

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

LONG BRANCH STATE PARK

Edge Wade, edgewATmchsi.com spring 2015

1,828 acres MACON Co. DeLorme 23, G-H 8-9

GPS: 39.7710752626693,-92.52685546875

DNR Owned; for additional information call 660-773-5229

Directions:

From the intersection of US 63 and US 36 on the north side of Macon, go west on US 36 approximately 3 miles to the Long Branch Lake and State Park exit. After exiting, turn left onto Visitor Center Rd. The building on your right immediately before the dam is the Corps of Engineers' visitor center. Continue across the dam to the main portion of the park.

There are two disjunctive portions of the park. The Macon Area extends north along Long Branch Rd. (the road running north from the US 63 exit), and is entered by turning left just north of Jungle Street.

The Bee Trace Area is immediately south of Axtell Rd. Axtell Rd. may be entered from the west by going north along Ironwood Ave. from the park's west exit, to the junction with Rt. O, and continuing north on Rt. O, or from the east by taking Jungle St. east to US 63 and going north on US 63 to Axtell Rd.

ADA Information: The road through the main park area (including the campground) is good for birding from a vehicle. The marina area has a very large lot that allows positioning a car for a variety of views. There are no ADA accessible trails.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: This park is underbirded in spring and early autumn when migrating warblers and vireos pass through undetected.

Long Branch gets special attention in the winter because of its reputation for attracting unusual gulls. Among the thousands of ring-bills, birders sort through the Herring Gulls to identify rarities such as Iceland, Glaucous, and Lesser Black-backed. These and a seen-by-many but undocumented Great Black-backed Gull have been reported, along with a single Laughing Gull. Franklin's and Bonaparte's Gulls are expected here in season.

Many birders trekked out the marina breakwater in November and December of 2010 to see 5 Snow Buntings nestled or foraging among the rocks. This species should be looked for every winter.

Grebes, diving ducks, geese, cold weather sparrows, kinglets and creepers add to the lure of a winter visit here.

Features of interest to birders:

Long Branch Lake (reservoir) was created when the Corps of Engineers dammed the Little Chariton River in 1979. The water (and in winter, the ice shelf on it) may be viewed from several places, but not from the dam from a vehicle. Stopping a vehicle on the dam is prohibited, but pedestrians are allowed along it. A fairly good vantage point is at a pull-out just beyond the west end of the dam. From this point, birders often walk down toward the control structure for closer views of birds on the ice or floating in rafts near the dam. The marina area and the end of a road in the campground provide other lake-viewing opportunities in the main area of the park.

The boat launches in the Macon Area (east side), and in the Bee Trace Area (north end) give views of portions of the lake not visible from the main area.

The tailwaters area may be reached by a road near the west end of the dam. Ducks and shorebirds are sometimes seen here, and someday someone may find a long-awaited Rock Wren on the dam face.

The sewage lagoons to the right along the road to the campground attract ducks. The campground roads wind through light woods where turkeys and bobwhites have been found regularly.

In breeding season, both Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos may be found, especially near willows.

The restored prairie offers looks at several sparrow species, including Henslow's.

Lake View Trail (1.5 miles, compacted rock surface) leads to a point on the west side that gives views of the main lake near the dam and the marina area cove, both favorite areas of resting gulls.

Little Chariton Prairie Trail (2.7 miles, grass surface) provides easy access to the tallgrass prairie.

Feeders at the Corps of Engineers' visitor center draw a good variety, including Red-breasted Nuthatch in invasion winters, but may not have been filled.

Toilets: Vault toilets are in the campground, the tailrace area, and at the boat launches. Flush toilets are in the Corps of Engineers' visitor center (during business hours).

Camping: Open year-round, there are basic and electric sites and additional walk-in sites. See the park website for details.

Hazards/Limitations: No vehicle stopping on the dam means viewing those gulls on the ice from a little further away. One of the best places to view the lake

from a campground loop sports a “No Parking” sign. The campground can be full of activity on weekends and during deer season.

Nearby Birding Sites: Macon City Lake, Long Branch ML, Atlanta CA, Thomas Hill Reservoir, Thousand Hills SP.

LONG BRANCH STATE PARK

LEGEND

B	Beach
C	Campground
P	Parking
M	Marina
BL	Boat Launch
GS	Group Shelter
PA	Picnic Area
RR	Restroom
SUA	Special-Use Area
AFD	Accessible Fishing Dock



