

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

BRADFORD FARM

591 acres Boone Co. DeLorme 38, B-1

GPS: 38.894624,-92.203596

Owned by University of Missouri

Directions: From the intersection of US 63 and Rt. AC (a.k.a. Grindstone Parkway to the west and New Haven Rd. to the east) go east 3.8 miles to Ben Williams Rd. and turn south to reach the west gate (no sign), or continue on New Haven Rd. an additional 1.1 miles to Rangeline Rd. and turn south for 1.2 miles to the main entrance on the east/west road that bisects Bradford Farm.

From the US 63 and Broadway exit, go east on Broadway (becomes Rt. W) to a right (south) turn onto Rangeline Rd. and continue to the signed main entrance on the right.

Note: The west gate may be closed after 5 p.m. on weekdays and all day on weekends, but the property is open and can be accessed via the east (main) entrance.

Officially known as the Bradford Research and Extension Center (BREC), this agricultural research farm was established via a warranty deed for 524 acres granted in 1959. The forty acres in the southwest corner were previously granted to the state as part of the “deal-sweetener” in 1839 to entice the legislature to place the state university in Boone County. These acres were sold to Mary Robnett in 1912. She, as Mary Robnett Bradford, was one of the two grantors in 1959. These 40 acres have been especially appreciated by birders who’ve seen them as a favored area for several species, among them, Short-eared Owls and even a Northern Shrike (see below).

In 1985, 71 acres were across Rangeline Rd. to the east were added and set up with plots and alleys in 1988 for research use.

Note that the “main road” referred to below is the gravel road running east/west (with a jog in the area of the building complex) between the main entrance on Rangeline Rd. and the west gate on Ben Williams Rd. Birders are welcome to use all roads and two-tracks, and to walk the grounds, *with care not to damage or disrupt research activities.*

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Bradford Farm is especially good for fall, winter and early spring birding. The 162 species checklist shows a good range possible. In most winters it is a reliable site for Short-eared Owl, usually spotted flying low, ‘like a floppy wet dish rag,’ around dusk in the west half of the area, sometimes even appearing to drive the competing harriers from the field.

Mixed goose flocks may graze; 15 species of duck have been found on the ponds. The shorebird list includes 18 species. Among them are Baird’s, Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpiper, American Golden Plover and Marbled Godwit. Green Heron is possible in

fall and early spring, especially at the west lake.

Horned Larks are resident. Recent management practices have favored Northern Bobwhite. Turkeys have wandered through. Listen carefully to the meadowlarks; Western are likely to appear between November and April.

Lapland Longspurs are regular in winter. Smith's Longspurs have been seen often, usually in the small patches of three awn (*Aristida*) grass near the south end of the two-track that goes off the main road just before the intersection with the road north to the brush pile. Most sightings have been in March, but there are also November, February and early April reports.

Raptors include resident kestrels, occasional Merlin and one Peregrine report. Northern Harriers are often seen in winter. This is a good place to seek Rough-legged Hawk. Cooper's, Sharp-shinned, Red-shouldered hawks, Bald Eagle and Osprey have been seen.

Great-tailed Grackle, Rusty and Brewer's Blackbird have gathered here, and once a Yellow-headed Blackbird joined the Red-winged flock. A fine spread of sparrows can be served up, most often in or near the brush pile near at the north end of the gravel road running north (about .4 mile) of the main road. Harris's should be looked for anytime White-crowned are present.

Sedge Wren and Le Conte's Sparrow are regular in autumn, most often found south of the main road. Henslow's have occurred.

Bradford is a place of surprises. Among the "one or two times" or "one bird reported by many observers" are a Snow Bunting one November, Sprague's Pipit in October and November, Pine Siskins in October, Winter Wren, Bell's Vireo, and a January 2014 Northern Shrike. An out of range Eurasian Tree Sparrow joined the resident House Sparrow flock in the equipment parking area for a late March-early April stint.

Features of interest to birders: The "brush pile" changes form and composition as it has been used to dispose of items as varied as pumpkins, hay bales and mattresses before the occasional fire and rebuilding. Check the nearby fencerow and trees for additional species.

The three ponds are often referred to by birders as "the west lake" (the biggest one, near the west gate, along the main road); "the east or northeast lake" (north of the farmhouse, east of the building complex), and "the northwest pond" (near the northwest corner, accessible by a two-track going west along the fence line from the brush pile).

There is a small sewage lagoon between the house and northeast lake sometimes favored by snipe.

Vemer's Ford Rd. along the south boundary can offer good views, especially of the southwest forty acres, and of the area east of Rangeline Rd.

Brushy areas, such as the shallow draw in the southwest and the small area east of the brush pile should be checked carefully.

Toilets: None

Camping: None

Hazards/Limitations: As noted above, this is an agricultural research site. Birders and other public users are welcome, but must not interfere with or harm research projects. Some of these may be flagged and obvious; other experiments underway may not be so apparent. Be very careful where you walk and drive.

The two-tracks are not maintained as regular roads. They may be very slick and/or very, very muddy. If in doubt as to the condition, walk or forego them.

Bradford Farm was once part of Two-Mile Prairie. Though now platted and plowed, it retains many prairie aspects. Among these is an unobstructed blast zone for arctic-like winds, placing it among the potentially most bone-chilling Missouri winter birding venues. Dress very warmly.

Nearby Birding Sites: Little Dixie Lake CA; University R-1 Lake (a pond) on Roosevelt Rd. and surrounding University research farms that are known as South Farm [this area is about 3 miles west of Bradford Farm]; Philips Lake; Rock Bridge Memorial State Park.