

Benton Lake

National Wildlife Refuge

Wildlife List



A Refuge and Breeding Ground for Birds



This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Seasonal Birding Highlights

Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) provides a glimpse into pre-settlement times, when the prairie sky was alive with ducks, geese, swans, and shorebirds each spring and fall, and the marshes teemed with downy young each summer. The Refuge is located at the western edge of the famed Prairie Pothole Region, an area characterized by millions of wetlands or "potholes" which serve as the breeding ground for most of the Nation's waterfowl. These wetlands also harbor scores of other wetland-dependent wildlife, including many endangered species.

Benton Lake NWR was established in 1929 as a refuge and breeding ground for birds. This 12,383-acre tract of wetland and prairie is just one pearl on a string of more than 545 refuges nationwide administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Enjoy and help protect this national gem!

As ice leaves Benton Lake, the spring spectacle begins. Thousands of tundra swans, and snow and Ross's geese, stop at the Refuge for a week or more on their journey from their wintering grounds in central California to their nesting areas in arctic Alaska and Canada. These birds are joined by 20 species of ducks, including 12 species that stay to nest on the Refuge. As the weather warms, more and more bird species arrive, with shorebirds appearing last.

Bald eagles and peregrine falcons are often seen in the spring. Sharp-tailed grouse begin breeding at this time of year. Visitors may view the courtship antics of male grouse on a lek or dancing ground by reserving the free Watchable Wildlife Viewing Blind in April and May.

By June, all of the birds that will nest at Benton Lake NWR have arrived. Broods of ducklings become

a common sight. Colonial nesting birds, such as eared grebes, white-faced ibis, and Franklin's gulls, and songbirds, like chestnut-collared longspurs and western meadowlarks, are raising their young. Young burrowing owls emerge from their underground nests to perch on dirt mounds in the upland grasslands.

Shorebird numbers peak once again in September and waterfowl begin to "stage" on the marsh in preparation for migration further south. Through late October, bald eagles and peregrine falcons are frequently seen feeding on or chasing waterfowl and shorebirds. Several thousand tundra swans stay on the Refuge into November and up to 20,000 Canada geese may still be present as the year comes to a close.

The frozen winter landscape provides a harsh environment for most birds. Northern shrikes, horned larks, Lapland longspurs, and snow buntings are among the few winter songbirds present on the Refuge. Great horned owls often move into the protective cover created by shelterbelt trees. Hardy raptors such as northern goshawks, gyrfalcons, and snowy owls are seen occasionally, while rough-legged hawks are a common sight in most winters.

Birding Tips

Viewing is best during the morning and evening hours when birds are most active. Birds quickly acclimate to vehicle traffic, so your vehicle is an outstanding observation blind in both the upland grasses and the marsh habitats. Most of the Refuge is open to birding, however, check with Refuge staff at the headquarters to learn where protected or sensitive areas are located. You are welcome to stop at the headquarters to share your bird observations and to learn about the latest bird sightings.

About this Checklist

About Birds

This checklist includes 243 bird species that have been sighted on Benton Lake NWR since 1961, when the Refuge was first staffed.

About Mammals

Many of the mammal species listed are seldom observed by visitors because of their secretive habits, the time of day when they are active, or the type of habitat they use.

About Reptiles, Amphibians, and Fish

Although some of the fish, amphibians, and reptiles are present in large numbers, none are easily seen by visitors.

Bird Breeding Status Codes

Seasonal Occurrence

- Confirmed breeding record
- Suspected breeding, but not confirmed

Sp March-May
S June-July
F August-November
W December-February

You may see some species at other times of the year than those indicated on the checklist.

Abundance

The checklist is designed to indicate the general trend of migrations and seasonal abundance for each species, and therefore, does not account for unusual occurrence.

c *common*

Present in large numbers, are widespread, and should be seen if you look in the right habitat.

u *uncommon*

Present, but due to their low numbers, behavior, habitat, or distribution, they are not easily seen. However, an average wildlife observer should be able to find them by looking in the right place at the right time.

o *occasional*

Present in low numbers, but are not expected to be seen without a special effort to find them. At least a few are seen each year.

r *rare*

Not expected to be seen every year. They occur in low numbers, may also be secretive or hard to identify, and may be unreported for several years.

v *vagrant*

Less than five sightings at Benton Lake. Vagrant birds are grouped at the end of the list of bird species.

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Swans, Geese, and Ducks				
Greater White-fronted Goose	o		o	
Snow Goose	c	r	c	o
Ross's Goose	c	r	c	o
• Canada Goose	c	c	c	c
Tundra Swan	c	r	c	o
Wood Duck	o	o	o	
• Gadwall	c	c	c	r
Eurasian Wigeon	o		r	
• American Wigeon	c	c	c	o
American Black Duck		r	r	
• Mallard	c	c	c	u
• Blue-winged Teal	c	c	c	
• Cinnamon Teal	c	c	c	
• Northern Shoveler	c	c	c	r
• Northern Pintail	c	c	c	
• Green-winged Teal	c	c	c	
• Canvasback	u	u	u	r
• Redhead	u	u	u	r
Ring-necked Duck	u	r	o	
Greater Scaup	r	r	r	
• Lesser Scaup	c	c	c	
White-winged Scoter		r	r	
Long-tailed Duck (<i>formerly Oldsquaw</i>)		r	r	
Bufflehead	u	o	u	u
Common Goldeneye	c	o	o	u
Barrow's Goldeneye	o	o	o	u
Hooded Merganser	o	u	o	
Common Merganser	o	u	o	o
Red-breasted Merganser	o	u	o	
• Ruddy Duck	u	u	u	
Gallinaceous Birds				
• Gray Partridge (<i>Introduced</i>)	u	u	u	u
• Ring-necked Pheasant (<i>Introduced</i>)	u	u	u	u
• Sharp-tailed Grouse	u	u	u	u
Loons				
Common Loon	o	r	o	
Grebes				
• Pied-billed Grebe	u	u	u	
Horned Grebe	o	o		
Red-necked Grebe	r	r	r	
• Eared Grebe	c	c	c	
• Western Grebe	u	u	u	
Clark's Grebe	r	r	r	
Pelicans				
American White Pelican	u	u	u	

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Cormorants				
• Double-crested Cormorant	u	u	u	
Bitterns, Herons, and Egrets				
American Bittern	u	u	o	
Great Blue Heron	o	o	o	
Snowy Egret	r	r		
Black-crowned Night-Heron	u	c	o	
Ibises and Spoonbills				
• White-faced Ibis	u	c	u	
Osprey, Kites, Hawks, and Eagles				
Osprey	o	r	o	
Bald Eagle	u	r	u	u
• Northern Harrier	c	c	c	o
Sharp-shinned Hawk	o		o	
Cooper's Hawk	o	r	o	o
Northern Goshawk	r		o	r
• Swainson's Hawk	u	c	u	
Red-tailed Hawk	o	o	o	
• Ferruginous Hawk	u	u	o	
Rough-legged Hawk	o	r	o	u
Golden Eagle	u	o	u	o
Falcons and Caracaras				
• American Kestrel	o	o	o	o
Merlin	o		o	o
Gyr Falcon	o		o	o
Peregrine Falcon	u	u	u	r
Prairie Falcon	u	u	u	o

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Rails				
Virginia Rail		o		
• Sora	u	c	u	
• American Coot	c	c	c	o
Cranes				
Sandhill Crane	o	r	o	
Plovers				
Black-bellied Plover	u	o	u	
American Golden-Plover	r		r	
Semipalmated Plover	o		o	
• Killdeer	c	c	c	o
Stilts and Avocets				
• Black-necked Stilt	u	u	o	
• American Avocet	c	c	u	
Sandpipers and Phalaropes				
Greater Yellowlegs	o	o	o	
Lesser Yellowlegs	u	u	o	
Solitary Sandpiper	r			
• Willet	u	u	o	
• Spotted Sandpiper	o	u	u	
• Upland Sandpiper	u	u	o	
Whimbrel	o	r	o	
• Long-billed Curlew	o	o	o	
• Marbled Godwit	u	u	o	
Ruddy Turnstone	r		r	
Red Knot	r	r		
Sanderling	o		o	
Semipalmated Sandpiper	o		o	
Western Sandpiper	u	o	o	
Least Sandpiper	u	o	o	
Baird's Sandpiper	u	u	u	
Pectoral Sandpiper	r	u	o	
Dunlin	r			
Stilt Sandpiper	r		r	
Short-billed Dowitcher	o	r	o	
Long-billed Dowitcher	u	c	u	
Wilson's Snipe	o	o	u	
• Wilson's Phalarope	c	c	u	
Red-necked Phalarope	o	o	o	

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Skuas, Jaegers, Gulls, and Terns				
• Franklin's Gull	c	c	o	
Bonaparte's Gull	o	o	u	
• Ring-billed Gull	u	u	u	
• California Gull	c	c	u	
• Common Tern	u	u	o	
• Forster's Tern	u	u	o	
• Black Tern	u	u	o	
Pigeons and Doves				
Rock Pigeon (<i>Introduced</i>)	o	o	o	r
• Mourning Dove	u	c	c	
Typical Owls				
• Great Horned Owl	u	u	u	o
Snowy Owl	r		r	r
• Burrowing Owl	u	u	o	
Long-eared Owl	o	r	o	
• Short-eared Owl	c	c	u	o
Nightjars				
Common Nighthawk		o	o	
Kingfishers				
Belted Kingfisher	r		r	
Woodpeckers				
Downy Woodpecker	r			
Northern Flicker	o	o	o	r

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Tyrant Flycatchers				
Least Flycatcher	r	o		
• Say's Phoebe	u	u	u	
• Western Kingbird	o	u	u	
• Eastern Kingbird	o	u	u	
Shrikes				
• Loggerhead Shrike	u	u	u	
Northern Shrike	r		o	o
Vireos				
Plumbeous Vireo		o		
Warbling Vireo		r		
Red-eyed Vireo		r		
Crows, Jays, and Magpies				
• Black-billed Magpie	u	u	u	u
• American Crow	u	u	o	o
Common Raven	r	r	r	
Larks				
• Horned Lark	c	c	c	c
Swallows				
• Tree Swallow	u	u	u	
Violet-green Swallow	r		r	
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	r	r	r	
Bank Swallow	o			
• Cliff Swallow	u	u	u	
• Barn Swallow	c	c	u	
Titmice and Chickadees				
Black-capped Chickadee			r	r
Mountain Chickadee			r	
Nuthatches				
Red-breasted Nuthatch	r	o	r	
Wrens				
• Rock Wren	o	o	r	
• House Wren	r	r	r	
• Marsh Wren	u	c	o	o
Kinglets				
Golden-crowned Kinglet	r		r	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	u	r	u	

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Thrushes				
Mountain Bluebird	o		o	
Townsend's Solitaire	o		o	o
Swainson's Thrush	u	r	r	
Hermit Thrush	r	o		
• American Robin	u	u	u	o
Varied Thrush	o		o	
Mimic Thrushes				
Gray Catbird	o	o	r	
Northern Mockingbird	r	r		
Brown Thrasher	o	o		
Starlings				
European Starling	u	u	u	r
Wagtails and Pipits				
American (Water) Pipit	u	u	c	
Sprague's Pipit	u	u	r	
Waxwings				
Bohemian Waxwing	o		o	u
Cedar Waxwing	r	r		
Wood Warblers				
Orange-crowned Warbler	r		r	
Yellow Warbler	o	o	u	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	u	u	u	
Townsend's Warbler	r			
Blackpoll Warbler	o			
American Redstart	r		r	
Northern Waterthrush	r			
MacGillivray's Warbler			r	
• Common Yellowthroat	u	u	u	
Wilson's Warbler			o	
Tanagers				
Western Tanager	r			

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Sparrows and Towhees				
Spotted Towhee	r			
American Tree Sparrow	o	o	o	o
Chipping Sparrow	u	o		
• Clay-colored Sparrow	u	u	u	
Brewer's Sparrow	r	r		
Vesper Sparrow	c	c	u	
Lark Sparrow	o	o		
• Lark Bunting	o	o		
• Savannah Sparrow	c	c	u	
• Grasshopper Sparrow	u	u	o	
Baird's Sparrow	u	u		
Song Sparrow	u	o	o	
Lincoln's Sparrow	o		o	
White-throated Sparrow	r	r	u	
Harris's sparrow	r		r	
White-crowned Sparrow	u	r	o	r
Dark-eyed Junco	o	r	o	
• McCown's Longspur	u	u	r	
Lapland Longspur	o		o	o
• Chestnut-collared Longspur	c	c	u	
Snow Bunting	o		o	u
Cardinals, Grosbeaks, and Allies				
Black-headed Grosbeak	r	r		
Blackbirds and Orioles				
Bobolink	o	r		
• Red-winged Blackbird	c	c	c	
• Western Meadowlark	c	c	c	
• Yellow-headed Blackbird	c	c	c	r
Rusty Blackbird			r	
• Brewer's Blackbird	u	u	o	
Common Grackle	r			
• Brown-headed Cowbird	u	u	u	
Bullock's Oriole		o		
Baltimore Oriole			r	
Finches				
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch			r	r
House Finch	u	u	u	
Common Redpoll	o		o	u
Pine Siskin	u		u	
American Goldfinch	o	o	o	r
Old World Sparrows				
• House Sparrow (<i>Introduced</i>)	o	o	o	
Vagrants				
Mute Swan (<i>Introduced</i>)	v	v		
Trumpeter Swan	v			

Common Bird Name	Sp	S	F	W
Garganey	v	v		
Surf Scoter			v	
Black Scoter			v	
Great Egret		v	v	
Cattle Egret			v	
Green Heron	v			
Piping Plover	v			
Hudsonian Godwit	v		v	
Curlew Sandpiper	v			
Red Phalarope			v	
Pomarine Jaeger		v		
Parasitic Jaeger			v	
Long-tailed Jaeger		v		
Sabine's Gull	v		v	
Caspian Tern		v		
White-winged Dove		v		
Black-billed Cuckoo		v		
Northern Saw-whet Owl		v		
Calliope Hummingbird	v			
Red-naped Sapsucker			v	
Olive-sided Flycatcher	v			
Western Wood-Pewee	v			
Blue Jay	v		v	
Purple Martin		v		
American Dipper		v		
Western Bluebird	v			
Veery	v			
Chestnut-sided Warbler	v			
Green-tailed Towhee	v			
Black-throated Sparrow		v		
Le Conte's Sparrow	v			
Smith's Longspur		v		
Lazuli Bunting		v		
Pine Grosbeak	v			
Red Crossbill		v		

Reference: *American Ornithologists' Union. 1998. Check-list of North American Birds, 7th ed. American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C. and the AOU (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005) supplements*

Common Mammal Name	Abundance
Cinereus or Masked Shrew (<i>Sorex cinereus</i>)	u
Dusky or Montane Shrew (<i>Sorex monticolus</i>)	u
Little Brown Myotis (<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>)	o
Big Brown Bat (<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>)	o
Mountain Cottontail (<i>Sylvilagus nuttallii</i>)	c
White-tailed Jackrabbit (<i>Lepus townsendii</i>)	c
Yellow-bellied Marmot (<i>Marmota flaviventris</i>)	u
Richardson's Ground Squirrel (<i>Spermophilus richardsonii</i>)	c
Northern Pocket Gopher (<i>Thomomys talpoides</i>)	u
Deer Mouse (<i>Peromyscus maniculatus</i>)	c
House Mouse (<i>Mus musculus</i>)	r
Meadow Vole (<i>Microtus pennsylvanicus</i>)	c
Muskrat (<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>)	c
North American Porcupine (<i>Erethizon dorsatum</i>)	o
Coyote (<i>Canis latrans</i>)	c
Red Fox (<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>)	o
American Black Bear (<i>Ursus americanus</i>)	v
American Badger (<i>Taxidea taxus</i>)	u
Northern Raccoon (<i>Procyon lotor</i>)	u
Long-tailed Weasel (<i>Mustela frenata</i>)	u
Least Weasel (<i>Mustela nivalis</i>)	r
American Mink (<i>Taxidea taxus</i>)	u
Striped Skunk (<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>)	r
Bobcat (<i>Lynx rufus</i>)	v
Elk (<i>Cervus canadensis</i>)	v
Mule Deer (<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>)	u
White-tailed Deer (<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>)	c
Pronghorn (<i>Antilocapra americana</i>)	o

Reference: *Revised Checklist of North American Mammals North of Mexico, 2003*

Common Reptile and Amphibian Name	Abundance
Tiger Salamander (<i>Ambystoma tigrinum</i>)	u
Boreal Chorus Frog (<i>Pseudacris maculata</i>)	c
Hernandez's Short-horned lizard (<i>Phrynosoma hernandesi hernandesi</i>)	r
Painted Turtle (<i>Chrysemys picta</i>)	o
Eastern Racer (<i>Coluber constrictor</i>)	r
Gopher-snake (<i>Pituophis catenifer</i>)	o
Western Rattlesnake (<i>Crotalus viridis</i>)	o
Common Garter Snake (<i>Thamnophis sirtalis</i>)	o
Terrestrial Garter Snake (<i>Thamnophis elegans</i>)	o
Plains Garter Snake (<i>Thamnophis radix</i>)	u

Reference: *Amphibians and Reptiles of Montana, 2004*
J.K. Werner, B. Maxel, P. Hendricks, and D. Flath

Common Fish Name	Abundance
Fathead Minnow (<i>Pimephales promelas</i>)	o

Reference: *Common and Scientific Names of Fishes from the United States, Canada, and Mexico, 6th ed.*
American Fisheries Society, 2004

Notes

Date _____ Time _____

Observers _____

Weather _____

Accessibility Information

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental ability. Dial 7-1-1 for a free connection to the State transfer relay service for TTY and voice calls to and from the speech and hearing impaired. For more information or to address accessibility needs, please contact the Refuge staff at 406 / 727 7400 or the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Opportunity, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, MT 59404
406 / 727 7400
406 / 727 7432 fax
bentonlake@fws.gov
<http://bentonlake.fws.gov>

For State relay transfer service
TTY / Voice: 711

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

For Refuge Information
1 800 / 344 WILD

October 2007

