



Eagle-Watching in Pennsylvania

Pine Creek Valley, Lycoming and Tioga counties



John S. Regester

A Pine Creek Valley Snapshot

Facilities: Multiple parking and access areas; limited comfort stations.

Driving Directions: From Williamsport, take Route 220 west to the Avis exit, Route 44. Follow Route 44 north through the valley to Route 414 above Jersey Mills. Watch for access area signs. There are two ways to access Pine Creek Valley From Wellsboro: take Route 660 to Route 362 to the trailhead at Ansonia. Also, from Wellsboro, take Route 287 south to Route 414, then go west to Blackwell and rail trail access.

Viewing Directions: The following parking/access areas: Clark Farm/Utceter Station Parking, Black Walnut Bottom Access, Slate Run Access and Rattlesnake Rocks Access.

Property Hours: SGLs 68, 75 and 208, sunrise to sunset; Tioga and Tiadaghton state forests, day-use areas and camping areas.

Best Eagle Viewing Season: Year-round.

Activities at the site: Hunting, fishing, birding, hiking, biking, canoeing, rafting.

Other Wildlife: Osprey, owls, raptors, songbirds, mammals.

Where to go, what to look for

Bald eagles fit perfectly into the rugged, mountainous landscape of Pine Creek Valley.

At the northern end of the valley, the creek cuts through a glacially-carved canyon to form Pine Creek Gorge. From the creek bed, the excessively steep forested walls rise sharply to 1,450 feet at the highest point. Rock outcrops crown sections of the canyon rims. Rim to rim, the impressive canyon is nearly three quarters of a mile in some places.



John S. Regester

Pine Creek Valley



Hal Korber/PGC Photo

The [Pine Creek Gorge Natural Area](#) and its surroundings are designated as an [Important Bird Area](#) (IBA) because of the unique gorge habitat and large-scale mature forest. This contiguous northern hardwood forest has substantial stands of white pine and hemlock, some of which are old-growth stands. A pair of bald eagles was nesting in the gorge near Tiadaghton when the Pennsylvania Audubon Society selected the area as number 28 on the state's IBA list. Presently, six pairs of bald eagles nest in Pine Creek Valley attesting to the area's importance to wildlife. Bald eagles can be seen throughout the valley year-round.

A pair of eagles nests at [Little Pine State Park](#), along Little Pine Creek, just north of Waterville. Eagles nest at the upper end of the park's 94-acre man-made lake. A designated eagle-viewing area opposite the nest site enables visitors to observe eagle activity during nesting season without disturbing the eagles. Binoculars or a spotting scope provide the best opportunity to watch adult eagles feeding the nestlings or the eaglets as they grow and fledge. When young eagles leave the nest at about 12 weeks old, parents continue to bring food to the young birds until they learn to hunt on their own. The eagle family usually remains near the nest area through much of summer.



John S. Register

Three eagle nests are spaced out along the stretch of Pine Creek between the villages of Cammal and Blackwell. Land topography and dense foliage conceal the nests, but several access areas along the [Pine Creek Rail Trail](#) and the trail itself provide excellent opportunities for spotting and watching eagles. Float trips down the creek also may provide views of eagles. A pair of eagles nests near the Clark Farm/Utceter Station Access and Black Walnut Bottom Access areas below Slate Run. During nesting, the adult eagles regularly fly up and down

this stretch of creek, hunting and bringing fish back to the nest. The mountainside rises steeply on the far side of the creek and the rail trail sits high, so eagles often fly past



Joe Kosack/PGC Photo

just above eye level. The eagles frequently call to each other, so listening for this high-pitched gull-like cackle is a great way to locate eagles.

The parking area at the Slate Run Bridge also is a good place to spot eagles. The creek widens here offering a broad view above and below the bridge. There are several fishing holes in this section where Slate Run and Little Slate Run join Pine Creek.

Another nest near the village of Cedar Run keeps eagles in this area through most of spring and summer. There is no trail parking access area here, but eagles spend a good bit of time on the mountainside opposite town or flying to and from the nest. Beach Road in town runs parallel with the creek and affords a creek-front view.



There is another eagle nest between Cedar Run and Blackwell along a very rugged and inaccessible stretch of the creek. Bicycling or hiking south from [Rattlesnake Rock Access Area](#) offers the best chance at discovering eagle activity here. The remoteness of these eagle nests helps ensure their protection from human intrusion.

In addition to the nest in the gorge near Tiadaghton, bald eagles nest on forestland near the Darling Run Access, which is at the northern end of the valley. Please keep a safe distance from all of these nests and keep your voice down so you do not disturb the eagles or interfere with their feeding activities. Eagles can be flushed from their nest, exposing the their eggs or young to cold, wet weather and predators.

Pine Creek Valley



Hal Korber / PGC Photo

Adult and young eagles disperse in late summer, but some remain in the area and other eagles move through the valley during fall migration. Several eagles winter in Pine Creek Valley as long as portions of the creek remain unfrozen. Wintering eagles routinely hunt productive fishing holes. They may perch on a particular branch overlooking a fishing hole at about the same time each day for weeks at a time. Crows often mob eagles at these sites, so locating the raucous clamoring of a flock of crows could reveal an eagle.

In addition to eagles, ospreys utilize Pine Creek and its tributaries throughout much of the year, but are most easily seen during their spring and fall migration. The clean waters of Pine Creek also provide great habitat for belted kingfishers, common mergansers and wood ducks that nest along the creek. Cedar waxwings, yellow warblers and tree swallows are common in the open sycamore bottomlands. In spring and summer, Louisiana waterthrush fly along the rocky streams and perch on rocks and logs, bobbing up and down as they forage for aquatic insects. They arrive in the valley just when trout season begins.

Pine Creek's numerous tributaries rush through narrow ravines and hollows often cascading over moss-covered rocks and layered grottos. This is a great place to **get acquainted with the 'big forest' birds of the Commonwealth.** The forest surrounding these streams hold large populations of many of our forest interior species, such as the wood thrush, black-throated green warbler, ovenbird and scarlet tanager. Familiar forest birds such as the pileated woodpecker, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, and brown creeper are



Scarlet Tanager

Jake Dingel / PGC Photo

Blue-Headed Vireo



Jake Dingel/PGC Photo

common in the creek valley. Not only are there eagles and vultures, but broad-winged hawks and a very few northern goshawks can be found here. The deep croaking of common ravens can accompany the canyon visitor all day either by flight overhead or from rimrock cliffs above. Overhead, it is not unusual to see common nighthawks in flight over the canyon swooping for flying insects. These relatives of whip-poor-wills are regular in migration, especially in August, and may nest in the canyon in small numbers.

The hemlock and pine stands are especially good for finding breeding birds. There, you can find the red-breasted nuthatch, golden-crowned kinglet, blue-headed vireo, magnolia warbler, pine warbler, Black-burnian warbler, yellow-rumped warbler and many others. Where there is a healthy understory, black-throated blue warblers and Canada warblers can be found. The great songster, the hermit thrush, is fairly common in these woods, but thrushes are not the only great songsters of the canyon. The warbling of the purple finch is another delight of the north woods that can be heard here. Winter wrens sing their miraculously loud and complex bubbly song in the glens of tributary streams. In these woods, **dark-eyed juncos are not a "feeder bird," but a common songbird.** Of course, this is just the place to encounter the state's upland game birds, wild turkeys and ruffed grouse, along the trails. The bogs and swamps in the highlands are places where you can find the rare nesting species like the Nashville warbler, northern waterthrush, and white-throated sparrow. The deep woods are home to big, hooting barred owls and the diminutive saw-whet owls. In winter, small flocks of red crossbills and evening grosbeaks may show up in the valley and surrounding mountains. Occasionally, the conifers attract red crossbills in spring and summer when they may nest. It is common to see white-tailed deer, gray foxes and black bears in the forest here. River otter and mink



Saw-Whet Owl

Joe Kosack/PGC Photo

Pine Creek Vista



Hal Korber / PGC Photo

thrive on Pine Creek's fish and aquatic invertebrates. Both animals den along the banks of the creek. Timber rattlesnakes can be found along the trails in the canyon, so visitors should be careful where they walk.

For additional information, contact:

Pennsylvania Game Commission, Northcentral Region, 1566 South 44 Highway, P.O. Box 5038, Jersey Shore, PA 17740. Telephone: 570-398-4744.

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, Forest District 12, 423 East Central Ave., S. Williamsport, PA 17702. Telephone: 570-327-3450.

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, Forest District 16, One Nessmuk Lane, Wellsboro, PA 16901. Telephone: 570-724-2868.

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

7/13/11