

## **A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS**

### **VAN METER STATE PARK**

**1,104.63 acres Saline Co. DeLorme 29, F-7**

**GPS: 39.257723,-93.262294**

**DNR owned; contact (660) 886-7537 during office hours**

**<http://www.mostateparks.com/park/van-meter-state-park>**

Directions: From Marshall, at the intersection of US 65 and MO 41 (Santa Fe Trail) go east for about .6 miles to the left to stay on MO 41 north (N. Miami Ave.), go 7.1 miles to a park sign, and a left (west) onto MO 122 for 1.8 miles to the park.

From US 24, east of Carrollton and west of Brunswick, take MO 41 south past Miami to a right (east) onto MO 122 into the park.

A detached section, site of the Missouri Indian Village, is on the east side of CR 427, off MO 122, north of the main entrance to the park.

Van Meter is known as an important archaeological site of the Missouri Indians, and for Missouri's American Indian Cultural Center housed in the park visitor center.

The park, in Saline County northwest of Marshall, is an island-like collage of bird-friendly habitats amid a vast "sea" of agricultural landscape. It has long been a favorite of birders, especially in spring migration. The 173-bird species checklist is a fair representation of the birdlife to be found here, and reflects bottomland and upland land features and associated habitats.

The bottomland portion of the park is often affected by major floods along the Missouri River. Mature trees in the upland part have suffered major damage in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century in wind and ice storms. The natural succession following these events has created a changing mosaic for birds to exploit and birders to explore.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: The picnic area is a favorite haunt of Red-headed Woodpeckers, and the whole park is good habitat for the full suite of Missouri woodpeckers.

The small marsh traversed by the boardwalk attracts an interesting array. The many Killdeer have been joined by Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, Sora, at least one King Rail, American and Least Bittern. It pays to be alert on the boardwalk!

Wood Thrush is a regular in the brushy area at the base of the hill toward the end of the paved loop through the picnic area. Swainson's, Gray-cheeked and Hermit Thrush are found in migration in good numbers.

Spring and fall migration bring lots of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and a good chance of

finding Brown Creepers in colder months. Thirty species of warblers have been found, some as summer residents, many as migrants. Six vireo species appear on the checklist, with Philadelphia found in May and September.

Olive-sided Flycatchers have been seen in May and September; Yellow-bellied Flycatchers come through in August and September. Black-billed Cuckoos have been found in May.

Just about anything may be seen at Van Meter. Sandhill Cranes have even visited. Be sure to check out the feeders at the visitor center for finches and maybe a Red-breasted Nuthatch or Pine Siskin in winter, and make the effort to get to as many of the habitat niches as possible.

Features of interest to birders: Bird (and birder) attracting features include the 300-acre Oumessourit Natural Area with a wetland boardwalk accessed by a trail from near the west-most picnic shelter. A nesting Bald Eagle may often be seen from the trail to the boardwalk. The natural area includes the marsh, fens, bottomland and upland forest.

The large picnic area and nearby campground in the floodplain are great for strolling/birding. The Native American features of the "Old Fort" and mounds on the upland, and the grounds around them are fine, open area birding sites with a savanna feel.

Lake Wooldridge (18 acres) and the Loess Hills Trail around it add a different dimension to birding options. Note that the paved road up the hill may be closed in winter, so call ahead if you are planning a trip in that season to determine access options.

A network of hiking trails provides access to this broad spectrum of habitats. Three trails lead from the parking area at the top of the hill. Lakeview and Loess Hills Trail lead to and around the lake; the short Missouri River Overlook Trail does just that and can be good for birds, too.

The Earthworks Trail is designed for access to and education about the archaeological features, but also allows access to forest and open land birding. The downhill end is reached from the area of the picnic shelters along the paved road. It is fairly steep along some portions.

The trail to the family cemetery is an easy walk and can produce several birds in a short stretch.

Toilets: A modern restroom is in the picnic area, near the campground; and in the visitor center when it is open.

Camping: Basic and electric sites are open year-round. The shower house is closed between October 31 and April 15.

Hazards/Limitations: The road to the upper portions of the park may be closed (gate locked) in winter. Inquire about access before you go.

Nearby Birding Sites: Grand Pass CA, Blind Pony CA, Miami Access, Swan Lake NWR, Marshall Habilitation Lake.