 approximately 8 miles west of West Yellowstone, this road parallels much of the south-west shore of Hebgen Lake. It is passable to passenger vehicles from approximately late May through October, and is a gravel road for most of its 18-mile length. A wide variety of habitats can be found along here including shallow bays on the lake, sagebrush and grassland meadows, aspen stands, and several different types of conifer forest.

13 Harriman State Park: Drive west and south from West Yellowstone on U.S. 20 for 37 miles to this Idaho State Park (daily use fee is charged). Bird checklists are available from the park office. Large shallow ponds offer nesting sites for waterfowl. Extensive aspens occur in the upland areas while sagebrush and grasses gently carpet the rolling hills. The ponds provide summer homes to eared, western, Clark's, and pied-billed grebes, cinnamon teal and numerous other kinds of ducks. Trumpeter swans, sandhill cranes, eastern kingbirds, marsh wrens, house wrens, dusky flycatchers, yellow and Wilson's warblers all nest in Harriman State Park.

14 Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge & the Centennial Valley: From West Yellowstone drive west about 12 miles on U.S. Highway 20 over Targhee Pass to its junction with Highway 87. Turn right (northwest) for about 5 miles to the Henry's Lake Road. Turn south (left). Go past Bill Frome County Park and follow the gravel road 25 miles to the refuge entrance. Red Rock Pass Road is usually open by mid-May. Roads through the 45,000-acre refuge are unpaved and rough; carry a reliable spare tire. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge was established to protect nesting trumpeter swans. A bird checklist is available at the refuge office.

