

A successful birding trip to Ashland and Bayfield counties requires only binoculars or a spotting scope and a camera, as most of the birding sites are accessible by foot. If you prefer a kayak, canoe, or bicycle, however, there are many available opportunities for these activities. A comfortable pair of walking shoes is recommended since the area has a variety of sites to explore. The birding locations listed provide ample options that are easily accessible and offer fantastic northwoods scenery. You should first stop at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, open seven days a week and located 2.5 miles west of Ashland. The center provides a variety of services and attractions, including pamphlets on birding. The following information was taken from the "Birding by the Bay" pamphlet available at the Visitor Center.



DAM ROAD

Dam Road, seven miles outside Cable, offers an osprey viewing platform and a great blue heron rookery. Follow along a few more miles to the head of the Namakagon River. In the open lake and wetlands area, many species of waterfowl and shorebirds can be sighted. In addition, warblers, orioles, vireos and thrushes can be sighted along the shoreline in the trees.

ASHLAND AREA

The airport and open fields south of Ashland offer bobolinks, upland plovers, bluebirds, meadowlarks, kestrels, sparrows and a variety of other species. Drive the roads that branch off State highway 118 and stop where fields are bordered by woods for notable viewing.

PRENTICE PARK

Prentice Park on the west edge of Ashland is a good place for picnicking and birding. The lagoon just north of the pavilion is worth scanning for waterfowl and shorebirds. The observation tower allows a different look at the lagoon and a chance to view a portion of the Fish Creek Sloughs where additional waterfowl can be seen. Walking around the nature trails sometimes produces interesting sightings of rare species, such as the snowy egret or least bittern.

COPPER FALLS STATE PARK

Copper Falls State Park, located just northeast of Mellen, is home to canyons, streams, waterfalls, a swimming beach, picnic areas with a log shelter and miles of trails. Copper Falls is 29 feet tall and marks the first drop of Bad River as it flows through steep-walled gorges. Hikers will enjoy self-guided nature trails and observation points overlooking spectacular vistas. Watch for eagles soaring overhead and a variety of forest-loving warblers and other songbirds.

MADELINE ISLAND

Take the ferry to Madeline Island, the largest of the Apostle Islands, where you can view many cormorants, gulls and mallards that come to visit. At La Pointe, take a walk along Capser Trail. You may see merlins that have been nesting along the trail. Visit the northern-most state park in Wisconsin, Big Bay State Park, and look for loons, bald eagles and forest birds.

BIRDING IN THE CHEQUAMEGON BAY

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HEAD OF THE BAY

The Head of the Bay, where Fish Creek flows into Lake Superior, offers excellent viewing opportunities on both sides of Highway 13. This site is a must during the spring. Eagles can often be seen soaring over the lake or sitting on a tree or sandbar. This site sometimes provides great viewing for waterfowl, shorebirds, herons, and warblers.

TERN ISLAND

On the eastern side of Chequamegon Bay in Ashland, Tern Island is at the end of a group of pilings from an old ore dock that is maintained by the Wisconsin DNR as a nesting site for common terns. Cormorants, gulls, common mergansers and other birds use the pilings as roosting sites. Flocks of diving ducks and occasional loons can also be observed.

THOMPSON'S WEST END PARK

Thompson's West End Park in Washburn is a good area for spotting water fowl, gulls, terns and shorebirds during the spring migratory season. A walking trail parallels the shoreline in an easterly direction and is a good area to view warblers and other brush-loving birds. This park on the northwest section of Chequamegon Bay offers a great opportunity to see the red-necked grebe and the majestic bald eagle. A spotting scope is helpful for scanning the water and pilings where birds often sit.

LONG LAKE AND BIRCH GROVE AREA

On the western side on Chequamegon Bay near Washburn Long Lake is a spring-fed lake situated in a pine/hardwood forest, where swimming and picnicking are popular. Warblers, thrushes, vireos, scarlet tanagers, ravens and an occasional black-backed woodpecker can also be seen in this area. Birch Grove is good for warblers, grosbeaks, orioles, flycatchers, thrushes, and woodpeckers though beware of extensive storm damage there after high winds in summer 2016.

LITTLE SAND BAY

Little Sand Bay, 13 miles north of Bayfield in the mainland unit of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, features a variety of beach, wetland and forest habitats that attract migratory shorebirds, warblers, sparrows, geese and waterfowl. Bald eagles and great blue herons are regularly seen.

BIG ROCK COUNTY PARK CAMPGROUND

The Big Rock County Campground, with its mix of conifers and hardwoods, along with a river running through its heavily forested valley, attracts a variety of birds to the area. Big Rock is an excellent area for warblers, vireos, thrushes, winter wrens and pileated woodpeckers. The Park is located by taking County Highway C north from Washburn for 4.2 miles and turning right on Big Rock Road.

BARK BAY SLOUGH

Bark Bay Slough is 4.5 miles west of Cornucopia in northern Bayfield County off Bark Bay Road. The floating sedge bog hosts a variety of migrating waterfowl and shorebirds in the spring. Nearby forests and wetlands team with warblers, sparrows, woodpeckers and thrushes during spring migration. American biterns, common loons, Virginia and sora rails, marsh and sedge wrens, eastern bluebirds and sandhill cranes will often nest near the slough. A boat launch off Bark Bay Road offers canoe access to the slough.

BAYFIELD FISH HATCHERY

Bayfield Fish Hatchery is located two miles south of Bayfield on State Highway 13. Pikes Creek and Pikes Bay are adjacent to the property. The ponds behind the hatchery attract migrating waterfowl, belted kingfishers and great blue herons. The forests along Pikes Creek host warblers, woodpeckers, nuthatches and sparrows. Nearby Pikes Bay is a good place to view bald eagles, shorebirds, gulls and migration waterfowl such as tundra swans, goldeneyes, bufflehead, scaup and mergansers.

MOQUAH BARRENS

The Moquah Pine Barrens offer a dramatic change to the local landscape – dry uplands with rolling hills of openings, pines, oaks and various shrubs – and host a unique assemblage of species such as Sharp-tailed Grouse, Vesper and Clay-colored Sparrows, Brewer's Blackbirds, Brown Thrashers, Eastern Towhees, Common Nighthawks, E. Whip-poor-wills, and more. Also look for interesting plants, mammals, and butterflies, like the Chryxus Arctic, American Badger, and Wild Bergamot. The area is best reached off FR236 about six miles north of Ino.

APOSTLE ISLANDS NATIONAL LAKESHORE

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is an important rest stop and nesting area for more than 250 species of birds on the 21 different islands. Small islands (Gull and Eagle) offer critical habitat for colonial nesting birds like the double-crested cormorants, herring gulls and great blue herons. Outer and Long islands host particular significant migrations of shorebirds, raptors and songbirds. Stockton Island offers a diversity of habitats that attract many nesting and migratory species, including merlins, American redstarts, red-winged blackbirds, parula warblers, white-throated sparrows, red-breasted mergansers and common loons.

FOREST LODGE NATURE TRAIL

Forest Lodge Nature Trail offers a variety of loops (from 1 to 5.5 miles) which provide excellent, leisurely hiking trails and spring birding opportunities. Enjoy various habitats along the trail, which host numerous birds such as assorted warblers, including black-throated blue warblers, thrushes, sparrows, vireos and bluebirds. During late spring, be sure to walk the boardwalk into the bog to see pink lady's slippers in bloom. The Forest Lodge Nature Trail is located 10 miles east of Cable on Garmisch Road, just off County Highway M, past the Lakewoods Resort.

NAMAKAGON RIVER

Grab your paddle and take a leisurely excursion down the Namakagon River. The river's best paddling is during the spring and early summer, which is also the best time to view birds. Along the way, you can observe bald eagles, osprey, belted kingfishers, common and hooded mergansers, along with numerous warbler species in the treetops. East access points are located at the canoe landings along County Highway M and Telemark Road.

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