

**Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Willamette Valley National Wildlife
Refuge Complex
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<http://www.fws.gov/willamettevalley/complex/index.html>**

News Release



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Baskett Slough NWR Loans Binoculars and Field Guides to Visitors.

Ever squint to see whether a duck is a pintail or a mallard? Ever notice a bird way up in the sky and wish you could focus on how it hovers or soars with little or no effort? Now, you can focus those images with new clarity -- even if you don't have a pair of binoculars for your next birding trip to Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

Visitors to Baskett Slough can now borrow binoculars and bird guides during their visits -- part of a nationwide effort to make bird watching on national wildlife refuges ever easier. National wildlife refuges across the country are home to more than 700 bird species, including over 200 species noted in the Willamette Valley.

National wildlife refuges across the country received 80 optics and field guide starter kits to invite people somewhat new to birding to become familiar with equipment and see firsthand why 46 million Americans find watching birdlife exhilarating. Almost a third of the nation's Important Bird Areas of global significance are on national wildlife refuges.

In the winter, Northern shrikes can be found hunting hedgerows and rough-legged hawks can be seen hovering over prairies on Baskett Butte. Peregrine falcons are attracted to the large numbers of waterfowl here in the winter and can sometimes be found perched in the snag trees in Cackler Marsh. Canada geese, cinnamon teal, mallards, bufflehead and hooded mergansers are just a few of the species found in the wetland areas. Wintering concentrations of streaked-horned larks are attracted to the heavily grazed grass fields and then use open areas in these fields as nesting habitat. Other species found nesting here are Common Mergansers, black-necked stilts, western meadowlark and yellow headed blackbirds.

The refuge offers several popular birding sites to visitors. The Highway 22 Wildlife Viewing Kiosk is located just ten miles west of Salem and offers the convenience of birding just steps from the parking lot. The Rich Guadagno Memorial Loop Trail and Observation Platform consists of a one-mile loop and three-quarter mile trail, respectively, to Baskett Butte. Visitors find opportunities to view migratory waterfowl on the wetlands below or songbirds like spotted towhees and ruby-crowned kinglets in the mix coniferous forest. Two additional trails, open from April 1st through September 30th, provide access to the interior of the refuge. Turnouts along Colville Road and Smithfield Road offer wildlife viewing from the comfort of a vehicle, a real benefit during inclement weather.

Baskett Slough NWR encompasses nearly 3,000 acres of wetlands and oak savannah habitat and is part of the Willamette Valley NWR Complex. The refuge office is located off Highway 22 approximately ten miles west of Salem. The office is open from 8am – 4pm daily, excluding Federal holidays. To borrow the optics starter kit, contact the refuge manager in advance at 503-623-2749 or Willamette Valley NWR Complex headquarters at 541-757-7236.

Vortex Optics, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt publishers and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provided the optics, field guides and funding for the national program. "We were honored and excited to work with the National Wildlife Refuge System in providing Vortex binoculars to refuges around the country. The loaner program will be a great way for visitors to maximize their enjoyment of the refuges." says Joe Hamilton, National Sales Manager of Vortex Optics. Willamette Valley NWR Complex received four sets of binoculars, lens cleaning kits and several field guides. Visitors must return the binoculars and field guides before they leave the refuge.

Birding is a great way to introduce youngsters to the natural world and create family memories. Visit any of the 549 refuges within the National Wildlife Refuge System, which spans more than 96 million acres. There is at least one national wildlife refuge in every state and one within an hour's drive of most major cities.

For more information about Baskett Slough and the Willamette Valley NWR Complex, go to <http://www.fws.gov/WillametteValley/complex/index.html>. For more information about activities on national wildlife refuges, go to http://www.fws.gov/refuges/SpecialEvents/FWS_SpecialEvents_Search.cfm. For general information about the National Wildlife Refuge System, go to <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.

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