

Republican River Wildlife Tour – Red Cloud, Republican City, Alma

Some 400 bird species regularly stop over in the state of Nebraska. The birds are here, why aren't you?

The birds are here, spring is popping, and viewing is easy. May is an ideal time to witness the annual migration of millions of birds passing through central Nebraska, the funnel, on their flight north to their nesting grounds. Live the wildlife viewer's fantasy! Walk a native prairie in the springtime, photograph wildlife from the vantage point of the historic bridges that span the recently restored Republican River, meander the many trails and habitat niches surrounding the Harlan County Reservoir.

When: April, May, June

Time: 2 day

How: self-guided

Habitat and Wildlife to See:

The Republican River Adventure offers abundant viewing opportunities for riparian, wetland, open water and prairie wildlife. See the mating rituals of the wild turkeys that stalk the prairies, orioles, lark buntings, migrating sparrows, swallows, yellow-headed blackbirds, a heron rookery, hawks, pelicans, egrets, and many more.

About the Physical Requirements & Pace:

The tour is self-guided, and you, the wildlife viewer set the pace. Wear sturdy shoes, dress in layers and bring a wind jacket, an umbrella, and a hat. Weather in Nebraska is unpredictable!

Description of the Viewing Areas:

The Willa Cather Native Prairie, Indian Creek Pond, Phil Hanson Wildlife Management Area, The Republican River Access at Red Cloud, Alma's Pheasant Ridge Walking/Biking Trail, River's Edge Nature Trail, Alma Hiking/Biking Trail, and Prairie Dog Drive

Willa Cather Native Prairie in Red Cloud

Experience 608 acres of never-been plowed native prairie. The Willa Cather Foundation is returning this land to its pre-1900 conditions, a time before overgrazing and the encroachment of man and foreign plant species. Nearly two miles of walking and hiking trails are now cut and open for the public. Nature lovers can enjoy areas of tall grass, short grass, warm season flowers, and resident wildlife. Visit www.WillaCather.org/cather-prairie for information on types of Forbes, wild flowers, prairie grasses and birds a visitor is likely to see.

Red Cloud Opera House

Visitors to the Red Cloud Opera House can gather information about the Willa Cather Prairie and acclaimed author, Willa Cather. Cather is one of the most eloquent writers about the beauty – even majesty – of the Nebraska prairie. Schedule a guided tour of the Willa Cather Native Prairie as well as learn facts about the Willa Cather Prairie for birders who choose a self-guided tour.

Harlan County Reservoir

The scenic Harlan County Reservoir covers 31,000 acres, with 13,250 acres of water surface. The reservoir is 9 miles long and has 75 miles of shoreline. The reservoir is managed by the U.S. Corp. of Engineers. The Corps maintains six established campgrounds, with the entire project open to public access. Visit www.harlanlake.com for more information. Listed as one of the top 10 tourism attractions in the state!

Republican River Wildlife Tour – Red Cloud, Republican City, Alma

ITINERARY

Day 1 – Red Cloud, NE Area

The Willa Cather Prairie Walk

Located 6 miles south of Red Cloud on Hwy 281

The following description of the prairie walk was taken from the Willa Cather Foundation website at www.willcather.org

The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie is a botanical treasure consisting of 608 acres of never-been-plowed native prairie. The Willa Cather Foundation is returning this land to its pre-1900 conditions, a time before overgrazing and the encroachment of man and foreign plant species. The area is classified as loess, mixed-grass prairie, which marks several transition points that bring together species at the southern edge of their range as well as those at the northern edge of their range. Biologists estimate the existence of 250 reliant plant species, including the rare Fremont's evening primrose and Fendler's aster---both potential candidates for "threatened" status by the Nebraska Natural Heritage Program. Also, this transitional location affects the species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians as well as invertebrates; included on this list are the rare narrow mouth toad and smooth green snake.

Indian Creek

Located 1 mile south of Red Cloud on Highway 281

Explore Indian Creek, a pond and creek on city property south of Red Cloud. Old growth trees rim the pond, and the surrounding natural landscape attracts a variety of birds and mammals. A resident kingfisher shows his stuff throughout the day and warblers, orioles and migrating sparrows may be seen foraging for food and nesting materials. Listen for owls in the evening and early morning. The pond is stocked regularly, and the fishing is excellent. Pull out your fishing rod and fish for bass, blue gill and crappie.

Republican River Access

Located 1 mile south of Red Cloud on Highway 281.

Picnic in the shade of century old cottonwood trees at the Republican River access, just south of Red Cloud. The Republican River, a sandy bottomed stream, winds west to east along the southern edge of Nebraska. Pause here and sit awhile. See migrating warblers, orioles, thrashers, mockingbirds, ovenbirds, grosbeaks and maybe a lazuli bunting.

Phil Hansen Wildlife Management Area

Located approx 4 miles east of Red Cloud on Highway 136

The Phil Hansen Wildlife Management Area on Highway 136, approximately 4 miles east of Red Cloud offers a rich and varied habitat of creek and prairie where visitors may spot lark buntings, migrating sparrows, nesting quail and turkey, as well as migrating warblers, orioles, grosbeaks, buntings and more.

Republican River Wildlife Tour – Red Cloud, Republican City, Alma

Day 2 - Scenic Highway 136, Republican City & Alma Areas

Travel the scenic Republican River Road, Nebraska's Heritage Highway 136. Pause to walk the historic bridges and natural grasslands, photograph the scenery and the birds, and see wildlife!

Prairie Dog Town

Drive south through Republican City and stop at the north end of the dam to check in with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' visitor center to see maps of the region and information about wildlife in the vicinity and interesting facts about the reservoir. Watch the antics of prairie dogs at the prairie dog town situated near the Army Corps of Engineers visitors center. Learn more about prairie dog habits and habitat at the following website: www.deltatech.com/rv/praredog.html.

Pheasant Ridge Trail in Alma

The winding, paved trail extends for three miles along the north shore of Harlan County Reservoir, through trees and parks from the picnic area and gazebo at the west end to the boat ramp.

River's Edge Nature Trail

Walk a nature trail east of the dam to see a heron rookery and explore trails on the south side of the reservoir and along the scenic Republican River. Experience a handmade corduroy road on the nature trail. Offering beautiful vistas, the trail is also a great place to see pheasants, owls, wild turkeys, migrating warblers, blue and evening grosbeaks, orioles. Other passerines and red bellied woodpeckers are flying, singing and within sighting range.

More Fun Things To Do

Red Cloud

Visit the Red Cloud Opera House to learn more about the Willa Cather Prairie and see early photos of the region and dabble in the lore and the collections surrounding Willa Cather.

Visit the Starke Round Barn, pasture and creek, located 5 miles east of Red Cloud on Highway 136. The Starke Barn is the state's largest and one of the largest in the nation. This extraordinary barn was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in April 1972. The Starke Barn was built in 1902-1903 by the four Starke Brothers, Conrad, Ernest, Bill and Chris, who came to Nebraska from Milwaukee. The massive structure measures 130 feet in diameter. The center silo has a diameter of 28 feet and a height of 65 feet. The barn itself is three stories tall, the bottom level for animals, the second for machinery and the third (or loft) for hay. The construction method combines balloon framing and heavy timber supports. The massive 12X12 timbers are held together by balanced tensions and stress rather than by nails or pegs.

Alma

Photographers: Before sunset, drive across the dam, turn right at first opportunity and find yourself at a high point on the south side of the dam, focus your camera and prepare to photograph the shimmering, jewel tones of a Nebraska sunset.

Sip fragrant coffees at Joe Camera's Coffee in Alma. Talk photography with Jo, see professional photographs of the region and wildlife.

Swim, boat, fish, play golf, listen to stories about life in Harlan County and fishing at Tall Tales in Republican City

Drive the back roads to see pheasants, turkeys, deer, fox, coyotes, raccoons, possums, return to a favorite niche and set up your camera, watch another splendid Nebraska sunset.

For more information, visit www.ChickenDanceTrail.com