

Mille Lacs Lake

Mille Lacs Lake is the largest body of water in Aitkin County, even though less than half the lake falls in Aitkin County! A small sliver of the western shore calls Crow Wing County home with the southern remainder falling into Mille Lacs County. The lake is a magnet for migrant birds, both spring and fall. It's during the autumn that Mille Lacs Lake is the most interesting as ducks, loons, gulls and other water birds visit the lake in often staggering numbers. Two State Parks are located on Mille Lacs Lake; both are good birding and hiking areas.

Birding Mille Lacs Lake can take all day. It's best if you can time your visit to insure the sun is at your back (east shore in the AM, west shore in the PM). Access to the lake is tightly controlled. Many resorts and landings have allowed access to birders, a policy that could change at any time. Be respectful of resort guests and boaters using the landings. We begin our tour of the lake in the NE corner at Malmo going counter-clockwise around the lake. As food, gas and lodging are never more than a few miles away, we have not indicated their presence in this account.

1. Malmo. West on State Highway 18, south on 220th Street to Malmo Memorial Park and picnic area, continue along the road to the Malmo Public Access. Spring wildflowers are abundant in the woodlands along the frontage road. Scan the lake for gulls, terns, waterfowl and the woodlands for passerines. Follow 325th Ave back to Highway 18.

2. Glen-Malmo Lion's Club Marina and bridge on Malmo Bay. The Mille Lacs Meadow, a large expanse of grassland on the north side of the highway is home to Sedge Wren, Swamp and LeConte's Sparrows and Red-winged Blackbird.

3. Carlsona Beach Resort. An elevated overlook from the parking area allows fine views of the lake.

4. Reddy Creek Beach. This stretch of sandy beach near Wealthwood is home to a State Aquatic Management Area. During low water levels, the shoreline is good for a variety of migrating shorebirds. Willet, Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone have all been seen here. Gulls roost on the sand spits.

5. Barnacles Bar, Restaurant and Campground welcomes birders. View the lake from the boat landing; be sure to check out the creek and shoreline. Gulls roost on a rock breakwater at the marina entrance. Be careful not to park in the driveways of the RV campers.

6. Red Door Motel and Resort has a boat ramp and access to the lake.

7. Wealthwood Township Road 49 winds through a residential area with bird feeders, fruit trees and wooded areas, which team with birds during migration. We've recorded more than 20 species of warblers here. There are few lake views.

8. Doc's Harbor, marina and RV campground has views of the lake.

9. (A) County Road 37 travels along the shore from State Highway 18 to the North Garrison Bay public access. There are a few lake views, many houses have bird feeders and the trees along the roadway are good during migration. The boat access (B) has great views of the bay.

10. Harbor Inn Marina. Located along US Highway 169 on the north side of Garrison Bay, the marina is a good place to view the lake. A number of rare gulls have been found here in recent years. Please note, the marina is not always open to the public.

11. Garrison. A tourist information booth on the lakeside of US Highway 169 has "The world's largest Walleye" and a stone wall ringed overlook. The overlook is a good spot to scan the lake and shoreline for waterbirds. In fall, Bonaparte's Gulls and Common Loons can be found in large numbers.

12. Garrison Wayside. South of Garrison on US Highway 169. The wayside has public access to view the lake. The frontage road has continuous views of the lake as it winds back to Highway 169. The wooded hill is great for migrants in the spring and fall and Northern Saw-whet Owls have been found roosting in the pines behind the restrooms.

13. St. Alban's Bay. The bay has hosted many good birds. However, this is a very busy road and there are NO pull-offs. Extreme caution is required. Terry's Marina on the south side of the bay has limited parking for short stops to view the lake.

14. Wigwam Bay. Check out the rock pile opposite County Road 25 for shorebirds, gulls, terns, cormorants and mergansers. Mille Lacs County's first Lesser Black-backed Gull was found here.

15. Mille Lacs County Road 35 follows the lakeshore for several miles. There are many