

# Changing Seasons

## Winter



The first winter freezes push all but the hardiest migrants out as the winter residents, including Bald Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks and Northern Shrikes arrive. During mild winters the valley will continue to harbor fair numbers of ibis, egrets, herons and shorebirds.

## Summer



By early May, the large number of colony nesters, including ibis, egrets and herons, have recolonized their colonies. In plentiful water years, Franklin's Gulls, Forster's and Black Terns will also nest. By late summer, large numbers of American White Pelicans congregate throughout the valley wherever fish are available. Meanwhile, the marshes are alive with the sights and sounds of many other species, including American Bitterns, Sora and Virginia Rails, Marsh Wrens, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

Waterfowl begin returning in February and early March. Shorebirds begin arriving in small numbers in March, with migration peaking in the third week of April with thousands of avocets, stilts, sandpipers, dowitchers and other species. One or more Peregrine Falcons will take advantage of the growing concentration of shorebirds to visit the valley.

## Spring

Landbirds mostly begin arriving in April, peaking in early May, when residents such as House and Bewick's Wrens, Lazuli Buntings, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Bullock's Orioles begin breeding. By early June, migration is coming to an end.



## Fall



Although some fall migrants already begin showing up in early July, it is in August when migration really gets underway with thousands of phalaropes, dowitchers, avocets and other shorebirds. Landbird migrants, including flycatchers, vireos, and warblers start moving from mid-August through late September. Beginning in September, wave after wave of waterfowl will arrive. October brings large numbers of White-crowned Sparrows, and pushes Red-breasted Nuthatches, Mountain Chickadees and other montane species down into the valley.

The Lahontan Valley wetlands, located in and around the community of Fallon, sixty miles east of Reno, represent Nevada's most important desert oasis and are widely recognized as among the most significant wetland systems in the American West.

Although the Carson Lake and Stillwater wetlands are well-known to birders, there are many other interesting waterbird and landbird sites worth visiting in the valley. More than 280 species have been sighted in the valley.

The Lahontan Valley wetlands have been designated as a site in the Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network due to the more than 250,000 shorebirds that migrate through the valley. These tremendously rich and diverse wetlands attract more than a million waterfowl, as well as over 20,000 other water birds, including pelicans, egrets, cormorants, herons, ibis, gulls and terns.

These Great Basin wetlands are also called "terminal" wetlands because they lie in a closed basin at the terminus of the Carson River. These wetlands undergo tremendous boom and bust cycles tied to the snowpack in the Sierra Nevada. Lying in the rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada, these wetlands are truly a desert oasis.

The Carson River corridor provides important songbird habitat for migrants and breeding birds. The agricultural lands near the wetlands provide accessible wildlife viewing and are a great place to see feeding White-faced Ibis.

Whether you have a few hours or a few days, birding in the Lahontan Valley will be a rewarding experience!

Fallon is the "Oasis of Nevada," established in 1896 when Mike Fallon built a crossroads store on his ranch property. The queen city on U.S. Highway 50 is surrounded by lush green farms and ranches that stretch for miles. It is also home to TOPGUN, the famous Navy fighter pilot school at Fallon Naval Air Station (NAS).

Fallon has great restaurants, first rate lodging and casinos, shopping centers, natural and historical attractions, and an abundance of recreational opportunities.

**Annual Spring Wings Bird Festival**  
[www.springwings.org](http://www.springwings.org)

For More Information

Fallon Convention and Tourism Authority  
 800-874-0903 or 775-423-4556  
[www.fallontourism.com](http://www.fallontourism.com)

Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge  
 775-423-5128 or 775-428-6452

Nevada Division of Wildlife  
 775-423-3171



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Birding in the  
**Lahontan Valley**  
 Fallon, Nevada



# Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge

## Soda Lake

● Big and Little Soda Lakes lie surrounded by arid desert sandhills and are a magnet for shorebirds, gulls and other birds. It is not unusual to find large numbers of grebes and phalaropes during migration on Big Soda Lake attracted by large masses of invertebrates composed of brine flies and brine shrimp. In addition, it is a good place to study shorebirds, including Western and Least Sandpipers, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, and Snowy Plovers. Fresh enough to support fish, Little Soda Lake is a good place to look for loons, grebes, diving ducks and terns. Keep an eye out for rarities. Pacific Golden Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Sabine's Gulls have been seen at Big Soda Lake.

Directions from Fallon: From the corner of Williams Ave (Hwy 50) and Allen Road in Fallon, go west 3.1 miles to Soda Lake Road. Take a right (north) and go 2 miles to Cox Road. Take a left onto Cox Road and go 1.3 miles and take a right onto a dirt road.

○ Along with Carson Lake, the Stillwater Marshes are the core of the Lahontan Valley wetlands. Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) provides outstanding birding opportunities and is scenically located at the foot of the Stillwater Mountains. Stillwater NWR attracts more than 250,000 swans, geese and ducks annually, including more than 10,000 Tundra Swans and large numbers of Canvasbacks. Shorebird migration is also spectacular with numbers rivaling those at Carson Lake. Stillwater NWR has attracted its share of rare birds, including Brown Pelican, Surf and White-winged Scoter, Pomerine Jaeger and Silt Sandpiper.

If you are unfamiliar with Stillwater NWR, visit the refuge field office to learn more about water conditions and the wetland locations. While the first time visitor may find it more difficult to bird Stillwater, a little persistence yields great birding. Stillwater NWR is open year round. The Stillwater NWR headquarters is located at 1000 Auction Road and can be reached at 775-423-5128. Or call the field office at 775-428-6452 for more information.

Directions from Fallon: From the corner of Williams Ave (Hwy 50) and Maine Street in Fallon head east on Hwy 50 out of Fallon. At 4.6 miles turn left onto Stillwater Road. Follow Stillwater Road 12.3 miles to a sign marking the entrance to the refuge.



## Carson River Diversion Dam

● Carson River Diversion Dam is one of the valley's best migratory songbird sites. Visitors should check the area just below the dam for song birds, particularly warblers and sparrows. In addition, a walk along the south side of the river upstream of the diversion dam will yield a most enjoyable search for passerines in the cottonwoods and Russian olives, as well as water birds in the wetlands created by the diversion dam.

Directions: From the corner of Williams Ave (Hwy 50) and Allen Road go 7 miles west of Fallon and turn south onto Pioneer Way. At 4.1 miles turn left just before the ditch crossing. Follow this gravel road and you will reach the river crossing at 4.4 miles. The river crossing may be impassable during high runoff releases. Go left, cross the bridge and turn immediately right after the bridge. Follow this unimproved dirt road upstream along the river. Park and walk.

## Harmon Reservoir

○ On the road to Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, Harmon Reservoir, another regulatory reservoir, provides a good combination of open water and wetlands. Harmon attracts large numbers of grebes, waterfowl, pelicans, gulls, terns, and a smaller assortment of shorebirds and marsh dwelling birds, including rails and bitterns (Least Bittern has been recorded here). The reservoir's Russian olives and tamarisks also attract passerines, including migratory warblers.

Directions: From the corner of Williams Ave (Hwy 50) and Maine Street in Fallon head east on Hwy 50. In 4.6 miles turn left onto Stillwater Road. Follow Stillwater Road 1.1 miles and where Stillwater Road curves north (left) go straight onto Stuart Road. In 1.1 miles Harmon will be on your right. At the east end of Harmon Reservoir turn south (right) onto a dirt road that takes you to the back side of reservoir.

## Carson Lake Wetlands

● The Carson Lake wetlands provide some of the best birding in northern Nevada. This large wetland complex is a mecca for waterbirds of all sorts.

Shorebird migration peaks in April and August with thousands of American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Long-billed Dowitchers and many other species comprising a spectacle unrivaled in the state. More than 30 species of shorebirds have been sighted here, including rare vagrants such as Ruff, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red Phalarope and Stilt Sandpiper.

Carson Lake also hosts large numbers of herons and egrets and is home to one of the West's largest White-faced Ibis colonies. Carson Lake also provides important migratory and breeding habitat for thousands of geese and ducks, including Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall and Redheads. Winter brings large numbers of raptors, including Rough-legged Hawk, Short-eared Owl and Bald Eagle.

The Holmes Levee, Lott Freeway and Madsen Levees provide excellent viewing opportunities, depending on water conditions. There are three viewing towers - one on the Holmes Levee and two on the Madsen Levee.

Carson Lake is open from sunrise to sunset most days of the year. During waterfowl hunting season, vehicles are restricted from certain areas. The caretakers can be reached at 775-423-3071. Visitors to Carson Lake should check in with the caretakers at the gate.

Directions: From the corner of Williams Ave (Hwy 50) and Taylor Street (Hwy 95) in downtown Fallon go 8.8 miles south to Pasture Road. Turn east (left) on Pasture Road and go 2 miles to an entrance marked with a "Greenhead Hunting Club" sign.

## NAS Fallon Nature Trail

● The Fallon Naval Air Station has developed a short nature trail complete with ponds, agricultural fields and riparian habitat. During migration and nesting, this is a good area to look for songbirds such as Bullock's Oriole and Black-headed Grosbeaks in the summer. When the fields are being irrigated, look for White-faced Ibis, Gulls and other water birds. During winter it is worth checking out the sparrow flocks for rarities.

Directions: From the corner of Williams Ave (Hwy 50) and Maine Street in Fallon head east on Hwy 50 out of Fallon. At 2.2 miles turn right onto Crook Road. Follow Crook Road 1.4 miles and just before you reach the Wildes Road intersection turn left into the parking area. Look for the trail marker.

## Legend

- Paved Road
- Un-paved Road

Birding Areas & Directions