

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

FRANKLIN ISLAND CONSERVATION AREA

Edge Wade, edgewATmchsi.com spring 2015

1626.85 acres Howard Co. DeLorme 37, A-7

GPS: 38.986603724,-92.7210900681

MDC owned; for more information call 573-815-7900

Directions: From I-70 at Columbia, take exit #121, US 40/MO 240 toward Fayette about 16.5 miles to the area entrance sign (CR 465). Two dirt county roads, CR 444 and CR 446, off MO 240 east of the main entrance lead south through farmland to Lot C on the Franklin Island CA map.

From I-70 at Boonville, take exit #103, Rt. B into Boonville, turning left onto Main St. to stay on US 40. Continue north on US 40/MO 5/MO 87 across the Missouri River. Stay on US 40, swinging east, past where MO 5 turns north, to go about one mile to the right turn into the area at the sign on CR 465.

Lewis and Clark camped here near the mouth of Bonne Femme Creek, June 7, 1804. The area is no longer an island. A remnant channel of the Missouri River was closed off by the Corps of Engineers in 1952 as part of channelization/flood control work. MDC purchased the land in 1978. Management goals include re-establishment of bottomland forest via natural succession and native species planting on 865 acres, permanent grasses and some unharvested crops (notably sunflowers in recent years) cover the 600 acres of old field and cropland. Work continues to improve the 160 acres designated as wetland.

ADA Information: The roads through this area provide good viewing from a car along the road to the river, through low areas, from a levee bordering Bonne Femme Creek and at parking and boat launch area on the Missouri River. There are no ADA accessible trails.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: The checklist total a little above 130 as of spring 2015 is not representative of the potential for this site. Timing can be everything in birding, and this is very true of a trip to Franklin Island. A routine morning of the "usual suspects" any season may become memorable with one or two unexpected sightings.

A winter trip is likely to reap a good number of juncos and variety of sparrows (even an occasional Harris') and woodpeckers, and perhaps birds along the Missouri or Bonne Femme Creek. A Sharp-shinned Hawk may be lurking along the creek woods; watch for a Northern Harrier over the open land and Ring-billed Gulls over the river. A cold January or February day may hold a flock of Canada Geese, with the possibility of a Cackling Goose among them, or be highlighted by a flock of Trumpeter Swans. Look for Lapland Longspurs in the open fields along the entrance road.

Spring here is as rich in potential and variety as any site along the Missouri River. Waterfowl will stop if there is water in the deeper parts of the wetlands. American Woodcocks may be displaying in early morning or at dusk. Be sure to give close attention along the creek and to the large trees near the boat ramp (lot D) for migrating passerines.

Summer can be hot and humid in the Missouri River bottomland, but special encounters with birds make visits worthwhile. Summer finds here have included Black-billed Cuckoo and as many as six Mississippi Kites on one trip. Fish Crows have become increasingly common. Typical brush-loving species such as catbirds, thrashers and towhees nest here in good numbers. Orioles, tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks add splashes of color and delightful sounds to a summer visit. Listen for Northern Bobwhite. Waders include Great Blue and Green Herons and Great Egret. Red-shouldered Hawk is likely.

A good variety may be found in fall migration. Be sure to check along the river. Broad-winged Hawk may be detected in early autumn. Watch for both kinglets and Brown Creeper.

Features of interest to birders: Access into the main area is off US 40, along CR 465, a road that traverses open land, offering good possibilities of seeing American Goldfinches, Horned Larks or Lapland Longspurs in season. About .9 miles from US 40 is a lot (Lot A) on the right, followed quickly by a road on the left. Lot A is a good place to begin a good look-over of brush and mature trees.

Staying straight will take you along a brush-lined road (watch for sparrows) that ends at the boat ramp and Lot D at the Missouri River. Spend some time watching and listening here.

Take the turn to the right onto the levee as you leave the river. The levee may be walked. If you stay with the car, this small loop leads to Lot E in a brushy area. A trail leads from this lot, giving foot access to a large area not visible from a car.

The road near Lot A goes east along the closed off chute on the left, then along Bonne Femme Creek to a gate and an open area on the creek (beware of mud there). This route gives excellent views of bottomland forest, open wetlands, brush, and grasses. Drive it slowly and stay alert for surprises. A gate on the right at Lot B closes off automobiles, but allows foot traffic along the levee that goes toward Lot E.

Lot C is a small open area around a large burr oak and access to woods on the northeast side of Bonne Femme Creek, accessible from either CR 444 or 446. This area is rich in habitat variety and on any day may offer sightings not found in a search through the main section.

Toilets: None

Camping: Primitive, at lots A, C & D

Hazards/Limitations: Dirt CR 444 and 446 may be impassible due to high water and/or mud. Recent high water along Bonne Femme Creek may leave mud under an apparent dry surface at the turn-around.

Nearby Birding Sites: Diana Bend CA, Davisdale CA, University Dairy Farm Ponds #1 and #3, DC Rogers Lake, Peters Lake, Prairie Home CA, Big Muddy NFWR, Taylors Landing Access.

