

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

### **BOONE'S CROSSING UNIT, BIG MUDDY NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE REFUGE— Troy Gordon, Updated: December 28, 2007 572 acres St. Louis Co. and St. Charles Co. DeLorme 40, E-5**

#### Directions:

In Chesterfield, take the Chesterfield Airport Road to Spirit of St. Louis Blvd. Turn north. Drive over the Interstate 64/Highway 40/61 overpass to North Outer 40 Drive. Turn left, travel about 500 feet, and take the first right into the Chesterfield Athletic Complex playing fields. Drive straight ahead past the playing fields and up and over the levee. At the bottom of the levee take the road to the right which leads past the playing field parking into to the parking area for the refuge.

Via the Missouri River from the Weldon Spring Access, travel four miles downriver, pass under the Highway 40/61 bridge, and the island is about one mile further on the right. The channel around the island is usually navigable except during extremely low flows. At all times watch for submerged logs, old pilings, and debris. On the west or up river end of the channel is an old access point that has created a drop pool. As the river plunges over this old access it creates unpredictable currents and waves. Use caution when passing over this point. A good landing spot is at Mosley's Landing (see map) on the eastern (downriver) side of the island.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Anytime. Good in spring and fall for migrating songbirds. Waterfowl and shorebirds in borrow pit area during spring and fall and in winter until it freezes over. Bottomland forest interior species are present year-round on Johnson Island and to the north of the agricultural levee.

Features of interest to birders: Main bank tract (130 acres in St. Louis Co.): A one mile loop trail with a mulch surface provides access to much of the area leading north from the parking area. Follow it north from the parking area to view borrow pit area (used for construction of the Monarch levee). While these are not on the refuge unit itself, there is excellent viewing from the trail, especially with spotting scopes. This area attracts waterfowl and shorebirds.

Continue north on the trail to the agricultural levee. North of this levee are mature woods intersected by chutes and ditches which may hold water in wet weather and at higher river levels. Expect bottomland forest interior species in this area.

Alternatively, follow the trail east (right) along the levee about ? mile. The main trail turns to the right. A spur continues along the agricultural levee. You can follow this trail past the refuge boundary on City of Chesterfield land about 200 feet to have a view of the river chute. Birds in this area are highly dependent on water levels, but shorebirds and wading birds may be present.

Returning to the spur, take the trail south, then back west on the loop back to the parking lot. The woods along this trail are fairly young, but expect migrating songbirds in spring and fall. Some open areas provide old field habitat.

Johnson Island (442 acres in St. Charles Co.)

Although only accessible via the Missouri River, the woods on the island are at least 50 years old and provide good habitat for bottomland forest interior species. Sandbars and bank edges also provide shorebird habitat. Backwater areas along the chute and in the shallow area upstream from the island provide shelter from the current for migrating waterfowl in spring and fall. Eagles are usually present in winter. A swallow colony usually nests in burrows in the bank of the island on the chute (south) side about 1/3 of the length of the island down from the upstream end of the island.

Toilets: None.

Camping: Camping and unauthorized overnight use on the refuge is prohibited. Public use of sandbars below the ordinary high water mark of the Missouri River is managed by the state and camping is usually allowed.

Hazards/Limitations: Be careful exploring the area north of the agricultural levee during high river levels. The chute is too deep to wade safely at any time. Johnson Island is accessible via the Missouri River only.

Nearby Birding Sites: Busch (August A.) Mem. CA, Weldon Springs CA, Babler (Dr. Edmund A.) SP