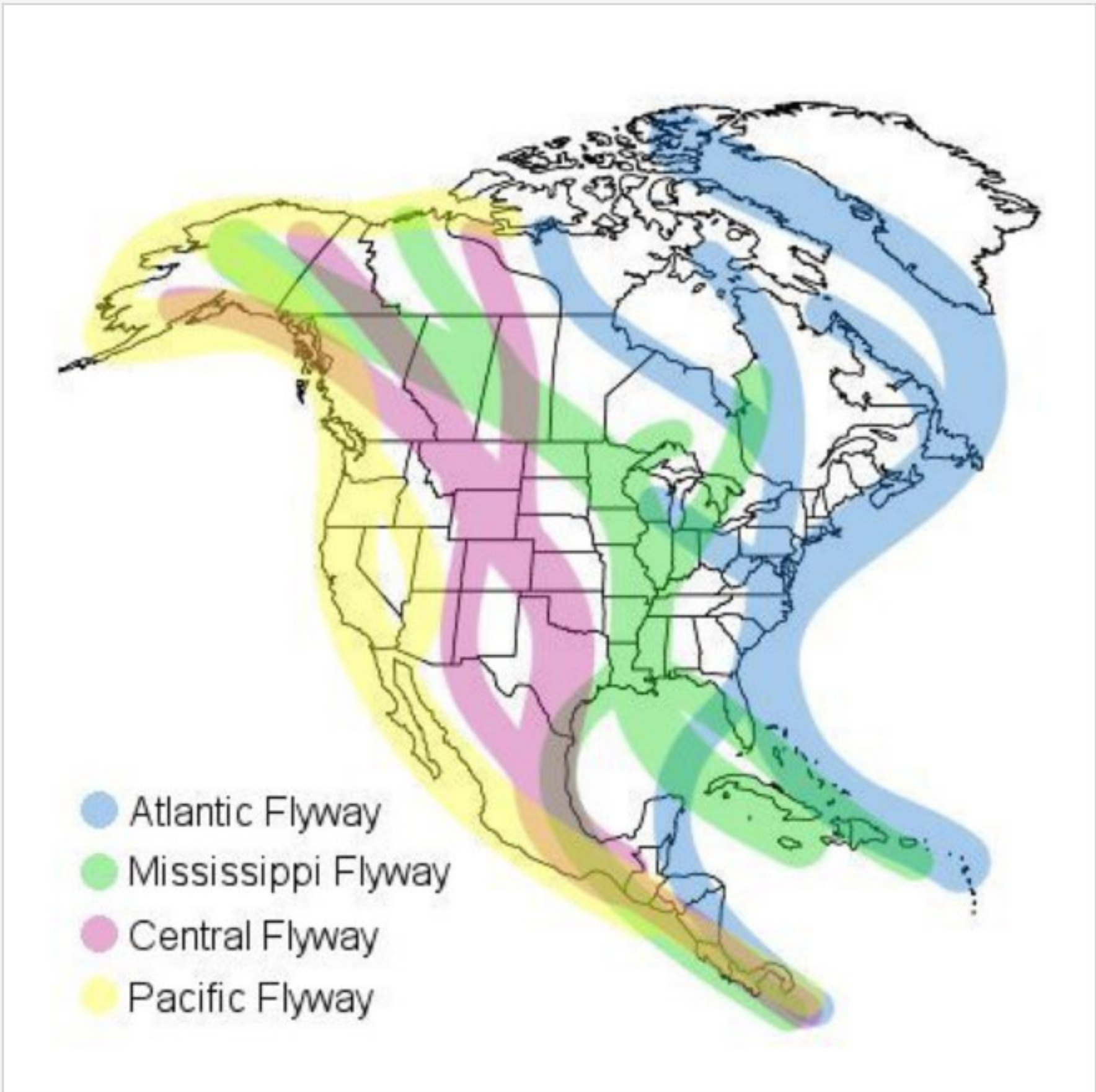


North America Migration Flyways

By [Melissa Mayntz](#)

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Major North America Migration Flyways

Melissa Mayntz

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North American Migration Flyway Routes

There are four major migration flyways in North America: the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central and Pacific Flyways.

- **Atlantic Flyway:** Stretches from the Arctic Circle down the Atlantic coast and Appalachian Mountains and into the Caribbean.
- **Mississippi Flyway:** Follows the Mackenzie River in Canada to the Mississippi River in the United States, from Canada's [boreal](#) forests to the Gulf of Mexico.
- **Central Flyway:** Leads from the Great Plains to the Gulf of Mexico, continuing down the Gulf coast to Central America.
- **Pacific Flyway:** Stretches from the Arctic Circle down the Pacific coast to Central America.

Each major route is augmented by multiple minor branches that feed into major migration corridors.

What Makes a Route Popular

Migration flyways are popular routes because they are rich regions that meet traveling birds' needs. Typically, a migration corridor features wide swaths of undeveloped habitats to serve as food sources, water sources and resting places for migrating birds. Flyways also lack significant geographic barriers that can inhibit long flights, such as steep mountain ranges or extensive deserts. Along flyways, wind currents aid easy flight.

Routes Can Vary

The exact routes of migration flyways can vary from year to year based on a variety of factors, including:

- Available food sources such as crop production and flower growth
- Depth and reliability of water sources including ponds, wetlands and rivers
- Weather patterns such as storms, droughts or floods

For individual species, flyways also vary based on predators, hunting or population growth. Irregular migrations, such as [irruptions](#) and [vagrant birds](#), can also impact exact seasonal routes between wintering grounds and breeding grounds.

Protecting Migration Flyways

Conservationists use migration flyways to study migrating birds. By knowing where major migration corridors and small routes merge, it is also possible to see where the most critical habitats are for migrating birds and to encourage strong conservation initiatives in those areas. For example, along the North America migration flyways, it is clear that Central America is critical for hundreds of thousands of migrating birds. Habitat conservation there is essential to protect migrating birds from the entire continent.

Birders tend to think of "their" local birds as protected if there are sufficient local preserves, but flyways tell a different story. For a migratory bird species to thrive, it is crucial that there be sufficient habitat all along its migration route, whether it is a songbird that travels along the Mississippi River, a shorebird that flies from the Arctic Circle to the Pacific coast or a raptor that soars along the Appalachian Mountains from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. By knowing where the migration flyways are and how to protect them, all migrating birds can have a clear path wherever they need to fly.

North American Outline Map © [WorldAtlas.com](#)

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