

# Self-Guided Gillson Park Bird Walks

## Spring Migration, 2020

Gillson Park is one of the finest birding opportunities in the area. Follow this simple guide as you discover birds living in our park and migrating through on their way north. Each highlighted area offers different sorts of habitat and attracts different species of birds.

Many thanks to the Wilmette Park District for providing and maintaining beautiful Gillson Park. Thanks also to birders Kat O'Reilly and Claire Labuda for developing our self-guided bird walk materials.

Before you head to Gillson Park, we encourage you to view the accompanying website <https://katbirding.weebly.com/> with maps and resources, and a slide show with descriptions and bird photos <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1yaZvht18xwfuwPsQdgTPOZVtJUihUwnjbTq5oPXXQYQ/edit>.

See also a bird identification sheet provided by Wild Birds Unlimited. <https://www.gogreenwilmette.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GV-Bird-Identification-Chart-PDF.pdf>

Enjoy some of the finest birding in Illinois at Wilmette's Gillson Park!

### **Purple Martin House by the Coast Guard Station:**

- Look for Purple Martins, the largest swallows in North America, perching outside the house or flying nearby.
- You may also see Tree Swallows and Rough-Winged Swallows in this area.

### **Harbor:**

- Look for water birds in the harbor. You can see a variety of ducks, including Mallard and Common Goldeneye. You can also see Canada geese.

- You may see Red Breasted Mergansers, diving ducks, displaying in courtship dances before they head north.
- In the air, look for gulls, terns and swallows. These birds like to land on the wooden piers in the harbor.

### **Under the Bridge/Locks/Canal Area:**

- You can access this area under the bridge by the stairs or ramp on the east side of the bridge, the path on the west side of Sheridan Road, or the ramp from the Baha'i parking lot on the southwest side of the bridge.
- Look for swallows building nests under the bridge, along with some house sparrows.
- Look for Black-crowned Night Herons staking out fishing spots along the southwest side of the bridge.

### **Woodland Path by the Harbor:**

- Look for thrushes hopping on the ground. These birds are similar to robins, but brown with speckled bellies.
- Look up into the trees and shrubs to see many warblers. (During the month of May, Gillson Park is a hotspot for migrating warblers.)
  - These tiny songbirds travel through Illinois in the spring and fall.
  - Warblers are often very colorful and vibrant - look for bright yellow feathers
  - These songbirds never stop moving and flit from branch to branch, eating bugs on branches.
- Look amongst the plantings for ground feeding birds such as Swamp Sparrows, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swainson's Thrush and Eastern Towhee.

- Check the low shrubs for Common Yellowthroat Warblers.
- Look up in the pines for Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds.
- Look for ground feeding birds in the open areas around the shrubs like Eastern Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrow.
- You still may see Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, a type of woodpecker, in early May.

### **Warbler Willow, north of Dog Beach:**

- Look for many birds, especially warblers, just hitting land after traveling all night, ready to eat.
- If birding in the morning, stand on the east side with the sun at your back.
- Look for Yellow Warblers who seem to love this spot. You may even spot a Prothonotary Warbler!

### **Water's Edge:**

- Hear a loud croaking above you? That's a Caspian Tern. This tern has sharp skinny wings and tail and a bright orange beak.
- Look for the Ring-Billed Gull, the most common gull at Gillson Park. This gull has more rounded wings than a tern and a bright yellow beak.
- Watch for Double-Crested Cormorants skimming across the water. Look for a large bird with a long thin neck and tail, dark black plumage and an orange hooked beak.
- Look for the many ducks in the water, including Common and Hooded Mergansers.
- See also gulls along the water's edge.

## **Grassy Field:**

- Look for Killdeer nesting in this wide-open area.
  - This large plover has a pair of black necklaces with a white neck and breast, with a brown head and wings.
  - They often lay eggs in or nearby this field, hiding in plain sight on the ground. They may feign an injury to lure you away from their nest.
- You can also see goldfinches and migrating sparrows snacking on dandelion seeds in the grass.
- Look above you to see swallows and swifts eating bugs on the fly.
  - Some swallows have colors, usually blue, and have sharp pointed wings, often with a forked tail.
  - Swifts, often a gray/black color, have the nickname of “cigar with wings” due to the shape of the body. Their wings are longer than their body and scythe shaped.
  - Barn Swallows, Tree Swallows, and Chimney Swifts are commonly seen.
- Try to spot warblers, orioles, gnatcatchers, kinglets and vireos in the treetops eating insects and caterpillars.

## **The Grove between the Middle Road and Michigan Avenue:**

- Look for warblers, kinglets, woodpeckers, orioles, vireos, and Blue Jays in these trees and bushes.
  - Kinglets are very small birds similar to warblers that flit around in branches eating bugs in the spring.

- Kinglets can be recognized by a bright crest going down the back of their heads, either red or yellow in color.
- Look for Baltimore Orioles high in the trees.
  - These robin-sized birds are easily recognizable with their bright orange plumage. (Offer orange sections or grape jelly at your bird feeders at home to attract Orioles.)

### **Michigan Avenue Thicket:**

- This area has a tangle of forsythia and other shrubs that provide good cover and lots of little bugs for foraging warblers, sparrows and kinglets.
- Look for Magnolia, Wilson's, and Yellow-rumped Warblers.
- In the trees above the thicket, you may spot Bay Breasted, Blackburnian, and Black and White Warblers. You may even spot a Mourning Warbler.

### **The Wildflower Preserve by the Wallace Bowl:**

- Look for warblers, songbirds, and orioles.
- Common warblers seen here are Yellow-rumped, American Redstart, Yellow, Black and White, Common Yellowthroat, and Palm.

### **Backstage at the Wallace Bowl:**

- Look in this sheltered area near the fence for thrushes, sparrows, thrashers and catbirds.
- Check the pines for Northern Flickers, orioles and warblers.

### **Bird Habitat on Michigan Avenue:**

- This area has been transformed from lawn to a habitat designed to support migrating and local bird species. Planted with the help of many local volunteers, it is becoming a prime spot for migrating birds.
- A variety of birds can be found in this habitat including goldfinches, warblers, Gray Catbirds and flycatchers.
- Look for Phoebes, a type of flycatcher. They are plump brown/gray songbirds. They often hang out on the ends of branches and then swoop down to catch bugs in the air.
- Look for thrushes on the ground and perched on the fence.
- Look up in the trees for Blackburnian, Black-and White, and Blackpoll Warblers, and Northern Parulas.
- In early May, look for White-throated, Swamp and Lincoln's Sparrows, Gray Catbirds, and Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes on the ground throughout the plantings.
- In mid-May, look out for Wilson's, Magnolia and Common Yellowthroat Warblers in the shrubs.
- In late May, you may spot a Mourning Warbler.

**Lakefront Path, by the diagonal beachfront parking:**

- Look into the trees to see gnatcatchers, chickadees, orioles, sparrows, thrushes and warblers.
- Look for Cedar Waxwings in the crab apple trees near this pathway. These robin-sized birds have gray wings with red tips, a gray tail with a yellow tip, a pale yellow belly and a brown head with a black eye mask.

**For more information, photos and videos about birding in Gillson Park, we offer these resources:**

Website created by local birder Kat O'Reilly for GGW with videos, maps, descriptions and many resources:

<https://katbirding.weebly.com/>

Slide show created by Claire Labuda, (NTHS Class of 2023) with descriptions and bird photos:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1yaZvht18xwfuwPsQdgTPOZVtJUihUwnjbTq5oPXXQYQ/edit>

Bird Identification sheet by Wild Birds Unlimited:

<https://www.gogreenwilmette.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GV-Bird-Identification-Chart-PDF.pdf>