

Spring means birding opportunities in Ozaukee County

By Ozaukee County
Tourism Council

Spring is here, and it is an exciting time that represents renewal, rebirth, awakening and bird migration season. For so many, there is the excitement of watching for specific species of birds, some passing through for a brief time on their migration and others staying until early winter before heading to warmer climates. Plants and trees begin to bloom and insects start to hatch, attracting birds that come to nest and raise their young.

Some of the first to arrive in Ozaukee County and often the highlights in backyards and feeders are red-winged blackbirds, rose-breasted grosbeaks, white-crowned and white-throated sparrows, brown creepers, yellow-rumped warblers, kinglets, and orioles (Baltimore and orchard). People tend to put out grape jelly, oranges and sugar water at the beginning of May to attract orioles and ruby-throated hummingbirds. Waterfowl (such as teal, mergansers, bufflehead, and redheads), shorebirds (such as killdeer) and sandhill cranes also start migrating back in large numbers.

Birdwatching, often referred to as birding, can be done anywhere, but there are particular species of birds that tend to be seen in specific habitats. For instance, in areas with farm fields and prairies, you may see meadowlark, kestrels, wrens, sparrows, and American Woodcocks as they perform their sky dances. Marsh areas tend to attract soras, green heron, American bittern, common yellowthroat, red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds, and blue-winged teal. Woodlands and forests tend to attract a myriad of songbirds including countless warblers (yellow-rumped, black-throated green, yellow, magnolia, Kentucky, American redstart and ovenbird) as well as indigo bunting and eastern towhees. In the spring you will also find many species of birds along the Lake Michigan shoreline such as numerous species of ducks, geese, gulls, hawks and shorebirds. The Milwaukee River corridor provides feeding and resting habitat to a multitude of migrating warblers, sparrows, thrushes and wrens.

Of course, migration time is not the only time for birding. All year long it is exciting to see the variety of birds at our feeders and in our trees, like woodpeckers, cardinals, chickadees, jays, and finches that stay through the winter.

Birding hotspots

Throughout Ozaukee County there are numerous birding hotspots on, along and near the Ozaukee Interurban Trail (OIT).

Ozaukee County was the first of 109 Wisconsin communities to be designated as a High Flyer Bird City Wisconsin community (learn more at birdcitywisconsin.org).



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A Planning and Parks Department volunteer checks in on a bluebird nest.

consin.org). The Planning and Parks Department has a rich history dating back to the 1970s of park and open space planning that includes creating and restoring habitat and monitoring birds.

As part of Ozaukee County's commitment to bird conservation, since 2008, bird species observations and nest box monitoring data has been collected by Planning and Parks Department staff and local volunteers. The department continues to install nest boxes all over the county, in areas like Mee-Kwon and Hawthorne Hills County Parks and Golf Courses, Tendick Nature Park and Virmond County Park.

This past winter department staff were surprised to find eastern screech owls using several kestrel nest boxes that had been installed. Data like this, as well as data collected from unoccupied boxes, is submitted to be used by ornithologists studying the various species.

The 116-acre Ozaukee Washington Land Trust Forest Beach Migratory Preserve is located along Lake Michigan in Port Washington. This preserve contains a five-acre hardwood forest with ephemeral (seasonal) ponds, open grassland and prairie, a partially wooded ravine and five constructed wetland ponds. This property lends itself to supporting migratory birds along the Lake Michigan Flyway and is a beautiful place for birding.

Another Ozaukee County hotspot is the Port Washington Harbor, providing bird viewing all year. In winter you can find numerous waterfowl species, as well as the occasional common or red-throated loon and snowy owl. For the past several springs, a flock of white pelicans makes a temporary home in the harbor too — often staying for a month or more.

Harrington Beach State Park in Belgium is another excellent place for birding with their 637 acres and one mile of Lake Michigan



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One hotspot for birding in Ozaukee County is along the Milwaukee River in Grafton.

frontage. Heading south, the Riveredge Nature Center in Saukville provides the perfect habitat for many types of birds. The center boasts more than 379 acres of land, meandering trails with prairies, woods, ponds, and more than a mile of Milwaukee River shoreline. Along the County's southern border, the Mequon Nature Preserve offers great birding opportunities with more than 400 acres of land including forests, wetlands and prairie.

Birding tips

To help with bird identification and areas where you will have a higher chance of seeing birds during migration (or anytime), download the Ozaukee Trailside Birding Guide at www.interurbantrail.com or call the Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department (www.co.ozaukee.wi.us/540/Planning-Parks) for a copy. The guide and the website also include great birding locations within the Ozaukee County Park System and Ozaukee Washington Land Trust preserves. More information is also available at the Land Trust website at www.owlt.org. The Trailside Birding Guide provides a map of

birding hotspots, along with on-site "kingfisher" logo signs, that will help direct you to locations providing the greatest birding success. There is also on-site bird educational signage to help you identify the birds in those specific habitat areas.

During the migration seasons in particular, birds can be confused by reflections in windows, often times flying directly into them. According to the American Bird Conservancy, even small windows can be dangerous to birds. Check for reflections on your windows. To help deter birds from flying into your windows, consider applying visible markings on the glass, such as vertical or horizontal stripes, or irregular patterns. Bird and garden stores and online resources can help you identify ways and products to help alert birds.

So whether you are an experienced birder or new to birding, this is a perfect time to get out and enjoy birds in your yards, parks, trails and almost anywhere now and throughout the year. For more information on the locations listed, please visit www.ozaukeetourism.com. Happy birding!