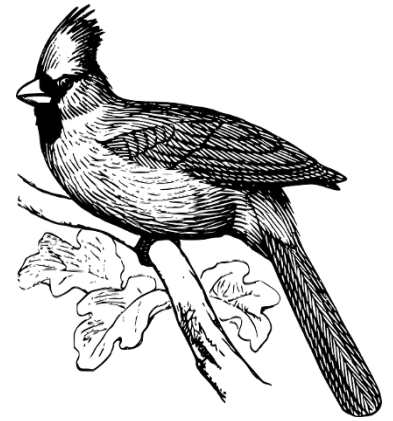


Spring Migration

Bike, Hike, and Bird at DCR State Parks
in the Connecticut River Greenway State Park

TRIP-TIP SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURE



Welcome

Each spring, thousands of migrating birds fly north through the Connecticut River Valley to nest. They join year-round resident birds looking for the best places to raise families. As you bike and hike and “migrate from park to park” like a bird, meet the early birds of spring and immerse yourself in the season. In this Spring Migration Trip Tip, these three signature parks in the Connecticut River Greenway State Park are all within 50 minutes of each other. With this guide, and a little preparation, each adventure offers a fresh look at how to fly full speed into spring.

Then there’s the good news from researchers— [being around a wide variety of birds makes you happier!](#) Just going outside makes people happier. Add trees, open water, scenic views, and birds to your outdoor adventure, and it all adds up to happy. Add a dash of warmer temperatures and more daylight and you’ve got a recipe for bliss! Here are your options:

Habitat is Home at **Norwottock Rail Trail** in Amherst

Soar to the Top at **Mount Sugarloaf State Reservation** in South Deerfield

Going with the Flow at **Canalside Rail Trail** in Turners Falls



Choose one park, two parks, or make it a multi-day adventure. Visit them in any order, you decide. They are presented here from south to north, just like migrating spring birds. Challenge yourself to visit all the parks with your family during April Vacation Week, anytime this spring, or even this summer. We hope you enjoy this Trip-Tip tour.

Share Your Adventure!

Share your Trip-Tip adventure with others through word of mouth, or on social media using the hashtags **#massdcr** and **#dcrtripitip**.

Things To Know, Before You Go

Remember, at all DCR parks and watersheds:

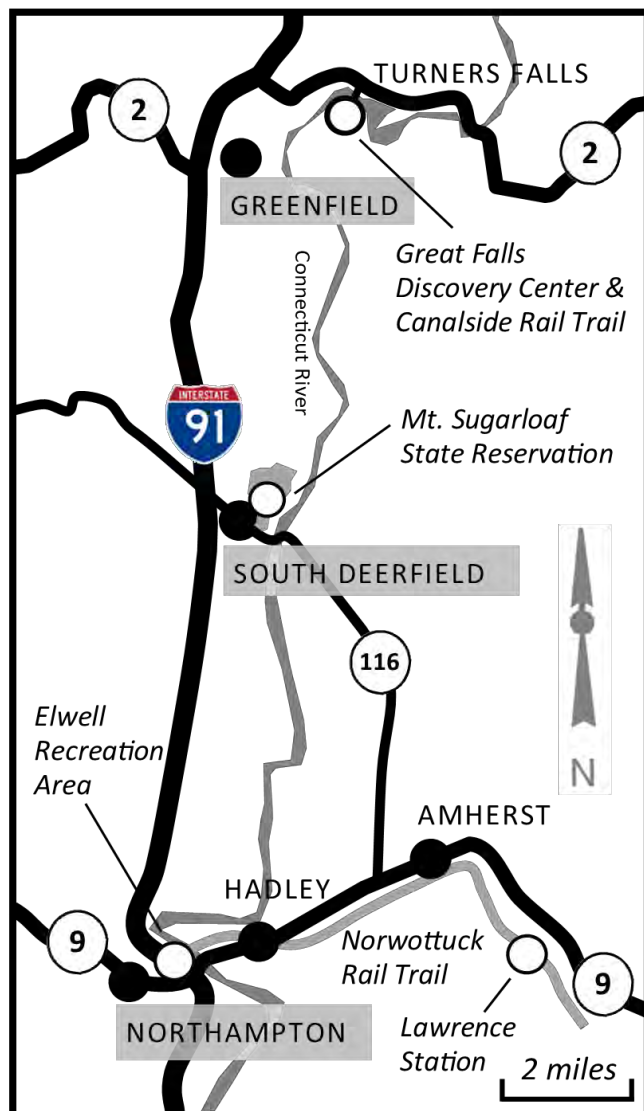
- Carry-in, carry-out all of your belongings, including trash.
- Stay on designated trails.
- Pets on 10-foot maximum leash at all times. Clean-up after your pet. Dispose of waste off-site.
- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Wear a mask and social distance.

Rail trail etiquette:

- Be courteous of other path users.
- Keep right unless passing.
- Stop at all stop signs.
- Trail is open dawn to dusk.
- Give a clear and audible signal before passing and pass only when it's safe to.
- Travel at a reasonable speed.
- Wear protective headgear. This is required by law for children 16 years and younger but recommended for all.
- Respect private property next to the trail.

What to bring:

- Binoculars
- Field guide
- Water
- Sturdy shoes
- Bicycle
- Helmet
- Trail maps
- Snacks
- Notebook



Habitat is Home

Norwottuck Rail Trail—Lawrence Station

Address: 292 Station Road, Amherst MA 01002

Phone: (413) 586-8706 ext. 3

Website: www.mass.gov/locations/norwottuck-rail-trail

Hours of Operation: Dawn to Dusk.

Parking: Free parking at Station Road. During weekends and sunny days, the parking lot may be full. Alternative parking options include behind Mountain Farms Mall and Railroad Street at Hadley Depot.

Restrooms: Starting April 1, 2021, portable toilets will be located at Elwell Recreation Area in Northampton, Railroad Street in Hadley, and Station Road in Amherst, for the summer season.

The Norwottuck Branch of the Mass Central Rail Trail is an 11-mile paved path linking Northampton, Hadley, Amherst, and Belchertown along the former Central Massachusetts Railroad Company right-of-way. This path's level terrain provides a safe way for pedestrian and wheeled users of all ages types and abilities. Your goal is to find your way to Lawrence Station at Station Road in Amherst.

Download a trail map [here](#). Coordinates: [42.342565937699995, -72.48692636513529](#)

Can you bike and look for birds at the same time? Probably not safely! But you can pack both tasks into an adventure if you do one thing at a time. So, grab your bike, helmet, field guides, binoculars, and a backpack, and head to Station Road in Amherst. Or, you can hike the trail too, at your own pace. If you don't have binoculars, you can make your own at home, before heading out. See the activity on the next page.

So, if birds help us be happy, let's get to know them a bit better. A field guide like *Peterson First Guides to Birds* can help. Or, if you have a smartphone, you could try the [Merlin Bird ID app](#). But, even if we can't name a bird that we see or hear right away, we can take steps to get there over time. The more you watch birds, the more you'll notice **size, shape, and color**.

Wetland Engineers

One way to discover who your bird neighbors are, is to know **which birds live in which habitats**. A habitat is a fancy way of saying an animal's home. Different habitats have different animals. As you look around Lawrence Swamp near Station Road, you're bound to see signs of the animal engineers responsible for the wetland habitat here. Teeth marks on downed




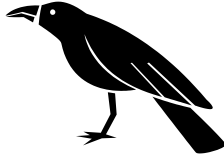







trees and huge mounds of sticks in the middle of the water, called lodges—are both sure signs that you've got beavers. Beavers built these wet spaces with dams to stay safe and raise families. Wetlands are good for so many other animals too—like painted turtles, frogs, muskrats, and certain birds. You may see mallard ducks, Canada geese, and great blue herons at this spot.

Another way to get to know birds, is to understand what they do. Is that bird hopping around? Maybe it's a robin. Is that bird wading? Maybe it's a heron. The [great blue herons](#) here hunt in the still waters, with long, spear-like beaks for fish, frogs, snakes, large insects, and small mammals. Herons are successful by moving very slowly and quietly. That is how you will be successful watching them too. They startle easily. The migrating [marsh wren](#) has only just arrived at its spring and summertime swamp. It may be flitting around the edges of the wetlands, landing, hidden, in the cover of marsh grasses and cattails. It is a small little brown bird that's hard to see, but that loves this place. Listen closely for its high pitched squeaks and buzzing.



During your birding adventures at this park, or all three parks, **can you get three in a row (tic tac toe)** while observing what birds do? See the activity on the next page.

You can likely count on seeing or hearing birds that like more than one habitat. You might notice birds like [black-capped chickadees](#), [northern cardinals](#), [American robins](#), [mourning doves](#), and [American crows](#) almost anywhere in Western Massachusetts. **Get to know their calls and songs** at allaboutbirds.org—and you will hear your familiar friends nearly wherever you go! It's hard to feel lonely if you listen for a bird song chorus throughout your day.

 <p>Singing bird</p>	 <p>Calling bird</p>	 <p>Hopping bird</p>
 <p>Perching Bird</p>	 <p>Flying bird</p>	 <p>Soaring Bird</p>
 <p>Eating bird</p>	 <p>Wading Bird</p>	 <p>Swimming bird</p>

Make Your Own Binoculars at Home

No binoculars? No problem! You can make your own with materials that you already have at home before you head outside for birding in our parks. These crafty binoculars may not make the birds that you see look bigger, but they help you focus on them, and give you a feel for how to use them. Here's how you can make your own cardboard binoculars:

1. **Decorate:** Cut a piece of paper to fit the toilet paper rolls. This will be the cover for your binoculars, so get decorating! (Keep in mind some of the paper will get covered up a little bit once the tubes are taped together.)
2. **Tape the two toilet paper rolls together.** Or wait to do this until after Step 3, depending on your preference.
3. **Tape the paper that you decorated to the toilet paper rolls.** You can wrap the paper to each tube individually or tape the tubes together first and then wrap and tape or glue the paper to two rolls at once.
4. **Use paper hole punch** to punch holes for binocular straps.
5. **Measure** how long you would like your yarn binocular straps to be, based on how big you are.
6. **Tie yarn** binocular straps to binoculars. Happy Birding!



Here's a good tip: Follow the bird's movements with your eyes first, and then slowly lift the binoculars to your eyes to start focusing on the bird. There's your bird!

Extend Your Experience at Elwell Recreation Area

If you've got the stamina to bike from Lawrence Station to the Elwell Recreation area on the Norwotock Rail Trail—you are a magnificent migrating bird! If you'd like to save some of your energy for later migrations, you can drive to the Elwell Recreation Area at Damon Road in Northampton to see the Connecticut River in all its spring glory. What different birds are in this river habitat that aren't in the wetlands habitat at Station Road?

Capture Your Observations

You can record what you see on your spring Trip Tip with photography or a nature journal that you could make yourself. You could color the drawings of birds in this guide and paste them into your journal. Or sign up on ebird.org to share your observations with everyone. You're on your way to gathering insights into which birds are seen where and when, just like a scientist! If you're still unsure about which birds you've seen or which ones you've missed—consider joining a local bird club or a Western Massachusetts birding Facebook group. And, when it's safe to do so again, you could attend a program on birds at a state park.



Soar to the Top

Mount Sugarloaf State Reservation

Address: 300 Sugarloaf St., South Deerfield, MA 01373

Phone: (413) 665-2928

Website: www.mass.gov/locations/mount-sugarloaf-state-reservation

Hours of Operation: Dawn to dusk for walking up to the summit. The road to the summit typically opens on Mother's Day. Call the park for exact dates. After opening for the season, the gate at the road to the summit opens at 9 a.m., seven days a week, through October.

Parking: Free parking is available at the base of the mountain on Sugarloaf Street. If the lot is full, additional parking is available on Sunderland Road (Rt.116), just around the corner as you head towards Sunderland. When the road to the summit opens for the season, there is a fee to park at the top.

Restrooms: After the road to the summit opens, restrooms at the tower open, and an accessible portable toilet is available at the parking lot area at the summit. A drinking fountain at the tower also becomes available.

"Away up there, in the pure atmosphere and genial sunshine... the beautiful expanse all around ... mundane cares seem to be left behind." --Greenfield Gazette & Courier, September 19th, 1870

Mount Sugarloaf gives us one of the most loved and scenic views in Western Massachusetts. You can see the Connecticut River, the Pioneer Valley, and the Pelham and Berkshire Hills. Here, you can get

a new perspective on the landscape, on bird life, and maybe your own life too.

The park includes two peaks, North and South Sugarloaf. South Sugarloaf features picnic tables, a pavilion, and a viewfinder, and is our destination.

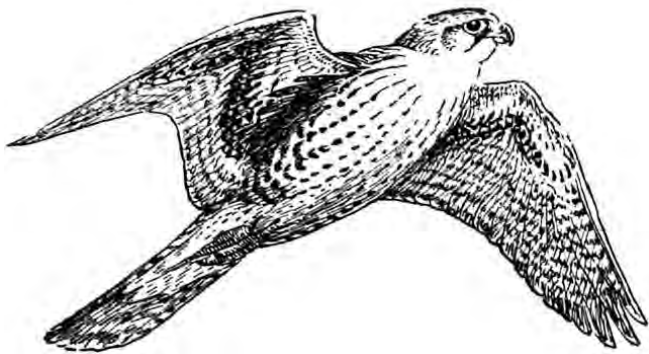
Hike to the Summit

From the parking lot area, as you face the entrance for the summit road, to the left is the **Old Mountain Trail** and to the right of the road is the start of the **Pocumtuck Ridge Trail**.

- The **Old Mountain Trail with red blazes** is a little less difficult to climb than the Pocumtuck Ridge Trail, but a little longer. As you head up the mountain via the Old Mountain Trail, follow the signs to the summit, which will eventually connect you to the blue blazes of the Pocumtuck Ridge Trail.
- While both trails are steep, starting at the **Pocumtuck Ridge Trail with blue blazes** at the base of the mountain, includes climbing up a few rocks. Be sure to wear sturdy shoes!
- Another option, especially before **the auto road to the summit** opens in May, is to walk up the road, which is a little bit more gradual of a climb, with no rocks and tree roots to scabble over.

The distance is about 1.4 miles, with moderate difficulty, but steep. If *only* you could fly up! **Download a trail map [here](#).**

As you make the climb through the woods, you may hear the songs of [the black-capped chickadee](#), in its small white, black, and gray outfit. Or maybe [the northern cardinal](#), with its flashy red feathers. Do you know their sounds yet? They're distinctive, my little "chick-a-dee-dee-dee." Are there any other frequent flyers that you see or hear, that you recognize from other parks or your neighborhood?



Featured Mountaintop Bird

Once you get to the top, you can take in the view of the Connecticut River, farms, and valley towns. Climb the summit tower and take a deep breath of mountain air. If you hear some high-pitched screeching interrupting your visit—you may be in luck to see and hear [peregrine falcons](#) that regularly nest on the ledges of South Mount Sugarloaf Mountain every spring. Some birds depend on a habitat of great heights to raise their families. The peregrine falcon hunts for its food by diving from

heights through the air at super high speeds to grab other birds for a meal. Watch out rock pigeons and songbirds! Having a nesting site high up in the air on a mountain's ledge, suits them just fine.

In the distance to the southeast you can see the UMass Amherst W.E.B. Du Bois library tower. On top of the library, is a [peregrine falcon nest and a webcam](#). Check it out before or after your trip to get a close-up view of falcons nesting! Webcams can teach you so much about birds. You may be able to recognize them more easily the next time you go outside.

Extend Your Experience at North Sugarloaf

Mount Sugarloaf State Reservation has not one, but two fabulous peaks. If you are up for a lengthier hike, you can consider exploring the vistas and forests of North Sugarloaf too. [Here's a trail map](#) that includes North Sugarloaf.

Going with the Flow

Canalside Rail Trail

Locations:

- Unity Park, 56 First Street at Unity Park, Turners Falls, MA 01376
- Great Falls Discovery Center, 2 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA 01376
- Intersection of Avenue A and 11th Street, Turners Falls, MA 01376
- McClelland Farm Road in East Deerfield

Phone: 413-863-3221

Website: www.mass.gov/locations/canalside-rail-trail and www.mass.gov/locations/great-falls-discovery-center

Hours of Operation: Dawn to Dusk.

Parking: Free parking at any one of the locations above.

Restrooms: Due to Covid-19 safety precautions, the Great Falls Discovery Center is closed, and public restrooms are not available this spring.

The Canalside Rail Trail follows a former rail bed for an easy-riding 3.7 miles, one way. A number of locations along the Canalside Rail Trail in Turners Falls provide excellent waterfowl viewing ([click here for trail map](#)). Your adventure will follow the current of the Connecticut River, including a diversion of water into a power canal. The birds enjoy a rest stop on the open waters of the power canal and above the hydroelectric dam near Barton Cove. Take a ride or a hike and take bird breaks. Guaranteed you will see and hear the [mallard ducks](#), [mute swans](#), gulls, and [Canada geese](#)!

Above the Turners Falls Dam at Unity Park

A first stop on the Canalside Rail Trail takes you above the Turners Falls Dam at Unity Park on First Street. A big river means good fishing for people and birds. Cross your fingers that you may get to see or hear the [resident bald eagles](#) flying nearby as they prepare their nest at Barton Cove. They grab fish out of the river with their sharp and powerful talons.

The dam here creates a reservoir, like a lake, in the river which is a great location for waterfowl to feed, rest and start families. **But please do not feed the ducks and geese.** This creates unnatural behavior and leaves a big mess behind. Keep the “wild” in wild-life.

You can practice your waterfowl identification all along the Canalside Rail Trail - numerous species have been found here, some of them rare! How many mute swans can you count? They're hard to miss – so huge and white – even if they are quiet. They benefit from the open expanse of water to be able to take off and land, with their big wingspans.

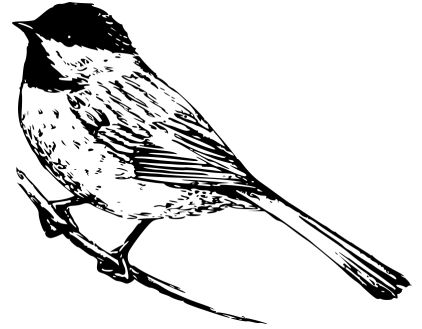


Along the way—Great Falls Discovery Center

Continue your migration downstream and head southwest on the **Canalside Rail Trail** for a 5-10-

minute walk, or a short bike ride, to enjoy the four-acre park surrounding the **Great Falls Discovery Center** at 2 Avenue A. While the center is presently closed, when it does open, inside it is **a great place to get to know birds too**. The center celebrates the Connecticut River watershed with beautiful habitat exhibits featuring both birds and bird song. Come visit when it is safe to do so again! For now, enjoy open play areas for leashed dog walks and picnic tables at the Center. Parking is in the lot off Avenue A and 2nd Street. Accessible parking is available on Avenue A.

Along the rail trail here, you can listen to the roar of the water in the canal. Can you see the river below the dam? Is it roaring with spring rains and snowmelt, or is it quiet and still? What birds do you see or hear at this stop? **Are they water loving birds or tree loving birds?** You may hear a noisy [blue jay](#) or a calling [chickadee](#), or maybe a [Northern mockingbird](#) singing its heart out.



Further Downstream



For your next waterfowl stop continue walking or biking south on the **Canalside Rail Trail** for about 1.5 miles to where the canal widens near a park bench, some picnic tables, and a few tall pine trees. This is just south of the intersection of Avenue A and 11th Street. Did you see any beaver sign along the way? Keep an eye out. This man-made power canal, which generates hydroelectricity at Cabot Station nearby, is right near wetlands and rivers that beavers love too. More than one species can change the course of a river! Take a rest at the picnic tables, and you may rest your eyes on hundreds of geese and ducks, who need to take a break too—for feeding or raising families. Are there any young ones yet? Honk, honk! Quack, quack! For additional information on birds that you'll see along the trail, you can view the [Turners Falls Area Birding Guide](#).

Extend Your Experience

The Canalside Rail Trail is level, so it is perfect for families with kids of all ages. Simply go as far as you can—keeping in mind, you will have to turn back. If you'd like to go all the way to the end of the Canalside Rail Trail, find yourself at an historic restored railroad bridge over the Connecticut River. It connects the village of Montague City to East Deerfield, just south of where the Deerfield River enters the Connecticut River. Keep going a bit more and discover a nice, wooded trail, with views of farm fields and the calls of chattering birds. It leads you to the end of the trail at the East Deerfield Rail Yard (a trainspotter's paradise). Along the way, practice listening and seeing familiar western Massachusetts birds like chickadees, robins, and [American crows](#) too. Once you know one bird by sight or song, you'll want to know them all.

Extend Your Experience at Unity Park

Once you migrate back to your starting point, keep in mind that the Town of Montague's Unity Park offers picnic tables, a playground, ballfields, and a skate park. You could spend a whole day on the Canalside Rail Trail and at Unity Park!

Why do birds make us happy?

Is it their joyful songs? The majesty of flight? The invitation to stop and notice something other than ourselves? The mystery of how they live their lives and migrate so far or hunt so fiercely? Solving the puzzle of which bird is which? You decide!

Recommended Reading:

You can check out these books from your local library:

- *Ruby's Birds*. By Mya Thompson
- *Have You Heard the Nesting Bird?* By Rita Gray
- *Eaglet's World*. By Evelyn White Minshull
- *Bird Watch*. By Christie Matheson
- *The Burgess Bird Book For Children*. By Thornton Burgess.
- *The Peregrine's Journey*. By Madeleine Dunphy
- *The Little Book of Backyard Bird Songs*. By Andrea Pinnington and Caz Buckingham
- *Watching Water Birds*. By Jim Arnosky
- *Crinkleroot's Guide to Knowing the Birds*. By Jim Arnosky
- *Peterson First Guides to Birds*
- *Peterson Field Guides to Feeder Birds of Eastern North America*

Thank you for joining us for this springtime park and bird migration Trip-Tip! In our parks, adventure and discovery await if you get out and move. Maybe you visited a park that you didn't know about before, or maybe you met a new bird. We hope that you will be inspired to take even more outdoor adventures all year long!

Thank you to these amazing bird resources:

- Allaboutbirds.org
- Audubon.org
- Merlin.allaboutbirds.org
- UMass Library Peregrine Falcon webcam
- Ebird.org

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) oversees over 450,000 acres of state parks, forests, beaches, bike trails, parkways, watershed lands, and dams across the Commonwealth. DCR's mission is to: *Protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all*. For more information visit: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/departement-of-conservation-recreation>.

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MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION