

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

### **PRAIRIE STATE PARK**

3,942 acres Barton Co. DeLorme 50, D-1

Owned by DNR; for additional information call 417-843-6711

Website: <http://mostateparks.com/park/prairie-state-park>

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Directions: From Joplin go north about 25 miles on Hwy. 43, then left (west) onto Hwy. 160 for 2 miles. Turn right (north) onto Rt. NN. Go one mile to Central Road (gravel); turn left (west) for 3 miles. Turn right (north) onto 150th Lane and go 1.3 mile to the visitor center.

From the north (about 110 miles south of Kansas City), Go south on US 71 to the Hwy. 160 (Lamar) exit. Go west on Hwy. 160 to Rt. NN. Go right (north) on Rt. NN for 1 mile; turn right (west) onto Central Road and go 3 miles, turning right (north) onto 150th Lane. Go 1.3 miles to the visitor center.

Or, if coming from Bushwhacker Lake CA, go south on MO 43, then right (west) onto Rt. K.

About 1 mile past the town of Liberal, do not stay with Rt. K as it turns north, do turn left (south) onto NW 140 Lane for 1 mile, then left onto Rt. P for one mile, then south on NW 150th Lane into the park.

When to Visit/Species to Expect:

Le Conte's, Henslow's (more common now in the park than 20 years ago), Grasshopper, Lark, Vesper and Harris's Sparrows are among the 17 sparrow species on the 166-species SPARKS printable field checklist.

Greater Prairie-Chickens have not been reported within the park recently as Missouri's native population continues to dwindle toward extirpation.

Come in summer to enjoy Eastern and Western Kingbirds, and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers (although expanding in the state, less common here recently). Flycatchers seen here include Alder, Willow, Acadian and Least.

Autumn and winter are good times to seek raptors at Prairie SP. Merlin, Peregrine and Prairie Falcon are visitors. Rough-legged Hawks hover in winter as Northern Harriers course the prairie by day and may linger into April or even May. Harriers are often replaced by an evening or dawn shift of Short-eared Owls.

Winter also brings Loggerhead Shrikes to the park. One Northern Shrike was seen in January, 2008.

The wooded campground and picnic areas are excellent for spotting woodpeckers, grosbeaks, creepers and kinglets in season.

Features of interest to birders:

Prairie State Park is Missouri's largest prairie remnant. The prairie landscape and the suite of flora and fauna dependent on it are maintained by the active management policies and activities of DNR staff. There is concern that the overall abundance and variety of bird species is declining due to the effects of increased grazing needs of the expanding bison herd.

Four natural areas (East Drywood Creek, Regal, Hunkah and Tzi-sho) have been combined into the Regal Talgrass Prairie Natural Area. This full range of prairie natural communities, including the great diversity of grassland bird species, may be explored on foot via a 12-mile network of mowed, natural surface trails. A SAFETY NOTE: Contact visitor center staff before hiking--bison roam the park.

Let your eyes stray from the birds and look and listen for the more than 380 species of plants, more than 20 butterfly species, or the very special northern crawfish frog and prairie mole cricket.

See the Prairie SP website for detailed descriptions of the five trails listed below. All offer potentially productive birding, as well as opportunities to observe prairie plants and fauna.

NOTE: No pets are allowed on trails.

Coyote Trail (1 mile linear trail)

Gayfeather Trail (1.5 mile loop)

Path of the Sky People (1.75 mile loop)

Drover's Trail (small .25 mile loop and large 2.75 mile loop)

Sandstone Trail (4.25 mile loop)

Toilets: Flush toilets at the visitor center. A vault toilet is near the basic campground sites.

Camping: Basic, primitive campsites suitable for individuals or groups of up to 20 people are available in a wooded setting.

At the backpack camp visitors may experience sleeping under a canopy of stars on the open prairie. NOTE: NO CAMPFIRES. The backpack camp may be closed due to presence of bison. Contact parks staff at 417-843-6711 for reservations and current information.

Hazards/Limitations:

Check the MDNR web site for the visitor center schedule of open days and hours, which vary seasonally.

Check on the location of bison and elk at the visitor center before hiking. These are wild animals; do not approach them.

Campfires are prohibited at the backpack camp.

Smoking is not allowed on the trails.

Pets are not allowed on the trail.

Nearby Birding Sites: Shawnee Trails CA, Bushwhacker Lake CA, Stockton Lake SP.