

3 Skillet Handle Birding Trail - A Nature Path



Upper Klamath Lake Shoreline



Running Y Boat Basin

Copper's Hawk Road descends to a lakefront parking area at the Running Y "Boat Basin" offering views of Buck Island and Modoc Rim on the far shore. The boat ramp provides lake access for skiffs and kayaks. The parking area also serves as the trailhead for the Skillet Handle Birding Trail. This trail follows a rocky ridge just above the rocky shoreline of Upper Klamath Lake.



Kayaking around the Skillet Handle

A paddle along the east-facing escarpment of the Skillet Handle makes for an enjoyable trip. Kayaking is best during morning hours, when winds tend to be lighter and surface water is usually smoother. The marshy edge of this shallow lake is a magnet attracting waterfowl during their season migration along the Pacific Flyway. In addition, during summertime shallow water habitats are crowded with fish-eating birds like pelicans, grebes and egrets.

Water Birds of Particular Interest

(Common water birds reported May-September)

Canada Goose	Mallard
Cinnamon Teal	Redhead
Lesser Scaup	Ruddy Duck
Pied-billed Grebe	Eared Grebe
Western Grebe	Double-crested Cormorant
Clark's Grebe	Am. White Pelican
Great Blue Heron	Great Egret
American Coot	Killdeer
Spotted Sandpiper	Ring-billed Gull
Osprey "Fish hawk"	Forster's Tern
Belted Kingfisher	

Path to Ecological Discovery

The Skillet Handle Birding Trail is little more than a narrow dirt path between boulders that serve as stepping stones over uneven ground. But, offers a secluded walk in woodland with an abundance of native wildflowers in summer and a diversity of wildlife year-round. This path of discovery is where one can leisurely spend 1 to 4 hours exploring natural habitats with a spectacular view of Upper Klamath Lake from a rocky overlook - 70 feet above the lake.



Skillet Handle Trail

This nature trail begins next to the Running Y Horse Coral (at the eastern end of Cooper's Hawk Road). Here, a lowland isthmus separates Upper Klamath Lake from Caledonia Marsh. The Skillet Handle Birding Trail offers a mix of plant communities: pine forests, oak woodlands, grasslands and sagebrush flats. The trail crosses old volcanic andesitic basalt flows, much older those that formed the High Cascades. A careful eye on the ground will keep hikers from meandering off path. You really can't get lost, unless you want too, since the trail eventually meets a gravel road – your return route.

The path gradually ascends to a high point on the backbone ridge of the Skillet Handle Peninsula providing sweeping views of Buck Island and Modoc Rim. At the highest point on the Skillet Handle Birding Trail (one mile from the trailhead) hikers arrive at a fork in the path: 1) To the left is the short loop that connects with a gravel road leading back to the trailhead (two miles roundtrip). 2) To the right is a longer loop, which adds one mile of hiking on uneven ground and a two-mile trek back on the gravel road to the trailhead (four miles roundtrip).



"Two-Track" Gravel Road

The long loop meanders along and connects with the “two-track” gravel road at a grassy swale. The roadway to the left (south) returns back to the parking area. The route to the right (north) travels to a small cove - an ideal place for lunch before returning back to civilization.

Skillet Handle Bird Habitats

Forest birds occupy niches on the forest floor and in the forest canopy. Seed eating birds, including sparrows, chickadees, nuthatches and juncos, feed on insects in addition to seed during their nesting season. Insect-eating birds, including woodpeckers and warblers, will eat plant seeds from time to time. Forest habitats provide shelter for all kinds of birds. Nesting cavities built by woodpeckers are used by a variety of forest birds. Walking softly and quietly on a forest trail brings new surprises – like the sound of a woodpecker’s drumming.



Nuthatch - insect meal



Flicker's Nesting Cavity

Open Pine woodland and **Oregon white oak groves** are the most dominate habitat types along the Skillet Handle Birding Trail. The Birding Trail travels under the open canopy of ponderosa pine surrounded by understory shrubs, flowering plants and grasses. Ponderosa have a fire-resistant thick-bark and bare trunks because lower branches die and drop off - called “self-pruning”. Anchored in rocky soil, oak trees produce branches loaded with nutritious acorns for deer and other animals. Oak groves provide nesting cavities for a variety of forest birds. On the Skillet Handle, Northern Flickers, Hairy

Woodpeckers and Red-breasted Sapsuckers can be heard drumming on tree trunks. Chickadees and Nuthatches, smaller trunk-loving birds, search for insects and seeds in crevices within tree bark.

Grasslands occur on the westside of the gravel road near diked farmlands. Native perennial grasses (especially bunch grasses) compete side-by-side with introduced grasses; however, native grasses have a distinct advantage in drier soils. Enjoy a terrific view of the Mountain Lakes Wilderness across the expanse of Caledonia Marsh. Enjoy bird watching in this serene setting.

Sagebrush flats are characterized by big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) and green rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus*). Yellow flowering rabbitbrush attract bees, butterflies and other insects along the gravel road. Sagebrush flowers are hard to notice but the plant itself is big and brushy - good cover for wildlife.



Oak Groves



Sagebrush Flats

Western junipers have invaded sagebrush flats on the eastside of the Skillet Handle peninsula. Junipers move into disturbed sites and persist in the absence of periodic brush fires. Junipers require large amounts of water, effectively competing with other trees and shrubby plants in semi-arid areas. Junipers have recently been removed near oak groves to improve growing conditions for white oaks – perpetuating oak savanna habitat.

Common Birds along the Skillet Handle Birding Trail

(Select birds reported May-September)

California Quail	Great Blue Heron
Great Egret	Turkey Vulture
Red-tailed Hawk	Bald Eagle
Mourning Dove	Red-breasted Sapsucker
Hairy woodpecker	Northern Flicker
Western Wood-Pewee	Steller's Jay
California Scrub-jay	Common Raven
Tree Swallow	Mountain Chickadee
Dark-eyed Junco	White-breasted Nuthatch
Marsh Wren	Bewick's Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet	American Robin
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Yellow Warbler
Chipping Sparrow	Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow	Spotted Towhee
Brewer's Blackbird	House Finch
Red-winged blackbird	Yellow-headed blackbird
Cassin's Finch	