

Birds of the Wetlands and Water

Musicians of the Marsh

Honk! Quack! Cackle! Squawk! Tune your ears to the wetland symphony, a resounding testament to the astonishing number and diversity of birds in these marshes.

Herons, egrets, rails, cranes, ducks, geese, pelicans, gulls, terns, and shorebirds live in and migrate through the Byway's wetlands by the millions.

Many of these wetland birds remain hidden in the dense marsh foliage. Listen for the rolling trill of the marsh wren, the descending whinny of the sora, and the deep pumping "oong-ka-choonk" of the American bittern (also known as the "thunder-pumper").

While most wetland birds here are seasonal, a number remain through the summer. Snowy plover, blue-winged teal, white-faced ibis, king rail, and many others nest here. Others, like the Canada goose, are year-round residents. In truth, there is no day along the Byway without the sounds of wetland birds.



Wilson's Phalarope
Ted Lee Eubanks



Whooping Crane/Ryan Hagerty, USFWS

Whooping Crane

In 1941, just 21 whooping cranes remained in the wild. By 2007, the population had rebounded to almost 350. Most migrate between Canada and the Gulf coast of Texas, and Byway wetlands are among the few places where you consistently see this majestic bird during migration.



Franklin's Gull/Ted Lee Eubanks

Franklin's Gull

After nesting in the northern Great Plains, Franklin's gulls undertake an astounding migration. They fly to the Texas coast and continue to Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec. From there, they fly overland to the Pacific coast, which they follow to southern Peru and northern Chile.



Piping Plover/Ted Lee Eubanks

Motion and Change

Consider the American golden-plover, able to fly more than 3,000 miles without a pause. Or the piping plover, which navigates through our wetlands to the same Texas beach each year. Whatever the mystery or magic, Byway wetlands offer the perfect place to contemplate this miracle of motion.