

Duluth Birding

The Inn on Gitche Gumee is situated in one of the top bird watching areas in the country. Many birders travel to Duluth, MN for the opportunity to view boreal bird species like Boreal Chickadees, Black-backed Woodpeckers, Great-gray Owls, and Northern Goshawks.

The gardens in front of the inn are beautiful to look at and enjoy, but are especially attractive to birds. Watch for Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Palm Warblers, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets during the spring and fall migrations. You can often find them flitting around from plant to plant. In late summer and fall, watch for the White-lined Sphinx Moth, which flies from flower to flower just like a hummingbird. In winter, you might notice small white birds on the sides of the road called Snow Buntings and up in the tops of fruit bearing trees you can find large flocks of Bohemian Waxwings.

The view of the lake is not only spectacular from each room but can also be good to watch for Osprey, Bald Eagles, Ring-billed Gulls, and Common Loons. As it gets colder in October through December, watch the lake before it freezes. Sea ducks known as scoters can sometimes be seen floating far out on the water as well as Common and Hooded mergansers, Common Goldeneyes, and Lesser Scaup.

The trails behind the inn can lead you to some great birds, a year round highlight being the crow sized Pileated Woodpecker. In the spring, listen for the melodious and mysterious songs of the Veery and the Hermit Thrush. Red-breasted Nuthatches can be seen and heard giving their high nasally yanking call. In spring and summer, warblers can be found in the tops of trees including Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Wilson's, and Northern Parula. Watch your step as you walk down the trails, you might flush a hidden Ruffed Grouse.

In colder months, if you're lucky, you might even spot a small Saw-whet Owl lurking in some of the conifers behind the Inn. In early spring, listen for their high-pitched tooting call at night.

Places to Bird around the Inn:

Hawk Ridge

Duluth's most well known birding spot is Hawk Ridge where literally thousands of eagles, hawks, falcons, and vultures migrate overhead in spring and fall. On September 15, 2003, a record 101,716 Broad-winged Hawks flew over the ridge! Though people gather to this spot from August through November to see Broad-winged Hawks, Peregrine Falcons, Bald Eagles, and Sharp-shinned Hawks it's well worth a trip just for the scenic view of the city and lake.



You can watch from the road or if you need to stretch your legs, Hawk Ridge offers a variety of trails for some excellent hiking and you might even find a Black-backed Woodpecker quietly scaling bark off some of the trees. The best days to watch for migrating raptors are in the fall when the winds are out of the Northwest.

To learn more about Hawk Ridge, the best times to visit, directions, and programs offered by the naturalists visit their website www.hawkridge.org.



Stony Point

To the north, not far from the inn is a wonderful neighborhood called Stony Point in which to view Lake Superior and find some great birds along the road. Head north on North Shore Scenic Drive to Stony Pointe Drive across from Tom's Logging Camp. When you turn onto Stony Point, you will see a parking area. Bird watchers enjoy scanning Lake Superior with a spotting scope from this vantage point especially during the spring and fall migration. In spring, you might find Red-necked Grebes and Red-throated Loons on the water. Watch the surrounding trees for warblers and kinglets. You can walk down the quiet road to look for other exciting species. During migration, watch for Northern Hawk Owls, Boreal Owls, Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, and Pine Grosbeaks. The road is public, but the homes are on private property along Stony Pointe Drive. Please be respectful of private property as you enjoy the wonderful birds in this neighborhood.



Park Point

Park Pointe Recreation Area is located four miles from the Aerial Lift Bridge on Lake Avenue South. Follow Lake Avenue over the bridge all the way to where it ends at the park. The large parking area at the soccer fields is a good place to park. Scan the fields for shorebirds and explore the beach for more shorebirds, gulls, loons, jaegers, and ducks. Near the air strip at the far end of the park is a trail that explores some of the woods which are always worth a look for owls, warblers, thrushes, eagles, nuthatches, and chickadees. Watch for shorebirds, jaegers, gulls, terns, snowy owls. You may see waterfowl rarities scoters, Harlequin Ducks, Long-tailed Ducks, and loons.

Though this spot is always worthwhile to watch for birds, it can be a great alternative to Hawk Ridge in the fall. If the winds are out of the Southwest or if it is foggy or rainy, Park Point can be a much more productive birding spot than Hawk Ridge.

Sax Zim Bog

If you're up for a longer excursion, then Sax Zim Bog is a must for some great birding. The area is named for the towns of Sax and Zim, which are surrounded by the tamarack bog. This area was well known to bird watchers as a great spot for boreal species but really grew famous during the winter of 2004 – 2005 when a few thousand Great Gray Owls flew into the state of Minnesota. The bog has always been reliable for one or two sightings of Great Gray Owls, but that winter a person could drive through and easily see 20 – 50 as well as a few Northern Hawk Owls in the middle of the day! Other great birds to watch for include Black-billed Magpies, Northern Harriers, Boreal Chickadees, Upland Sandpiper, Connecticut Warbler, and Gray Jays. In winter, keep an eye open for the owls as well as Rough-legged Hawks and Snow Buntings. This is also a reliable spot for Sharp-tailed Grouse and Yellow Rails.

Birders in this area tend to pull over on the sides of the road and watch for birds. Keep in mind that this area is used for logging and large trucks can pass by at any time. Use common sense and always be cautious when viewing birds from the road.

For directions, visit www.exploreminnesota.com/attractions/8911.html.

The Duluth area is chock full of great birding spots. These are just some of the favorites. To learn more about birding this area try the following books:

- *DNR's Traveler's Guide to Wildlife in Minnesota* by Carrol Henderson
- *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota* by Kim Eckert
- *The North Shore Birding Trail* by Audubon Minnesota

You can get up to date information about birds seen in the area by calling the Duluth Rare Bird Alert at 218-834-2858 or by visiting the website for the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union www.moumn.org.