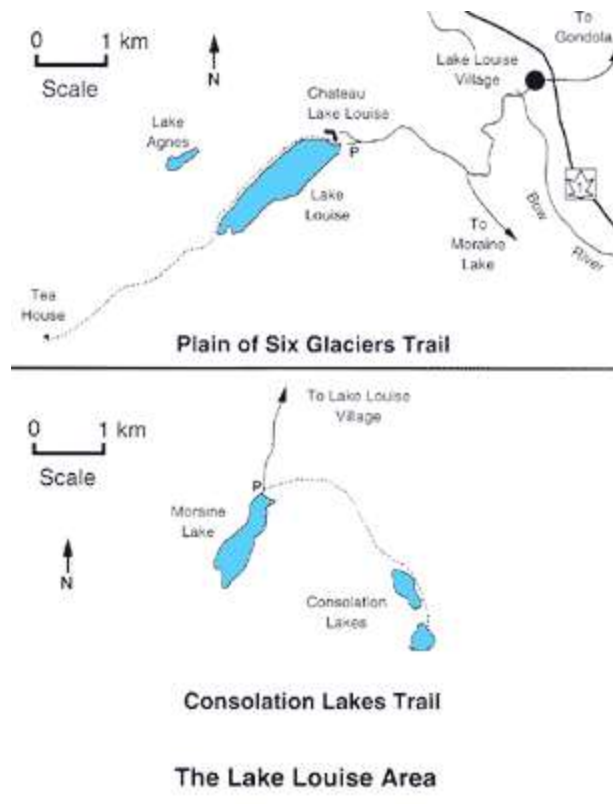


The Lake Louise & Moraine Lake Area by William J.F. Wilson (1993)

The big attraction of the Lake Louise area is the magnificent scenery. You will probably not be inundated with birds. However, there are certainly interesting birds to be found, and this article describes two easily-accessible (and very scenic) half day bird walks. There are many other trails in the same area, and a map is available from the park information service.



Drive to the Lake Louise exit on Hwy 1 in Banff National Park, about 170 km west of Calgary (2 hours driving time, non-stop). Follow the directional signs through Lake Louise Village to Lake Louise itself, 5 or 6 km from the exit. Birds to watch for while driving between Banff and Lake Louise are Harlequin Duck (summer) and American Dipper along the Bow River (dippers are often seen in winter, bobbing at the edge of the ice along open stretches of the river in the last 10 or 15 km before the Lake Louise exit), and perhaps a Steller's Jay (very uncommon).

Lake Louise: Plain of Six Glaciers Trail

This trail begins in front of Chateau Lake Louise. The first two and a half kilometres are flat and easy walking along the shore to a point slightly beyond the end of the lake, providing access to birds of the subalpine forest. Most, if not all, bird species to be expected can be found along this stretch. The next 3 km are moderately steep through glacial moraine, ending at the Plain of Six Glaciers Teahouse and spectacular views of Mt. Victoria and surroundings. Sturdy footwear is recommended for this second section. The non-stop walking time from the Chateau to the end of the lake and back is about an hour to an hour and a half, but it is best to allow 3 hours or more to give adequate time for birding. Add another 3 hours to this if you wish to continue to the teahouse.

Birding is best during June and early July, when the snow has melted along the lake and the breeding birds are singing. However, many of the species are still around (but quieter) later in the summer, and some, such as Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Steller's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Common Raven and Mountain Chickadee, can stay all winter. The best time of day is early to mid-morning, before the crowds build up.

Birds to be seen around the parking lot and hotel buildings include Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, American Crow, Common Raven, American Robin and sometimes, Varied Thrush (check the lawns around the Chateau). A colony of Cliff Swallows nests on the Chateau. Violet-green and Barn Swallows used to nest there as well, but the recent renovations to the Chateau seem to have eliminated them; perhaps they will return. Along the lakeshore, watch for Fox Sparrow near the canoe dock and buildings.

Just past the Chateau, there is a trail junction marked by a post with directional signs. Follow the left-hand branch (the trail to the Plain of Six Glaciers Teahouse) for 2 km along the shore to the end of the lake. Birds to be expected on a morning's walk through the forest along this stretch during the breeding season include Mountain Chickadee; Red-breasted Nuthatch; Winter Wren (listen for a long, bubbly song alternating between two pitches); both kinglets; Varied Thrush (a single drawn-out note, reminiscent of a telephone ringing, repeated on different pitches); Yellow-rumped Warbler; Townsend's Warbler (usually high in the trees; listen for a thin, relatively high-pitched song: se-se-se-SEE-see); and Pine Siskin.

Shortly before the end of the lake there is a brushy slope swept almost clear of trees by winter avalanches (no danger in summer). At this point the habitat changes from deep to open forest, gravel flats and cliffs. The trail runs up a small hill, then descends back to the lake level for a while before starting the ascent to the teahouse. Birds to listen and watch for along this section include Sharp-shinned Hawk (occasionally, near the cliffs); Olive-sided Flycatcher (quick-three-beers); Western Flycatcher (in the trees near the cliffs; soft, whistled song, "whee-weet", reminiscent of someone whistling for a dog); Winter Wren; Wilson's Warbler (usually in the shrubs near the water; often near the canoe dock); and Fox Sparrow (in the trees on or near the avalanche slope; listen for a loud song with slurred notes). As you climb higher towards the Teahouse you should also add Hermit Thrush.

Mammals to watch for on the hike are Least Chipmunk (striped, including the face); Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (like an overgrown chipmunk, but lacks stripes on the face); Columbian Ground Squirrel (no stripes at all); Porcupine; Pika (in rockpiles; smaller than a ground squirrel; no tail); Hoary

Marmot (also in rockpiles; size of a large housecat; bushy tail) and, possibly, Mountain Goat high up on the slopes.

Meals can be obtained at Chateau Lake Louise and snacks are available at the Teahouse during the summer tourist season. There are good washrooms at the parking lot, and outhouses at the Teahouse. Full tourist services are available in Lake Louise Village.

Moraine Lake: Consolation Lakes Trail

Follow the route description to Lake Louise, but about a kilometre before Lake Louise itself turn left at the directional sign for Moraine Lake. Drive 11 km to the parking lot at the end of this road. In summer arrive early to avoid the crowds. The road to Moraine Lake is closed October through May.

The Consolation Lakes Trail starts from the large rockpile at the lefthand end of Moraine Lake (as seen from the parking lot). The trail runs through subalpine forest for about 3 km, mostly uphill but not steep, then opens out into rocks, open slopes and nice views at the first lake. The trail is good, but there is rock-hopping for the last hundred metres to the shore of the lake; good footwear is recommended. Allow half a day.

A walk in early August produced the following birds in the open forest and small meadows in the last half kilometre before the first lake: Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, both kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Fox Sparrow, White-winged Crossbill and Pine Siskin; and, on the rocks and along the stream where the trail reaches the first lake: Spotted Sandpiper, a migrating Solitary Sandpiper, Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, half a dozen Townsend's Solitaires hawking insects from the rocks, Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco and Pine Siskin. Varied Thrush and Pine Grosbeak have also been reported along the trail.

There are no facilities at the lakes. Pit toilets are available at the Moraine Lake parking lot.