Local Birding Spots in the Susquehanna River Valley

**Bald Eagle State Forest**
Bald Eagle State Forest covers 194,000 acres in Snyder, Union County, Centre, Mifflin and Clinton Counties. The forest spans across the high, sharp ridges of central Pennsylvania and features miles of pristine mountain streams and tracts of old growth forest. Bald Eagle offers unparalleled pleasing beauty and boundless recreational opportunities such as an extensive network of trails, awesome scenic vistas, flaming fall foliage and picturesque drives. [Facebook: Bald Eagle State Forest](http://www.facebook.com/BaldEagleStateForest)

**The Hook Natural Area**
Located within Bald Eagle State Forest, the Hook Natural Area is the largest natural area in the state of Pennsylvania and is a very important habitat for many species of birds. The Audubon Society has a page about it [here](http://www.audubon.org/). The Easiest way to get there is to follow Jones Mountain Rd. which is off of Rt. 192 (Buffalo Rd) west of Lewisburg.

**R. B. Winter State Park**
Within Bald Eagle State Forest, R. B. Winter’s hemlock groves, extensive hardwood forests, and open water make this park a good place to look for owls, whippoorwills, many species of breeding warblers, scarlet tanagers, thrushes, vireos, and occasional waterfowl. At the park office and the Halfway Run Environmental Learning Center, flower and herb gardens attract wildlife, butterflies and birds including goldfinches, chipping sparrows, juncos and ruby-throated hummingbirds among others. Enjoy sitting at the center’s observation window listening to birds gathered at the microphone-equipped feeding station or attend an environmental education program or guided walk. In the Natural Area, watch for black and white pileated woodpeckers and barred owls. To find R.B. Winter State Park, drive about 17 miles west of Lewisburg on Rt. 192 until you reach the park. Explore all the roads of the park and the vicinity to find a variety of habitats.
**Milton Island State Park**
Located between West Milton and Milton, the Milton State Park can be accessed between the river bridges. The rich soil of the floodplain supports a diversity of dense vegetation. The southern part of the island is undeveloped and covered in a forest of predominantly silver maple, river birch, and sycamore. 3.5 miles of trails explore the riverine habitats of the island and provide excellent birding for migrating songbirds and waterfowl.

**Shikellamy State Park**
Located at the confluence of the West and North Branches of the Susquehanna River, Shikellamy State Park encompasses 132 acres that feature a Marina at Lake Augusta and a scenic river overlook. Shikellamy State Park is a wonderful place to watch wildlife, especially migrating birds, waterfowl and wading birds. The lovely nature trails on Shikellamy Overlook reveal varied habitat. You'll discover different forest stages from scrub forest to mature hardwood forest and meadowland as well as unique geologic formations. The area abounds with wildlife. A walk around the park is perfect for watching and listening for songbirds.

**Directions:** Shikellamy Overlook - From US 15, the overlook is reached by following County Line Road east for 2.3 miles to the park entrance road. From US 11, the overlook is reached by traveling west on County Line Road for about 0.25 mile to the park entrance road. Shikellamy Marina - The marina is reached off of PA 147 (Bridge Avenue) on Packers Island.

**Allenwood Game Lands**
State Game Lands No. 252, at the northernmost part of Union County, is managed for wildlife. There are many ponds and small impoundments, marshes and swamps, brushy cover, and second-growth forests. The “Allenwood Game Lands” as they are known, can be good for migrating warblers, thrushes, and waterfowl. This is also a good place to hear drumming Ruffed Grouse. Wear hunter orange if you visit during hunting season. To reach SGL 252, drive west of Allenwood on Rt. 44. After about 5 miles you will cross the creek and come to a handsome dark brown-stained frame house on the right. Turn right here and drive to the “T” intersection. Turn right into the game lands. About a mile ahead you can park and begin walking the many trails. Be sure to check the ponds for nesting waterfowl in season and listen for singing Golden-winged Warblers from May through June.

**Buffalo Valley Rail Trail**
The Buffalo Valley Rail Trail is a 9.5-mile-long finished scenic trail that spans between Lewisburg and Mifflinburg with trailheads, interpretive signage, facilities, and parking areas. The Rail Trail is a protected spine of asphalt and gravel which serves all ages and abilities, whether for recreation or transportation. The scenic trail is relatively flat and goes through neighborhoods, beautiful farmland and woodlands. The Judy Anderson Memorial Garden has a lovely picnic area and beautiful flowers and is located at the halfway point on the trail, in Vicksburg.

Facebook: Buffalo Valley Rail Trail
Dale’s Ridge Preserve
Merrill W. Linn Land & Waterways Conservancy manages this property which includes the Dale’s Ridge Trail on our Dale/Engle/Walker easement located along Buffalo Creek and Strawbridge Road northwest of Lewisburg. A trailhead kiosk contains information about the trail and a descriptive brochure specific to the property. Enjoy scenic ridge-top views of the Buffalo Valley, wildflowers and birding within a variety of habitats along the two-mile trail. The trail passes through numerous habitats, including riparian forest, a pond, a hemlock grove, a white pine grove, second-growth hardwood forest, farm fields, meadows, and mature hardwood forest. This diversity of habitat provides a large bird list for so small an area. Take Rt. 192 about two miles west of Lewisburg to Strawbridge Road. Turn right. A parking lot at Strawbridge Road and the bridge at Buffalo Creek leads to a trail.

Hess Recreation Area
(Wetlands and Observation Area)
The Hess Recreation Area is managed by Montour Area Recreation Commission and is located just outside of Danville. The park features 102 mostly wooded acres, 1.1 miles of Mahoning Creek, 3.9 miles of trails, a covered bridge and a 12’ x 15’ wetland wildlife viewing blind. The park can be accessed behind Perkins Restaurant and the Continental Fire Co.; from PA-54, turn onto Montour Street, then right onto Meadow Lane; follow Meadow Lane to the park entrance road.

Montour Preserve
The preserve, near Washingtonville in Montour County, is really a complex of many good birding sites. Among these are the power plant cooling water ponds, known as the Ash Ponds, Lake Chillisquaque, extensive deciduous forests, pine plantations, old fields, and brushy cover. This area is, arguably, the best place in this region for waterfowl. Nesting bald eagles can be found near the lakeshore. The Montour Area Recreation Commission is responsible for the maintenance and operation of two wildlife observation blinds in the Goose Cove portion of the Montour Preserve’s wildlife refuge. Access is allowed by special permit only. To request access to these facilities, contact Jon Beam, MARC Assistant Director, at JBeam@MontourRec.com or by phone at (570) 772-4021. To reach the preserve, take Interstate 80 to the Rt. 54 exit at Danville. Follow the signs to Washingtonville and then to Montour Preserve. The Ash Ponds are on the north side of the power plant on Creek Road; the nature center and Lake Chillisquaque are a couple of miles farther north. There are observation points over the lake and a pleasant trail encircling it.
The **Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art** is a bird and wildlife watchers dream. The Center offers more than 500 acres of rustic beauty with twelve miles of trails and stunning views of the Susquehanna River from the mountaintop. The land provides habitat for wildlife – deer, bear, fox and many species of smaller animals. It is the perfect habitat for watching birds.

Be sure to check out the center’s ongoing research about Pennsylvania’s smallest owl, the Saw Whet Owl. Each autumn the Center’s team of trained researchers and volunteers harmlessly catch, band and release hundreds of these tiny raptors at three banding stations in central Pennsylvania. Their work helps to map the movements of a species so secretive that most avid birders have never glimpsed one – an owl that was, until recently, considered quite rare.

**Shamokin Mountain Trail**
The [Shamokin Mountain Trail](#) is off Forest House Lane, which is south of Lewisburg on the east side of Stein Lane. Part of the trail is on a property under conservation easement that is managed by the [Merrill W. Linn Land & Waterways Conservancy](#). The other part of the trail is on Pennsylvania State Game land. The trail is usually closed for two weeks during rifle deer hunting season. Be mindful of other hunting seasons when in the state game lands portion of the trail and wear orange. A brochure is available at the site and the property owners invite you to enjoy the trail. The 1 mile red-blazed path passes through deciduous woods, crosses a power line with a vista to the southwest across Dry Valley and well south along the Susquehanna River Valley. The trail enters a field managed by the State Game Commission then loops back through the woods to the trailhead.

**Walker and Faylor Lakes**
These public reservoirs in Snyder County are proving to be excellent habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and interesting breeding birds, depending on the season. A trip to these spots can include a short hike into Tall Timbers in Snyder-Middleswarth State Park near Troxelville. Here there is old-growth hemlock forest and unusual breeding species such as Winter Wrens. To get to Walker Lake, take Rt. 45 west to Mifflinburg, turn south on Rt. 104 to the village of Penn’s Creek, and turn west on Troxelville Road. Just before you get to Troxelville, turn left at the entrance to Walker Lake. Faylor Lake is not far away between Benfer and Beaver Springs.