



North Carolina

Birding Trail

mountains • piedmont • coast

Greater Charlotte West

1 Lake Norman State Park

Owner: NC State Parks

159 Inland Sea Lane, Troutman, NC 28166
704-528-6350

Iredell County

www.ncparks.gov

Site Description: Birders will get the most reward by leaving heavily used areas of this 2,000-acre park, in favor of the more than 18 miles of trail within the park. The Itusi Trail, located at the north end of the park and divided into four loops, passes through habitats ranging from floodplain forest to dry oak-hickory forest. The range of habitats offers the opportunity to see everything from Wood Duck to Black-and-white Warbler. Do note, this trail is primarily a mountain biking trail, so hikers must yield right-of-way to bicyclists. The Lakeshore Trail, located at the southern end of the park, provides a 5-mile loop that roughly follows the shoreline. This trail passes through mixed pine-oak forests and offers many views of Lake Norman. The course of the trail follows numerous coves where waterfowl can be observed, away from the main channel of Lake Norman. The 0.8 mile Alder Trail, located in the northern part of the park, goes along a peninsula formed by Norwood Creek and Hicks Creek and offers good views of shorebirds, Osprey and Belted Kingfisher.

Species of Interest: Broad-winged Hawk, Common Loon, Little Blue Heron, Black-and-white Warbler, Scarlet Tanager

Habitats: oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, floodplain forest, early successional, lake

Access & Parking: Lake Norman State Park is open from 8am to 6pm, November – February; 8am to 8pm, March, April, September, October; 8am to 9pm, May – August. The park office is open daily from 8am to 4:30pm. Parking is available at both recommended trailheads. Trails close 30 minutes prior to park hours. Call ahead to find out about any trail closures.

Directions: Lake Norman State Park is 10 miles south of Statesville and 32 miles north of Charlotte. Reach the park from I-77 by taking Exit 42 to US 21 North. Travel on US 21 to Troutman. In Troutman, turn left on Wagner Street, then right on State Park Road, which leads into the state park.

Coordinates: N 35° 39' 00" W 80° 56' 46"

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2 Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge

Owner: Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department

2329 Neck Road, Huntersville, NC 28078
704-875-1391

Mecklenburg County

www.parkandrec.com

Site Description: More than 200 species of birds have been documented at this 660-acre county-owned wildlife refuge lying along the banks of the Catawba River. Other state and local agencies protect adjoining lands, preserving a total of more than 2,000 acres of wildlife habitat along both sides of the river. Public access to the wildlife refuge is limited to the entrance road and an observation stand overlooking two waterfowl impoundments, but birders will find a great variety of birds viewable year-round. In addition to the ponds, other habitat types on the refuge include an assortment of native grass fields, shrub areas, and both pine and mixed-hardwood forests. Spotting scopes are recommended for viewing from the parking area and observation platform. The courtship flight of the American Woodcock can be observed here each winter and Wild Turkey are also easily seen. Several unusual species have wintered on the refuge, including LeConte's Sparrow, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren and Virginia Rail. Bobolink are often observed in spring. Nesting Osprey can be observed during the breeding season, and in some years there are great numbers of Black and Turkey Vultures roosting on the power lines and towers.

Species of Interest: Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, American Woodcock, Prairie Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, wintering waterfowl

Habitats: dry coniferous woodlands, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, early successional, lake

Access & Parking: Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge is open daily from 7am to sunset. Public access to this site is limited to birding along the entrance road, and at the observation platform at the parking lot at the road's end.

Directions: From I-77 South, take Exit 23 (Huntersville). Turn right off of the exit on Gilead Road. (From I-77 North turn left off the exit). Proceed west for 5 miles. At the stop sign, turn left on Beatties Ford Road and proceed south for 3.5 miles. Turn right on Neck Road and continue for 4 miles until the road bears left and turns to gravel. Continue 0.5 miles to the refuge entrance.

Coordinates: N 35° 22' 53" W 80° 57' 41" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 57





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3 Latta Plantation Nature Preserve

Owner: Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department

5226 Sample Road, Huntersville, NC 28078
704-875-1391

Mecklenburg County

www.parkandrec.com

Site Description: Latta Plantation Nature Preserve is the largest nature preserve in Mecklenburg County, protecting over 1,340 acres of mostly forested habitat. The preserve is a peninsula surrounded on three sides by the Catawba River. An interesting diversity of both land and water birds can be encountered here throughout the year. Birders can explore 16 miles of trails leading into pine forests, beech hardwood forests, and an oak-hickory forest area that is ranked as an important North Carolina natural heritage site. In addition, birders can view the open water of Mountain Island Lake from several locations throughout the preserve. A 35-acre Piedmont prairie restoration area provides nesting habitat for Prairie Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Indigo Bunting, Common Yellowthroat and more. Kentucky Warbler have been found nesting along the densely forested Gar Creek in late spring. Be sure to stop in at the nature center to check out the bird feeders, hike the nature center trail, and to get a copy of the current bird checklist and a trail map. The Carolina Raptor Center is also located within the preserve, providing visitors close-up looks at a wide variety of North American raptors.

Species of Interest: Yellow-breasted Chat, Prairie Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Indigo Bunting

Habitats: dry coniferous woodlands, oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, early successional, lake

Special Features: Birders should be considerate of the equestrian riders that have access to some of the trails. The federally-endangered Schweinitz's sunflower can be viewed in good numbers each fall at the Latta Prairie.

Access & Parking: Latta Plantation Nature Preserve is open daily from 7am to sunset. Latta Plantation Nature Center is open 9am to 5pm, Monday – Saturday; 1pm to 5pm, Sunday.

Directions: From I-77 South, take Exit 23 (Huntersville). Turn right off the exit on Gilead Road. (From I-77 North, turn left off the exit). Take the third left on McCoy Road. At the stop sign, turn right on Beatties Ford Road. Turn left on Sample Road and continue 1 mile to the preserve.

Coordinates: N 35° 21' 21" W 80° 54' 32" DeLorme (NC Gazetteer) Page: 57





North Carolina

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4 Carolina Raptor Center

Owner: Carolina Raptor Center

6000 Sample Road, Huntersville, NC 28078
704-875-6521

Mecklenburg County

www.carolinaraptorcenter.org

Site Description: See the country's most extensive collection of birds of prey at the Carolina Raptor Center. Located just 20 minutes from uptown Charlotte, in Latta Plantation Nature Preserve, Carolina Raptor Center is home to eagles, hawks, owls, vultures and falcons. Carolina Raptor Center, a nonprofit organization, is dedicated to environmental education and the conservation of birds of prey through public education, the rehabilitation of injured and orphaned raptors, and research. Each year the Center receives and treats hundreds of raptors from all over the south. The majority are rehabilitated in the on-site medical facility and released back in the wild. Non-releasable birds may become permanent residents and part of the education team. Carolina Raptor Center's "Raptor Trail" houses 23 different species of raptors. Be sure to visit the eagle aviary, the largest in the Carolinas. Raptor presentations, special events and festivals are held throughout the year.

Species of Interest: Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Barn Owl, Barred Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl

Habitats: oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, lake

Access & Parking: The Carolina Raptor Center is open 10am to 5pm, Monday – Saturday; 12pm to 5pm, Sunday. Admission is \$7/adult, \$6/ Senior (age 60 & up), \$5/Student (age 5 & up); members and children get in free.

Directions: From I-77, take Exit 23 (Huntersville). Turn right off the exit on Gilead Road. Take the third left on McCoy Road. At the stop sign, turn right on Beatties Ford Road. Turn left on Sample Road and head straight into Latta Plantation Nature Preserve. Carolina Raptor Center is 0.7 miles on the left inside the preserve gate.

Coordinates: N 35° 21' 03" W 80° 55' 04"

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5 McDowell Nature Preserve

Owner: Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department

15222 York Road, Charlotte, NC 28278
704-588-5224

Mecklenburg County

www.parkandrec.com

Site Description: This 1,100-acre nature preserve protects a section of the Catawba River shoreline along Lake Wylie in Mecklenburg County. The entire preserve is designated a significant natural heritage site. The preserve is predominately forested and there are more than 100 species of wildflowers and ferns growing here. Birding along the lake can produce good finds during migration and in winter. Good habitat for both grassland birds and butterflies can be explored at the 150-acre Piedmont Prairie restoration site. Investigate the forest areas by walking over 7 miles of trails that meander throughout the preserve. Birders can easily spend more than a day here, exploring the roads and trails, stopping at the nature center, boating, fishing, or picnicking in the park. Other wildlife that can be found at the preserve include bobcat (rarely seen), red fox, gray fox, coyote, box turtle, hognose snake, white-tailed deer, and numerous species of dragonflies and butterflies.

Species of Interest: Common Loon, Northern Harrier, Pileated Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, Prairie Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow

Habitats: oak forest & mixed hardwoods/pine, early successional, lake

Access & Parking: Access is directly off York Road (NC 49). The preserve is open daily, 7am to sunset. The Nature Center is open 9am to 5pm, Monday – Saturday; 1pm to 5pm on Sunday. Call 704-588-5224 to inquire about bird programs and guided nature tours.

Directions: From I-77, take Exit 6A for NC 49 South/York Road. Travel south on York Road for 10 miles. The nature preserve entrance and sign are on the right.

Coordinates: N 35° 05' 40" W 81° 57' 41"

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