

# Gilliam County, Oregon



## Gilliam County Birding Locations

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**Authors/Editors:** Darrel Faxon, Linda Fink, Chuck Gates

**County Seat:** Condon

**County Size:** 1223 square miles

**High Elevation :** Un-named location (4285 ft)

**Rarities :** Stilt Sandpiper, Glaucous Gull, Snowy Owl, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Least Flycatcher, Blue Jay, Red-eyed Vireo, Bohemian Waxwing, Blackpoll Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow, American Tree Sparrow, Common Redpoll

**Top County Lister :** Darrel Faxon (206)

**Year List Record :** Craig Corder & Judy Stevens 1994 (183)

**County Contact Person:** Email [Darrel Faxon](mailto:Darrel Faxon) [return to the top](#)

**Introduction:** Why would anyone bird in Gilliam County? Some years ago when the idea of county listing was first proposed in Oregon Birds, and the threshold number for a list from each county was set at one hundred, one correspondent suggested it might not be possible to find a hundred species in Gilliam.

This assumption was based on the fact that a casual trip through the county reveals little in variety of either habitat or birds. The journey along the slack water of the Columbia behind the John Day dam offers almost no significant coves or other places attractive to water birds. Similarly, Highway 19, the main north-south route through the county runs primarily through mile-after-mile of wheat farms, and the only birds one often sees there are Horned Larks.

However, once one begins to explore the backroads and side canyons of Gilliam County, he/she will find a surprising variety of habitats, and a surprising variety of birds. Each canyon is different. Some have narrow strips of fields alongside creeks; some rimrock; some small marshes, some groves of trees; some sagebrush flats. Each has its own component of birds. Combine these varied habitats with the forest lands at the extreme south of the county, and the Willow Cove Wildlife Management Area at the extreme northeast corner, and it all adds up to a challenging and rewarding experience for the birder. The aggregate list of birds seen in the county is now well over double the initial suggested threshold for reporting. As more birders explore the regions further afield from the main roads, this list will undoubtedly grow even more.

For those who are less thrilled about listing, and more into just enjoying a birding experience, Gilliam County still has a lot to offer. Waking up to the cry of Long-billed Curlews drifting through the morning mist east of Arlington is a memorable experience indeed. And there are a number of similar experiences one may have which will enhance his appreciation for the habitats, the birds, the solitude, and perhaps even the people of this fascinating county. [return to the top](#)

## **COLUMBIA RIVER AREA**

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**Location:** There are two principle places to do river watches in Gilliam: at the north end of the freeway interchange to Hwy 74 (exit 147, [45.78777, -120.03956](#)) and at the rest stop/overlook a few miles downstream ([45.71726, -120.23348](#)). To get to the 74 freeway interchange, travel east from Arlington for 9 miles and take exit 147. Turn north on the frontage road and follow it until you get a good view of the river. To get to the rest area, go west from Arlington for just over a mile and look for the exit to the rest area. This can only be accessed from the west-bound lane. Getting water

birds in Gilliam County is difficult, and the Columbia River not normally productive, but you never know.

**Habitat and Birds:** Gulls, including Western Gull, can be seen. It is possible to see White Pelicans flying by. Given the fact that there are good numbers and unusual species of birds below both the John Day and McNary dams and that Gilliam county lies between the two, there must be some traffic of these birds up and down river.

### **Phillipi Canyon** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 B-3 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 C-3  
**geographic coordinates** 45°40'36.5"N 120°29'09.1"W  
([45.6768, -120.48585](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** Continue west on Blalock Canyon Road from West Road for just over 3 miles. Turn west on Heritage Road. Take Heritage Road for 7.5 miles and turn west on Philippi Canyon Road. Once finished, return to Quinten Canyon Road and on to I-84.

**Habitat and Birds:** First 0.5 miles is good for Chukar and sparrows. Return to the road leading north to I-84. Check the brushy hillside on the west side of the road for Rock and Canyon Wrens. ( Used to have more birds, when stock tank still held water). Near the cliffs overlooking I-84, look for White-throated Swift.

### **West Road** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 B-3 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 C-4  
**geographic coordinates** 45°37'34.8"N 120°19'54.0"W  
([45.626340, -120.331669](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** Return to the Rock Creek School site. Go north toward Cedar Springs. Turn west on Blalock Canyon Road. Turn south on West Road. Return to Blalock Canyon Road when finished.

**Habitat and Birds:** Farmland. Look along fence on west side for Grasshopper Sparrow. Long-billed Curlew common.

## **Arlington** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 B-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 B-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°42'50.3"N 120°12'04.3"W  
([45.713970, -120.201190](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist for Arlington](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist For The Port Of Arlington](#)

### **City Information**

**Location:** Turn east on I-84. Take Arlington exit (exit 137). Drive through the town and look for hummingbird and other feeders. Be sure to check the cemetery on the southwest side of town as this is the best place to find Western Scrub-Jay in the county.

**Habitat and Birds:** City and port. While in Arlington, go north through the park to the granary on the Columbia River. In winter expect grebes, both scaup and both goldeneyes. Tufted Duck has wintered here also. In summer, cruise the streets (there aren't many) looking for hummingbird feeders and ornamental plants. Can be good in migration for passerines.

## **Rhea Road** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 B-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 B-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°42'22.1"N 120°10'54.5"W  
([45.70613, -120.18181](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** Take Rhea Road east of Arlington and follow it to the Heppner Hwy.

**Habitat and Birds:** Most of this area is an extensive grassland. It harbors many Long-billed Curlew in season. Toward the east end, just before the road drops back down into the valley, Grasshopper Sparrow has been sighted. Sage Thrasher has also been seen on this route. The little bluff overlooking the valley from the north side of the road at the east end has good sparrow potential.

## **Willow Creek Wildlife Management Area** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 A-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 73 B-6  
**geographic coordinates** 45°46'54.8"N 120°00'27.6"W  
([45.781890, -120.007658](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist for Willow Creek WMA](#) (more eBird data is needed for this location)

**Location:** Continue east on I-84 to near the Morrow County line. Take Three Mile Canyon exit (exit 151). Turn right there, then right again at the first road leading west. It is the one marked with signs leading to the WMA. The road to Willow Cove passes through farm land, and getting there involves taking a number of sharp turns and passing a number of confusing intersections. There are markers at most of them, but it can be confusing if you are not really paying attention. It might prove to be very difficult to find in the dark. Access to this location is through Morrow County but the site itself is in Gilliam.

**Habitat and Birds:** Good birding spot, a bit difficult to access. Many ducks are here in winter along with Pied-billed and Western Grebe. Also, look for the occasional American White Pelicans. Follow ( on foot) the service road north. In summer, at the north end, look for Western Kingbird, and at the extreme south end, when you come to a gate, you might find Eastern Kingbird. The brushy roadside has sparrows at any season. First 0.25 to 0.5 mile is a dirt road. Below this road is an extensive cattail marsh. Still has Virginia Rail, Red-winged Blackbird, occasional Yellow-headed Blackbird. Tricolored Blackbird is a possibility. This marsh used to be much more open, and in spring the mudflats there were a magnet for many shorebirds, including Black-necked Stilt and American Avocet. Black-crowned Night Heron and American Bittern have also been sighted here. Unfortunately, in recent years the drawing down of the waters behind the John Day dam have lowered the water level, and the mudflat has completely grown over with vegetation, so this area no longer attracts these species. At the parking lot near the water there are a number of cottonwood trees mixed with willows. The area is a potential vagrant trap. One June a vociferous Least Flycatcher was here. In the willows north of the substation both Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings have been sighted (but not common). Wood Duck has been seen along the paved section of the road south of the substation at Willow Cove and the extensive grove of trees in that area has hosted Barn Owl.

## **Eight Mile Canyon** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 B-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 C-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°38'45.2"N 120°04'58.0"W  
([45.6459, -120.08279](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** From Arlington, travel south on Hwy 19 for two miles to Four Mile Road. Take Four Mile Road for 5 miles and look for Eight Mile Canyon Road.

Turn south on Eight Mile and explore the canyon. For a little more adventure, return to Four Mile Road and cross it heading north on the dirt road extension of Eight Mile Canyon Road. This will take you to Willow Creek and a nice riparian area.

**Habitat and Birds:** Extensive tall sage should produce some sage species. This road is a prime Grasshopper Sparrow area. Burrowing Owl has not been found here but the habitat looks good.

## **MIDDLE COUNTY**

### **Cottonwood Canyon State Park** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 C-3 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 D-3  
**geographic coordinates** 45°28'35.5"N 120°28'04.6"W  
([45.476533](#), [-120.467943](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist for Cottonwood Canyon State Park](#) (more eBird data is needed for this location)

**Location:** If you are traveling north on Hwy 97, you can access this area via the town of Wasco at Hwy 206. If you are coming from the west on I-84, Travel east on I-84 and take the Fulton Canyon exit. This is exit #97 near Celilo Village and is called the Wasco/Heppner Hwy on some maps. Follow Hwy 206 for Approximately 30 miles as you bisect Sherman County. After you cross the John Day River into Gilliam County, check the willows along the north side of the road. Oregon's newest state park straddles the river so don't miss out on Cottonwood Canyon State Park on the Gilliam side.

**Habitat and Birds:** Look in the willows on the north side of the road for Yellow-breasted Chat and Lazuli Bunting. Common Poorwill can be heard in this region at night.

### **Hwy 206 Mountain Overlook** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 C-3 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 D-4  
**geographic coordinates** 45°22'48.6"N 120°24'05.9"W  
([45.380180](#), [-120.401640](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** Just over 8.5 miles east (still on 206) of the intersection of 206 and the John Day River, you will find a mountain overlook and identifier.

**Habitat and Birds:** This is an open sage area where sage species like Brewer's Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, and Vesper Sparrow can be found.

## **Condon to Olex via Wolf Hollow and Upper Rock Cr. Roads** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 C-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 D-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°21'32.5"N 120°08'15.3"W (Wolf Hollow Rd.)  
([45.359019, -120.137595](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** From Condon, go north on Hwy 19 for almost 9 miles. Turn east on Wolf Hollow Road and travel 4.8 miles to the Jct. of Upper Rock Creek Rd. and Wolf Hollow Road. Turn left (northwest) on Upper Rock Creek Road and follow it to Olex.

**Habitat and Birds:** Another area of extensive riparian growth with good possibilities. A bit far from the road, but not impossible. Migrant Olive-sided Flycatcher has been seen here. A mile or so south of the intersection of Wolf Hollow Road and Rock Creek road, there is a small marsh. It has a small colony of Red-winged Blackbirds. One year a few Tricolored Blackbirds were found among them. Gray Partridge can often be found along the upper end of Wolf Hollow Road, just as it begins to dip into the canyon.

## **Cayuse Canyon** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 C-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 E-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°21'18.2"N 120°08'23.3"W  
([45.355070, -120.139815](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** 12 miles south of Olex, near the community of Gwendolen, is Cayuse Canyon Road. Take this road and explore the canyon for as long as you have time.

**Habitat and Birds:** Cayuse Canyon is extremely narrow (only one track) on the south end, but probably is also a good spot for Grasshopper Sparrow. The canyon bottom has Canyon Wrens and some riparian growth.

## **Rock Creek From Olex** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 B-3 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 C-4  
**geographic coordinates** 45°30'00.2"N 120°10'38.4"W (Olex)  
([45.500068, -120.177328](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** At Olex, cross Hwy 19 and continue down Rock Creek. Follow it all the way to the John Day River on Middle Rock Creek Ln. At the Rock Creek School, take Lower Rock Creek Road to the river. When finished, return to the school at Rock Creek.

**Habitat and Birds:** Mostly a narrow valley with pasture/hay fields and brush along the creek. Good variety of birds. Both Brewer's Sparrow and Long-eared Owl have been seen here. The riparian area at the John Day River can be very birdy in migration. Look for Western Screech Owls in the trees at the river.

### **Rock Creek Crossing** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 C-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 73 E-6  
**geographic coordinates** 45°15'40.0"N 120°01'02.6"W  
([45.26111, -120.01739](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** From Condon, go east on Hwy 206 to the Rock Creek Crossing. Once done birding this location, return to Condon.

**Habitat and Birds: Extensive riparian area. Warbling Vireo, Bullock's Oriole, Western Kingbird. One report of Gray Catbird.**

## **CONDON AREA**

### **Condon** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 D-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 E-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°14'02.1"N 120°11'05.2"W  
([45.233907, -120.184781](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

### **Condon City Information**

[eBird Hotspot Checklist For Condon City Park](#)

**Location:** 26 miles from the Jct. of Hwy 206 and the John Day River is the small town of Condon (population 750). Condon is located on the high plateau of the Columbia River Region where Oregon State Highways 19 and 206 meet. Condon is located 38 miles south of Arlington and the Columbia River, 80 miles southeast of The Dalles, 150 east of Portland, 130 miles north of Bend or 100 miles southwest of Pendleton. Condon's Main Street is registered on the National Historical Site and contains an active business district.

**Habitat and Birds:** Not terribly birdy but the few tall trees are the only ones for miles. This town is mostly under-birded so surprises may be right around the corner. In the winter both Merlin and Peregrine Falcon can sometimes be found hanging around town, presumably keeping a watchful eye on the abundant House Sparrows and Eurasian Collared Doves.

## **Condon Sewage Ponds** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 D-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 E-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°13'42.5"N 120°10'50.9"W  
([45.22848, -120.18081](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist for Condon Sewage Ponds](#) (more eBird data is needed for this location)

**Location:** As you enter Condon from Hwy 206, turn right (south) on Main Street. The road will fork at the Jct. of Hwys 19 and 206. Take the left fork (206). Go 4 blocks and turn right (south) on Jefferson St. Take Jefferson to the end and you will see the ponds.

**Habitat and Birds:** These ponds are excellent for ducks, moderate for shorebirds; open to birders. The city would like you to call ahead and let them know you will be out there. To check first at the city hall, drop by at 128 S. Main Street during the week or call 541-384-2711. The staff is very friendly. The gates to the ponds are often closed on the weekends so call ahead. You can still view the ponds if the gate is closed.

## **Wehrli Canyon** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 D-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 F-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45 09' 13" N 120 12' 49" W  
([45.153574, -120.214361](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist For Wehrli Canyon Road](#)

**Location:** Continue south on highway 19 from Condon for approximately 6.3 miles. Turn right on Wehrli Canyon Road. Explore the length of this road to its Jct. with Quinn Road.

**Habitat and Birds:** Very birdy. Ash-throated Flycatcher. If you can continue on to Quinn Road, do so, but you may have to return to Highway 19. Possible species here include Lark Sparrow, Ferruginous Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, California Quail, Lazuli Bunting, Spotted Towhee, Canyon and Rock Wren, Mountain Bluebird and (if you're lucky) Gray Partridge. In the first

one half mile west of Hwy 19, Yellow-breasted Chat and Bullock's Oriole are abundant in spring and summer. This is also a good place to look for Bushtit.

### **West of Mayville** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 D-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 F-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°05'17.5"N 120°14'53.0"W  
([45.088203, -120.248058](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** If you must return to Highway 19, go on south to Mayville and turn west on Quinn Road. Two or three miles down the road dips down into a hollow, takes a sharp turn west, and heads upslope past a juniper filled canyon.

**Habitat and Birds:**Juniper and Sage. Gray Flycatcher and Lark Sparrow as well as other sage/juniper species.

### **Carter Hill Road** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 84 D-4 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 72 F-5  
**geographic coordinates** 45°04'56.1"N 120°11'16.9"W

[View A Google Map](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist For Carter Hill Road](#) ([45.08224, -120.18802](#))

[eBird Hotspot Checklist For Dyer State Wayside](#) ([45.125223, -120.187697](#))

**Location:** Return to Mayville. Go across Highway 19 and take Carter Hill Road. Follow it east and then north. The north portion is marked Ramsey Canyon on some maps. Take this road until it meets back up at Dyer State Wayside. You will find restrooms there.

**Habitat and Birds:** Immediately east of Mayville there is some scrub brush along the road which is attractive to sparrows, quail and such, but as soon as you top the first hill you break out into open grassland. Then you turn north through more open grassland. However, where the road turns west again and heads downhill, you enter a narrow brushy canyon which becomes brushier the further one travels down it, until by the time you reach Dyer State Park, the entire hillside to the south is brushy. It is loaded with birds: Rock Wren, Lazuli Bunting, Spotted Towhee, to name a few. Swainson's and possibly Ferruginous Hawk might be found along this route as well.

## **Gilliam Forest Lands** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 85 D-5 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 73 F-6

**geographic coordinates** 45°04'13.6"N 119°58'15.8"W  
([45.070437, -119.971051](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

[eBird Hotspot Checklist For Trail Fork Road](#)

**Location:** It's difficult to find forested areas in Gilliam so this side trip is well worth the time. From [Dyer State Wayside](#), go north (about 5 miles) on Hwy. 19 (past Wehrli Road). Turn east on Trail Fork Road (Also called 30 mile road or John Day Hwy). Continue east and south for about 16 miles. Be aware that at the southeast end, Trail Fork Road jogs into Wheeler County. At its juncture with Lost Valley Road (Wheeler County), turn north and travel 1.4 miles and you will be back in Gilliam County. You actually do not get to any forest land until you reach the east end of the road. The first mile of the road east of Hwy 19 is brushy creek bottom. Then you climb slowly into open grassland at the ridge top, and follow it to Lost Valley Road (initially in Wheeler County) where the forest habitat begins. The last 0.125 miles or so of pine forest is in Gilliam County.

**Habitat and Birds:** West end, open sage and farmland. East end, pine forest. Excellent birding. At west end, Yellow-breasted Chat. At the east end, all three nuthatches, Brown Creeper, Ruffed Grouse, Flammulated Owl, Hairy and Pileated Woodpecker, Clark's Nutcracker, Townsend's Solitaire, Cassin's Finch, in short, most of the forest species one would expect anywhere in eastern Oregon. Northern Goshawk has been seen here, as has Williamson's Sapsucker. On the ridge above, (in Wheeler County) Great Gray Owl has been sighted. Leaving the pine forest you come to a large valley with open meadows and a brush bordered creek. Chipping, Vesper, and summering Fox Sparrow; Long-billed Curlew. Look for Northern Pygmy-owl throughout this area.

## **Lonerock** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 85 D-5 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 73 F-6

**geographic coordinates** 45°05'21.2"N 119°53'02.9"W  
([45.08921, -119.88414](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** Continue north on Lost Valley Road. Where Lost Valley Road connects with Lonerock Road, turn east and travel just over 6 miles to the town of Lonerock. When finished birding, return to Condon on Lonerock

Road. Don't neglect the canyon going into Lone Rock. The birding there is very productive.

**Habitat and Birds:** Just before you reach the town of Lonerock, on the brushy slope to the west look for Green-tailed Towhee. In the town, be alert for Black-chinned Hummingbird. A large Wild Turkey flock is sometimes found here. Continue south as far as Lonerock cemetery: Wilson's Snipe, Red-winged Blackbird, both bluebirds.

## **Buttermilk Canyon** [return to the top](#)

DeLorme (copyright 2001) Pg 85 D-5 DeLorme (copyright 2008) Pg 73 F-6

**geographic coordinates** 45°05'47.1"N 119°52'48.5"W  
([45.096428, -119.880149](#))

[View A Google Map](#)

**Location:** From Lonerock, take Main Street north and it will become Buttermilk Canyon Road.

**Habitat and Birds:** This area has the best stand of juniper trees so could harbor Gray Flycatchers and Ash-throated Flycatchers. Mountain Bluebirds and Chipping Sparrow are also possible. Grasshopper Sparrow and Varied Thrush have been sighted here.

