

# North Cascades

Ross Lake and Lake Chelan

North Cascades National Park  
Ross Lake National Recreation Area  
Lake Chelan National Recreation Area  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## BIRDING AROUND THE PARK: WHERE TO LOOK



American dipper

### STATE RT. 20 CORRIDOR

SR 20 runs through some of the most rugged mountains in the United States, made all the more spectacular by the lush green forest and meadows that flood valley bottoms and cling to steep slopes at great heights. The thick vegetation owes its existence to Washington's celebrated rainy weather, which dumps nearly 110 inches of precipitation a year on the west side of the Cascades. The mountains, valleys, streams, rivers, forests and meadows all provide an abundance of habitat for birds of many kinds. The following sites are some of the best birding spots in key westside habitats between Marblemount and Washington Pass, listed by milepost (mp) number on SR 20.

#### POWERLINE ROAD (mp109)

Access Powerline Road by taking Diobsud Creek Road on the north side of SR 20 a few hundred yards to the junction. Park at the junction, and walk east along the powerline corridor, looking in the shrubs and rocks for *willow flycatchers*, *Bewick's wrens*, *song sparrows*, and *lazuli buntings*. In the taller trees that border the road, look for *Pacific-slope flycatchers*, *western tanagers*, *Cassin's*, and *warbling vireos*, *black-throated gray warblers*, and other passerines.

#### COUNTY LINE PONDS (mp116.5)

The area between the highway and the Skagit River was used by Seattle City Light for gravel pits, which have become ponds. Access is via a gated road on the south side of the highway near the Whatcom-Skagit county line sign. Many species can be seen in the riparian forests skirting the ponds and roads, including *Hammond's flycatchers*, *common yellowthroats*, *marsh wrens* and *red-eyed vireos*. *American redstarts* nested here in 1996 and 1997. Be advised, this land is owned by the utility. Please park off the highway, and do not block the gate.

#### GOODSELL CREEK CAMPGROUND (mp118)

For another pond area, park clear of the gate at the end of the gravel road one mile west of Goodsell Creek Campground, and walk back about one-quarter mile past more gravel piles to the aggregate ("ag") ponds. Waterfowl (*Barrow's* and *common goldeneyes*, *ring-necked ducks*, *mallards*, *hooded mergansers*, *bufflehead* in winter) and *belted kingfishers* abound, *barn, violet-green, tree* and *rough-winged swallows* skim the surface of the water. Keep an eye out for river otters and beavers in the ponds!



Black swift

#### NEWHALEM (mp120)

At the North Cascades Visitor Center, look for *pileated woodpeckers*, *Steller's jays*, *chestnut-backed chickadees* as well as *black* and *Vaux's swifts*. The swifts nest north across the Skagit River in the cliffs above Goodell

Creek and are present in the summer, especially in late afternoon.

*Swainson's* and *varied thrushes*, *Pacific-slope* and *Hammond's flycatchers* and *Townsend's* and *black-throated gray warblers* are often along the River-Loop Trail behind the visitor center.

*American dippers* sing up a storm in the side drainages of the Skagit. Along the power lines near SR 20, keep your eyes open for *lazuli buntings* and *Nashville warblers*.

#### COLONIAL CREEK (mp130)

*Barred owls* have nested in the campground here in recent years and are seen and heard in breeding

season. Along Diablo Lake, look for *spotted sandpipers*; *cliff swallows* nest under the bridge. At the south end of the campground, take the Thunder Creek Trail southward and watch for *warblers* (*MacGillivray's*, *Nashville*, *Yellow*, *Townsend's*), *Lincoln's sparrows*, *warbling* and *Cassin's vireos*, *Hammond's flycatchers* as well as *hairy* and *pileated woodpeckers*. Watch the creek for *harlequin ducks*, *American dippers* and *common mergansers* as well as breeding *Barrow's goldeneye*. One mile down the trail, a suspension bridge crossing Thunder Creek leads to a willow and alder thicket. Keep an eye out overhead for an occasional glimpse of an *osprey*.

## ROSS LAKE (mp134)

Ross Lake is not easily accessible, but it bears mentioning as a superb spot to bird by kayak or canoe. *Common loons* call across the lake all summer, *osprey* nest near waterfalls along the shore, and *northern goshawks* appear from time to time. *Spotted sandpipers* and flocks of songbirds inhabit the many wooded islands. Rarities seen here in recent years include, *red-necked phalaropes*, *tree* and *violet-green swallows*, *mountain bluebird* and various waterfowl. During migration, keep an eye out for *American white pelicans*. Boats can be rented at Ross Lake Resort at the south end of the lake. You can also put in your own boat on Diablo Lake and pay the resort to portage it around Ross Dam.

## MT. HARDY BURN (mp151)

Immediately past milepost 151, take the road on the northeast side of the highway that leads a short way to a gravel pile. Park on the north side of the gravel pile, and either bird the vicinity or bushwack one-half mile up to the burn on the southwest face of Mt. Hardy. A fading fire-crew trail leads to the burn, making the way easier, if you can find it. Numerous species have been recorded near the gravel pile, including *blue grouse*, *northern goshawk*, *mountain chickadees*, *white-winged crossbills*, *black* and *Vaux's swifts*. In the burn itself, look for *black-backed*, *three-toed* and *pileated woodpeckers*, *mountain bluebirds*, *calliope hummingbirds*, and *gray-crowned rosy finches*. *Spruce grouse* nested here recently.

## CUTTHROAT LAKE TRAIL (mp 167)

Here you are high up on the east side of the Cascade Crest, walking a gentle trail through stunted alpine trees. The first two miles jump with birds, including *white-winged crossbills*, *mountain chickadees*, *Townsend's* and *yellow-rumped warblers*, *hermit thrushes*, *Clark's nutcrackers* and *gray jays*. *Pine grosbeaks*, *spruce grouse* and *gray-crowned rosy finches* are a possibility, and if you're exceedingly lucky, even *boreal chickadees*. Also look out for raptors like *peregrine falcons*.



Steller's jay

## STEHEKIN

Isolated at the head of Lake Chelan with access only by boat, plane or foot, the Stehekin Valley lies in a transition zone from the westside to the eastside of the Northern Cascades. Because of its unique geography and climate, bird life thrives here, and birding is fantastic. The diversity of habitats include rich riparian areas, numerous lakes, including Lake Chelan, Ponderosa pine forests carpeting the Stehekin Valley, enticing rock outcroppings dotting the hillsides, and high alpine areas where trails taper off. Birds to expect include the many eastside species that are forest denizens and mountain dwellers. This list of birding spots starts at the landing and continues up the Stehekin Valley Road.

### LANDING/LAKE HEAD

Along the two-mile stretch of road, between landing and bakery, you cross many habitat types, sources of a great diversity of species. On the open water of Lake Chelan, look for *common loons*, *horned* and *western grebes*, *ring-necked ducks*, *Barrow's goldeneye*, *common* and *hooded mergansers*. In the marshy areas at the lake's head, look for *mallard ducks*, *Canada geese*, *gray catbirds* and *soras*. The forest edges may yield *warblers* (*Nashville*, *yellow-rumped*, *yellow*, *Wilson's MacGillivray's*, *Townsend's*), *veerys*, *Swainson's* and *varied thrushes*, *olive-sided* and *Hammond's flycatchers*, *red-breasted nuthatches* as well as *calliope* and *rufous hummingbirds*. At the bakery, *California quail* may dodge across the road or *common nighthawks* might swoop overhead. Keep eyes open and ears alert for the jack-hammer drumming of *pileated woodpeckers*.

### BUCKNER ORCHARD

This historic orchard is a perfect place for viewing species that love open spaces. *Say's phoebes* and *chipping sparrows* abound. *Red-naped sapsuckers* are often spotted exploring the bark of the old apple trees, a popular nesting site for the *house wrens*. Down by the river, keep a look out for *harlequin ducks* and the abundant *American dipper*. Across the road, you can explore the Rainbow Falls area. The cliffs above are home to the *canyon wren*. If the roar of the falls is not too overwhelming, you may be rewarded with the sound of the downward-spiraling call of this wren.

### COON LAKE

Along the Pacific Crest Trail between High Bridge and Bridge Creek, Coon Lake is the valley's birding mecca. *Barrow's goldeneyes*, *wood ducks*, *hooded mergansers* and *cinnamon teals* lounge on the lake, while around the shore *warblers* (*yellow*, *MacGillivray's*, *Nashville*), *chipping sparrows*, *Cassin's finches*, *cedar waxwings*, *black-headed* and *evening grosbeaks* as well as *pileated* and *three-toed woodpeckers* stay busy in the trees. Underfoot, look for *ruffed* and *blue grouse*, while overhead you may spot a *golden eagle*. Sightings of all three accipiters are possible. Keep your ears open for *northern pygmy owls*, *common ravens* and *red-breasted nuthatches*.

Please report unusual bird sightings. In person: Fill out a wildlife sighting card at a ranger station or visitor center, where bird lists and guides are available. By phone: Call (360)856-5700, ext.368.