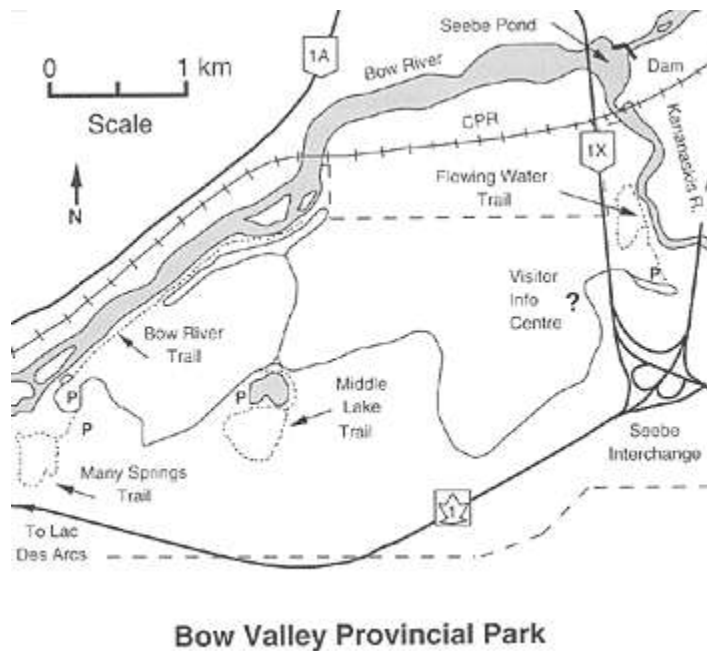


Bow Valley Provincial Park by Dave Elphinstone (1993)

Bow Valley Provincial Park is located on the Trans-Canada Highway immediately east of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. Here, the intersection of montane, foothills and grassland environments creates a diversity of habitats. More than 140 species of birds have been identified within the park. A potentially excellent location for uncommon warblers (especially during migration), it is also the closest location to Calgary where Calliope Hummingbird occurs regularly.



The best months for birding are May and June. A full day is required to cover the major habitat types; alternatively, either of the park's two campgrounds can be used as a base for visiting nearby birding localities. From Calgary a birder has the choice of two routes. The quickest and most direct is to take the Trans-Canada Highway (Hwy 1) west to the interchange with Hwy 1X, a distance of 65 km from Canada Olympic Park. Access to Bow Valley Provincial Park is from Hwy 1X and is well sign-posted.

A slower but perhaps more scenic route is to take Hwy 1A, the extension of Crowchild Trail in the northwest part of the city. In this case turn left (south) onto Hwy 1X and drive 3.3 km to the park entrance.

The Trans-Canada Highway divides the park into an eastern and a western block. All the birding locations discussed here are in the developed western block. This western block is cut in two by Hwy 1X, with the Bow River forming the park boundary to the northwest, and the Kananaskis River to the northeast. A special aspect is the variation in vegetation from one end of the park to the other.

There are extensive grasslands to the east, mixed woodlands of Aspen and White Spruce, and large areas dominated by Lodgepole Pine with small pockets of Douglas Fir and Limber Pine. Aquatic habitats are well-represented with beaver ponds, freshwater springs, small lakes and river communities.

Four hiking trails provide access to the park's major birding areas. Probably the most interesting is the Flowing Water Trail which starts from the Willow Rock Campground on the eastern side of Hwy 1X.

This area is best visited early in the morning when the birds are most active and the campers still torpid. From Hwy 1X drive through the registration area and park by the washrooms. Just north of the washrooms is a small trail that winds through the wooded area of the campground to the start of the Flowing Water Trail.

Once through the campground you arrive at the Flowing Water loop trail. Keep to the right and you will soon be walking along the banks of the Kananaskis River. Continue until an open hillside is reached. At the top of the hill look for soaring hawks, Osprey, Common Raven and occasionally, eagles. Continue along the pathway until it descends into a dense stand of Aspen Poplar.

After this area of dense woodland, one of the best beaver dams of the park and a most interesting area for birds, is reached. The willows between the trail and the highway can also be good for migrating warblers. The final part of the trail leads through an area of dense willow bush.

From the Willow Rock Campground, drive west across Hwy 1X and enter the main part of the park. Continue on this road until Middle Lake is reached. In winter the road is kept open to here. If time is limited, continue beyond Middle Lake and take the left-hand fork to the Many Springs Parking Lot.

The Many Springs area and loop trail can be very productive. The area's abundance of flowers seems to attract large numbers of hummingbirds, each tall snag sporting a territorial male. Along the far side of the lake you should find warblers. In fall this is an excellent location for migrants. Mixed feeding flocks are typical, so let the chickadees lead you to the warblers.

Finally, the Bow River Trail also offers access to good birding areas.

From Many Springs continue downhill and park at the Whitefish Picnic Area. The trail winds along the Bow River for 2.5 km through a variety of shrubby and woodland habitats. As this area is heavily used, it is best birded early in the morning or in the evening.

Although the park is well to the west of the major shorebird migration routes, interesting species can sometimes be seen along the muddy shoreline, particularly in fall. At this time too, watch for migrant warblers and sparrows.

Elk, deer and beaver are the mammals most likely to be seen within the park. Numerous uncommon or unusual flowers, especially orchids, occur within the park; the Many Springs area is a good place to look for these in June. If you visit Bow Valley in spring or early summer be sure to have plenty of insect repellent, as mosquitoes and ticks easily outnumber the birds.

Seebe Pond: Although it is outside the park boundary, another good birding location is the deep pond formed in the Bow River by the hydroelectric dam at Seebe. In early spring this is an excellent area for many species of waterfowl. In summer all six swallow species can be found at the dam; and in October and early November the deep water here is probably one of the most reliable locations for Surf Scoter in the Calgary area. In late fall, all loons at the pond and upstream of the bridge should be scrutinized carefully.

Gas and food can be obtained at Exshaw; full tourist facilities are available in the town of Canmore.