

Where to Go:
(and tips on what to do when you get there)

The Pacific Northwest is an amazing place to bird, and our coastal area is especially rich during the fall migration. Below are some of the best places to spot our winged friends, and also some tips on shorebirding in this area. Thanks to Mike Patterson and Brian Godfrey for much of this information.

Willapa Bay has been called the largest unspoiled estuary on the West Coast. The 20-mile Long Beach Peninsula separates the bay from the ocean, and its northern tip is Leadbetter Point; the last four miles of the peninsula are in the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge and Leadbetter Point State Park. One of most the outstanding birding spots on the Washington coast.

North Jetty of the Columbia River near Ilwaco, Washington. Drive through Fort Canby and park within about 150m of the North Jetty. A walk to the end is about 1km (not recommended during extreme high tides or bad weather). Keep an eye out for the Least Sandpiper, the world's smallest shorebird.

Twilight Eagle Sanctuary. Oregon and Washington have more Bald Eagles than any of the other lower 48 states. The Sanctuary has an observation platform that offers good views of the Columbia estuary. Just east of Astoria (2.9 miles east of the John Day bridge).

South Jetty, Columbia River (SJCR). Clatsop Spit, which forms the southern edge of the mouth of the Columbia River, is the site of the south jetty of the Columbia, known to birders as *the* South Jetty. Almost completely surrounded by salt and fresh water and tidal marshes, SJCR is an excellent place for spotting sea birds, shorebirds, and ducks. Its long point of land makes a good migrant trap. Parking lot C has a viewing tower with a vantage of the ocean, some of the river estuary, shorebird flats and grassy hummocks. Viewing platform provides opportunities to see sea ducks like Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, and Black Scoter. Great location for fall seabird migration, including up to 500,000 Sooty Shearwater migrating past the South Jetty. Parking lot D has a viewing bunker overlooking tidal flats where you can observe a variety of ducks and shorebirds.

Clatsop Beach – the long stretch of beach from Gearhart to the wreck of the Peter Iredale can turn up thousands of Sanderlings and good numbers of Semipalmated Plovers, Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstones.

Necanicum River Estuary. The Seaside High School observation deck is the easiest vantage to access. This is probably the best place around to see the Long-billed Curlew. The largest shorebird, it has an unmistakable nine-inch long down-turned bill that it uses to probe for the many ghost shrimp found on the west side of the river. The Necanicum Estuary has recently turned up breeding Snowy Plovers, a threatened species.

Ecola State Park. The viewpoint is a great vantage for whales, sea lions, and pelagic and shorebirds. Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons nest in the park and can often be seen hunting sea birds here. With a scope you have an excellent view of Bird Rocks

where 41,000 Common Murres nest, along with some Brandt's Cormorants. Ecola is also a reliable spot for sea lions and the remarkable Gray Whale migration (peaks in December and March). Verdant coastal rainforest is a good habitat for forest owls.

Haystack Rock, Cannon Beach. Nesting site for Tufted Puffins, Western Gulls, Pelagic Cormorants, Pigeon Guillemots and Black Oystercatchers. This area is also a reliable year-round spot for Harlequin Ducks. If you're on the beach during a low tide in the summer, look for the Haystack Rock Awareness Program. A marine education program, their interpreters sometimes set up spotting scopes to see all the action.

While in Cannon Beach, be sure and check out the treatment ponds at the east end of 2nd Street. A viewing tower has been built and you can sometimes see very interesting birds in or around the ponds. Green Herons and Wood Ducks are known to nest there.

Oswald West State Park. Great views from the Neahkahnie viewpoint (right on Hwy 101) for pelagic birds, Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons and whales. Numerous trails lead through coastal spruce and hemlock forests with sunny clearings, rocky outcrops, beaches, streams, etc. You can usually find Pileated Woodpeckers and many other arboreal species, American Dippers along the streams, Rufous Hummingbirds, and many songbirds.

Nehalem Bay State Park occupies most of the Nehalem River spit. Good place to see Great Blue Herons, Northern Harriers, and various sparrows and warblers. If you go clear out to the end of the spit you can observe hundreds of Harbor Seals.

Bayocean Spit separates Tillamook Bay from the ocean and is reached from the Three Capes Scenic Route out of Tillamook. To the east of the parking area and along the shore to the south is known as "the shorebird flats"; follow the trail worn in the salt marsh. It's best to arrive at high tide and watch as the tide goes out. As the mudflats are slowly uncovered the birds will come in to feed.

Cape Meares National Wildlife Refuge. On the north side of the trail to the lighthouse are two lookout points. Both offer good views of two offshore rocks that are colonial nesting areas for Tufted Puffin, Common Murre, and Pigeon Guillemot. Good place to see Steller's Sea Lion, Harbor Seal, California Sea Lion, and Gray Whale. Trails to and from the cliffs wind through old-growth forest (western hemlock and Sitka spruce).

Just south of Cape Meares is Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, the first wildlife refuge in the western U.S. and home to the largest murre colony south of Alaska (more than 200,000 birds). Two-thirds of Oregon's nesting tufted puffin population resides at Three Arch Rocks.

Other good birding spots include Netarts Bay, just north of Cape Lookout, and the Nestucca estuary and the Robert W. Straub State Park on the Nestucca Spit.

Shorebirding Tips

- Before trying figure out if the bird in your binoculars is a Western or a Semipalmated Sandpiper, learn the more recognizable shorebirds first—black

oystercatcher, American avocet, killdeer. Shorebirds are often found in mixed flocks; use this opportunity to judge sizes and compare with nearby birds.

- Check out Mike Patterson's online photo shorebird guide at <http://www.astoriaschools.org/ahscience/shorebird.html> for some great shots of the usual suspects found on the Pacific Flyway, especially during the fall.
- Patience is a big birding virtue. High tides usually offer the best birding as flocks of feeding birds are pushed closer to public viewing areas, and birds may fly in and out of an area for two to three hours around high tide time.
- Be sure you have the right tide table. Astoria tables are set for Tongue Point where the tide occurs about hour later than at the South Jetty, for example.
- For sheer numbers of shorebirds, the South Jetty is most active the second week of August. For diversity, the chance to see a high variety of shorebirds, the peak time is the first week of September. Your best bet is an afternoon high tide in late August or early September. If possible, go mid-week to avoid the weekend crowds.