

## **Bird Walk on the North Creek Trail in Mill Creek**

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By Douglas Resnick

We met on a cool autumn morning at McCollum Park, in particular, at the temporary bus stop at the park's park-and-ride. It was cool enough to put dew on our windshields and float a bit of mist over the playfield. A short walk took us into Mill Creek and onto the North Creek Trail.

The trail runs south, keeping some distance from the creek itself, at least as drawn in Google Maps, but approaching the creek more and more closely the farther it goes from McCollum Park. For much of the way, there are trees and bushes beside the trail, and in various places one can view wetlands, ponds, and tributaries associated with the creek. Meeting a practical need, restrooms can be found minutes from the trail, at Mill Creek Sports Park and at City Hall South.

Individuals of several bird species kept us company along most of the walk, most often only heard. These included Black-capped Chickadees, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Song Sparrows, and Spotted Towhees. Occasionally, we'd encounter a burst of activity, which gave us opportunities to see these birds. Less often, we heard Pacific Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Red-winged Blackbird.

There were also a couple of real surprises. At one point, several of us heard geese. We looked around us and finally spotted a mixed flock of Snow Geese and Cackling Geese flying south, overhead. Much later on, we spotted an even larger flock flying north, this time exclusively of Cackling Geese. In the ponds, we were lucky to find several Wood Ducks and one Green Heron calmly foraging. In a livelier encounter, we observed six American Crows in the sky, harassing a Red-tailed Hawk.

The terminus of our walk was North Creek Park, just outside of city limits. By the time we reached this park, the temperature had risen considerably, as if in a resurgence of summer. The northernmost part of the park yielded a number of additional observations, including Belted Kingfisher, Canada Goose, and Killdeer. The goose flock also included some Cackling Geese, which made it easy to contrast the two species.

The walk ended around noon. We had walked about 4 miles and reported observations of 39 species. Several of the birders stayed together a while longer, having lunch at Mon Amie Bakery. We returned to our vehicles at McCollum Park by boarding a bus on Community Transit's Swift Green Line.