

Trail 1: Medicine Hat and Redcliff

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Specialty species that are often sought for, and which can be relatively reliably found in Medicine Hat include, Violet-green Swallow, Rock Wren, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Spotted Towhee, and Lazuli Bunting.

Trail 1 includes the City of Medicine Hat and the Town of Redcliff. Medicine Hat is divided by the South Saskatchewan River, and has three additional watercourses: Seven Persons, Bullshead and Ross Creeks. The valleys of these streams are particularly attractive to bird species as the flood plains contain riverine forests consisting of cottonwood trees as well as shrubs such as Saskatoon, Chokecherry, and Thorny Buffaloberry, which are preferred by many species of birds. Medicine Hat is blessed with a number of “natural area” parks that border these rivers and creeks and thus the bird diversity is truly astounding. Christmas Bird Count and May Species Count for Medicine Hat average 45 and 130 species respectively.

Along these streams a great network of biking and walking trails provides easy access. Along the river, waterfowl, gulls, terns, Osprey and soaring Turkey Vultures may be seen. Often in the evening Turkey Vultures may be found perched on the Telus Tower in downtown Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat is a city of 63,000 with all the amenities one might expect. It would make a great headquarters for forays to many of the birding areas in this brochure. Of course there are also a wide variety of other unique attractions including a vibrant arts community with corresponding art galleries and bistros, The Esplanade and the Canalta Event Centre which attract a wide variety of first class entertainment, a living butterfly display, shops and shopping centres, the Family Leisure Centre, the Medalta Potteries (National Historic Site) and even a casino for those who like to take a flutter.

In all, eight sites within Medicine Hat and the nearby town of Redcliff are detailed in this brochure and are depicted on Map 1.

A: Police Point Park

Police Point Park is the premier natural area within Medicine Hat. This park is well known throughout Alberta as a great place to bird for uncommon species and for birds common to the Medicine Hat area but not usually found elsewhere in Alberta. The park has a great network of trails winding throughout this 160 hectare riparian forest. Police Point Park also contains a Nature Centre (403-529-6225), which is staffed by interpreters who can provide information on trails and on recent sightings both in the park and in the vicinity. The Nature Centre is open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Tuesday through Sunday.

Police Point Park is situated in the city's northeast, on the left bank of the South Saskatchewan River. It can be accessed from the city centre by heading north on the Maple Avenue Bridge, then taking the first right onto Parkview Drive. Continue up the hill, at the sign make a right turn on to Police Point Drive and continue to the end of the road. At times the gate at the entrance to the park may be locked but foot access is allowed and vehicles can be parked on the street adjacent to the golf course.

The diverse vegetation within the park varies from prairie grasses and sagebrush to berry species such as Saskatoon, Chokecherry and Thorny Buffaloberry. Large Plains Cottonwoods, some 300 years old, tower overhead. Willows, Buckbrush and other shrubs abound within the park. The diversity of bird species parallels this floral diversity. Depending on the season, the park may contain nesting Wood Ducks, a colony of nesting Great Blue Herons (across the river in the large cottonwoods near the sewage treatment plant), a Bald Eagle nest near the Great Blue Heron rookery, floating American White Pelicans, nesting Prairie Falcons on the cliffs across from the point of the park and good populations of Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, Spotted Towhee, Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Kingbird, Least Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, American Kestrel, Lark Sparrow, Cooper's Hawk, and many other species. Uncommon species that are sometimes seen include such diverse species as Pileated Woodpecker, Great Horned Owl, Lazuli Bunting and Yellow-breasted Chat. Rarities that have been observed in the park include Eastern Screech-Owl, Long-eared Owl (have nested within the park), Northern Saw-whet Owl, Bullock's Oriole and White-winged Dove.

Coyotes and porcupines are frequently seen in the park as are White-tailed and Mule Deer, Nuttall's Cottontail and occasionally moose. Beaver can be seen along the riverbanks. Bull Snakes are often seen within the park and on occasion Prairie Rattlesnakes have also been seen. Cougars have been seen infrequently in the park.

B: Strathcona Island Park

This park lies directly across the river from Police Point Park and is accessed from Maple Avenue. Signs point east along 5th Street SE to the park. Drive from the entrance to the parking lot at the end (Heritage Pavilion). A number of trails lead from here and all have their attributes. A hiking trail runs along the top of the recently constructed flood protection berm.

The trail leading south from the Heritage Pavilion, around the small pond, is often the best birding route, particularly in the spring and early summer. From the pond continue south across Seven Persons Creek where Lazuli Bunting and Yellow-breasted Chats can be observed. Other species of note include Osprey, White-breasted Nuthatch, Cooper's Hawk, and Brown Thrasher. Rarities observed in the past few years have included Eastern Screech-Owl, Black-billed Cuckoo, Indigo Bunting, McGillivray's Warbler, and Northern Waterthrush.

One can continue south for several kilometres along the creek. Seeps near the former Metis Settlement may contain a good variety of species. If one continues westward along this trail you will access Kin Coulee Park. Also, travelling west along the riverside trails from the Heritage Pavilion to Lion's Park and beyond has produced good results.

C: Kin Coulee Park and Ajax Coulee

Kin Coulee Park is for the most part groomed for picnics and large gatherings but surprisingly, a number of natural areas still exist, particularly along Seven Persons Creek. A small wetland near the Lorne Holden Ballpark has held Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, a variety of duck species (including Canvasback, an unusual species for the middle of a city), In the fall Rusty Blackbird has been tallied here.

A hike up Ajax Coulee can produce Ring-necked Pheasant, Blue Jay, Dark-eyed Junco, occasionally Townsend's Solitaire and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and there has been a sighting of an Eastern Bluebird. The off-leash dog walking area, southwest of the Trans Canada Highway, can be easily accessed by a pedestrian underpass. Although not too esthetically pleasing, contains sufficient cover of Thorny Buffaloberry and other shrubs, reeds and rushes along the creek. Such species as Common Yellowthroat, Spotted Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Song and Lincoln Sparrow and Lazuli Bunting can be found here. American Tree Sparrow and Dark-eyed Juncos uses the vegetation in the fall and winter.

These coulees are visible from the Trans Canada Highway. For access, travel north from the Tourist Information Office along College Drive. Turn west at the bottom of the hill into Kin Coulee Park.

D: Echo Dale Regional Park

Echo Dale Regional Park lies west of the city along the south side of the South Saskatchewan River. Birding this park may be easily combined with a trip to Sauder Reservoir. To access the park take Hwy 3 past the airport and turn right (west) onto Holsom Road. At the park sign (RGE RD 64) proceed north and watch for a variety of species in the wetlands bordering the road. Several species of raptor may be seen along the roadside and the bushes along the road can contain some surprising birds. While proceeding down into the river valley watch the sides of the roads for Lark Sparrow. Watch for Loggerhead Shrike along the entrance road.

This can be a very busy park in the summer, so it is best birded early in the morning although the gate to the park isn't unlocked until 7:00 AM. The east pond and is best for birding. Also proceed to the boat launch parking area and take the hiking/biking trail east along the river. This trail can produce such species as Song Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole, Common Yellowthroat and both Eastern and Western Kingbirds. An occasional Grasshopper Sparrow has been seen in the field directly to the east of the developed area.

Both these areas are best birded in the spring and fall during the passerine migration as the shrubbery and trees attract such species as Wilson's, Magnolia, Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush, and Western Tanager.

E: Redcliff Riverside Park

Redcliff Riverside Park is directly across from Echo Dale Regional Park. Access to this park is gained by travelling westward along Main Street in the Town of Redcliff until you come to a sign indicating the turn to the park. Travel south on this street to the Town Maintenance Yard (park access is also signed here) and then turn west and proceed down the steep river valley hill to the parking areas.

You can begin hiking at either parking area. The first parking lot is adjacent to the badlands and proceeds east. When the pathway turns back to the west take the undeveloped clay footpath. Along here is the best area to encounter Rock Wren, Say's Phoebe, Violet-green Swallow, Prairie Falcon, Turkey Vulture and Lazuli Bunting. Keep a careful watch for Prairie Rattlesnake (they den in the cliffs during the winter). Bull Snakes may be seen along these trails.

Note: Redcliff has some great coffee shops, an excellent bakery, and a number of restaurants where one can relax and enjoy a meal or a snack after a couple of hours of walking the Riverside Park Trail.

F: River Trails

In Medicine Hat on both sides of the South Saskatchewan River, lie pathways through the riverine forests. These may be developed hiking trails or merely pathways forged by animals and/or hikers. These pathways have great habitats for bird life but because of recent floods a large amount of flood works are being constructed and access to these trails may be limited.

Both of these trails are best during the spring and fall during the passerine migration. A variety of warblers,

flycatchers and sparrows have been observed.

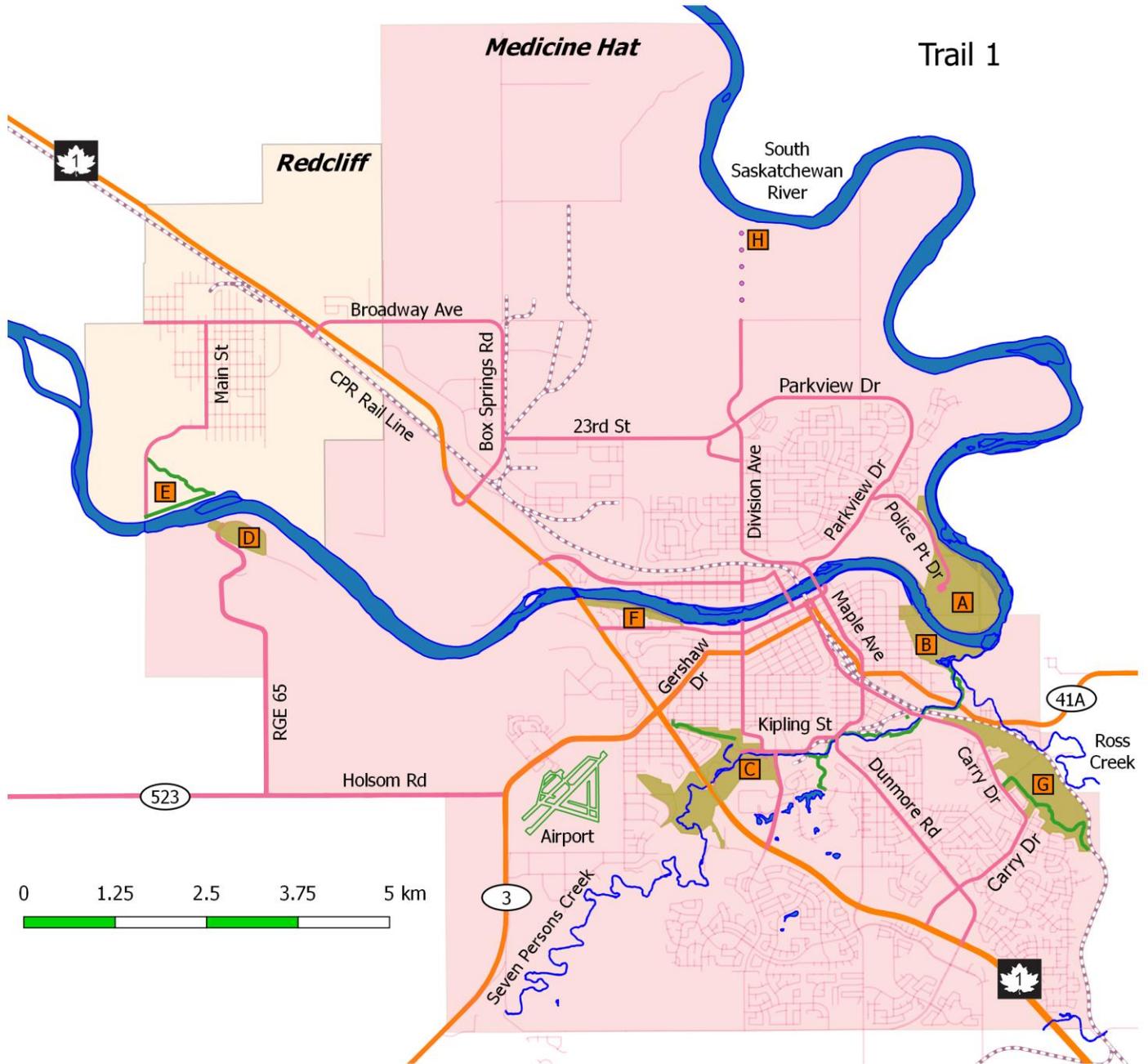
G: Ross Creek Natural Park

This trail lies on the southeast side of Medicine Hat and parallels the Ross and Bullshead Creek valleys. The trail hugs the west side of the valley, crossing several minor coulees that have varying amounts of shrubbery and hence a good cover for birds. In the spring and summer similar species to those seen in Strathcona Island Park can be observed. The valley contains good populations of Ring-necked Pheasant. Other species which may be encountered include Lazuli Bunting, Brown Thrasher, Spotted Towhee, and on rare occasions, even Indigo Bunting. In the winter, this is the best trail to see Sharp-tailed Grouse and Northern Shrike within the City Limits.

H: Scout Falls

This birding site lies on the northern edge of the city. Access this site by following a northward extension of Division Avenue (north of 23rd Street N), then continuing north on a track when the gravel road turns east. Proceed to the barbed wire fence at the edge of the South Saskatchewan River valley. The riverbank contains a number of seeps that result in brush and shrubbery growth. For the most part one must bird from the top of the valley looking down into the shrubs so a scope would be an asset here. These bushes have produced such species as Yellow-breasted Chat, Black-billed Cuckoo, and Indigo Bunting. More frequently seen are such species as Spotted Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, and on the river, a number of waterfowl including American White-Pelican and Caspian Tern. Both Golden and Bald Eagles are often seen here. As one drives the trail to and from the river a close watch of the prairie may produce Long-billed Curlew who have bred in this area the past few years.

This prairie property is being sold by the City of Medicine Hat and thus could be subject to significant changes during the next few years.



Trail 1: Medicine Hat and Redcliff

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|  Observation Points |  Amenities |
|  Police Point Park | All amenities available |
|  Strathcona Island Park | |
|  Kin and Ajax Coulees | |
|  Echo Dale Regional Park | |
|  Redcliff Riverside Park | |
|  Kiwanis River Park | |
|  Ross Creek Natural Park | |
|  Scout Falls | |

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