

# Birds of the Upper Mississippi River

## Follow the Great River Road to Great Birding!

Imagine how the bird habitat and bird life along the Mississippi River must change as the river changes from a small stream running through the pine forests of northern Minnesota, then through what was once tall-grass prairie and oak savanna of central Minnesota. Then it changes again as it cuts through the blufflands of southern Minnesota, northeast Iowa, southwest Wisconsin and northwest Illinois. Finally, the river habitat and bird life reflects the big, wide river of southern Illinois and Missouri, where the Missouri and Illinois rivers join in.

You can now take a self-guided birding tour on the northernmost reaches of what is likely one of America's longest birding trails. The "Great River Birding Trail" parallels both sides of the Mississippi River from the headwaters, down 1,366 miles to the confluence with the Ohio River at Cairo, Illinois. The trail is named after the already well known federally-designated scenic drive called the Great River Road that goes from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

## The Upper Mississippi River: A Globally Important Bird Area and Migratory "Flyway" for Birds

The mighty Mississippi flows through the heart of our nation. It draws millions of visitors each year from all over the world, who come to experience the mystery and magnificence of this old river valley, rich in history, culture, habitat, and recreation. But they aren't the only visitors passing through – 40% of all North American waterfowl use the river as a migratory flyway, and 326 bird species (35% or about 1/3 of all species in North America) use the river corridor as a globally important flyway in their spring and fall migrations.

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge stretches southward for 261 miles along the Mississippi River from just above Wabasha, Minnesota, nearly to Rock Island, Illinois. This refuge and the entire Upper Mississippi River offer fabulous opportunities for birding among extensive marshlands, wooded bottom lands, open water, sand prairie, and wooded bluffs.

The river environment serves as a migration corridor not only for waterfowl, but also for numerous other birds such as raptors, shorebirds, and neo-tropical migratory songbirds. In the spring and summer, the river provides important nesting habitat for many species. Even in the coldest months, the area serves as a wintering ground for northern bird populations, in addition to year-round residents.

## Success Stories

Conservation and reintroduction efforts have benefited several bird species in the Upper Mississippi River. The Bald Eagle is one of the greatest success stories in the recovery of an endangered species. While a few hundred eagles used to winter along the Mississippi River, there are now thousands. Peregrine Falcons, once extirpated from their entire eastern range the U.S., have been successfully reintroduced and now nest on cliffs, towers, and bridges along the river. They were recently removed from the endangered species list, but are still endangered in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Red-shouldered Hawks nest in large tracts of mature or medium-aged, floodplain forests along the Mississippi River. Their diet varies but includes frogs, crayfish, salamanders, snakes, small mammals, and birds. They are listed as endangered in Iowa and Illinois, and a species of concern or threatened in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Red-shoulders are still uncommon in many parts of the Upper Mississippi River, but research has indicated relatively stable populations between McGregor, IA and Cassville, WI, and on the Illinois side from East Dubuque to Savanna, IL.

## Species of Concern

Neo-tropical migrants such as the Cerulean Warbler and the Prothonotary Warbler breed along the Upper Mississippi River while wintering in more suitable climates such as Central America and the northern rim of South America. Populations for both of these warblers have been in decline, but are still common along the Upper Mississippi. Red-headed Woodpeckers bore nest cavities in dead trees, fence posts, or utility poles in open woods, savannas, farmlands, and bottomlands. They feed on acorns, nuts, and berries, storing them in caches they defend vigorously. This widespread and common woodpecker's numbers have declined in the past decade due to loss of woodlands and competition with the European Starling. The Upper Mississippi River area is an important refuge for these and other bird species of concern.

## Connecting People to the Mississippi River

The Great River Birding Trail was developed to help educate citizens about the ecological significance of the Upper Mississippi River as an important flyway for birds and to encourage citizens to explore the Upper Mississippi River region through a form of hands-on, low-impact, and non-consumptive recreation. The Great River Birding Trail is a project of the Audubon - Upper Mississippi River Campaign. To learn more about the Audubon - Upper Mississippi River Campaign and the Great River Birding Trail, go to [www.audubon.org/campaign/umr](http://www.audubon.org/campaign/umr).

## IBA's Take Flight: Identifying and Conserving Essential Habitat for Birds

Important Bird Areas, or IBAs, are defined as sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of birds that are a high priority within a state, such as birds that are threatened, endangered, or have been in population decline. The IBA Program helps birds by setting science-based priorities for habitat conservation and promoting positive action to safeguard vital bird habitats. In 1995, Audubon launched an IBA initiative in the United States, working to establish IBA programs in all 50 states. IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds, and are selected using standardized, science-based criteria. You can help identify and conserve Important Bird Areas in your state or region. For more information on the Audubon IBA Program, go to: [www.audubon.org/bird/iba/](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/). This site includes the addresses of state IBA coordinators as well as information about many other Audubon bird conservation projects.

## Birds of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge Checklist

Provided below is a checklist highlighting the 302 species of birds that can be found within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge. It is not a comprehensive checklist for the entire Upper Mississippi River. Be sure to bring a birding book along for reference, or contact the state Department of Natural Resources or state Ornithological Union for a more specific birding list to the region you are visiting. Season, abundance and nesting status for each bird's suitable habitat along the Mississippi River corridor are coded as follows:

### Season:

Spring – March through May  
Summer – June through August  
Fall – September through November  
Winter – December through February

### Abundance and Nesting Status:

A – abundant  
C – common  
U – uncommon  
R – rare  
\* – Nests on the refuge

Common Name	Sp	Su	F	W	Common Name	Sp	Su	F	W	Common Name	Sp	Su	F	W
Common Loon		U		U	Herring Gull		C	U	C	U				
Horned Grebe				U	Glaucous Gull				R					
Pied-billed Grebe*		C	C	C	Caspian Tern		U	U	U					
Red-necked Grebe				R	Common Tern		U	U	U					
American White Pelican		C	U	C	Forster's Tern*		C	U	U					
Double-crested Cormorant*		C	C	C	Black Tern*		C	C	U					
American Bittern		U	U	U	Rock Dove*		C	C	C	C				
Least Bittern*		U	U	U	Mourning Dove*		C	C	U					
Great Blue Heron*		A	A	A	Black-billed Cuckoo*		U	C	C					
Great Egret*		A	C	A	Yellow-billed Cuckoo*		C	C	U					
Snowy Egret		R			Eastern Screech-Owl*		U	U	U	U				
Little Blue Heron			U		Great Horned Owl*		C	C	C	C				
Cattle Egret		U	R	U	Snowy Owl		R			R				
Green Heron*		C	C	C	Barred Owl*		C	C	C	C				
Black-crowned Night-Heron*		U	U	R	Long-eared Owl*		U	R	U	U				
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron*		U	R	U	Short-eared Owl		U	U	U	U				
Tundra Swan		A		A	Northern Saw-whet Owl*		U	U	U	U				
Trumpeter Swan		R	R	U	Northern Nighthawk*		C	C	U	U				
Mute Swan		R	R	R	Whip-poor-will*		U	U	U					
Greater White-fronted Goose		R		R	Chimney Swift*		C	C	U					
Snow Goose		U	U		Rudy-throated Hummingbird*		U	C	U					
Canada Goose*		A	C	A	Belted Kingfisher*		C	C	U	U				
Wood Duck*		A	C	A	Red-headed Woodpecker*		U	U	U	U				
Green-winged Teal		C	R	C	Red-bellied Woodpecker*		C	C	C	C				
American Black Duck*		C	U	C	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker*		C	C	C	R				
Mallard*		A	C	A	Downy Woodpecker*		C	C	C	C				
Northern Pintail		C	R	C	Hairy Woodpecker*		C	C	C	C				
Blue-winged Teal*		A	C	A	Northern Flicker*		C	C	C	U				
Northern Shoveler		C	U	C	Pileated Woodpecker*		U	U	U	U				
Gadwall		C	U	A	Olive-sided Flycatcher		R	U	U					
American Wigeon		A	U	A	Eastern Wood Pewee*		C	C	C	C				
Canvasback		A	R	A	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher		R	R	R					
Redhead		C	R	C	Acadian Flycatcher*		R	R	R					
Ring-necked Duck		A	R	A	Alder Flycatcher		R	R	R					
Greater Scaup		U	U		Willow Flycatcher*		U	U	U	U				
Lesser Scaup		A	R	A	Least Flycatcher*		C	C	C	C				
Oldsquaw		R		O	Eastern Phoebe*		C	U	C					
Black Scoter			R	R	Great Crested Flycatcher*		C	A	U					
White-winged Scoter		R	U	R	Eastern Kingbird*		C	C	U					
Common Goldeneye		A		A	Horned Lark*		R	R	R	U				
Bufflehead		C	A	R	Purple Martin*		U	U	U					
Hooded Merganser*		C	C	R	Tree Swallow		A	A	C					
Common Merganser		R		R	Northern Rough-winged Swallow*		C	C	C	U				
Red-breasted Merganser		C	U	C	Bank Swallow*		C	U	U					
Ruddy Duck		C	R	C	Cliff Swallow*		R	U	U					
Turkey Vulture		C	C	C	Barn Swallow*		C	C	C					
Osprey*		U	U	C	Blue Jay*		A	A	A	C				
Bald Eagle*		C	C	A	American Crow*		A	A	A	C				
Northern Harrier*		U	U	U	Black-capped Chickadee*		C	C	C	C				
Sharp-shinned Hawk		C	U	A	Tufted Titmouse*		U	U	U	U				
Cooper's Hawk*		U	U	C	Red-breasted Nuthatch		U	U	U	U				
Northern Goshawk		U		R	White-breasted Nuthatch*		C	C	C	C				
Red-shouldered Hawk*		U	U	R	Brown creeper*		C	U	C	U				
Broad-winged Hawk*		C	U	R	Carolina Wren*		R	R	R					
Swallows Hawk		C	U	R	Bewick's Wren		R	R	R					
Red-tailed Hawk*		C	C	A	House Wren*		A	A	C					
Rough-legged Hawk		U	U	U	Winter Wren*		U	U	U	R				
Golden Eagle		R	U	R	Sedge Wren*		U	U	U					
American Kestrel*		C	C	C	Marsh Wren*		C	C	C					
Merlin		U	U	U	Golden-crowned Kinglet		U	U	U	R				
Peregrine Falcon		U	U	U	Ruby-crowned Kinglet		C	C	C					
Gray Partridge*		U	U	U	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher*		C	C	U					
Ring-necked Pheasant*		U	U	U	Eastern Bluebird*		C	C	C	R				
Ruffed Grouse*		C	C	C	Veery*		C	R	U					
Wild Turkey*		U	U	U	Gray-cheeked Thrush		C	C	U					
Northern Bobwhite*		U	U	U	Swallows Thrush		U	U	U					
King Rail*		R	R		Hermit Thrush		U	U	U					
Virginia Rail*		C	C	C	Wood Thrush*		C	U	U					
Sora*		C	C	U	American Robin*		A	A	A	U				
Common Moorhen*		U	U	U	Gray Catbird*		C	C	C					
American Coot*		A	R	A	Northern Mockingbird		R	U	R					
Sandhill Crane*		U	U	U	Brown Thrasher*		C	C	C					
Black-bellied Plover		U	U	U	American Pipit		R		R					
Am. Golden-Plover		U	U	U	Bohemian Waxwing				R					
Semipalmated Plover		U	U	U	Cedar Waxwing*		C	C	C	U				
Killdeer*		C	C	C	Northern Shrike		U	U	U	U				
American Avocet		R	R	R	Loggerhead Shrike*		R	R	R					
Greater Yellowlegs		U	U	U	European Starling*		A	A	A	C				
Lesser Yellowlegs		C	C	C	White-eyed Vireo		R	R						
Solitary Sandpiper		U	U	U	Belt's Vireo*		R	U	U					
Willet		R	R	R	Blue-headed Vireo		U	U	U					
Spotted Sandpiper*		C	C	C	Yellow-throated Vireo*		U	U	U					
Upland Sandpiper*		R	R	R	Warbling Vireo*		A	A	A					
Hudsonian Godwit		R			Philadelphia Vireo		U	U	U					
Marbled Godwit		R			Red-eyed Vireo*		A	A	A					
Ruddy Turnstone		U	U	W	Blue-winged Warbler*		U	U						
Sanderling		U	U	U	Golden-winged Warbler		U	U	U					
Semipalmated Sandpiper		C	C	C	Tennessee Warbler		C	C	C					
Least Sandpiper		C	C	C	Orange-crowned Warbler		C	C	C					
White-rumped Sandpiper		U	U	U	Nashville Warbler		C	C	C					
Baird's Sandpiper		U	U	U	Northern Parula		R	U	U					
Pectoral Sandpiper		C	C	C	Yellow Warbler*		A	A	U					
Dunlin		U	U	U	Yellow-throated Warbler*		R	R						
Silt Sandpiper		U	U	U	Chestnut-sided Warbler		C	C	U					
Short-billed Dowitcher		U	U	U	Magnolia Warbler		U	U	U					
Long-billed Dowitcher		U	U	R	Cape May Warbler		U	U	U					
Common Snipe		C	U	C	Black-throated Blue Warbler		R	R						
American Woodcock*		U	U	U	Yellow-rumped Warbler		A	A	A					
Wilson's Phalarope		U	U	R	Black-throated Green Warbler		C	U	U					
Red-necked Phalarope		U	U	R	Blackburnian Warbler		U	U	C					
Franklin's Gull		U	U	U	Pine Warbler		R	U	U					
Bonaparte's Gull		U	U	U	Palm Warbler		C	C	C					
Ring-billed Gull		C	C	C	Bay-breasted Warbler		R							

### American Birding Association Code of Ethics

- Birders must always act in ways that do not endanger the welfare of birds or other wildlife.**
  - Observe and photograph birds without knowingly disturbing them in any significant way.
  - Avoid chasing or repeatedly flushing birds.
  - Use recordings and similar methods of attracting birds sparingly.
  - Keep an appropriate distance from nest and nesting colonies.
  - Refrain from handling birds or eggs unless engaged in recognized research activities.
- Birders should do their best to not cause harm to the natural environment.**
  - Whenever possible, stay on existing roads, trails, and pathways to avoid disturbing fragile habitat. Leave all habitat as found.
- Birders must always respect the right of others.**
  - Respect the privacy and property of others by observing "No Trespassing" signs and by asking permission to enter private or posted lands.
  - Observe all laws and the rules and regulations which govern public use of birding areas.
  - Practice common courtesy in contacts with others.
  - Always behave in a manner that will enhance the image of the birding community in the eyes of the public.



Follow the Great River Road to Great Birding Along the Upper Mississippi River



Tree Swallow



Bald Eagle



Willet

Audubon Great River Birding Trail Map Section 10 of 15 Iowa/Illinois Burlington, IA Area New Boston, IL to Keokuk, IA



For Questions about the Great River Birding Trail or to order additional maps: Audubon - Upper Mississippi River Campaign 1707 Main Street, Suite 105 La Crosse, WI 54601 Phone: (608) 784-2992 Email: [bkcopp@audubon.org](mailto:bkcopp@audubon.org)

For More Information on Wildlife Tourism, Travel and Recreation Along the Upper Mississippi River: National Mississippi River Parkway Commission [www.mississippi-river.com](http://www.mississippi-river.com) (763) 212-2560

Iowa Department of Natural Resources [www.state.ia.us/government/dnr/index](http://www.state.ia.us/government/dnr/index) 1-515-281-5918

Iowa Office of Tourism [www.state.ia.us/tourism](http://www.state.ia.us/tourism) 1-888-472-6035

Illinois Department of Natural Resources [www.dnr.state.il.us](http://www.dnr.state.il.us)

Illinois Department of Tourism [www.enjoyillinois.com](http://www.enjoyillinois.com) 1-800-2CONNECT Designed and produced by Romance Valley Graphics email: [rvg@mvmt.net](mailto:rvg@mvmt.net)

Printed by La Crosse Graphics Inc., La Crosse WI [www.lacrossegraphics.com](http://www.lacrossegraphics.com)

Map illustration by Riverwise

The printing of the Great River Birding Trail map series was funded in part by the McKnight Foundation, the Iowa-Mississippi River Parkway Commission and the Federal Highway Administration



Published by the Audubon Upper Mississippi River Campaign



# Great River Birding Trail

Burlington, Iowa Map — from New Boston, Illinois, to Keokuk, Iowa (River Mile 437 to 361)



**1. Lake Odessa, Toolesboro Access**   
**Where:** Turn east on the gravel road off Hwy. 99 in Toolesboro.   
**Birds:** Excellent bird diversity including waterfowl and shorebirds during migration, bottomland forest birds such as Brown Creepers, Prothonotary Warblers, several vireos and other neotropical migrants. Also Red-shouldered Hawks, Pileated Woodpeckers, Double-crested Cormorants, as well as Bald Eagles wintering and nesting.

**2. Malchow Mounds State Preserve**   
**Where:** Go 13 miles north of Burlington on Hwy. 99.   
**Birds:** The preserve includes extensive upland forests and hilltop openings. Excellent for warblers, vireos and other songbirds and migrating raptors.

**3. Starr's Cave State Preserve**   
**Where:** North of Burlington, east of Hwy 61, west of Hwy. 99 — look for signs.   
**Birds:** Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Yellow-throated Vireos, Scarlet Tanagers and a good variety of warblers.

**4. Crapo Park & Arboretum**   
**Where:** A beautiful forested city park south of downtown Burlington with sidewalk trails and a scenic river overlook.   
**Birds:** Baltimore Orioles, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Cedar Waxwings and Catbirds.

**5. Geode State Park**   
**Where:** Go 8 miles west of Burlington or 4 miles southwest of Danville.   
**Birds:** Excellent variety of songbirds in the upland forests.

**6. Sullivan Slough County Park & Blackhawk Bottoms Wildlife Area**   
**Where:** South of Burlington turn south off of Cty. Rd. W62 (Summer St.) at Cessford Construction and look for County Conservation Area signs. County- and state-owned land and extensive private land along the confluence of the Skunk and Mississippi rivers.   
**Birds:** Prothonotary Warblers, Warbling Vireos and Red-shouldered Hawks. Also excellent for waterfowl, neotropical migrants and bottomland forest birds.

**7. Lower Skunk River Access**   
**Where:** Go 7 miles southwest of Burlington — 2 miles upstream from the Hwy. 61 bridge.   
**Birds:** Spotted Sandpipers, Great Blue Herons and American Goldfinches.

**8. Heron Bend — Lee County Park**   
**Where:** Just north of Montrose.   
**Birds:** Great Blue Herons, excellent variety of waterfowl during migration and Bald Eagles during the winter.

**9. Riverview Park**   
**Where:** At Montrose.   
**Birds:** Good viewing area for portions of Pool 19. Excellent for waterfowl during migration.

**10. Rand Park**   
**Where:** City Park along the Mississippi River bluffs on the north end of Keokuk with an excellent bluff view.   
**Birds:** Baltimore Orioles, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Cedar Waxwings and Catbirds.

**11. Lock & Dam 19 & George M. Verity Museum**   
**Where:** Just east of downtown Keokuk and at several locations along the river below the lock and dam.   
**Birds:** Excellent for wintering eagles, also waterfowl during migration, including pelicans in the fall.

**12. New Boston Access**   
**Where:** West end of New Boston.   
**Birds:** Good viewing location for Sturgeon Bay and waterfowl during migration. Great Blue Herons, Double-crested Cormorants in summer and Bald Eagles during winter.

**13. Crosses Corner Public Use Area**   
**Where:** Go west off of New Boston Rd. on to 176th Ave., then go south for 2 miles and go west on 160th Ave.   
**Birds:** Barred Owls, Prothonotary Warblers, Pileated Woodpeckers and Wild Turkeys.

**14. Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge - New Boston/Keithsburg Unit**   
**Where:** South of New Boston and North of Keithsburg just west of Keithsburg Rd. Rich bottomland has very little human traffic. A variety of habitats includes coniferous thickets and good marsh areas, especially near Swan Lake.   
**Birds:** There is a heron rookery nearby. Also, Prothonotary Warblers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, Swamp Sparrows, Double-crested Cormorants and Eurasian Tree Sparrows. Good for rails in summer and for warblers during migration.

**15. Big River State Forest**   
**Where:** The north end of the forest is 3 miles south of Keithsburg. The south end of the forest is 3 miles north of Oquawka. This is the largest coniferous forest in the area. Sandy soil and brushy habitats as well as bottomland forests and Mississippi River backwater habitats are accessible on the north and south ends of the park.   
**Birds:** Lark Sparrows, Ruby and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Brown Creepers and an excellent diversity of songbirds. Long-eared and Saw-whet Owls during winter.

**16. Delabar State Park**   
**Where:** One mile north of Oquawka.   
**Birds:** Good for eagles during winter, waterfowl and warblers during migration.



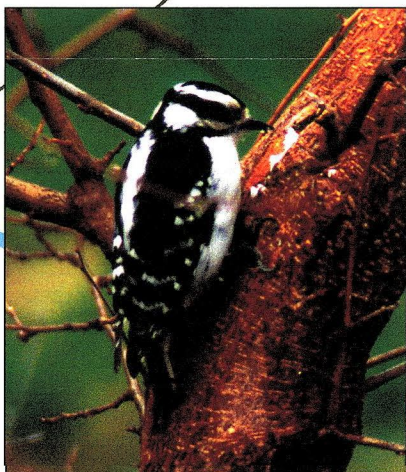
Eastern Bluebird  
photo by Kay Shaw



Sandpiper  
photo by Gary Krogman



Sora Rail  
photo by Gary Krogman



Downy Woodpecker  
photo by Kay Shaw

KEY	
	River View
	Blufftop View
	Open Water
	Bottomland Forests
	Open Fields
	Upland Forests
	Lock & Dam
	Great River Road
	Boat Landing
	Canoe Trail
	Hiking Trail
	Information
	Restrooms
	Bike Trail
1" = 3.5 miles	
0" 25" 5" 75" 1"	



**Audubon**

Published by the Upper Mississippi River Campaign, © 2003