

## A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

### **HAWN STATE PARK**

**Paul Bauer and Edge Wade, fall 2014**

**4,955.66 acres Ste. Genevieve Co. DeLorme 49, H-8**

**GPS: 37.833830,-90.240900**

**DNR owned; contact (573) 883-3603 during office hours**

**<http://mostateparks.com/park/hawn-state-park>**

**Directions:** From I-55 exit #154, take Rt. O toward Ste. Genevieve for 6 miles, then right onto MO 32 west for 5.2 miles to a left onto Miller Switch Rd. for about 1/3 mile to a left (east) onto MO 144, continuing straight onto Bauer Rd. At the park office on the right, there is paved parking and a pathway to a kiosk for information if the office is closed.

Western Ste. Genevieve County, on the eastern side of the St. Francois mountains, has some of the most beautiful and rugged landscapes in the state. LaMotte sandstone features of canyons bluffs, native shortleaf pine, stands of white oak, hickory and maple, the springtime blossoms of dogwood and azalea, and the clear sand bottomed creeks combine to create a wondrous collage. We can thank Helen Coffey Hawn for her bequest of the original 1,459 acres for this park in 1952. This acreage was purchased parcel by parcel with her savings from a schoolteacher's salary.

At the bottom of the hill in the park are the camping and picnic areas where several trails begin. Across the creek from the camping area is a trail that leads to the picnic area. Beyond the creek from the picnic area is another trail that leads high along the bluff (overlooking azaleas in the spring) and recrosses the creek to meet another trail coming from the picnic area. Where these two trails meet, a "figure eight" trail of 10 miles [Bauer: Whispering Pine Trail with north and south loops meanders through a mixed hardwood and pine forest, past exposures of sandstone and granite ridges, glades, and the River Aux Vases, which runs through the south part of the park. The scenic mile-long Pickle Creek Trail traverses sandstone bluffs, granite shut-ins, and Pickle Creek, which will remind visitors of a cascading mountain stream. It continues up the creek and ends at the camping area. *See below for additional trail information.*

**When to Visit/Species to Expect:** A trip to Hawn SP any time of year will be rewarding to attentive birders. Approaching the park after leaving the interstate, watch the wires and fences for Eastern Bluebird, Loggerhead Shrike, Blue Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Dickcissel, and Lark and Grasshopper Sparrows.

The 114-species SPARKS checklist (with Wood Duck, Canada and Snow Geese the only waterfowl represented) includes 21 warbler species (and that does not show a Swainson's Warbler found in 1990 or Ceruleans which are surely present).

Pine Warblers are most easily found in the conifers around the headquarters, especially

March to mid-October. Chipping Sparrows also occur in the pines. Broad-winged Hawk, Wild Turkey and Wood Thrush nest in the park. In late April, watch for nesting Summer Tanager, and for Scarlet Tanager beginning in late April/early May. Worm-eating Warbler can be found on the hillsides, and Prairie Warbler can be found in the park glades and by driving the roads, such as Hawn Park Road, to the west of the park.

Ozark streamside birds such as Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Northern Parula, Cerulean Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush are to be expected. Whip-poor-will can be heard in late spring and early summer.

Henslow's Sparrows may be found in summer along Hwy. 144 in grasslands on the right, BUT, this is private land, an inholding. You may pull over and listen and watch for the Henslow's from the grassy road verge, but stay outside the fence.

Wintering species take advantage of the protection of the pines. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers, Winter Wrens and Hermit Thrushes are winter residents. Watch and listen for both species of kinglet.

American Tree, White-throated, Song, Fox and Swamp Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos winter here in appropriate habitats.

**Features of interest to birders:** The geologic features combine to sustain cool climate niches favorable to plants more common to climates farther north. Undoubtedly, birds familiar with more northern habitats find these areas in the park attractive as they migrate northward or come here to winter.

The park boasts three natural areas: Botkins Pine Woods (30 acres); Lamotte Sandstone Barrens (81 acres); and the 120-acre Orchid Valley Natural Area closed to the public. The barrens area might be well worth a look for glade-loving birds. Check with park staff for additional information.

There are two-tracks and non-trail-designated footpaths such as the one that leads from the campground into pines that offer access to habitat niches.

Much of the park is in the Whispering Pines Wild Area (see the Whispering Pines Trail description below.) Several miles of official trails invite exploration

*Overlook Trail* is a 300-ft. linear paved trail blazed in orange running from the picnic area between the park office and campground to a small overlook of Pickle Creek valley. It has interpretive signs describing the pine woodlands and the Lamotte Sandstone formations.

*Pickle Creek Trail* is a .70-mile linear trail blazed in green running along the shut-in creek. The trailhead is in the picnic area between the park office and campground. Users may retrace the route or follow the Whispering Pines Trail from the junction.

*Whispering Pines Trail* is a 9.75-mile figure eight trail looping through the 2,880 acre

Whispering Pine Wild Area (north loop 6 miles blazed in red; south loop 3.75 miles blazed in blue). The trailhead is at the wooden bridge beyond the parking area near the picnic area parking area. It is a favorite hikers and backpackers as it traverses bluffs and follows the banks of Pickle Creek and the River Aux Vases. It is signed counterclockwise (widdershins), and has spur trails to primitive campsites (no open fires allowed).

*White Oaks Trail* is a 3.75-mile loop signed in yellow with the trailhead on the right near the park entrance at the end of Hwy. 144. It runs through mixed hardwood and shortleaf pine forest, crossing several wet-weather creeks and offering viewpoints atop exposed sandstone rock outcrops.

**Toilets:** Restrooms in the campgrounds (water turned off in winter) and vault toilets in picnic areas.

**Camping:** The campground has electric and basic sites (and can be very full in summer and on warm weekends). Pickle Creek runs along the edge. There are many picnic tables shaded by pines, a large open shelter and a paved pathway connecting the facilities.

**Hazards/Limitations:** Much of the area is rugged, rocky and steep; watch your footing. The natural beauty of this park attracts large numbers of visitors, so try to time your visit for birding to avoid high density visitor days.

**Nearby Birding Sites:** Pickle Springs NA, Horton Farm CA, St. Joe SP, Hickory Canyons NA, Johnson's Shut-Ins SP, Washington SP.