



International Migratory Bird Day

Helping Birds Along The Way

Featured Travelers

For birds migrating between breeding grounds in the United States and Canada and wintering grounds in the southern U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean, migratory stopover sites offer safe refuges to rest and refuel before continuing on the next leg of their journey. With more than 350 species of migratory birds occurring in North America, these sites are essential to maintaining healthy populations. Stopover habitats are as diverse as the birds that rely on them—supporting migrants across the Western Hemisphere in high altitude forests, expansive tidal flats, marshes, open grasslands, and even the plants, shrubs, and trees you have in your backyard.

Learn more about some of the bird species that depend on stopover habitats from Venezuela's grasslands to the shorelines of the Great Lakes.

FOREST BIRDS (Black-throated Blue Warbler, Wood Thrush)

After breeding in southeastern Canada, northeastern United States and the Appalachian Mountains, the Black-throated Blue Warbler migrates through forested habitats en route to wintering grounds in the Greater Antilles. Another eastern forest bird, the Wood Thrush, whose ethereal summer song is a favorite of bird lovers, migrates across the Gulf of Mexico to southern Mexico and Central America. Heading north in the spring, the Wood Thrush, which is in steep decline, must stop along the Gulf Coast to rest and refuel. Tracking technologies, including radar and geolocators, have demonstrated how important these coastal areas are for the Wood Thrush during migration. Even urban oases, like Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C. and Central Park in New York City, provide important stopover habitat for both these forest birds. *(Photos by Charlesjsharp and CheepShot)*



Black-throated Blue Warbler



Wood Thrush

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

Those who live east of the Mississippi River may think of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird as a backyard bird, one we enjoy watching at our hummingbird feeders, but it is a species shared with many countries. Before its arduous migration across the Gulf of Mexico to wintering grounds in southern Mexico and Central America, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird must fatten up on nectar and insects, so we can play a role in ensuring this charismatic species has sufficient food for the journey. *(Photo by Michelle Lynn Reynolds)*





WILSON'S WARBLER

The Boreal and Rocky Mountain forests and the tropical forests of Mexico and Central America bear little resemblance to the riparian woodland along the San Pedro River in Arizona, but the Wilson's Warbler needs all of these habitats to support its annual life cycle. During migration, this species is one of the most prevalent along the San Pedro, an important migratory corridor in the southwestern United States. *(Photo by Michael Woodruff)*

THE SPECTACLE OF MIGRATION

(Tree Swallow, Merlin; Western Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs)

Some stopover sites are well known for their bird migration spectacle, and for supporting a diversity of migrating species. Cape May, New Jersey, for example, is famous for concentrations of Tree Swallows in the fall. Huge flocks, once estimated at half a million birds, "stage" here to feast on the abundant insects in preparation for migration, which, in turn, creates a visual feast for birders. The Merlin, a small falcon which breeds in northern forests and prairies, also migrates along this coast and congregates at Cape May during the fall, with counts of up to almost 2,000. Given that their prey is small to medium-sized birds, the Merlin has a lot to choose from at Cape May during migration! Shorebirds like the Western Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs also migrate along the coast of New Jersey, but the spectacle for these species occurs in different geographic areas. At the San Francisco Bay in California, Copper River Delta in Alaska and Fraser River Delta in British Columbia, hundreds of thousands of Western Sandpipers congregate to rest and refuel during spring migration. Birders can witness an astounding five million shorebirds at the Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival each May! During southward migration, the Upper Bay of Panama, Parte Alta de la Bahía de Panama, hosts more Western Sandpipers than any other stopover area. Interior sites like Cheyenne Bottoms in Kansas are also important for both species during migration, but especially for the Lesser Yellowlegs in spring when over 50,000 birds stage there. *(Photos by Kurt Bauschardt, Drew Avery, dominic sheron and Wwcsig)*



Tree Swallow



Merlin



Western Sandpiper



Lesser Yellowlegs

GREEN-WINGED TEAL

The abundant Green-winged Teal, most of which breed in Canada, migrates along all the major flyways, but protected inland and coastal marshes such as Cheyenne Bottoms in Kansas and Magee Marsh on Lake Erie in Ohio are important during their transit. The conservation of wetlands used by waterfowl and the associated upland habitat also benefits many landbird and shorebird species during migration. *(Photo by Alan D. Wilson)*



PAINTED BUNTING

The Painting Bunting, the male of which is considered the most stunning songbird in North America, breeds in the south-central and south Atlantic states. The migration ecology of this declining species is complex and unusual, with two distinct populations whose migratory routes and molting times differ. The western population migrates to southeastern Arizona and northwestern Mexico to undergo a partial molt, then continues to wintering grounds in southern Mexico and Central America, whereas the eastern population molts on the breeding grounds before migrating to spend the winter in southern Florida, Cuba and the Bahamas. The beauty of the Painted Bunting has made it a popular cage bird, an illegal trade but one unfortunately still practiced in some countries. *(Photo by Francesco Veronesi)*



BOBOLINK

The Bobolink, a striking bird of prairies and fields, has one of the longest migrations of any songbird in the world (Renfrew et al., 2013). Its amazing migration from such geographically separated breeding areas as Oregon, Nebraska, and Vermont has been documented through the use of geolocators. These Bobolinks migrated through the Caribbean to the Llanos of northern Venezuela and Bolivia, before reaching wintering grounds in Argentina. Such tracking technology has helped us to learn about the “migratory connectivity” of bird populations throughout their annual life cycle, and the stopover sites they use that are important for us to protect.

(Photo by Andrea Westmoreland)



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