

Birding Winneshiek County

Premier Birding in Northeast Iowa!

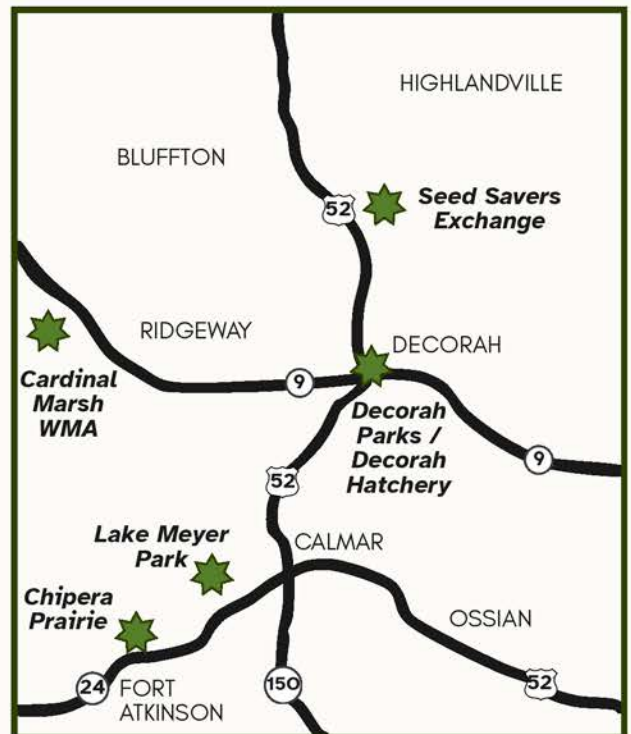
Winneshiek County is a premier destination for birding in Iowa and the Midwest! The abundant natural areas including wildlife management areas, trails, and city and county parks, plus county-wide efforts to promote birding and conservation efforts, led to Winneshiek County's designation as one of the first and most long-standing **Bird Friendly Iowa communities!**

Birders will find thousands of acres of **diverse habitats**, including native and restored prairies, hardwood and pine forests, and wetlands and marshes. The county is situated within the **Mississippi River Flyway** and criss-crossed by the **Upper Iowa** and **Turkey Rivers** and numerous **coldwater trout streams**. Campgrounds, **hiking and biking trails**, and wide-ranging natural areas means that Winneshiek County offers additional outdoor recreational opportunities for everyone!

In This Guide

- **Local expert** recommendations on where to go for the **best birding** in Winneshiek County
- Tips, amenities lists, and **species highlights** for each recommended site
- Places to **stay and eat** and additional **attractions and activities** for when you need a break from birding
- Where to find more information to help **plan your visit** to Winneshiek County!

Best Sites



Cardinal Marsh Wildlife Management Area

Winneshiek County's Birding Hotspot!

Getting There: West of Ridgeway off Madison Rd. or 345th Ave.

Best For: Experienced birders or those looking for adventure

Trails: Easy. Mowed grass, flat

Habitats: Marsh, grassland, upland forest

Best Season: Spring and Early Summer

Access and Amenities: Easiest birding access is the south entrance on Madison Road, 3.5 miles south of Highway 9. No amenities. Grass on trails can grow long later in the season. Be aware of public hunting seasons.

Species Highlights:

- Abundant waterfowl, shorebirds, and marsh species
- Nesting sandhill cranes and trumpeter swans
- Grassland and riparian songbirds
- Warblers, vireos, flycatchers



Lake Meyer Park: A Family-Friendly Hidden Gem

Getting There: 2546 Lake Meyer Rd., Fort Atkinson

Best For: Families and groups, kid-friendly birding

Trails: Varied. Single-track or mowed grass, flat to moderate

Habitats: Wetlands, oak-hickory forests, prairie

Best Season: Year-Round

Access and Amenities: Seasonal restrooms in the campground; year-round pit toilets by the boat ramp. Playground, ballfield, and picnic shelters.

Species Highlights:

- Spring warblers and woodland songbirds
- Swallows, osprey, and nighthawks
- Feeding station with abundant orioles, hummingbirds, finches, grosbeaks, woodpeckers, and other feeder species

Chipera Prairie: Prairie Highlights

Getting There: Off 128th St., 4.5 miles south of Fort Atkinson on Hwy 24

Best For: Experienced birders or those looking for adventure

Trails: Easy. Mowed grass, flat

Habitats: Native and restored prairies, riparian areas

Best Season: Summer and Fall

Access and Amenities: Take 128th Street from Highway 24. Cross the railroad tracks, take an immediate right, and follow the access road to the parking area. No amenities. Be aware of public hunting seasons.

Species Highlights:

- Grassland and riparian songbirds
- Meadowlarks, bobolinks, flycatchers, sedge wrens, and bluebirds
- Outstanding fall sparrow migrations



Decorah Parks System

Explore 20 Parks, 650 Acres and 20 Miles of Trails

Getting There: Parks and trails found throughout Decorah

Best For: Families and groups, kid-friendly birding, hikers and bikers

Trails: Varied. Single-track, mowed, and paved; flat to challenging

Habitats: Varied: woodlands, pine forests, prairies, and riparian

Best Season: Year-Round

Access and Amenities: Numerous seasonal restrooms, picnic shelters, and playgrounds found throughout the park system. Additional attractions include coldwater trout streams, Dunning's Spring waterfall, Ice Cave, and the "Point of Impact" for the Decorah Impact Crater.

Species Highlights:

- Woodland songbirds and warblers
- Grassland and riparian species
- Woodpeckers, cardinals, blue jays, finches, and other "town species"



Chuck Gipp Decorah Fish Hatchery

Famous Eagles, Trout, and a Waterfall

Getting There: 2321 Siewers Spring Rd., Decorah

Best For: Families and groups, kid-friendly birding

Trails: Easy. Mowed grass, flat

Habitats: Wetlands, riparian, and small prairies

Best Season: Year-Round

Access and Amenities: Year-round restroom, picnic shelters, trout fishing, hatchery fish-feeding and exploration, Siewers Springs waterfall.

Species Highlights:

- Eagles
- Riparian species and waterfowl
- Orioles, cedar waxwings, and warblers

Seed Savers Exchange: Seeds, Birds, and Scenery

Getting There: 3094 North Winn Rd., Decorah

Best For: Gardener-birders, sightseers

Trails: Varied. Single-track and mowed; flat to challenging

Habitats: Gardens, prairies, pastures, streams, white pine and hardwood forests

Best Season: Spring and Summer

Access and Amenities: Visitor's Center with restrooms and gift shop open March through October; trails open year-round. Display gardens, trout fishing, and an historic apple orchard.

Species Highlights:

- Grassland, woodland, and riparian species
- Warblers and migrating songbirds
- Hawks and owls



When Should I Come?

No matter the time of year, there's great birding and great adventures in Winneshiek County!

Spring (Late April - early June) for woodland migrants, shorebirds, waterfowl, and low crowds

Summer (June - August) for abundant woodland species, raptors, and non-birding activities

Fall (September - October) for migrating raptors, waterfowl, and stunning fall color

Winter (November - March) for birding by cross-country ski, resident winter eagles and songbirds, and no crowds

Where Should I Eat?

Winneshiek County has dozens of restaurants with everything from pizza to burgers to sushi to Mexican! Just a few **local favorites** include

- Euphoria Coffee - Calmar
- Smoky Dough - Calmar
- Fireman's Inn - Ridgeway
- Don Jose's - Decorah
- La Rana Bistro - Decorah
- Mabe's Pizza - Decorah
- Magpie Coffeehouse - Decorah

I Want to Know More!

These local partners can help you find everything you need to know about where to bird and how to plan your visit to Winneshiek County!



WinneshiekWild.com



VisitDecorah.com

Where Should I Stay?

Winneshiek County is home to a variety of **lodging options** including hotels, Airbnb and VRBO properties, Bed and Breakfasts, Cabins, and more! It's also the perfect place to camp and local **public campgrounds** offer great rates, and great birding!

Lake Meyer Campground - Calmar

Electric-hookup RV sites with gravel pads and fire rings, restrooms with flush toilets and showers, drinking water, and a dump station

Pulpit Rock Campground - Decorah

Electric-hookup RV sites with gravel pads and fire rings, restrooms with flush toilets and showers, drinking water, and a dump station

What Else Should I Do?

You can't visit Winneshiek County without taking advantage of all there is to offer besides birding. Don't miss your chance to

Kayak, canoe, or fish at **Lake Meyer** or on the **Upper Iowa River**

Bike the flat, easy **Prairie Farmer Recreational Trail** between Calmar and Cresco, or the hilly but scenic **Trout Run Trail** that circles Decorah

Cool off at the Decorah or Calmar pools or explore the **Sunflower Discovery Center**

Shop **unique boutiques** and local stores or find seeds (and birds) galore at Seed Savers Exchange

Discover Northeast Iowa's **unique geology** with visits to Ice Cave Park, the Decorah Impact Crater, or Pulpit Rock Park

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