

## A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

### **BENNETT SPRING STATE PARK**

**Lester Pannell, Edge Wade: [edgew AT mchsi.com](mailto:edgew AT mchsi.com)**

**3,216 acres Laclede and Dallas Co. DeLorme 44, A-4**

**DNR owned; for information call the park office: 417-532-4338**

Directions: From Lebanon, from the junction of MO 5 and MO 64, go northwest on MO 64 for 10.4 miles to MO 64A. Turn left onto MO 64A to enter the park. If coming from the west, from the intersection of US 65 and MO 64 at the village of Louisburg, go east on MO 64 for 17 miles, then right on MO 64A to enter the park.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: In migration 16 species of warblers can be expected, as well as orioles, tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. A full spectrum of Missouri woodpeckers may be found at any time and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers pass through. A good selection of sparrows may be found migrating and wintering on site.

Features of interest to birders: An excellent mix of Ozark habitats can be found in the park. In addition to the 1.5 mile spring branch and a slice of the Niangua River, there are areas of savanna, glades, hardwood forest and old fields. Camping and picnic areas and a good trail system provide a variety of birding opportunities.

Trails include the 7.5-mile loop Natural Tunnel Trail, running south along Spring Hollow to the 15 foot-wide, S-curved, nearly 300 foot-long natural tunnel; the 2-mile Savanna Ridge Trail, beginning near the spring and curving through woods along the bluff tops; Spring Trail connecting the spring and hatchery and leading past the 5-acre Bennett Spring Hanging Fen, a calcareous seep community; Whistle Trail, beginning opposite the hatchery and following the spring stream to the Niangua River (Spring and Whistle total 1.5 miles); and Oak-Hickory, Bridge and Bluff Trails that give access to forest areas away from the stream bottoms. The overlooks on Bluff Trail provide views into the canopy as well as the grounds below.

For birding, the Natural Tunnel and Savanna Ridge Trail, and the trail on the west side of the spring (off limits to fishing), and the north end of the park along the Niangua are usually the best when the park has many visitors.

Toilets: Several restrooms are spaced throughout the park.

Camping: There are 5 campgrounds. A motel and cabins are also available, and a dining lodge is open during trout season. Check the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Missouri State Parks web page, <http://mostateparks.com/bennett.htm>, for up-dated dining, camping and lodging information.

Hazards/Limitations: This is a heavily used trout fishing park. Weekends and even week days during trout season can be very crowded. Birding conditions may be less than optimal in parts of the park due to heavy human activity. Campsites may be full. Even under these circumstances, birding can be very rewarding here because there is excellent access to a variety of habitats

Nearby Birding Sites: Bennett Spring Access, Moon Valley Access, Barclay CA, Lead Mine CA, Goose Creek CA (multiple units).