

Birds of the Freezout WMA

These species have been observed by the author at least once in 24 years of observation on the Area and along the roads bordering the Area.

Status (STATUS) is defined as follows:
B – Direct evidence of breeding
b – Indirect evidence of breeding
t – Observed, no evidence of breeding
W – Overwintering
w – Observed, December 15 - February 15
(#) – Number of times observed by author

These definitions are those of P. D. Skaar’s Montana Bird Distribution.

Seasons of occurrence:
SP – March - May
S – June - July
F – August - November
W – December - February

These seasons correspond to the four seasons as published in North American Birds.

Relative abundance by season:
a – Abundant, common species, very numerous
c – Common, likely to be seen in suitable habitat
u – Uncommon, present but may not be seen
o – Occasional, seen only a few times a season
r – Rare, seen only once a year or less
v – Vagrant, seen only once or twice in 10 years

FIRST – Average date of first observation (month/day)
Res – Resident
* – Observations not yet recognized by the Montana Bird Records Committee

SPECIES	STATUS	SP	S	F	W	FIRST
1 ____ Greater White-fronted Goose	t	o		r		4/02
2 ____ Lesser Snow Goose	t,w	a	r	a	r	3/06
3 ____ Ross’s Goose	t	c		c		3/17
4 ____ Cackling Goose	t	r		r		
5 ____ Canada Goose	B,W	c	c	c	u	2/09
6 ____ Trumpeter Swan	t	o	r	o		3/24
7 ____ Tundra Swan	t	a	r	a		3/05
8 ____ Wood Duck	t	r	o			6/20
9 ____ Gadwall	B	c	c	u		3/19
10 ____ Eurasian Wigeon	t	u		v		3/12
11 ____ American Wigeon	B,w	a	c	c	r	3/06
12 ____ Mallard	B,W	a	c	a	u	2/06
13 ____ Blue-winged Teal	B	c	c	c		4/13
14 ____ Cinnamon Teal	B	a	c	c		4/05
15 ____ Northern Shoveler	B	a	a	c		3/19
16 ____ Northern Pintail	B,w	a	c	c	r	3/04
17 ____ Green-winged Teal	B	a	c	a		3/15

SPECIES	STATUS	SP	S	F	W	FIRST
18 ____ Canvasback	B	c	c	c		3/13
19 ____ Redhead	B	c	c	u		3/11
20 ____ Ring-necked Duck	t	u	u	o		3/20
21 ____ Tufted Duck*	(1)	v				
22 ____ Greater Scaup	t	r		v		3/15
23 ____ Lesser Scaup	B	c	u	u		3/19
24 ____ Surf Scoter	(3)			r		10/26
25 ____ White-winged Scoter	(3)	v		r		10/24
26 ____ Long-tailed Duck	t			r		11/06
27 ____ Bufflehead	t	c	u	u		3/21
28 ____ Common Goldeneye	t,W	c	o	o	o	2/16
29 ____ Barrow’s Goldeneye	t	o	o	r		3/27
30 ____ Hooded Merganser	t	r	r	r		3/19
31 ____ Common Merganser	t,w	r			r	3/20
32 ____ Red-breasted Merganser	t	c				4/04
33 ____ Ruddy Duck	B	a	c	u		4/06
34 ____ Gray Partridge	B,W	u	u	u	u	Res
35 ____ Ring-necked Pheasant	B,W	c	c	c	c	Res
36 ____ Sharp-tailed Grouse	t,W	u	o	u	u	Res
37 ____ Pacific Loon	(1)			v		
38 ____ Common Loon	t	u	r	o		4/16
39 ____ Yellow-billed Loon	(1),w				v	
40 ____ Pied-billed Grebe	B	c	u	u		5/09
41 ____ Horned Grebe	B	o	o	o		4/30
42 ____ Red-necked Grebe	B	u	u	o		4/25
43 ____ Eared Grebe	B	a	c	u		4/10
44 ____ Western Grebe	B	c	c	c		4/20
45 ____ Clark’s Grebe	B	u	u	u		4/26
46 ____ American White Pelican	t	c	c	c		4/04
47 ____ Double-crested Cormorant	B	c	c	c		4/11
48 ____ American Bittern	B	o	o	r		5/12
49 ____ Great Blue Heron	t	u	u	u		4/12
50 ____ Great Egret	(3)	v	v			5/28
51 ____ Snowy Egret	t	r	v			
52 ____ Cattle Egret	(3)		v	v		
53 ____ Black-crowned Night-Heron	B	c	c	u		4/25
54 ____ Glossy Ibis	(1)			v		
55 ____ White-faced Ibis	B	o	o	r		5/26
56 ____ Osprey	B	o	c			5/04
57 ____ Bald Eagle	t,W	r	r	u		1/29
58 ____ Northern Harrier	B,W	c	c	c	u	2/12
59 ____ Sharp-shinned Hawk	(2)	v		v		4/16
60 ____ Cooper’s Hawk	(2)			v		9/20
61 ____ Swainson’s Hawk	B	c	c	u		5/03
62 ____ Red-tailed Hawk	B	u	o	o		4/01
63 ____ Ferruginous Hawk	(3)	r				5/05

SPECIES	STATUS	SP	S	F	W	FIRST
64 ____ Rough-legged Hawk	t,W	o	v	o	u	1/30
65 ____ Golden Eagle	t,W	o	o	o	u	2/06
66 ____ American Kestrel	t	o	r			4/22
67 ____ Merlin	t,w			r	r	9/19
68 ____ Gyrfalcon	t,w	r		r	r	5/27
69 ____ Peregrine Falcon	t	r				4/03
70 ____ Prairie Falcon	B	o	o			5/03
71 ____ Virginia Rail	B	r	r			7/05
72 ____ Sora	B	u	u	o		5/06
73 ____ American Coot	B	c	c	c		3/17
74 ____ Sandhill Crane	t	o	r			4/08
75 ____ Black-bellied Plover	t	o	r	o		5/22
76 ____ American Golden Plover	t	v	v	v		8/16
77 ____ Snowy Plover*	(1)	v				
78 ____ Semipalmated Plover	t	o	o	o		5/15
79 ____ Piping Plover	(3)		v			
80 ____ Killdeer	B	c	c	c		3/11
81 ____ Black-necked Stilt	B	c	u	u		4/16
82 ____ American Avocet	B	c	c	u		4/06
83 ____ Spotted Sandpiper	t	o	r	o		5/13
84 ____ Solitary Sandpiper	t	r		r		5/16
85 ____ Greater Yellowlegs	t	u	o	u		4/09
86 ____ Willet	B	c	u	u		4/21
87 ____ Lesser Yellowlegs	t	c	o	c		4/17
88 ____ Upland Sandpiper	B	u	u			5/16
89 ____ Whimbrel	t	r				5/09
90 ____ Long-billed Curlew	B	u	o	o		4/17
91 ____ Hudsonian Godwit	t	r		r		7/23
92 ____ Marbled Godwit	B	c	u	u		4/22
93 ____ Ruddy Turnstone	t	r	r			6/04
94 ____ Red Knot	t	r	v			5/23
95 ____ Sanderling	t	u		r		6/18
96 ____ Semipalmated Sandpiper	t	u	o	u		5/11
97 ____ Western Sandpiper	t	o	r			6/07
98 ____ Least Sandpiper	t	u	o	u		5/10
99 ____ White-rumped Sandpiper	(2)	v				
100 ____ Baird’s Sandpiper	t	u		u		5/15
101 ____ Pectoral Sandpiper	t		r	u		7/25
102 ____ Dunlin	t	r		v		5/06
103 ____ Curlew Sandpiper	(1)		v			
104 ____ Stilt Sandpiper	t	r	r	r		6/07
105 ____ Short-billed Dowitcher	t		r			
106 ____ Long-billed Dowitcher	t	c	u	c		5/07
107 ____ Wilson’s Snipe	b	c	u	u		4/21
108 ____ Wilson’s Phalarope	B	c	c	c		4/29
109 ____ Red-necked Phalarope	t	u		u		5/18
110 ____ Red Phalarope	(2)	v		v		

SPECIES	STATUS	SP	S	F	W	FIRST
111 ____ Franklin’s Gull	B	c	c	c		4/10
112 ____ Bonaparte’s Gull	t	o	r	u		5/18
113 ____ Ring-billed Gull	B	c	u	u		3/12
114 ____ California Gull	B	c	u	u		3/09
115 ____ Herring Gull	t			v		7/14
116 ____ Glaucous Gull*	(1)			v		
117 ____ Sabine’s Gull	(3)			v		9/27
118 ____ Caspian Tern	B	r	r			6/01
119 ____ Black Tern	B	u	c	u		5/23
120 ____ Common Tern	B	c	c	c		4/26
121 ____ Forster’s Tern	B	c	c	u		4/30
122 ____ Parasitic Jaeger*	(2)			v		9/04
123 ____ Rock Pigeon	b,W	o	o	o	r	2/26
124 ____ Eurasian Collared-Dove	(1)			v		
125 ____ Mourning Dove	B	u	u	u		4/25
126 ____ Great Horned Owl	B,W	u	u	u	u	Res
127 ____ Snowy Owl	t,w				v	
128 ____ Burrowing Owl	B		r	r		6/25
129 ____ Long-eared Owl	(2)			v	v	6/06
130 ____ Short-eared Owl	B,w	u	u	u	o	3/29
131 ____ Common Nighthawk	B		u	u		6/23
132 ____ Rufous Hummingbird	(1)	v				
133 ____ Belted Kingfisher	(2)		v	v		7/14
134 ____ Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	(1)			v		
135 ____ Red-napped Sapsucker	t	v		v		4/24
136 ____ Downy Woodpecker	t		v	r		8/16
137 ____ Hairy Woodpecker	(2)			v		
138 ____ Northern Flicker	t/w	r		r	r	5/02
139 ____ Western Wood Peewee	B		o	r		6/04
140 ____ Least Flycatcher	t	r	r			6/07
141 ____ Say’s Phoebe	b	o	u	r		5/14
142 ____ Western Kingbird	B	o	o			5/27
143 ____ Eastern Kingbird	B	c	c	u		5/16
144 ____ Loggerhead Shrike	t	v				5/16
145 ____ Northern Shrike	t,W	r			u	1/17
146 ____ Warbling Vireo	(2)		v	v		8/12
147 ____ Red-eyed Vireo	(2)	v	v			
148 ____ Black-billed Magpie	B,W	c	c	c	u	Res
149 ____ American Crow	t	o		r		3/26
150 ____ Common Raven	t,w	o			o	2/25
151 ____ Horned Lark	b,W	u	u	u	c	
152 ____ Tree Swallow	b	u	r			4/18
153 ____ Violet-green Swallow	(2)	r	r			5/22
154 ____ Northern Rough-w Swallow	(2)	r				5/16

SPECIES	STATUS	SP	S	F	W	FIRST
155 ____ Bank Swallow	t	u	u	u		5/22
156 ____ Cliff Swallow	B	c	c	o		5/14
157 ____ Barn Swallow	B	c	c	u		4/28
158 ____ Red-breasted Nuthatch	(2)	v		v		6/04
159 ____ Brown Creeper	(2)			v		10/09
160 ____ House Wren	B	o	o	o		5/20
161 ____ Winter Wren	(1)			v		
162 ____ Marsh Wren	B	c	c	o		4/07
163 ____ Golden-crowned Kinglet	(1)			v		
164 ____ Ruby-crowned Kinglet	(1)	v				5/15
165 ____ Mountain Bluebird	t	r				3/23
166 ____ Townsend’s Solitaire	(2)	v				5/06
167 ____ Swainson’s Thrush	(2)	v				5/16
168 ____ Hermit Thrush	(2)	v				5/14
169 ____ American Robin	B	c	c	u		3/17
170 ____ Gray Catbird	t	v	v	v		7/03
171 ____ Northern Mockingbird	(1)	v				
172 ____ Brown Thrasher	(1)	v				5/21
173 ____ European Starling	B,W	c	u	c	o	3/03
174 ____ American Pipit	t	o		r		5/01
175 ____ Sprague’s Pipit	(2)		r			
176 ____ Bohemian Waxwing	(1)	v				
177 ____ Cedar Waxwing	t	r	r			5/18
178 ____ Tennessee Warbler	(2)	v		v		
179 ____ Orange-crowned Warbler	t	v		r		5/09
180 ____ Nashville Warbler	(1)			v		
181 ____ Yellow Warbler	B	c	c	o		5/19
182 ____ Yellow-rumped Warbler	t	o		o		5/05
183 ____ Townsend’s Warbler	(2)			v		9/13
184 ____ Palm Warbler	t			r		9/18
185 ____ Blackpoll Warbler	(2)	v				
186 ____ Black and White Warbler	(1)			v		
187 ____ American Redstart	(3)	v				5/28
188 ____ Northern Waterthrush	(2)	v				5/17
189 ____ Common Yellowthroat	B	u	u	u		5/18
190 ____ Wilson’s Warbler	t	r		r		9/15
191 ____ Spotted Towhee	(1)	v				
192 ____ American Tree Sparrow	t,W	o			o	1/29
193 ____ Chipping Sparrow	t	o	o	r	o	5/22
194 ____ Clay-colored Sparrow	b	u	u	r		5/11
195 ____ Vesper Sparrow	B	c	c	u		5/01
196 ____ Lark Sparrow	t	r	r			5/19
197 ____ Lark Bunting	B	r	u	o		6/07
198 ____ Savannah Sparrow	B	a	c	c		4/28
199 ____ Grasshopper Sparrow	(3)		r			

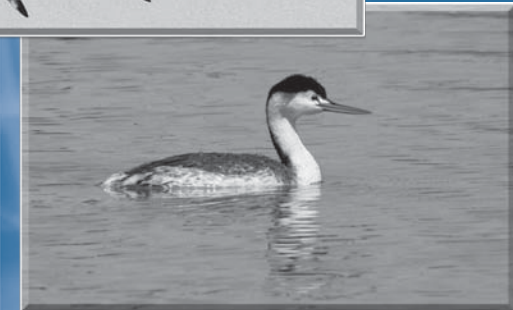
SPECIES	STATUS	SP	S	F	W	FIRST
200 ____ Baird’s Sparrow	b		o			
201 ____ Song Sparrow	t	r		r		4/10
202 ____ Lincoln’s Sparrow	(2)			r		7/02
203 ____ White-throated Sparrow	t			v		9/24
204 ____ Harris’ Sparrow	(3),w	v		v	v	2/02
205 ____ White-crowned Sparrow	t	o		r		5/03
206 ____ Dark-eyed Junco	t	r				4/08
207 ____ McCown’s Longspur	B	r	r			
208 ____ Lapland Longspur	t,w				o	4/06
209 ____ Chestnut-Collared Lngspur	B	c	c	r		4/26
210 ____ Snow Bunting	t,w			r	o	3/16
211 ____ Bobolink	(3)	v				
212 ____ Red-winged Blackbird	B	a	a	c		3/15
213 ____ Western Meadowlark	B,w	c	c	u	o	3/14
214 ____ Yellow-headed Blackbird	B	a	a	c		4/02
215 ____ Rusty Blackbird	(1)	v				
216 ____ Brewer’s Blackbird	B	c	c	u		5/02
217 ____ Common Grackle	t	r	r			5/09
218 ____ Brown-headed Cowbird	B	c	u	o		5/06
219 ____ Bullock’s Oriole	(3)	v	v			6/10
220 ____ Baltimore Oriole	(2)	r	r			6/24
221 ____ Gray-crowned Rosy Finch	(2)			v		11/11
222 ____ House Finch	t,W		r	o		4/28
223 ____ Common Redpoll	t,w		v	r		3/16
224 ____ Pine Siskin	t		r	r		
225 ____ American Goldfinch	t		o	r		7/02
226 ____ House Sparrow	B,W	u	u	o	o	
227 ____ Domestic Goose (Wild)	(3)	r		v		

HUNTING AT FREEZOUT LAKE

The special place that is Freezout Lake owes its existence to waterfowl hunters. Funds from hunters’ licenses and taxes on arms and ammunition sales made acquisition of the Area possible and continue to support its management. Although the short term objectives often differ between birders and hunters, their long-range objectives are similar–high quality natural places that support a large diversity of nature’s creatures. Please accept the two-month hunting disruption, since it helps provide ten months of a high quality birding experience. Purchasing state conservation and migratory bird licenses and federal migratory bird stamps are an excellent way for non-hunters to contribute to the continued existence of places like Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area.

Funding for this brochure was provided by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, photos courtesy Brent N. Lonner, American Avocet drawing by Michael T. Schwitters.

BIRDING AT FREEZOUT LAKE



A BIRDING GUIDE BY MICHAEL T. SCHWITTERS

CHOTEAU, MONTANA
THIRD EDITION, MARCH 2008

Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) offers a diverse seasonal variety of birding opportunities that are typical of a shortgrass prairie marsh habitat. This birding guide is based on 24 years of birding the Area by the author and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks staff. This guide presents a checklist of 227 species with each bird's status, seasonal abundance, and average date of first appearance. Also, a map of the area, annotated to show good spots for observation and species likely to be seen, is included. Additional information describing seasonal birding highlights is included as are some tips that may prove helpful.

Photos: Top to bottom - Lesser Snow Geese, Clark's Grebe & American Avocet

Seasonal Birding Highlights

Spring Waterfowl Migration – Often before the ice is out, late in February, Canada Geese return to Freezout. Soon after the whistling calls of Northern Pintail are heard—often tens of thousands are present. Next come the Tundra Swans, about 10,000 birds in the second week of March. Large flocks of white geese stop over to feed in surrounding fields, enroute to their arctic nesting grounds after wintering in central California. The Snow Geese peak about March 29. By mid-April, more than half of the white geese in the flocks are Ross's Geese. Look carefully for the rare dark or "blue" phase Ross. Throughout March and April, large numbers of ducks are moving through or arriving to nest. Eurasian Wigeon are present in flocks of American Wigeon. Large numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers can be seen. In the first half of April, the Main Lake can be filled with huge numbers of Ruddy Ducks, Eared Grebe, and American Coot.

Spring Shorebird Migration – By mid-April, the shorebirds are beginning to be seen in the shallows. American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, and yellowlegs have arrived by the end of April. May brings the balance of the shorebird migration. Although there are never massive numbers of shorebirds at Freezout, the variety is very good (36 species have been recorded by the author). Always take time to look for rare shorebirds.

Nesting Season – Freezout produces thousands of young birds each summer. The Canada Geese chicks appear the first week in May. Many birds are courting and displaying at this time. Common Terns, Double-crested Cormorants, California, Ring-billed and Franklin's gulls, Eared and Western Grebes, and Black-crowned Night-herons crowd the islands and selected patches of bulrushes. In June, broods of ducks form little rafts of down escaping your approach. By the last two weeks of June, grebes are frequently seen with "baby on board."

Waterfowl Summer Molt – By late June the bright mating plumage of the male ducks begins to be replaced by brown. By July, it is "brown duck time." The summer molt presents a challenge for identification. The drab plumage can be discouraging, but this is somewhat compensated by an influx of new ducks from as far as California for the food and security offered at freezout during their flightless time.



Franklin's Gulls



Trumpeter Swans



Black-necked Stilts



Northern Pintail

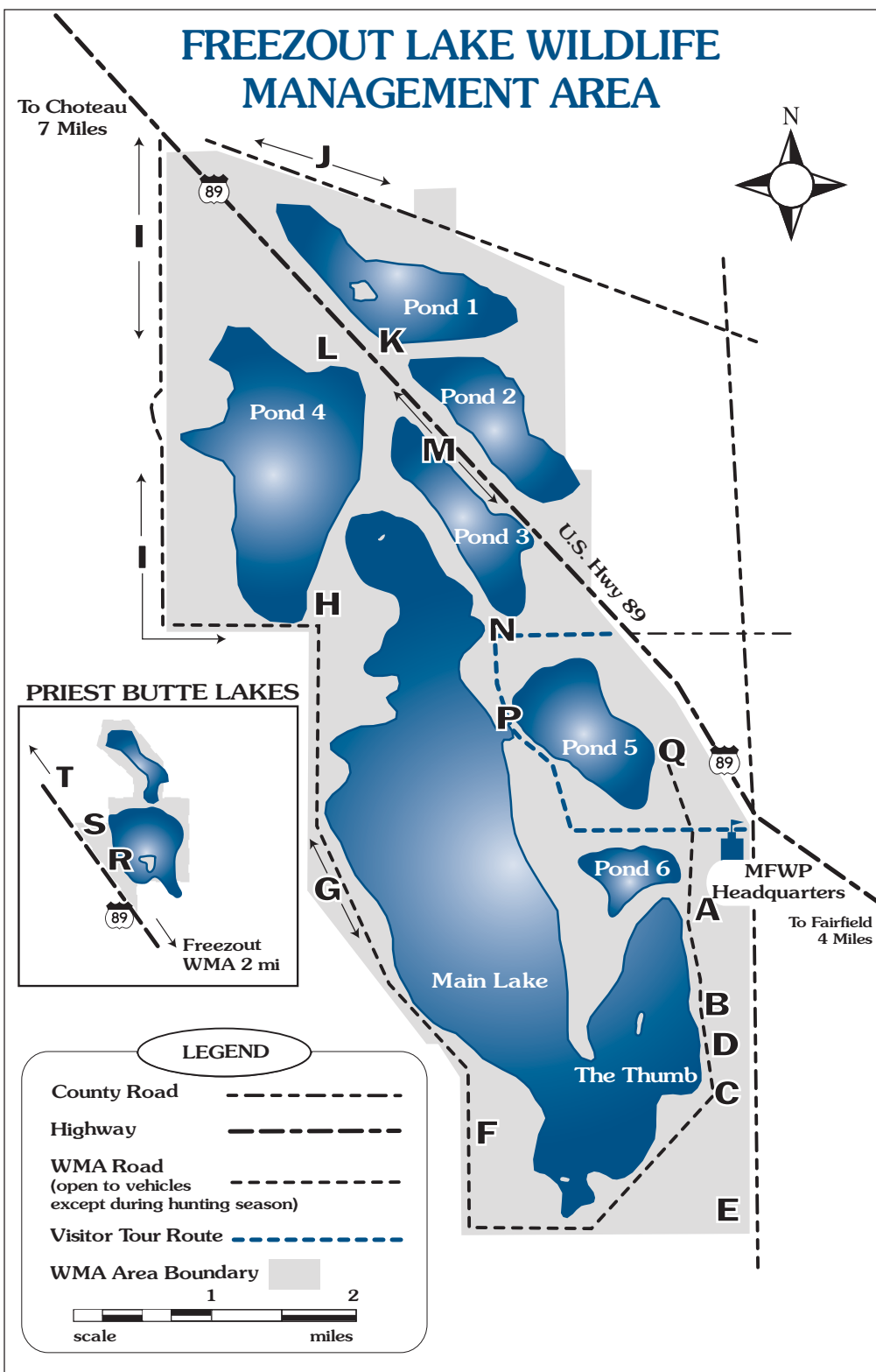


Short-eared Owl



MFWP Region 4
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, Montana 59405-0901
406-454-5840

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- A.** Grebe City: bulrush patch across the water to the west. Breeding area for grebes, American Coots, and Black-crowned Night-herons. Forster's Terns nest here, too.
- B.** The "Thumb": The shoreline along this road is a good spot for shorebirds. Savannah Sparrows nest in the grass.
- C.** Southeast corner of the Main Lake: A consistently good view spot for waterfowl, grebes and in season shorebirds.
- D.** The Garage: One of the few spots for passerines, Yellow Warblers, House Wrens, and in summer, Western Wood-pewees are good bets. Great Horned Owls nest here in early spring. Swainson's Hawks nest here, too.
- E.** Southeast corner of Area: Bushes and trees near this old farmstead are favorite haunts of Brewer's Blackbird, Eastern Kingbird, and in spring migration, several sparrow species. Winter cover for Ring-necked Pheasants.
- F.** Look along this road for Chestnut-collared Longspurs and Baird's Sparrows. Long-billed Curlews and Western Meadowlarks nest here.
- G.** A pleasant drive through short grass prairie with good views of the Main Lake. Some rattlesnakes here.
- H.** Good views of the south end of Pond 4. Often many waterfowl. Chestnut-collared Longspurs by the parking area; watch for snakes.
- I.** Road back to the highway: Vesper Sparrows and Lark Buntings on the fence wires, Say's Phoebe nest in the old homestead. Look for Upland Sandpipers on fence posts. This gumbo road eats cars when wet! AVOID WHEN WET.
- J.** Many sparrows along this road including Vesper and Clay-colored. View of Pond 1, but a spotting scope is needed.
- K.** Pond 1, often filled with waterfowl. Snow Geese rest here and Tundra Swans feed in early spring. The two islands on the left, close in, are colonized by Common Terns. American White Pelicans frequent these waters in the summer. This is one of the few spots where good sun angles are found in the afternoons.
- L.** Pond 4, often lots of waterfowl and gulls. During migration, Tundra Swans feed in the shallow pond. In dry years it can draw down to mud flats for many shorebirds.
- M.** Highway by Pond 3. Openings in the bulrushes can give you the closest views of ducks and American Coot. Black Terns nest here. Migrating White-faced Ibis stop here to rest and feed. Pull well off the road to avoid traffic.
- N.** Check out the bay of the Main Lake and the points on either side. The north point can be very good for shorebirds.
- P.** The Neck. This is the best birding spot on the Area. Marsh Wrens and Sora nest in the rushes. Shorebirds are present in great diversity, especially in dry years. A spotting scope is needed here for best views. Pond 5 from here gives good looks at waterfowl and grebes. Forster's Terns are here.
- Q.** Pond 5 boat launch, a good view of the east part of Pond 5. Marsh Wrens in the rushes; ducks in the water. The Red-necked Grebes nest here.
- R.** Priest Lake, 1½ miles northwest of the main area. Turn off Highway 89 onto the road going down to the water, but stop just after going through the gate. The large island is a major nesting spot for Canada Geese. The deeper waters here attract diving ducks. In spring there is nearly always a Common Loon out in the lake. White geese rest here during their migrations. Some rare species have been seen here, including White-winged Scoter and Long-tailed Duck (Nov.).
- S.** Priest Butte. Pull off on the east side of Highway 89 at the locked gate, a high point to view the north part of the lake. Priest Butte (State land) dominates the view west. Cliff Swallows nest on the cliffs. Raptors use the updrafts. (The three crosses have served as a setting for a Choteau church's Easter sunrise services.) Watch for traffic when returning to the highway.
- T.** Choteau...motels, restaurants, shopping and fuel. Camping at the City Park (birding, too) and a KOA just east of town. Choteau serves as a good stop-over point for birding the Rocky Mountain Front and Glacier Park.