



Access Considerations for Birding Locations for holding Accessible Bird Outings or completing Birdability Site Reviews

This document is designed to help you decide if a particular birding trail or other location might be a good place to hold an accessible bird outing, or to help you complete a Birdability Site Review to populate the Birdability Map. What is accessible for one user may not be accessible for another. The internet or hear-say cannot serve as reliable sources of a location's accessibility; in-person visits must authenticate the site's accessibility.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (1991) sets clear guidelines for the built environment to improve access for people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act Standards are enforceable by law and apply to newly constructed commercial, and state and local government facilities. They are incredibly important, but they do not cover everything. Just because a facility is "ADA approved" does not mean that everyone with a disability will be able to access it. The ADA Standards should be considered the minimum – a great start, but there is a lot more to it!

The list below has been compiled based on the experiences of Virginia Rose, Birdability founder and wheelchair user, with additional recommendations by Freya McGregor, Occupational Therapist. We do not claim that it covers every user, but it certainly covers most.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that no one can predict what an individual with an accessibility challenge can or cannot do. Often, the mobility-challenged birder won't know either until she or he gives it a try. As Virginia says, "You won't know until you go!"

Parking

- Is it on a slope, paved or filled with potholes?
- Are there handicapped parking places for vans? These are not the 'regular' handicapped parking spaces, but those with 8 feet (2.5m) of side space (often 'hashed out' with painted diagonal lines.) These spaces can be vital for wheelchair users.
 - If there are no van spots on the morning of your bird outing, park across two spaces and use a cone (with a wheelchair sticker on it) to block the area next to the ramp space to 'save' it.

Bathrooms

- Is there a bathroom? Many people with disabilities may need to use one more often than those without disabilities.
- Are the doors into the bathroom and into a stall manageable?

- The door is not too heavy or awkward to push or pull, and there is ample room to get in and out of the door.
- The space in a doorway should be 32 inches (80cm). Note that not all wheelchairs require that width.
- Thresholds can be problematic, particularly if slanting or in a doorway.
- Stall size: 60 inches by 60 inches (1.5m by 1.5m) is ideal, but not all wheelchairs require that much room.
- Toilet height: approximately 18-20 inches (45-50cm).
- A hook that can be reached from a seated position inside the stall, on which to hang coats, binoculars, hats, etc.
- Sink: often difficult for wheelchair users. If seated, could you reach the faucets?
- Faucets: ideally have a long bar/handle that can be 'swiped at' with the back of your hand.
 - Many people cannot manage faucets requiring two hands at once.
 - Faucets that have small side 'wings' can be difficult or impossible to use.
 - Faucets that are stiff or hard to turn can be inaccessible.
- Hand dryers or towels within reach of a seated person.
- Mirrors can be seen from a seated position.

Trail

- What is the distance of the trail? Is it a loop, out-and-back, or 'lollipop'?
 - Some people need shorter trails, e.g. 0.5 – 2 miles (0.8 – 3km).
 - Others like Virginia Rose, who has been a wheelchair user for over 40 years and has no other health concerns, may want longer trails so they can keep on birding!
- Zero steps. So many walking people say, "There's only one small step." While one small step may be manageable for a manual wheelchair user, that may be only with assistance from a walking person, and so is not ideal.
- Are the surfaces manageable?
 - Concrete and asphalt are preferred.
 - Hard-packed dirt paths work wonderfully, until it rains.
 - Crushed granite paths are okay, depending on how hard packed they are.
 - Gravel, sand, thick grass, roots, rocks, or ill-placed bollards can block access.
- Is the slope of the trail manageable? Are there any unmanageable sections?
 - Minimum slope (or gradient) is 1:12 for ramps or 1:20 for trails. "1:20" means that for every 1 inch of vertical rise, the trail must travel 20 inches horizontally.
 - These slopes are ideal, but rare. Many people with mobility challenges often encounter difficult slopes and can manage. However, people who may be new to using a wheelchair or who have a medical condition that causes fatigue, for example, may not be able to manage difficult slopes independently.

- Is there ample shade along the trail?
 - Apart from the risk of skin cancer, most people like the choice of shade! Many people with conditions like lupus or multiple sclerosis should avoid full sun; it can have negative impacts to their overall wellness later that day or following days.
 - During the warmest part of the year, is the trail shaded?
 - During the morning (when most bird outings are held) is it shaded?
 - What about during the hottest part of the day?
- Gates are manageable.
 - What kind of gate is it? Does it open like a door? If so, ADA Standards requires the width of any opening be a minimum of 32 inches (80cm); however, some wheelchairs are much narrower (Virginia's is 22 inches wide, for example).
 - Is it a horizontal bar that blocks access to cars, but one that a walking person could bend down and scoot under? Some wheelchair users can manage this, but some cannot. (Power wheelchairs, for example, cannot bend!)
 - Is it a chicane-style barrier? These are designed to prevent bicycles from passing and require walking people to take a series of quick turns to pass. Wheelchairs cannot get through these!
- Railings on boardwalks or bridges are placed to optimize, not obstruct, the eye line of a seated person. Virginia's eye line is at 3 feet (1m), so the railing needs to be below that for her to see (ideally at 2 – 2.5 feet or 0.6 – 0.7m).
- Are bird blinds manageable?
 - Entrance into the blind is wide enough (32 inches).
 - The viewing windows are low enough, starting 2 – 2.5 feet from the floor.
 - Interior benches or seats need to be movable and easy to move.
 - Interior needs to be large enough for wheelchairs to maneuver.
- Are benches available?
 - How frequently along the trail? Just at the trailhead? Every 500 feet (150m)?
 - While irrelevant to wheelchair users, people with injuries or medical conditions causing fatigue, for example, may appreciate the opportunity to 'take a load off'.
- Is the trail near or on a public transit route? Many people with disabilities, including those who are legally blind, cannot drive. How will they get to the trail?
- Is there accessible and accurate signage at the trailhead and along the trail?
 - At the minimum, does the sign have a clearly seen map with trail distances?
 - Do interpretive signs have tactile features (for touching)?
 - Is there a way to *hear* the sign? For example, a button to push that reads it aloud, or an audio guide that visitors can download to their smart phone?