

Birding on the Coast

A 3-day Itinerary for bird species and birding locations in and around Newport, Oregon

Are you a birder, or interested in birding? Birding is a fascinating hobby, and Newport is full of opportunities to view unique coastal birds in their natural habitats. Come prepared with hiking boots, field guides and binoculars to experience some of the finest birding in Oregon.

Day One: Drive from Portland to Lincoln City for lunch, and spend several hours at the Lincoln City Outlet Mall to take advantage of their wide variety of tax-free shopping. Continue driving south on Highway 101 to Devil's Punch Bowl State Natural Area, roughly eight miles north of Newport. The Devil's Punch Bowl is a unique geological site where high tides crash and swirl around in a hollow rock bowl, and a great place to start your birding adventure! During the summer, Brown Pelican, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Heermann's Gull, and Black Oystercatcher are common to the area, and in winter, expect to see Harlequin Duck, Black Oystercatcher, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, and Rock Sandpiper.

Next, drive less than a mile south to Beverly Beach State Park, a wooded walkway opens onto a long expanse of beach that connects Otter Rock with Yaquina Head to the south. Within the coastal forest along Spencer Creek, look for Pileated Woodpecker, Bandtailed Pigeon, Swainson's Thrush, Pacific-slope Flycatchers, Brown Creepers, Cedar Waxwing, Darkeyed Junco, White-crowned Sparrow, Northern Flycker and Wilson's Warbler, and on the beach, Western and Heermann's Gull, Common Loon, and Brown Pelican, Sanderling, Whimbrel, and Western Sandpiper can be seen.

Just a bit further south is the Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area, complete with historic lighthouse, an interpretive center, hiking trails, disabled accessible tide pools, and wildlife viewing decks; Yaquina Head is such a great place for birding that it has been designated a Globally Important Bird Area. The Area is home to one of the largest Common Muir colonies on the coast. During the summer, Bald Eagle, Black Oystercatcher, Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorant, Western Gull, Brown Pelican, and Pigeon Guillemot are common. From December through February, look for Red-necked and Western Grebe, Common Loon, Peregrine Falcon, and Marbled Murrelet.

After a full afternoon of exploration, drive into the dynamic city of Newport for sustenance and rest! Head over to Nye Beach, a quaint beachfront neighborhood, complete with galleries, gift shops, restaurants, and lodging. There are many great dining options in Nye Beach, such as house made offerings at Nye Beach Café, or try handmade pasta at Sorella Italian. Dine on fresh "Catch of the Day" seafood, with an amazing view of the Pacific Ocean at Georgie's Beachside Grill, or for an outstanding traditional Irish dinner, choose Nana's Irish Pub. Linger afterward for a cocktail or dessert, or if possible, catch an evening event at the Newport Performing Arts Center, where a variety of local and nationally recognized performers and presentations are available.

Day Two: Wake to the sound of the ocean and enjoy a casual breakfast & locally sourced cuisine at Café Sylvia, paired with stunning ocean views atop Nye Beach's cliffs. After breakfast, drive past Newport's Historic Bayfront, and head east on Highway 20, right on southeast Moore

Drive, left on southeast Yaquina Bay Road, and right at the sign “1702 Yaquina Bay Road” around the bend to park at the pullouts after the “yellow “S-Curves/35 MPH” sign. Walk west of the road to view Western Meadowlark, Northern Shrike, Killdeer, and Wilson’s Snipe, American Pipit and Western Kingbird in spring. From fall to spring American Wigeon, Canvasback, Common Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, Redheads, Surf and White-winged Scoters, and Red-breasted Merganser. Red-necked and Eared Grebes are common. Red-breasted, Common and Hooded Merganser, and all six species of grebes occurring in Oregon may be seen from October through November.

Drive back to the Yaquina Bay Road and turn right; follow the road twelve miles to the end. The entire length of this road is good for birding, especially from fall to spring. There are many pullouts along the way to view loons, grebes, ducks, and gulls. Stop at the bridge just before milepost 6.7 to search for perched gulls, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, and Green Heron or Snowy Egret. During winter months Dunlin, Western and Least Sandpiper, Black Turnstones, and Purple Martins can be seen on wooden rafts at high tide. Make sure to stop again at mileposts 8.8 and 9.2 and walk this stretch of road to view White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, and Mourning Dove. Each slough is divided by a tidal gate that separates freshwater from saltwater. Watch for Pied-billed Grebe, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, and rarely, Redhead on the freshwater side, and Common Loon, Horned and Western Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Surf Scoter, and Western, Glaucous-winged, Mew and California Gulls and Caspian Tern on the saltwater side.

After an exciting morning, drive back into Newport’s Historic Bayfront for lunch. Home to Oregon’s largest fishing fleet, Newport’s working Bayfront is a mix of art galleries, gift shops and eateries sharing space with canneries and fish processing plants. Stop at Mo’s Seafood & Chowder Restaurant for fresh seafood lunch options, such as their world famous clam chowder that may be eaten there, or shipped anywhere in the world.

After lunch, drive over to the Yaquina Bay State Park, located between the southern end of the Historic Bayfront and the iconic Yaquina Bay Bridge. The park is home to Newport’s second lighthouse, which includes an observation deck overlooking the bay and ocean. Brown Pelican, Pelagic Cormorant, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Swainson’s Thrush, swallows, and flycatchers are common in the summer. During winter, Yellow-billed Loon, Long-tailed Duck, Townsend’s Warbler and Hermit Thrush may be seen. Although elusive, Wrentits are often spotted year-round.

Next, drive over the Yaquina Bay Bridge, take the first right, and then left onto 26th Street and South Jetty where the Yaquina River empties into the Pacific Ocean. Watch for Common and Pacific Loon, and Yellow-billed Loon, Harlequin Duck, Black Turnstone, Surf-bird, Rock Sandpiper, and Blacklegged Kittiwakes on and around the strip of rocks that run into the bay. Glaucous, Herring, and Thayer’s gulls often inhabit a large “gull puddle” just above the beach during the rainy season. View large flocks of scoters and gulls in February and March, and young Common Murre are visible and call to one another in July and August. During winter, Snow Bunting, Longspur, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, and Snowy Owl are present.

Cross back under the Yaquina Bay Bridge and Hwy 101, and follow the signs to the Oregon Coast Aquarium, one of Oregon’s most visited destinations. The Oregon Coast Aquarium is often referred to as “a living classroom,” and plays an active role in conservation and animal

rehabilitation. The aquarium boasts the largest open-air seabird aviary in North America, which is home to Tufted Puffin, Pigeon Guillemot, Common Murre, Black Oystercatcher, Rhinoceros Auklet, Semipalmated Plover, and the endangered Western Snowy Plover. View Green Heron, Great Blue Heron, Killdeer, and Purple Martin from an interpretive trail that overlooks the Yaquina Bay estuary.

Travel a short distance from the aquarium to S.E. OSU Drive and the Oregon State University Hatfield Marine Science Center. Park on the east side of the visitor center, and walk down the one mile nature trail that borders the Yaquina Bay. View these impressive birds of prey: Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, White-tailed Kite, Peregrine Falcon, and Merlin. During the winter, Palm Warbler and Savannah Sparrow are common. Fall migration brings Western Meadowlark, Sage Thrasher, Mountain Bluebird, and Say's Phoebe; a large variety of waterfowl are abundant on the mudflats in the fall. During spring migration in late April, view Dunlin, Western and Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, Whimbrel, and Long-billed Curlew. Caspian and Elegant Tern are common in the summer.

Drive a few blocks over to S.E. Marine Science Drive, and park at the west end of the lot. Walk over to the fishing and crabbing pier, which is a great place for observing seabirds while surrounded on three sides by water. During the winter, watch for Long-tailed Duck or a Yellow-billed Loon, and in the summer, Western Gull, Pigeon Guillemot, and Pelagic Cormorant are common.

After a full day of birding, cross the Yaquina Bay Bridge back to the Historic Bayfront. The Bayfront offers fantastic culinary delights from Clearwater Restaurant, Asiatico Waterfront Fusion Sushi, Thai Port Restaurant, Local Ocean Seafoods, and others.

Day Three: Get an early start after breakfast! Drive back across the Yaquina Bay Bridge (unless of course you stayed in South Beach), turn left from Hwy 101 onto S.E. 50th Street and follow to trail head. Follow the one-mile loop through forest, wetlands, and shrubs. View Wood Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and Wilson's Snipe in the spring, and Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Brown Creeper, Wrentit, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Hutton's and Cassin's Vireo, Great Horned Owl, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Bushtit, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Purple Finch, Spotted Towhee, Red Crossbill, Northern Flicker, Townsend's, Wilson's, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Hermit, Varied, and Swainson's Thrush may be seen throughout the year.

Drive about 8 miles south on Hwy 101 to Brian Booth State Park and Ona Beach. Watch for Bald Eagle and Red-shouldered Hawk on the tall trees and power lines at the entrance of the park. On the west side of the park where Beaver Creek intersects with the Pacific Ocean, watch gulls, Caspian Tern, migrating shorebirds, and Brown Pelican. Observe year-round Steller's Jay, American Crow, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific and Bewick's Wren, Hairy Woodpecker and Brown Creeper. During winter, view Golden-crowned Kinglet, Varied and Hermit Thrush, and Townsend's Warbler, and in the summer Violet-green Swallow, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit and Wilson's Warbler, Cedar Waxwing, and Purple Finch may be seen. The east side of the park is a freshwater coastal marsh, and may be accessed by canoe or kayak; from boat or bank, view Piedbilled Grebe, Green Heron, and Belted Kingfisher during summer, Spotted Sandpipers and Virginia Rail in the spring and Great Egret, Common Goldeneye, Northern Pintail, Bufflehead, Greater Scaup, Surf and Whitewinged Scoter, Hooded Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser during summer months.

Return to Hwy 101, and continue south several miles to Seal Rock State Park. Observe offshore birds from the north-end viewing deck overlooking the ocean, and then follow the main trail through the forest to the south-end viewing deck to see Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorant, Western Gull, Pigeon Guillemot, Harlequin Duck, Black Scoter, loons, grebes, Black Turnstone, Rock Sandpiper, Wandering Tattler and Ruddy Turnstone.

In addition to this birding itinerary, many other diverse birds may be seen from locations off the Pacific coastline.

For more information please contact:

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Note: For additional birding locations north and south of Newport, please visit Oregon Coast Birding Trail at www.oregoncoastbirding.com where many of these site location directions can also be found.