

A Self-Guided Beyond Backyard Birding Adventure at the UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve

By Ashley Olah (ahannah@wisc.edu) and Kristin Brunk (kbrunk@wisc.edu),
With photos by Jeremy Cohen (jcohen39@wisc.edu)

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Hello Birders!

We definitely didn't expect a year ago that the pandemic would still be raging and that we still wouldn't be able to lead in-person birding trips, but here we are! Luckily, birding by yourself or with those you live with is still a great way to learn and enjoy the outdoors and the spring weather! Below, you will find instructions for a self-guided birding adventure at the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, including a map of our suggested route and tips about what to look for in certain places! We've also included a checklist of some of the most common species you're likely to see at Picnic Point, the Biocore Prairie, and the Class of 1918 Marsh this time of year. Depending on the weather each spring, migrants may arrive early, on time, or late – so keep in mind that some migrants may not be around yet when you embark on this self-guided field trip. Be safe and be sure to observe all social distancing guidelines while on your trip, as well!

For the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Trail Map, copy and paste this link in your browser:
<https://d138k1rt4vd1y.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2020/02/Preserve-Trail-Map-12-2019.pdf>

And here are the 2 routes described in this guide:



Take the white route to bird only Picnic Point. Take the blue path if you want to bird for longer or don't feel like birding Picnic Point.

SOME TIPS AND TRICKS FOR BEGINNING BIRDERS

(1) Don't forget to bring your binoculars and field guide, whether a physical book or your smart phone! If you enjoy using your smart phone, the **Merlin Bird ID app** is free and very useful for identifying birds. Just answer a few questions in the app and it will give you a list of possible matches. Field guides are key when trying to identify birds. Look in the first few pages of your field guide – there should be a diagram showing the different parts of the bird. Those are features we can use to distinguish between even very similar looking birds! Bird field guide apps often have bird songs included, which can also be helpful if you hear a song you don't recognize. Additionally, take your time when learning to use binoculars! We recommend first locating a bird of interest with your eyes, then, without moving your head, slowly bring your binoculars up to your face. As with most things – practice is THE best way to get better!

(2) Don't rush! Birding is not about how far or how fast you travel in any given birding adventure. If you only go 100 feet in an hour, that's just fine! Take the time to stop, look, and listen in each habitat you encounter. Also, it's important to really observe each bird before you move on. Look for distinguishing colorations, patterns, and markings; watch how they move and what they are doing; observe what habitat or vegetation they are in, where they are (up high, down low etc.), and listen quietly for any noises they may make. Size and shape are other important clues when observing birds. Are they big or small, slim or chunky? Do they have long legs or short legs, necks, tails, and bills? These are all very important features that can help you tell birds apart. If you already know some birds by heart you can use those as a reference. Is the bird you're looking at bigger or smaller than an American robin or a black-capped chickadee? If you hear a bird call or song you don't recognize, try to find the singer, identify it, and watch it sing. The combination of visual and auditory cues will help your brain remember that species better than either cue would alone!

(3) Don't forget to check what might be likely in the area where and when you are birding. In April, we have many resident birds (i.e., those that do not migrate for winter). While some early migrant species may be seen, many migrant species won't return to Wisconsin until May. Many field guides cover areas beyond Wisconsin and include species that don't live in Wisconsin, only occur in part of Wisconsin, or only occur in Wisconsin for part of the year. Many field guides have range maps next to each species – looking at those maps can help you identify which species don't occur in Wisconsin at all or are only around in winter or summer. For example, if you see a bird that is brilliant blue on the back and a rusty orange on the underside, it is unlikely that it is a western bluebird (this species only lives in the western US), but very likely that it is an eastern bluebird (lives all over the eastern US). A look at the maps in the bluebird section of your field guide can help you determine which similar-looking species you might be seeing.

(4) We've included a helpful bird species checklist at the end of this guide, which you can use to mark down the bird species you've seen today! We put the most common species you're likely to see in bold.

Lastly – have fun! Correctly identifying birds is cool, but in reality, birding is all about having fun! Good luck and happy birding!

Ashley and Kristin

Okay, on to the actual Self-guided Birding Trip!

1) Park at the main Picnic Point parking lot (UW Lot 130) 2003 University Bay Drive. The parking lot is fee-free on the weekends and after 4:30pm on weekdays. Alternatively, bike, walk, or take the route 80 bus to the entrance of Picnic Point. During the pandemic follow the guidelines outlined on the Science Expedition Main page.

2) **Begin birding while still in the parking lot.** Take a few minutes to look and listen for marsh birds in the Class of 1918 Marsh, or across the street near the entrance to Picnic Point at the edge of the lake. You might hear red-winged blackbirds, song sparrows, swamp sparrows, Canada geese, sandhill cranes, tree swallows, common grackles, American robins, and rusty blackbirds (especially at the edge of the lake). You also might see a variety of ducks and other waterfowl such as buffleheads, mallards, blue-winged teal, wood duck, northern shovelers, pied-billed grebes, and American coots in the Class of 1918 Marsh or on the lake. In the marsh you might also see great-blue herons!

3) After spending a few minutes birding the parking lot, carefully cross the street and **head down the main path towards the tip of Picnic Point.** This path will take you along the lakeshore out to the end of the peninsula, and along it there will be various spots where you can overlook the lake. **Looking out over the lake,** you might see a variety of waterfowl including common loons (listen for their haunting calls), Canada geese, wood ducks, mallards, American coots, pied-billed grebes, northern shovelers, bufflehead, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, canvasback, and common mergansers. You might also see ring-billed gulls, American white pelicans, or double-crested cormorants flying over the lake, and potentially a bald eagle or osprey!



Photo Credits: Jeremy Cohen

Here are four common black and white birds that you may see at Picnic Point. The black-capped chickadee (top left), the white-breasted nuthatch (top right), the downy woodpecker (bottom left), and the hairy woodpecker (bottom right). The two woodpeckers on the bottom are quite similar, but pay close attention to their size – if you feel like you could easily fit it in your pocket, it’s probably a downy woodpecker! The hairy woodpecker also has a longer bill in relation to its body size.

4) **In the woods** you might expect to find a variety of songbirds, including American robins, northern cardinals, white-breasted nuthatches, black-capped chickadees, eastern phoebes, tufted titmice, American crows, blue jays, tree swallows, brown-thrashers, hermit thrushes, cedar waxwings, house finches, American

goldfinches, fox sparrows, dark-eyed juncos, eastern towhees, song sparrows, red-winged blackbirds, ruby-crowned kinglets, golden-crowned kinglets, and several kinds of woodpeckers. You might encounter downy, hairy, red-bellied, and pileated woodpeckers, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, and northern flickers. If you look high up in the treetops, you may be lucky enough to see some streaky, quickly flitting, busy birds with bright yellow rumps (the top part of the bird's butt, where the tail meets the body). These may be our earliest arriving warblers, yellow-rumped warblers (sometimes affectionately known as "butterbutts").



Photo Credit: Jeremy Cohen

The yellow-rumped warbler is the first warbler to migrate back to our area in the spring. Look for the bright yellow spots on its head, armpits, and the top side of its tail!

5) Once you reach the end of Picnic Point you can follow the same path straight back to the parking lot. Alternatively, if you want to spend more time birding, take the right-hand path when the trail splits at the Narrows, just beyond Fire Circle #3. Along this path, you can look out over the lake on the other side of the Picnic Point peninsula for more waterfowl and observe more forest birds. This path also takes you past the **small, wooded Picnic Point Marsh** where you might be able to spot wood ducks, swamp sparrows, tree swallows, and song sparrows. If you're lucky and look carefully up in the tree branches, you might hear or see a barred owl. Eventually this path will take you to Biocore Prairie.

6) At Biocore Prairie you might encounter wild turkeys, mourning doves, American robins, eastern phoebes, blue jays, American crows, black-capped chickadees, song sparrows, tufted titmice, tree swallows, golden-crowned and ruby-crowned kinglets, white-breasted nuthatches, winter wrens, brown thrashers, eastern bluebirds, hermit thrush, house sparrows, house finches, American goldfinches, field sparrows, fox sparrows, white-throated sparrows, eastern towhees, brown-headed cowbirds, dark-eyed juncos, red-winged blackbirds, European starlings, common grackles, and northern cardinals. NOTE: There is a purple martin house standing above the edge of Biocore Prairie and the Eagle Heights Community Gardens. That structure has a decoy purple martin on it. However, purple martins are (almost definitely) not present in Wisconsin in April. The decoy is there to attract purple martins to the house when they do arrive later in the spring.



Photo Credits: Jeremy Cohen

If you're ready for a challenge, you can start learning to identify the sparrows – these five species are all fairly common in the spring! On the top row (left to right) are the song sparrow, chipping sparrow, and swamp sparrow. To tell them apart, pay attention to how much streaking is on the breast and the colors of eyestripes and faces. The bottom row has the white-throated sparrow (left; easily distinguished by the bright white throat) and the white-crowned sparrow (right).

7) From Biocore Prairie you can walk through **the Eagle Heights Community Gardens** or head back towards the Picnic Point parking lot. In the Community Gardens please stay on mowed trails and don't disturb garden plots. You might find American robins, hermit thrushes, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, eastern bluebirds, European starlings, and a variety of sparrows such as fox sparrow, white-throated sparrow, dark-eyed junco, eastern towhees, song sparrows, and field sparrows foraging in the gardens.

8) To get back to the parking lot you can follow the paved trail at the southwestern edge of the Community Gardens (near the entrance to the gardens by the road), or you can take any number of paths through Bill's Woods.

9) If you're still looking for more birding to do (or spots to check out another day), we highly recommend a walk (in waterproof shoes!) around the **Class of 1918 Marsh**, located on the other side of the main parking lot. There is a path around the outside of the marsh, from which to see American robins, chipping sparrows, song sparrows, and cardinals. There is also a small wooden deck for observing the central pond, where you may see more geese, coots, and ducks. A little later in the spring, this is a great spot to see and/or hear soras and Virginia rails, both very secretive marsh specialists. In years with flooding in the grass around the outside of the marsh, we've even seen soras foraging out in the open and Wilson's phalaropes in this area!

Common Birds for Picnic Point, Biocore Prairie, and Class of 1918 Marsh - April

***Bold Type** indicates some of the most common birds

WATERFOWL

- Cackling Goose
- Canada Goose**
- Wood Duck**
- Blue-winged Teal**
- Northern Shoveler**
- Gadwall
- American Widgeon
- Mallard**
- American Black Duck
- Green-winged Teal
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck**
- Greater Scaup**
- Lesser Scaup**
- Bufflehead**
- Common Goldeneye**
- Hooded Merganser**
- Common Merganser**
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Ruddy Duck

GAMEBIRDS

- Wild Turkey**

GREBES

- Pied-billed Grebe**
- Horned Grebe

PIGEONS AND DOVES

- Rock Pidgeon**
- Mourning Dove**

SWIFTS

- Chimney Swift**

RAILS AND COOTS

- Virginia Rail
- Sora
- American Coot**

SHOREBIRDS

- Killdeer**
- Spotted Sandpiper
- Greater Yellowlegs
- Lesser Yellowlegs

GULLS

- Ring-billed Gull**
- Herring Gull**
- Bonaparte's Gull

LOONS

- Common Loon**

CORMORANTS

- Double-crested Cormorant**

PELICANS

- American White Pelican

HERONS

- Great Blue Heron**
- Great Egret
- Green Heron**
- Black-crowned Night Heron

VULTURES AND RAPTORS

- Turkey Vulture**
- Osprey**
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper's Hawk
- Bald Eagle**
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk**

OWLS

- Eastern Screech-Owl
- Great Horned Owl**
- Barred Owl**

KINGFISHERS

WOODPECKERS

- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker**
- Downy Woodpecker**
- Hairy Woodpecker**
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker**

FALCONS

- American Kestrel
- Merlin (rare)
- Peregrine Falcon (rare)

FLYCATCHERS

- Eastern Phoebe**
- Eastern Kingbird

VIREOS

- Blue-headed Vireo
- Warbling Vireo**

CROWS AND JAYS

- Blue Jay**
- American Crow**

CHICKADEES AND TITMICE

- Black-capped Chickadee**
- Tufted Titmouse

LARKS

- Horned Lark

SWALLOWS

- Tree Swallow**
- Barn Swallow
- Cliff Swallow
- Bank Swallow
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- Purple Martin

KINGLETS

<input type="checkbox"/>	CRANES Sandhill Crane	<input type="checkbox"/>	Belted Kingfisher	<input type="checkbox"/>	Golden-crowned Kinglet Ruby-crowned Kinglet
<input type="checkbox"/>	NUTHATCHES White-breasted Nuthatch Red-breasted Nuthatch	<input type="checkbox"/>	NEW WORLD SPARROWS Song Sparrow	<input type="checkbox"/>	CARDINALS AND GROSBEAKS Northern Cardinal Rose-breasted Grosbeak
<input type="checkbox"/>	TREECREEPERS Brown Creeper	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chipping Sparrow White-throated Sparrow Dark-eyed Junco Eastern Towhee American Tree Sparrow Swamp Sparrow Field Sparrow Fox Sparrow		
<input type="checkbox"/>	GNATCATCHERS Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	White-crowned Sparrow Vesper Sparrow Savannah Sparrow Lincoln's Sparrow		
<input type="checkbox"/>	WRENS House Wren Winter Wren Carolina Wren	<input type="checkbox"/>	BLACKBIRDS Red-winged Blackbird Brown-headed Cowbird		
<input type="checkbox"/>	STARLINGS European Starling	<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Grackle Eastern Meadowlark Rusty Blackbird Orchard Oriole Baltimore Oriole		
<input type="checkbox"/>	CATBIRDS AND THRASHERS Gray Catbird Brown Thrasher	<input type="checkbox"/>	WOOD WARBLERS Yellow-rumped Warbler Black-and-white Warbler Yellow Warbler Palm Warbler American Redstart Northern Waterthrush		
<input type="checkbox"/>	THRUSHES American Robin Eastern Bluebird Hermit Thrush Swainson's Thrush	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ovenbird Blue-winged Warbler Prothonotary Warbler Orange-crowned Warbler Nashville Warbler Pine Warbler Black-throated Green Warbler		
<input type="checkbox"/>	WAXWINGS Cedar Waxwings	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	OLD WORLD SPARROW House Sparrow	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	FINCHES House Finch American Goldfinch Pine Siskin	<input type="checkbox"/>			