

## **Trail 2: Sauder Reservoir, Rattlesnake Lake and Murray Lake** © Society of Grassland Naturalists

These reservoirs lie west and south of Medicine Hat and are particularly good birding destinations in the spring and fall when migratory waterfowl are abundant. This area is also good for migrating shorebirds. This trail contains good populations of a variety of breeding ducks and grebes and smaller passerines that utilize the willows, reeds and rushes in the wetlands. Often the spring and/or fall migrations produce a spectacle of tens of thousands of migrating swans, Snow, White-fronted and Canada Geese milling in the sky, on the reservoirs, on nearby ponds and sloughs, and feeding in the surrounding fields.

A circle trip can take the better part of a birding day. A suggested route is to take Hwy 3 from Medicine Hat to the Holsom Road turnoff. A visit to Echo Dale Park (A) can be integrated into this birding day. Follow this road westward and around the turn to the south. Turn west at a sign indicating Golden Sheaf Park. Follow this road to the dam (B) on Sauder Reservoir (locally known as Rattlesnake Reservoir), stopping here to scope for such species as loons, ducks, terns, and gulls, among others. This locale has turned up Long-tailed Duck, Common Loon, occasionally Pacific Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, Caspian Tern, and even Rusty Blackbird.

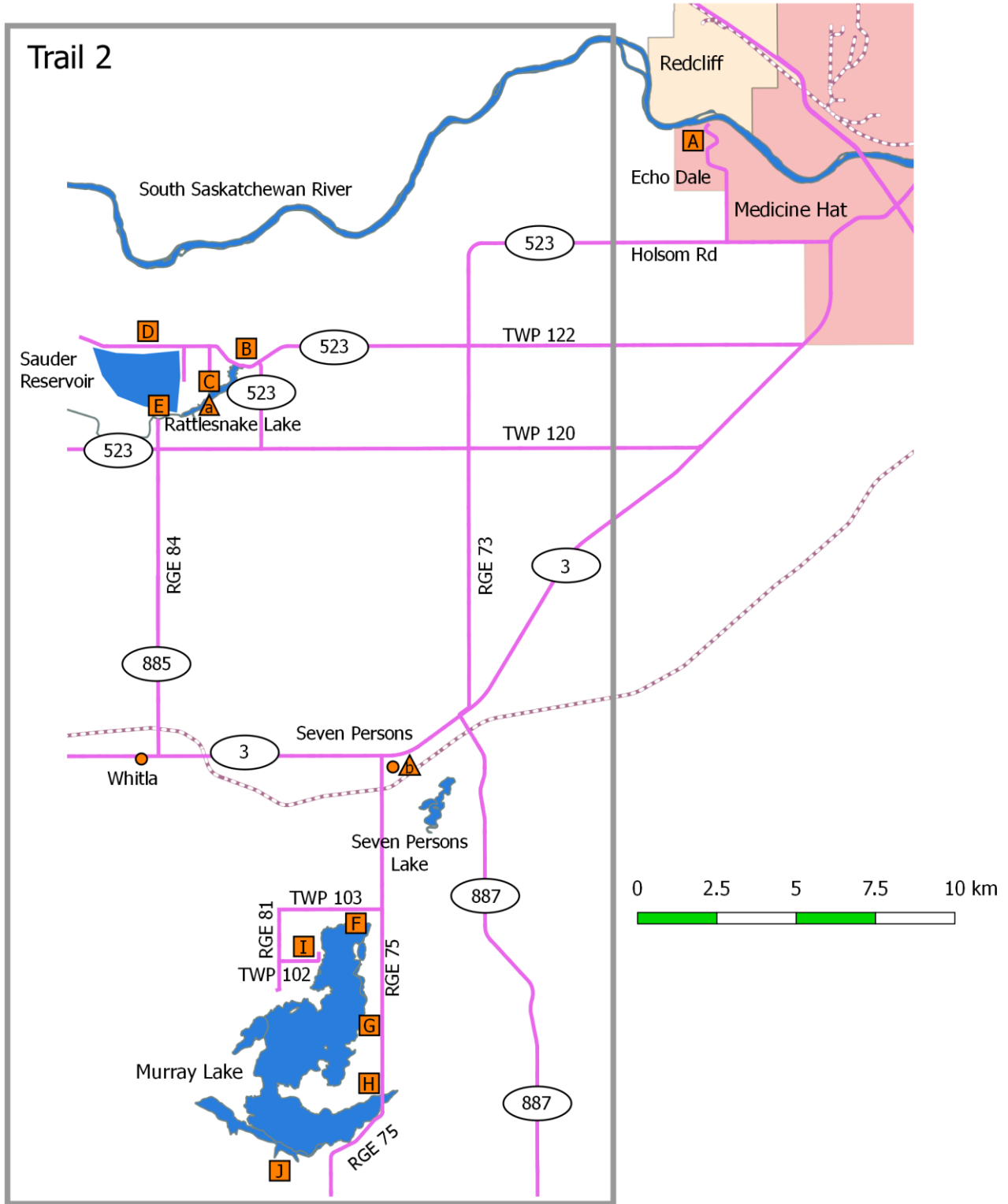
Continue across the dam to the turnoff to Golden Sheaf Park (C), a campground area that is well treed and which can produce some surprising passerines during their migration. **Note: There may be a day charge for entrance to this Park.** This is another spot from which to view the lake for waterfowl species. From Golden Sheaf Park, proceed back out to the main road and follow it west to the short loop around the north side of Sauder Reservoir (D). Loop can be made in either direction. Note: The actual reservoir cannot be seen from the road but continue on up on top of the dyke and the lake will be spread out before you. The shallows of the east side, depending on water levels of the reservoir, may produce good varieties of shorebirds and waterfowl. Proceed along the embankment and scope the reservoir. The rocks of the embankments, especially during fall migration, can produce American Pipit along with other passerines. Large populations of American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant and a variety of gulls are often encountered. Rarities that have turned up here in recent years include Peregrine Falcon, Sabine's Gull, Clark's Grebe, Pacific Loon and jaeger species.

From Sauder Reservoir backtrack across the dam and take the first range road east of the reservoir. Turn south and follow this around as it turns west onto TWP RD 120. Turn north on RGE RD 84 to the causeway (E) crossing a shallow arm of Sauder Reservoir. This can be a great place to observe a variety of duck, gull, grebe, and shorebird species. It is a fairly reliable spot for Eurasian Wigeon in the spring. This is also a good spot for Caspian Tern. Walk north from the fence crossing to the southern shore of the main lake. This area of the lake can be quite shallow and as a result a large variety of shorebirds, gulls and other species may gather here.

Continue west on TWP RD 120 for about 6 km to where this road crosses an ephemeral slough with a large shoreline that can, depending on water levels, be a good spot for migrating shorebirds. Backtrack to RGE RD 84 and follow this road south to Hwy 3, watching along the way for prairie passerines and raptors. Turn east onto Hwy 3 where one can proceed to the village of Seven Persons where tourist amenities can be found and which contains a great sausage shop where one can purchase a variety of products and even lunch.

If one does not wish to stop at Seven Persons go east to RGE RD 75, following this road south to Murray Reservoir. There are four major birding stops along the east side of this reservoir: the dam at the north end (F), the wetlands at TWP RD 102 (G) and on the southeast end of the reservoir along RGE RD 75 (H). Continue along this road and view the wetlands at the south end of Murray Lake (I). In the fall a site, on the west side of this reservoir (accessible from TWP RD 102) may have enormous flocks of Snow Geese and swans (J).

Bird species that may be found at Murray Reservoir include Western Grebe (occasionally Clark's Grebe), as well as all the other grebe species and a good variety of waterfowl. The wetlands are a great place to search for Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and a variety of sparrows. At the south end, depending on water levels, a variety of shorebirds may be seen. White-faced Ibis, Black-necked Stilt and White-winged Scoter have also been seen here. A large colony of breeding Franklin's Gulls can be found at the south end of the reservoir.



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■ Observation Points

▲ Amenities

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>A</b> Echo Dale Park              | <b>F</b> Murray Lake Dam                    |
| <b>B</b> Rattlesnake Lake Dam        | <b>G</b> Wetlands                           |
| <b>C</b> Golden Sheaf Park           | <b>H</b> Wetlands                           |
| <b>D</b> Sauder Reservoir Embankment | <b>I</b> Northwest side of Murray Lake      |
| <b>E</b> Rattlesnake Lake Causeway   | <b>J</b> Wetlands south side of Murray Lake |

- ▲ Golden Sheaf Park\*: camping and restrooms
- ▲ Seven Persons: meals and restrooms

\* Day use fee payment may be required.