

PRESCOTT AREA BIRDING TRAILS: A SELF-GUIDED TOUR



---Welcome---

Welcome to Prescott – a birder’s paradise! Birding is a fast-growing hobby and a great way to enjoy and get out and get into the natural world. Sites listed in this guide are good spots for novice and expert birders of all ages. Take an hour; take a week—it’s up to you. We’re certain you’ll return to Prescott.

With pleasant weather, over 350 species of birds, and an exceptional variety of habitats to explore, the Prescott area is a delight year-round. This guide will direct you to many of the best and most accessible sites.

The following descriptions mention just a few of the bird species you might find at each site, with an emphasis on species unique to the Southwest. Uncommon species seen at each site

are noted under the “Rare but possible” headings. Some species, such as Lesser Goldfinch, may be found in almost any setting and season. Many others, like Lazuli Buntings, stop by in spring and fall migrations. Wintering ducks have earned our lakes the special Important Bird Area designation. The best viewing time is early in the day when birds are more active. Please remember that birds don’t necessarily like out attention. Birding requires patience and perseverance, but the rewards are worth the effort. Don’t forget your camera!

Bring along your binoculars, a field guide, sunscreen, and water.

Each site is coded for its best seasons:

Sp = Spring

S = Summer

F = Fall

W = Winter

Sites with the greatest appeal for families are marked with this icon:



Directions for many sites begin at the center of Prescott, Courthouse Square. Pick up a free visitor’s map at the Chamber of Commerce, 117 W Goodwin St., on the SW corner of the Square.



Prescott Town Tour

This tour can keep a birder busy for days! It includes Watson Woods, Watson Lake and the Peavine Trail, several Willow Lake Trails, the Granite Dells neighborhood, and the Flume Trail

Driving direction for this tour are from Courthouse Square, the center of downtown Prescott, at N 34.32485, W 112.28211.



Watson Woods : Sp, Su, F, W {families}, Riparian

To reach **Watson Woods**, head eastbound on Gurley St, then head left (north) onto Hgwy 89. In 2.3 miles, turn right onto Prescott Lakes Parkway, cross the bridge and turn left immediately where you see the Humane Society building on Sundog Ranch Rd. On your left, you will see the Peavine Trail parking lot, (\$2 fee area) at N 34.57544, W112.42702.

Rare but possible: Black-and-White and Chestnut-sided Warblers, Red-shouldered Hawk (migration). Red-breasted Sapsucker, Harlan's Hawk, Pacific Wren, White-throated Sparrows (winter).

Arizona specialties: Bridled Titmouse, Lucy's Warbler, Ladderback woodpeckers, Wood Duck, Blue Grosbeak, Common Black Hawk

Watson Woods can be magic in any season. In spring and fall, look for warblers and flycatchers. Winter brings sparrows, sapsuckers, and raptors. From the parking lot walk west down the path, cross

over the old railroad bed (the Peavine Trail) and go through the walk-in fence opening. Head down a short way into the preserve. After a few yards, the trail splits. Turn right, towards the lake. The trail again splits around a small pond where you may find skulking Wood Ducks, migrating warblers, or a Pacific Wren in winter. Generally, the west (left) fork is best. At the north end of the pond you'll find a red bridge over Granite Creek. Crossing the bridge will take you along the west side of the woods to Watson Lake. Return back to the bridge and head east a short stretch until the trail returns up to the railroad bed. Turning left (north) will take you along the Peavine Trail to the east side of Watson Lake. Along these trails, grasses harbor wintering sparrows. At the lake edges, you could see dabbling ducks, Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, Wilson's Snipe and other shorebirds in season. Raptors abound: Bald Eagles, wintering Merlins and Northern Harriers, Peregrine Falcons, and Osprey. In the cottonwoods, Red-tailed hawks, Cooper's Hawks and Great Horned Owls nest. Listen for the screaming of the Common Black Hawk as well.



Peavine Trail: Sp, Su, F, W

Rare but possible: Common Yellowthroat, wintering Sparrows, Greater Roadrunner, Western Screech Owl

AZ Specialties: Rufous-crowned Sparrow, AZ Bald Eagle, Ladderback Woodpecker

The Peavine Trail is the level, wide pathway that heads northward from the same parking lot (fee) used for access to Watson Woods and Watson Lake. It is a perfect choice for a brisk walk or easy birding through three habitats—cottonwood riparian, lakeside, and the magical mix of chaparral and red rocks that is the Dells. For the first mile, this trail forms the east boundary of Watson Woods and Watson Lake. For the next mile, it enters the Dells. For maps of the entire trail and descriptions of connecting trails, go to <http://www.cityofprescott.net/services/parks/trails/>. Or simply pick up a map from the box by the entrance sign and parking kiosk. The Dells are home to bobcats, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, White-throated Swifts and Zone-tailed Hawks, as well as Bridled Titmouse, Violet-green Swallows, and Anna's Hummingbirds. Walking the Peavine will offer you good exercise, great landscape views, and a uniquely Arizona array of bird species. Since the trail is fine gravel, it can be difficult for some wheelchairs; otherwise it's an open, user-friendly trail, good for sharing with your pet.



Watson Lake : SP, Su, F, W

It's hard to say just where Watson Woods ends and **Watson Lake** begins. Not that it matters; it's all good.



Rare but possible: Common Loon, Grebes, Red-breasted and Hooded Merganser, Blue-winged Teal, Osprey, Tundra Swan, shorebirds when the lake is low

Arizona specialties: Wintering ducks galore, including Wood Ducks. Also AZ Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Neotropic Cormorant in season

From the Peavine trailhead parking lot (fee), birding your way through Watson Woods or along the Peavine Trail (see above) brings you to the south end of Watson Lake. Two other access points are on the west side of the lake. If you are driving northbound on Hgwy 89, take the first right after the intersection with Prescott Lakes Parkway into an overlook with about a dozen parking spaces. Note: you cannot turn left into this overlook from the southbound lanes. Here you can find ducks and shorebirds just below you, and you can scope out the entire lake. Be aware that you are looking east, so the lighting can be tough in the morning. Afternoons or evenings are perfect. Continuing north on Hgwy 89 brings you to a roundabout. Turning right here takes you into Watson Lake Park (fee), which has two good overlooks for the north end of the lake. The water is deeper here, so look for diving ducks and the occasional loon. Going straight takes you uphill to an overlook parking area. Turning right just before the restroom takes you down to a boat dock. You can walk the lake edge trails from any of these overlooks.



Willow Lake : Sp, F, W

Rare but possible: Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Neotropic Cormorant, Greater White-fronted Goose, Hooded Merganser, the occasional Scoter, Vaux's Swift, Black Tern, shorebirds, Pelicans, Tundra Swan, Grebes, breeding and migrant Warblers

AZ Specialties: AZ Bald Eagle, hundreds of wintering ducks, Bronzed Cowbirds, Phainopepla, Bridled Titmouse, Wood Duck

Willow Lake sports four access points, each of which brings you to the level, wide, pet-friendly trail that circles the lake. Only the north access point, in Heritage Park, is a fee area.

Access point 1: The South East side

From the center of town, head east on Hgwy 69 to the northbound turn onto Hgwy 89. Go north on Hgwy 89 3.6 miles to the roundabout. Go left here to Willow Lake Drive. Go another 0.6 miles to the first unpaved turnout near some utility boxes. This part of the lake is best when water is high, but

visibility can be poor unless you get off the trail. That said, this is a good starting point for a nice long walk with your family and your pet around Willow. As you face the lake, head left along the trail.

Access point 2: The South side

When you are ready to return to your vehicle, turn right and continue on Willow Lake Rd for another half-mile to a small unpaved pullout on your right. The pullout is just after the road curves left around a bend. You will see a gate with an opening in the fence. Park at the pullout and walk in through the weeds towards the lake or just stroll along the lakeside trail. You will be looking across the lake towards the boat ramp on the north shore. This south side can have migrating shorebirds if water levels are low. It has Marsh Wrens and Lincoln's Sparrows in winter, Common Yellowthroats, and wonderful views of wintering waterfowl and raptors overhead. Look for migrating Swifts in fall. Common Nighthawks visit at dusk in the summer. The small islands off shore harbor many a Wood Duck. In the fall and winter, this south side of Willow is unparalleled if you want to enjoy an afternoon stroll to observe hundreds of freshly-plumaged ducks. The afternoon sun highlights everything just perfectly.

Access Point 3: The "Dog Park" trailhead:

Following the shoreline westward from the south access brings you to the "Dog Park" trailhead. Turn right where Willow Lake Rd. ends at Willow Creek Rd. In a half-mile past that intersection, turn right at the dog park and drive past the park and a baseball field to an unpaved trailhead parking lot. (Restrooms are at the ball field.) Head left along the lakeside trail. You will come to a lovely peninsula of old Cottonwoods. Look for Great Horned Owls, nesting Great Blue Herons, Yellow and Lucy's Warblers, and colorful Orioles. Scan the utility poles for raptors, including Merlin, Prairie and Peregrine Falcon. The dry slopes near the trail are home to wintering sparrows and a Roadrunner or two. This side of the lake can have Hooded Mergansers in winter and early spring. Just beyond this peninsula, you will see a dead willow tree along the shore that is a very active Cormorant rookery in the early spring.



Access Point 4: Heritage Park and the north shore:

Returning to Willow Creek Road, turn right again for the fourth access point, 0.7 miles northbound up the road. Turn right at Heritage Park Road, opposite the main entrance to Embry-Riddle University, then make a quick right again, for the entrance to Heritage Park (fee area). (Park kiosk at N 34.61251, W - 112.44376) This access has restrooms, great trails the City of Prescott has established in the Dells bordering the lake, and a boat ramp (nonmotorized boats only). From the boat ramp dock, look along the lakeshore trees for warblers, Bronzed Cowbirds, Bullock's oriole, Phainopepla, and Bridled or Juniper Titmouse. Looking across the lake, scan the whitewashed "Cormorant Rock" near to shore for the occasional Neotropic Cormorant among the Double-crested. The lake can have American White Pelicans in migration, Great and Snowy Egrets, and many ducks and Grebes. Look for Great Blue, Night, and Green Herons on the shoreline.

Granite Dells and the Flume Trail: Sp, S, F

Rare but possible: Black-throated Gray Warbler, American Dipper

AZ specialties: Wood Duck, Bridled Titmouse, Lucy's Warbler, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Zone-tailed Hawk, Common Black Hawk

Granite Dells Rd at Hgwy 89: N 34.60142, W -112.42410

As outlined above, head East from the Courthouse Square on Gurley St, (Hgwy 69). Go 1.3 miles and turn left (north) to Hgwy 89. Travel 4.2 miles, past Watson Lake and straight through the roundabout to a right turn onto Granite Dells Road. This will take you to two good birding trails. The first is the **"Flume Trail"**, a loop trail part of which parallels a nice riparian stretch of Granite Creek. The unpaved parking pullout is on your right; just a short ways after the turn onto Granite Dells Rd. The trail has a bit of rock scrambling as it works its way to a fork. Stay left to follow the creek, or go right to loop around through the rocky Dells first. Look for migrant warblers and Empidonax Flycatchers in the scrub, Zone-tailed and Cooper's Hawks overhead, and Wood Ducks in the creek. Listen for a Rufous-crowned Sparrow in the rocky Dells.

Returning to the paved road, continue eastbound. In about 0.5 miles, you will reach a T-intersection just after the bridge over Granite Creek. (N 34.60300, W -112.41621) Park to the right and bird along the road that follows the creek. That road turns right, then left as it winds through a neighborhood. This area boasts a spattering of riparian, chaparral, and rocky Dells habitat and can be quite birdy. Please use caution, as you are walking along a public road and through a neighborhood. Respect private property and no trespassing signs.

Granite Basin Tour: Granite Basin Lake and Wilderness Area



*If you only have time for one stop, especially in the warmer months, head to **Granite Basin**. You'll find high-altitude coolness, picnic tables, and a nice mix of habitats that make it a regular stop on local birders' lists. Habitat is part Ponderosa forest, part high chaparral, with Mint Creek and the small reservoir called Granite Basin Lake.*

Driving direction for this tour are from Courthouse Square, the center of downtown Prescott, at N 34.32485, W 112.28211.

Sp, S, F

Rare but possible: Peregrine Falcon, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Northern Parula, Red Crossbill, Williamson's Sapsucker, Northern Pygmy-owl

AZ Specialties: Zone-tailed hawk, Olive Warbler, Bridled and Juniper Titmouse, Grace's Warbler

From the Square, drive north on Montezuma. The road turns and changes name until you are westbound on Iron Springs Rd. About 4.8 miles from town, turn right at the brown sign for Granite Basin Road. Following this road for 3.2 miles, you will arrive at “Wekuvde”, the first of four Forest Service parking areas along a loop road beside the lake. All are USFS fee areas with restrooms. Park here, then walk west 50 yards past a gazebo until you are walking along the driving loop road. Turn right to head towards the lake. Bird the road or any of the trails that intersect. Walking the road until you reach the lake, then working the trails around and near the lake can make a great visit. To begin closer to the Wilderness Area trail that climbs Granite Mountain (trail 261), drive past the first parking area and continue to the “Playa” parking area. The trail drops into the large cottonwoods from the west side of the parking lot. Some higher parts are closed during Peregrine Falcon nesting season—contact the USFS for details at (928)-443-8000.

Chino Valley Tour

This tour offers a great stretch of high desert grasslands, pinion-juniper, as well as some special, out-of-the-way riparian birding.

Mileages for this loop are from the intersection of Hgwy 89 and Hgwy 89A near the Prescott Airport.
N 34.337748, W -112.26368



Sp, S, F, W

Rare but possible: Swainson's Hawk, Lark Buntings and Lark Sparrows in migration. In Winter, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Ferruginous Hawk, and the rare Rough-legged Hawk. Also Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, Chipping and Brewer's Sparrows. In breeding season, Indigo Bunting, Myiarchus Flycatchers, Orioles.

AZ specialties: Black-throated Sparrow, Scott's Oriole, Pinyon Jay, Lillian's (Eastern) Meadowlark, Lesser Nighthawk, Vermillion Flycatcher

This is mostly a driving route, and much of the road is graded dirt, difficult after a rain. Keep alert for fast-moving trucks, especially near Chino. If you drive north 8.9 miles on Hgwy 89 from the Hgwy 89/Hgwy 89A interchange, you will reach the commercial center of Chino Valley at Road 2 North, with a Safeway grocery store on your right. In winter, begin in the town itself, driving roads just west of Hgwy 89 from Road 4 South to Road 5 North. Especially on Road 1 West and Road 5 North, "**Hawk Alley**", scan the utility poles for raptors. On the west edge of town, Sparrows and Meadowlarks perch on the fences.

Returning to the center of town at Road 2 North, head northward on Hgwy 89 for 0.7 miles to a right (east) turn onto **Perkinsville Road** (County Road 70). Along the 24-mile drive to Perkinsville, scan grasslands, Pinyons, and Century plant blooms for birds of the Pinyon-grasslands. Keep your eyes open for possible Pinyon Jay flocks. At Perkinsville (no services), the road crosses the **Verde River**. At the far end of the bridge, you will see an unpaved parking area on your left. Stop and walk along the river a bit, especially in spring. To complete a loop tour, continue on for 17 miles, carefully following signs for Drake. Note a marked turn left (westward) off from a short paved portion—staying on pavement will take you too far north. You will return to Hgwy 89 shortly beyond the very visible Drake cement plant. Turning left (south) for 19.5 miles returns you to Chino Valley. If you prefer, you can simply return to Chino Valley the way you drove in.

If you prefer a shorter loop, try this: From the center of town at the Safeway, drive north 5.1 miles to a right turn onto **Old Highway 89**. This road parallels the highway and can be quite birdy. Pull well off the road if you are stopping to bird. Raptors work the fields nearby, as do Sparrows and Meadowlarks, both Eastern and Western. In 2 miles, park at the bridge and bird from the roadside. You will see the shell of an old stone building to your left. Just down slope from that is **Sullivan Lake**, which is seasonally wet and a bit of an oasis for antelope and birds. This playa pond is the headwaters of the Verde River. In late fall, look for Mountain Bluebirds, wintering ducks, Prairie Falcon, and the occasional Sage Thrasher.

Senator Highway Ponderosa Forest Tour



If you are birding Prescott after mid-May and are seeking cool and shade, you'll want to head out Senator Highway. This entire tour offers a true Prescott forest experience, and the high-elevation specialties do not disappoint.

Directions for this tour are from the intersection of Gurley St. and Mt. Vernon Street, east of the Courthouse Square. N 34.32290, W -112.27479

Sp, S, F

Rare but possible: Bald Eagle, Gray and Cordilleran Flycatchers, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Hooded Merganser, Lewis' Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, Band-tailed Pigeon, warblers, Brown Creeper

AZ specialties: Red-faced, Grace's, Lucy's, and Olive Warblers, Greater Peewee, Bridled Titmouse, Painted Redstart



All the stops on this tour can be very productive birding. Begin by heading south on Mt Vernon St, which becomes Senator Highway. First stop is a well-marked right turn into **Goldwater Lake**, at N34.30162, W-112.26649 This is a fee area (\$2) with picnic and bathroom facilities, as well as some fishing. After

birding the lake edges and looking for the Bald Eagles in the treetops, try following the shore southward (left as you face the lake) to a trail that crosses the inlet. You can bird the trail through the Ponderosa forest as far as you choose. For the next site, return to Senator Hgwy. and exit right (south) to continue on towards a small group of homes called Groom Creek. At the south end of Groom Creek town, look for a sign and left turn to **Schoolhouse Loop** (2.6 miles from Goldwater Lake)(USFS fee area). This is a short, paved, handicap-accessible trail which can be pleasantly full of Warblers, Flycatchers, and Towhees.

Continuing south on Senator Highway, you will see a sign for Mount Tritle Rd. /Whispering Pines Camp (1.3 miles). This is the second right after the pavement ends. Turn here and bird your way along, avoiding the left fork to Whispering Pines, for about 1.3 miles to a small pullout where the road crosses the Hassayampa River headwaters. Birding around this area can be productive any time of year. A dirt track follows the river north a short ways, and it's worth a look. Driving past the Hassayampa another 0.4 miles brings you to a larger parking pullout for the **Kendall Camp Trail**. (Target practice has made the small sign unreadable...) Park here, then walk along the two-track road that angles right uphill towards some aspens. If you follow this road a ways, you will come to the old fences of Kendall Camp itself. If you have not heard the song of the Greater Peewee yet, this is the spot to stop and listen.

Returning out to Senator Highway, simply turn left (northbound) to backtrack into Prescott. If you have the time, continuing 3.2 miles up Senator Highway (southbound) will bring you to the junction with Walker Road. Birding this area from the road can be good for Red-breasted Nuthatch and Red-faced Warblers.

Walker Road Tour: The Highland Center for Natural History

and Lynx Lake. 

Want to spend a morning with family or friends and get some good birding in at the same time? Try Lynx Lake and the Highland Center for Natural History.

Directions for this tour are from the intersection of Highway 69 and Walker Rd, between Trader Joe's and CostCo

Sp, S, F

Rare but possible: White-winged Scoter, Osprey, Williamson's sapsucker, Northern Parula, Northern Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, Indigo Bunting, fall migrant flycatchers

AZ specialties: Painted Redstart, Red-faced and Grace's Warbler, Black-chinned Sparrow, Bridled and Juniper Titmouse

To reach these Ponderosa forest hotspots, turn southbound onto Walker Rd. After 1.8 miles, you will see the sign to turn left into the **Highlands Center for Natural History**. They have trails, an amphitheater, and a gift shop. The small parking area is just to the right after the entrance gate.

Returning to Walker Road, drive 0.3 miles to the north entrance to **Lynx lake** or 1.0 miles to the south entrance road. Both are USFS fee areas with Forest Service facilities. Birding the trail around the lake,

approximately 2 miles, can be terrific. Note: The east half of this trails is closed during Bald Eagle nesting season, in spring and early summer. Call the Forest Service at 928-443-8000 for details.



From the south parking area, you might follow the trail along the inlet, Lynx Creek, or stay higher and just bird along the paved road that is actually the exit road. Either way, the mix of Ponderosa and dry slopes and streamside habitats can yield a surprising mix of birds, from Red-faced Warblers to Gray Flycatchers to Indigo Buntings , with hopes always for interesting migrants.

Additional birding information

Birds know no boundaries and are not confined to the sties mentioned here. A pocket of trees, a fruiting bush, a spot of water—any of these can offer a bit of birding magic. Hawks watch from power line poles, sparrows rest on fences, meadowlarks sing from weedy fields. So, we encourage you to look around (after you park the car!) and discover these unexpected birding moments for yourself.

A word on **birding etiquette**. The National Audubon Society's guidelines remind us all to:

- Tread lightly and respect boundaries. Do not trespass.
- Take extra care when in a potential or active nesting area. Without safety and privacy, birds will abandon their nests and be stressed.
- Don't frighten the neighbors! Avoid pointing binoculars at other people or their homes.

- And, always—enjoy yourself! Bring your family and get out into the natural world we all call home.

Prescott Audubon Society offers birding trips, many for beginners. Most trips are 2-3 hours long and can introduce to these sites and others, as well as to others who enjoy birding. For a list of scheduled trips, go to prescottaudubon.org or “like” Prescott Audubon Society on Facebook.

With special thanks to Sue Drown and Keith Archibald for their contributions to this guide. For the wonderful photos, we thank John West. Thanks also to Prescott Audubon and the entire local birding community.

