

## **Central \_\_\_\_ . Lake Louise State Recreation Area, Hand County**

Lake Louise is a 164-acre reservoir on Wolf Creek, a tributary of the James River, which is surrounded by mixed deciduous woodland and prairie. The recreation area is located 14 miles northwest of Miller (population 1500) and lies near the eastern edge of the Missouri Coteau. Relatively few lakes occur in this area, so it can be attractive to waterfowl and other waterbirds, especially during migration. Fairly extensive marsh habitat, with attendant marsh birds, surrounds much of the lake. This spot seems to be a particularly good location for breeding Willow Flycatchers. A woodland composed of deciduous trees mixed with eastern red cedar and a few planted ponderosa pines lines much of the reservoir on the south side, where the recreation area is located. These woodlands can also be attractive to birds and they host many of the typical deciduous forest breeding species of eastern South Dakota, although the park is far enough west that some eastern species are found in fewer numbers, but western species are a possibility. As many as 15 species of warblers are possible during a good day in spring migration. Lake Louise receives relatively little birding pressure, as it is located away from major population centers in the state, but, surprisingly, has hosted several rarities, including Black-legged Kittiwake, Red-shouldered Hawk and Worm-eating Warbler. The best birding is in spring and summer, but fall migration can also be productive. Snow Geese sometimes concentrate in this area during migration in the thousands, and a few Ross's Geese are usually mixed in during spring migration in March and April. Grasslands in the general vicinity of the park host many mixed-grass prairie species, including Greater Prairie Chicken, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Ferruginous and Swainson's hawks, Upland Sandpiper, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Dickcissel and Bobolink. Baird's Sparrow also occasionally occurs in the area.

The park boasts a nice campground, with 29 electrical sites and two camping cabins, on the southeast side of the lake in a dense grove of mixed woodland, and a second campground on the southwest portion of the lake offers another 10 tent sites in a grove of large, old cottonwoods. In addition to birding, the park has a swimming beach, a Frisbee golf course, and offers good fishing for panfish, perch, bass and the occasional pike. To reach Lake Louise from Miller, travel north on South Dakota Highway 45 (the first mile is shared with Highway 14) for 7 miles from the junction of highways 14 and 45 at the south end of Miller. After 7 miles, turn west (left) on 191<sup>st</sup> Street and continue for 7 miles to the recreation area on your right. Motel facilities are available in Miller. The 3.2-mile Pheasant Run hiking trail loops around the south end of the lake and passes through woodland, grassland and lakeshore habitats, so hiking this trail, or portions thereof, is a great way to bird the park.

The mixed woodland in which the main campground occurs is composed of elm, green ash, hackberry, locust, cottonwood (by the lake), eastern red cedar and ponderosa pine, with some shrubby understory. Common breeding birds in the campground area include Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker, Western and Eastern kingbirds, House Wren, Brown Thrasher, Yellow Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Orchard Oriole, and American Goldfinch. This is also one of the westernmost spots in South Dakota where Northern Cardinals regularly occur. At the north end of the campground is a boat launch with a dock that provides good fishing access, as well as nice views of the lake and a marsh. Five species of swallows, Barn, Bank, Northern Rough-winged, Tree and Cliff, regularly occur over the lake. The marsh habitat here, as elsewhere along the lake, hosts breeding Willow Flycatcher, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow and Red-winged Blackbird. Both Sora and Virginia Rail also occur here. The dock can also be a good spot for viewing Black and Forster's terns, and Franklin's and Ring-billed gulls flying over the lake.

The trailhead for the Pheasant Run trail begins just to the west of the main campground on the southeast side of the lake. Initially, the trail passes close to the lakeshore, which is bordered by willows and Russian olive trees in this area. After passing by the handicap fishing pier, the trail penetrates another mixed woodland grove with some plum thickets, honeysuckle and other shrubs that host Willow Flycatcher (in more open shrubby areas), Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, and Song Sparrow, among other birds. After passing through the swimming beach area, where good views of the lake can be had, the trail loops around a sizeable spit of land jutting into the lake. This is where the Frisbee golf course is located, so much of the grass is mowed in this area, but scattered trees in this area are especially good for Orchard Orioles. As the trail loops around the north end of this spit, it passes a good shrubby area bordering the lake, where Willow Flycatchers are almost certain to be found. As the trail continues looping around the north end of the spit, it leads to the Island Overlook, which provides nice views of the lake and marsh to the

east. As the trail leaves the spit, it follows the south shore of the lake, which is mostly an extensive marsh in this area, so this is a great spot to observe marsh birds, again including Willow Flycatchers.

After passing around this marshy area, the trail plunges into more woodland and plum thickets before leading to the tent campground, which occurs in a grove of large, old cottonwoods. Look for Northern Flicker, Warbling and Red-eyed vireos, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Orchard Orioles and American Goldfinch here. As the trail loops around the northwest end of the tent campground, it emerges from the woodland to provide an overlook of the upper end of Lake Louise, which has narrow channels of open water bordered by marsh. From here, the trail passes through an area of more open woodland with planted locust and silver maple trees before entering into a grassland area. Once in the grassland area, look for Ring-necked Pheasant, Field Sparrow and Bobolinks, which occasionally fly overhead. The trail next passes a large (100 yards long) plum thicket with scattered trees on the left. This thicket is an especially good spot for close-up views of Willow Flycatcher, Western and Eastern kingbirds, and Yellow Warbler during summer, and this thicket can also be a very productive area during migration for songbirds, including warblers and sparrows. After the thicket, the trail passes through grasslands and shelterbelts (primarily of eastern red cedar) on both sides of the park entrance, which aren't particularly birdy, but might support Townsend's Solitaire and waxwings in fall and winter in years when the berry crop is good. Eventually the trail loops around to reconnect with the main park road just before it leads back into the main campground. This area provides good access to the south end of the mixed woodland grove of the main campground and should be an especially productive spot during migration.

In addition to the camping facilities at Lake Louise, motels are available in Miller, as are stores and restaurants.