

## A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

### **THOMAS HILL CONSERVATION AREA**

**11,000 acres Macon and Randolph Co. DeLorme 30, A-3, B-3**

**Owned by Associated Electric Cooperative, Inc., of Springfield, MO; multi-year lease by MDC.**

**For additional information call: 660-785-2420**

**William Goodge, updated by Edge Wade edgewATmchsi.com February 2011**

Directions: From the north, go 5.25 miles west of Macon on Hwy. 36, then 10 miles south on Rt. C to College Mound, and 2.4 miles west on Rt. T.

From the south, go west from Moberly on Hwy. 24, to Rt. C through Huntsville. Go west on Rt. F to begin birding in the southwest corner of the lake via the route described below, or continue to Gazelle at the south side of College Mound or continue to Rt. T.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: There are more than 180 species on the checklist. This area is underbirded in spring passerine migration and in summer. Several species surely present have gone unrecorded.

Late fall gulls draw birders' attention. Gulls have included Sabine's in mid to late September, a Little Gull in late October to mid November, a California Gull in mid November. Two Black-legged Kittiwakes have been seen, including the only Missouri record of an adult.

Fall migrating and wintering waterfowl can be plentiful and exciting at Thomas Hill. November records include all three scoter species, Red-throated Loon, Western and Red-Necked Grebes. A Yellow-billed Loon was seen one December. Eared Grebes have been seen in late fall and early spring.

In winter, make a point of checking the riprap around the boat ramp and fishing dock at the Rt. T campground (Parking Lot G). A lone Snow Bunting was here in November, 2004.

One Northern Shrike was reported over the grasslands off Rt. F in October. Sparrows are plentiful in fall and winter.

Features of interest to birders: The 4,950 acre reservoir is surrounded by about 4,400 acres of open and forested land. The several parking areas and boat ramps provide viewing opportunities for different portions of the lake. Viewing access by automobile has become more difficult in recent years due to closure of two campgrounds and one parking area, but short to moderate distance walks will lead to good viewing points.

The area north of the Rt. T causeway is a wildlife refuge and is often the best area for ducks in waterfowl hunting season. The easiest points to view this area are from the causeway verge (be careful, this road has regular traffic) and from the parking lot at the end of Gaslight Place on the west side of the main arm.

The warm water arm, best seen from the southwest parking lot (Lot B), remains ice-free in

winter.

Much of the land portion of the area is underbirded. Old fields, stream frontage and woodland offer some birding adventure.

Toilets: 2 at the Rt. T campground (Parking Lot G), 1 at the boat ramp (Parking Lot C) on the southeast corner of the lake on CR 1177, reached from Rt. F west of Rt. C , and one at the boat ramp on the southwest portion of the lake, accessed off Hwy. 3 on CR 1180 (Parking Lot B).

Camping: Camping is now limited to the campground at the Rt. T campground in Macon Co.

Hazards/Limitations: The public is restricted from about 2,100 acres at the south end. Viewing the dam (where the adult kittiwake was found), even at spotting scope distance, is now forbidden.

The bank at the Mac's Cove viewing vantage point continues to erode. It is severely undercut. Approach the viewing point carefully.

The water level has been raised. Extensive mudflats at the north end, as noted in previous descriptions of Thomas Hill, have not been reported for several years. Viewing positions previously reachable by foot are no longer accessible.

Viewing of deep water species from the closed primitive campground on the east side now requires a half-mile walk from a gated road.

Nearby Birding Sites: Long Branch SP, Macon City Lake