

Birding Hotspots

Birding Sites of the Harrisburg Area

Central Pennsylvania has many excellent locations for birding. Both the Susquehanna River and the Appalachian Mountains are major flyways. Some of the more productive locations within a half an hour drive of Harrisburg are described here. There are many other good spots in the area. This is not an exhaustive list.

Wildwood Park

<https://www.wildwoodlake.org/>

This Dauphin County park is located in north Harrisburg. Several miles of trails and boardwalks encircle the lake. This is an excellent location to view Great Egrets and other wading birds. It is a good spot to look for waterfowl, particularly Wood Ducks, Gadwall, and other puddle ducks. The trails are often good for warblers and other migrants in both the spring and fall.

Some of the rare birds which have been seen here: Glossy Ibis, Little Blue Heron, Red-necked Grebe, Eurasian Wigeon, and Prothonotary Warbler. The Olewine Nature Center has numerous bird feeders and there are exhibits inside, many of which are designed especially for children. The Olewine Center is also home to the office of [Audubon Pennsylvania](#).

Susquehanna River

The Susquehanna River is a major flyway for waterfowl, gulls, terns, swallows and many other birds. Any of the many public access points can be productive. One of the best, is the boat launch in West Fairview, on the west shore of the river, across from the city of Harrisburg. It is located on the north bank of the Conodoguinet Creek where it empties into the river. Almost every species of waterfowl recorded in Pennsylvania has been seen here at one time or another.

Spring is the most exciting time. March and April are the best times for waterfowl. May is good for terns and Black Tern is usually seen on several different days. July and August can be good for shorebirds when the water level is low. Even the winter months can be interesting, especially when the river is mainly frozen and the ducks concentrate at this location. Water birds are not the only attraction at this location. A trail leading up the creek from the parking lot can be good at almost any time of year. Some of the rarities seen at West Fairview: Harlequin Duck, Least Tern, Franklin's Gull, Long-billed Dowitcher, Willet, and Connecticut Warbler.

Fort Hunter

<https://forthunter.org/>

Another excellent vantage point along the River is Fort Hunter, just north of Harrisburg. There is a small park along the river, and a boat launch just north of the park. A large variety of waterfowl is possible here. This is an excellent location to see Double-crested Cormorants roosting on the many rocks. This is a good spot to see gulls, especially Bonaparte's and Little Gulls during late March and early April.

This same section of the river can be viewed from the town of Marysville on the west shore of the river. There are two public boat launches - one at the north end of town, one at the south end. This section of the river has produced many rarities as well, including: Pomarine Jaeger, Red-necked Phalarope and Common Black-headed Gull.

Stony Creek Valley/State Game Lands 211

[State Game Lands 211 Map](#)

Stony Creek Valley runs from the town of Dauphin east to Lebanon Reservoir. There are many good birding spots throughout this area. Stony Creek Road runs east from Dauphin to a gated old railroad bed. There are several trails off of this road before the gate. The railroad bed runs for about 20 miles through excellent forest. This can be walked or biked. The road is only open to vehicles one Sunday per

year in the fall. There is an access at Cold Spring Road at Indiantown Gap 7 or 8 miles from Dauphin. Gold Mine Road crosses the railroad bed another 5 or 6 miles east of Cold Spring. You can continue east on the railroad bed to a dead end at the Lebanon Reservoir from this point. This valley is excellent for spring and fall migrants. There are many interesting breeding birds here including: Barred Owl, Whip-poor-will, Red-shouldered Hawk, Blue-headed Vireo, Winter Wren, and many species of warblers. In the winter months Pine Siskin, Red-breasted Nuthatch and on very rare occasions, Crossbills can be found.

State Game Lands 246

[State Game Lands 246 Map](#)

This State Game Lands is easily reached from the Middletown - Hummelstown exit of Route 283. It is 400 acres of both forest and open areas. It can be an excellent migrant spot, both in the spring and the fall. Mourning, Golden-winged and Kentucky Warblers have been found here.

As with any game lands be sure to wear fluorescent orange during hunting season!

Waggoner's Gap Hawk Watch

<http://www.waggap.com/>

<http://hawkcount.org/>

This site, owned and maintained by [Audubon Pennsylvania](#), is an excellent place to see migrating raptors. It is located where Route 74 crosses over Blue Mountain, north of Carlisle. There is a parking lot on the south side of the mountain. A trail runs from the parking lot to the rocky outcropping on top of the mountain. A dedicated group of counters, led by Dave Grove, are on duty from August 1 to December 31 each year. This is an excellent spot to see Golden Eagles as over 200 are seen here annually. In an average year approximately 20,000 raptors are counted during the season.

Memorial Lake State Park

[Memorial Lake](#)

Located at Fort Indiantown Gap, these two locations offer some interesting birding. Memorial Lake can attract a good variety of waterfowl in the spring and fall. Gulls congregate here in late fall, with some rarer species such as Iceland and Lesser Black-backed being seen. The trail around the lake can produce migrants in both spring and fall.

Second Mountain Hawk Watch

<http://www.stonyvalley.com/watch.html>

Second Mountain Hawk Watch is located at the top of Second Mountain, north of the lake. Several signs for the Hawk Watch point the way. You are able to drive right to the hawk watch. The flat parking lot makes it easy to use a chair or telescope to view the migrating raptors. Counters are on duty from August through December. In addition to raptors, migrating songbirds are often seen along the road or on the trail beyond the hawk watch. A short drive down into Stony Valley via Cold Spring Road can also be productive.

Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area

[PA Game Commission - Middle Creek](#)

[Middle Creek Waterfowl Migration Update](#)

Looking for large numbers of birds to get your heart thumping? How about these recorded Feb. 19 & 22, 2018 at Middle Creek:

Snow Geese: 200,000
Canada geese: 3,500
Tundra swans: 4,000

Great birding at other times with a nice nature center, trails, and automobile touring route. About 45 minutes east of Harrisburg. Be there at sunrise or sunset to see the big numbers.

Chestnut Grove Natural Area

[Chestnut Grove](#)

Great birding and hiking with 13 trails covering 4.5 miles. Birds, wildlife, native plantings including the American Chestnut tree. Located south of Harrisburg in Conestoga, PA. Interpretive panels, wetland boardwalk, plenty of parking. With Turkey Hill's windmills on the horizon.