



Eagle-Watching in Pennsylvania

Conneaut Marsh, Geneva Marsh, SGL 213, Crawford County



Jake Dingel/PGC Photo

Conneaut Marsh, Geneva Marsh, SGL 213 Snapshot

Facilities: No facilities.

Driving Directions: From Interstate 79, take Exit 141 and follow Route 285 west. Continue on Rt. 285 a short distance to Route 19 North (Perry Highway) on the right. Route 19 crosses the marsh. At the north end of the bridge, pull over to a parking area on the left.

Viewing Directions: Route 19 spans the marsh. Just beyond the north end of the bridge, pull over to a parking area on the west side of the road. Looking southwest toward Route 285, an eagle's nest sits on the hillside and is visible in winter and spring with binoculars or a spotting scope.

Property Hours: Sunrise to sunset.

Best Eagle Viewing Season: Late winter and spring before trees leaf-out, but eagles can be found in all seasons.

Activities at the site: Waterfowl hunting, birding, canoeing/kayaking and fishing.

Other Wildlife: Wetland birds, waterfowl, raptors, numerous threatened and endangered species.

Where to go, what to look for

Interstate 79 and Route 19 cross the lower third of Conneaut Marsh. The panoramic views from the highway bridges reveal only a glimpse of this great marsh. From its Conneaut Lake headwaters, the marsh stretches more than 12 miles before reaching French Creek. Its width averages a half mile, but in places expands to more than a mile. More than 5,500 acres of the mixed wetland habitats are preserved as State Game Land 213.



Hal Korber/PGC Photo

This extensive wetland is extremely valuable to many breeding and migrating birds and is designated as Site 7 on [Pennsylvania's Important Bird Area \(IBA\) list](#). It actually comprises several kinds of wetlands, including emergent marsh, open water, and wooded swamps. The mix of these kinds of wetlands make it especially valuable to a wide diversity of bird species and offers many kinds of foraging and nesting opportunities for birds. Numerous bird species of special conservation concern nest in the wetlands or utilize the site during migration. It not only is important as a nesting habitat, but also as a stopover for migrants seeking wetlands. Several rare plant and animal species occur here as well. One of the most important features of the wetland is the open water between dense vegetation. Active management is required occasionally to maintain this open-water space.

Bald eagles have nested consistently in Conneaut Marsh and as recently as 2003, four pairs nested here. On average, about eight eagles hunt the marsh through winter. For this large bird of prey, the marsh provides an abundant supply of fish and other quarry, protected space and suitable trees for roosting and nesting.

One eagle nest is visible from the parking area on the north end of the bridge along Route 19. Looking southwest across the marsh, a nest can be seen on the distant hillside when trees are bare during winter and early spring. By mid-May, foliage conceals the nest. This lot provides a broad view of the marsh. Eagles roost on the snags of standing dead trees out in the marsh and they are often seen soaring above or flying low to scan the open marsh. A boat launch north of Geneva, near the intersection of Watson Run Road and Geneva Road, offers a wide view of the middle marsh.

Another launch with good visibility is about a mile east of Geneva, off of Route 285. This also is a likely spot to find eagles. A few miles further east, Route 285 reaches the town of Custards. Mercer Pike intersects Route 285 and travels north crossing the lower marsh. Mercer Pike and the second parking area provide good observation points for eagles and many other birds.



Bald Eagle

Thomas G. Barnes Photo

Lesser Scaup



Joe Kosack/PGC Photo

This lower section of the marsh narrows with a mix of open pools fringed with duckweed, emergent marsh with stands of cattails and spatterdock, and forest swamp at its edges. During migration, both species of scaup, bufflehead, common goldeneye, ruddy ducks and canvasback, may be spotted on the main channel of open water. Dabbling ducks, such as the northern shoveler, green-winged teal, gadwall, northern pintail, American wigeon, and blue-winged teal, feed in the cover of the cattails, bulrushes, reeds and grassy hummocks. The ubiquitous mallard is fairly common as a nesting bird, but a few blue-winged teals can be found here, too. Red-winged blackbirds, common yellowthroats, and swamp sparrows are common songbirds of the marsh. The loud gurgling song of the marsh wren can be heard in many parts of the marsh where it can be locally abundant here despite its spotty distribution across the state. The eastern kingbird and yellow warbler are among the more conspicuous birds that can be found along the marsh edge. In dead trees, there are a few places where the rare, but audaciously plumaged, red-headed woodpecker nests.

Common Loon



Jake Dingel/PGC Photo

Toward the middle of the marsh, the wetland gets thick with shrubby plants. Green herons, Wilson's snipe, belted kingfishers, American coot, and common moorhens are attracted to the small openings of open water. Smaller birds, such as willow flycatchers tree swallows, yellow warblers, common yellowthroats, and swamp sparrows, also are found here. The middle marsh widens with open water winding through water lilies, pickerelweed, smartweed, cattails and spatterdock. Many ducks feed and hide throughout the emergent plants of the middle marsh. This also is a good section to find the marsh wren and other interesting birds such as the American bittern, least bittern, pied-billed grebe, Virginia rail, sora, and common moorhen, all of which nest at Conneaut Marsh. The very rare black tern has nested here in past years and hopefully will nest here regularly again. During migration, great egrets and great blue herons are conspicuous visitors in the marsh. Migration also brings common loons, Canada geese, American black ducks, tundra swans, and gulls to the open water.

Rusty Blackbird



Jake Dingel/PGC Photo

The upper marsh, from Browns Hill Road up to the outlet at Conneaut Lake, changes to forest swamp. It is possible to see prothonotary warblers nesting here. This cavity nesting warbler builds a cup nest of twigs, leaves and moss in a cavity of a standing dead tree, stump, or nest box. It is common to see or hear wood ducks, vireos, wood thrushes, pileated woodpeckers and barred owls in this wooded swamp. In migration, this and other larger wetlands are important stopover locations for the rusty blackbird, a [U.S. WatchList Bird of Greatest Conservation Concern](#) strongly associated with wetlands. The rusty blackbird migrates from the boreal forests to the swamps of the Southeast, where most spend the winter.

The best way to spot eagles and other birds of Conneaut Marsh is by launching a canoe or kayak at one of the boat launches and paddling the main channel and the open water woven throughout. This marsh also is the kingdom of mink and muskrat and many other swamp creatures.

For additional information, contact:

Pennsylvania Game Commission, Northwest Region, P. O. Box 31, 1509 Pittsburgh Rd., Franklin, PA 16323. Telephone: 814-432-3188

By Kathy Korber and Doug Gross
Pennsylvania Game Commission
Connecting you with wildlife!

5/19/11