

# MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

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**BEST NESTS Newsletter**  
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## **Money Birds!**

### **Part Two: Northern and Inland Birds**

Above Acadia National Park the forest begins to change, as do the birds in it. There is a significant difference between the target birds of southern Maine and those of the northern coastal area and inland areas above Bangor. The forest south of Bangor is largely dominated by hardwoods. To the north, the woodlands begin a transition to spruce/fir that eventually becomes the dominant forest type in Canada.



Spruce Grouse

The term “boreal” comes from the Latin word *borealis*, meaning “northern.” The boreal zone begins in Maine and intensifies into Canada until it finally gives way to the stunted trees of the subarctic in the *taiga* zone. Some birds of the boreal forest do not occur south of Bangor and these are highly sought-after by visiting birders. Among these, Spruce Grouse is probably the most prized, followed by American Three-toed Woodpeckers, Black-backed Woodpeckers, Gray Jays, and Boreal Chickadees. Certain finches are also reliant on the boreal forest, including two types of crossbills: White-winged Crossbills and Red Crossbills. A number of northern warblers prefer coniferous forests. They are hard to get and are often the targets of visiting birders. These include Cape May, Bay-breasted, Tennessee, and Mourning Warblers.

Here is where the innkeeper opportunity lies: The farther north you go, the more boreal habitat there is...but the farther away you get from the tourism infrastructure. There is lots of significant boreal spruce/fir forest in the North Maine Woods, but very few tourists are willing to drive great distances over rough roads to get there. Fortunately, there are good pockets of boreal habitat right near certain vacation destinations. On the Maine map it appears as an arc – sort of an arc of opportunity for innkeepers. The cooler mountains



of western Maine and the maritime conditions of eastern Maine push the boreal zones farther south. Communities along this arc include Bethel, Rangeley, Kingfield, Greenville, Millinocket, Grand Lake Stream, Lubec, and Jonesport.

There are some good pockets of boreal habitat east of Bangor along forestry roads that run all the way to Princeton – notably the Stud Mill Road. (In fact, some of the northern target species are found right in Bangor City Forest, though they are very difficult to locate there.)

One target species is the American Three-toed Woodpecker – the northernmost woodpecker in the western hemisphere. On occasion, it is found in the Rangeley area and in Baxter State Park, but mostly it is a denizen of Aroostook County. This one bird has accounted for many hardcore birding trips as far north as Fort Kent. Knowledgeable birders often bundle a chase for this bird with a stop in Easton near the McCain's processing plant. Two artificial lakes in this area contain the only known nesting sites in Maine for a certain set of unusual ducks.



One other bird is in a class by itself. The Bicknell's Thrush is an alpine specialist that can be found only in the stunted spruce zone above 3000 feet. It has a limited range, stretching from the Adirondacks across the top of New England to Mount Katahdin. It resides atop the bigger mountains of the Mahoosucs in western Maine, the mountains around Carrabassett Valley, two mountaintops adjacent to Moosehead Lake, and the peaks of Baxter State Park. The most reliable and accessible place to locate this obscure bird in state is on the slopes of Saddleback Mountain near Rangeley. Combined with the other boreal bird specialties in the area, I've always thought that Rangeley had significant potential for a birding festival in June, but that's a subject for another day.

Maine has one last significant advantage over many states south of us. While a lot of our birds pass through southern states in migration, Maine is where they breed. Over two dozen warblers nest in the Pine Tree State. Migrating birds are mostly silent and their whereabouts are undependable. From mid-May through the Fourth of July, Maine's birds sing prolifically and most are easily findable. The state is alive with songbirds in a way that other states can only envy. This contributes to an overwhelmingly positive experience for visiting birders, even when they are not chasing our particular specialties.



The July and August *Best Nests* newsletters have given innkeepers a better understanding of what specific birds draw many of the birding tourists. These birding destinations govern how many of these ecotourists use the state and how they move around in it. Call it a *tourist flow*. The September newsletter will discuss how to better take advantage of these flows, perhaps gaining more multiple-night stays and a bigger market share.

**Coming next month: Tourist Flows**