

BIRDING IN THE MORGANTOWN AREA

Including the Monongahela and Cheat River valleys, city parks, rural farms and grasslands, and a huge mountaintop state forest, there is lots of wonderful habitat in the Morgantown area in which to find and observe birds.

Many common birds can be found almost anywhere in proper habitat all year long. These include Canada Goose, Mallard, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Barred, Eastern-Screech, and Great Horned Owls, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy, and Pileated Woodpeckers, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, American Goldfinch (Morgantown's official City Bird), and House Sparrow.

Summer residents arrive in the spring and leave in the fall, including Green Heron, Killdeer, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Chimney Swift, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, White-eyed, Blue-headed, and Red-eyed Vireos, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Yellow, Black-throated Green, and Hooded Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Orchard and Baltimore Orioles.

Only a few birds are primarily winter residents, arriving in fall and staying until spring, including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco—though a few of these can be found in the nearby mountains in summer.

Spring and fall migrants not normally seen in summer and winter (except when lakes and rivers are unfrozen) include Tundra Swan, Wood Duck, American Black Duck, Bufflehead, Ring-necked Duck, Hooded Merganser, Common Loon, and Pied-billed Grebe. A few songbirds such as Hermit Thrush and Cape May and Blackpoll Warblers also pass through twice a year.

Although there are many good birding locations around Morgantown, check out these in particular. A spotting scope is often necessary at Cheat Lake and along the Monongahela River.

1. Cheat Lake Stretching south along the east shore of Cheat Lake from the Lake Lynn dam at the Pennsylvania state line, Cheat Lake Trail and Park is a 4.5-mile long former railroad right-of-way owned by Allegheny Power. It is a flat trail along the lakeshore bordered by woods. From late fall through early winter until the lake freezes it is a major stopover for migrating water birds. Almost 100 species have been recorded at various times of the year, including 20 species of duck (especially Mallard, Wood,

American Black, Ring-necked, and Ruddy Ducks, Bufflehead, and Hooded Merganser), Canada Goose, Tundra Swan, Wild Turkey, Common Loon, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes, Bald Eagle, Spotted Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull, Eastern Screech and Great Horned Owls, Belted Kingfisher, six species of woodpeckers, Common Raven, Barn Swallow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Dark-eyed Junco. Web site: <http://www.cheatlaketoday.com/parkandtrail/default.asp>.

The south end of Cheat Lake is primarily of interest during spring, fall, and early winter water bird migration. The best vantage points—all on the east side of the lake—are at Sunset Harbour Marina, directly under the east end of the I-68 bridge, and near the marinas south of I-68. Both Barn and Cliff Swallows nested under the bridge until its recent repainting.

Directions:

Cheat Lake Park and Trail: From I-68 exit 10 just east of Cheat Lake, take Route 43 north 0.5 mile to the first exit, turn left on Bowers Lane and go 0.2 mile, then left on Route 857. Go 1.5 miles and turn left on Morgan's Run Road. Follow for 1.6 miles to the parking lot on the left.

South end of the lake: At the first exit of Route 43, turn right on Bowers Lane, which will curve around and become Sunset Beach Road. Sunset Harbor Marina is 0.8 miles from Route 43. Continue south on Sunset Beach Road another 0.4 mile and turn right at the small shopping center onto Route 857 (unmarked). Follow this road 0.3 mile to the light blue utility building just past the bridge, where there is a short trail down to the water. Continue south on Route 857 another 0.1 mile to the road to the WV Geological and Economic Survey just before the bridge, turn left and go 0.4 mile to the driveway just past the Edgewater Marina, where you can scan the marinas at the south end of the lake.

2. Cooper's Rock State Forest This 12,713-acre West Virginia State Forest, where over 100 species have been seen, lies predominantly south of I-68. It is a prime breeding area for songbirds such as five species of woodpeckers, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian and Great Crested Flycatchers, Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Cerulean, and Hooded Warblers, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Baltimore Oriole, and Dark-eyed Junco. Many miles of trails wind through upland forest, stream valleys, and Rhododendron and Hemlock patches. The cliffs at the Main Overlook and Raven Rock give panoramic views of the Cheat River Canyon and great views of soaring vultures and hawks.

The area north of I-68 contains the West Virginia University experimental forest (which contains some clearcut areas, but also vast stretches of forest), the Trout Pond (where Least Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Barn Swallow, Yellow Warbler, Red-winged Blackbird, Baltimore Oriole, and Spotted Sandpiper have been seen), the Hemlock Trail (which is a hotspot for Acadian Flycatcher, Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, Winter Wren, Veery, and numerous warblers), and several other trails. Web site: www.coopersrockstateforest.com. Note: hunting is permitted in fall. Roads past the parking area 0.3 mile south of I-68 are closed in winter due to heavy snow; the roads north of I-68 are plowed.

Directions:

South of I-68: From I-68 exit 15 at the top of the mountain east of Cheat Lake, turn right and go about 3.0 miles to the end of the road at the Main Overlook. A side road 0.5 mile south of I-68 leads to the Henry Clay Iron Furnace Trailhead. Other trailheads are located at various points along the main road.

North of I-68: From exit 15, cross over the highway, turn left, and go 0.5 mile to the Trout Pond. For the experimental forest and Hemlock Trail, cross the highway, turn right and go 0.5 mile on Old Route 73. At Chestnut Ridge Road, continue straight on Route 73 for 2.3 mile to the Hemlock Trail, or turn left and go 1.5 miles to the Ken's Run Trailhead parking lot on the right, passing the clear-cut areas and a couple of other trailheads.

3. Dorsey's Knob Park Located on one of the highest points in Morgantown, this 70-acre city park has several miles of hiking trails through mountaintop fields and woods, and there is a wonderful panoramic view of Morgantown and the Monongahela River Valley from atop the Sky Rock, its highest point. It is a popular stopover for migrating songbirds and many nest there as well. About 70 species have been seen. Look for Wild Turkey, Chimney Swift, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Bluebird, Wood Thrush, Northern Mockingbird, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Towhee, Chipping, Field, and Song Sparrows, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles. Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets and nine species of warblers have been seen in migration. Web site: www.boparc.org.

Directions: From the downtown Morgantown end of the Route 19 bridge, go south on Route 119 for 2.7 miles to the entrance on the left.

4. Monongahela River/Caperton Trails A former railroad right-of-way along the east bank of the river stretches from the Pennsylvania state line 29 miles south to Prickett's Fort State Park north of Fairmont. Several miles through downtown Morgantown are paved and called the Caperton Trail. The best areas are stretches north and south of the end of Van Voorhis Road, from Edith Barill Park in Star City south to the Morgantown Utility Board wastewater treatment plant, the stretch through the Core Arboretum, from Morgantown Lock and Dam north to the Route 19 bridge just north of Hazel Ruby McQuain Park, and north and south of the Uffington access area near the I-79 bridge. About 110 species have been seen between Van Voorhis Road and Uffington. During late fall and winter, the Dam-McQuain Park stretch may be the only unfrozen part of the river and is a concentration point for Canada Goose, American Black Duck, Mallard, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, and other ducks, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes, American Coot, and Ring-billed Gull. Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Double-crested Cormorant are seen occasionally all along the river at any time of year. The other stretches are largely bordered by forests and are home to many resident and migrating birds such as Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, six kinds of woodpeckers, Chimney Swift, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Kingbird, White-eyed, Warbling, and Red-eyed Vireos, Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Yellow, Yellow-throated, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Towhee, Field, Song, and White-throated Sparrows, Northern Cardinal, and American Goldfinch. Web site: www.montrails.org.

Directions:

Van Voorhis Road: From the junction of Routes 19 and 705 at the WV University basketball arena, take

705 south for 1.2 miles and where 705 makes a sharp right, go straight through the stoplight for 2.1 miles to parking area next to trail.

Barill Park in Star City: from the Route 19/705 junction take Route 19 north 0.8 miles, turn right on Boyers Avenue, then make an immediate left opposite Leeway Street. Go two blocks, turn left and cross the trail, then make a sharp right and go past the 84 Lumber store to the parking lot next to the river.

Morgantown Lock and Dam: From the downtown Morgantown end of the Route 19 bridge, go south on Route 119 for 0.7 mile to a parking area just past the Jeep dealer.

Uffington: From the Lock and Dam lot, continue south on Route 119 another 1.3 miles and bear right on Route 73 for 1.6 miles to the trail access road just past the Uffington public access lot.

5. Upper Decker's Creek Trail The 19-mile long Decker's Creek Trail is an abandoned railroad right-of-way stretching from McQuain Park in downtown Morgantown to east of Route 92 just south of Reedsville in Preston County. The stretches through Morgantown traverse mostly residential and commercial areas and have relatively few birds. The Upper Decker's Creek area in Preston County from about a mile north of McKinney Cave Road around the west and south sides of Reedsville to about a mile east of Route 92 is the best area for birding—it is bordered by wetlands, small ponds, farm fields, and woods. Burke Road and the West Virginia University Reedsville Farm just off the trail are also good places to check. Among the more than 120 species seen along the trail, the most notable are Canada Goose, Mallard, Hooded Merganser, Green Heron, Killdeer, Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel, Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Willow Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Common Raven, Tree and Barn Swallows, Cedar Waxwing, Palm, Yellow-rumped, and Blackpoll Warblers, Eastern Towhee, White-throated, White-crowned, Lincoln's, Swamp, and other sparrows, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Orchard Oriole, Purple Finch, and American Goldfinch. Web site: www.montrails.org.

Directions: To reach the following areas from I-68 exit 4 in Sabraton, take Route 7 east 10.3 miles through Masontown to McKinney Cave Road.

McKinney Cave Road: Turn right (not sharp right) at the 10.3 mile mark and go 0.9 miles to the trail crossing just past the bridge.

Burke Road: Continue on Route 7 east another 0.8 mile and turn right onto unmarked Burke Road (opposite Sunny Hill Road), and go 0.9 mile to the trail crossing.

WVU Reedsville Farm: Continue another 1.4 miles east on Route 7, turn right onto Kingwood Pike, and go 1.0 mile to just past the trail crossing.

Route 92 parking area: Continue south on Route 92 past Kingwood Pike for 0.4 mile to the trail crossing.

6. West Virginia Botanic Garden This hidden gem is primarily composed of an old mostly-dried up reservoir fed by streams through a small shrubby marsh and heavily forested areas. These are traversed by several miles of trails; the wetlands have a short boardwalk. Over 80 species have been seen. Most notable birds are Pileated and five other woodpeckers, Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos, Common Raven, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Nashville, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, and ten other warblers, Scarlet Tanager, and Field, White-throated, and Song Sparrows, and Dark-eyed Junco. Black and Turkey Vultures and several hawks are occasional flyovers. Web site: www.wvbg.org.

Directions: From I-68 exit 7, take Route 857 north (which is actually south of I-68 at this point) past the Pierpont Landing development 2.1 miles to Tyrone Road. Turn right and go 2.5 miles to the garden entrance on the left. Information board, map and brochures just downhill from the parking lot.

7. West Virginia University Core Arboretum This 91-acre showplace shines best in the spring when trees are just leafing out and wildflowers and shrubs are in bloom, but summer and fall are also very good. There are three miles of trails through the old-growth hillside and floodplain forests adjacent to the Monongahela River, plus the Caperton Trail which separates the two sections. Mountaineer Audubon conducts weekly bird walks for several weeks in April and May. Over 90 species have been tallied. Many warblers, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, and many other species migrate through, while Great Blue Heron, 5 kinds of woodpeckers, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed, Yellow-throated, Blue-headed, and Red-eyed Vireos, Northern Rough-winged and Barn Swallows, Carolina Wren, Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Yellow-throated and Prothonotary Warblers, Eastern Towhee, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Cardinal, Indigo Bunting, and many other songbirds are seen in season. Web site: <http://www.as.wvu.edu/biology/facility/arboretum.html>.

Directions: From the intersection of Routes 19 and 705 at the West Virginia University basketball arena, go south on Route 19 for 0.2 mile, staying in the right lane, to the parking lot. When exiting, you can only go south on Route 19. Information board, maps, and bird list at parking lot.

8. White Park This 170-acre park on Morgantown's south side, where about 65 species have been seen, contains five miles of trails in two separate sections of interest to birders. The section south of Mississippi Street west of the Morgantown Ice Arena contains a modest-sized reservoir where Canada Goose and Mallard breed; Great Blue and Green Herons and migrating Solitary Sandpiper have also been seen. The bordering forest is home to many woodpeckers, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, and in fall and winter Yellow-rumped Warbler and White-throated Sparrow. The section north of the athletic fields along Hite Street also hosts Yellow-rumps, White-throats, and Dark-eyed Junco in fall and winter, and is home year-round to Red-shouldered Hawk and common woodland birds such as woodpeckers, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, and Northern Cardinal. Migrants include Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing, and Black-throated Green Warbler. Web site: www.boparc.org.

Directions: From the downtown Morgantown end of the Route 19 bridge, go south on Route 119 for 1.9 miles to Route 857 (Green Bay Road), turn left and go 0.7 mile to M-Tec Drive, turn left and go 0.1 mile, turn left onto Mississippi Street and go 0.1 mile to East Parkway. For the southern section, continue on Mississippi 0.1 mile to the last entrance to the parking lot just past the ice arena; for the northern section turn right on East Parkway, then left on (unmarked) Hite Street to a parking lot across from the last athletic field.

Several other good birding locations within two hours of Morgantown include the following:

Cathedral State Park: Preston County, Route 50 east of Aurora, WV

Cranesville Swamp: Preston County, Feather Road, Cranestown, WV

Friendship Hill National Historical Site: Fayette County, PA, Route 166 north of Point Marion, PA
Krepps Park: Morgantown, Laurel Street off Route 705
Little Indian Creek Wildlife Management Area: Monongalia County, south of Route 19 west of Morgantown Mall
Marilla Park: Morgantown, White Avenue off Decker's Creek Boulevard
Mason and Dixon Historical Park: Monongalia County, Route 39 north of Route 7, Core, WV
Pedlar Wildlife Management Area— Dixon Lake Unit: Monongalia County, Little Indian Creek Road south of Route 7, Core, WV
Pedlar Wildlife Management Area—Mason Lake Unit: Monongalia County, Route 7 west of Little Indian Creek Road, Core, WV
Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area: Barbour County, Routes 119/250 south of Grafton, WV
Prickett's Fort State Park: Marion County, Prickett's Creek Road, Fairmont, WV
Snake Hill Wildlife Management Area: Monongalia County, Snake Hill Road south of Tyrone Road
Tygart Lake State Park: Taylor County, south of Route 119 south of Grafton, WV
Valley Falls State Park: Marion County, Route 310 east of I-79 near Fairmont, WV
Westover City Park: Westover, Dupont Road south of Route 19