

PRESCOTT AREA BIRDING TRAILS: A SELF-GUIDED TOUR



--Welcome--

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

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

Several sites described below are Prescott City parks. These City parks are currently \$3/vehicle fee areas (Wednesday is free.) Purchasing a pass gives you access to ALL the Prescott City parks for that day. Just purchase your pass at the vending machine located at the parking area or entrance road for each fee area.

The following descriptions mention just a few of the bird species you might find at each site,

with an emphasis on species unique to the Southwest.

Essentials: your binoculars, a field guide, sunscreen, and water. Also essential is to respect the birds and their needs when you are out birding. Please refer to the [Birders' Code of Ethics](#) for suggestions.

Each site is coded for its best seasons:

Sp = Spring

S = Summer

F = Fall

W = Winter

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



Directions for several of our birding sites begin at the center of Prescott, Courthouse Square. We have listed map coordinates for several places in the text below. Also, in this guide, you will see links to the eBird “hotspots” associated with many of the sites below. In eBird, you can find bar charts showing birds reported at each “hotspot” by month.

Prescott Town Tour

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

Driving direction for this tour are from Courthouse Square, the center of downtown Prescott, at N 34.540922, W -112.469446.



Watson Woods : Sp, Su, F, W

eBird Hotspot- [Watson Lake and Riparian Preserve](#)

To reach **Watson Woods**, head eastbound on Gurley St, then head left (north) onto Hwy 89. In 2.3 miles, turn right onto Prescott Lakes Parkway, cross the bridge and turn left immediately onto Sundog Ranch Rd. On your left, you will see the Peavine Trail parking lot, (\$3 fee area) at N 34.575409, W -112.427353.



Redstart

Rare but possible: Vagrant Eastern warblers in migration, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Harlan's Hawk, Pacific Wren, White-throated Sparrows (winter).

Arizona specialties: Bridled Titmouse, Lucy's Warbler, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Wood Duck, Blue Grosbeak, Common Black Hawk, Painted

Watson Woods can be magic in any season. In spring and fall, look for warblers and flycatchers. Winter brings sparrows, sapsuckers, and raptors. Follow the path from the parking lot, cross over the old railroad bed (the Peavine Trail) and go through the walk-in fence opening. Head down a short way into the preserve. After a few yards, the trail splits. Turn right, northbound, to bird your way towards the lake. At the next trail junction, turning left will take you across a tiny pedestrian bridge, then to a larger red bridge over Granite Creek, then along the west side of Watson Woods to the lake. Just beyond the first bridge and on your left is a small pond. Stop here to look for skulking Wood Ducks, migrating warblers, or a Pacific Wren in winter. Returning back to the trail junction east of the small bridge, continue east a short stretch until the trail climbs up to meet the Peavine trail. Turning left (north) will take you along the Peavine Trail to the east side of Watson Lake. Along these trails, grasses harbor wintering sparrows. At the lake edges, you could see dabbling ducks, cormorants, Great Blue Herons, Wilson's Snipe and other shorebirds in season. Raptors abound: Bald Eagles, wintering Merlins and Northern Harriers, Peregrine Falcons, kestrels, and Osprey. In the cottonwoods, Red-tailed hawks, Cooper's Hawks and Great Horned Owls nest. In season, listen for the screaming of the Common Black Hawk as well.

If you want to explore more, return to the trail junction where you first turned right after entering the woods. Rather than turn back to the parking area, simply continue south down the trail and under the Prescott Lakes Parkway bridge. The two-track road along the east side makes a nice walking trail. In about 0.3 miles from the Prescott Lakes Parkway bridge, taking the right fork will bring you across Granite Creek to the Rosser St. trailhead and some well-marked trails into this south side of Watson Woods.



Peavine Trail: Sp, Su, F, W

eBird Hotspot- [Watson Lake and Riparian Preserve](#)

Rare but possible: Vermillion Flycatcher, wintering sparrows, Greater Roadrunner, Western Screech Owl

AZ Specialties: Rufous-crowned Sparrow, AZ Bald Eagle, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Canyon Towhee, Crissal Thrasher, Juniper Titmouse

The Peavine Trail is the level, wide pathway that heads northward from the same parking lot (fee) used for access to Watson Woods and Watson Lake. It is a perfect choice for a brisk walk or easy birding through three habitats—cottonwood riparian, lakeside, and the intriguing mix of chaparral and mosaic red rocks that is our Prescott Dells. For the first mile, this trail forms the east boundary of Watson Woods and Watson Lake. For the next mile, it enters the Dells. The Dells are home to bobcats, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, White-throated Swifts and Zone-tailed Hawks, as well as Bridled Titmouse, Violet-green Swallows, and Anna’s Hummingbirds. Walking the Peavine will offer you good exercise, great landscape views, and a uniquely Arizona array of bird species. Since the trail is fine gravel, it can be difficult for some wheelchairs; otherwise it’s an open, user-friendly trail, good for sharing with your family and your (leashed) pet.



Watson Lake : SP, Su, F, W

eBird Hotspot- [Watson Lake and Riparian Preserve](#)

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



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

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

From the Peavine trailhead parking lot (fee), follow the Peavine Trail (see above) to the south end of Watson Lake. Two other access points are on the west side of the lake. If you are driving northbound on Hwy 89, take the first right after the intersection with Prescott Lakes Parkway into an overlook with about a dozen parking spaces. Here you can find ducks and shorebirds just below you, and you can scope out the entire lake. Be aware that you are looking east, so the lighting is best in the afternoons. Continuing north on Hwy 89 brings you to a roundabout. Turning right here takes you into Watson Lake Park (fee), which has two good overlooks for the north end of the lake. The water is deeper here, so look for diving ducks and the occasional loon or scoter. Going straight takes you uphill to an overlook parking area. Turning right just before the restroom takes you down to a boat dock. You can walk the lake edge trails from any of these overlooks.



Willow Lake (aka Willow Creek Reservoir):

Sp, F, W

eBird Hotspot- [Prescott-- Willow Lake](#)

Less developed than Watson Lake, Willow Lake's waters are mostly shallow, which the dabbling ducks and shorebirds prefer.

Rare but possible: Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Greater White-fronted Goose, Hooded Merganser, the occasional Scoter, Vaux's Swift, Black Tern, shorebirds, pelicans, Tundra Swan, grebes

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

Willow Lake sports four access points, each of which brings you to the level, wide, pet-friendly trail that circles the lake. Only the north access point, in Heritage Park, is a fee area. Willow Lake is especially rich in birdlife during spring and fall migration, and it is the heart of our Willow/Watson Important Bird Area in the winter season when it harbors hundreds of wintering waterfowl.

Access point 1: The Southeast side

From the center of town, head east on Hwy 69 to the northbound turn onto Hwy 89. Go north on Hwy 89 for 3.6 miles to the roundabout. Go left here to Willow Lake Rd. In another 0.6 miles, you reach the first unpaved turnout near some utility boxes. This is a good starting point for a nice long walk with your family and your pet (leashed) around Willow. As you face the lake, head left along the trail.

Access point 2: The South side

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

Access Point 3: The "Dog Park" trailhead:

Continue along Willow Lake Rd. westward. Turn right where Willow Lake Rd. ends at Willow Creek Rd. In a half-mile past that intersection, turn right where you see a dog park and drive past the park and a baseball field to an unpaved trailhead parking lot. (Restrooms are at the ball field.) Head left along the lakeside trail. You will come to a lovely peninsula of old Cottonwoods. In spring, look for Great Horned Owls, nesting Great Blue Herons and Double-crested Cormorants, singing Yellow and Lucy's Warblers, and colorful Orioles. Scan the utility poles for raptors, including falcons: American Kestrel, Merlin, Prairie and Peregrine Falcon. The dry slopes near the trail are home to Phainopepla, wintering sparrows and a Roadrunner or two. This side of the lake can have Hooded Mergansers in winter and early spring.



Access Point 4: Heritage Park and the north shore:

Returning to Willow Creek Road, turn right again for the fourth access point, 0.7 miles northbound up the road. Turn right at Heritage Park Road, opposite the main entrance to Embry-Riddle University, then make a quick right again, for the entrance to Heritage Park (fee area). (Park kiosk at N 34.612601, W -112.443750) This access has restrooms, great trails the City of Prescott has established in the Dells bordering the lake, and a boat ramp for non-motorized boats. From the boat ramp dock, stop to look into the lakeshore trees for warblers,

Bullock's oriole, Phainopepla, and Bridled or Juniper Titmouse. Looking across the lake, scan the whitewashed "Cormorant Rock" near to shore for the occasional Neotropic Cormorant among the Double-cresteds. The lake can have American White Pelicans, several gulls, and shorebirds in migration, as well as Great and Snowy Egrets, and many ducks and grebes. And coots-- many, many coots. Look for Great Blue Heron or, if you're lucky, a Night Heron or a Green Heron on the shoreline.

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

eBird Hotspot- [Prescott-- Granite Dells](#)

Rare but possible: Black-throated Blue Warbler, American Dipper, Pacific and Winter Wren

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

Granite Dells Rd at Hwy 89: N 34.601395, W -112.424284 . As outlined above in the Prescott Town Tour, head east from the Courthouse Square on Gurley St, (Hwy 69). Go 1.3 miles and turn left (north) to Hwy 89. Travel 4.2 miles, past Watson Lake and straight through the roundabout. In 0.6 miles beyond the roundabout, turn right onto Granite Dells Road. This will take you to two good birding trails. The first is the "**Flume Trail**", a loop trail. The unpaved parking pullout is on your right just a short ways after the turn onto Granite Dells Rd. The trail has a bit of rock scrambling as it works its way to a fork. Stay left to follow the creek, or go right to loop around through the rocky Dells first. Signage is good along the trail- and simply follow the painted white dots along the rocky portions. Look for migrant warblers and Empidonax flycatchers in the scrub, Zone-tailed and Cooper's Hawks overhead, and Wood Ducks in the creek. Listen for a Rufous-crowned Sparrow in the rocky Dells.

Returning to the paved road, continue eastbound. In about 0.5 miles, you will reach a T-intersection just after the bridge over Granite Creek. (N 34.6032506, W -112.416245) Parking is very limited, with just enough for one or two vehicles before the bridge. Birding here is only along the road that follows the creek downstream then turns right and climbs a bit into the Dells and then through a neighborhood. This area boasts a spattering of riparian, chaparral, and rocky Dells habitat and can be quite birdy. Please use caution, as you are walking along a public road and through a neighborhood. Respect private property and no trespassing signs.

Granite Basin Tour: Granite Basin Lake and Wilderness Area



eBird Hotspot- [Granite Basin Lake](#)



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

Driving direction for this tour are from Courthouse Square, the center of downtown Prescott, at N 34.5409142, W -112.4694408.

Sp, S, F

Rare but possible: Peregrine Falcon, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Red Crossbill, Evening Grosbeak, Williamson's Sapsucker, Northern Pygmy-owl, Dusky-capped Flycatcher

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

From the Square, drive north on Montezuma. The road turns and changes name until you are westbound on Iron Springs Rd. About 4.8 miles from town, turn right at the brown sign for Granite Basin Road. Following this road for 3.2 miles, you will arrive at "Wekuvde", the first of four Forest Service parking areas along a loop road beside the lake. All are USFS fee areas with

restrooms. Park here, then walk west 50 yards past a gazebo until you are walking along the driving loop road. Right here, there is a small spring on the other side of the road, with some nice brushy tangles, good for wintering sparrows with possible Cassin's Finch and Red Crossbills in the Ponderosa Pines above. Acorn Woodpeckers are resident, with their "granary trees" full of holes. Turn right to head towards the lake. Bird the road or any of the trails that intersect. Walking the road until you reach the lake, then working the trails around and near the lake can make a great visit.

Starting at the second parking area, the Boat Dock access is a trail that heads down Mint Wash, below the dam. The trail starts just beside the restroom. We recommend you bird around the parking lot first, especially the lake and the small row of Cottonwood trees. Mint Wash trail goes through a drier, rockier habitat, with chances for hearing and perhaps seeing Rufous-crowned and Black-chinned Sparrow, Rock and Canyon Wrens, and the occasional small owl.

To begin closer to the Wilderness Area trail that climbs Granite Mountain (trail 261), drive past the first two parking areas and continue to the "Playa" parking area. The trail drops into the large cottonwoods from the west side of the parking lot. The Cottonwood grove and the nearby small meadow at the inlet to the reservoir host a wide variety of birds – Hepatic and Summer Tanagers, migrant and wintering warblers and Empidonax flycatchers, Pacific Wren, Sora, kinglets, sapsuckers, Hutton's Vireo, and more.

Some higher parts of the trail system, close to the mountain rock face itself, are closed during Peregrine Falcon nesting season—contact the USFS for details at (928)-443-8000.

Chino Valley Tour

eBird Hotspots: [Sullivan Lake](#), [Upper Verde River-- Campbell- North](#), [Upper Verde River-- Hell Canyon](#)

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

Mileages for this loop are from the intersection of Hwy 89 and Hwy 89A (Pioneer Parkway) near the Prescott Airport.

N 34.632279, W -112.429052



Sp, S, F, W

Rare but possible: Swainson's Hawk, Lark Buntings and Lark Sparrows in migration. In winter, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Ferruginous Hawk, and the rare Rough-legged Hawk. Also Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, Chipping and Brewer's Sparrows, occasionally a longspur. In breeding season look for Indigo Bunting, Myiarchus Flycatchers, orioles and warblers along the Verde River.

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

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

Returning to the center of town at Road 2 North, head northward on Hwy 89 for 0.7 miles to a roundabout; turn right (east) onto **Perkinsville Road** (County Road 70). Along the 24-mile drive to Perkinsville, scan grasslands, Pinyons, and Century plant blooms for birds of the Pinyon-grasslands. Keep your eyes open for possible Pinyon Jay flocks. At Perkinsville (no services), the road crosses the **Verde River**. At the far end of the bridge, you will see an unpaved parking area on your left. Stop and walk along the river a bit, especially in spring. To complete a loop

tour, continue on for 17 miles, carefully following signs for Drake. Don't miss a marked turn left (westward) off from a short paved portion—staying on pavement will take you too far north. You will return to Hwy 89 shortly beyond the very visible Drake cement plant. Turning left (south) for 19.5 miles returns you to Chino Valley. If you prefer, you can simply return to Chino Valley the way you drove in.

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

Senator Highway Ponderosa Forest Tour



eBird Hotspots- [Prescott--Goldwater Lakes](#), [Groom Creek Loop Trail #307](#), [Kendall Camp Trail](#)

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

Directions for this tour are from the intersection of Gurley St. and Mt. Vernon Street, east of the Courthouse Square. N 34.541797, W -112.463171

Sp, S, F

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

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



All the stops on this tour can offer very productive birding. Begin by heading south on Mt Vernon St, which becomes Senator Highway. First stop is a well-marked right turn into **Goldwater Lake**, at N34.502656, W-112.444245. This is a Prescott City fee area (\$3) with picnic and bathroom facilities, as well as some

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

Continuing south on Senator Highway, you will see a sign for Mount Tritle Rd. /Whispering Pines Camp (1.3 miles). This is the second right after the pavement ends. Turn here and bird your way along, avoiding the left fork to Whispering Pines. In about 1.3 miles, the road crosses the Hassayampa River headwaters. Birding around this area can be productive any time of year. A dirt side road follows the river north a short ways, and it's worth a look. Driving past the Hassayampa another 0.4 miles brings you to a larger parking pullout for the **Kendall Camp Trail**. (Target practice has made the small sign unreadable...) Park here, listen for singing Grace's Warblers and more, then walk along the two-track road that angles right uphill towards some aspens. If you follow this road a ways, you will climb a bit then drop down to the old fences of Kendall Camp itself. If you have not heard the song of the Greater Peewee yet, this is the spot to stop and listen. Wild Turkey, Painted Redstart, Red-faced, Virginia's and Grace's Warblers all summer here. Along this road, you can sometimes hear Mexican Whip-poor-will and Flammulated Owl at dark.

Walker Road Tour: The Highland Center for Natural History

and Lynx Lake.

eBird Hotspots- [Highland Center--Lynx Creek Site](#), [Prescott--Lynx Lake](#)

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

Directions for this tour are from the intersection of Highway 69 and Walker Rd, between Trader Joe's and Costco, N 34.548372, W -112.399899

Sp, S, F

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

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

To reach these Ponderosa forest hotspots, turn southbound onto Walker Rd. After 1.8 miles, you will see the sign to turn left into the **Highlands Center for Natural History**. They have trails, an amphitheater, and a gift shop. The small parking area is just to the right after the entrance gate. Returning to Walker Road, drive another 0.3 miles to the north entrance to **Lynx Lake** or 1.0 miles to the south entrance road. Both are USFS fee areas with Forest Service facilities. Birding the trail around the lake, approximately 2 miles, can be terrific. Rarities such as Northern Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, and Northern Parula have all been seen around the lake, along with Lewis's Woodpecker.

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

For a shorter walk from the south parking area, try following the trail along the inlet, Lynx Creek, or just bird along the paved road, which is actually the exit road that returns you to Walker Rd. Either way, the mix of Ponderosa, dry slopes, and streamside habitats can yield a surprising mix of birds, from Red-faced Warblers to Gray Flycatchers and breeding Indigo Buntings, with hopes always for interesting migrants.