

AMERICAN FALLS DAM

Author: Chuck Trost

Site SE-22 — Map SE-22

Highlights: Loons, Waterfowl, Shorebirds, Gulls

Major Habitat: Wetland

Location: Power Co., 25 miles west of Pocatello

Spring: **** **Summer:** **** **Fall:** **** **Winter:** ****

American Falls Dam is arguably Idaho's best year-round birding site. In spring migrating loons, ducks, and songbirds congregate in shallow waters and isolated tree groves. During summer huge mudflats are exposed, attracting 30 shorebird species, while fall and winter bring a variety of ducks and gulls to open water below the dam.

DIRECTIONS:

To reach great birding, take I-86 Exit 40 and follow Pocatello Avenue 1.5 miles southwest into American Falls, following the curve to the right (west) onto Harrison Street. Stay on Harrison Street for two blocks, then turn left (south) on Ft. Hall Avenue (a.k.a. Business I-86) and follow it one block to its intersection with Idaho Street. This intersection is the starting point for all four spots described below; zero your mileage here.

BIRDING:

WILLOW BAY MARINA

From the starting point head northeast on Ft. Hall Avenue, crossing over ID 39. The road dead-ends at the marina in 2 miles.

Along the marina's entrance road are seasonally-flooded lagoons surrounded by willows and Russian-olives and bordered by a bike path. Watch for migrating Yellow-rumped and Wilson's Warblers, resident Song Sparrows, and wintering White-crowned, Harris's, and White-throated Sparrows.

The marina's 0.25-mile-long jetty provides good views of the water. During late fall, Oldsquaw and Harlequin Duck have been sighted here, along with many other species. When the reservoir is low, spring-fed seeps along the jetty attract foraging shorebirds.

About 0.25 mile east of the jetty is a secluded swampy lagoon and woodland which can be productive for migrating songbirds. You can walk to this area along the shore.

GRAIN ELEVATOR

When American Falls Dam was constructed in the mid-1920s, the entire town site of "old" American Falls was flooded. All buildings were demolished

or moved, with the exception of a huge concrete grain-elevator (a.k.a. "the silo") which is still standing near the dam. To reach this area from the starting point, take Ft. Hall Avenue 0.9 mile northeast, crossing ID 39 and the railroad track, then turn left (southwest) on Pacific Road. A half mile down this graveled road, look for some seep ponds on the right (west) that attract herons, shorebirds, and gulls. A few Great and Snowy Egrets and White-faced Ibis often forage here in July and August. Continue driving southwest on the dirt 2-track road to the elevator. These "roads" are often impassable when wet.

During low water you can actually watch birds from your car by driving out onto the dried mudflats, along the streets of old American Falls. *The mud away from the old streets can be almost bottomless.*

The best shorebirding is between the elevator and Willow Bay Marina. Disturbance from dirt-bikes can be a factor, so it is best to bird the mudflats in early morning. Western and Baird's Sandpipers can number in the hundreds. Marbled Godwit flocks are common, and a few Black-bellied Plovers and American Golden-Plovers may be found on higher ground. Watch for raptors (including Peregrine Falcons). Rare species seen here have included Snowy Plover, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Red Knot, Sanderling, Stilt Sandpiper, and Short-billed Dowitcher.

During some years there's an August/September build-up of hundreds of small terns near the elevator. A few Arctic Terns are possible among the more regular Forster's and Common Terns. All this activity attracts jaegers, which are almost annual. For much of the fall, there are thousands of American Pipits along the beach, with an occasional Merlin or Prairie Falcon thrown in for excitement. In mid-October and November, look for migrating loons. Pacifics can be almost common. Red-throateds are rare but regular, and even a Yellow-billed has shown up! By December the reservoir can be very sterile after freeze-up eliminates habitat.

SNAKE RIVER

From the starting point, follow Ft. Hall Avenue southwest 0.6 mile and turn right (west) on Falls Avenue. After 0.4 mile you'll reach the intersection of Falls Avenue and McKinley Street. From here you have three choices: 1) continue straight (west) 0.3 mile to a river overlook, 2) continue straight (west) 0.2 mile and turn left (south) on Valdez Street and follow the signs to the Sportsman Access Boat Launch at road's end, or 3) turn left (south) on McKinley Street and follow the road 0.5 mile to the cemetery and beyond to the landfill. You will probably want to do all three!

At the river overlook, boat launch, and cemetery, look for hundreds of fall terns foraging in turbulent water below the dam. In April, May, and October you'll likely see Bonaparte's Gulls as well; watch also for vagrant Sabine's Gulls. Several diving ducks winter in this area, including both goldeneyes and all three mergansers.

At the cemetery Northern Flickers and Black-billed Magpies can be found in the junipers, along with Great Horned Owls and Juniper Titmice. During migration, the trees attract Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, and various warblers. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks also pass through, but ever-present magpies keep them on the move! Between November and March, Bald Eagles are frequently present. The cemetery is open 8 am to 5 pm except in summer, when it's open 8 am to 8 pm.

About 0.25 mile south of the cemetery, turn right (west) on the paved road. You'll reach the landfill on the left (south) in 0.4 mile. (The landfill is closed on Sundays.) Glaucous, Thayer's, and even Mew Gulls have been spotted here, along with hundreds of Ring-billed and California Gulls. This facility was recently converted to a garbage transfer station, so gull numbers may well decline. If you continue west on the paved road past the landfill, you'll reach another river overlook at road's end. It's okay to walk or drive southwest along the 2-track dirt road to get better views (city property). The small rapids below are used by a variety of wintering waterfowl, including Greater Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and Red-breasted Mergansers, and have attracted even Harlequin Ducks, Oldsquaws, and Surf, White-winged, and Black Scoters!

FISH HATCHERY

Directly across the river from the landfill is a state-owned fish hatchery which offers good birding in brushy habitats. To get there from the starting point, follow Idaho Street west to ID 39 and take the highway southwest across the dam. At the top of the hill on the west side of the dam, turn left (south), then immediately left again (east), and follow the signs for about a mile to the fish hatchery.

The public is welcome at the hatchery during the day. Trails above and below the workers' houses allow river viewing (bird checklist and nature trail available at hatchery headquarters). Breeding species include Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Yellow Warbler, and Bullock's Oriole. Along the hatchery's effluent you can find summering Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teals and Virginia Rails. Look in dense Russian-olive trees on the north side of the hatchery for either Barn or Great Horned Owls, as well as for roosting Black-crowned Night-Herons. In winter, Northern Flickers, American Robins, Townsend's Solitaires, Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and White-crowned Sparrows can be abundant.

OTHER:

American Falls has motels, fuel, groceries, and camping. Pocatello is a full-service community. For more information, contact the American Falls Parks and Recreation Department (208/226-7055). Other useful contacts are: City Clerk (208/226-2569), Willow Bay Recreation Area (208/226-2688), and BOR (208/226-2217).

MASSACRE ROCKS STATE PARK

Authors: Chuck Trost, Eric Lepisto

Site SE-23 — See Southeastern map, page 214

Highlights: Pacific Loon, Clark's Grebe, Juniper Titmouse

Major Habitats: Wetland, Juniper

Location: Power Co., 10 miles southwest of American Falls

Spring: ** **Summer:** ** **Fall:** ** **Winter:** *

Massacre Rocks SP borders the Snake River at the upper end of Lake Walcott. Although the river freezes in winter, the water offers good birding during the rest of the year. Other park attractions include Oregon Trail history and bizarre lava flows!

DIRECTIONS:

From American Falls follow I-86 southwest for 10 miles, take Exit 28, and turn right (northwest). At the T in 0.1 mile, turn right (northeast) and drive 0.7 mile to headquarters.

BIRDING:

To bird Massacre Rocks SP, wander along the campground loop roads and investigate the narrow riparian zone along the river. Look for resident Juniper Titmice in the juniper. During winter you may also find Black-capped Chickadees, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Townsend's Solitaires. Species to watch for at the river include nesting Western and Clark's Grebes, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Canada Goose, and Red-tailed Hawk.

The best birding is during spring and fall, since the Snake River serves as a migration corridor for several species. From October to freeze-up, Common and Pacific Loons commonly forage in the calm backwaters of the park. This is also the time to look for Greater Scaup, Oldsquaws (rare), Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Common Mergansers, Bald Eagles, and Herring Gulls.

Register Rock Day Use/Group Camping Area is about 1.5 mile downstream from the visitors center. To get there, backtrack to the Interstate and take the overpass to the south side of I-86. Turn right (southwest) on the frontage road and follow it 2 miles to Register Rock. The frontage road is good for Northern Shrikes in fall and winter. Large numbers of Northern Flickers, American Robins, and Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings winter at Register Rock, often attracting the unwelcome attention of Sharp-shinned Hawks and Merlins!

OTHER:

Trails, campgrounds (with solar showers in summer and fall), and a boat launch are available at the park. There is a small interpretive museum at park headquarters (208/548-2672) with many Oregon Trail artifacts. The closest services are in American Falls or Burley.

MINIDOKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Authors: Jack Trotter, Steve Bouffard

Site SE-24 — Map SE-24

Highlights: Swainson's Hawk, Long-billed Curlew

Major Habitats: Wetland, Shrub-steppe

Location: Minidoka Co., 12 miles northeast of Rupert

Spring: ** **Summer:** *** **Fall:** ** **Winter:** *

Minidoka Dam is one of many Snake River impoundments. The 12,000-acre reservoir behind the dam ("Lake Walcott") is managed as a NWR. An impressive 200 bird species have been recorded here.

DIRECTIONS:

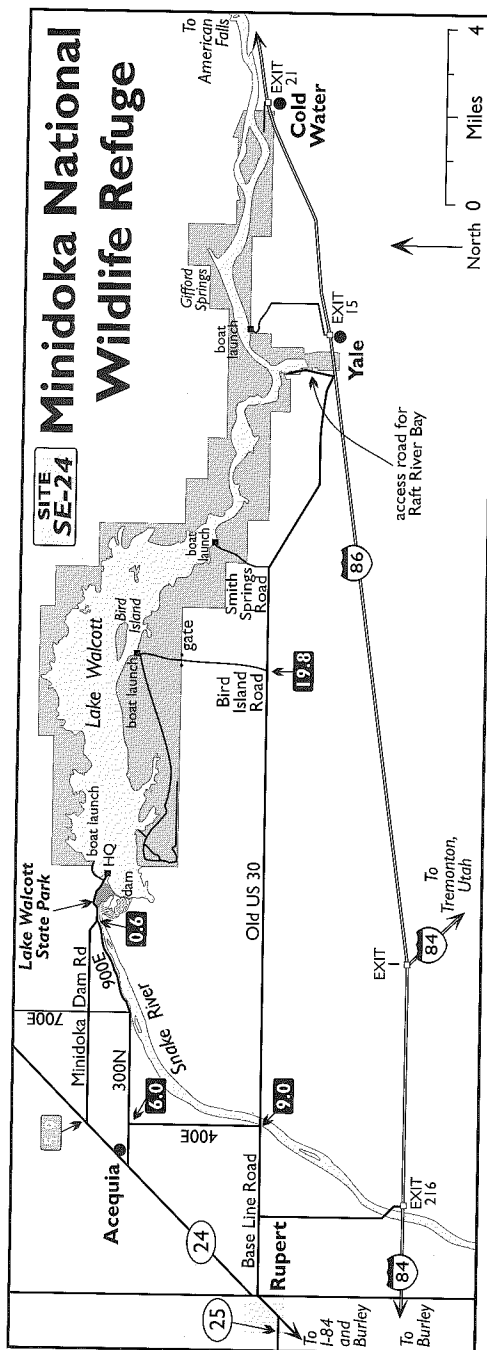
Zero your mileage in Rupert at the intersection of ID 24 and 25, then go northeast on ID 24. At the north end of Rupert, immediately after crossing the railroad tracks, turn right (north) at the refuge sign, staying on ID 24. This turn is easily missed, so keep alert. At mile 5.9 turn right (east) on Minidoka Dam Road and drive toward refuge headquarters.

BIRDING:

At mile 8 check the small marsh areas for nesting Marsh Wrens, Common Yellowthroats, and Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds. At mile 11.3, just before reaching refuge headquarters, you'll pass Lake Walcott SP on the right (south). The park (fee) holds nesting Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Western Wood-Pewees, Cedar Waxwings, Yellow and MacGillivray's Warblers, Bullock's Orioles, and more. A short loop road circles the park, allowing easy access to Lake Walcott viewpoints.

Lake Walcott attracts migrating Common Loons, and nesting Western, Clark's, Eared, and Pied-billed Grebes, American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, California and Ring-billed Gulls, and Caspian, Forster's, and Black Terns.

There are more vantage points for scanning Lake Walcott at refuge headquarters, as well as a paved shoreline trail. The trail is excellent for viewing migrating songbirds. About 0.5 mile northeast of headquarters is a boat launch area. Spend some time listening for warblers here, and again scan



the lake. In the shrub-steppe habitat, watch for Sage Thrashers, Western Meadowlarks, and Vesper, Brewer's, and Lark Sparrows.

To further explore the refuge, return to headquarters, re-zero your mileage, and head west on Minidoka Dam Road. At mile 0.6 turn left (south) on 900 E. At mile 0.7 you'll reach a delightful view of the cascading Snake River as it leaves Minidoka Dam. American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, and Caspian and Forster's Terns are often present. In spring and summer look for Bank Swallows and Yellow-breasted Chats at the river's edge. Follow the road (now called 300 N) downriver, constantly scanning for birds. Check out the marsh on the right (north) at mile 2.7 for more wetland species. At mile 6.0 turn left (south) on 400 E. At mile 9.0 turn left (east) on Old US 30 (a.k.a. Base Line Road), crossing the Snake River. Watch for Swainson's Hawks, Long-billed Curlews, and Burrowing Owls along Old US 30.

At mile 19.8 turn left (north) on an unsigned dirt field road ("Bird Island Road") and follow it 2 miles to the southern border of Minidoka NWR. This road accesses Lake Walcott's south shore, but it is gated until September. If you contact the refuge manager ahead of time, you may receive permission to drive into this

area to view nesting American White Pelicans, Great Blue Herons, Snowy Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Double-crested Cormorants, and California Gulls. When the gate is locked, enter on foot and walk a mile to the nearest water. *If you do drive in, be aware of your vehicle's capability.* (The road can be pretty rough.) Either way, look for Horned Larks, Loggerhead Shrikes, and Vesper, Lark, Brewer's, and Grasshopper Sparrows

You can also access the south shore of Lake Walcott from Smith Springs Road, which is 2.7 miles east of Bird Island Road. If dry, the road is passable to 2-wheel-drive vehicles with good ground clearance. It's about 1.5 miles to the reservoir.

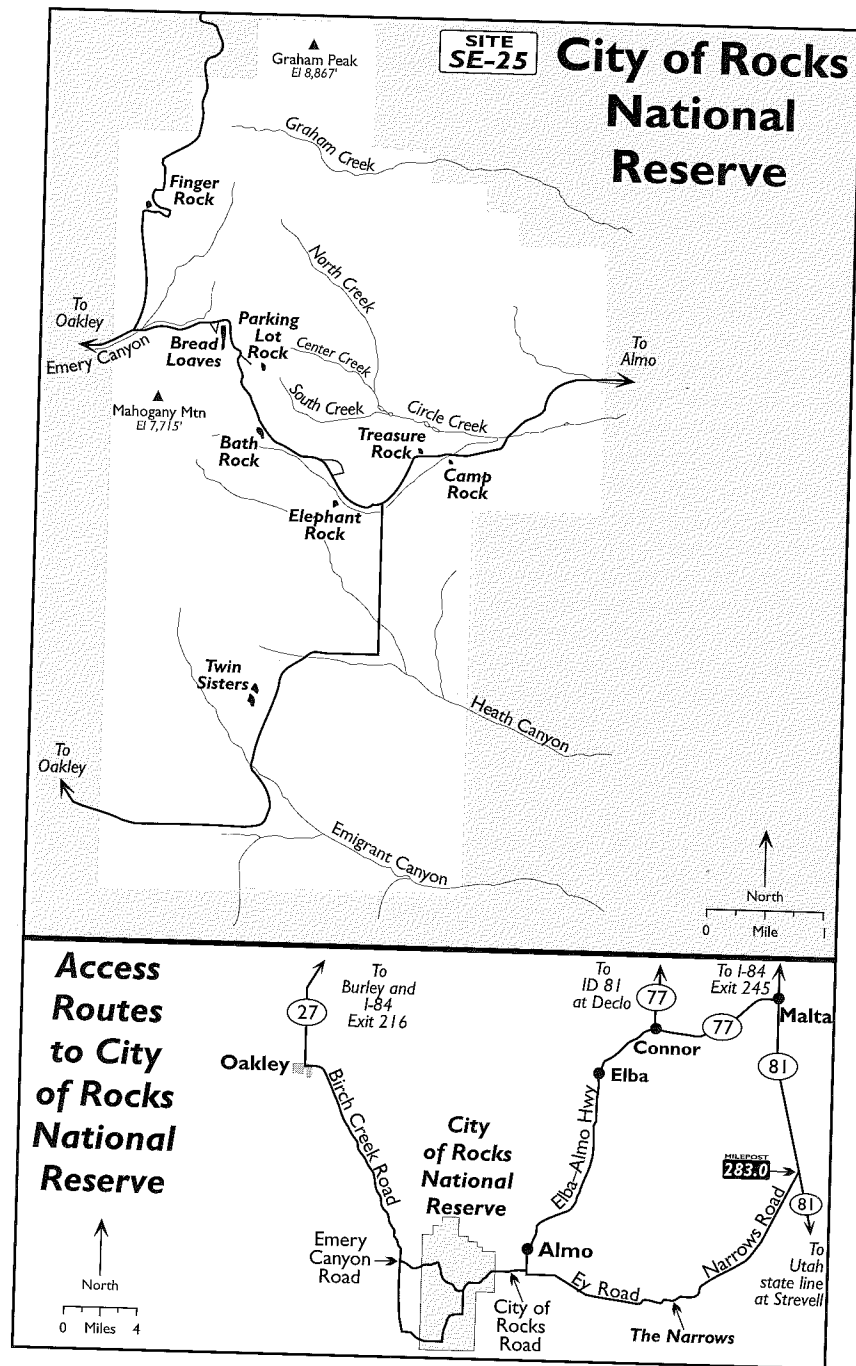
Raft River Bay provides another vantage point. A graveled road follows the bay's western shore. To find the road, follow Old US 30 to I-86 Exit 15, then turn around and backtrack northwest 1.7 miles (see map). Turn right (north) on the graveled road, which is usually passable to at least the large gravel pit, where you can overlook the entire bay for waterbirds, including migrating swans and Bald Eagles.

Other access points along the south shore are best reached from I-86. At Exit 15 go north 0.1 mile, then turn right (east) and follow signs to Gifford Springs in 2 miles, where you can overlook the lake's upper end. Farther east, at Exit 21, follow the graveled road as it heads west on the north side of the interstate. This short road is also gated until September, but you are allowed to walk the short distance to the reservoir year round. This is a good place to see thousands of molting ducks in August and September. In late fall and winter, look for Tundra and Trumpeter Swans. Watch for Juniper Titmice and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers in junipers.

Winter birding at Minidoka NWR can be worthwhile, also. Besides Canada Geese, Mallards, Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Common Goldeneyes, Common Mergansers, Horned Larks, and Snow Buntings, look for rarities such as scoters and Oldsquaws.

OTHER:

Further information, refuge pamphlets, and a checklist are available from the USFWS (208/237-6615) in Pocatello, or from refuge headquarters (208/436-3589). Developed camping is available at Lake Walcott SP. For other services, try Rupert.



CITY OF ROCKS NATIONAL RESERVE

Author: Chuck Trost

Site SE-25 — Map SE-25

Highlights: Prairie Falcon, Pinyon Jay, Juniper Titmouse

Major Habitats: Juniper, Shrub-steppe

Location: Cassia Co., 4 miles west of Almo

Spring: *** **Summer:** **** **Fall:** ** **Winter:** **

City of Rocks National Reserve covers about 14,800 acres and contains a portion of Idaho's only Pinyon Pine forest. Birding is often wonderful here, but most visitors come to marvel at the strange granite monoliths, some over 500 feet high.

DIRECTIONS:

You can access the reserve from the west (through Oakley), east (through Almo), or north (through Albion). All routes are well signed.

To reach the reserve from the west, zero your mileage in Oakley, then go east on Main 2000 S Road. At mile 1.0, turn right (south) on Birch Creek Road. Check out Birch Creek and adjacent cliffs for a variety of birds (including Canyon and Rock Wrens). At mile 13.3 turn left (east) on Emery Canyon Road and drive into City of Rocks National Reserve at mile 14.8.

To access the reserve from the east, zero your mileage in Malta at the junction of ID 77 and ID 81 and drive south on ID 81 to mile 10.2 (milepost 283). Turn right (west) onto graveled Narrows Road and head through the "Narrows" of the Raft River toward Almo. Along this route watch for Turkey Vultures, Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, and Prairie Falcons. At mile 22.3 Narrows Road goes straight, while Ey Road goes left (southwest). Take Ey Road. (Be aware that the DeLorme Atlas has these road names switched.) When you come to a T intersection at mile 28, turn right (north). The City of Rocks Road goes left (west) in 0.25 mile. Turn here to enter the reserve in 1.6 miles, or go straight for 0.75 mile to visit the reserve office in Almo.

The easiest and most direct route to the reserve is from the north. Take I-84 Exit 216 (east of Burley) and follow ID 77 south for 23.5 miles through Declo and Albion. At the T intersection turn right (west) and drive another 16 miles through Elba to Almo, where you can stop at the reserve office.

Reserve roads can be snow-covered from November to April, and they may be gated if impassable. At other times wet roads may still be too much for a 2-wheel-drive vehicle; 4-wheel drive is advisable during the period of September to May. You can call the park office (208/824-5519) to learn the latest road conditions.

BIRDING:

The best areas for birding are the pinyon/juniper woodlands. This is especially true when the pinyon nut crop is plentiful. The large, meaty pinyon seeds are highly prized by a variety of species. During poor crop years, the woodlands can seem to be almost devoid of birds, particularly in winter. The best example of pinyon/juniper woodland is found at the reserve's east entrance. Most of the habitat is fenced to control grazing. Private and public property is mixed here. Public lands are clearly signed. Among the species to look for are Gray Flycatcher, Juniper Titmouse, Bushtit, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Black-throated Gray Warbler (irregular), and Lazuli Bunting. Also keep an eye out for Ash-throated Flycatchers, Loggerhead Shrikes, and Scott's Orioles (only one local record so far). With the exception of Gray Jay, all of Idaho's corvids can be found using the Pinyon Pine habitat. Western Scrub-Jays are present year round, as are Common Ravens, which can be observed doing their mid-air rollovers in spring. During a good mast year, one can watch Pinyon Jays and Clark's Nutcrackers secretly cache pine nuts.

Blue Grouse are year-round residents but are hard to find. Look for them, Hermit Thrushes, and Green-tailed Towhees in the higher forested hills. Listen for Plumbeous and Warbling Vireos in Quaking Aspen groves, such as those near Bread Loaves and Parking Lot Rock. Virginia's and MacGillivray's Warblers can be found in riparian Chokecherry bushes. Good riparian birding can be had along South Circle Creek, east of Bath Rock.

Several raptors nest in the Reserve, including Turkey Vultures, Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, and Red-tailed Hawks, Golden Eagles, American Kestrels, and Prairie Falcons. Western Screech-Owls, Great Horned Owls, and Northern Pygmy-Owls can be heard on spring evenings. In late spring and summer White-throated Swifts often zoom by, sometimes copulating in midair! Wintering birds include Bald Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Flickers, American Robins, Spotted Towhees, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Cassin's Finches.

Much remains to be learned about the birdlife at this relatively new park. The helpful and bird-wise staff can be of great assistance in pointing out additional areas for exploration.

OTHER:

Plan to pick up a map and a checklist at the office in Almo, and ask the ranger about recent bird sightings.

This area is decidedly remote, with no repair facilities for many miles. Tray's Store in Almo offers food and showers, but it's not open on Sundays and has no beer (ye gads!).

City of Rocks National Reserve is internationally known for rock climbing. Because of that activity, campgrounds are typically full in spring and summer, so plan on arriving early in the day. There are several camping areas and restroom facilities in the main portion of the rocky outcrops.

CURLEW NATIONAL GRASSLAND

Author: Chuck Trost

Site SE-26 — Map SE-26

Highlights: Ash-throated Flycatcher, Scott's Oriole

Major Habitats: Shrub-steppe, Wetland, Juniper

Location: Oneida Co., 20 miles west of Malad City

Spring: *** **Summer:** *** **Fall:** ** **Winter:** *

Curlew National Grassland encompasses 48,000 acres of Great Basin shrub-steppe in three isolated tracts. Despite its name, there are few curlews here. Instead, this area's birding attraction is Idaho's premier example of Great Basin avifauna.

DIRECTIONS:

Curlew National Grassland surrounds Holbrook, which can be accessed from several directions. From the west follow I-84 south to Snowville, Utah, then turn north on Stone Road and follow it 16 miles to Holbrook. From the east take I-15 south to Malad City (Exit 13) and turn right (west) on ID 38. Follow it 24 miles to Holbrook.

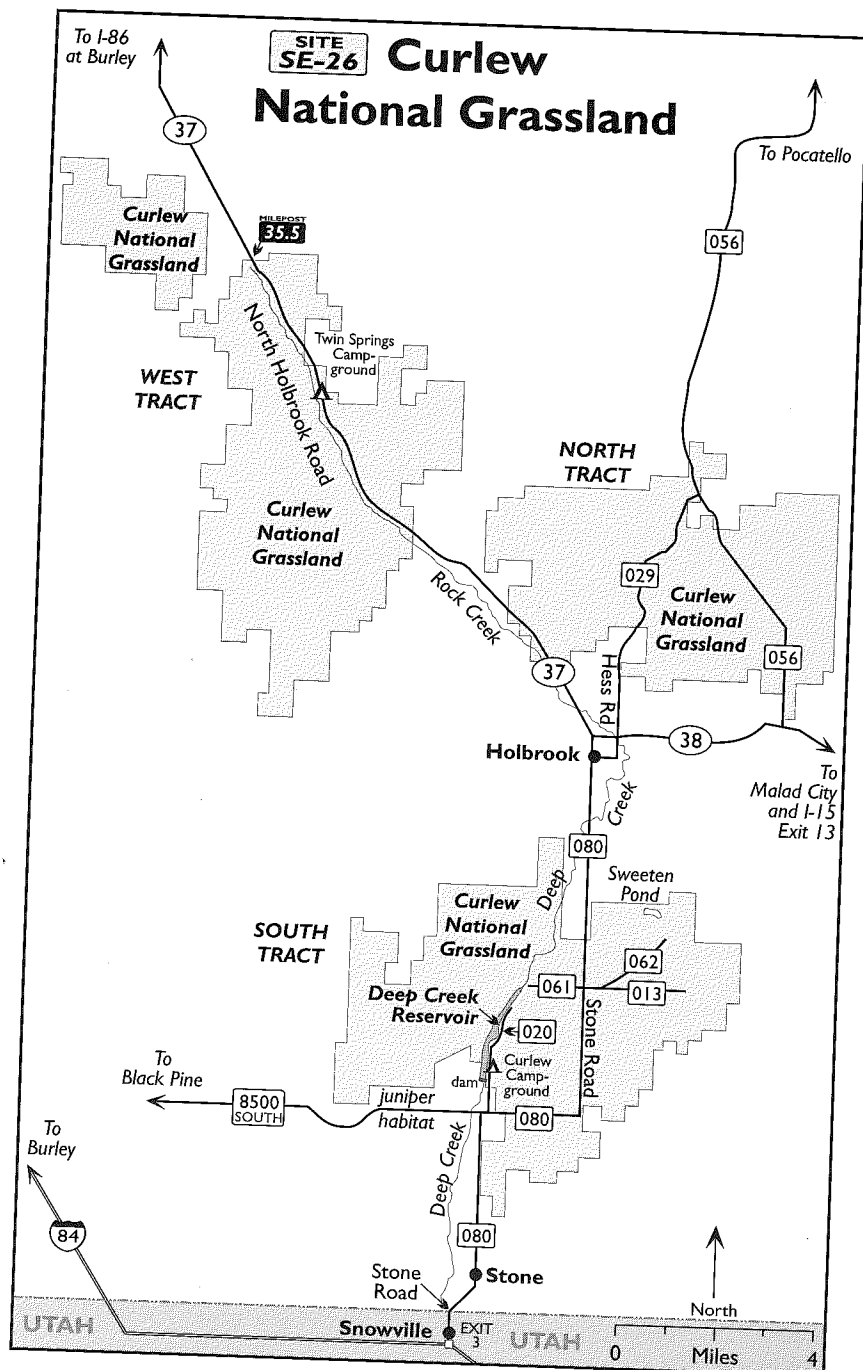
To reach the Grassland's north and west tracts from Holbrook, follow Stone Road (a.k.a. Grassland Road [GR] 080) north 1 mile to the intersection of ID 38 and ID 37. To bird the north tract, follow ID 38 east 0.4 mile, then turn left (north) on Hess Road (a.k.a. GR 029), which bisects the north tract. The west tract lies along ID 37 (a.k.a. North Holbrook Road), from the junction of ID 37/38 to ID 37 milepost 35.5.

The Grassland's south tract is along Stone Road and begins about 3 miles south of Holbrook. Deep Creek Reservoir (a.k.a. Stone Reservoir) is in the center of the south tract. To find the reservoir from Holbrook, head south on Stone Road. After 5 miles, turn right (west) on GR 061 (unsigned), and drive about 2 miles to the reservoir's north end. Another view can be had at the Curlew Campground and boat ramp near the dam. To get there, follow Stone Road 9 miles southwest of Holbrook, then turn right (north) on GR 020 (a.k.a. 22500 West) and follow the road 1 mile to the campground and dam.

BIRDING:

The best way to bird Curlew National Grassland is simply to wander along the various highways and side roads. Be sure to investigate any water in this arid country, particularly Deep Creek Reservoir.

Spring and fall are the most exciting seasons, when a variety of migrants are present. It's in early summer, however, that the sage/grass flats come alive with sky-larking Sage Thrashers and Vesper Sparrows. Summer is also



the time to hear the amazing buzzing song of Brewer's Sparrows. If you're lucky, you may also find Black-throated Sparrows in the south tract.

Curlew National Grassland has one of the largest Sharp-tailed Grouse populations in the state. Leks are scattered throughout the valley, but their locations often change from year to year. One traditional lek is located about a mile east of West Carter Field. To find this area from Holbrook, follow Stone Road south 5 miles, then turn left (east) on GR 013 (unmarked), go 0.5 mile, then turn left (northeast) on GR 062 for 0.5 mile, and look on the right (east) side of the dike. The grouse dance for only a short time after dawn, and only in late March into April. It would be a good idea to call the IDFG (208/232-4703) in Pocatello, or the FS (208/766-4743) in Malad City, to find out if they can direct you more precisely to an active lek.

Curlew National Grassland is the best place in Idaho to see Ash-throated Flycatchers and Scott's Orioles. To find their preferred juniper habitat, follow Stone Road south from Holbrook for about 7 miles, then follow the road right (west) and stay straight for about 4 miles (road becomes 8500 South, a.k.a. Black Pine Road; do not follow GR 080 to Stone). Juniper habitat can be found from here west, as well as along the numerous side roads. Scott's Orioles have been seen regularly in this area, but they often require a lot of work to encounter. Other nesting species include Ferruginous Hawk, Common Poorwill, Gray Flycatcher, Western Scrub-Jay, Pinyon Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Mountain Bluebird, Loggerhead Shrike, and Chipping Sparrow.

Deep Creek Reservoir attracts many migrating ducks, especially divers. Look for Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, Canvasbacks, and Lesser Scaup. Common Loons and Western Grebes are regular April visitors, but they do not nest here. In summer look for Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds in the willows and for Bullock's Orioles in the Russian-olives. Flocks of Canada and Snow Geese stop over in fall.

Deep Creek Reservoir is also a prime focus of winter birding, since it remains open long after nearby wetlands are frozen. Wintering birds include Killdeer and Marsh Wrens at the reservoir outlet and American Tree and Song Sparrows in nearby riparian brush. Look for Sharp-tailed Grouse in shelterbelts near the reservoir. Also watch for Rough-legged Hawks, Common Ravens, and Northern Shrikes on power poles, and for Western Meadowlarks and huge flocks of Horned Larks along snow-covered roads.

OTHER:

Besides Curlew Campground there is a primitive BLM campground ("Twin Springs") 9 miles north of Holbrook along ID 37. Twin Springs campground borders a wet meadow that is worth investigating for Sharp-tailed Grouse, Sage Thrashers, Green-tailed Towhees, and Vesper and Savannah Sparrows.

Food, fuel, and other supplies are available in Malad City, American Falls, and Snowville, Utah. For more information, call the FS (208/766-4743) in Malad City.