

DEER FLAT NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Author: John F. Gatchet

Site SW-7 — Map SW-7

Highlights: Peregrine Falcon, Shorebirds, Warblers

Major Habitats: Wetland, Deciduous Forest

Location: Canyon Co., 4 miles west of Nampa

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

Deer Flat NWR is southwest Idaho's best birding spot. An impressive 230 bird species have been recorded. In years when the refuge's mudflats are exposed, thousands of shorebirds stop to feed. Winter months find over 10,000 geese and 100,000 ducks present, attracting both Bald and Golden Eagles. Deer Flat is also the state's most dependable spot for vagrant passerines, having attracted rarities such as Palm, Black-and-white, Tennessee, Hooded, and Magnolia Warblers!

DIRECTIONS:

From I-84 Exit 35 near Nampa, turn north on Northside Boulevard and go 0.3 mile to the 4-way stop-sign. Turn left (west) on ID 55 (a.k.a. Karcher Road) and find a safe place to park. Look for Idaho's most dependable Peregrine Falcon pair atop the adjacent Amalgamated Sugar Company's towers and buildings, then continue west 4.2 miles on ID 55 and turn left (south) on Lake Avenue. After 3.4 miles the road curves to the left below the refuge's "Upper Dam." Turn sharp right (northwest) onto Upper Embankment Road and pull into the parking lot at the east end of the dam.

BIRDING:

From the parking lot scan Lake Lowell, which is the reservoir encompassed by Deer Flat NWR. Among the rare or unusual migrant species possible are Pacific Loon, Great Egret, Greater Scaup, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Franklin's, Bonaparte's, Herring, and Sabine's Gulls, and Common and Black Terns. If the gate on Upper Embankment Road is open, drive west across the dam 1.1 miles to refuge headquarters. The interpretive center has maps, information, and a checklist. There is also a short nature trail, where Clark's Grebes, Trumpeter Swans, Bald Eagles, and a variety of ducks and other waterfowl can be seen for much of the year.

After visiting headquarters, backtrack east across the dam to Lake Avenue, re-zero your mileage, and turn right (east). At mile 0.3 park in the second parking area on the left (east). Bird the brush and trees for wintering Northern Saw-whet Owls, Varied Thrushes, Orange-crowned Warblers, and White-throated Sparrows, but be aware that the adjacent area is closed to public access (watch for warning signs).

Continue east on what is now Iowa Avenue. At mile 2.0 turn right (south) onto Middleton Road. At mile 2.5 turn right (west) onto Greenhurst Avenue. The sagebrush, Russian-olives, and willows in the public hunting area on the left (south) at mile 3.3 attract a wide variety of birds, including Gray Partridge. Migrant or summer species include Common Poorwill, Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, "Western," Dusky, and Gray Flycatchers, Hermit Thrush, Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, Plumbeous Vireo, Townsend's, MacGillivray's, and Wilson's Warblers, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting, and White-throated Sparrow (rare).

At mile 3.5 is a great birding area, but public use is prohibited from October 1 to January 31. During the rest of the year, drive or walk the 0.5-mile dead-end dirt road to Gott's Point, passing Greenhurst Access parking lot along the way. Investigate both the excellent riparian cover and the great lake views for additional birds, then backtrack to Greenhurst Access parking lot. From here a gated patrol road heads southeast along the lakeshore all the way to Schaffer's Access. Walk or bicycle this 4-mile-long road to experience the refuge's best birding. Scan any mudflats along the patrol road for White-faced Ibises, Black-bellied Plovers, American Golden-Plovers (rare), Snowy Plovers (rare), Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets,

Solitary Sandpipers, Marbled Godwits, Sanderlings, Semipalmated, Western, Baird's, and Pectoral Sandpipers, Dunlins, Stilt Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers (rare), and Parasitic Jaegers (rare). In the woodland bordering the patrol road, watch for more vagrants such as Black Swifts, Blue Jays, and Black-and-white and Hooded Warblers.

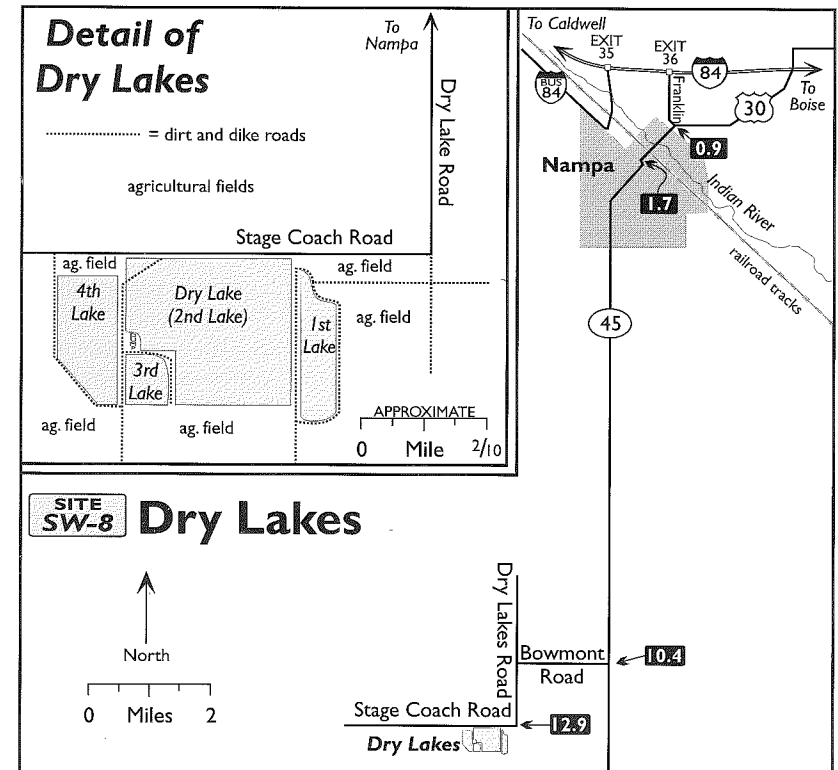
To continue birding, drive east on Greenhurst Avenue 2 miles, then turn right (south) on Midland Road. At the L intersection in 1 mile, turn left (east) onto Locust Lane and go only 0.3 mile before turning right (south) onto paved/graveled Tio Lane and driving 1 mile to Schaffer's Access parking lot at the end of the road. Walk the two gated roads which come into the parking lot. The east road accesses excellent woodland and marsh habitats. Both Blue Jays and White-throated Sparrows have been seen here several times. In winter Western Screech-Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls can be found in Wood Duck boxes. Listen for vagrant Swamp Sparrows (winter) in marsh habitat. (The west road is the patrol road mentioned above.)

Backtrack 0.5 mile north on Tio Lane and turn right (east) on Burke Lane. After 0.8 mile turn right (south) on ID 45, then turn right (west) on Lake Shore Drive after 1.3 miles. Lake Shore Drive parallels the southwest shore of Lake Lowell for 11.2 miles to Lower Dam. Along the way you'll pass eight "Access Point" parking lots which allow additional lake-scoping and investigation of the shoreline's deciduous forest, which might harbor wintering Barn Owls. Be aware that Lake Shore Drive makes a 90-degree turn to the north at the stop-sign, which is 8.2 miles west of the Lake Shore Drive/ID 45 junction. At the end of Lake Shore Drive, turn right (northeast) onto Riverside Road and cross the Lower Dam. "Good" birds seen from the dam include Pacific Loons, Clark's Grebes (nests), Great and Cattle Egrets, Greater White-fronted and Ross's Geese, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Red-breasted Mergansers, Merlins, Gyrfalcons, and even an Ancient Murrelet! In winter look for Rough-legged Hawks and Northern Shrikes.

At the northeast end of Lower Dam, turn right into the recreation area. This is one of the refuge's most productive birding areas. There are trees and hedge-rows at the end of the park road. In fall there is usually a mudflat, too. Among the more unusual migrants have been Northern Goshawks, Lewis's Woodpeckers, Olive-sided and Least Flycatchers, Hermit Thrushes, Plumbeous Vireos, Tennessee, Nashville, Palm, and Townsend's Warblers, American Redstarts, Clay-colored and White-throated Sparrows, and Common Grackles.

OTHER:

For more information call the refuge (208/467-9278). Nampa is a full-service community. The refuge is open during daylight hours only. The visitors center is generally open from 7:30 am to 4:00 am on weekdays.



DRY LAKES

Author: John F. Gatchet

Site SW-8 — Map SW-8

Highlights: Shorebirds

Major Habitat: Wetland

Location: Canyon Co., 10 miles southwest of Nampa

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

Dry Lakes is one of those tiny, out-of-the-way, easily-overlooked spots that provides great birding. The "lakes" are actually four small pools used to hold irrigation water; but that doesn't prevent them from acting as an oasis amid miles of potato, bean, and mint fields!

Dry Lakes is privately owned. Although public use is currently allowed, that could change at any time. The dried lake beds are very popular with ultra-light-aircraft users, model-airplane enthusiasts, and ORV owners. The one hard and fast etiquette rule is: Do not drive or walk across the lake bed until it is completely dried out.

DIRECTIONS:

Zero your mileage at I-84 Exit 36 and head south on Franklin Boulevard into Nampa. At mile 0.9 turn right (southwest) onto 11th Avenue North. Follow signs to Murphy and ID 45 as you weave through downtown Nampa. Specifically, at mile 1.7 turn left (southeast) on Third Street South. After 1 block turn right (southwest) on 12th Avenue. Stay on 12th, which becomes ID 45, headed south. At mile 10.4 turn right (west) on Bowmont Road. At mile 11.9 turn left (south) onto Dry Lake Road. At mile 12.9 turn right (west) on Stage Coach Road. The lakes are on the left (south), at mile 13.1.

BIRDING:

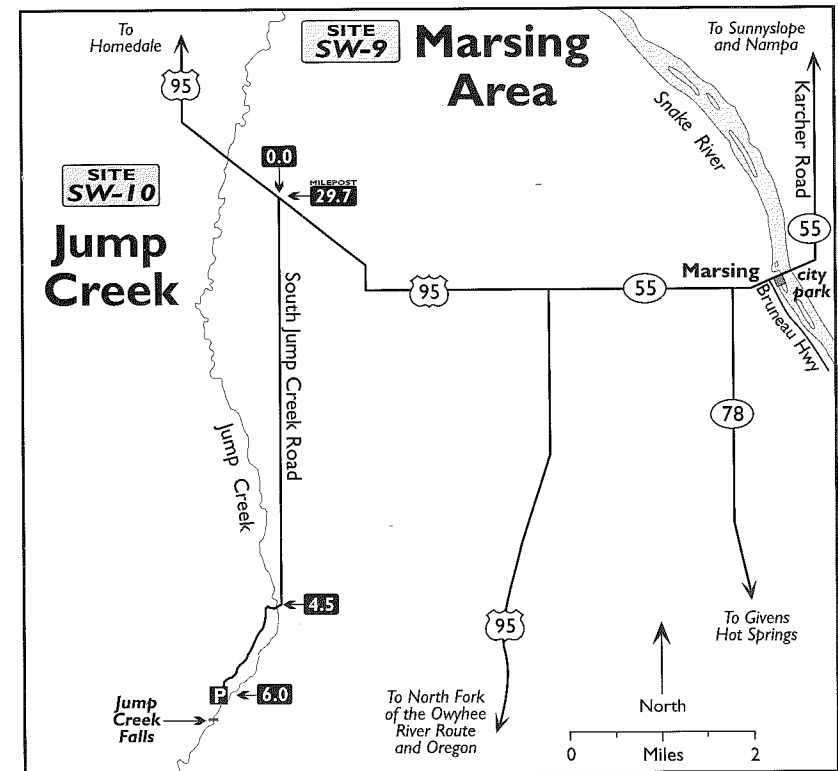
The eastern-most pool has water year round, and it occasionally attracts migrating Red-necked and Clark's Grebes. Other migrant species include Great Egret, White-faced Ibis, Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, Cinnamon Teal, Greater Scaup (also present in winter), and Bonaparte's Gull. Franklin's and Herring Gulls and Caspian, Forster's, and Black Terns are possible.

The second pool is the largest and is the one referred to as "Dry Lake." It is here that most of the migrant shorebirds have been seen, including Black-bellied Plovers, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Solitary Sandpipers, Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, and Semipalmated, Western, Least, Baird's, and Pectoral Sandpipers. You may also see large numbers of Willets and Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes. Rarities have included American Golden-Plovers, Snowy Plovers, Dunlins, Stilt Sandpipers, and Short-billed Dowitchers. In fact, this spot has produced most of Idaho's winter shorebird records.

There are two more pools on the west side of Dry Lake. Dike roads encircling these pools are usually navigable, but you may want to walk to avoid driving in ruts and mud. Ducks favor these two wetlands year round.

OTHER:

Nampa is a full-service community.



MARSING AREA

Author: John F. Gatchet

Site SW-9 — Map SW-9/SW-10

Highlights: Eurasian Wigeon, Oldsquaw, Great-tailed Grackle

Major Habitats: Wetland, Farmland

Location: Owyhee Co., Marsing

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

Winter birding is excellent in Marsing, but good birding is also available during migration. Most birds are concentrated in a few miles of riverfront, so checking out this potential hotspot requires little time.

DIRECTIONS:

To reach Marsing from Nampa, take I-84 Exit 35, turn north on Northside Boulevard, and go 0.3 mile to the 4-way stop-sign. Turn left (west) on ID 55 (a.k.a. Karcher Road) and find a safe place to park. Look for Idaho's most

dependable Peregrine Falcon pair atop the adjacent Amalgamated Sugar Company's towers and buildings, then continue west on ID 55 for 11.1 miles, follow the road as it curves left (south), and enter Marsing in another 4.3 miles. As soon as you cross the Snake River on the edge of town, turn left (east) and visit the small city park along the river's south bank.

BIRDING:

The city park's fishing-pond attracts over a dozen wintering waterfowl species, including Wood Duck, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Oldsquaw, Hooded Merganser, and Eurasian Wigeon. Along the riverbank look for Common Snipe and for Great-tailed and Common Grackles, the latter two being irregular but increasing vagrants. Other possible winter birds include American White Pelicans, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Trumpeter Swans, and Merlins. The park road passes beneath the bridge to access more ponds and a wooded area to the west. These ponds attract Great and Snowy Egrets, and (perhaps) a Green Heron in fall, while the woods often support wintering Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers.

After birding the park, follow ID 55 southwest another 0.1 mile. Before crossing the railroad tracks, turn left (southeast) onto Bruneau Highway. This road follows the Snake River upstream, offering more opportunities to find wintering waterfowl and passerines. *All land here should be considered private.* After about one mile you'll reach a large feedlot area where Red-winged, Yellow-headed, and Brewer's Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds can be found, November to April. Along the road search flocks of wintering White-crowned Sparrows for the odd American Tree, Fox, White-throated, or Harris's Sparrow. More river views and patches of brush and trees can be investigated by continuing along this road. Watch for wintering and migrating Common Loons, Western Grebes, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, Canada Geese, Wood Ducks, Green-winged Teal, Mallards, Northern Pintails, Gadwalls, American Wigeons, Canvasbacks, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Oldsquaws (rare), Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Bald Eagles, Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, and Rough-legged Hawks, and Merlins. Enjoy!

OTHER:

Marsing offers food, fuel, and accommodations. For other services try Nampa. See also Deer Flat NWR (p. 162) and Jump Creek, the next site.

JUMP CREEK

Author: John F. Gatchet

Site SW-10 — Map SW-9/SW-10

Highlights: Short-eared Owl, White-throated Swift

Major Habitats: Shrub-steppe, Deciduous Forest

Location: Owyhee Co., 12 miles southwest of Marsing

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

The Jump Creek birding site is a remote, beautiful canyon sheltering a small riparian zone. Unfortunately, one of the most common riparian plants is Poison-ivy; be careful. For the hardy rock scrambler, a short climb up the canyon reveals a pretty waterfall.

DIRECTIONS:

From Marsing head west 5.4 miles on ID 55/US 95. At milepost 29.7 turn left (south) onto South Jump Creek Road and zero your mileage. Pavement ends at mile 4. Most of the land along the way is private, although Jump Creek Canyon itself is public (BLM).

BIRDING:

As you drive Jump Creek Road, watch for Long-billed Curlews and Short-eared Owls in grasslands and for Loggerhead Shrikes and Sage Thrashers in sagebrush areas. In winter look for White-throated and Harris's Sparrows in both habitats, as well as for Northern Shrikes. At mile 4.5 turn right (west), cross the creek, and head uphill, passing several road intersections. Stay on the main road until you reach the major road fork at mile 5.5, then stay left and proceed down to Jump Creek Canyon parking lot at mile 6.0. The constantly changing and mostly unsigned road system may mislead you, so be aware and remember that you're headed for a canyon, not up into the mountains.

At the Jump Creek Canyon parking lot, walk up the stream 400 yards to view the waterfall, watching for White-throated Swifts, Calliope Hummingbirds, Downy Woodpeckers, Western Wood-Pewees, Canyon and House Wrens, Black-capped Chickadees, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Warbling Vireos, Orange-crowned Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Lazuli Buntings. You may also see Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, Chukars, Say's Phoebes, Dusky Flycatchers, Rock Wrens, Plumbeous Vireos, Western Tanagers, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Green-tailed Towhees. During migration Gray Flycatchers and Townsend's, MacGillivray's, and Wilson's Warblers may also be present. Wintering birds include Golden Eagles, Mountain Chickadees, Canyon Wrens, Mountain Bluebirds (rare), Northern Shrikes, Snow Buntings (rare), and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches. The trail ends at the waterfall.

OTHER:

Marsing offers food, fuel, and accommodations. The primitive BLM campground at Jump Creek parking lot has a few picnic tables but no toilets or water. Nampa/Caldwell is the closest full-service community. For maps and more information, contact the BLM (208/384-3300) in Boise. See also Marsing, the previous site.

NORTH FORK OF THE OWYHEE RIVER

Author: John F. Gatchet

Site SW-11 — Map SW-11

Highlights: Gray and Ash-throated Flycatchers, Bushtit

Major Habitats: Shrub-steppe, Juniper

Location: Owyhee Co., 80 miles southwest of Caldwell

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

This 32-mile drive provides spectacular scenery, good birding, and an opportunity to see Mule Deer and Pronghorn antelope. The North Fork also provides your best chance for finding Bushtit in Idaho. Owyhee County is arguably the most remote non-wilderness section of this remote state, so be sure that you're well-provisioned before heading out.

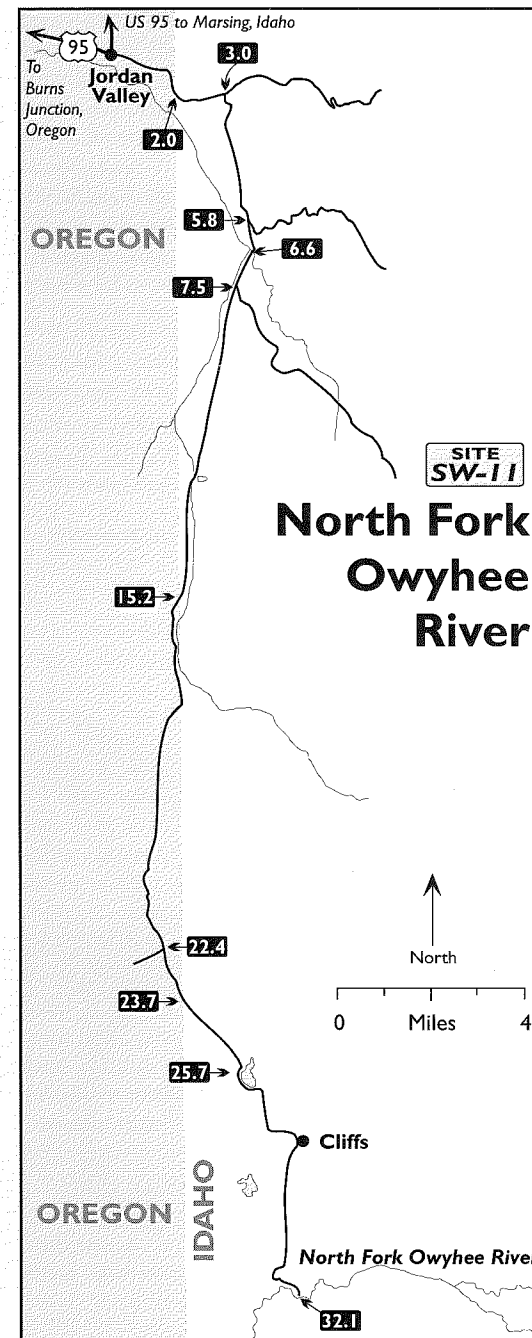
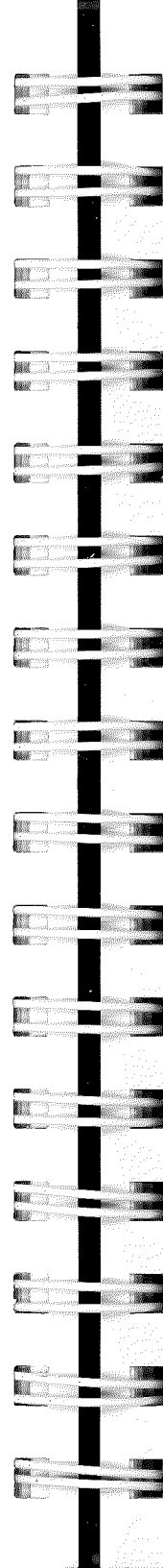
DIRECTIONS:

The route begins in Jordan Valley, Oregon. Zero your mileage at the intersection of Yuturri Boulevard and US 95 (next to the Chevron Station), then follow Yuturri Boulevard east out of town. At mile 2 you'll reenter Idaho (unmarked). At mile 3 the road forks. Turn right (south) toward South Mountain. Most of this route passes through public land (BLM).

BIRDING:

At mile 3.6 park by the BLM sign reading "Caution" and "North Fork Crossing 28." Although this spot looks similar to habitat which you just drove through, it's particularly birdy here. Watch for Gray Flycatchers in the scattered trees and large sage, and for Loggerhead Shrikes, Sage Thrashers, Rock Wrens, and Brewer's, Lark, and Vesper Sparrows. Northern Shrikes and Townsend's Solitaires are occasional in winter. In 1994 a vagrant Eastern Phoebe was found immediately behind this sign.

You'll reach another road fork at mile 5.8; stay right (south) on "Owyhee Upland BackCountry Byway" toward South and Juniper Mountains. At mile 6.6 you'll cross Jordan Creek on a single-lane bridge. Pull over to look for MacGillivray's and Wilson's Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Lazuli Buntings. You may also catch migrating passerines, such as Townsend's Warblers. At mile 7.5 stay right (south) toward Juniper Mountain. Pavement



ends at mile 7.9, and good gravel begins. Be aware that this road can get mighty greasy when wet.

Near mile 10, look in the tall sagebrush for Loggerhead Shrikes and Sage and Brewer's Sparrows. Black-throated Sparrows are a possibility, too. Swainson's Hawks, Golden Eagles, and Common Poorwills frequent this area in summer, as do Rough-legged Hawks in winter. You'll reach another good riparian area at mile 11.7, but the land there is private; please bird from the road.

The road sneaks into Oregon at mile 15.2. At the road fork at mile 22.4, stay left (south) toward Cliffs and Juniper Mountain. At mile 23.7 you cross back into Idaho. Dougal Ranch Reservoir at mile 25.7 is excellent for shorebirds and ducks, but you'll likely want to bird from the road because of intermingled private land. Cinnamon Teal, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Marbled Godwit, and Long-billed Curlew are among the species that have been found here. Barrow's Goldeneyes should be looked for in migration.