

## **LAKE CONTRARY**

Tom Nagel & Larry Lade, 2017

320 acres (includes lake & associated marshes & mudflats around shoreline)  
Buchanan Co.

GPS: 39.719876, -94.904397

Buchanan County owns the boat ramp, beach area, & Gasper Landing public fishing access; the rest of the shoreline is privately owned. The lake itself is considered waters of the state.

Lake Contrary is in the northern part of the Audubon Iaton/Weston River Corridor Important Bird Area. The Important Bird Areas Program (IBA) is an effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. This is an oxbow abandoned channel of the Missouri River. The site is utilized by loons and grebes, cormorants, wading birds, swans and geese, diving and dabbling ducks, gulls and terns, and a variety of shorebirds during migration and nesting season. When the lake is high, several uncommon marsh birds may be found at the west end of the lake.

**Directions:** At the intersection of U.S. Highway 59 & State Route U / Alabama Street in the southwestern part of Saint Joseph, go west on Route U / Alabama Street 1.25 miles. Route U / Alabama Street makes a sharp left at this point, where you will want to turn right on Southwest Lakefront Lane West instead. Go 0.7 miles to the Lake Contrary boat ramp and beach which will be on your left. Though the boat ramp is open year round, the gate to the adjacent beach area is closed & locked during the colder parts of the year.

Gasper Landing is small public fishing access with 3 jetties cooperatively provided by Buchanan County, the Lake Contrary Development Association, and the Missouri Department of Conservation. It is on the left side of SW Lake Front Lane West, 1.3 miles past the beach area. When the lake level is relatively high, Southwest Nelson Road, a graveled county road to the left 0.6 miles past Gasper Landing, offers views of wetlands at the west end of Lake Contrary.

The majority of the rest of the lakeshore is privately owned. Occasional vacant lots along the way offer open views to the lake. However, birders should avoid giving local property owners the wrong impression; do not look for birds out on the lake through occupied lots with houses.

**ADA Information:** The fishing jetties at Gasper landing on the north shore of the lake are accessible to the disabled. The lake is easily viewed from a vehicle at the boat ramp and beach parking lots.

**When to Visit & What to Expect:** This can be an excellent area during spring migration. Fall migration can also be good, though the lower sun angle makes viewing birds on the lake more challenging at this time of the year.

The abundance and variety of birds can vary greatly day-to-day depending on a variety of factors: activity on and around the lake, weather patterns, the lake level influenced by the level of the Missouri River immediately adjacent to the northern lake shore behind the levee (privately owned with no public access); recent rains, and how much water is being pumped into the lake by the local property owners association from an outlet near the boat ramp. Depending on whether the area is in an overall drought or wet cycle, the mix of open water, shallow water and mudflat habitat in and around the lake can also vary greatly.

Rare to uncommon species for this part of the state include Red-breasted Merganser, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Least Bittern, Osprey, Willet, Caspian Tern, Bonaparte's Gull, Marsh Wren, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Great-tailed grackle. Hundreds to sometimes over 1,000 American White Pelicans rest here during spring migration.

**Features of Interest to Birders:** The deepest part of the lake is from the boat ramp to Gasper Landing. In drought years, extensive mud flats may form in the shallower parts of the lake. When the lake level is high, best marsh viewing is on the west end of the lake.

Viewing from the boat ramp & beach area along the northeastern shore of the lake is best in the morning. Strong back and side lighting makes it more difficult in the afternoon and evening and, especially on warmer days, human activity can pick up as the day progresses. When drought cycles occur during the migration season, exposed mudflats along the shoreline offer shorebird viewing opportunities, though they can be highly variable day to day.

During wet years, emergent marsh occurs on both sides of SW Nelson Road at the west end of the lake. East of SW Nelson, the marsh is in the shallower area of the lake basin itself, while on the west side an approximately 10-acre marsh develops on private land. In drought cycles, the private land west of SW Nelson Road is farmed and the west end of the lake basin dries up.

**Toilets:** The restroom at the beach area is closed during most of the spring and fall migration, usually being open from around mid-May until around Labor Day when the beach is more heavily used. Facilities are available at convenience stores and fast food restaurants near the intersection of U.S. 59 & Rt. U / Alabama Street.

**Camping & Picnicking:** There is no camping around the lake. There is a picnic area across the road from the beach.

**Hazards/Limitations :** None. All viewing is from parking lots and roads, limiting exposure to poison ivy, ticks, etc.

**Nearby Birding Sites:** The 40 acre Kneib Conservation Area is about ¼ mile south of the west end of Lake Contrary. Bounded on the north by SW Nelson Road & on the east by SW 43rd Road, there is a small parking lot near the northeast corner of the area. There are no toilet facilities.

Muskrat Lake & Horseshoe Lake, both lakes in the abandoned Missouri River channel on private land visible from nearby public roads, are about 3 to 3 ½ miles south of Lake Contrary. Viewing is from the county road only - **please do not trespass.**

Bluffwoods Conservation Area\*, one of the larger blocks of upland forest in the Missouri River bluff line north of Kansas City, is on the east side of U.S. 59 about 5 miles south of the U.S. 59 & State Route U / Alabama Street intersection. It's an excellent area for a number of neotropical migrant forest birds that are uncommon to rare in this part of the state.

The Old Girl Scout Camp Area\* along the Northwest Parkway in north central Saint Joseph offers about 45 acres of upland oak-hickory forest. In the spring, it can produce a variety of warblers & other migrant songbirds from late April until mid-May.

Jentel Brees Access\* is on the Missouri River about 3 miles to the south southwest. During the nesting season, it sometimes produces Red-headed Woodpeckers, Blue Grosbeaks, and Bell's Vireos between the eastern boundary and the river levee ½ mile to the west.

A special thanks to Larry Lade who has birded this site for over 20 years, greatly contributed to our birding knowledge of this area, drawn the attention of many other birders to Lake Contrary, and devoted much time to taking birders from throughout Missouri around the lake for hard-to-find birds.