

3M FLAT BRANCH-HINKSON CREEK WETLANDS

eBird hotspot 3M Wetlands

Lottie Bushmann, Edge Wade editor, Fall, 2020

26.2 acres, Boone Co. (Columbia). DeLorme 37, 10-B

GPS: 38.9277012,-92.3628838,17

Owned by City of Columbia; for more information call Columbia Parks & Recreation Office 573-874-7460

Site history: In 1998, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources placed Hinkson Creek on the list of impaired waters for “unspecified pollutants” due to urban runoff. Columbia was forced to address a long-standing problem and began looking at options. In 2009, the City of Columbia Parks and Recreation Department took the idea of a wetland restoration project to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife. By 2010, flooding on the MKT Trail was causing citizens to seek solutions, and storm runoff flooding in the Hinkson watershed had attracted the attention of the federal EPA. People got serious about finding a solution. A \$40,000 grant from the 3M Corporation was the cornerstone of a 17-group partnership of NGOs and government agencies to restore wetlands around an old decommissioned sewer plant.

For a full description of the project see:

https://www.fws.gov/FieldNotes/regmap.cfm?framesFlag=0&arskey=34508&callingKey=executive_summary&callingValue=rubble.

Directions: Park at the Forum Nature Area parking lot on Forum Blvd. and walk northeast on the MKT trail through the tunnel. Almost immediately you’ll come to a path that heads off to the left and takes you into 3M. Alternately, you can park at Forum Theaters and take the concrete path down the hill.

Features of Interest: Birding access is along a 1.25 gravel mile loop (including the MKT portion as the southern leg) with benches and interpretive signs with QR codes for smart phone scanning for information about wetlands, flora and fauna, and the histories of the 3M Wetland area and the MKT Trail

ADA Information: Chat surface trail.

When to visit/ Species to expect: On a spring morning walk expect 30-50 species, with a total species count for March, April and May of about 125.

In March, expect the usual winter species including all our resident woodpeckers, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Carolina and Marsh Wrens, and Chipping, White-throated, Song, Field and Swamp Sparrows. Water species include Canada Geese, Ring-necked and Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal (nested successfully in 2020!), Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, and Great Blue Heron.

It is a wonderful place to study sparrows by taking the mowed paths that lead off the trails, making a figure-8 pattern through the entire area. The city does a pretty nice job of keeping it mowed and if you wear good boots you can even access the trail that leads around the back side of the pond (the side closest to the MKT trail). It is generally dry but with lots of rain, you may want to wear rain boots or at least waterproof boots.

In April, the migrants make their way in with Yellow-throated Warblers and Northern Parulas coming back early and filling the sycamores with their song. The two ditches on the sides of the trail as you first head in may be filled with Hermit and Swainson’s Thrushes, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes,

Eastern Bluebirds, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and White-breasted Nuthatches. Of course, throughout the month migrant warblers will keep showing up, including Black-and-white, Prothonotary, Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Kentucky, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstarts, Yellow, Blackpoll, Palm, and Black-throated Greens.

If you walk the concrete path that goes up the hill from the concrete shelter toward the movie theater, mixed in with the warblers you'll find vireos, including Red-eyed, Blue-headed, Yellow-throated, Warbling, and White-eyed. This is also where you'll find the Red-Shouldered Hawk's nest, and further up the hill near the theater parking lot is where the Cooper's Hawk's nest was located in 2020.

3M is a great site for studying bird behavior. I (Lottie) think my favorite day in April was when I happened upon at least 18 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, all down at eye level, singing and hopping, working the trees, eating and chasing each other. I sat on a bench and watched them for over 30 minutes. It was absolutely magical. All were showing their trademark crown, but the males had them displayed more brightly than I'd ever seen.

In late April watch for a Green Heron in the pond/wetland area below the shelter. That area has also hosted American Bitterns and Soras during April and May.

In May, the birding only becomes better. More migrants come in and nesting species start their work. There were at least five pairs of nesting Eastern Bluebirds spaced evenly throughout the area in 2020. Tree Swallows use the nesting boxes around the large pond, and Barn Swallows nest in the shelter.

New migrants in May include Summer and Scarlet Tanagers and Philadelphia Vireos, as well as Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. This is a reliable site to get Lincoln's Sparrow in spring or fall. New warblers in May include Canada, Mourning, Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Magnolia, Wilson's, and Chestnut-sided. A Black-billed Cuckoo has appeared here in mid-May. In 2020, a surprising Swainson's Warbler decided to hang out near the trail all month.

The Red-shouldered Hawks that have nested regularly here for several years had a nest in 2020 that was back from the trail, but fairly visible most every day, with four young that successfully fledged. After fledging at separate times, the four juveniles flew together through mid-July.

Red-headed Woodpeckers have become regular residents in the last several years, and if you walk here anytime in June, July or August, you're likely to have such easy views of them that you don't even need binoculars. There were at least three nesting pairs in 2020.

Barred Owls also nest here. They love to hang out in the trees along the MKT trail on the 3M side. Watch for begging fledglings in the summer.

If you bird here anytime during the summer, you're likely to see many species' fledglings following their parents and being fed. One morning in 2020 it was five Carolina Wren babies all lined up on a branch. Another day the Barn Swallows were spread out around the shelter sitting on all the signs and picnic tables, while the Red-shouldered Hawk siblings were practicing flight around the big pond uphill from the shelter. Kingfishers regularly rattled and flew between the many dead tree stumps that weren't being used by the hawks. House Finches successfully used an old Barn Swallow nest, and later the same nest was used again by Barn Swallows. One day early in the summer, I happened upon three Wood Duck mommas who collectively were watching 33 chicks. It was a bit sad to see the number of ducklings dwindle to less than 10 by July.

October brings Le Conte's and Clay-colored Sparrows and Rusty Blackbirds to the wetlands, contributing to the 181 total species found at here.

3M is a vibrant place with lots going on. It is a rich ecosystem for us all to enjoy. How spectacular it will be when the bush honeysuckle is eradicated. That's a project for some time soon, I hope.

Toilets: None on site, closest is at Forum Nature Area/MKT parking lot.

Camping: None

Hazards/Limitations: None

Nearby birding sites: Forum Nature Area, Twin Lakes Recreation Area, Phillips Lake, South Farm R-1 Lake, Rock Bridge Memorial State Park.

