

*Birding Guide for northwestern North Dakota:  
Burke, Divide, and northern Ward, Mountrail and Williams counties*



**This guide highlights the best birding sites that have public access and are close to major highways or towns in Burke County, Divide County, northwestern Ward County, northern Mountrail County, and northern Williams County. Sites are listed from west to east. Each site description includes a detailed route with stops that can be followed by vehicle odometer, with a narrative of bird species of interest that can be found at the respective stops and areas. For each site, asterisks following seasons roughly indicates the quality of birding by season, ranging from single asterisks (indicating poor to mediocre birding), to four asterisks (indicating outstanding birding).**

**The guide includes several site descriptions that are expanded from those provided in the *North Dakota Bird-Finding Guide*, edited by Ron Martin and Dan Svingen.**

**The guide also provides a summary of the incredible diversity and abundance of breeding bird species found across the central part of northwestern North Dakota, based on three 24.5-mile roadside routes that are surveyed each June as part of the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Landscapes covered by the routes are a mix of prairie pastures, wetlands, hayland, and cropland characteristic of the area. About 140 species of breeding birds have been observed along these routes. The breeding season is short; late May through June is the best time to witness the tremendous variety of birds that nest in the area.**

**While this guide focuses mainly on birds that nest in the area, another 100+ species of birds that breed elsewhere migrate through the area or reside locally through the winter months. A list of these bird species and the seasons and habitats in which they're most likely found during migration is best indicated in the "vertebrate list" pamphlet available for Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge (copies available at the refuge headquarters).**

**Please report any unusual findings to the North Dakota Birding Society:**

**<http://www.ndbirdingsociety.com>**

**- Bob Murphy, Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge, June 2006**

## APPAM LAKE-ZAHL NWR AREA

**Author:** Bob Murphy

**Highlights:** full complement of native prairie species;  
migrant and breeding shorebirds including piping plover

**Spring\*\* summer\*\*\* fall\*\* winter\***

**Location:** next to towns of Appam and Zahl, northern Williams County

### **DIRECTIONS:**

This is a convenient, quiet, very worthwhile stop for those traveling along highway 50 between the Lostwood NWR area and northeastern Montana. The initial starting point is the junction of state highways 50 and 85, about 30 miles north of Williston.

### **BIRDING:**

#### Zahl NWR

From the starting point go 1.3 miles north on highway 85, until the refuge fenceline ends on the west side of the road. There, turn left (west) onto the gravel trail and park in the small parking area next to the refuge fence. There is a small gate in the fence, allowing easy walking access to the refuge. From the gate/parking area, walk up to 0.5 miles south and west through the rolling native prairie, which mainly is composed of western wheatgrass, blue grama, needle-and-thread, plains muhly, threadleaf sedge, and many forbs. This is one of the most accessible areas in northwestern North Dakota where most northern prairie specialties can be readily observed in a small area. Common breeding birds throughout the upland prairie area include Baird's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, and Chestnut-collared Longspur. In a slow, 2-hour morning walk here at least 14 other grassland bird species can also be seen, such as Ferruginous Hawk, Northern Harrier, Marbled Godwit, and Bobolink.

The upland area borders extensive, moderately brackish marshes to the south and southwest. The marshes include much open water and provide habitat for at least 36 breeding bird species, including four grebe and 12 duck species, Forster's Tern, Common Tern, Black Tern, California Gull, and Wilson's Phalarope (California Gulls and Common Terns nest on islands on the main refuge unit south of highway 50).

To the west, about 0.4 miles west of the parking area, is a 40+ acre meadow covered by sedges, tall grasses, and snowberry patches. There find LeConte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Short-eared Owl, and other meadow-dwellers.

In winter Zahl NWR harbors wintering pheasants, and thus is a good area to check for gyrfalcons and prairie falcons. Golden eagles are usually seen also.

Zahl is a tiny town of perhaps 30 people with no public facilities. Nearby Grenora (about 13 miles west) offers a cafe and other services.

### Appam Lake

From the starting point at the junction of highways 50 and 85, go 1 mile east on highway 50 then turn left (north) onto a gravel road, marked by a binocular sign. Go 0.4 miles north and park along the road edge, overlooking Appam Lake to the north and east. Most of the lake and some adjoining upland habitat is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In all but the wettest and driest years, this alkali lake is a very important breeding area for Piping Plover, a Threatened species in the U.S. Great Plains. It is illegal to disturb the plover, so please be cautious and do not approach within 100 yards of any open beach during May through July.

Cross the fence at the "Waterfowl Production Area" sign on the right (east) side of the road and walk 0.3 miles east to the top of the high, barren ground overlooking the lake. Marbled Godwit, Willet, Grasshopper Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Lark Bunting are common around the lake, while Baird's Sparrow and Sprague's Pipit tend to be fairly common. Besides Piping Plover, American Avocet and Eared Grebe are common breeding species on the lake. In spring and late summer this can be an excellent spot for migrant shorebirds, depending on water levels. Many sandpiper species often are encountered including Baird's and White-rumped. In spring both Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes commonly occur, and many others such as Ruddy Turnstone and Black-necked Stilt are rare but regular.

Appam is a tiny town of just a few households. Faded wooded placards along the town's main street identify sites of merchants' buildings that existed long ago.

*This account regards one of several birding areas near Lostwood NWR. This is a convenient and rewarding stop for birders traveling along Hwy 5, between the Westby area and Lostwood or Des Lacs NWRs.*

## **Beaver Lake**

**Authors:** Bob Murphy & Mia Sondreal

**Highlights:** waterfowl, marsh birds

**Spring\*\* Summer\*\* Fall\*\* Winter\***

**Location:** near town of Lignite, north central Burke County

### **DIRECTIONS:**

Lignite (pop. 300) is 1 mile south of Hwy 5. Travel 0.6 miles south of Lignite on Burke County highway no. 11. Then proceed right (west) via gravel road for 2.0 miles, at which point the gravel road curves right (north). The curve area is the starting point and a good place to park, although there is insufficient room for large RVs with trailers. From here, the very rough road that extends south serves as a good foot trail but car travel on this trail is unwise, even for four-wheel drives.

Beaver Lake (approx. 500 acres) lies 1 mile west from the starting point and is hidden from view by low prairie ridges. An extensive marsh (cattail-bulrush-sedge meadow; approx. 2300 acres) surrounds the lake. Most of the marsh lies south and southwest of the starting point. To reach the lake, drive north 0.9 miles from the starting point, then go left (west) 1.0 miles, then turn left (south) and park on the trail. Hike the trail 0.7 miles south through marsh and grassland south, to the lake's northeast shore.

### **BIRDING:**

In spring and summer the Beaver Lake marsh is a place of solitude and discovery, off the beaten path. Common nesting species include Marsh Wren, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and 10 duck species. Also look for LeConte's Sparrow, Sedge Wren, Short-eared Owl, and Wilson's Phalarope. At least 40-50 bird species can be discovered in a 2-hour morning stroll. In some years, several hundred Franklin's Gull nest on the lake margin. The lake also is fair for finding Clark's Grebe. During fall the area is open to hunting, yet Sandhill Cranes and waterfowl often rest quietly on the marsh. Sharp-tailed Grouse, Northern Harrier, Mallard, and Marsh Wren are common components of a fall morning. Thousands of Lesser Snow Geese regularly roost on the lake during October. Merlin and American Rough-legged Hawk are fairly common in early and late fall, respectively. During winter the marsh and surrounding area harbors some pheasants plus the grouse, and probably is among the most promising places in North Dakota for seeing Gyrfalcon and Snowy Owl.

*This account regards one of several birding areas near "Lostwood NWR. This is a convenient and pleasant stop for birders traveling along state Hwy 50, between Lostwood NWR and northeastern Montana or Williston.*

## **Powers Lake**

**Author:** Bob Murphy

**Highlights:** waterfowl, marsh birds

**Spring\*\* Summer\*\* Fall\* Winter\***

**Location:** near town of Powers Lake, southern Burke County

### **DIRECTIONS AND BIRDING:**

The initial starting point for Powers Lake (pop. 500) is the high school on the east side of town. This school is on the south side of state highway 50, 7.5 miles west of Lostwood NWR. At the school turn south off the highway curve and west into town. Drive 0.4 miles until reaching a "T" intersection on the southwest edge of town, then turn left (south) and drive on the blacktop 0.4 miles. Park here along the wide, paved road, near the junction of a gravel road that travels west, away from the lake.

The north end of the lake extends along the east side of the paved road. This is a large (2.5 miles long, approx. 2500 acre) and relatively fresh natural basin with a narrow fringe of bulrush and cattail. A grand marsh (cattail-bulrush-sedge meadow; approx. 2300 acres) extends northwest from the road. Most of the marsh is a federally-owned Waterfowl Production Area, as indicated by signs. In spring and summer simply walk along the road shoulder plus the gravel road that borders the south side of the marsh to see and hear more than 40 bird species. Common breeding species include Western Grebe, American Bittern, rails, 10 duck species, Northern Harrier, Wilson's Phalarope, Black Tern, Sedge Wren, and LeConte's Sparrow. In spring and fall there often are large numbers of diving ducks especially Canvasback and scaup on the lake. More of this extensive lake and marsh complex can be viewed along highway 50 1.4 miles west of Powers Lake. Loggerhead Shrike regularly breed in the latter area, too. While returning through town to the starting point, the small cafe along the south side of the road is a must stop for great sour cream raisin pie.

## LOSTWOOD NWR

**Authors:** Bob Murphy, Gordon Berkey, and Bob Danley

**Highlights:** highly reputed as the quintessential example of northern prairie pothole country, with a full complement of native bird species

**Spring\*\*\*\* summer\*\*\*\* fall\*\*\* winter\*\***

**Location:** south central Burke and north central Mountrail counties;  
18 miles west of Kenmare; 19 miles north of Stanley; 70 miles northwest of Minot

### DIRECTIONS:

Initial starting point is the refuge headquarters, located 0.5 miles west of the entrance sign on state highway 8, 5.5 miles north of state highway 50. The main office door is always open; just inside there's an information area and restrooms. A checklist of refuge birds and other vertebrate animals is available, as is a refuge auto tour leaflet with descriptions corresponding to numbered stops. A map with current birding hotspots often is posted during spring and summer.

There is only one road open to public vehicle travel. This 7.5-mile long gravel road begins at the starting point and winds south through the refuge center. It's open during May through September and is navigable in all but the wettest weather. The route encompasses nearly all representative habitats, especially hilly to rolling native prairie dotted with small grassy sloughs, cattail-bulrush marshes, big alkali lakes, and occasional thickets of trees and shrubs. Usually the gate at the road end is locked but there's ample area to turn around, even for most RVs. Birders may park and hike up to 100 yards from this road but can't roam freely on the refuge except in the 5,500-acre Wilderness Area, which comprises the northwest part of the refuge.

### BIRDING:

More than 250 bird species have been documented on this spectacular 27,000-acre refuge. Lostwood probably is the best stop in North Dakota to see Sharp-tailed Grouse, Piping Plover, Baird's Sparrow, and Sprague's Pipit in one place, plus experience most other species of prairie-nesting ducks, shorebirds, and passerines amidst acres and acres of pristine prairie. The refuge generally is at its best on May and June mornings.

In spring and summer the headquarters area is good for several raptor species especially Cooper's Hawk and sometimes Long-eared Owl. Say's Phoebe and Black-billed Magpie usually nest here, too, and occasionally Black-billed Cuckoo. The slough immediately south of the office usually provides a good mix of prairie ducks. In tall grasses on the west end of this slough are Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Across the gravel road to the west usually LeConte's Sparrow sings in low, grassy areas.

Proceeding away from headquarters, keep in mind that local occurrence of prairie birds can be unpredictable from year to year. This is especially true on Lostwood's very dynamic prairies, which experience fire or a heavy grazing impact every few years, as

they did historically. What seems a good stopping point for Baird's Sparrow one year may be blackened in early spring the following year. Drought cycles and annual shifts in regional distribution also influence local birds and birding. Thus, it's particularly important on Lostwood to bird a cross-section of representative habitats, from recently disturbed areas to those that appear well-rested from fire and grazing disturbances. Expect wetland-associated species to be scarce in dry years. See helpful hints for bird-finding in the refuge checklist.

Zero your mileage at the refuge headquarters office and follow the "Auto Tour" sign, taking the left gravel road through a metal gate and towards the fire tower. The fire tower area (0.8 miles) is a fair bet for Sprague's Pipit; find the pipit by listening closely for its ringing, descending song over high prairie knolls and ridges. Traveling west, the marsh and meadow that adjoin the road at 1.2 miles is often good for Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, and Sedge Wren. For the next 2.5 miles the road passes prairie, sloughs, and several burned-out tree clumps. There are good birding opportunities all along the way. Old cropland areas (between 2.0 and 3.0 miles) have been recently reseeded to native plants, and Gray Partridge occasionally are found in these sites. Swainson's hawks nest each year in this area, too. Upper hill slopes typically support Grasshopper and Baird's sparrows, and Bobolinks inhabit broad stretches of lower, moister prairie. Horned Grebe, Wilson's Phalarope, and Black Tern are fairly common in the small sloughs most years. Northern Harriers are common, as are Short-eared Owls in some years. During spring through fall, the small copses of quaking aspen are used by at least 30 bird species such as Western Kingbird, Mountain Bluebird, Baltimore Oriole, Red-tailed Hawk, kinglets, vireos, and a variety of warblers.

Stop along the narrow strip between the lakes at 4.0 miles. To the south (left) is a large alkali lake that typically supports Eared Grebes, American Avocets, phalaropes, and other migrant shorebirds. Thousands of ducks and American Coot often stage here in fall, feeding on wigeongrass. In spring this is a fairly good area to see migrant Peregrine Falcons hunting shorebirds. To the right (north) is a large, relatively fresh slough with Horned Grebe, American Bittern, Canvasback, Redhead, Marsh Wren, and many other breeding waterbird species. Several rare but regular migrant species have been documented here in spring such as Whimbrel and Hudsonian Godwit.

Most years, the best spot to see Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, and Sharp-tailed Grouse is the Grouse Blind area, about 5.1 miles from the starting point. The blind usually is removed by late spring but the site is marked by a sign along the road. Be sure to walk, look, and listen here. This is a broad, high prairie plateau that supports many other prairie bird species as well. The prairie east of the road often is good also. Southwest of this high prairie is a quaint marsh rimmed with bulrush and replete with the sounds of American Coot, Pied-billed Grebe, Sora, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

A small round slough adjoins the west side of the road at mile 5.4. This often is a great place to observe breeding Ruddy Duck. About 100 yards east is a small fen where Virginia Rail and Yellow Rail sometimes occur, along with nesting Common Snipe.



Continue to mile 6.3, stopping at the Piping Plover auto-tour sign. From the hilltop just east of the road, scan the alkali lake beaches of Upper Lostwood Lake with a spotting scope for Piping Plover and American Avocet. Fence enclosures of various designs are used to deter predators from plover eggs and chicks. Do not approach these beaches or otherwise disturb the plovers. By late summer the water draws down and myriad shorebird species appear especially Baird's, White-rumped, Stilt, and other sandpipers and dowitchers.

The high prairie country surrounding this point annually supports Marbled Godwit, Willet, and Upland Sandpiper. Following a livestock grazing treatment, Chestnut-collared Longspur can be found here and occasionally Lark Bunting, amidst Vesper, Clay-colored, and other sparrow species. This habitat should support Burrowing Owl, but the species has become very rare over most of North Dakota and hasn't been observed on Lostwood since the 1970s.

Near the end of the road on the west side is a small, round lake that often supports many diving ducks, grebes, and black terns. In spring most years, Red-necked Phalaropes abound here and on Upper Lostwood Lake to the east.

Returning to the starting point, consider a long walk along a refuge trail that runs west and north of headquarters to Iverson Lake. Officially, this is closed to the public but birders on foot often are allowed; check with the refuge manager. The trail offers a mellow, 2- to 4-mile (round-trip) walk through some of Lostwood's finest prairie. There are several major wetland birding spots along the trail, including 25-acre Teal Slough at 0.8 miles and 220-acre Iverson Slough at 1.3-2.0 miles from headquarters. The high knoll along the east side of the trail at 1.2 miles always has a large grouse lek and several pipit territories. During mid-May through June, nearly all bird species native to northern mixed prairie can be observed or at least heard on a memorable morning or evening walk. On September evenings flocks of Sandhill Crane often roost on the west shore of the large lake east of the trail. Recent refuge records of Whooping Crane also are from this area.

In winter, Lostwood birding may resemble an arctic outing. A trek on skis or snowshoes across the stark, snowy prairie offers solitude but sparse birding; perhaps a dozen species might be recorded on a good day. However, due to local abundance of sharp-tailed grouse the area is a good bet for gyrfalcon. Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur often are found. Bohemian Waxwing and Northern Shrike use the headquarters area.

#### **OTHER:**

The refuge is open an hour before sunrise to an hour after sunset. Office hours are 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., weekdays. The refuge maintains an observation blind on a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek during April and May. The blind is reserved by phoning refuge headquarters at (701) 848-2722. There is no overnight camping on the refuge. Kenmare, Stanley, Powers Lake, and Bowbells all offer motel, camping, food, and gas station services 17-19 miles from refuge headquarters.

*This account regards birding areas close to Lostwood NWR. This is a quick, fun stop for birders traveling between Lostwood NWR and Kenmare/Des Lacs NWR.*

## **Bob & Ann Gammell Longspur Pasture**

**Author:** Bob Murphy

**Highlights:** Chestnut-collared Longspur, Burrowing Owl

**Spring\*\* Summer\*\* Fall\* Winter\***

**Location:** 4 miles northeast of Lostwood NWR, Burke County

### **DIRECTIONS AND BIRDING:**

This is a traditional birding stop along the “Niobe Road” between Des Lacs and Lostwood NWRs. The native prairie remnant was among favorite birding sites of Dr. Bob and Ann Gammell, stellar birders from Kenmare during the 1940s-70s. Neither Des Lacs or Lostwood offers many opportunities to view Chestnut-Collared Longspur, but the species is readily seen here during late spring through summer. As well, this is one of few known breeding sites for Burrowing Owl remaining in northwestern and north central North Dakota; breeding was confirmed several years during the 1990s.

Driving west from Des Lacs along the paved county highway (in Burke County it's county highway no. 16), go 4.2 miles west of the railroad crossing at the tiny town of Niobe. On the south side of the road, a single row of trees borders the east side of a 1/2-mile wide parcel of native prairie. A gravel road borders the west side of the tract. If coming from Lostwood NWR, travel only 1.1 miles east from highway 8. Park on either corner, safely off the county highway. This land is public (state-owned), leased for livestock grazing. Aside from prairie hills far to the south, this is the only native prairie around. It's been grazed annually by horses for years. The mares and their colts tolerate visitors, but be very careful to not leave an open gate.

Cross the fence and walk slowly through this area. Typically there are at least five or six male longspurs defending breeding territories on the north half of the pasture. Sprague's Pipit is fairly common here, as are Willet and Marbled Godwit. Burrowing Owls tend to be quite secretive here. The best opportunity to detect them is early morning or after sunset, in early May or July. There is a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek on a slight prairie ridge, not far south of the highway.

Note the distinct escarpment of the Missouri Coteau about 1 mile south of Longspur Pasture. This 12- to 20-mile wide glacial moraine extends from northwestern Iowa to southeastern Alberta and contains most of the continent's best remaining prairie pothole habitat, including Lostwood NWR.

## DES LACS NWR

**Authors:** Bob Murphy, Ron Martin, and Dan Severson

**Highlights:** grebes and other marshbirds, waterfowl, eastern woodland species

**Spring\*\*\*\* summer\*\*\*\* fall\*\*\* winter\*\***

**Location:** Kenmare, northwestern Ward County

### **DIRECTIONS:**

Des Lacs Refuge, with Kenmare at its center, is a traditional stopover point for birders traveling from J. Clark Salyer to Lostwood (or vice-versa). Kenmare (pop. 1200) is on state highway 52, about 55 miles northwest of Minot. Des Lacs Refuge headquarters is 0.5 miles west of Kenmare just off the junction of county roads no. 1A and 2. There are bold signs in and around the town that will help point you to headquarters. The checklist for refuge birds is the "Souris Loop" list, which also includes Upper Souris and J. Clark Salyer NWRs. This list is available at refuge headquarters, along with other general information leaflets. Des Lacs Refuge

There are 3 good roads on the refuge that are open to public vehicle travel; all 3 can be negotiated in all but the wettest weather. Thus, below birding descriptions are organized according to road. Birders may park and hike up to 100 yards from these roads. There also are several excellent hiking trails at Des Lacs that cover a variety of distances, terrain, and habitats. Check with refuge personnel or information pamphlets for details on these; some are only open certain months of the year.

### **BIRDING:**

Des Lacs NWR probably offers more bird species diversity than most refuges of its size in the northern plains. Within 5 miles of Kenmare and refuge headquarters there are examples of mixed grass prairie, mature ash-elm woodland, open lake, deep and shallow marsh, wet meadow, and brushy coulee habitats. At least 230 bird species have been documented on this 19,500-acre refuge. Des Lacs is an excellent place for viewing breeding western grebes and 4 other grebe species (Clark's also possible), plus myriad breeding waterfowl (12 species) and other marsh and wading birds. In late fall, nearly one-half million lesser snow geese use this refuge. This river valley can be a great place to witness fall and spring migrations of raptors as well as waterfowl.

The "Old Lake Road" is a graveled, state-designated "Scenic Byway" that extends about 7 miles south from Kenmare along the east side of the lower refuge impoundments. This road provides great access to grassland and extensive marsh habitats. Find your way to the quaint town square of Kenmare. Zero your odometer at the square and drive down the street 1 more block towards the Middle Lake. Turn left at the bottom of the hill and enjoy the drive south along the lake, parallel to the RR tracks (on your right). From about mile 2.3 to 5.3 miles there are several major marsh impoundments close by that offer viewing of at least 30 species of waterbirds during spring and early summer. In fall these marshes often hold many staging Tundra Swan and Canvasback, which feed on

the abundant sago pondweed. Golden Eagle is fairly predictable along this stretch in winter. At mile 5.3 ("Munch's Coulee"), a 1-mile hiking trail will take you through coulee shrubland, woodland, and grassland habitats. The grassland leg should yield Baird's Sparrow in spring and early summer, and Sprague's Pipit can be found displaying above the top of the upper hillslopes facing the lake. Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Swainson's Hawk often are here, too. The Old Lake Road continues about another 2 miles then joins highway 52.

Travel next to refuge headquarters just west of Kenmare. Stop at the overlook next to the entrance road to view the north end of the Middle Des Lacs Lake. This reed-covered area supports a small Western Grebe colony most years, plus other over-water nesters. To visit Tasker's Coulee, find county road 1A at the entrance road to headquarters. Follow this gravel road 1.8 miles then turn left (east) at the sign and drive another 0.4 miles to the entrance gate. The road drops steeply into Tasker's and may not accommodate large RVs especially during heavy rains. Tasker's Coulee is open only during daylight hours, May through September. The area's nicely sheltered, mature woodland is a good bet for spring warblers. Local breeding species include Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, both grosbeak species (Black-headed much less common, hybrids possible), Veery, Cooper's Hawk, Eastern Wood Pewee, woodpeckers, others.

The "Boat Dock Road," another graveled "Scenic Byway," extends 5 miles north of Kenmare, following the west side of an extensive wet meadow and the long Upper Lake. The drive mostly is wooded with good access to meadow, lake, woodland, and wooded coulee habitats. It's shady in summer and offers shelter from brisk west winds in spring and fall. To explore the area, return to the headquarters entrance road, then take county road 1 only 0.4 miles towards Kenmare but make the first left (north) turn, still on county road 1, and drive another 0.6 miles. Follow the gravel road turnoff to the right, over the railroad tracks. After zeroing your odometer at the tracks, stop at 0.2 to get out and scan the wet meadow east of the trail for marsh birds. A few breeding LeConte's sparrows and Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows can be detected in this area most years. Sedge Wren and Northern Harrier are good bets. Sprague's Pipit usually can be heard on calm spring mornings above the steep hill to the west. Continue to 1.0 miles, at the pull-out on the south end of the Upper Lake. Water depth at the end of this extensive lake varies annually, and so does the local bird makeup. In some springs you can see 5 breeding grebe species here, plus nesting Ruddy Duck, Redhead, Black Tern, and many others. This often is a loafing area for nonbreeding White Pelican. There is another pull-out at 1.4 miles, with information signs.

Follow the road until 3.7 miles, stopping along the way to observe woodland edge birds. At 3.7 miles, mature woodland on the left (west) side harbors Veery, Black-and-White Warbler, and Red-eyed Vireo. The boat dock area, at mile 4.0, is a great picnic stop with an excellent view of the open lake dotted mainly with Eared Grebe, Western Grebe, and hundreds of diving ducks. You can return to Kenmare along the same route, or else follow the gravel road west out of the valley to the farmlands above.

Des Lacs offers fairly good birding in winter. Kenmare is the center of a Christmas Bird Count that's been conducted since 1939. On average 22 species are recorded. High and low annual counts are 9 and 33 species; 76 species have been recorded over all years combined. Look for Northern Goshawk along the Boat Dock road, along with both waxwings and Pine Grosbeak. Gray Partridge, Short-eared Owl, Snow Bunting, and Lapland Longspur are found in open fields around Kenmare most winters. Snowy Owls are spotted in these open habitats most years, usually atop utility poles. Northern Shrike usually inhabit the south end of the refuge near the highway 52 overpass.

**OTHER:**

Kenmare could be considered the birthplace of North Dakota birding. Due mainly to the efforts of Dr. Bob and Ann Gammell, Kenmare had an active birding club through the 1970s and hosted the first meeting of the American Birding Association in 1973. ABA returned in 1994 to North Dakota, with tours to Des Lacs and other "Souris Loop" Refuges plus Lostwood NWR.

Des Lacs NWR is open during daylight hours. Office hours are 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., weekdays. The refuge maintains an observation blind on a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek during April and May. This blind can be reserved by phoning refuge headquarters (701-385-4046). There's no overnight camping on the refuge. Nearby Kenmare offers gas stations, unusually good motel facilities, camping, great food including a Chinese restaurant and a locally-owned pizza spot, plus a town square with its authentic Danish windmill.

