

Let's Go Birding
along the
**Steele Birding
Drive**

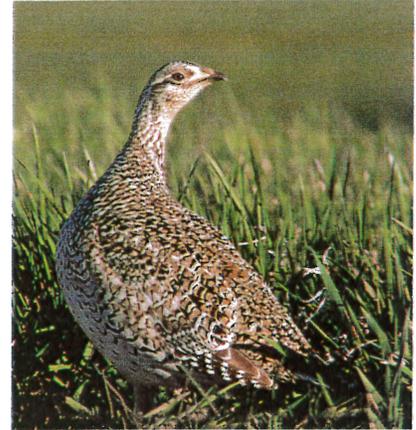


Welcome ! Birders ■

Welcome to Kidder County, one of the best birding destinations in North America! This booklet provides information to help make your birding expedition to the Steele area fun, fulfilling, and memorable.

Where do you start? In the town of Steele, of course. But even before you arrive, you can use this booklet as a guide to plan your outings and explore new areas. Three primary birding routes are mapped and described on the following pages to help you find the hidden treasures along the backroads of the center of the continent. Each of these birding drives leads you through some of the most interesting and most remote locations in central North Dakota where you can fully absorb the essence of the Northern Great Plains, its landscapes, wildlife, and people. Enjoy Dakota hospitality and friendship while you are here, and enjoy great birding at one of America's most unique ecotourism destinations.

What birds will you find? Timing is crucial in birding. Annual variations based on climatic conditions include wet and dry cycles. Seasonal variations are probably most important in determining what birds will be present. Spring and fall migration will offer great variety and abundance of species. The summer nesting and staging periods will offer



more behavioral observations, as well as the chance to see family groups and growing young birds. Daily rhythms from morning to afternoon and evening will dictate the activities and availability of many animals, and changes in weather will likewise vary your experiences.

Beyond timing, habitat will dictate what birds you find. Native prairie grasslands, wetlands, natural woods, planted tree groves, hayfields and other croplands all attract different kinds of birds. Even among the multitude of wetlands in the region, their variety ranges from shallow to deep, small to large, permanent to seasonal, and fresh to saline. Each individual wetland supports an environment for certain plants, invertebrates, insects, fish, frogs, amphibians, and other animals that attract certain birds searching for food. Other birds may utilize a wetland as a roosting site, a loafing





The diversity of shorebirds in Kidder County includes the American Avocet, Upland Sandpiper, and Wilson's Phalarope.

With the three refuges in mind, we've named the three routes of the Steele Birding Drive the Chase Lake Route, the Long Lake Route, and the Slade Route. Along these three routes, you will reach some classic birding sites amid this famous birding destination, such as the Horsehead Lake area, the Kunkel Lake area, the Dewald Slough and Dewald Flats area, the Dawson Wildlife Management Area, the Bird Lake area, and the Chase Lake Wilderness Area. If these locations sound attractive, just wait until you visit them!

Chase Lake

Chase Lake Refuge provides a remote destination far from the nearest town, or even the nearest farmstead. It features a broad expanse of windswept grass where you can walk among virgin prairie filled with wildflowers and bird songs. The real attraction to Chase Lake is the continent's largest nesting colony of American White Pelicans, numbering as many as 18,000 nesting pairs during peak years. The pelicans are a fitting icon for the Birding Drive network, for you will find them swimming in area wetlands, as well as flying overhead periodically throughout your travels. When you get close, you will experience the majesty of their soaring and gliding flights on the broadest wingspan of any North American birds – about nine feet wide!

Of course, there are hundreds of other species, ranging from Ferruginous Hawks to Snowy Owls; Baird's Sparrows to Sprague's

Pipits; White-fronted Geese to Canvasbacks; and Upland Sandpipers to Chestnut-collared Longspurs. The timing of your visit and even a certain amount of birder's luck will help make your visit to Kidder County one of your most memorable birding trips!

Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge is located in one of the most remote areas of North Dakota, and access by car requires driving along some fairly primitive roads. This is a super location to use your hiking boots, for walking among the rolling hills and prairie flowers is one of the great opportunities of this Birding Drive network. Access to the pelican nesting colony is distant. To prevent disturbing the birds during the critical nesting period, a refuge permit is required to get closer to view or photograph the nesting activities.

Long Lake

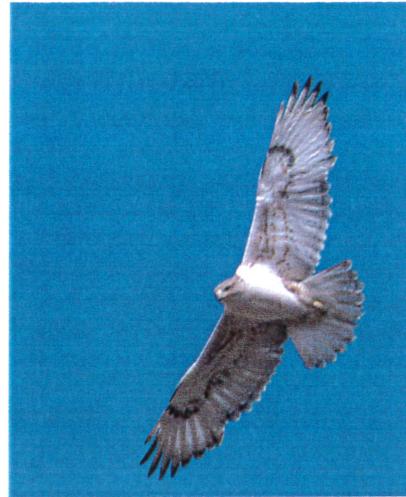
Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge is one of the premier destinations of photographers, for it is relatively easy to get very close to a variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and water birds. When driving along the refuge road system, your vehicle will serve you well as a mobile blind. Even if you are not a photographer, you will marvel at close views of many birds.

Long Lake has been designated a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Site, and an Important Bird Area. A trip to the Refuge Butte will provide a spectacular panoramic view of miles of surrounding landscape, and possibly a bird's-eye view of some soaring species.

area, a bathing pond, or a location to get a drink of water.

So the birds you find will depend on the time of year you choose to visit, the climatic and weather conditions, the time of day you're in the field, and the kinds of habitats you visit. Whatever the mix of these variables, we are sure you will find a host of exciting birds while you explore one of the premier birding locations in North America!

Three locations stand out as essential points of destination. Two of the best wildlife refuges in the country anchor the Steele Birding Drive, with Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge in the northeast part of the Birding Drive and Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge in the southwest part. In addition, the center of Kidder County, just east of Steele, harbors Slade National Wildlife Refuge, which is essentially a wilderness area with access limited to walking or cycling along the old roadway.

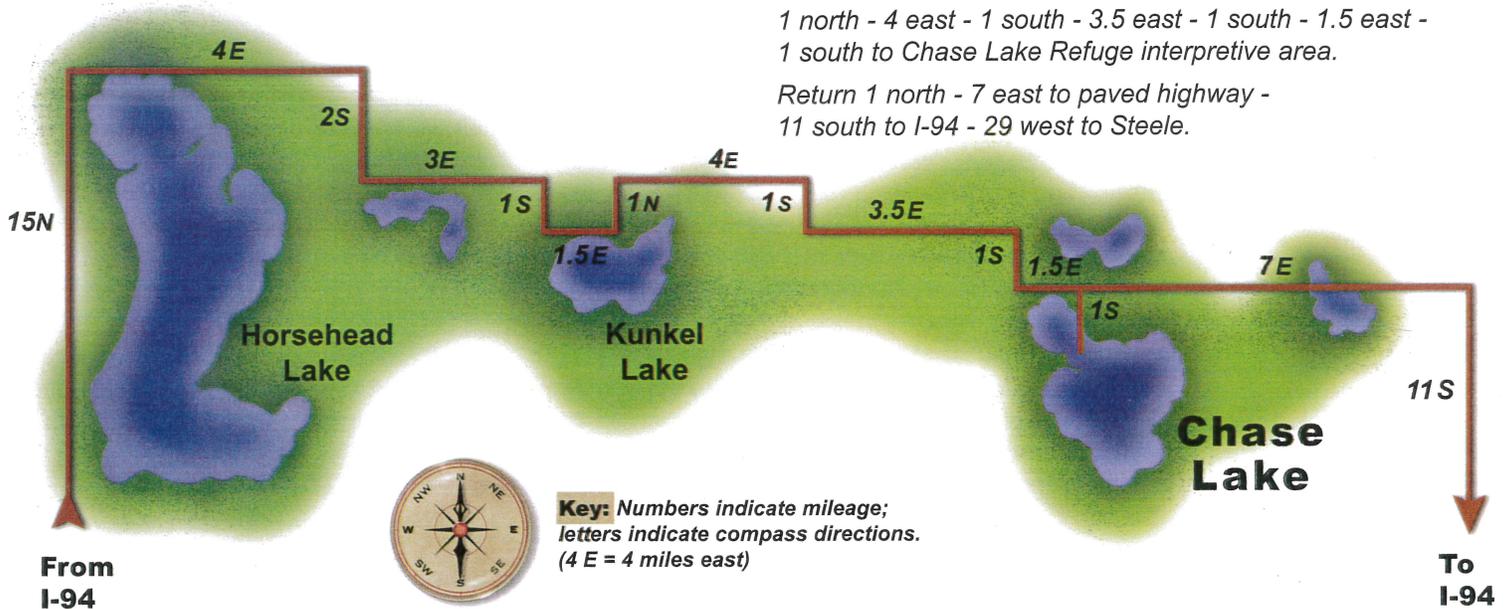


Imagine the excitement of finding a Ferruginous Hawk and Sharp-tailed Grouse in a prairie landscape.

Chase Lake Route

From the north side of Steele, drive 4 miles east on Interstate 94 and exit north at the Robinson exit - drive 15 north - 4 east - 2 south - 3 east - 1 south - 1.5 east - 1 north - 4 east - 1 south - 3.5 east - 1 south - 1.5 east - 1 south to Chase Lake Refuge interpretive area.

Return 1 north - 7 east to paved highway - 11 south to I-94 - 29 west to Steele.



Dakota Birds

Some of the northern prairie birds you can find from late April through September include Franklin's Gulls, Black Terns, Swainson's Hawks, Western Grebes, American Avocets, Marbled Godwits, Wilson's Phalaropes, Yellow Rails, Orchard Orioles, Sprague's Pipits, and a variety of native sparrows, including the famous Baird's Sparrows, along with LeConte's and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows.

Although they are fairly common under appropriate climatic conditions during June, Baird's Sparrows and Sprague's Pipits are especially hard to see. Sprague's Pipits can be heard over a wide range, singing high beyond human eyesight. Baird's Sparrows are notorious for hiding in the grass, but you have a better chance of actually seeing

As an integral part of the Prairie Pothole Region, the Missouri Coteau provides important nesting habitat for a variety of ducks, including Canvasbacks.

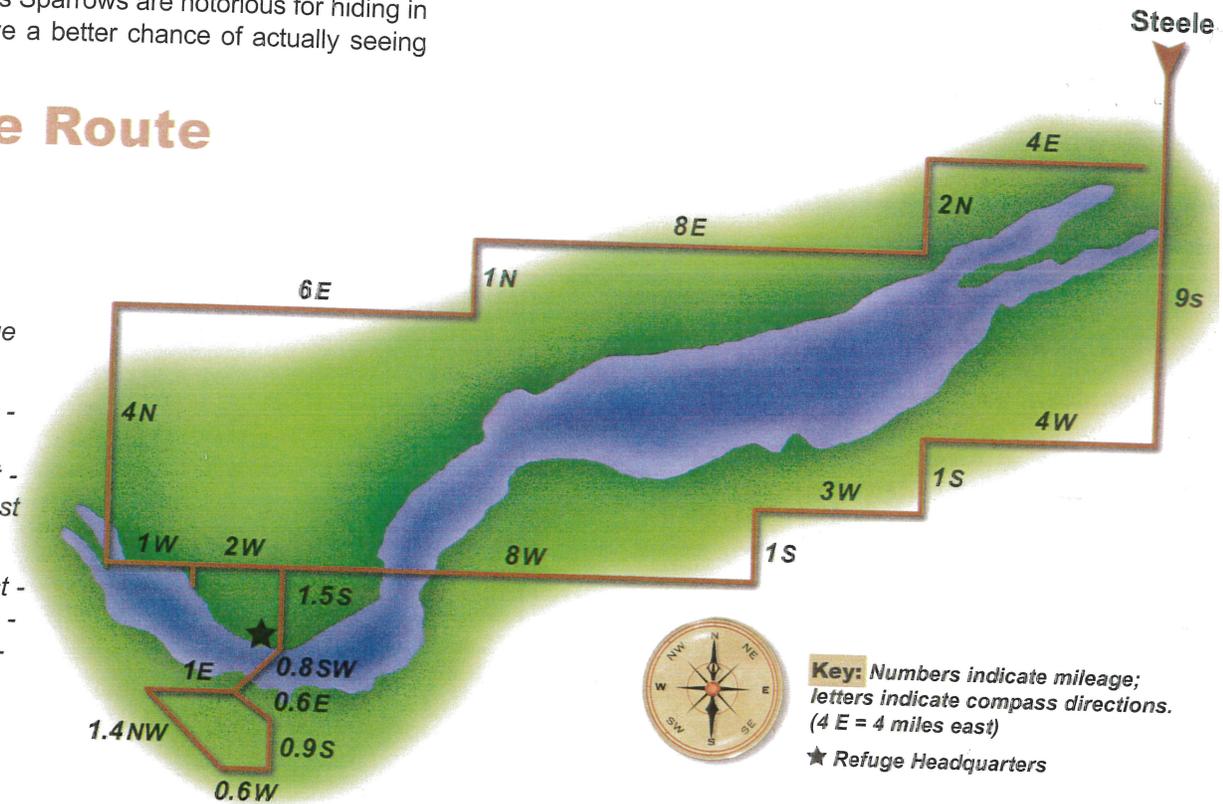


Long Lake Route

From the southeast corner of Steele, drive 9 miles south - 4 west - 1 south - 3 west - 1 south - 8 west - 1.5 south - to the Refuge Headquarters.

Continue 0.8 southwest - 0.6 east - 0.9 south - 0.6 west - 1.4 northwest - 1 east - 2.3 north - 2 west to the Refuge Butte.

To continue, drive 1 west - 4 north - 6 east - 1 north - 8 east - 2 north - 4 east - 4 north to Steele.



Canada Geese mixed among them. Sandhill Cranes offer similar migration phenomena, and Tundra Swans, a variety of ducks, shorebirds, and songbirds make Dakota migrations remarkable to witness. Such exciting shorebirds as Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Hudsonian Godwits, Stilt Sandpipers, and White-rumped Sandpipers can be found, while the rarest of all wading birds – Whooping Cranes – migrate across North Dakota each spring and fall.

Birds of prey are plentiful during migrations. Prairie Falcons and Peregrines are rare finds, but possible, and Merlins are more common at times. Red-tailed Hawks dominate the *Buteo* migrations, but their diversity keeps interest levels for birders high. Whiter Krieder's and black Harlan's races of Red-tails can be found, along with black-, rufous-, and light-color morphs of boreal forest- and plains-nesting Redtails.

Spring migration primarily takes place during April and May. Fall migration begins by August for some birds, but September and October are the primary fall migration months. Some years, early November offers exciting days when the last northern birds are forced south by freezing weather. Then, flocks of geese, cranes, ducks, and other



Steele was once known as the windmill city.

species can continue across the sky for days at a time – only to leave the Northern Plains quite barren of wildlife.

Yet, even though the numbers and variety of birds encountered during late fall and winter is limited, some of the most exciting species can be found, such as Snowy Owls, Short-eared Owls, Rough-legged Hawks, Bald and Golden Eagles, Snow Buntings, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and White-winged Crossbills.

As you explore Kidder County using the Steele Birding Drive as your guide, we hope you appreciate the beauty of the northern plains. Come during the primary seasons, but



A spotting scope can provide a magnified look at a distant flock to search for Ross' Geese among spectacular spring and fall flocks of migrating Snow Geese.



If you see Whooping Cranes or other rare birds, please report their location to the North Dakota Birding Hotline at 701-250-4418.



No trip to Steele is complete until you visit the World's Largest Sandhill Crane. Also be sure to visit area merchants and greet residents and Kidder County landowners and land managers who have supported the development of the Steele Birding Drive.

appreciate that in this northern clime, things change quickly. Stop and take deep breaths of our fresh air, appreciate the vastness of the horizons and big sky; listen to the wind blowing through the buffalo grass, and imagine the way this land looked 200 years ago, when vast

herds of bison roamed the prairie. Marvel at the unequalled starscape at night, and if you are lucky, you may even witness the northern lights! This is a magnificent region of America, and we hope you enjoy our history, culture, and friendly nature, and revel at our birds.

Enjoy the Steele Birding Drive

STEELE NORTH DAKOTA

Steele is located adjacent to Interstate 94 at Exit 200, 40 miles east of Bismarck. Steele is 60 miles west of Jamestown and 160 miles west of Fargo. The closest air service is in Bismarck. For more information about Steele, visit our website: www.SteeleNorthDakota.com

For more information about our network of Birding Drives in central North Dakota, refer to the Birding Drives Dakota website at www.BirdingDrives.com or telephone 701-475-2133.

Additional Resources:

North Dakota Birding Hotline: 701-250-4418 ext. 554

North Dakota Birds Listserv:

www.listserv.nodak.edu/archives/ndbirds

Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge: 701-752-4218

Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge: 701-387-4397

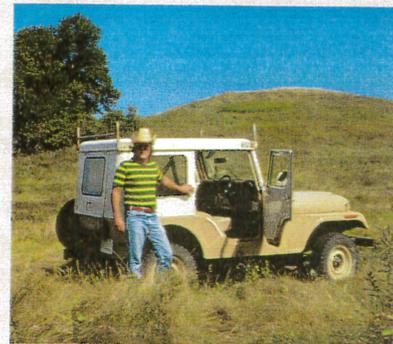
For a wealth of information about the birds and other wildlife of the northern Great Plains, consult *Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center's website:*

www.npwrc.usgs.gov

Accommodations at Steele:

Cobble Stone 475-4478

OK Motel & Campground: 701-475-2440



Safety is paramount to any successful birding adventure. Use caution when driving and stopping along roadways, and be weather conscious. Enjoy your trips afield!

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All photographs by Paul M. Konrad.

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