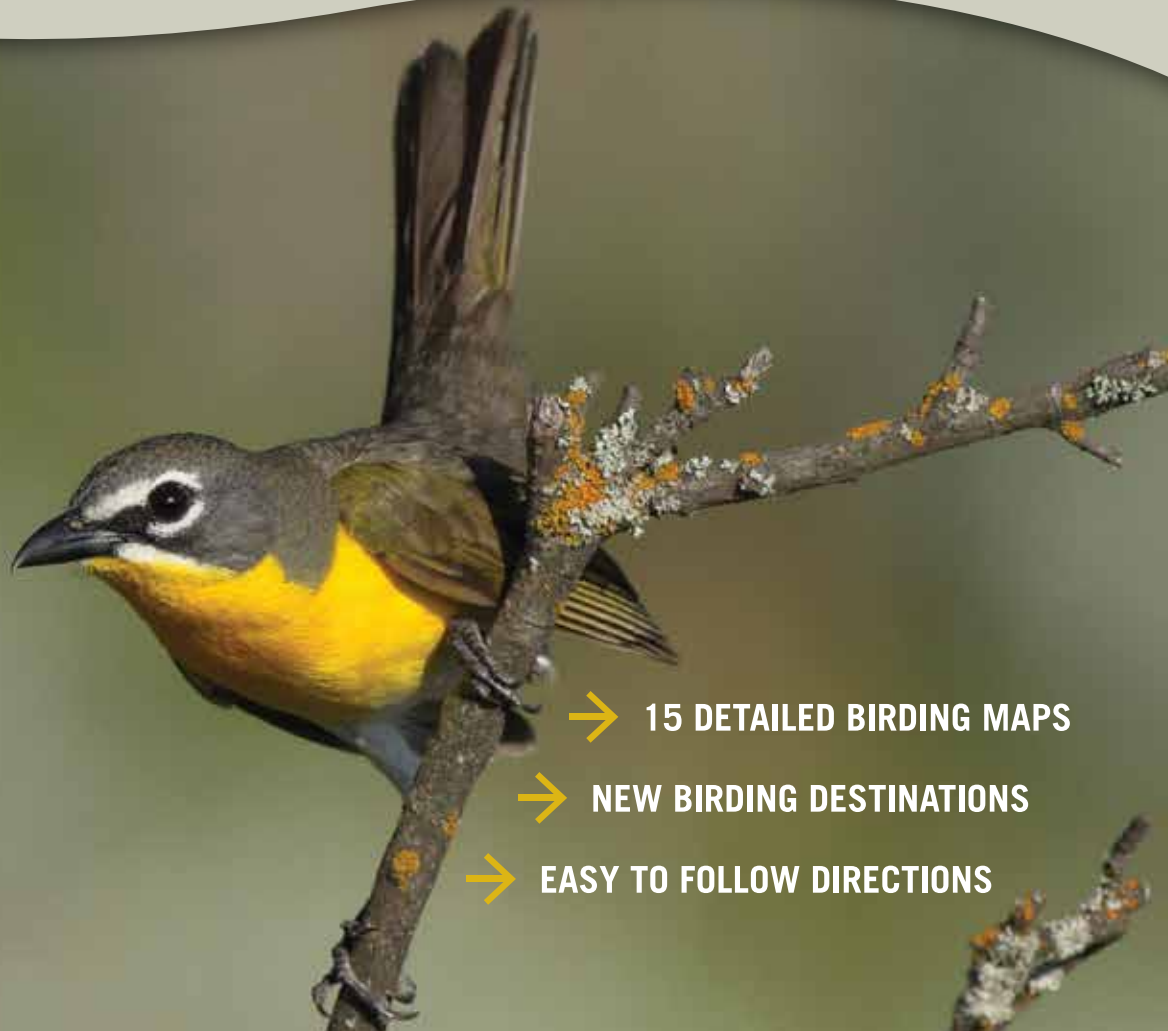
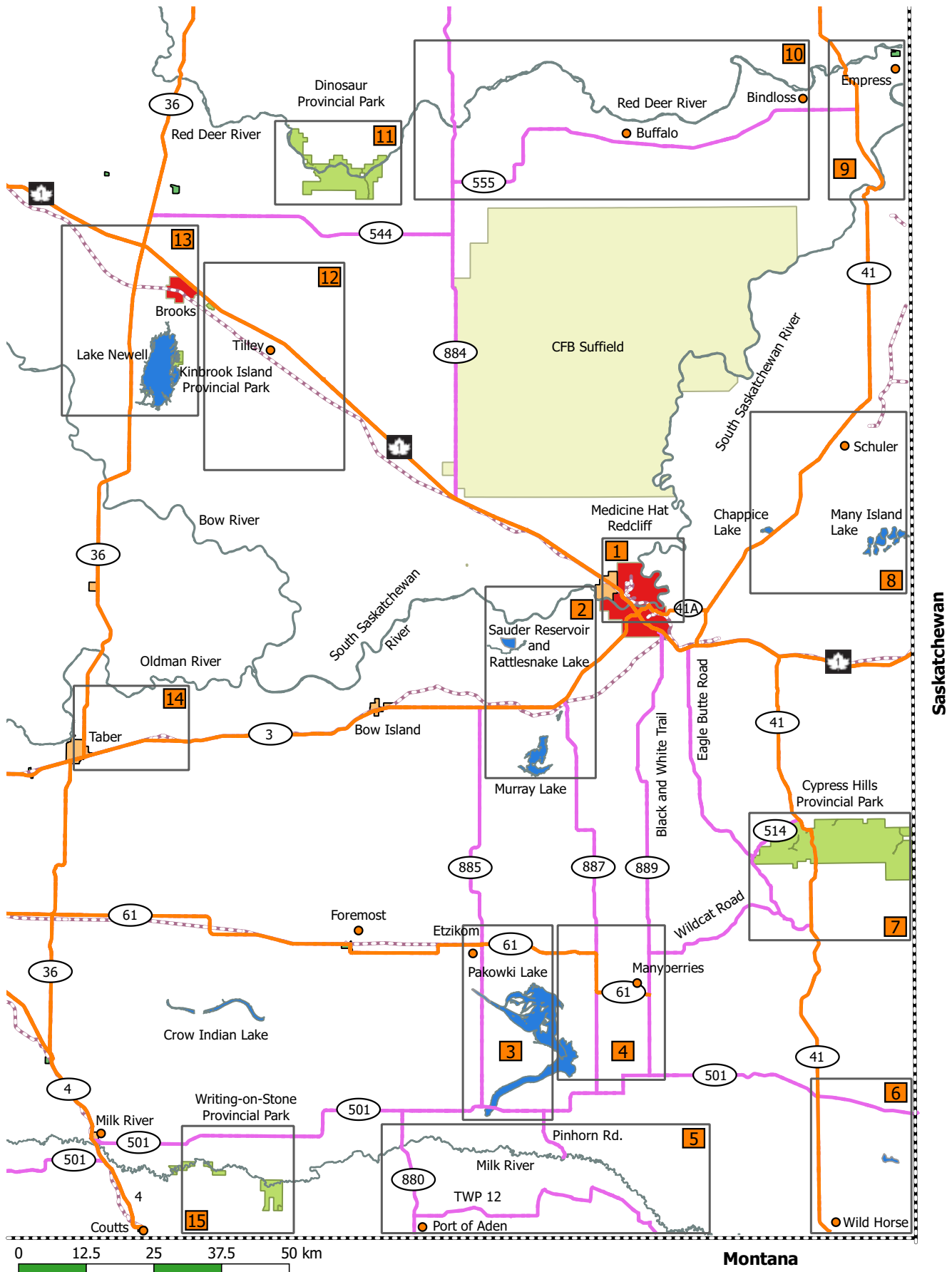


BIRDING TRAILS *of* SOUTHEASTERN ALBERTA



- ➔ 15 DETAILED BIRDING MAPS
- ➔ NEW BIRDING DESTINATIONS
- ➔ EASY TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS



Southeastern Alberta Birding Trails

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 Medicine Hat and Redcliff | 6 Wild Horse Area | 11 Dinosaur Provincial Park |
| 2 Sauder / Murray Reservoirs | 7 Elkwater / Cypress Hills | 12 Tilley Area |
| 3 Pakowki Lake and Etzikom | 8 Chappice and Many Island Lakes | 13 Lake Newell / Kitsim |
| 4 Manyberries Area | 9 Sandy Point / Empress | 14 Taber and Purple Springs |
| 5 Pinhorn / Onefour | 10 Buffalo / Bindloss | 15 Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park |

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Overview

Welcome to Alberta's grasslands! Many hard-to-spot species of birds inhabit these vast, rolling prairies. With good roads and generally sunny weather, you have a great opportunity to tally some unusual sightings.

This guide covers the area between the US border and the Red Deer River, from Hwy 36 to the Saskatchewan border (shown on the overall Southeastern Alberta Birding Trails map, page two). The landscape includes the largest expanses of native grasslands in Alberta, as well as riparian forests along the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan Rivers. Surprisingly, this dry region boasts of numerous wetlands of various sizes. Along the Saskatchewan border, the Cypress Hills rise up as a coniferous island in the midst of the sea of grass. The Canadian Badlands is a tourism destination region that includes this area. A more complete listing of facilities and services can be found at the website: www.canadianbadlands.com

Medicine Hat, with a population of 63,000 people, is the main service centre. Full services are also available in Brooks and Taber, with tourist supplies available in Bow Island, Foremost and Elkwater.

This guide identifies 15 birding trails, each with a detailed map, and a description of the best sites. A clear description guides people along an easy itinerary. Expert birders from the region have combined their experience to describe both the typical species that may likely be encountered, while teasing with some rarities that have been spotted over the years. Other natural features and wildlife, museums and historic sites are mentioned.

The Grasslands Naturalists have published a comprehensive Checklist of the Birds of Southeastern Alberta. This checklist is available on-line at (www.natureline.info/gn). Hardcopies are available at the Police Point Park Nature Centre in Medicine Hat and from the Cypress Hills Provincial Park Visitor Centre (www.cypresshills.com) in Elkwater. Remember that spring comes early, and fall stays late, on the grassland. The earliest migrants (Horned Lark, Tundra Swan, Mountain Bluebird) may return in late March. The birding year draws to a close with spectacular aggregations of Snow Geese in early November.

Several annual bird counts offer a chance to meet local experts and get personal viewing tips. Consider joining these events:

- Medicine Hat Spring Bird and Wildflower Count → Last Sunday in May
- Brooks Spring Bird Count → → → → → → → → → Long Weekend in May
- Writing-on-Stone Prov. Park Spring Bird Count → Weekend after the Brooks Count
- Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count → → → → → Sunday before Christmas
- Cypress Hills Christmas Bird Count → → → → → Saturday after New Year's
- Manyberries Christmas Bird Count → → → → → No fixed date

For more information regarding these counts and current sightings contact the Police Point Park Nature Centre or visit the website (www.natureline.info). Please call 403-529-6225 to report new sightings, or if the guide needs updating.

Roads are generally well maintained. Please observe the 80 km/h speed limit on all gravel roads. Although the visibility is generally excellent, a sudden stretch of washboard can send a speeding vehicle into the ditch. Most gravel roads will be very muddy but passable when wet, but take only a day to dry out after a rain. Please drive only on the designated range and township roads that are indicated by blue signs at intersections. Unnamed roads are mostly private, and require the owner's permission for access. Do not cross fences unless this guide indicates that land is open for walking.

A few safety tips:

- Always leave with a full gas tank. Service stations are available in Elkwater, Empress, Jenner, Foremost, and Milk River. Limited hours and special conditions can apply particularly at Foremost.
- Always carry several litres of drinking water, and some emergency food along with an emergency kit and extra warm clothing, blankets, candles, etc.
- Always park on a gravel surface. Tall dead grass can easily catch fire if it touches the muffler.
- Avoid blocking any gate with your vehicle.
- Save your windshield by slowing down for oncoming traffic.
- Only smoke when standing on gravel or pavement, as prairie grass will burn very easily. Never throw butts out of the vehicle.
- **Some of the remote areas do not have cell phone coverage, particularly south of the Cypress Hills.**

South Saskatchewan River
Dwayne Myers

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TRAIL 1

→ Medicine Hat *and* Redcliff

Specialty species that are often sought for, and which can be relatively reliably found in Medicine Hat include, Violet-green Swallow, Rock Wren, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Spotted Towhee, and Lazuli Bunting.

Trail 1 includes the City of Medicine Hat and the Town of Redcliff. Medicine Hat is divided by the South Saskatchewan River, and has three additional watercourses: Seven Persons, Bullshead and Ross Creeks. The valleys of these streams are particularly attractive to bird species as the flood plains contain riverine forests consisting of cottonwood trees as well as shrubs such as Saskatoon, Chokecherry, and Thorny Buffaloberry, which are preferred by many species of birds. Medicine Hat is blessed with a number of “natural area” parks that border these rivers and creeks and thus the bird diversity is truly astounding. The Christmas Bird Count and May Species Count for Medicine Hat average 45 and 130 species respectively.

Along these streams a great network of biking and walking trails provides easy access. Along the river, waterfowl, gulls, terns, Osprey and soaring Turkey Vultures may be seen. Often in the evening Turkey Vultures may be found perched on the Telus Tower in downtown Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat is a city of 63,000 with all the amenities one might expect. It would make a great headquarters for forays to many of the birding areas in this guide. Of course there are also a wide variety of other unique attractions including a vibrant arts community with corresponding art galleries and bistros, the Esplanade and the Canalta Event Centre which attract a wide variety of first class entertainment, a living butterfly display, shops and shopping centres, the Family Leisure Centre, the Medalta Potteries (National Historic Site) and even a casino for those who like to take a flutter.

In all, eight sites within Medicine Hat and the nearby town of Redcliff are detailed in this guide and are depicted on Map 1.

Spotted Towhee
Dan Schiebelbein





Yellow-breasted Chat
Bob Frew



Brown Thrasher
Milt Spitzer

Lazuli Bunting
Dan Schiebelbein



A → Police Point Park

Police Point Park is the premier natural area within Medicine Hat. This park is well known throughout Alberta as a great place to bird for uncommon species and for birds common to the Medicine Hat area but not usually found elsewhere in Alberta. The park has a great network of trails winding throughout this 160 hectare riparian forest. Police Point Park also contains a Nature Centre (403-529-6225), which is staffed by interpreters who can provide information on trails and on recent sightings both in the park and in the vicinity. The Nature Centre is open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Tuesday through Sunday.

Police Point Park is situated in the city's northeast, on the left bank of the South Saskatchewan River. It can be accessed from the city centre by heading north on the Maple Avenue Bridge, then taking the first right onto Parkview Drive. Continue up the hill, at the sign make a right turn onto Police Point Drive and continue to the end of the road. At times the gate at the entrance to the park may be locked but foot access is allowed and vehicles can be parked on the street adjacent to the golf course.

The diverse vegetation within the park varies from prairie grasses and sagebrush to berry species such as Saskatoon, Chokecherry and Thorny Buffaloberry. Large Plains Cottonwoods, some 300 years old, tower overhead. Willows, Buckbrush and other shrubs abound within the park. The diversity of bird species parallels this floral diversity. Depending on the season, the park may contain nesting Wood Ducks, a colony of nesting Great Blue Herons (across the river in the large cottonwoods near the sewage treatment plant), a Bald Eagle nest near the Great Blue Heron rookery, floating American White Pelicans, nesting Prairie Falcons on the cliffs across from the point of the park and good populations of Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, Spotted Towhee, Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Kingbird, Least Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, American Kestrel, Lark Sparrow, Cooper's Hawk, and many other species. Uncommon species that are sometimes seen include such diverse species as Pileated Woodpecker, Great Horned Owl, Lazuli Bunting and Yellow-breasted Chat. Rarities that have been observed in the park include Eastern Screech-Owl, Long-eared Owl (have nested within the park), Northern Saw-whet Owl, Bullock's Oriole and White-winged Dove.

Coyotes and porcupines are frequently seen in the park as are White-tailed and Mule Deer, Nuttall's Cottontail and occasionally moose. Beavers can be seen along the riverbanks. Bull Snakes are often seen within the park and on occasion Prairie Rattlesnakes have also been seen. Cougars have been seen infrequently in the park.

B → Strathcona Island Park

This park lies directly across the river from Police Point Park and is accessed from Maple Avenue. Signs point east along 5th Street SE to the park. Drive from the entrance to the parking lot at the end (Heritage Pavilion). A number of trails lead from here and all have their attributes. A hiking trail runs along the top of the recently constructed flood protection berm.

The trail leading south from the Heritage Pavilion, around the small pond, is often the best birding route, particularly in the spring and early summer. From the pond continue south across Seven Persons Creek where Lazuli Bunting and Yellow-breasted Chat can be observed. Other species of note include Osprey, White-breasted Nuthatch, Cooper's Hawk, and Brown Thrasher. Rarities observed in the past few years have included Eastern Screech-Owl, Black-billed Cuckoo, Indigo Bunting, McGillivray's Warbler, and Northern Waterthrush.

One can continue south for several kilometres along the creek. Seeps near the former Metis Settlement may contain a good variety of species. If one continues westward along this trail you will access Kin Coulee Park. Also, travelling west along the riverside trails from the Heritage Pavilion to Lion's Park and beyond has produced good results.

C → Kin Coulee Park and Ajax Coulee

Kin Coulee Park is for the most part groomed for picnics and large gatherings but surprisingly, a number of natural areas still exist, particularly along Seven Persons Creek. A small wetland near the Lorne Holden Ballpark has held Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, a variety of duck species (including Canvasback, an unusual species for the middle of a city). In the fall Rusty Blackbird has been tallied here.

A hike up Ajax Coulee can produce Ring-necked Pheasant, Blue Jay, Dark-eyed Junco, occasionally Townsend's Solitaire and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and there has been a sighting of an Eastern Bluebird. The off-leash dog walking area, southwest of the Trans Canada Highway, can be easily accessed by a pedestrian underpass. Although not too esthetically pleasing, it contains sufficient cover of Thorny Buffaloberry and other shrubs, reeds and rushes along the creek. Such species as Common Yellowthroat, Spotted Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Song and Lincoln Sparrows and Lazuli Bunting can be found here. American Tree Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco uses the vegetation in the fall and winter.

These coulees are visible from the Trans Canada Highway. For access, travel north from the Tourist Information Office along College Avenue. Turn west at the bottom of the hill into Kin Coulee Park.

D → Echo Dale Regional Park

Echo Dale Regional Park lies west of the city along the south side of the South Saskatchewan River. Birding this park may be easily combined with a trip to Sauder Reservoir. To access the park take Hwy 3 past the airport and turn right (west) onto Holsom Road. At the park sign (RGE RD 64) proceed north and watch for a variety of species in the wetlands bordering the road. Several species of raptor may be seen along the roadside and the bushes along the road can contain some surprising birds. While proceeding down into the river valley watch the sides of the roads for Lark Sparrow. Watch for Loggerhead Shrike along the entrance road.

This can be a very busy park in the summer, so it is best birded early in the morning although the gate to the park isn't unlocked until 7:00 AM. The east pond is best for birding. Also proceed to the boat launch parking area and take the hiking/biking trail east along the river. This trail can produce such species as Song Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole, Common Yellowthroat and both Eastern and Western Kingbirds. An occasional Grasshopper Sparrow has been seen in the field directly to the east of the developed area.

Both of these areas are best birded in the spring and fall during the passerine migration as the shrubbery and trees attract such species as Wilson's, Magnolia, Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush, and Western Tanager.

E → Redcliff Riverside Park

Redcliff Riverside Park is directly across from Echo Dale Regional Park. Access to this park is gained by travelling westward along Main Street in the Town of Redcliff until you come to a sign indicating the turn to the park. Travel south on this street to the Town Maintenance Yard (park access is also signed here) and then turn west and proceed down the steep river valley hill to the parking areas.

You can begin hiking at either parking area. The first parking lot is adjacent to the badlands and proceeds east. When the pathway turns back to the west take the undeveloped clay footpath. Along here is the best area to encounter Rock Wren, Say's Phoebe, Violet-green Swallow, Prairie Falcon, Turkey Vulture and Lazuli Bunting. Keep a careful watch for Prairie Rattlesnake (they den in the cliffs during the winter). Bull Snakes may be seen along these trails.

Note: Redcliff has some great coffee shops, an excellent bakery, and a number of restaurants where one can relax and enjoy a meal or a snack after a couple of hours of walking the Riverside Park Trail.

F → River Trails

In Medicine Hat on both sides of the South Saskatchewan River, lie pathways through the riverine forests. These may be developed hiking trails or merely pathways forged by animals and/or hikers. These pathways have great habitats for bird life but because of recent floods a large amount of flood works are being constructed and access to these trails may be limited.

Both of these areas are best birded during spring and fall passerine migration. A variety of warblers, flycatchers and sparrows have been observed.

G → Ross Creek Natural Park

This trail lies on the southeast side of Medicine Hat and parallels the Ross and Bullshead Creek valleys. The trail hugs the west side of the valley, crossing several minor coulees that have varying amounts of shrubbery and hence a good cover for birds. In the spring and summer similar species to those seen in Strathcona Island Park can be observed. The valley contains good populations of Ring-necked Pheasant. Other species which may be encountered include Lazuli Bunting, Brown Thrasher, Spotted Towhee, and on rare occasions, even Indigo Bunting. In the winter, this is the best trail to see Sharp-tailed Grouse and Northern Shrike within the City Limits.

H → Scout Falls

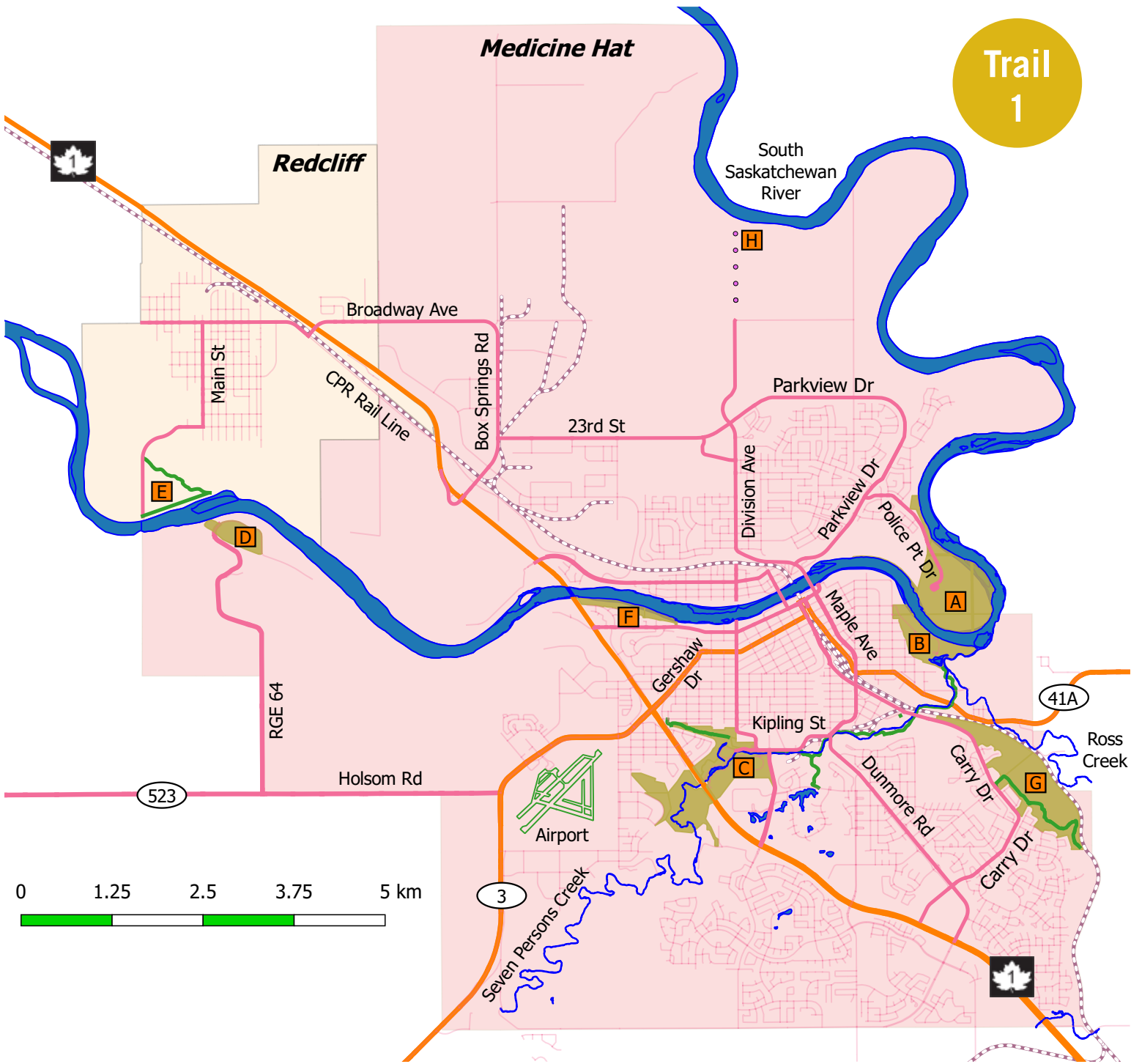
This birding site lies on the northern edge of the city. Access this site by following a northward extension of Division Avenue (north of 23rd Street N), then continuing north on a track when the gravel road turns east. Proceed to the barbed wire fence at the edge of the South Saskatchewan River valley. The riverbank contains a number of seeps that result in brush and shrubbery growth. For the most part one must bird from the top of the valley looking down into the shrubs so a scope would be an asset here. These bushes have produced such species as Yellow-breasted Chat, Black-billed Cuckoo, and Indigo Bunting. More frequently seen are such species as Spotted Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, and on the river, a number of waterfowl including American White Pelican and Caspian Tern. Both Golden and Bald Eagles are often seen here. As one drives the trail to and from the river a close watch of the prairie may produce Long-billed Curlew who have bred in this area the past few years.

This prairie property is being sold by the City of Medicine Hat and thus could be subject to significant changes during the next few years.



Police Point Park
Milt Spitzer









Trail 1



Trail 1: Medicine Hat and Redcliff

 Observation Points

 Amenities

-  Police Point Park
-  Strathcona Island Park
-  Kin and Ajax Coulees
-  Echo Dale Regional Park
-  Redcliff Riverside Park
-  Kiwanis River Park
-  Ross Creek Natural Park
-  Scout Falls

All amenities available

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TRAIL 2

→ Sauder Reservoir, Rattlesnake Lake *and* Murray Lake

These reservoirs lie west and south of Medicine Hat and are particularly good birding destinations in the spring and fall when migratory waterfowl are abundant. This area is also good for migrating shorebirds. This trail contains good populations of a variety of breeding ducks and grebes and smaller passerines that utilize the willows, reeds and rushes in the wetlands. Often the spring and/or fall migrations produce a spectacle of tens of thousands of migrating swans, Snow, White-fronted and Canada Geese milling in the sky, on the reservoirs, on nearby ponds and sloughs, and feeding in the surrounding fields.

A circle trip can take the better part of a birding day. A suggested route is to take Hwy 3 from Medicine Hat to the Holsom Road turnoff. A visit to Echo Dale Park **(A)** can be integrated into this birding day. Follow this road westward and around the turn to the south. Turn west at a sign indicating Golden Sheaf Park. Follow this road to the dam **(B)** on Sauder Reservoir (locally known as Rattlesnake Reservoir), stopping here to scope for such species as loons, ducks, terns, and gulls, among others. This locale has turned up Long-tailed Duck, Common Loon, occasionally Pacific Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, Caspian Tern, and even Rusty Blackbird.

Continue across the dam to the turnoff to Golden Sheaf Park **(C)**, a campground area that is well treed and which can produce some surprising passerines during their migration. **Note: There may be a day charge for entrance to this Park.** This is another spot from which to view the lake for waterfowl species. From Golden Sheaf Park, proceed back out to the main road and follow it west to the short loop around the north side of Sauder Reservoir **(D)**. A loop can be made in either direction. Note: The actual reservoir cannot be seen from the road but continue on up on top of the dyke and the lake will be spread out before you. The shallows of the east side, depending on water levels of the reservoir, may produce good varieties of shorebirds and waterfowl. Proceed along the embankment and scope the reservoir. The rocks of the embankments, especially during fall migration, can produce American Pipit along with other passerines. Large populations of American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant and a variety of gulls are often encountered. Rarities that have turned up here in recent years include Peregrine Falcon, Sabine's Gull, Clark's Grebe, Pacific Loon and jaeger species.

From Sauder Reservoir backtrack across the dam and take the first range road east of the reservoir. Turn south and follow this around as it turns west onto TWP RD 120. Turn north on RGE RD 84 to the causeway **(E)** crossing a shallow arm of Sauder Reservoir. This can be a great place to observe a variety of duck, gull, grebe, and shorebird species. It is a fairly reliable spot for Eurasian Wigeon in the spring. This is also a good spot for Caspian Tern. Walk north from the fence crossing to the southern shore of the main lake. This area of the lake can be quite shallow and as a result a large variety of shorebirds, gulls and other species may gather here.

Continue west on TWP RD 120 for about 6 km to where this road crosses an ephemeral slough with a large shoreline that can, depending on water levels, be a good spot for migrating shorebirds. Backtrack to RGE RD 84 and follow this road south to Hwy 3, watching along the way for prairie passerines and raptors. Turn east onto Hwy 3 where one can proceed to the village of Seven Persons where tourist amenities can be found and which contains a great sausage shop where one can purchase a variety of products and even lunch.

If one does not wish to stop at Seven Persons go east to RGE RD 75, following this road south to Murray Reservoir. There are four major birding stops along the east side of this reservoir: the dam at the north end **(F)**, the wetlands at TWP RD 102 **(G)** and on the southeast end of the reservoir along RGE RD 75 **(H)**. Continue along this road and view the wetlands at the south end of Murray Lake **(I)**. In the fall a site, on the west side of this reservoir (accessible from TWP RD 102) may have enormous flocks of Snow Geese and swans **(J)**.

Bird species that may be found at Murray Reservoir include Western Grebe (occasionally Clark's Grebe), as well as all the other grebe species and a good variety of waterfowl. The wetlands are a great place to search for Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and a variety of sparrows. At the south end, depending on water levels, a variety of shorebirds may be seen. White-faced Ibis, Black-necked Stilt and White-winged Scoter have also been seen here. A large colony of breeding Franklin's Gulls can be found at the south end of the reservoir.



Western Grebe
Bob Frew

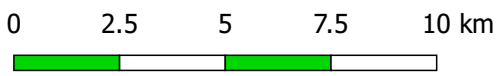
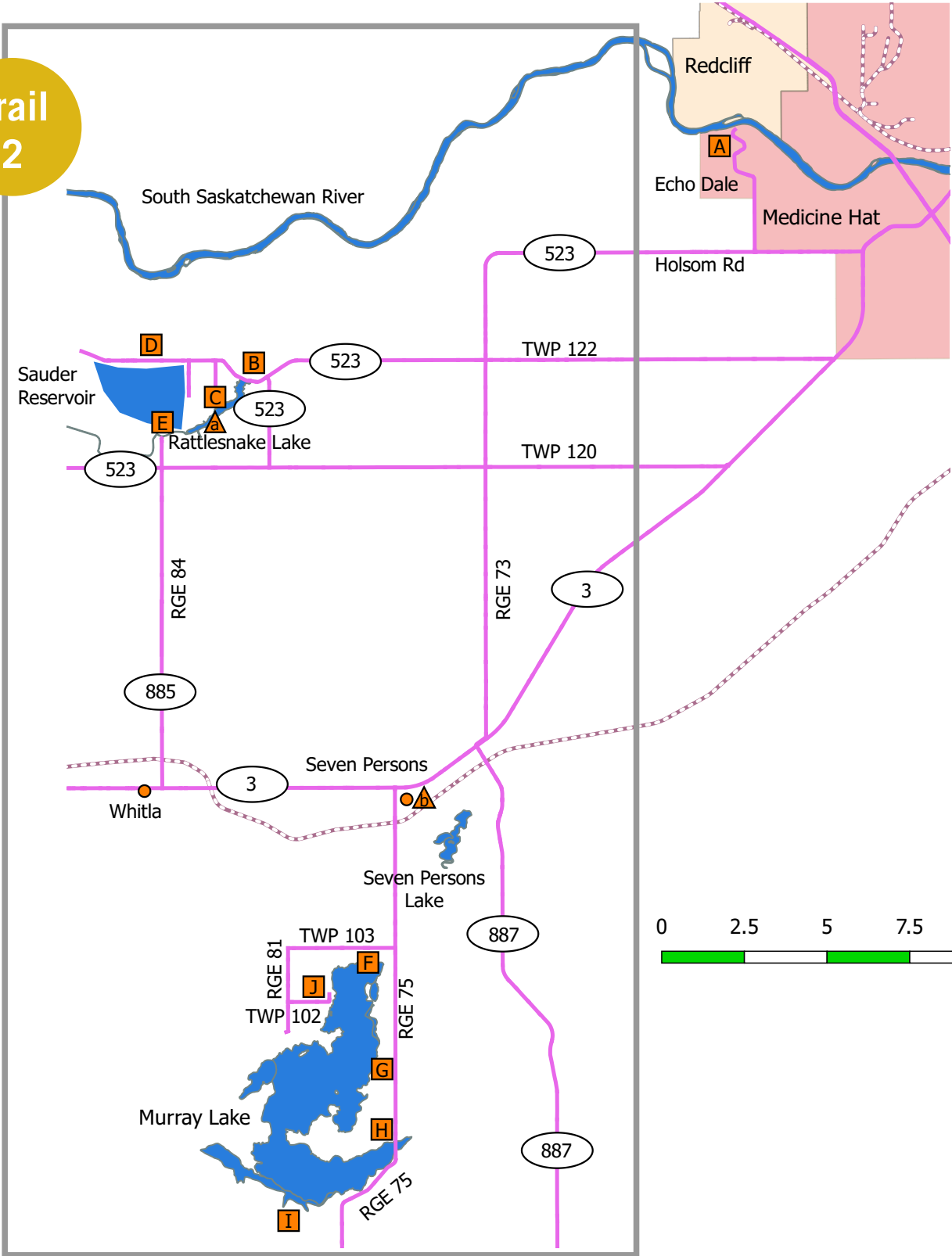


Eared Grebe
Dan Schiebelbein



Murray Lake
Bob Frew

Trail 2



Trail 2: Sauder Reservoir, Rattlesnake Lake and Murray Lake

■ Observation Points
 ▲ Amenities

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Echo Dale Park B Rattlesnake Lake Dam C Golden Sheaf Park D Sauder Reservoir Embankment E Rattlesnake Lake Causeway | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> F Murray Lake Dam G Wetlands H Wetlands I Wetlands south side of Murray Lake J Northwest side of Murray Lake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Golden Sheaf Park*: camping and restrooms ▲ Seven Persons: meals and restrooms |
|--|---|---|

* Day use fee payment may be required.

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TRAIL 3

→ Pakowki Lake *and* Etzikom

Pakowki Lake is renowned for its large congregations of waterfowl, particularly during spring and fall migrations. Depending on water levels a variety of shore birds may be present. Specialty birds, which may be found here include White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Bittern and occasionally egrets. Pakowki Lake is a large landlocked lake south of the hamlet of Etzikom. The levels of this lake can vary greatly from year to year, depending on precipitation totals. Birding hot spots along this lake vary with the water level.

One can access Pakowki Lake from Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Foremost or Taber. Etzikom's excellent Windmill Museum has a small café and ice cream shop. It's a great refreshing stop and the museum makes a great diversion from birding. The museum is only open from May to September.

A suggested itinerary is to start at Etzikom **(A)**, proceed west along Hwy 61 to RGE RD 93 (Sunrise Road). Turn south and follow along through farmland and some undisturbed prairie, watching for Chestnut-collared Longspur and other prairie passerines. The small sloughs often have good numbers of Cinnamon Teal as well as other waterfowl and depending on the water levels may be good for shorebirds. Proceed south along this road until you arrive at the marshy west arm of Pakowki Lake **(B)**. The Sunrise Hutterite Colony is just to the south of this arm. This wonderful wetland abounds with bird life. Good numbers of White-faced Ibis (first site in Alberta to host this species), Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Bittern, Sora, Common Tern, and Western Grebe may be found here. Rarities that have been found here include: Virginia Rail, Clark's Grebe and recently, both Great and Snowy Egret. Many Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets frequent this wetland.

From these wetlands, backtrack to TWP RD 55 following it east to Hwy 885. Turn south on 885 and stop where the highway bisects the west arm of the lake **(C)**. If the lake is relatively shallow a profusion of cattails and rushes will provide excellent cover for a variety of nesting species including Common Yellowthroat, Marsh Wren, terns, grebes, perhaps a bittern or two and even Whimbrel on the rocky shoals. During the summer of 2012, a Black-headed Gull was found among the more common gull species. Hwy 885 is a very narrow road and although lightly travelled one must be very aware of potential traffic hazards while birding.

Backtrack to a gravel road (TWP RD 53A) that winds eastward to another portion of the lake. Follow this trail to its eastern extremity ending at an abandoned but privately owned farm site **(D)** (Permission should be sought to drive onto the farmyard). Often a Great Horned Owl or two will be found near the farm. A large colony of Cliff Swallows has built their mud nests under the eaves of the house. On the lake you may find species that you have missed at the other two sites on the west end of the lake. As you proceed along the gravel road watch for Horned Lark, Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspur. Burrowing Owl has also been seen along this route.

Continue south along Hwy 885 to the junction with Hwy 501. This portion of the route is primarily surrounded by cultivated land which provides little cover for birds. However Ferruginous Hawk may be found in the few trees along the road. Anywhere along Hwy 885, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, and other raptors may be seen.

At Hwy 501 proceed east to the south arm of Pakowki Lake **(E)**. At times the lake may be dry here but when water is present this can be an excellent spot for shorebirds such as, American Avocet, both species of

[continued on next page →](#)

Yellowlegs, Pectoral and peep Sandpipers. Even a small flock of Sanderlings has spent their summer here. A small population of resident Bonaparte's Gull has also been observed here throughout the summer.

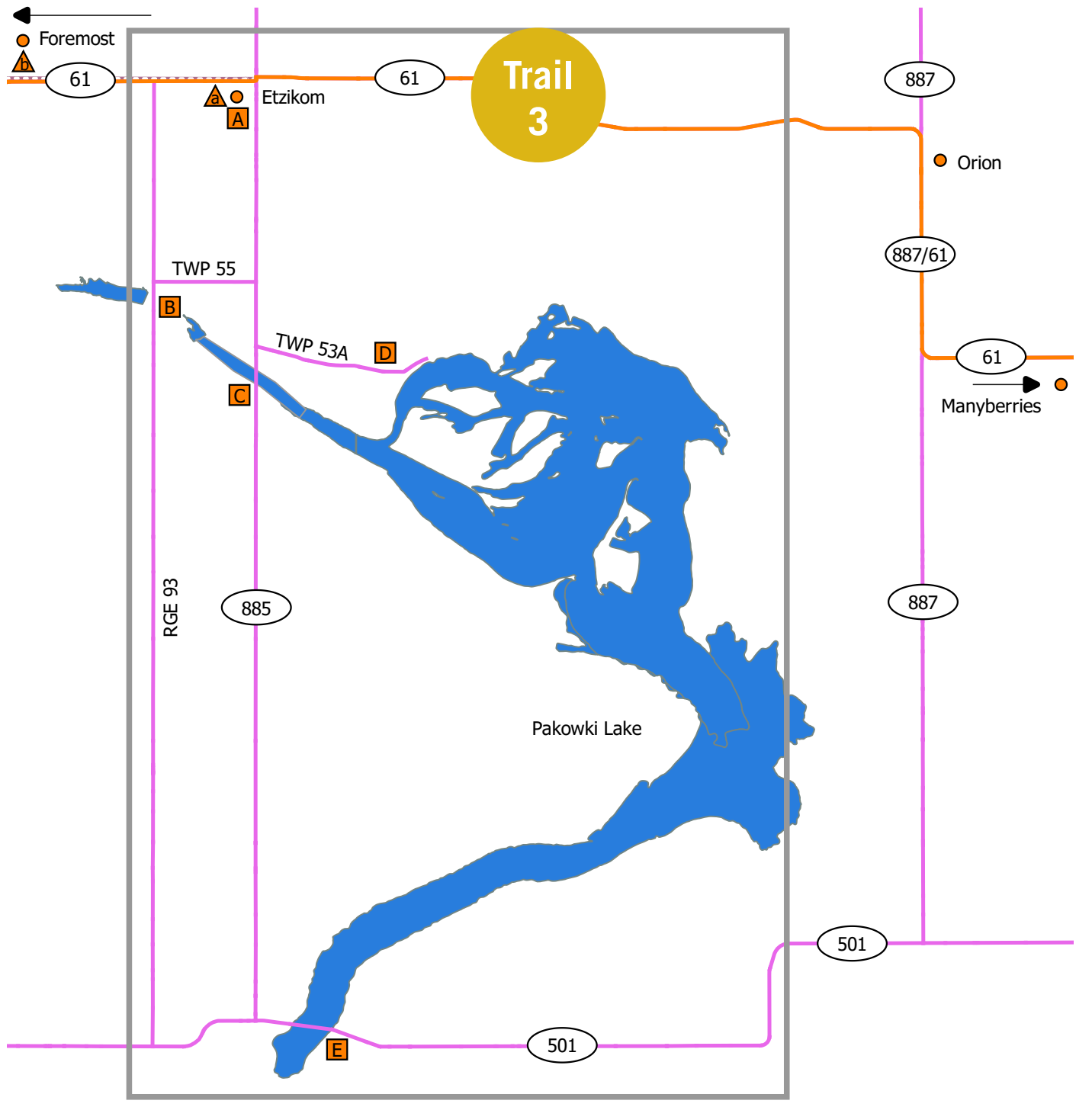
Depending on one's schedule, the Manyberries area (Trail 4) could also be birded on the same day although one might want to bird either trail in conjunction with the Onefour/Pinhorn Ranch areas. The nearest overnight accommodations are located in Foremost, Elkwater or Medicine Hat. The Manyberries Hotel is sometimes open on a very limited basis and perhaps a snack and drink could be purchased here.



White-faced Ibis
Milt Spitzer



Pakowki Lake
Dwayne Myers



Trail 3: Pakowki Lake and Etzikom

- A Observation Points
- A Windmill Museum
- B Sunrise Wetlands
- C Causeway
- D Pakowki Lake North Trail
- E Pakowki Lake Southwest Arm

- a Amenities
- a Etzikom: meals, restrooms and museum*
- b Foremost: fuel, meals, lodgings and camping

* Only open from May long weekend to September long weekend.

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TRAIL 4

→ Manyberries Area

Specialty species along this trail include: Sharp-tailed Grouse (do not approach the lek sites), Ferruginous Hawk (stay away from the nest sites), Short-eared Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Say's Phoebe, Golden Eagle, and a variety of grassland sparrows. If extremely lucky it is remotely possible to find Sage Grouse along this trail.

The Greater Sage Grouse is protected by an Emergency Protection Order (EPO). The main portion of this order applying to birders is: "Avoid driving vehicles within 3.2km of a Greater Sage Grouse lek between 1 ½ hours before sunset and 1 ½ after sunrise in all of April and May." The pertinent link for the complete EPO is: <http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=B3B27B60-1>.

Do not drive off signed gravel roads! The surrounding prairie is very sensitive to disturbance and often the fire hazard is extremely high. Adjacent lands require permission to access. Help ranchers prevent wildfires by staying on the graveled roads.

The area southwest of Manyberries has a mixed habitat including developed agricultural land, some of which is devoted to farming, some to ranching and some to hay production. The latter is surrounded by an extensive network of dykes, which in wet years, attracts thousands of waterfowl during their northward migration. The ranching areas contain large tracts of unbroken prairie interspersed with sand dunes covered with brush and silver sage. The east side of Pakowki Lake is situated at the west end of this trail but access to the lake is difficult and requires permission.

From Manyberries proceed west on Hwy 61. Signed Nature Conservancy of Canada property lies to the north of Hwy 61 **(A)**. These two sites can be hiked to look for a variety of grassland species such as Grasshopper, Brewer's and Baird's Sparrows, McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs and Long-billed Curlew.

Turn south onto Hwy 887 to TWP RD 52. Proceed 4.8 km west **(B)**: farmyards along here may contain kingbirds, Great Horned Owl, and other woodland species. Head south along RGE RD 73. At the T-intersection turn east on TWP RD 50 to Hwy 887 **(C)**. A number of different routes can be followed down to Hwy 501 with a return to Manyberries along Hwy 889.

The hamlets of Orion and Manyberries also could be birded as the brush and trees here can harbor additional species. Recently, Eurasian Collared-Doves have populated Manyberries. Rarities that have been observed in this area include Sage Thrasher and Bullock's Oriole. Animal species which inhabit the area include Pronghorn, White-tailed and Mule Deer, and surprisingly, even Moose.

A hotel in Manyberries has restricted hours in the café/bar where one might be able to get a meal and beverage. Accommodations and full meals are available at Foremost, Medicine Hat or if proceeding from this area to the Cypress Hills via the Wildcat Trail (TWP RD 62) in Elkwater. The UFA cardlock station in Foremost accepts credit cards and fuel is also available in Elkwater.

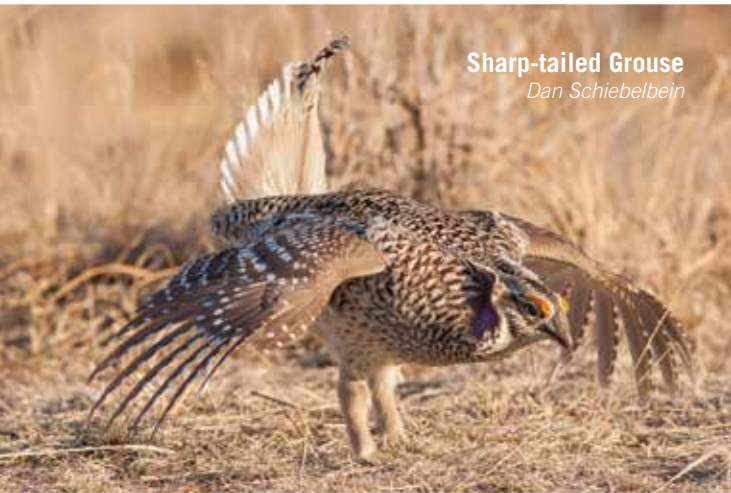
Manyberries
Rob Gardner



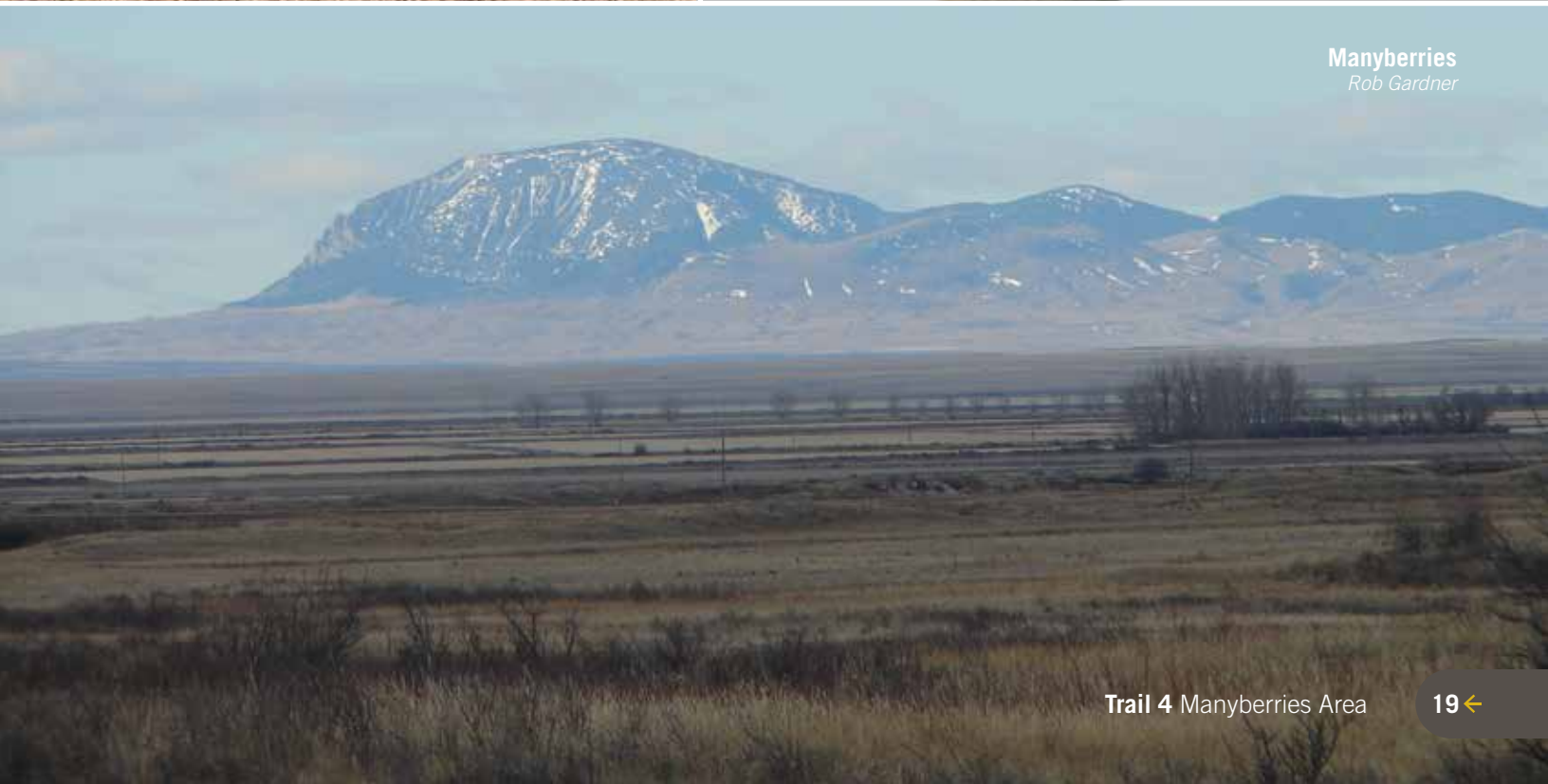
Ferruginous Hawk
Milt Spitzer



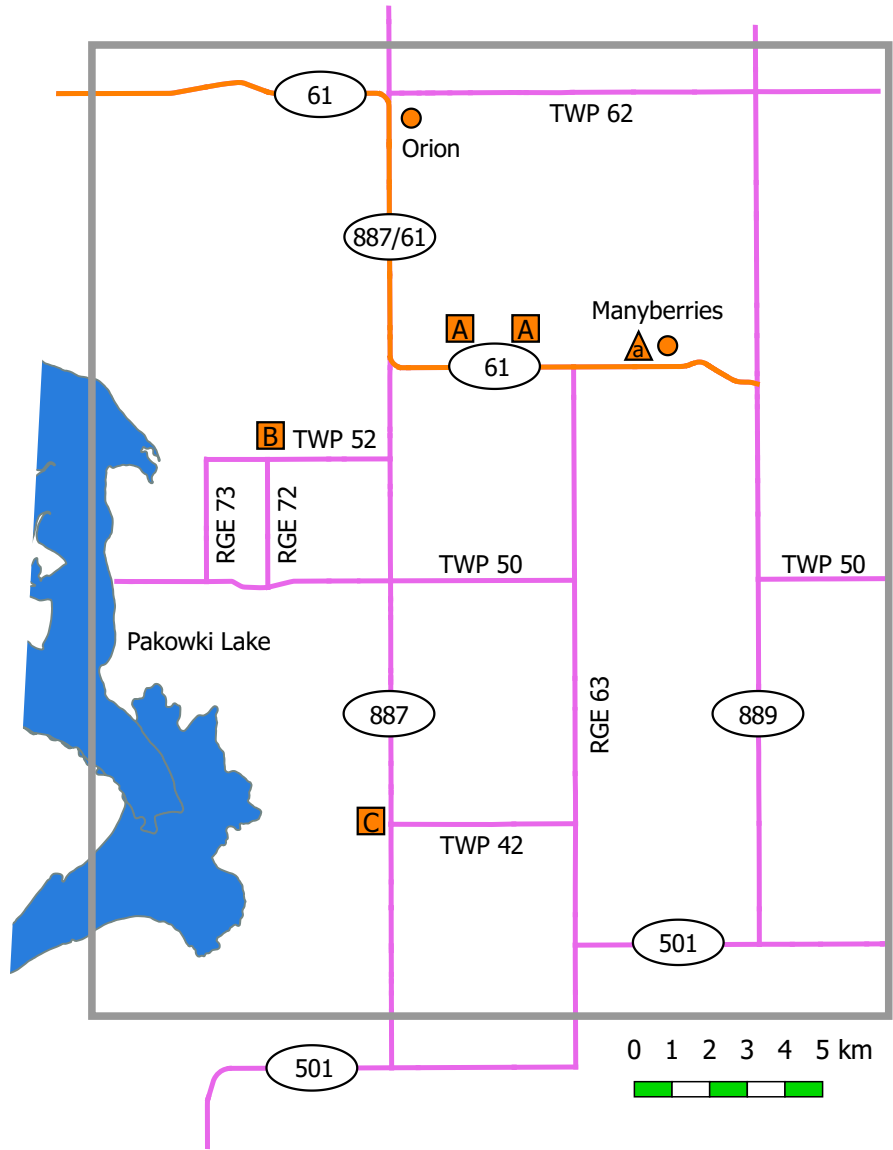
Sharp-tailed Grouse
Dan Schiebelbein



Manyberries
Rob Gardner



Trail 4



Trail 4: Manyberries Area

- Observation Points
- ▲ Amenities
- A Nature Conservancy Properties
- B TWP Rd 52
- C TWP Rd 42
- ▲ Manyberries: cafe (sometimes)

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TRAIL 5

→ Pinhorn/Onefour

Because of its remoteness the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve is very much under-birded and a good list of bird species is not available. The southern banks of the Milk River are particularly scenic, exhibiting badland topography that is home to Prairie Falcon and Golden Eagles. The undeveloped nature of the reserve means the native grasses abound with prairie passerines, which may be rare in other areas. Such species as Grasshopper and Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspur are likely here. On a Grasslands Naturalists outing a Mountain Plover was seen.

The Greater Sage Grouse is protected by an Emergency Protection Order (EPO). The main portion of this order applying to birders is: "Avoid driving vehicles within 3.2km of a Greater Sage Grouse lek between 1 ½ hours before sunset and 1 ½ after sunrise in all of April and May." The pertinent link for the complete EPO is: <http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=B3B27B60-1>.

This trail area is divided into five sub-sections: the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve south of Milk River **(A)**, the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve north of the Milk River **(B)**, the Silver Sage **(C)** and Escape Coulee **(D)** conservation sites and the Onefour **(E)** area.

To access the southern portion of the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve **(A)** one must proceed south on Hwy 880, then east on TWP RD 12 (also known as Black Butte Road) into the Reserve. Caution! This area is very undeveloped and when wet, roads are impassable and help, if one is stuck, is very far away! Once into the reserve ensure that you remain on a developed trail. The main trail heads eastward into the Milk River Natural Area with spectacular views of the Milk River canyon. Kennedy Coulee Provincial Ecological Reserve is found to the south of the trail (near the eastern extremity) but one must be prepared to walk to the reserve. Remember, if birding this area, to have a full gas tank and supplies, as the nearest town is Foremost more than 100 kms away. These badlands are also rife with fossils. At the end of the trail one will get to the Rooster Comb, a unique volcanic intrusion.

The northern portion of the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve **(B)** is the easiest to access and can be combined with a trip to Pakowki Lake and/or to the Manyberries area. Take RGE RD 80 south from Hwy 501 and follow it down to the Milk River. There is a residence at the end of this road and one should check in here to tell them what you are up to. The main road is good gravel but side roads are mostly dirt trails and caution must be used. As one proceeds down into the valley listen for Rock Wren and at the bottom watch for Loggerhead Shrike.

The Silver Sage Conservation Area **(C)** lies along Hwy 501 east of Hwy 889. This 2051 acre site has been purchased by the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) with other conservation groups. This site is clearly signed. Cropland is being restored to native grasses, and is already showing increased bird usage. Sixty-five species have been observed within this site.

The Escape Coulee Conservation Area **(D)** abuts the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve. Access is from Hwy 501, proceeding south along RGE RD 63 and then west along TWP RD 22. The south side of this site overlooks the extraordinary Milk River valley with the Montana Sweetgrass Hills as a backdrop. The westward extension of TWP RD 22 is poorly maintained and should only be attempted when dry.

The fifth site within this Trail is Onefour (formerly an Agricultural Research Centre) **(E)**. Onefour can be accessed by turning south from Hwy 501 onto RGE RD 51 following this to TWP RD 22 and then heading

[continued on next page →](#)

east along this road. The former research station is well treed with a number of buildings and corrals. However this Centre has been shut down and its future is unknown; it is currently uninhabited. While the site is open it is a good place to see Common Nighthawk. They are quite abundant during the late spring and early summer. The trees and bushes are also rife with a variety of flycatchers, sparrows and Baltimore Oriole. Bullock's Oriole has also been seen here. By continuing east along TWP Rd 22, and onto TWP RD 14 visitors will eventually reach HWY 41 just north of Wild Horse. Birding the Wild Horse area (Trail 6) may be combined with the Onefour area but again be prepared for a very long day. (Medicine Hat to Manyberries about 1 hour; Medicine Hat to Wild Horse approximately 90 minutes; Manyberries to Kennedy Coulee about 2 hours).

Chestnut-collared Longspur

Dan Schiebelbein



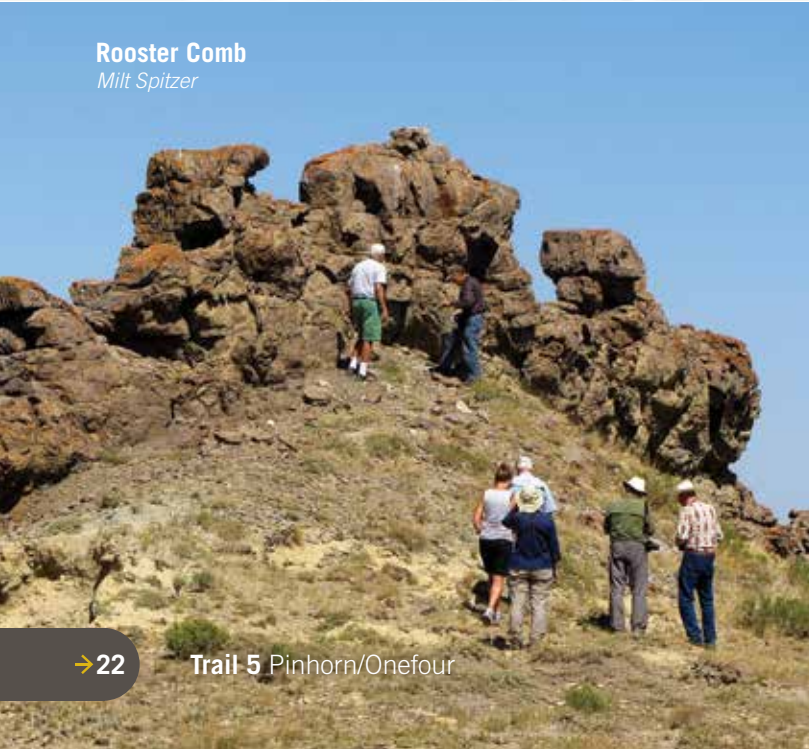
Sprague's Pipit

Dan Schiebelbein



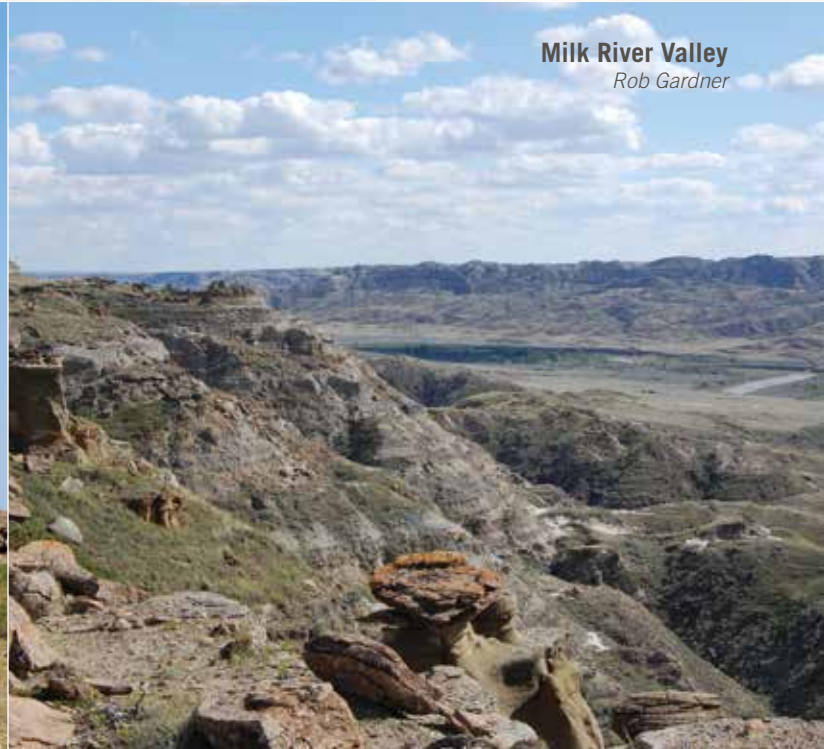
Rooster Comb

Milt Spitzer

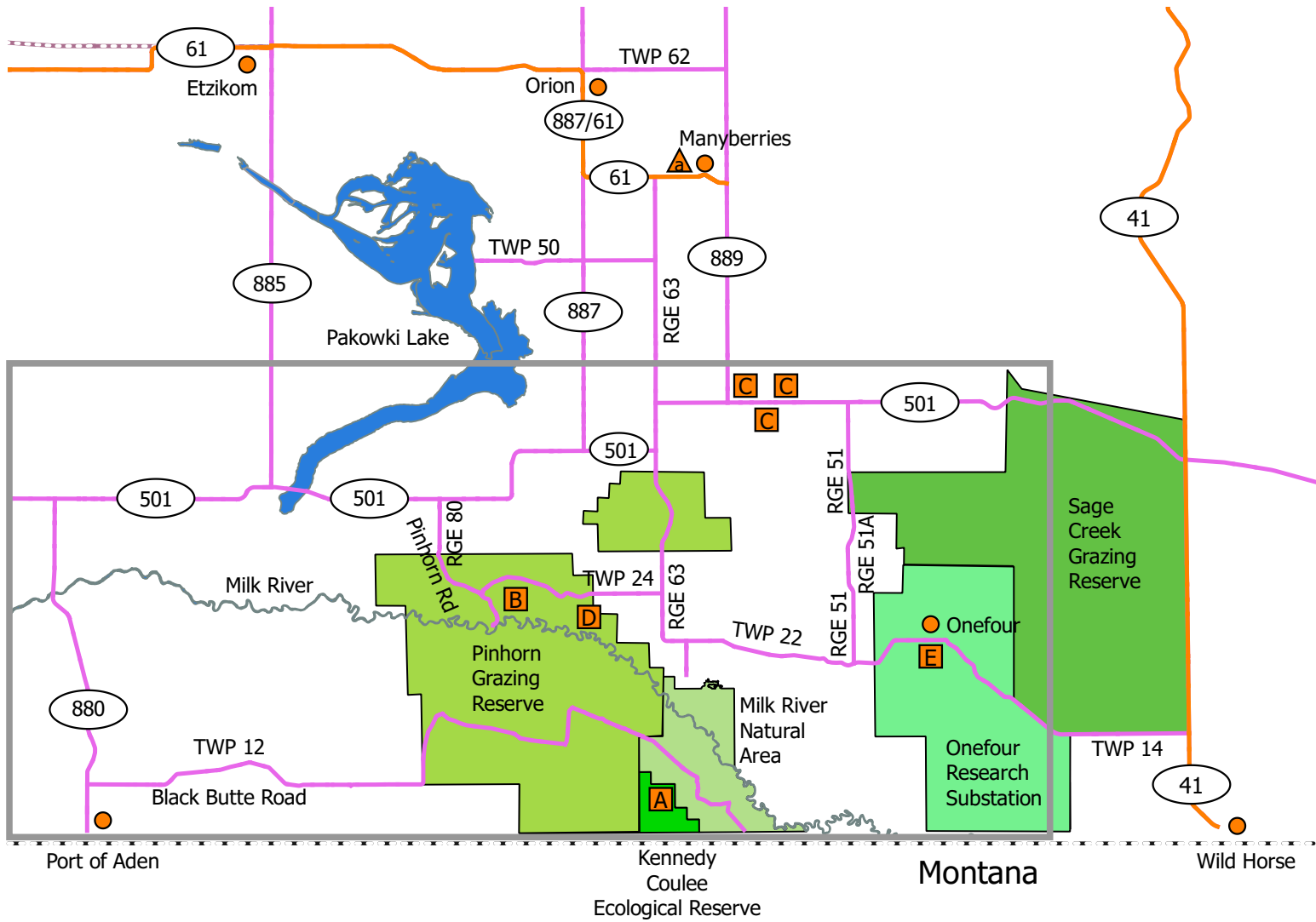


Milk River Valley

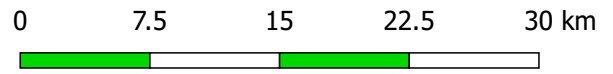
Rob Gardner



Trail 5



Trail 5: Pinhorn / Onefour



■ Observation Points

- A** Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve
- B** Pinhorn Grazing Reserve (North of Milk River)
- C** Silver Sage ACA
- D** Escape Coulee ACA
- E** Onefour

▲ Amenities

▲ Manyberries: cafe (sometimes)

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TRAIL 6

→ Wild Horse Area

Much-sought after species occur in this area including, Mountain Plover (in very heavily grazed areas but not every year), Burrowing Owl, Short-eared Owl, Greater Sage Grouse (very rare), and a variety of sparrows including Grasshopper, Brewer's, and Baird's. Also found here are Sprague's Pipit, Upland Sandpiper. Lark Bunting is irruptive and in some years, this is the only locale where this species can be found. Depending on precipitation, the area might have considerable wetlands that can produce good quantities and varieties of waterfowl and shorebirds.

The Greater Sage Grouse is protected by an Emergency Protection Order (EPO). The main portion of this order applying to birders is: "Avoid driving vehicles within 3.2km of a Greater Sage Grouse lek between 1 ½ hours before sunset and 1 ½ after sunrise in all of April and May." The pertinent link for the complete EPO is: <http://www.registrelp-sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=B3B27B60-1>.

Starting at the Wild Horse Border Crossing on Highway 41, follow RGE RD 23A north to TWP RD 12, then east to RGE RD 20, north to TWP RD 20 and back west to Hwy 41. Alternately one can continue northeast along TWP RD 20 to Hwy 501 and then back west to Hwy 41.

"DO NOT DRIVE OFF THESE SIGNED GRAVEL ROADS!" The surrounding prairie is very sensitive to disturbance and often the fire hazard is extremely high. Adjacent lands require permission to access. Help ranchers prevent wildfires by staying on the graveled roads.

Animal species in this area include Pronghorn, Mule and White-tailed Deer, Coyote, Badger, Red Fox and if one is very lucky, Swift Fox.

The nearest site for lodgings, food and fuel is at Elkwater in the Cypress Hills. Therefore this birding area could be combined with a Cypress Hills birding trip for an extended two or three day excursion. You might also include the Onefour area on a birding trip to Wild Horse.



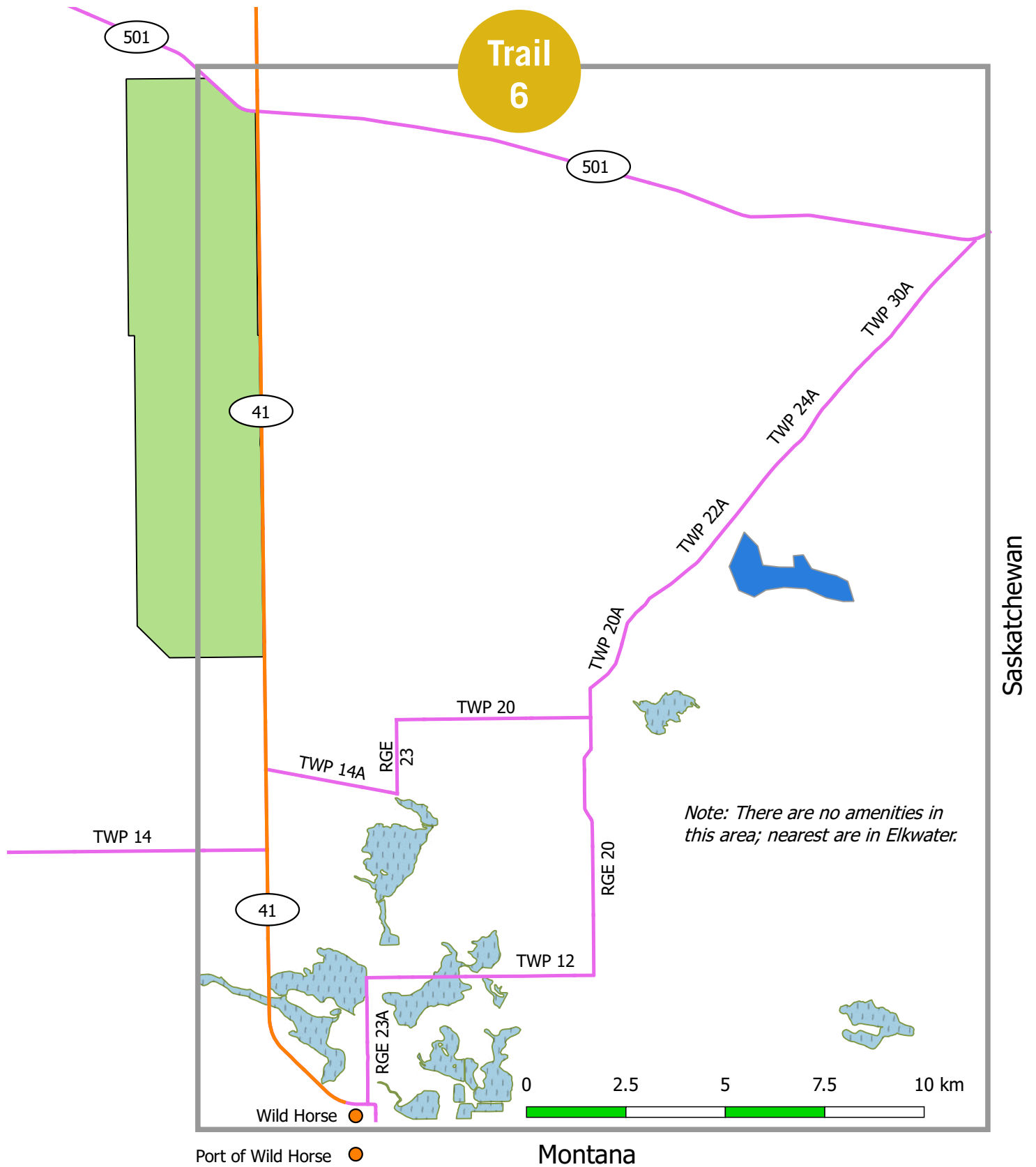
Lark Bunting
Milt Spitzer

McCown's Longspur
Milt Spitzer



Wild Horse Area
Dwayne Myers





Trail 6: Wild Horse Area

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TRAIL 7

→ Elkwater/Cypress Hills

The Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park is unique to Southeastern Alberta as it is an area of relatively high altitude with the top of the hills being similar to Banff townsite (Elkwater is 1,234 metres in elevation). These hills are forested with a mixture of lodgepole pine, white spruce and aspen. The protrusion of these hills from the surrounding prairies can be a migrant trap. The montane vegetation also contains bird species that are typically found in the foothills and mountain areas of Alberta. A large number of vagrants have turned up in this park including such species as Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Clark's Nutcracker and Summer Tanager. This park is also one of the very few locales in Alberta with nesting Common Poorwill. A population of Wild Turkey is resident in the park but their numbers seem to be diminishing, perhaps due to the ban on bird feeders. This ban was imposed due to the presence of cougars within the hills and is meant to discourage this animal from coming into the Elkwater townsite. In the past both Northern Goshawk and Broad-winged Hawk have nested in the hills.

A number of hiking trails and roads wind throughout the park, which should be explored by any avid birder or nature lover. Roads are depicted on Map 7 but this map should be complemented with Alberta Parks trail and area maps. Each year a banding program is conducted in the park with the mist nets located near Site A. A visit to the banding station will give a good idea as to what is present in the park. Drop by the Visitor Centre (open from 9:00AM to 5:00PM daily) for maps, brochures and checklists and to view the exhibits, or call 403-893-3833 for information on current conditions.

For the purposes of this guide the Cypress Hills Birding Trail has been sub-divided into a number of birding sites as described in the following.

A → Southwest End of Elkwater Lake

This site is 1.5 km west of the Elkwater beach, past the Visitor Centre and the turnoff to the campsite registration kiosk. From this parking lot one can walk west along the boardwalk and trail following the shoreline of Elkwater Lake. As well, one can hike east from the parking lot down to, and along, the lake. The bird banding program is in operation here and the banders are very amenable to answering queries as to birds in the area and will willingly demonstrate banding techniques. The banding station is operated from April through June and from August through October. This work has given valuable insight in to the birds of Cypress Hills. For example a Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher has been banded here. This particular bird stayed in the area for several weeks giving many birders the opportunity to view it. In the fall of 2015 a Black-throated Blue Warbler was banded. Elkwater Lake has a good population of breeding White-winged Scoters in spite of the motorized boat activity on the lake. A number of wood warblers are found along this trail as are several species of flycatchers.

B → Soggy Bottom Trail

This trail can be accessed from the picnic area located north of the mini-golf course. A rather lengthy trail extends from here in both directions but proceeding west leads to the beach area with little habitat. The trail east leads into a well treed and brushed wetlands. Follow this trail east and across the Elkwater access road for another kilometre to Hwy 41.

Bird species one is likely to encounter along this trail include Marsh Wren, Red-necked Grebe, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Waterthrush and McGillivray's Warbler. Crossing the causeway gives the opportunity to see American Redstart, Dusky Flycatcher, and Red-naped Sapsucker. The marshy areas can host a variety of species including Wilson's Snipe, Killdeer, and a variety of duck species. In the past Sedge Wrens, Virginia Rail, Sora, LeConte's Sparrow, Lewis's Woodpecker and Bobolink have been seen along this trail.

C → Beaver Creek Loop Trail

This trail can be started right from the Visitor Centre parking lot, hiking south through the Beaver Creek Campground to the trailhead. This is an easily hiked well developed, loop trail that can be completed in about an hour even with frequent stops to view bird life. Because of the busy nature of this trail it is best hiked early in the morning.

The banks of this small creek can house McGillivray's Warbler and Northern Waterthrush. The surrounding trees may be populated with other montane species, such as both species of crossbills, Townsend's Solitaire, Song and White-crowned Sparrows. Broad-winged Hawks have been known to breed in this area, and sometimes Wild Turkeys are encountered.

D → The "Bench"

The top of the Cypress Hills is often referred to as "The Bench" as it is flat and is sparsely forested. The roads and trails along the top of the bench can be birded while driving, being on the lookout for such species as Mountain Bluebird (perhaps Eastern Bluebird), Upland Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and a variety of grassland sparrows. Red-tailed Hawks and Northern Harriers can also be seen along these roads. Birding the hillsides at dusk in June might turn up Common Poorwill.

E → Spruce Coulee Reservoir

Spruce Coulee Reservoir is accessed from the top of the Cypress Hills "bench" by going east from Hwy 41. Access to the reservoir is well signed. As one proceeds along the gravel road the fence posts are festooned with birdhouses, which from April to July have large populations of Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Observe closely as Eastern Bluebirds have also bred here. As one proceeds down the hill to the reservoir, bird the surrounding aspens and conifers. This is a great area for a variety of flycatchers including Least, Western Wood Pewee and perhaps even Olive-sided. Both Rose-breasted and Black-headed Grosbeaks can be seen along this road. Be cautious while birding this road as it is relatively narrow and is often travelled by campers and fishermen: so pull well over when stopping.

Around the lakeshore and near the campground are good locations for Western Tanager. Hiking across the dam and up the hill leads to one of the best areas to find Dusky Flycatcher. The woods near the campground and downstream from the dam are very mature. Three-toed Woodpeckers have been observed while hiking in these woods. The lake area often has such species as Belted Kingfisher, Black, Common and Caspian Terns, as well as a variety of duck species.

F → Reesor Lake

Reesor Lake is also accessed from the "bench" and is well signed: instead of turning off to Spruce Coulee Reservoir just continue east along the paved road down to the reservoir and along it to the campground. Similar species to those mentioned for Spruce Coulee Reservoir can be found here. The mature forest at the bottom of the Reesor Road should be birded as significant numbers of species have been seen here. The campsite is also a good place to wander through for a variety of forest birds. Painted Turtles have been seen along the shoreline and along Battle Creek.

Peripheral Roads Surrounding the Hills

The roads paralleling the hills on the south, north and west can be extremely productive for a wide variety of birds.

G → Highway 514 (Jackpot Road)

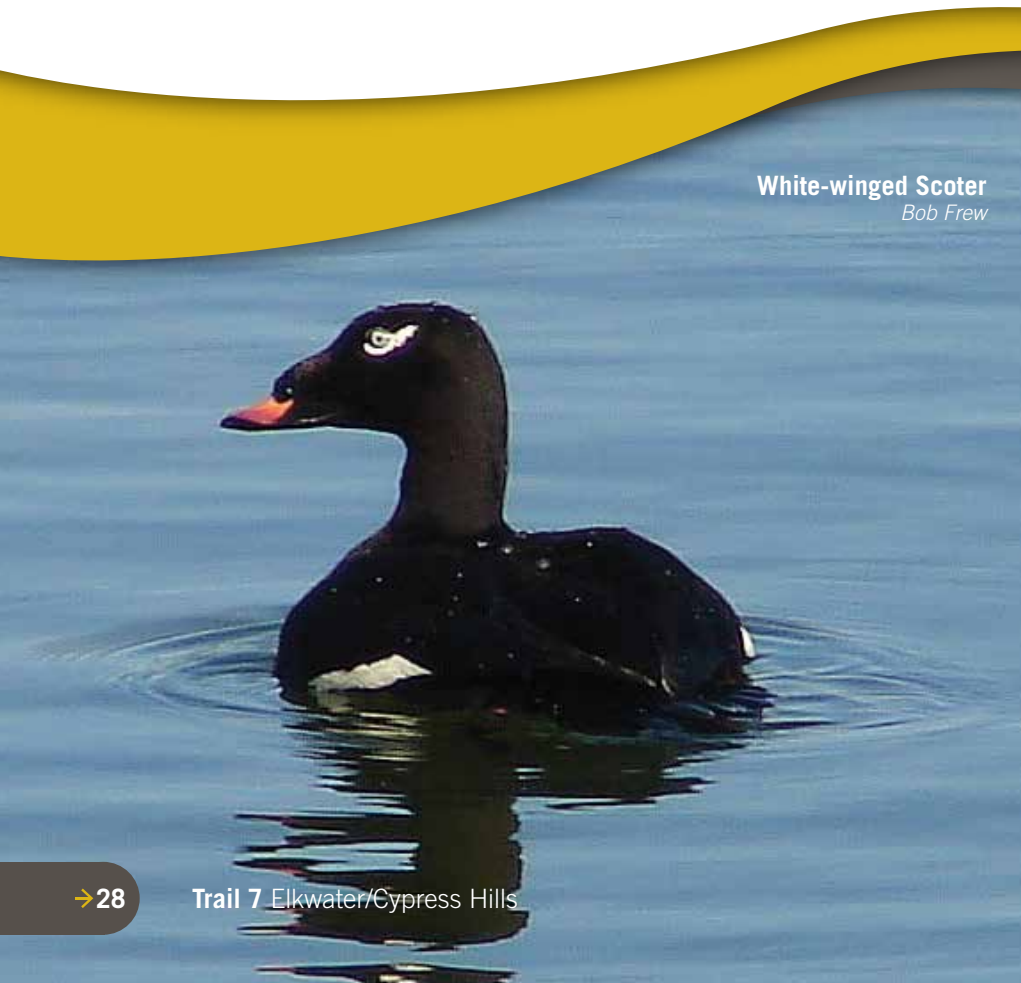
This road connects Eagle Butte Road and Hwy 41 paralleling the north side of the Cypress Hills and Elkwater Lake. A number of sloughs along this road contain a variety of waterfowl and the roadside has good populations of bluebirds and swallows. Bobolink occasionally have been seen.

H → Eagle Butte Road from Highway 514 south to Highway 41

This road follows a broad valley marking the west side of the Cypress Hills. The road goes southward eventually veering to the east to join up with Hwy 41. This very interesting road has good populations of bluebirds, swallows, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Loggerhead Shrike (in the winter Northern Shrike) and several raptor species. RGE RD 32B where Eagle Butte Road turns to the east is marked as a dead end but makes an interesting side trip. It follows Lodge Creek, on the east, which is heavily willowed while the area to the west is open prairie. The willows may house good populations of Yellow-breasted Chats while the sagebrush and prairie have produced Brewer's Sparrow and breeding Long-billed Curlews.

Summary of Birding in the Hills

With such a wide variety of trails, roads and habitat within the Cypress Hills area, several days could be devoted to birding here. Elkwater has excellent tourist facilities including lodgings, restaurants, small grocery stores and a service station. Other attractions include: exploring the Visitor Centre, relaxing on the beach, boating, golfing, both regular and mini, and just laying back to enjoy the surroundings.



White-winged Scoter
Bob Frew



Mountain Bluebirds
Dwayne Myers

Western Tanager
Milt Spitzer



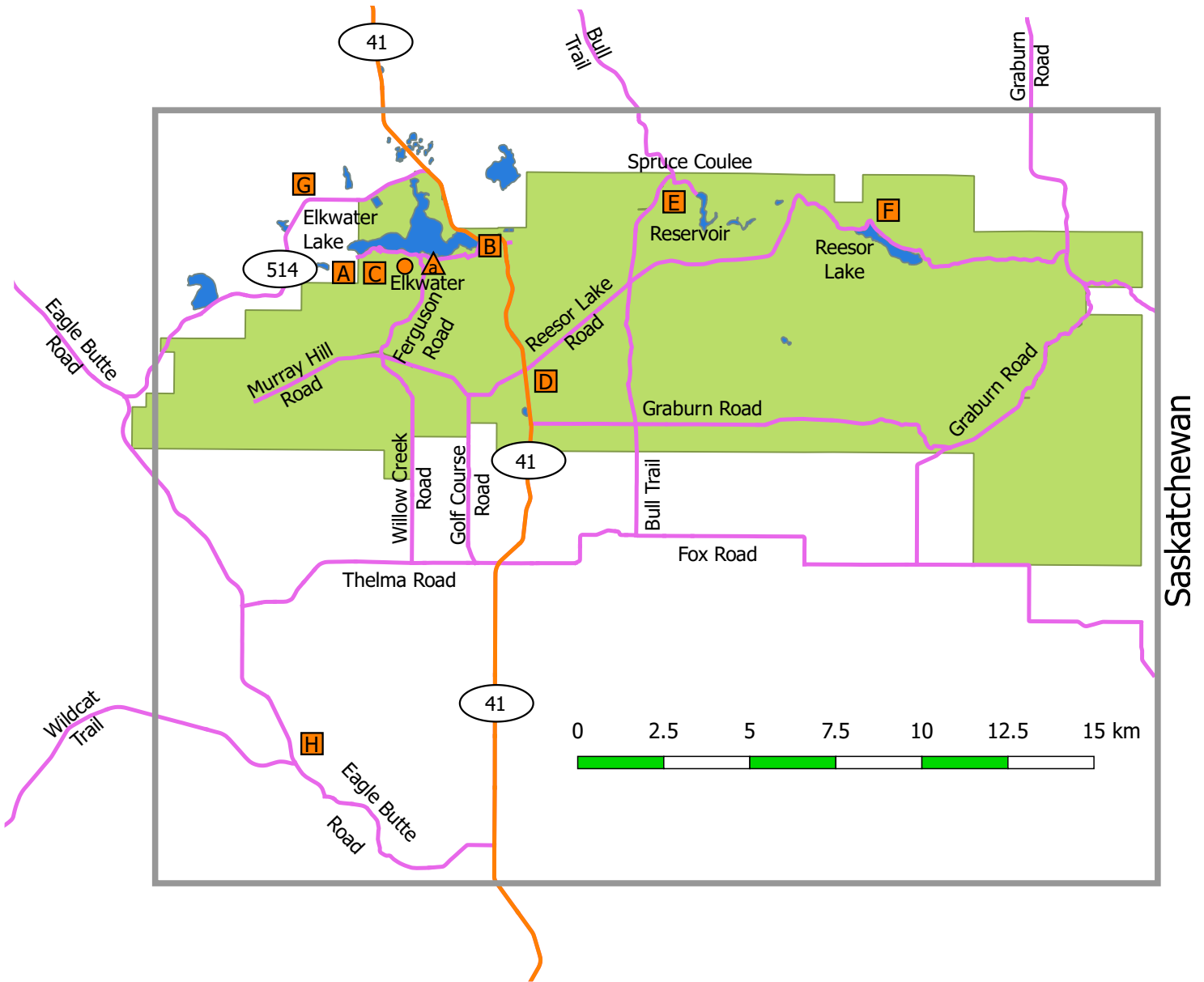
Cypress Hills
Rob Gardner



Elkwater Lake
Bob Frew



Trail 7



Trail 7: Elkwater / Cypress Hills

- Observation Points
- A Southwest End of Elkwater Lake
- B Soggy Bottom Trail
- C Beaver Creek Loop Trail
- D The Bench
- E Spruce Coulee Reservoir
- F Reesor Lake
- G Highway 514 (Jackpot Road)
- H Eagle Butte Road from Highway 514 south to Highway 41
- ▲ Amenities
- ▲ Elkwater: camping, meals, fuel, lodgings, restrooms, and interpretive centre.

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TRAIL 8

→ Chappice *and* Many Island Lakes

The undisturbed prairie areas within this trail are particularly good for both McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs and for Sprague's Pipits as well as grassland sparrows. During migration the sloughs are probably as good as anywhere in southeastern Alberta for shorebirds and occasionally, spectacular spring and fall migrations of waterfowl including Sandhill Cranes and White-fronted Geese.

This vast area of undeveloped grasslands is interspersed with saline sloughs and is bounded on the east side by the ephemeral Many Island Lake. This area can be explored over a long day or perhaps even two days.

Chappice Lake (A) is located on the west side of Hwy 41 about 20 km north of Medicine Hat. The sloughs in the area, depending on water level, can be great shorebird magnets. It is difficult to access Chappice Lake itself as one must walk a considerable distance to the waters edge and landowner permission is required before doing so. The small slough between Hwy 41 and Chappice Lake is often surprisingly replete with shorebirds.

From Chappice Lake proceed north along Hwy 41 and turn east towards the Village of Schuler. Schuler Lake (B) lies just south of Schuler. This lake is also very good for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds depending on water levels. The brush and trees in the village could be birded for interesting and unusual passerines. Several years ago a Red-headed Woodpecker was found in the trees on the east shore.

One can access the west end of Many Island Lake (C) by travelling along Hwy 41 to TWP RD 150 taking this road eastward to RGE RD 15 then turning south to the Gas Plant and to the west end of Many Island Lake. This lake can vary from being completely dry to a shallow lake spreading over several townships. When the lake has water it is particularly good for migrating waterfowl including Sandhill Crane, White-fronted, Snow, Ross's and Canada Goose, Tundra Swan and many duck species. Also in large numbers are American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant. The water's edge is often good for shorebirds. The northeastern side of the lake is particularly good although before travelling the trails along the north shore of the lake to the east side access permission is required from Heller Ranching. Alternately the east side of the lake (D) can be accessed from the grid roads north of the lake. TWP RD 132 (E) on the south side of Many Islands Lake is a good locale for Upland Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Grouse and at times for Short-eared Owl.



Baird's Sandpiper
Bob Frew



American Avocet
Milt Spitzer



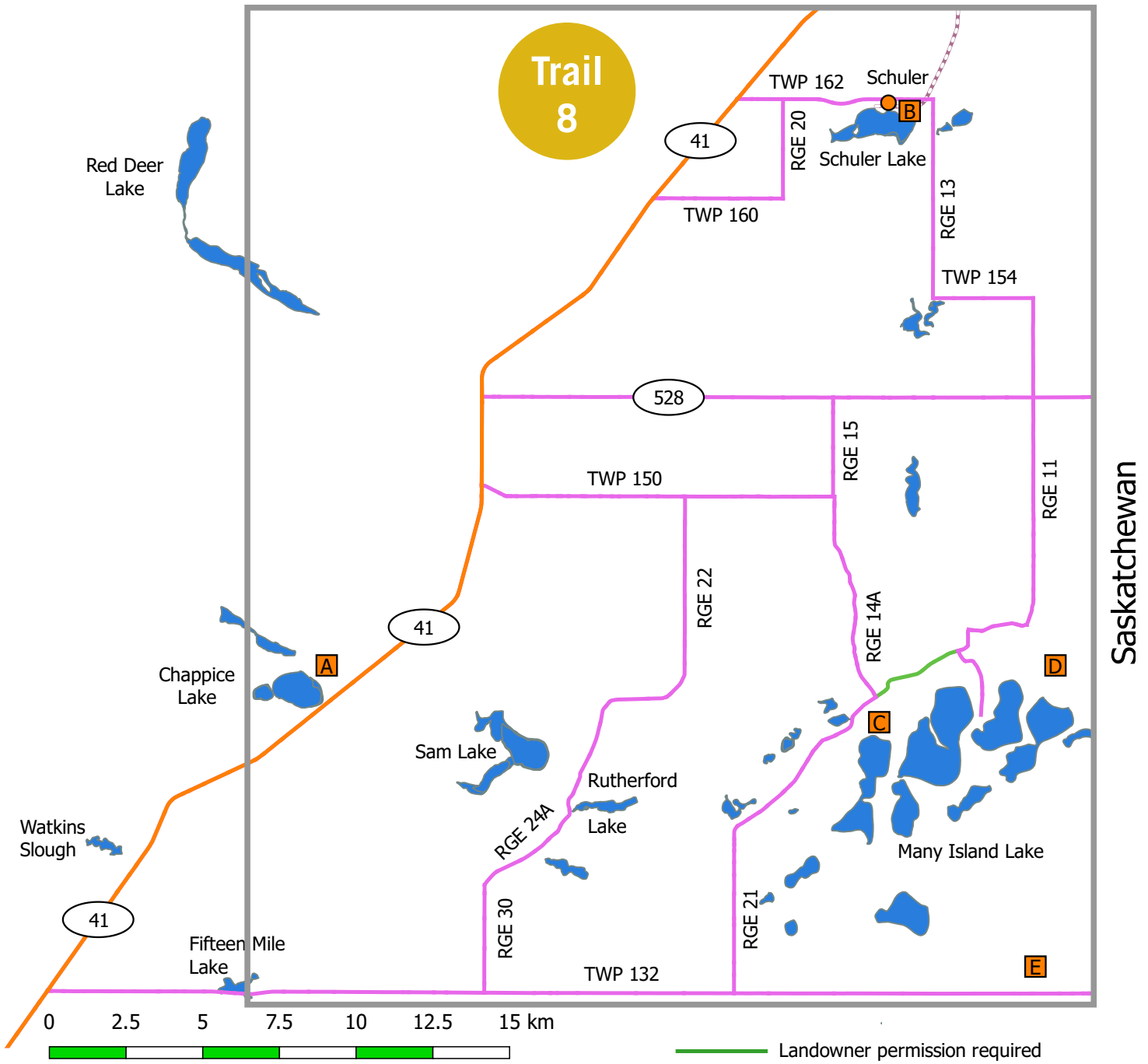
Chappice Lake
Milt Spitzer



Upland Sandpiper
Milt Spitzer



Many Island Lake
Milt Spitzer



Trail 8: Chappice and Many Island Lakes

- Observation Points
- A Chappice Lake
- B Schuler Lake
- C Many Island Lake, Northwest Side
- D Many Island Lake, Northeast Side
- E Twp. Rd. 132 near Saskatchewan Border

- Amenities

There are no amenities at Schuler; nearest full service centre is Medicine Hat.

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TRAIL 9

→ Sandy Point/Empress

Sandy Point Regional Park **(A)** is located along Hwy 41 at the South Saskatchewan River crossing. The campground here is often used by fishermen. This campground has willow and brush cover along with some large cottonwood trees that can attract rarities. In the past such species as Bullock's Oriole and Northern Saw-whet Owl have resided here during the summer. More frequently seen species include Baltimore Oriole, Common Nighthawk, Say's Phoebe, Rock Wren, Golden Eagle and a variety of flycatchers.

Peter Fidler Campground **(B)** in Empress includes a one km trail along the Red Deer River. Such species as Brown Thrasher, Lark Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Yellow-breasted Chat and uncommon species may be found. Black-billed Cuckoo, although very rare and irruptive, may at times be found here or along the river at Buffalo or Jenner. For a change of pace a night drive near the Empress Cemetery may produce Ord's Kangaroo Rat and possibly hunting rattlesnakes.

In addition to the campgrounds at Sandy Point and Empress, some additional tourist facilities including gasoline are available at Empress and at Burstall, Saskatchewan.



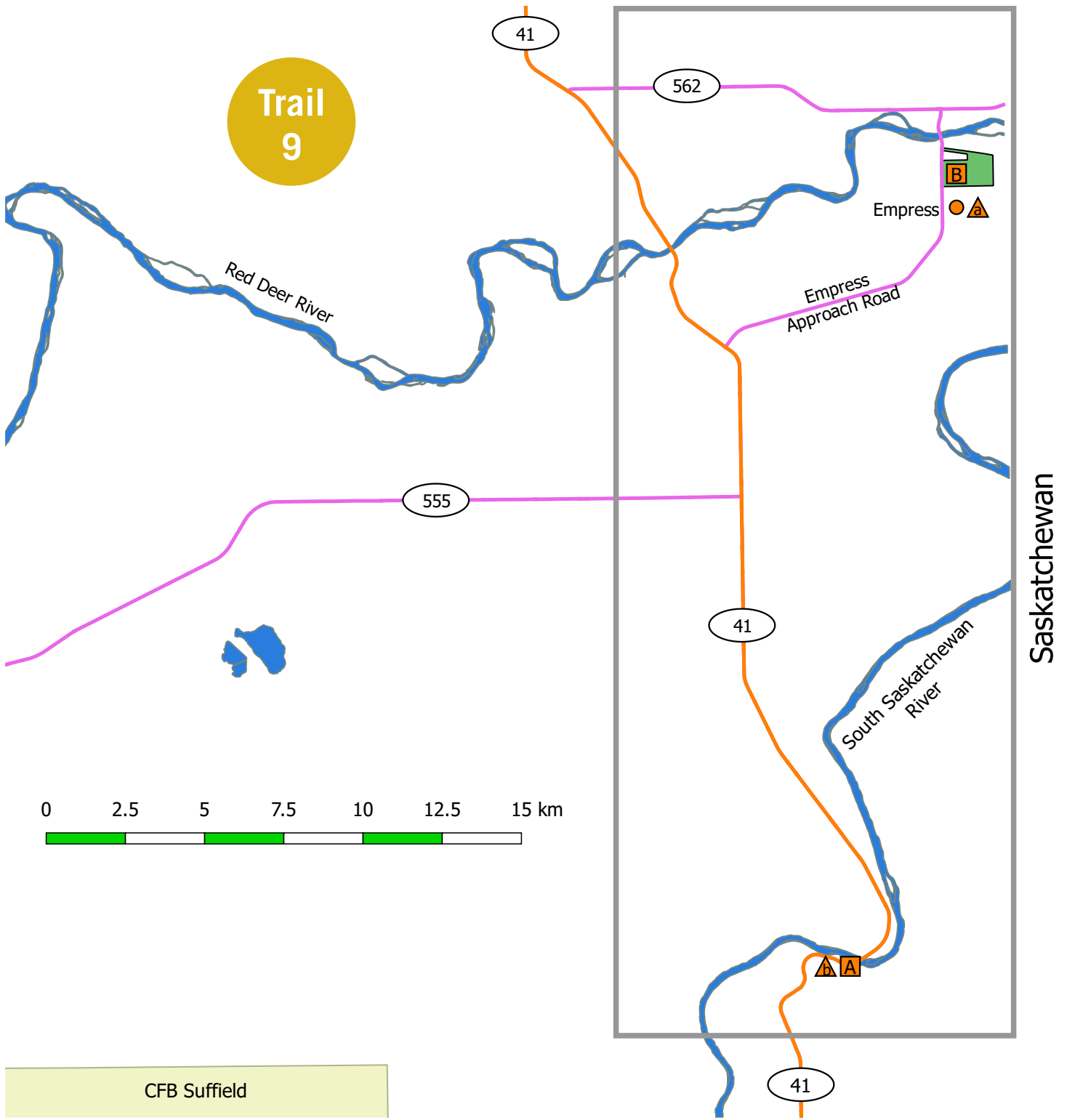
Western Kingbird
Dan Schiebelbein



Swainson's Hawk
Milt Spitzer



Sandy Point
Milt Spitzer



Trail 9: Sandy Point / Empress

- Observation Points
- Amenities
- A Sandy Point Regional Park
- A Empress: fuel, meals, lodgings, camping and restrooms
- B Peter Fidler Campground in Empress
- A Sandy Point: camping and restrooms

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TRAIL 10

→ Bindloss/Buffalo

This uncommonly visited grassland stretches from the north boundary of CFB Suffield north to the Red Deer River. Gas well trails and section roads give quite good public access, particularly in the Remount and Buffalo-Atlee Community Pastures.

Follow the signs to Bindloss by driving west on Hwy 555, from its junction with Hwy 41 or east from the junction with Hwy 884 (Jenner). Several sites warrant investigation within this area including the Red Deer River north of Jenner **(A)**, the primitive campsites on the Red Deer River north of Buffalo **(B)** and north of Bindloss **(C)**, and Princess Springs **(D)** south of Bindloss. Any of the range roads leading south of Hwy 555 could be investigated, particularly for prairie species such as Baird's Sparrow and Sprague's Pipit. Be observant as you travel along Hwy 555 as Alberta's densest concentration of Loggerhead Shrike can be found along this route.

Hwy 886 north of Hwy 555 from Buffalo crosses the Red Deer River. At this crossing **(B)** an unserviced campsite often produces a variety of birds. It is particularly good in late August or early September during the southern migration of passerines. A variety of warblers, flycatchers and thrushes can be seen during this period. The rare, in Alberta, Gray-cheeked Thrush can be found here and Black-billed Cuckoo has also been noted. In the fall this site is often used as a base campground for hunters so it could be busy. Pit toilets only, are in vogue here.

The unserviced campsite **(C)** near Bindloss can be accessed by travelling north of Hwy 555 on RGE RD 30 to a T intersection taking the road to the left and proceeding to the bridge crossing. The campground is found on the south side of the river. Similar species to those found at the Buffalo campsite can be found here.

To reach Princess Springs **(D)**, travel south from Hwy 555 on RGE RD 30 (a track paralleling a power line) for 8.5 km at which point there is an unreadable sign with two posts within old tires. Turn west at this sign following the trail for 3.3 km to a cattle guard. After crossing the cattle guard turn north and follow this track north and then northwestward to some corrals. From here one must proceed on foot. (Do not drive on untracked prairie as this can result in extreme prairie fires.) You can investigate the springs, the wetlands and the sloughs, which in the fall, may contain large flocks of resting waterfowl as they proceed southward. The access road is a good locale to find McCown's Longspur. On the hills south of the springs one can find teepee rings and other artifacts. If one turns south at the cattle guard rather than north you are led into the Middle Sand Hills, which has good populations of Sharp-tailed Grouse and Loggerhead Shrike among other species.

Trail 10 has good herds of Pronghorn as well as White-tailed and Mule Deer. Rattlesnakes are quite common throughout the area.

This entire area is a prime hunting zone in the fall and caution must be exercised when birding this trail. Also be mindful of private property. Be sure to get permission if you want to wander on private land. All the sites described above are on public lands.

Some traveller's amenities are available at Jenner and at Empress. A visit to Trail 10 could be combined with a visit to Trail 9 (Sandy Point/Empress).



Loggerhead Shrike

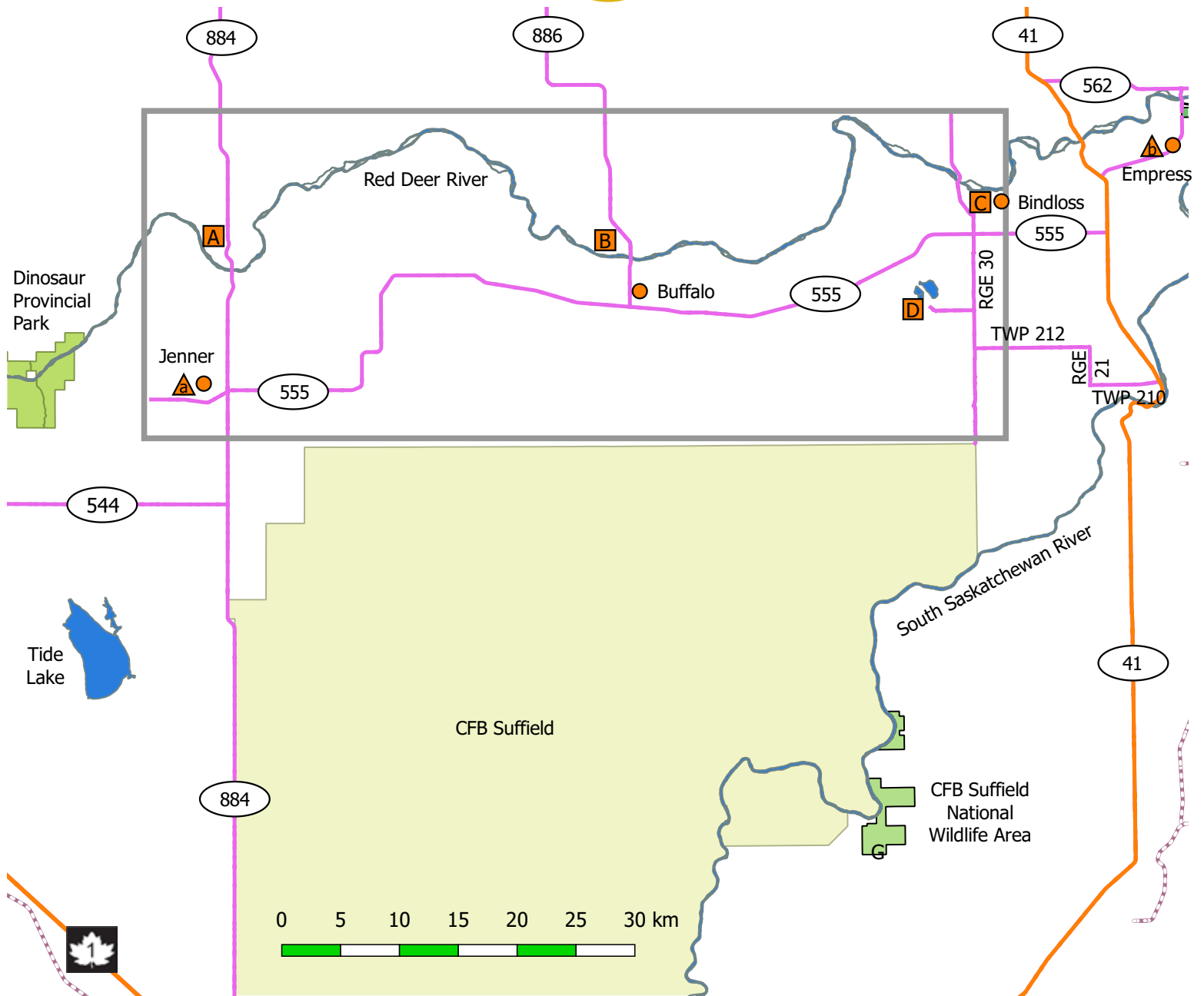
Bob Frew



Princess Springs

Rob Gardner

Trail 10



Trail 10: Bindloss / Buffalo

■ Observation Points

▲ Amenities

■ A Red Deer River near Jenner

▲ a Jenner: fuel and lodgings

■ B Buffalo Campground

▲ b Empress: fuel, meals, lodgings, camping and restrooms

■ C Bindloss Campground

■ D Princess Springs

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TRAIL 11

→ Dinosaur Provincial Park

Dinosaur Provincial Park has a great diversity of birds in and adjacent to it. Species which can be found here with regularity include: Yellow-breasted Chat, Say's Phoebe, Lark Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Lazuli Bunting, Prairie Falcon, Rock Wren, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, a variety of other flycatchers, Common Nighthawk, and Baltimore Oriole. Rarities that have been found in this area include Northern Mockingbird, Bullock's Oriole, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and Bobolink.

This park is located northeast of the city of Brooks and is well signed from the Trans Canada Highway and from other major routes in the area. This is one of the premier provincial parks in Alberta and as such is very busy during the camping season. It has excellent campground facilities but is often full so one should make reservations. The draw is the Red Deer River Badlands with its hoodoos, erosion features, and of course, the Palaeontology sites and corresponding interpretive programs.

Several well-maintained hiking trails allow birders to investigate all habitats within the park. The large cottonwoods and brush around and in the campsite harbor a significant number of birds. The circle drive east of the campground through the badlands can also produce a variety of species. While the park staff are primarily involved with the Palaeontology features and tours of the park, they might be able to inform you as to what birds are currently being found.

The campground service center has a small restaurant. The rustic hotel in Patricia has a small café. Brooks is only about a half hour away and is rife with hotels, motels, restaurants and other tourist facilities. Of course Brooks could be used as a center for birding this park as well as other trails around Brooks, which are described in more detail in Trails 12 and 13.

For more information regarding park events, camping, trails, amenities, etc. visit the Dinosaur Provincial Park website: <https://www.albertaparks.ca/media/123302/dppmapv2.pdf>.

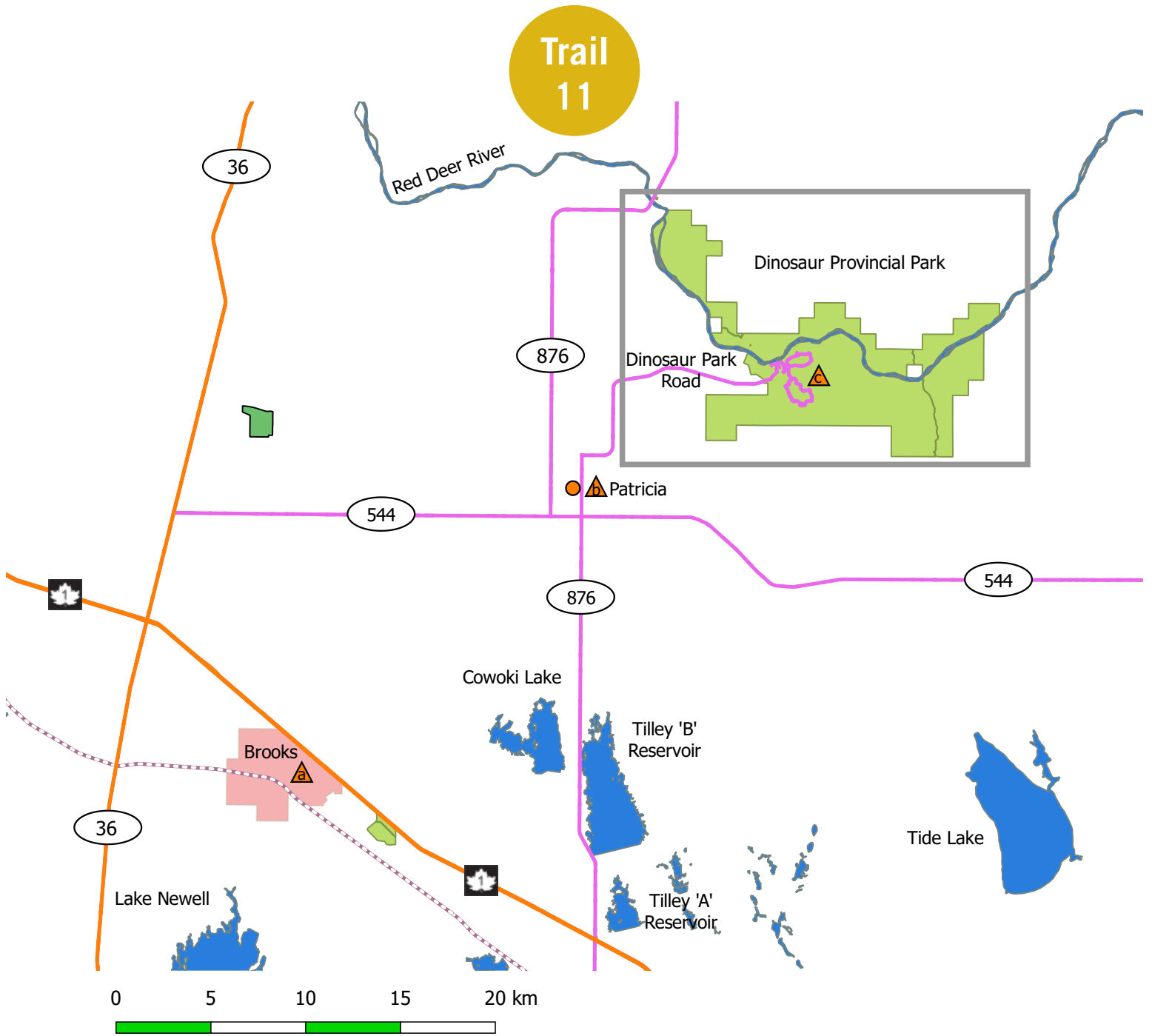


Lark Sparrow
Milt Spitzer







Rock Wren
Dan Schiebelbein





Trail 11: Dinosaur Provincial Park

-  Amenities
-  Brooks: all amenities
-  Patricia: meals and lodgings
-  Dinosaur Provincial Park: meals, camping, restrooms and interpretive centre

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TRAIL 12

→ Tilley Area

The Tilley area has many reservoirs and sloughs within its boundaries, which are replete with waterfowl and during appropriate periods, with a wide variety of shorebirds. The undisturbed grasslands have good populations of sparrows and longspurs.

This area can be explored using either Brooks or Medicine Hat as a departure site or conversely one can stay in the well-appointed campground in Tillebrook Provincial Park just off Hwy 1. Birding sites in the area include: Kininvie Slough, Tilley A (Campbell) and B Reservoirs, the Tillebrook campground, and a number of other internal water storage sites and natural sloughs.

An easy way to access Kininvie Slough **(A)** is to take TWP RD 164 west from the Trans Canada Highway. Follow this road to the old highway and then across the railway tracks. Turn right onto a dirt track. (Gate may be closed and if so make sure to reclose it behind you.) As you drive west you will come to a dugout which is the beginning of Kininvie Slough. You can proceed westward along the northern edge of the slough turning left onto a two-wheel track used by oil well servicing personnel. By following this track you will come to an embankment impounding an even larger slough. In very dry conditions you can proceed across the dyke and follow the road east along the south side of Kininvie back to where you started. Be very cautious when accessing this site and following the trails, as in wet conditions they can be very slick and one can easily get stuck. Also be very cautious when attempting to cross supposedly dry alkaline areas as often the underlying soil can be saturated, waiting for unsuspecting vehicles to fall into their trap.

Depending on water levels, Kininvie can produce a wide variety of shorebirds as well as waterfowl. The surrounding prairies can host a wide variety of passerines. Species of interest include: Black-necked Stilt, White-faced Ibis, American Bittern, most if not all the grebe species, Black-crowned Night-Heron, many duck species, Common Yellowthroat and Marsh Wren. The prairies play host to Western Meadowlark, Savannah and Vesper Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur and Horned Lark. This area has also produced a number of rarities including Great and Snowy Egret, and unusual herons. The old Highway 1, either east or west from the Kininvie turnoff, has produced Burrowing Owl and Long-billed Curlew.

Tilley A **(B)**, can be accessed by travelling directly north of Tilley (Hwy 876) from Hwy 1, turning immediately right (east) into the gravel stock pile, skirting the pile on the right and following the tracks to the impoundment dyke. Again, caution must be exercised when following the trail, particularly in wet conditions and when on the dyke, as it is impossible to turn around. One must proceed to the end (east side) before retracing your steps. Depending on water levels this reservoir can also produce a wide variety of shorebirds and waterfowl.

Tilley B **(C)**, further north along Hwy 876, is a large impoundment and is readily evident from the highway. You can access it by driving onto the embankment at the south end, or via several trails along the reservoir's western side. This is not a good site for shorebirds but the reservoir does host a variety of waterfowl. Other internal storage lakes in the area include Cowoki Reservoir **(E)**, and Timko Lake (Bantry Lake) **(F)** and Bantry Reservoir **(G)**. These reservoirs host species similar to those already mentioned.

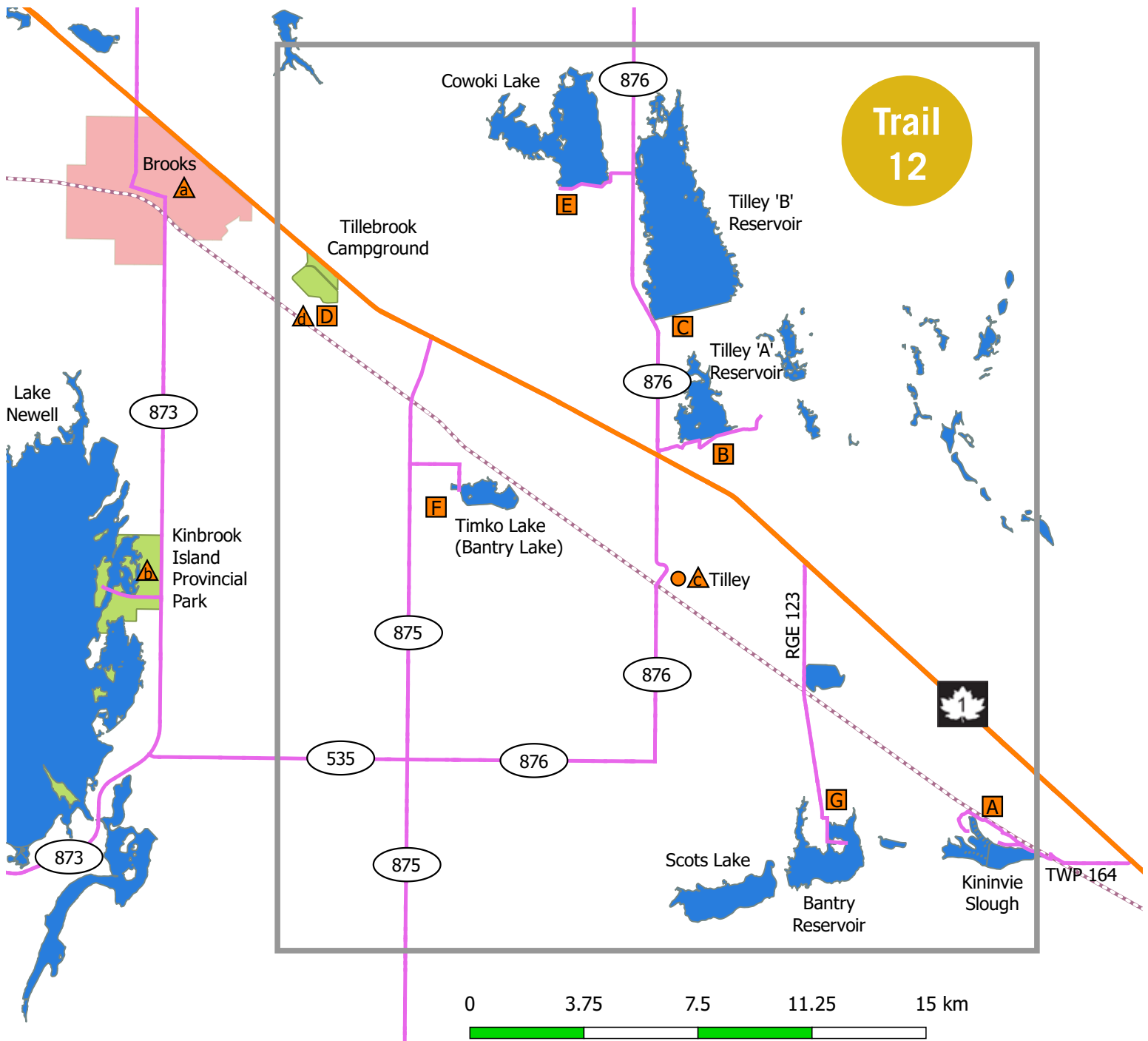
The Tillebrook campground **(D)**, particularly during spring and fall migration, can host a wide variety of passerines. During the May long weekend, this site is the centre of activity for the Brooks May Species Count, which encompasses an area within an 80 kilometre radius circle. Many birders from all over Alberta participate in this count and either stay at the campground or in Brooks. This count produces thousands of Black-bellied Plovers often with interspersed Red Knots. Whimbrel may also be present. This count on average tallies about 160 species.

Long-billed Curlew
Milt Spitzer



Kininvie Slough
Milt Spitzer





Trail 12: Tilley Area

■ Observation Points

- A** Kininvie Slough
- B** Tilley A
- C** Tilley B
- D** Tillebrook Provincial Park
- E** Cowoki Lake
- F** Timko Lake
- G** Bantry Reservoir

▲ Amenities

- ▲** Brooks: all amenities
- ▲** Kinbrook Island Provincial Park: camping restrooms and store*
- ▲** Tilley: meals
- ▲** Tillebrook Campground: camping and restrooms

* Some light snacks; not open all the time.

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TRAIL 13

→ Lake Newell/Kitsim

The area south and west of Brooks contains two major reservoirs, Lake Newell and Kitsim Reservoir. (Kitsim lies west of Highway 36 but is so close to Brooks and is such a good birding area it is necessary to include it in this trail guide.) The description proceeds in a westerly direction from Brooks and then circles in a counter clockwise direction. The opposite direction works equally well.

From Brooks take the Trans Canada Highway west turning south on Hwy 36. Take the west turnoff to Cassils, viewing the sloughs along this road for shorebirds. Continue on TP RD 190 to a T intersection. Turn left, and then right after crossing the railway tracks. Proceed approximately 5 km west to the turnoff to Antelope Creek Ranch **(A)**. This ranch welcomes birders and ecotourists to their trails through grasslands and large wetlands. Access map and information is available on their website: www.antelopecreekranch.ca. This ranch is maintained by Alberta Fish and Game Association to demonstrate how ranching, gas production and wildlife can co-exist.

From Cassils, follow RGE RD 155 (turns into RGE RD 160A) south as far as Hwy 539. Several sloughs **(B)** along this road are excellent for shorebirds. Ferruginous Hawk and Burrowing Owl have also been seen along this road. Once you arrive at Hwy 539 turn right (west) and follow the highway until you get to the Kitsim Reservoir inflow canal. Follow the canal, on the right bank (west side) to the Kitsim Reservoir **(C)** and then drive along the dam to the east end and out to Hwy 36. Again depending on water levels, the southwest end of Kitsim Reservoir can be an excellent habitat for shorebirds. Caspian Tern and American Bittern are often found here. On the reservoir itself, in addition to a large variety of waterfowl, a good colony of Western Grebe nest here and Clark's Grebe have been found as well. On the east side of Kitsim one can find a variety of sparrows as well as Chestnut-collared Longspur.

After completing the Kitsim portion of Trail 13 turn right (south) onto Hwy 36 and then left (east) onto Hwy 873, which travels along the south side of Lake Newell. Follow Hwy 873 east and then north. Along the northern portion of the road view the sloughs **(D)**, particularly on the west side of the highway, for a variety of shorebirds and other species. A 1.6 km side trip east on Hwy 535 could be worthwhile as the sloughs **(E)** on either side of the highway have had good concentrations of migrating shorebirds. As one travels north along Hwy 873 you get to a turnoff to Kinbrook Island Provincial Park **(F)**. This large and very busy park has campgrounds, playgrounds, boat docks, a swimming area and a small store and confectionary. The campground and cabin area is heavily treed with mature poplars and can produce a wide variety of passerines. Although the causeway into the park contains abundant waterfowl, it would be much safer to bird this area from the well-maintained adjacent trails. The trail on the north end of the Park follows a spit between the main lake and the wetlands to the east. This trail should be hiked as it can turn up a good variety of species. In the past this trail has produced Long-eared Owl along with a variety of passerines and waterfowl.

Black-crowned Night-Heron
Bob Frew

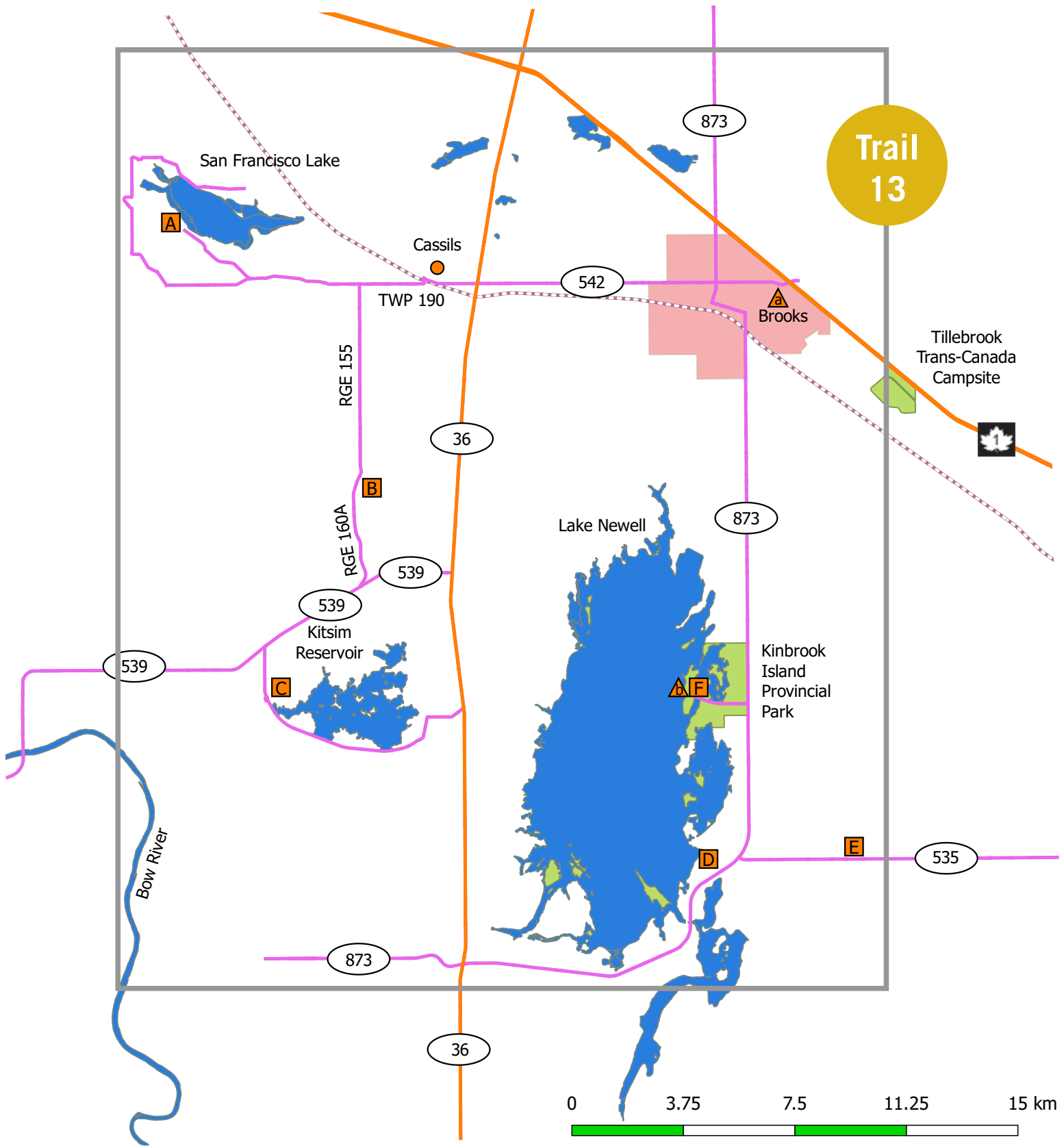


American Bittern
Milt Spitzer



Kitsim Reservoir
Milt Spitzer





Trail 13

Trail 13: Lake Newell / Kitsim

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | Observation Points | | Amenities |
| | Antelope Creek Ranch | | Brooks: all amenities |
| | Sloughs along Rge. Rd. 160A | | Kinbrook Island Provincial Park: camping, restrooms and store* |
| | Kitsim Reservoir | | |
| | Sloughs southeast side of Lake Newell | | |
| | Shorebird Slough on either side of Hwy. 535 | | |
| | Kinbrook Island Provincial Park | | |

*Some light snacks not open all the time.

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TRAIL 14

→ Taber *and* Purple Springs

A & B → Taber Lake

Taber Lake is an irrigation reservoir fed by canals coming from the St. Mary River. Water from this system nourishes the many valuable irrigated crops in this area, such as sugar beets, potatoes, corn, and dry beans. At the same time, the reservoir provides excellent marsh habitat, as well as nesting islands for gulls, pelicans and cormorants.

The lake starts just north and east of the Lantic Inc. sugar factory yard on the east side of Taber, and it extends to the east for about 5 km ending in a high dike. Three small islands have nesting colonies of California Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls, and Double-crested Cormorants. The land around the lake is fairly flat, and the water is probably not much more than a metre deep in any part of the lake.

The west side of the lake (**A**) can be accessed from Hwy 36 by going east on 57th Avenue, just north of the sugar factory yard, and just south of Kirk's Tirecraft. After about 500 meters turn left, crossing a small Texas gate, and from there the lake is in sight.

The lake to the east of the road has all of the expected diving and dabbling ducks, as well as being a good breeding area for Eared and Red-necked Grebes, Ruddy Duck, and American Coot. The extensive areas of cattail and bulrush marshes support large numbers of breeding Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Common Yellowthroat, Marsh Wren, and Sora. A large area of bulrushes in the middle of the lake supports a colony of nesting Franklin's Gulls. Western Grebes, which are rare breeders in this area, have nested at the lake. Some of the less common birds that have been found here include Black-crowned Night-Heron, American Bittern, White-winged Scoter, Forster's Tern, Caspian Tern, Virginia Rail, and migrating Swamp Sparrow, Common Loon, Surf Scoter, Greater White-fronted Goose, Red-breasted Merganser, Greater Scaup, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Thayer's Gull, and Long-tailed Duck. Both a Ross's Goose and a Snow Goose spent parts of a summer along the south side of the lake.

To the west side of the road lies a small area of shallow water maybe 150 meters in length, which attracts a large number of birds. Some of the puddle ducks can concentrate here in spring and fall, and as well, many shorebirds are attracted to this area, both migrants and the summer residents. Some of the unusual birds that have been found here include: Cattle Egret, Eurasian Wigeon, Ruddy Turnstone, and Hudsonian Godwit. Flocks of Whimbrels are sometimes found here in May, and White-faced Ibises are present in increasing numbers, especially in late summer.

Another access point on the east side of the lake (**B**) is worth checking out. From the intersection of Hwys 3 and 36 on the east end of Taber, go east for 4.8 km, and turn north on RGE RD 16-1 (Note: This signage is used in the Municipal District of Taber; in other counties this is equivalent to RGE RD 161). After about 300 metres cross a small canal. Turn west on the canal and follow the dirt trail for about 500 metres. The top of the steep dike gives good views of the lake. Patches of willows and other bushes and some large cottonwoods can have a number of songbirds, including Bullock's Oriole and Rusty Blackbird.

C & D → Fincastle Lake

Fincastle Lake (**C**) is also an irrigation reservoir, located just a few minutes east of Taber Lake. The lake is surrounded by a narrow strip of pasture featuring rolling hills. The lake is only about 2 km long and about 1.5 km wide. The best access point is on the east side of the lake. To get there turn north onto RGE RD 15-3 (153) about 11 km from Taber. On the east side of the road is the large Lamb Weston potato plant. Go north almost a kilometre, to the large Buck for Wildlife sign on the left. Turn into a narrow gate and follow a dirt trail, which heads to the northwest, until you reach the lake. This part of the lake is popular with fishermen, both in summer and winter. It is also a great place for birding. Because of the rolling hills, there are many islands in the lake, which offer secure nesting areas for many birds. The first thing people notice when they get out here is the Great Blue Heron colony a couple of hundred metres to the west, on an island. Formerly all of the nests were in a large cottonwood tree, but when the tree started to die the Alberta Conservation Association erected a few nest platforms on poles that are now used by the herons. Canada Geese nest on the islands in large numbers, as well as Ring-billed and California Gulls, Common Tern, Double-crested Cormorant, and in some years a pair of Caspian Terns.

Some birds may concentrate here during migration, especially in spring. For example, both Common Loons and Red-breasted Mergansers are found here in higher numbers than any nearby lake in spring. Perhaps the best known rarity in this area is the Whimbrel, which is a rare spring migrant in most of Alberta. While they may be found anywhere in the Taber area in spring, the biggest flocks of Whimbrels are frequently found in the area of Fincastle Lake, mostly in fields to the north and northwest of the lake (**D**). At times they can be seen resting on the shores of the lake. They arrive here in late April or early May, and stay for at least 3 weeks.

In spring and fall, huge flocks of blackbirds and starlings can sometimes be found at a feedlot just north of the lake, and some overwinter there. The blackbirds are mostly Brewer's, but others such as Red-winged, Yellow-headed, and Rusty, and even a Brown-headed Cowbird have been seen here in the winter. American Kestrel and Sharp-shinned Hawk have also been seen here in the winter.

A large number of rare birds have been found here. Some of these include: Pacific and Red-throated Loons, Cattle Egret, Great Egret (One bird spent several weeks here, and was re-arranging sticks in one of the heron nests in July.), Glaucous Gull, Mew Gull, Sabine's Gull and Clark's Grebe. Eurasian Wigeon can be common here in the spring, and Brewer's Sparrow has been found in the prairie near the lake. The trees and bushes near the lake and in nearby farmyards have had unusual birds such as Cassin's Vireo and a singing MacGillivray's Warbler.



Common Nighthawk
Milt Spitzer

E & F → Purple Springs Dunes

This is a great place to see the typical prairie birds, such as Western Meadowlark, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Horned Lark, Vesper and Savannah Sparrows, and Swainson's Hawk. Some of the less common birds found here are: Brewer's, Grasshopper, and Baird's Sparrows, Lark Bunting, Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Upland Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew, Sprague's Pipit, and Sharp-tailed Grouse. The wetlands in this area can have large numbers of breeding waterfowl, such as puddle and diving ducks, Red-necked and Pied-billed Grebes, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and both Common and Black Terns. American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant commonly feed here, and White-faced Ibis have been seen here recently. The banks of the sand dunes can have nesting Bank and Northern Rough-winged Swallows.

The Purple Springs Dunes area is fascinating, whether you enjoy birds, animals, plants, insects, or just the feel of the wide open prairie. As the name suggests, this area of very sandy soil still has a number of active sand dunes. Some of the land is a grazing reserve, belonging to the M.D. of Taber (open to the public). Some areas farther east are privately owned. This sandy area extends eastward almost to the north of Grassy Lake. A wide variety of plants have adapted to live in this sandy soil, and a number of rare plants are found here, some of which only grow in the loose sand of dunes. Mammals found here include large ones like the Pronghorn and Mule Deer, as well as the rest of the typical prairie animals. The Prairie Rattlesnake and Plains Garter Snake can be found here. Surprisingly, three species of toad live in the area: the endangered Great Plains Toad and the Canadian and Spadefoot Toads.

The Purple Springs Dunes **(E)** can be accessed from Hwy 3, about 16 km east of Taber. Go north on RGE RD 15-0 (150). Go north on this road, and soon you will have prairie on both sides. The best way to find the birds of the area is to stop the vehicle frequently; get out and listen and watch for the vast variety of bird species. As one continues north, notice how the landscape changes. Most of the west side of the road is fairly flat, but then some areas are very rugged and uneven, because they were shaped by wind erosion and shifting sand. Maybe 6 km from the highway the road crosses a lake **(F)**, which is a good place to stop and look around. Just north of the lake a white sign marks the public use area. The prairie ends about 2 km north of here, so it is recommended to turn around and go back south to TWP RD 10-4 (104). Go west for a mile here, then go south again on RGE RD 15-1 (151), ending up again at Hwy 3.

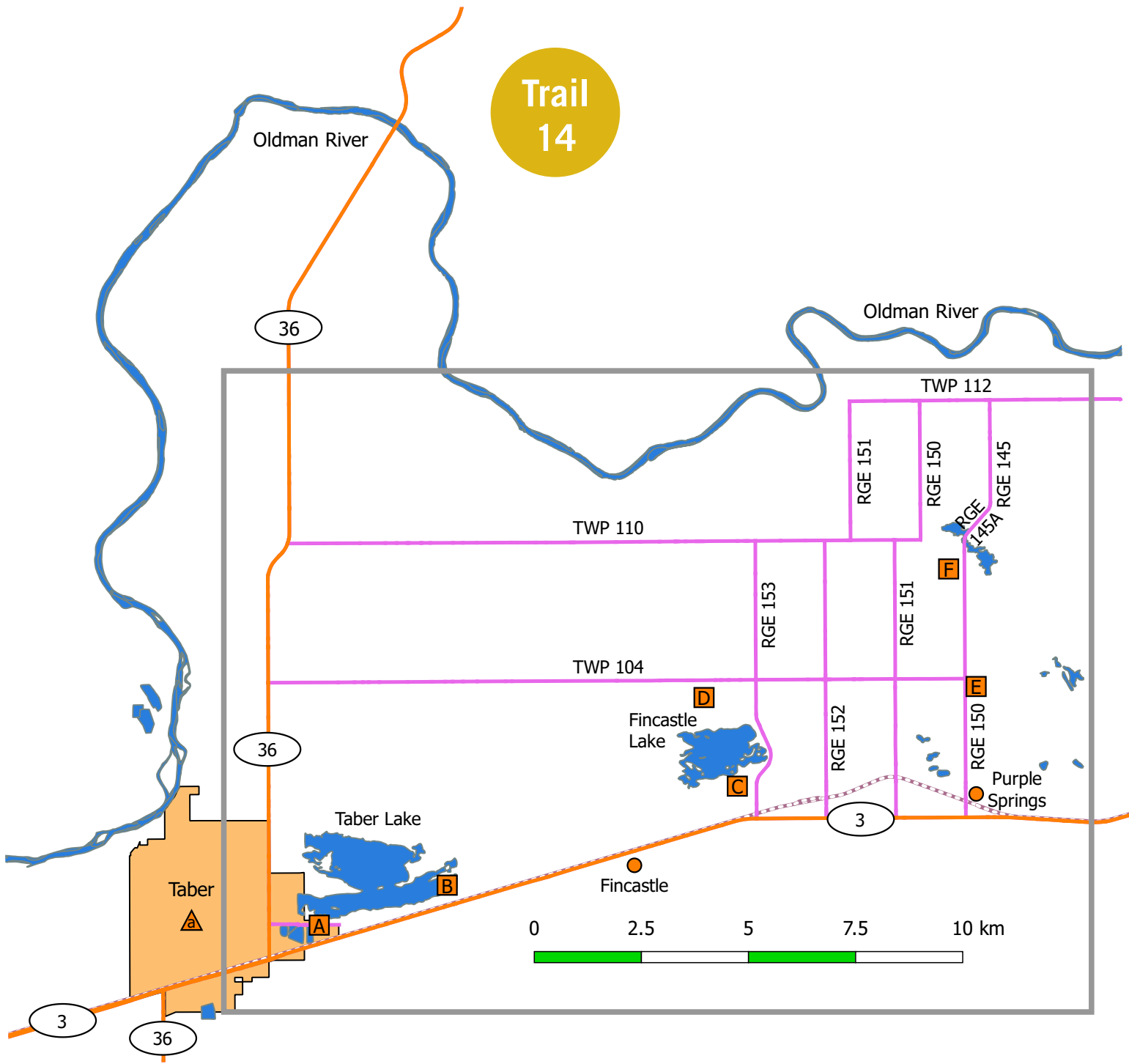


Whimbrel
Milt Spitzer



Fincastle Lake
Ken Orich

Trail 14



Trail 14: Taber and Purple Springs

- Observation Points
- ▲ Amenities
- A West side of Taber Lake
- B East side of Taber Lake
- C Fincastle Lake
- D Fields north and west of Fincastle Lake
- E Purple Springs Dunes
- F Lake on Rge. Rd. 150
- ▲ Taber: all amenities

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TRAIL 15

→ Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park

Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park marks the west end of a large tract of unbroken native grasslands. The Milk River runs through the park and the valley is filled with cliffs, hoodoos, cottonwood forests and coulees. This area has special spiritual significance to the Blackfoot people.

The park is 42 km southeast of the town of Milk River. Access to the park from Milk River along Hwy 501 is well signed and the highway from this direction is paved. Writing-on-Stone is located approximately 60 km southwest of Foremost. Follow Hwy 879 south to Hwy 501, then head west following the signs. Access via this route is also paved. Both of these towns have fuel, meals and accommodation available. Note that the unstaffed card-lock gas station in Foremost accepts credit cards.

The stretch of Hwy 501 between Milk River and the junction with Hwy 500 is mostly large farm fields with very little habitat favourable for birds. However, depending on the time of year, raptors such as Bald and Golden Eagles, Ferruginous, Swainson's, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks might be seen. The occasional Prairie Falcon, Merlin or Kestrel may be sighted too. Great Horned Owls often nest along the highway in farm woodlots. Other typical birds along the way include Western Meadowlark, Horned Lark, Mourning Dove and different species of blackbirds. During migration, different species of ducks and shorebirds may be observed in farm dugouts and prairie potholes. **The highway is narrow and traffic can be busy at times. There are very few places to pull off, so EXTREME CAUTION is necessary.** All of the land along this highway is private, so permission to access these properties must be obtained.

The short stretch of Hwy 500 from its junction with Hwy 501 **(A)** has some farmland but is mostly surrounded by native grasslands. Other than the raptors and other birds previously mentioned, one may observe Western and Eastern Kingbirds, Pronghorn and with luck, a Loggerhead Shrike in late spring to early fall. It is possible to see Northern Shrike during late fall, winter and early spring. Sharp-tailed Grouse and Gray Partridge may also be observed.

Approximately 7.5 km along Hwy 500 south of its junction with Hwy 501, a gravel road provides access to the Milk River **(B)**. Look for a sign that says RGE RD 131 and "Rodeo Grounds and River Access". The road is 3.5 km long and runs along the park boundary. Access beyond the road is restricted, but it is a good place to find Vesper Sparrow and kingbirds. As you drop downhill through hoodoos, be on the lookout for Golden Eagle, Kestrel or Prairie Falcon. The parking area is small, but only 25 m from the river. This is a good place to scan the river, the hoodoos and the valley across the river. It offers spectacular views of the Sweetgrass Hills in Montana and the hoodoos and cliffs along the Milk River valley. Don't forget your camera! One often sees Mule Deer along this stretch of road.

Once you return to Hwy 500, turn right. The access to Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park **(C)** is only 700 metres to the east. Long-billed Curlew are often seen along the short stretch between Hwy 500 and the Park's Interpretive Visitor Centre. Once you cross the Texas gate, turn left to the Visitor Centre. The centre offers another great view of the Sweetgrass Hills and the hoodoo-laden river valley. The Visitor Centre is open from the May long-weekend until mid-September. Hours are 09:00 to 19:00 on Fridays and Saturdays and from 09:30 to 16:30 on Sundays through Thursdays. A copy of the Bird Checklist for the park may be obtained at the front desk. You have to ask for one, but it is free. Of the 160 birds listed, over 40 are considered migrants (spring and/or fall) while 60 are considered to be summer residents. An example of some summer residents are Yellow-breasted Chat, Short-eared Owl, Sprague's Pipit, Rock Wren, Baird's and Brewer's Sparrows, Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspurs, Lark Bunting and Baltimore Oriole.

First Nation rock art is a feature of this park and no visit would be complete without a guided tour to the restricted area. For information regarding this art, tours, and other information concerning the park go to: www.albertaparks.ca/writing-on-stone.aspx.

A short drive from the Visitor's Centre will take you to the bottom of the river valley and the campground/day use areas. If you have decided to camp, it is best to make reservations ahead of time as this is a very popular destination campground during long-weekends and the summer months of July and August.

The day use parking lot is at the bottom of the hill to your right. After parking take a stroll around the campground loop. Brown Thrashers, Spotted Towhees, Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, American Robins and Cedar Waxwings are just a few of the birds that are relatively easy to find. A pair of Merlins nests near the outdoor theatre, so if things are quiet, they may be on the hunt. Depending on the time of day and time of year, many other species may be seen, especially migrating warblers and thrushes. You will surely hear cock pheasants crowing in the background; the challenge is to find them!

One thing to note, if the Group Camps are occupied, ask for permission to bird in those sites or pass them by. If they are vacant, some interesting birds may be found as they are adjacent to the Milk River and have a good mix of shrubs, trees and dense cover. Make it a point to scan across the river: you might be surprised at what you see. Don't worry if the group sites are occupied as the campground has lots of other good access points.

The Hoodoo Trail starts at the entrance to the day use parking lot. It is approximately 2 km one way and will take a minimum of 90 minutes return, depending on what you find and how often you stop. Take plenty of water, sunscreen, bug repellent and don't forget your camera and binoculars. Adequate footwear is recommended: not sandals or flip-flops. The trail is narrow, uneven and steep in places. Uneven stairs are chiseled into the sandstone and cribbed stairways have eroded, so caution is necessary. Trail conditions will vary with weather, so during wet weather they will be slippery. Since it is a 4 km round-trip and often done in very hot weather, a person must consider their fitness level. There are benches to rest on along the way, but no toilet facilities. The trail takes you through hoodoos, then along the Milk River for a few hundred metres and back into hoodoos. You must stay on the trail, as the entire area is extremely sensitive to disturbance. It is recommended to make the hike in the evening or early morning to avoid the heat of the day. More bird activity will be happening then anyhow.

Rock Wren, American Pipit (in the fall), different sparrows and perhaps even a Yellow-breasted Chat may be seen along the trail. Butterflies, wild flowers and fantastic scenery make the hike worthwhile even if you don't find many new birds. The river reach is very thickly brushed and if you "bird by ear", this is the place to test your knowledge.

The Writing-on-Stone area is noted for turning up some very unusual and rare species for Alberta. Some of the species seen in the area include: Bullock's Oriole, Sage Thrasher, Mountain Plover, Eastern Screech-Owl, White-throated Swift, Lewis's Woodpecker, Cassin's Kingbird, Pinyon Jay, and Orchard Oriole. Keep your eyes and ears open for potential surprises. If the river is low, consider wading across. This area is much less visited and has the potential for interesting species. Be sure to obey the signs indicating areas with restricted access.

Remember that Prairie Rattlesnakes are protected by law in Alberta, so if you encounter one, it has the right-of-way. It is as afraid of you as you might be of it and all it wants to do is get away!

Say's Phoebe
Dan Schiebelbein



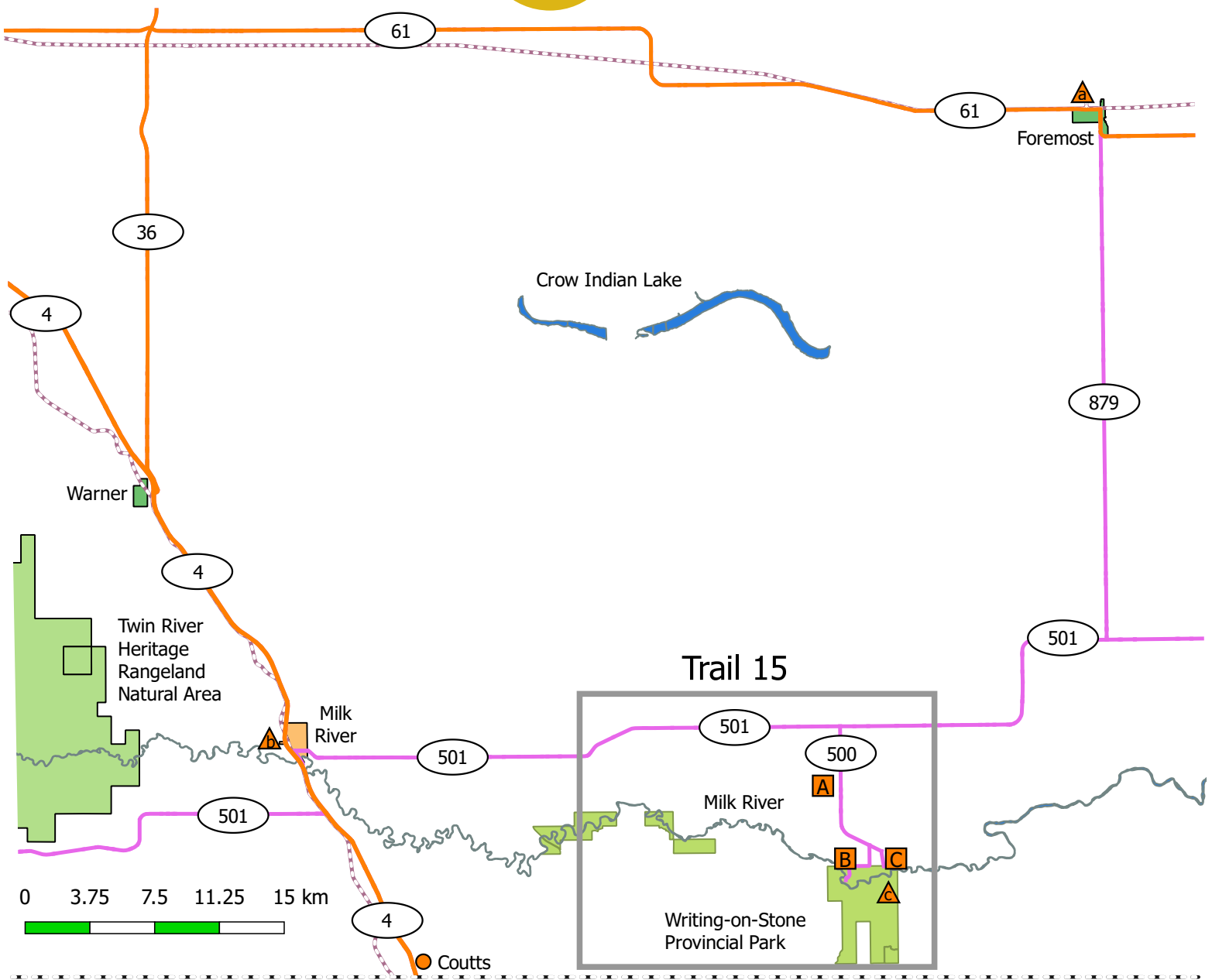
Spotted Towhee
Milt Spitzer



Writing-on-Stone
Paul Thibault



Trail 15



Trail 15: Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park

Montana

Observation Points

- A** Highway 500; Native Grasslands
- B** Range Road 131; Rodeo Grounds, River Access
- C** Visitor Centre; Access to Park

Amenities

- A** Foremost: fuel, meals, lodgings and camping
- B** Milk River: all amenities
- C** Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park: camping and restrooms

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Credits



This birding trails guide for Southeastern Alberta was compiled by the Grasslands Naturalists Birding Trails Committee which is comprised of Phil Horch, Chairman, and members: Hugh Armstrong, Marty Drut, Mackenzie Fai, Bob Frew, Rob Gardner, Bill Knibbs, Michael O'Shea, Colton Prins, John Slater, Milt Spitzer and Paul Thibault. Special contributions were made by Ken Orich, Lethbridge, who provided the write-up for Trail 15; Writing-on-Stone and by Lloyd Bennett, Taber area, who did the write-up for Trail 14: Taber and Purple Springs.

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