

Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail



**Watchable
Wildlife**

Manitoba



Where the Grassland Birds Still Sing

Imagine the grasslands of the Great Plains of North America reaching from the Red River in the east to the edge of the Rocky Mountains in the west and south through the central states to the Gulf of Mexico. A vast meadow of wildflowers and grasses covered the belly of the continent. On the eastern edge the soil is fertile and moist – there the lush tall-grass prairie grows. On the western edge, in the rain shadow of the Rockies the land is dry – the drought-tolerant short-grass prairie grows there. In the centre, from here to central Alberta is the mixed-grass prairie – a blending of both. Some grasses grow shoulder-high, others ankle-high, but most are knee-high.

The southwest corner of Manitoba is the best place in the province to see grassland birds. You will have the opportunity to hear the rarest of the grassland birds' sweet songs and see many threatened species – the Burrowing Owl, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Baird's Sparrow, Loggerhead Shrike, Ferruginous Hawk, Sprague's Pipit and more. The unique symphony of our grassland birds is heard best along the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail.

The Birding Trail features a variety of wildlife habitats. Tall, short and mixed-grass prairies are embedded with seasonal wetlands, trees and shrubs along streams, lush valleys and dry ridges – home for an extraordinary orchestra of grassland birds. Along this driving trail you can get out of your vehicle at various stops to explore these habitats.

The Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail is an opportunity to experience remnants of the once great grasslands. It is a photographer's paradise – rare birds and wildlife, grassland flowers and huge prairie skies. En route, abandoned buildings bear silent witness to the dustbowl days of the Dirty Thirties that gave rise to the name *Poverty Plains*.

Scattered along the two routes of the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail are towns and hamlets to amble through where you can sample the charm of small town service. Melita and Pierson have restaurants and gas stations. There is a choice of hotels, bed and breakfasts, grocery stores or campgrounds for accommodations in several communities.

Planning Your Adventure

A two-day visit is recommended, but three days is even better. Start with breakfast in Melita. Then just down the road is the Gerald W. Malaher Wildlife Management Area (WMA). There you can walk the short *Dust to Diversity* interpretive trail and find out about Gerald Malaher's pioneering experiment. After the Gerald W. Malaher WMA do the shorter northern route of the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail. After supper you might want to return to one of the sites along the route to get in a little evening birding or just mosey around town. After a good night's rest, get an early start for the best birding and head out on the southern route. Plan on breakfast in Pierson.

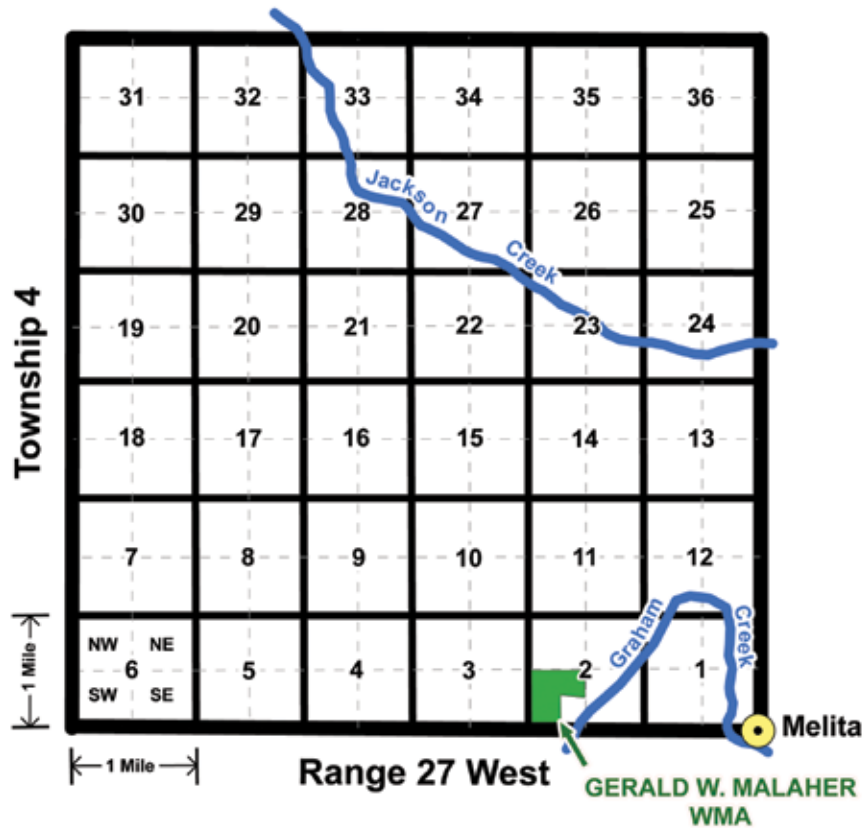
Just follow the driving guide – the route and stops are laid out for you. There are stops where you can stretch your legs and explore, listen for birds and take photographs. Bring along a picnic lunch or stop at a local restaurant. A three-day stay gives you time to do it all, get in some early morning birding and see some of the other sites such as the Burial Mounds and Antler River Museum.

Manitoba Grid System

Manitoba's roads were developed in a grid system of one-mile sections (see Figure 1). These sections are organized into numbered Townships and Ranges that explain their location. Townships are numbered northward from the Canada-United States border. Ranges are numbered east and west of the Principle Meridian, which lies just west of Winnipeg. Each Township has 36 numbered sections that are one-mile square. The numbering system helps locate each section of land. For example, the Gerald W. Malaher WMA is described as the southeast quarter

Township Diagram

Figure 1



of Section 2, Township 4, Range 27 west of the Principle Meridian. Section roads generally outline the one-mile squares. These are often gravel roads that are little traveled and good for birding but sometimes in poor condition in wet or snowy weather. A road allowance is a right-of-way for a section road even if it was not developed. Provincial Trunk Highways (PTH) and Provincial Roads (PR) are much better maintained but have heavier traffic.

Kilometres and Miles

The guide provides distances in both kilometres and miles. Canadian car odometers are in kilometres but the roads are set out in a mile grid. These mile roads or section roads are numbered. For example Road 7N is the gravel road seven miles north of the U.S. border. Road 165W is 165 miles west of the Principle Meridian. It is often easiest to count the section roads every mile to know where you are or find your location on a map. To convert kilometres to miles, multiply a kilometre by 0.62. To convert miles to kilometres, multiply a mile by 1.60 (1 kilometre = 0.62 miles).

Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates are included for most of the stops.

Start at the Gerald W. Malaher WMA

The Gerald W. Malaher Wildlife Management Area (GPS N49°2691 W101°02998) is the best place to start your exploration of the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail. It is just west of Melita. Take Provincial Road (PR) 445 west from Melita to Road 158W and turn north/right, the parking lot is the first driveway on the east/right side of the road. Here you will find an information kiosk for the birding trail and the birding trail sign for the Gerald W. Malaher WMA *Dust to Diversity Trail*. Interpretive signs describe the site, wildlife and Gerald Malaher's experiment in creating wildlife habitat.

The Gerald W. Malaher WMA is the jumping-off point for the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail, both Northern and Southern routes.

A Few Tips from the Experts

The southwest corner of the province is the best place in Manitoba to see the endangered Burrowing Owl. From year to year they can change their nesting locations so there is no specific site to see them. Look for them on the ground near the ground squirrel burrows they use for nesting. Often they are in cattle pastures where the shorter grass allows them the best lookout for predators. These tiny owls are very special and should never be disturbed or approached; at time of publication there were fewer than 10 known pairs in the entire province. Efforts by landowners, biologists and concerned citizens have helped them recover from a low of only a couple of pairs.

The best time to listen and look for birds is early morning or early evening, as prairie winds during the day can make it difficult to hear bird calls. When arriving at a site, turn off the car and wait quietly for a few minutes. Be careful when you pull onto the shoulder and watch for oncoming farm machinery and vehicular traffic.

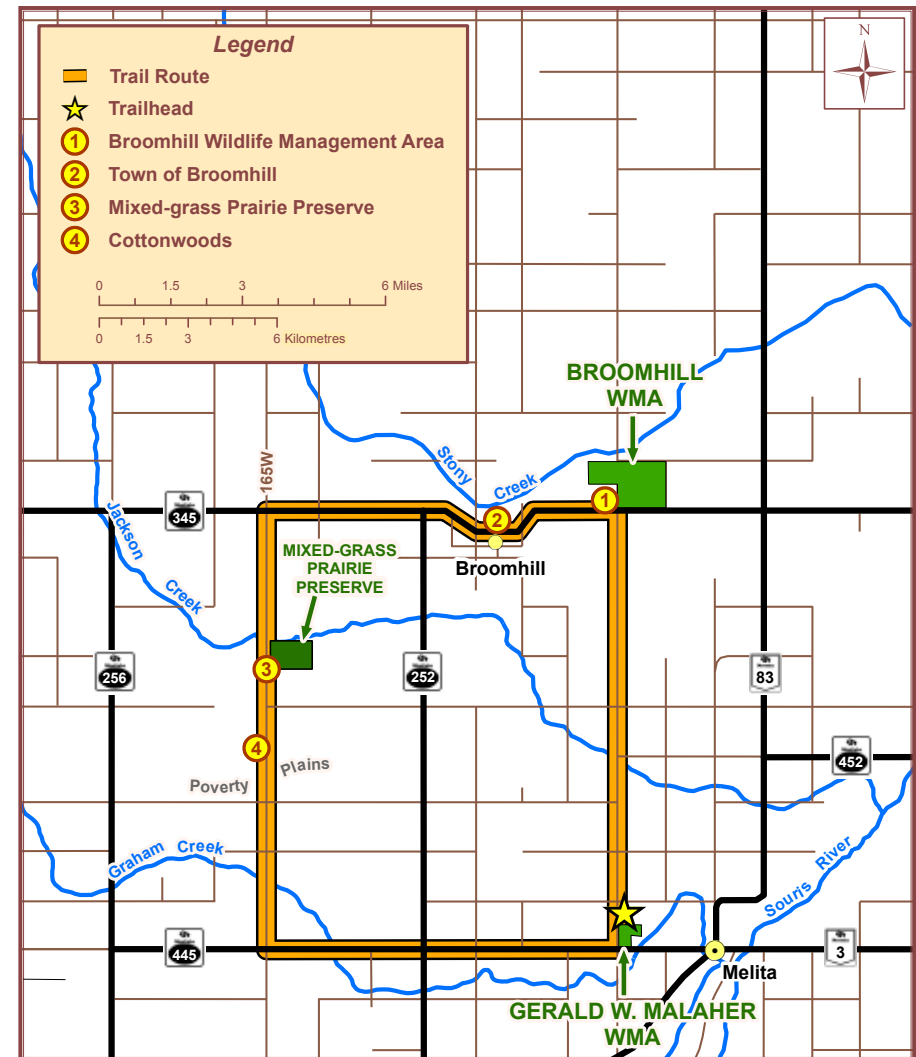
The best place to stop and listen is near an open meadow or grassland. When you hear a call, scan the area with your binoculars.

Drive slowly between stops on the back roads. Watch for birds perched on fence posts, overhead lines, dead tree branches, shrub tops, or in flight. Many grassland species nest on the ground where they are difficult to find, but you can often hear or see them singing from a perch.

Spring is a fabulous time to see the migrating birds in their courtship colours. Late spring and early summer is the best time to identify birds by their territorial calls. Fall brings flocks of Meadowlarks, and Sandhill Cranes in the thousands. If you are planning to visit in the winter to see Snowy Owls, stay on numbered provincial roads and highways. If the road isn't maintained and cleared of snow, avoid it.

A checklist is provided at the back of this guide so you can keep track of the birds you see. Save the list for subsequent visits. You can purchase or download from the Internet a field guide to bird calls that will make identification easier. Don't forget to bring a bird field guide book, binoculars, camera, snacks, water and a GPS unit if you have one.

Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail Northern Route



Northern Route

The Northern Route of the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail takes you from the Gerald W. Malaher WMA up to the Broomhill WMA, over to the old town of Broomhill, down to the Mixed-grass Prairie Preserve and through the Poverty Plains. Total driving distance 53 kilometres or 33 miles.



Swainson's Hawk

① Broomhill WMA

Starting from the Gerald W. Malaher WMA, just west of Melita on PR 445, drive north on gravel road 158W, which runs along the west side of the WMA. Drive slowly and scan the field edges for Gray Partridge and the skies over open areas for Swainson's Hawks. Its call is a shrill *kreeeeeer*. Look for birds perched on fence posts.

As you pass through the grassland and pastures, listen and watch for a wide range of prairie birds. In wet years there may be Wilson's Phalarope and Common Snipe in low lying areas.

Cross over PR 345, where you will see the Broomhill WMA sign. Proceed north about 0.8 kilometre or a 0.5 mile to the Grasslands Birding Trail sign on the west/left side of the road (GPS N49° 40.77 W101° 03.127). Take a walk on the prairie.

② Town of Broomhill

Return to PR 345 and drive west/right about 1.6 kilometres /1 mile (GPS N49° 33.95 W101° 05.36). Pull into the turnoff on the south/left side of the road. Looking directly south about 1 kilometre you will see a large, lone balsam poplar tree with one of the largest Ferruginous Hawk nests in the southwest. The nest has been used continuously for two decades and is at least two metres deep and more than a metre wide.

Every year more sticks are added to the nest. With binoculars you might be able to see one parent on the nest or even the young waiting to be fed. Look for the male sitting on the ground near by. (This is **private land** so you can only observe it from the roadway.) There are a couple of reasons why you should not approach any closer. This is private land and Ferruginous Hawks are particularly sensitive to people approaching the nest – they may desert the eggs if disturbed. While stopped, listen for the songstress of the prairie, the Western Meadowlark singing its complicated melody. Look for the Chestnut-collared Longspur, a sparrow-like bird with a dark triangle on a white tail. The Longspur's song is a softer version of the Meadowlark's signature tune. Red-tailed and Swainson's Hawk also regularly nest nearby.



Ferruginous Hawk

On your short drive to the town of Broomhill check the grazed pastures for Burrowing Owls. You might see them on slight mounds usually associated with Richardson's Ground Squirrels.

In the Town of Broomhill, keep an eye out for the Say's Phoebe. It is often found nesting near or in old buildings.



Red-tailed Hawk

③ Mixed-grass Prairie Preserve

Leaving Broomhill, drive west on PR 345. Watch fence posts, utility wires and the dead branches of scattered willows for the endangered Loggerhead Shrike. Its call is a screeching, repeated *schweep*. The Loggerhead feasts on bugs and small rodents but has no talons to hold its prey while eating, so it impales them on thorns or sharp points, giving it the nickname Butcher Bird. Its black mask adds to the mystique.

Watch for Swainson's Hawks perched on fence posts or in trees. You might also see Red-tailed and Ferruginous hawks or Northern Harriers along this stretch.

The Harrier usually flies low to the ground and has an obvious white rump. It shouts *kee-kee-kee* if you are near the nest, but they are usually silent as they fly over their hunting grounds. Males are silver gray coloured and arrive earlier in spring than the larger brown coloured females.



Loggerhead
Shrike

At 6.4 kilometres (4 miles) turn south/left onto the gravel road 165W and continue for 4.8 kilometres (3 miles).

As you travel south on 165W watch for White-tailed Deer. You might also see Red-tailed and Swainson's hawks and possibly a Ferruginous Hawk as you near the Mixed-grass Prairie Preserve.

At the Mixed-grass Prairie Preserve get out and stretch your legs (GPS N49° 33.731 W101° 18.808). Walk along the unused road allowance, while looking for prairie wildflowers and birds.

There is a ford crossing of Jackson Creek along the municipal road adjacent to the Mixed-grass Prairie Preserve. In the spring or after a heavy rain, you may want to backtrack to PR 345 and take PR 252 south instead.

④ Cottonwoods

Continue south on Road 165W until you reach the large cottonwoods overhanging the road. These cottonwoods and surrounding open pastures attract Loggerhead Strikes, Lark Sparrows, Brown Thrashers and Orchard Orioles.

This section of road down to PR 445 is good for most grassland birds. Look for Loggerhead Shrike. Listen for the sweet ditty of the Sprague's Pipit – *tshling, tshling, tshling* – usually sung in flight high above the prairie.

Perched on posts you might see Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit and Willet. Although shorebirds are usually associated with beaches and tidal flats, these

species typically nest in the grasslands. Listen for the musical melody of the Baird's Sparrow – two or three high-pitched *zips* with a trill on the end, and the Grasshopper Sparrow with an even higher-pitched *pi-tup zeeeeeeeeee*.

Cottonwoods through Poverty Plains returning to Gerald W. Malaher WMA

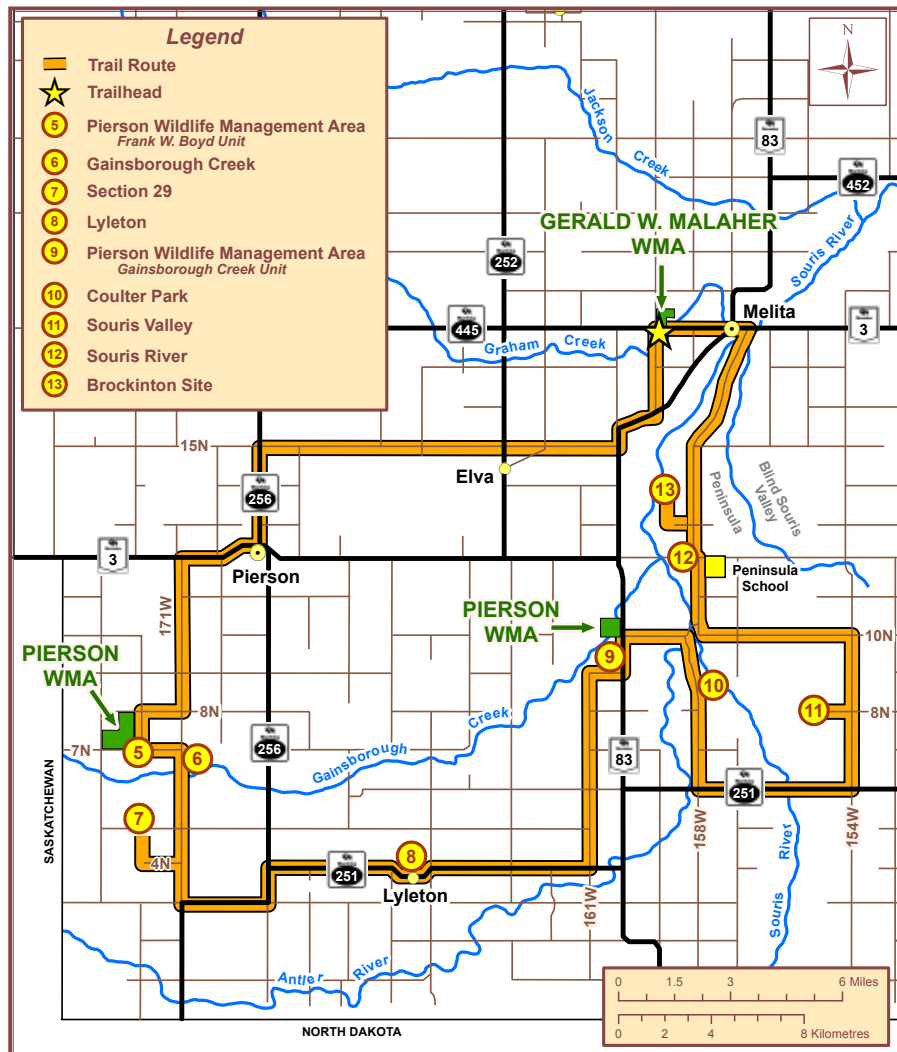
Continue south 6.4 kilometres (4 miles) on road 165W until you reach PR 445, then turn east/left to the Gerald W. Malaher WMA or Melita.

This area was once the western most edge of glacial Lake Souris. Its light sandy soils are the remains of the old beach ridge of the glacial lake.

As you drive through these grasslands, imagine the difficulty of the early pioneers trying to make a living in what would come to be known as the Poverty Plains. When they first arrived the mixed-grass prairie, which took thousands of years to grow and evolve with the harsh conditions and light soils, would have looked lush and full of promise for use as farmland. Once the prairie sod was broken there was little to hold the light soils in place and they soon blew away with the prairie winds.

The Northern Route of the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail has given you the opportunity to explore some of the best grassland birding sites in the province. We hope you have enjoyed the trail and were able to check off many of the species on the bird list. Once you have completed the Northern Route you might want to go on to Melita and take advantage of the amenities there before you pick up the Southern Route starting again at the Gerald W. Malaher WMA. Or better yet stay the night and get an early start on the Southern Route – the birds sing the sweetest early in the morning.

Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail Southern Route



Southern Route

The Southern Route has a total driving distance of 150 kilometres or 93 miles. There are plenty of different grassland habitats to explore along the way. You begin at the Gerald W. Malaher WMA just west of Melita, head southwest to Pierson through an expanse of native prairie, to Lyleton, on to the ravine at Gainsborough Creek, into the Souris Valley and back along 'The Peninsula' to Melita.

We are fortunate to have tracts of native prairie and riparian woodland corridors tucked into the southwest corner of the province. Here you can still experience the beauty of its open expanse and big skies, wildflowers and wildlife, and the sweet melodies of rare grassland birds.

5 Pierson WMA – Frank W. Boyd Unit

From the Malaher WMA on PR 445, head south on Road 158W and at Hwy 83 turn west/right for just under 2 kilometres or a little more than a mile. After the bend in the road turn west/right at the gravel road marked 15N/Elva Road heading towards the Elva grain terminal. Drive west for 14.5 kilometres (9 miles) until you reach the second stop sign at PR 256.



Upland Sandpipers

Along the way, stop and look for little brown Burrowing Owls in pastures or perched on fence posts – this is prime Burrowing Owl real estate. You might also see long-legged Upland Sandpipers perched on posts or even sitting on overhead wires, Ferruginous Hawks soaring overhead, or Loggerhead Shrikes perched on utility wires or lurking in willow lowlands. Other rare grassland birds to watch or listen for are the Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit and Chestnut-collared Longspur.



Baird's Sparrow

Look for stretches of prairie that have grown back after cultivation. On the north side of the road in the final kilometre and a half (1 mile) before the stop sign at PR 256 you may see a marsh during wet years. Listen for Sora, Common Snipe, Pied-billed Grebe, Blue-winged Teal, American Coot and Marsh Wren. The little Marsh Wren has a series of rapid high-pitched gurgles and *cheeeeppps*.

At the paved road, PR 256 stop sign, turn south/left and drive into Pierson, cross the railway tracks and head towards the grain elevators. Pierson has a great restaurant for breakfast or homemade pie; you can find a gas station and grocery store in town too. There is some debate as to the origin of the town name – it is either named after a banker from Amsterdam who introduced Canadian Pacific Railway shares to the European market or an early surveyor in the area.

Leave Pierson by the west exit, returning PTH 3. Head west for about 1.6 kilometre (1 mile) before turning south/left onto Antler Road, 171W. Continue south 6.4 kilometres (4 miles) – count the section roads. Turn west/right, and drive about 1.6 kilometres (1 mile). Then turn south/left for 1 kilometre until you see a sign on the west/right side of the road for the Frank W. Boyd Unit of Pierson WMA.

Along the way watch for deer, various hawks and Western and Eastern Kingbirds. The Eastern Kingbird calls a series of rapid high notes – *kit-kit-kitter-kitter*. The Western Kingbird sings a jig of rapid chattery notes – *whit-ker-wit*.

Along this stretch, there are occasional Bluebird boxes on the fence posts. Tree Swallows and Mountain Bluebirds inhabit most but you may see the occasional Eastern Bluebird.

At the Frank W. Boyd Unit of the Pierson WMA it is time to get out and listen for birds. This is also a great spot to



Mountain Bluebird

listen for a variety of aspen parkland birds. Listen for Ring-necked Pheasants – this is one of the most reliable places to find them. The male often makes a squawking *kork-kok* when displaying or flushed.

6 Gainsborough Creek

When you leave the Frank W. Boyd Unit of the Pierson WMA, proceed south .6 kilometre (.4 miles) to Road 7N, turn east/left 1.6 kilometre (1 mile) to Antler Road, 171W, then turn south/right and drive south for 4.8 kilometres (3 miles). You can pull into a site owned by the RM of Edward and explore the wooded area along Gainsborough Creek. After you leave this site, continue south and cross the creek where you might see a flurry of Cliff Swallows that have a colony under the bridge. Stop and listen for the Willow Flycatcher in the shrubs – its *fitz-bew* call distinguishes it from the similar-looking Alder Flycatcher that sings *fee-bee-o*.

Just past the bridge on the west/right side of the road (GPS N49°05.162 W101°17.720) you will see a small sign describing the Boundary Commission Trail. This is the route developed by the brave men of the Boundary Commission who surveyed the border between Canada and the United States, Boundary Commission who surveyed the border from the Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains. This trail opened the West. It was later used by the North West Mounted Police in their famous March West and by countless settlers.

7 Section 29

Continue south and at the 4.8 kilometre (3-mile) mark from where you returned to 171W, turn right onto a prairie trail (at GPS N49°03.533 W101°17.706). The grass may be long but the trail surface is good. Drive west for 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) until you reach a turn to the north/right. If you are feeling adventurous you can drive north the remaining .5 kilometres (.3 miles), but we recommend



Willow Flycatcher

you park here and walk the rest of the way. The track can be a little rough and you will have a greater opportunity to see more wildlife. As you approach Section 29 on the track, you might flush a Sharp-tailed Grouse or two.

This is possibly the best grassland birding spot on the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail – it is worth any extra effort. It will transport you back in time to the prairie before settlement.



Chestnut-collared Longspur

You will see the sign on the west/left side of the track (GPS N49°06.284 W101°31.763). Hike the road allowance northward or meander through the pasture to look for birds and prairie wildflowers. Watch for the rarely seen Baird's Sparrow – this is one of the few places it has been found in recent years.

The Sharp-tailed Grouse can be watched dancing on their lek in spring – approach it quietly to see their flamboyant mating dance. You might hear the Chestnut-collared Longspur that seems to be mimicking a Meadowlark medley, and a Sprague's Pipit ditty – tshling, tshling, tshling – often sung in flight.

Prairie shorebirds, including the Marbled Godwit, Upland Sandpiper and Willet are regularly seen in this area. Look for these long-legged shorebirds perched on the ground or posts. During nesting season they can be particularly noisy with raucous scolding calls from the Godwit and Willet.

8 Town of Lyleton

Return to 171W, turn south/right and after a mile turn east/left onto PR 256 and head for Lyleton. Follow the paved road for 4.8 kilometres (3 miles).

As you drive along PR 256 you will see some of the few remaining grasslands that have never been put to the plow. Watch for Logger-head Shrike, Ferruginous Hawk, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Chestnut-collared Longspur.

You often see Northern Harrier along this stretch, usually flying low to the ground. Short-eared Owls may be seen hunting over the grasslands.

At PR 251 turn east/right to Lyleton where you will find another Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail sign (GPS N49°05.75 W101°17.978). Time to get out and explore the village – look for the Warbling Vireo, Brown Thrasher, Orchard Oriole, Say's Phoebe and the recently established Euraian Collared-Dove. The ballpark near the other end of town is another great area to walk and bird watch.

9 Pierson WMA – Gainsborough Creek Unit

Leaving Lyleton, take PR 251 east for 8 kilometres (5 miles) to Road 161W and turn north/left. Wild Turkeys, Gray Partridge and White-tailed Deer are often seen along this stretch.

About 8 kilometres (5 miles) north, at the right angle turn in the road, slow down and watch for prairie wildflowers in bloom – bergamot, purple coneflower, prairie rose and more. Continue east for 1.6 kilometre (1 mile) to Hwy 83 – turn north/left and in 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) you will see the sign on the west/left side of the highway for the Gainsborough Creek Unit of the Pierson WMA (GPS N49°14.755 W101°04.961).

At the Gainsborough Creek Unit stop and take a walk west to see the ravine created by the creek. This is a good spot for a picnic lunch or to just sit and listen for birds. Riparian or streamside areas are rich habitat for all kinds of wildlife. This is one of the few places where Mule Deer have been seen recently. You might find a Red Fox den or two as well.

10 Coulter Park

Leaving Gainsborough Creek Unit, take 10N, the road east directly across from the Gainsborough Creek pull-off on the east side of Hwy 83, and follow it to the T-junction. Turn south/right and follow a winding road



Sprague's Pipit



Mule Deer

along an oxbow of the Souris River to Coulter Park (GPS N49°13.549 W101°00.805).

At Coulter Park, listen and watch for a variety of swallows and woodpeckers plus Yellow-throated Vireo, Cooper's Hawk, Eastern Wood Pewee, Catbird, House Wren, and Say's Phoebe in this riverbottom forest habitat. The surrounding forest is still lovely but the park itself has lost a number of old elm trees to Dutch elm disease.

At the park you will find non-modern washrooms and historic buildings to explore. Camping facilities are also available. This is thought to be the oldest municipal park in Western Canada.

11 Souris Valley

As you drive south out of the valley take your time and enjoy the view. You may see Mule Deer in the valley.

SIDE TRACK: At the top of the hill you will see a "Historic Site" sign on the right. If you follow the road it takes you to the Burial Mounds (GPS N49°07.023 W101°01.023). It makes an interesting side trip and there is a sign to tell you about the mounds.

Continue south on 158W until you reach PR 251, turn east/left. Drive east through the hamlet of Coulter. Turn north/left at Road 154W, 4.8 kilometres (3 miles) east of Coulter.

On the way you will cross the beautiful Souris River Valley. It is a grand valley for the size of the river. The valley was carved by huge flows of glacial meltwater thousands of years ago.

After coming up out of the valley turn north/left onto Road 154W for 3.2 kilometres (2 miles), then turn west/left on 8N. This will take you down into the Souris River Valley for a more isolated vantage point. This valley is the only place in Manitoba you can find buffalo grass, a very short grass with small seed head that appears orange at the end of June. If you get out to explore the valley, watch where you walk – there is also prickly pear cactus. If you are here in the evening listen for Nighthawks hunting insects – their voice is a nasal *peent* or *pee-ik*. Here you will have a feel for the prairie grasslands



Buffalo Grass

of an earlier era. Imagine the wild grasslands stretching from here to Texas. This is also a great spot to look and listen for Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Baird's and Grasshopper Sparrows, Sprague's Pipit and Chestnut-collared Longspur.

12 Souris River

As you drive back up to the top of the valley look to the southeast/right – on a clear day you can see Turtle Mountain in the distance. Turn left onto 154W again and continue north for 3.2 kilometres (2 miles), turn west/left at Road 10N and follow it for 6.4 kilometres (4 miles) to where the road turns north 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) to the junction with Road 12N. This is a lovely stretch of quiet road where you can make frequent stops to listen and look for birds. At the corner there is an old prairie schoolhouse – the Peninsula School.

This area between the Blind Souris Valley and the Souris River Valley is known as the Peninsula. *Melita's Tales & Trails, 1879 – 1967* explains: "The Blind Souris, we are told, is the original Souris River bed. Thousands of years ago the river channeled a new course and became the winding, looping river that shapes the boundary of the peninsula on the west side."

At the school turn west/left onto Road 12N and follow the road until you reach the Souris River again (GPS N49°10.39 W101°01.49) [confirm GPS]. Stop in the riparian area between the Souris River and the oxbow. Listen for the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Yellow-throated and Warbling Vireos, Eastern Wood Pewee, Great Crested Flycatcher and even rarely the Black-billed Cuckoo. The Cuckoo has a lovely croon – soft mellow *cucucu* in little groups.



Yellow-throated Vireo



Black-billed Cuckoo

13 Brockinton Site

Backtrack east on 12N 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) to Peninsula Road/158W, the first gravel road on your left, and turn north/left heading back to Melita. It is a lovely drive between the two valleys with a pastoral view as you approach Melita.

Drive 1.6 kilometres (1 mile) north on Peninsula Road, turn west and follow a prairie trail. At the T-junction turn right, into the site of an old homestead with a stone house known as the Brockinton Site. Down by the creek was a bison jump used by Aboriginal people hundreds of years ago.

Peninsula Road takes you to Hwy 3, then turn left to head into Melita for a well-deserved meal and rest.

The Southern Route of the Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail has given you the opportunity to see a range of habitats in this mixed-grass prairie and hear some of our rarest bird songs. We hope you have enjoyed your birding journey.

Manitoba's Wildlife Management Areas

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are Crown lands designated for the use of wildlife and people. WMAs can range in size from 64 hectares to the largest, Churchill WMA, at 848,813 hectares. There are more than 80 WMAs across the province.


WMAs are lands set aside in Manitoba for better management, conservation and enhancement of wildlife under *The Wildlife Act*. WMAs protect the land in a near-to-natural state to provide much needed habitat for wildlife and to conserve Manitoba's biodiversity. Manitoba Conservation administers the lands. Some WMA lands allow for agricultural and other uses.

WMAs are yours to enjoy. They provide an opportunity for a variety of wildlife-related activities – birding, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing, trapping and just enjoying the sounds and experiences nature provides. There is no charge to visit a WMA.

To find out more about Manitoba's WMAs see www.manitoba.ca/conservation/wildlife/viewing/wma.html.

Watchable Wildlife Manitoba

From Arctic tundra to the boreal forest, aspen-oak parkland and prairie grasslands, Manitoba's diverse landscape supports some amazing wildlife. Where else can you see the largest carnivore on land, the fastest bird in the sky, and the largest congregation of snakes in the world?

Look for the Watchable Wildlife symbol  **Watchable Wildlife** for recommended sites to visit. Check out the website at www.manitoba.ca/conservation/wildlife/viewing/index.html or www.watchablewildlife.org

Travel Information

- ▶ Travelling to Manitoba: www.travelmanitoba.com or 1-800-665-0040
- ▶ Melita-Pierson and Area Tourism: www.melita.mb.ca or call the Town of Melita office at 204-522-3413
- ▶ Coulter Park: 204-522-3263 or 204-522-3413
- ▶ River Park RV Campground: 204-522-3413
- ▶ Antler River Historical Museum & Fred Jensen Trophy Room: 204-522-3103

Wildlife Viewing and Historic Resources

It is always helpful to bring along field guides to help you identify wildlife. There are many excellent guides such as Peterson, Audubon, Sibley, and National Geographic that can help you identify birds of North America. They also have field guides to wildflowers, insects, mammals, grasslands, pond life and more. Peterson and Golden have great smaller guides for children. A field guide or two in your backpack is a great addition to any trip to explore the wonderful world of nature. You can also download birdcalls to your MP3 player to help you identify birds by their calls (see www.enature.com/birding/audio.asp). CBC Ideas has a podcast called *Pastures Unsung*, which looks at the landscape and bird life of the northern grasslands (www.cbc.ca/ideas/features/pastures-unsung/index.html).

Here are a few local books:

- ▶ *Manitoba Birds*, by A. Bezener and K. De Smet
- ▶ *Finding Birds in Southern Manitoba*, by Manitoba Naturalists Society
- ▶ *Manitoba, Naturally: Scenic Secrets of Manitoba*, by B. Stilwell
- ▶ *Pelicans to Polar Bears, Watching Wildlife in Manitoba*, by Catherine Senecal
- ▶ *Wildflowers Across the Prairies*, by F. R. Vance, et al.
- ▶ *Backroad Mapbook: Southern Manitoba*, L. Aksomitis, Backroad Mapbooks Mussio Ventures Ltd.
- ▶ *Our First Century: Town of Melita and Municipality of Arthur*, Melita-Arthur History Committee
- ▶ *Melita's Tales & Trails, 1879 – 1967*, Women's Institute
- ▶ *Along the Old Melita Trail*, Isabel M. Reekie

Looking for more?

If you would like to continue to explore the area here are a few recommendations:

Lauder Sandhills WMA

The Lauder Sandhills is 14.4 kilometres (9 miles) east of the Broomhill WMA, on the south side of the road, along PR 345. The sandhills is a unique habitat to see birds that do not appear elsewhere on the trail – Eastern and Spotted Towhee, Veery, Orange-crowned Warbler and Saw-whet Owl. As you drive east on PR 345 at Hwy 83, stop in the old town of Bede where the community is restoring an old school.

Oak and Plum Lakes

Oak Lake and Plum Lakes are north of the Lauder Sandhills WMA off PR 254. There is a provincial park for camping and a picnic area. From the park, follow the road along the lake's southeast side and you will come to a viewing tower that provides a nice overlook of Oak Lake and Plum Lakes.

Whitewater Lake WMA

You can head southeast to Whitewater Lake WMA located between Deloraine and Boissevain. Whitewater Lake is recognized as a Canadian Important Bird Area and is not only nationally significant but also globally significant for the large number of wading birds, shorebirds and waterfowl that use the site.

There is a viewing mound with a partially enclosed observation area, a picnic shelter and non-modern washrooms. Take a short walk on the boardwalk into the marsh. For those wanting to go further there is a longer walk, 1.3 kilometres, to the Lake View Tower from which you can see the lake proper. Bring your bikes and ride the dikes around the marsh. The Marsh Dike Trail is 3.2 kilometres. Afterwards, take a drive through Turtle Mountain Provincial Park or stop in Boissevain to enjoy more small town hospitality and view some incredible murals.

Manitoba Grasslands Birding Trail – Grasslands Bird Checklist

Ducks, Geese and Swans

- Greater White-fronted Goose (M)
- Snow Goose (M)
- Ross's Goose (M)
- Canada Goose
- Cackling Goose (M)
- Tundra Swan (M)
- Wood Duck
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Mallard
- Blue-winged Teal
- Northern Shoveler
- Northern Pintail
- Green-winged Teal
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Greater Scaup (M)
- Lesser Scaup (M)
- Bufflehead
- Common Goldeneye
- Hooded Merganser
- Common Merganser (M)
- Red-breasted Merganser (M)
- Ruddy Duck

Partridge, Grouse and Turkey

- Gray Partridge
- Ring-necked Pheasant
- Ruffed Grouse
- Sharp-tailed Grouse
- Wild Turkey

Loons

- Common Loon (M)

Grebes

- Pied-billed Grebe
- Horned Grebe
- Red-necked Grebe
- Eared Grebe
- Western Grebe
- Clark's Grebe

Pelicans

- American White Pelican

Cormorants

- Double-crested Cormorant

Hérons, Bitterns and Allies

- American Bittern
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Cattle Egret

- Black-crowned Night-Heron

Ibises and Wood Stork

- White-faced Ibis

Vultures

- Turkey Vulture

Hawks and Eagles

- Osprey
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper's Hawk
- Northern Goshawk
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Swainson's Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Ferruginous Hawk
- Rough-legged Hawk (M)
- Golden Eagle (M)

Falcons

- American Kestrel
- Merlin
- Prairie Falcon (fall)
- Peregrine Falcon
- Gyrfalcon (W)

- Rails & Coots**
- Yellow Rail
 - Virginia Rail
 - Sora
 - American Coot
- Cranes**
- Sandhill Crane (M)
- Plovers**
- Black-bellied Plover (M)
 - American Golden-Plover (M)
 - Semipalmated Plover (M)
 - Killdeer
- Avocets**
- American Avocet
- Sandpipers & Allies**
- Greater Yellowlegs (M)
 - Lesser Yellowlegs (M)
 - Solitary Sandpiper (M)
 - Willet
 - Spotted Sandpiper
 - Upland Sandpiper
 - Hudsonian Godwit (M)
 - Marbled Godwit
 - Ruddy Turnstone (M)
 - Red Knot (M)
 - Sanderling (M)
 - Semipalmated Sandpiper (M)
 - Least Sandpiper (M)
 - White-rumped Sandpiper (M)
 - Baird's Sandpiper (M)
- Pectoral Sandpiper (M)
- Dunlin (M)
- Stilt Sandpiper (M)
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper (M)
- Short-billed Dowitcher (M)
- Long-billed Dowitcher (M)
- Wilson's Snipe
- American Woodcock (M)
- Wilson's Phalarope
- Red-necked Phalarope (M)
- Gulls and Terns**
- Franklin's Gull
 - Bonaparte's Gull (M)
 - Ring-billed Gull
 - California Gull
 - Herring Gull
 - Caspian Tern (M)
 - Common Tern (M)
 - Forster's Tern
 - Black Tern
- Pigeons and Doves**
- Rock Pigeon
 - Eurasian Collared-Dove
 - Mourning Dove
- Cuckoos**
- Black-billed Cuckoo
- Owls**
- Eastern Screech-Owl
 - Great Horned Owl
 - Snowy Owl (W)
 - Burrowing Owl
 - Long-eared Owl
 - Short-eared Owl
 - Northern Saw-whet Owl
- Goatsuckers**
- Common Nighthawk
- Hummingbirds**
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Kingfishers**
- Belted Kingfisher
- Woodpeckers**
- Red-headed Woodpecker
 - Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
 - Downy Woodpecker
 - Hairy Woodpecker
 - Northern Flicker
 - Pileated Woodpecker
- Tyrant Flycatchers**
- Olive-sided Flycatcher (M)
 - Eastern Wood-Pewee
 - Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (M)
 - Alder Flycatcher
 - Willow flycatcher
 - Least Flycatcher
 - Eastern Phoebe
 - Say's Phoebe
 - Great Crested Flycatcher
 - Western Kingbird
 - Eastern Kingbird
- Shrikes**
- Loggerhead Shrike
 - Northern Shrike (W)
- Vireos**
- Yellow-throated Vireo
- Blue-headed Vireo (M)
- Warbling Vireo
- Philadelphia Vireo (M)
- Red-eyed Vireo
- Jays and Crows**
- Blue Jay
 - Black-billed Magpie
 - American Crow
 - Common Raven
- Larks**
- Horned Lark
- Swallows**
- Purple Martin
 - Tree Swallow
 - Northern Rough-winged Swallow
 - Bank Swallow
 - Cliff Swallow
 - Barn Swallow
- Chickadees**
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Nuthatches**
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
 - White-breasted Nuthatch
- Creepers**
- Brown Creeper (M)
- Wrens**
- House Wren
 - Winter Wren (M)
 - Sedge Wren
 - Marsh Wren
- Kinglets**
- Golden-crowned Kinglet (M)
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Thrushes**
- Eastern Bluebird
 - Mountain Bluebird
 - Veery
 - Gray-cheeked Thrush (M)
 - Swainson's Thrush (M)
 - Hermit Thrush (M)
 - American Robin
- Thrashers**
- Gray Catbird
 - Brown Thrasher
- Starlings**
- European Starling
- Pipits**
- American Pipit (M)
 - Sprague's Pipit
- Waxwings**
- Bohemian Waxwing (W)
 - Cedar Waxwing
- Wood-Warblers**
- Golden-winged Warbler (M)
 - Tennessee Warbler (M)
 - Orange-crowned Warbler
 - Nashville Warbler (M)
 - Yellow Warbler
 - Chestnut-sided Warbler
 - Magnolia Warbler (M)
 - Cape May Warbler (M)
- Yellow-rumped Warbler (M)
- Black-throated Green Warbler (M)
- Blackburnian Warbler (M)
- Palm Warbler (M)
- Bay-breasted Warbler (M)
- Blackpoll Warbler (M)
- Black-and-white Warbler
- American Redstart
- Ovenbird
- Northern Waterthrush
- Connecticut Warbler (M)
- Mourning Warbler
- Common Yellowthroat
- Wilson's Warbler (M)
- Canada Warbler (M)
- Sparrows and Allies**
- Eastern Towhee
 - American Tree Sparrow (M)
 - Chipping Sparrow
 - Clay-colored Sparrow
 - Vesper Sparrow
 - Lark Sparrow
 - Savannah Sparrow
 - Grasshopper Sparrow
 - Baird's Sparrow
 - Le Conte's Sparrow
 - Nelson's Sparrow
 - Fox Sparrow (M)

- Song Sparrow
- Lincoln's Sparrow (M)
- Swamp Sparrow
- White-throated Sparrow
- Harris's Sparrow (M)
- White-crowned Sparrow (M)
- Dark-eyed Junco (M, W)
- Lapland Longspur (M, W)
- Smith's Longspur (M)
- Chestnut-collared Longspur
- Snow Bunting (W)

Cardinals and Allies

- Scarlet Tanager
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Indigo Bunting

Blackbirds

- Bobolink
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Western Meadowlark
- Yellow-headed Blackbird
- Rusty Blackbird (M, W)
- Brewer's Blackbird
- Common Grackle
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Orchard Oriole
- Baltimore Oriole

Finches

- Pine Grosbeak (M)
- Purple Finch (M)
- House Finch
- Red Crossbill (M)
- White-winged Crossbill (M)
- Common Redpoll (W)
- Hoary Redpoll (W)
- Pine Siskin
- American Goldfinch
- Evening Grosbeak (M)

Old World Sparrows

- House Sparrow

Casual / Rare Species

- Trumpeter Swan
- Eurasian Wigeon
- American Black Duck
- Cinnamon Teal
- Least Bittern
- Snowy Egret
- Little Blue Heron
- Tricolored Heron
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
- Glossy Ibis
- Whooping Crane
- Piping Plover
- Black-necked Stilt
- Whimbrel (M)
- Western Sandpiper (M)
- Ruff (M)
- Red Phalarope (M)
- Little Gull (M)
- Laughing Gull (M)
- Glaucous Gull (M)
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo

- Northern Hawk Owl (M)
- Great Gray Owl
- Boreal Owl
- Eastern Whip-poor-will (M)
- Chimney Swift
- Rufous Hummingbird
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Western Wood-Pewee
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (M)
- Gray Jay (M)
- Boreal Chickadee
- Rock Wren
- Townsend's Solitaire
- Wood Thrush
- Varied Thrush (M)
- Northern Mockingbird
- Northern Parula (M)
- Pine Warbler (M)
- Spotted Towhee
- Field Sparrow
- Lark Bunting (irruptive)
- Summer Tanager
- Western Tanager
- Northern Cardinal
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- Lazuli Bunting
- Dickcissel (irruptive)
- Brambling (M)
- Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (M)

Abbreviations:

(M) migration only
(W) winter only

All other species are either breeding visitors or year-round residents

Note: Many of the boreal species mentioned in the list of casual / rare birds, are regular just north of this area; for example, in the vicinity of Riding Mountain National Park. Likewise some of the species indicated as migrants in the main species list breed in the Riding Mountain National Park area.

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