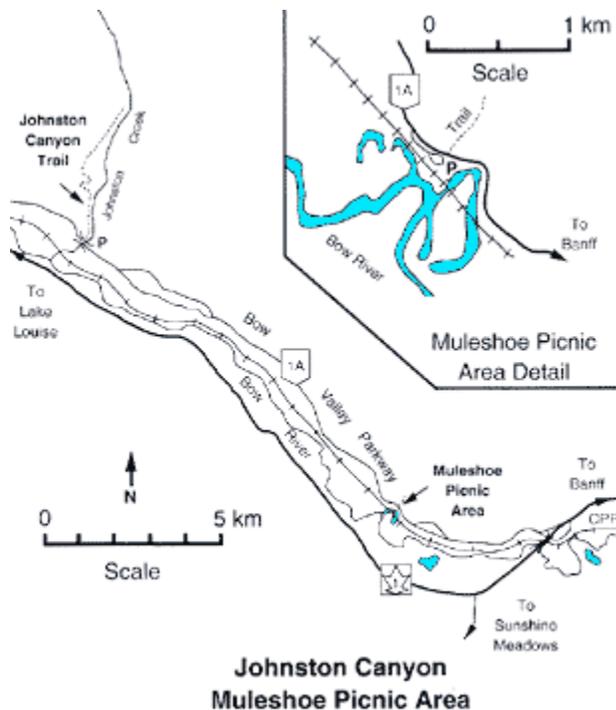


Muleshoe Picnic Area by Andrew Slater (1993)

UPDATE: Although the area was subject to an intense fire during a controlled burn in the early 1990s it is still excellent for the Hammond's flycatcher.



To reach this location, drive west on the Trans-Canada Highway (Hwy 1) for about 5.5 km from the Banff Townsite/Mt. Norquay interchange and exit to the right onto Hwy 1A (the Bow Valley Parkway). Follow this road west for a further 5.5 km to a large parking area on the left side of the road, well-marked "Muleshoe Picnic Area". There are washrooms and several picnic tables on a small hill overlooking Muleshoe Lake, an oxbow cut-off of the Bow River. The vegetation between the road and the lake and river consists of a mixture of poplar, spruce and shrubbery. On the other (north) side of the road the

slopes of Mt. Cory ascend steeply, the aspens soon thin out and large patches of open alpine meadow appear between the stands of conifer.

The main birding interest at the Muleshoe Picnic Area is the reliability of finding Hammond's Flycatcher. This species occurs in aspens on the steep slopes above the road and on the edges of the alpine meadows. It is often not necessary to climb very far, since they may occur within a couple of hundred metres of the road. However, if you cannot find one that low down walk up the slope until the song is heard. June and the first few days of July is the season when they sing most consistently, but they are present until mid-August and usually perch in fairly prominent places. The only other Empidonax that is known to occur in the vicinity is Willow Flycatcher which might be found near the lake, but which has a completely different song.

Another bird of the mountain slopes is the Blue Grouse which may be heard hooting from mid-April to mid-June. The sound is actually a low, echoing series of "AROOMPH AROOMPH AROOMPH" sounds, a bit like a distant foghorn blowing short blasts. There is a definite ventriloquial quality to the call and it may be quite difficult to track down the displaying male bird. With

persistence he should be found eventually, hooting from a conifer, a log or even from the ground.

Other birds that may be found on the steep slopes are: Spruce Grouse (very tame but hard to find), Pileated Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Common Raven, Mountain Chickadee, Boreal Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, both kinglets, Townsend's Solitaire, Hermit Thrush, Varied Thrush, Townsend's Warbler, Fox Sparrow (near timberline), and White-winged Crossbill. Around Muleshoe Lake a broader range of birds is to be expected, including Violet-green Swallow, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat and Wilson's Warbler.

Muleshoe Picnic Area is situated midway between Fenland Trail and Johnston Canyon and may be visited in combination with either or both of these locations.