

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

ST. JOE STATE PARK

Judy Bergmann and Edge Wade, summer 2014

8,242.98 acres St. Francois Co. DeLorme 49, H/J-6

GPS: 37.821961,-90.535100

DNR owned; contact (573) 431-1069 during office hours

<http://www.mostateparks.com/park/st-joe-state-park>

Directions: From I-55 at Festus, take exit #174B to merge with US 67 south toward Bonne Terre for 30 miles. Take MO 32 west toward Leadington/Park Hills and go right and onto MO 32 Bypass west for about 3.3 miles. Turn left onto Pimville Rd. into the park.

From eastbound MO 8 from Potosi, turn right (south) onto Rt. Z (a.k.a. Main St.) in Park Hills. Follow W. Main St. 1.7 miles to a right onto Flat River Dr., continuing onto Federal Mill Rd/Sports Cpmplex Rd. for .2 mile, then merge onto 32 Bypass W. Turn left onto Pimville Rd. into the park.

The St. Joe Lead Co. began using the diamond-tipped drill in 1869 and brought lead mining from small digs into the industrial age. The "Lead Belt" of southeast Missouri produced nearly 80% of the lead produced in the U.S. for 100 years. St. Joe Minerals Corporation closed operations here in 1972 and donated the land for the park in 1976. The 2,000 acres of tailings (crushed limestone) designated for ORV use are crisscrossed by a trail system; the remaining 75% of the park provides a variety of habitats of accessible, potentially very good birding

When to Visit/Species to Expect: St. Joe State Park has several long trails, which are much under-birded. DNR sources are not consistent as to the trail lengths. The main trail (officially called the Paved Bicycle Trail) is a loop blazed in yellow that goes all the way around the main areas of the park. Distance around the loop varies, depending on the trailhead used. The loop can be from 11 to 14.5 miles.

The Pine Ridge Trail Loop is a 10.0 to 13 mile natural surface loop blazed in red. The Hickory Ridge Trail loop is 3.75 to 4.00 miles of natural surface blazed in green that includes portions through hardwoods and pine; white connectors can vary the route. The trailhead is at the equestrian staging area, with additional access from two points in Campground 2. Lakeview Trail is a 1.25 natural surface loop blazed in orange.

Walking along the footpaths can be very productive for those who may not want to walk a long trail. After entering Pimville Rd. from Highway 32, continue east past Harris Branch Trailhead for .6 mile to a service road on the left. This has a locked gate. Walk back along the road. The Pim Prairie restoration area can be seen through some trees on the right with mature woods on the left. This restored prairie remnant has been managed with fire for decades to encourage native species to thrive and expand across a very disturbed landscape.

Expect a variety of passerines along this service road. Warblers during migration often include Magnolia, Golden-winged, American Redstart, Black-throated Green and many more. A Black-throated Blue has been viewed here.

Continuing on Pimville Rd. eastward for .5 mile, there is a service road on the right, again with a locked gate. Park and walk back. Immediately on the right you will see a wide, brushy ravine with an old field on the left. Many birds can be seen here, often at eye level. During migration expect many warbler species, including Yellow Warbler and American Redstart, and vireo species (including Blue-headed). Several swallow species and flycatchers (E. Kingbird, Willow, E. Phoebe) hunt over the ravine or the adjoining open field. Swallows, flycatchers, Gray Catbirds, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Yellow-breasted Chats, Tanagers and others nest in the area. Listen for Northern Bobwhite.

Continuing eastward on Pimville Rd. for .5 mile turn left into the main entrance. About .5 miles on the right you will see the Pim Day Use Area. Walking along the slope above the wooded area often yields warblers, including Black-throated Green, Magnolia, and others, especially in migration, along with vireos, flycatchers, orioles, and both tanagers. The 1.5 mile Lake View Trail has a trailhead in this day use area. This loops along through a mature forest to Monsanto Lake and back to the day use area. Expect tanagers, Black-and-white Warblers, Kentucky Warblers, Wild Turkey and other forest species. Near the Monsanto Trailhead the trail leads along the lake. Watch for Spotted Sandpipers and Solitary Sandpipers during migration. Scan Monsanto Lake for waterfowl.

Leaving the Pim Day Use Area, the main road through the park comes to a "T." Straight ahead is the ORV area. The trees immediately across the ORV area can yield raptors including an occasional Merlin. Listen for a Prairie Warbler in season. To the right is Monsanto Lake (previously discussed) and the Lake View Trail. Scan the small lake on the right for Prothonotary Warblers in summer. In migration scan the tall trees leading to Monsanto Lake for warblers. Backtracking and entering the ORV Staging Area, scan Pim Lake on the left for Kingfishers or Killdeer. The trees that surround the staging area can be very fruitful. The hillside above Shelter 5 has yielded many vireos and warblers, including Golden-winged, especially during migration.

Before leaving the park, going back toward the park office, the last road on the right leads to Campground 1. Near the entrance to the campground on the left is the MDC Pim Prairie restoration project, a series of fields that are periodically burned. There is no footpath through the prairie area. Wintering sparrows can be found in abundance here. In summer Indigo Buntings nest here as do Blue Grosbeak, Yellow-breasted Chat, Gray Catbird and others.

Back on Pimville Rd., continue east 2.4 miles to the Equestrian Trail parking lot. A creek just beyond the parking lot with several old fields and mature forest adjoining can be very productive. Park and walk past the parking lot to the footpath that goes off to the left at the recycling bins. The old fields here yield Blue-winged Warblers during migration.

Yellow-breasted Chats, Prairie Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Eastern Bluebirds and others nest here. In early spring listen from the parking lot for American Woodcock. If lucky you may have an irate Woodcock buzz you as it flies across the road from an old pasture (private) and creek beyond. In season listen for Whip-poor-wills.

Features of interest to birders: Four lakes, three of which (Jo Lee, Pim, and Monsanto) can be viewed from or near roads; Apollo Lake is in the ORV area. Much of the park is in early-stage second-growth oak-hickory forest, with some of the most mature trees in or near the campgrounds. There are intermittent streams and some wetland. Blankshire Savanna can be accessed from the paved bicycle trail; Pimville Prairie from Pimville Rd.

Toilets: Flush toilets in season in campgrounds; vault toilets in day use areas, at the two beach areas, and trailheads

Camping: Two campgrounds. Campground 1 has 40 electric pull-through and 35 back-in asphalt sites and is open year-round. Campground 2 has 13 electric back-in gravel sites and 12 basic back-in gravel sites. There are hitching posts at each campsite. Five basic trailside sites are available along the paved bicycle trail.

Hazards/Limitations: Weekdays are recommended for birding. 2000 acres, largely on St. Joe mine tailings, are designated for off-road vehicle riding. The ORV Staging Area can be congested and hazardous with youngsters entering and leaving the ORV riding area. Weekdays have lighter use.

In addition, all of the foot trails and paths can be rugged with steep inclines and/or slippery loose rock. Most trails are open to equestrian traffic and can be deeply pitted by horses' hooves, especially in low-lying areas. Mountain bikes may be encountered.

Nearby Birding Sites: Hawn State Park, Farmington City Lakes (Giessing, Hager and Thomas), Leadwood Access, Mineral Area College Range and Pond, Bismarck Lake CA, Iron Mountain City Lake.