

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

BUSHWHACKER LAKE CONSERVATION AREA--UPDATED JUNE, 2011

Harold F. John and Edge Wade, edgewATmchsi.com

4,790 acres Vernon and Barton Co. DeLorme 50, B-2

MDC owned; for information call 417-895-6880

Directions: The Area is in southern Vernon Co., along the Barton Co. line, about 4 miles west of Sheldon and 3.5 miles southeast of Bronaugh. It can be reached from US 71 or MO 43.

From US 71, there are two options: Take the Sheldon exit and go west on Rt. N 3.5 miles, turn left (south) on 1525 Rd. (where Rt. N turns north) for 1.5 miles, then right (west) onto Zodiac/NW100 Rd. for 1.1 miles to a parking lot (see below for birding from this point).

Or, at the Sheldon exit go west on Rt. N for 0.1 mile to the outer access road. Go south one mile to Zodiac/NW100 Rd. Turn right (west) onto Zodiac/NW100 Rd., which usually has good roadside birding. Go 4.1 miles to the same parking lot as above.

From Bronaugh go 2.5 miles south on MO 43; east one mile on Zodiac/NW100 Rd.

When to Visit/Species to Expect:

The area hosts about 90 breeding species, including grassland species as Northern Harrier (limited breeding in this relatively southern location; numerous spring and fall), Upland Sandpiper, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell's Vireo, Dickcissel, Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrow. Western species occasionally appear, such as Swainson's Hawk (possible breeder), Spotted Towhee, and Western Meadowlark. Other uncommon breeding species, such as Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Black-billed Cuckoo, can sometimes be found.

From late June through early August the area around the two lakes often serves as a concentration area for migrating swallows. Cliff Swallows are predominant.

Fish Crows and Osprey should be looked for in fall and spring.

Late October through February here can produce some interesting birding. Short-eared Owls may be found in very good numbers; Cackling Geese may be among Canada Goose flocks. Two Trumpeter Swans were present in January, 2010. Harris's Sparrows are common.

The last Greater Prairie-Chicken report for the area in the CACHE database was in late March, 2008.

Features of interest to birders: There are 1,500 acres of native prairie, 440 acres of non-prairie grasses, 270 acres of savanna, and about 850 acres in forest and woodland. Two impoundments add to the possibilities: 157-acre Bushwhacker Lake and 28-acre Willow Lake (walk in access only, 1/4 mile from the road).

There are 22 parking lots; 3 fishing jetties and a boat ramp.

Hiking is allowed throughout the area. These suggested birding hikes begin with the southeast-most parking lot on Zodiac/NW100 Rd., about 5.1 miles east of MO 43.

East areas. Exploring the mixed, brushy habitat along the trail and the limited riparian habitat between the parking area and the bridge should produce several woodland and edge species.

Trails from the next two lots west (the first reached by road about one-third of a mile north from Zodiac, and the second along Zodiac) go into wooded areas and will produce birds typical of upland oak woods. Birding along Zodiac/NW100 Rd. to the west can be rewarding. The trail going north from the fourth lot (counting the southeast-most as number 1), is perhaps the best trail for birds. Over a distance of a little more than two miles, it leads through grassland and some small wooded areas to the lake edge and onto Little Dry Wood Creek. Likely birds are Bell's Vireo (usually multiple birds along this trail), Prairie Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Summer Tanager. Watch for Northern Harrier in open areas and Black-billed Cuckoo in brushy thickets.

From the first parking lot west of where NW 80 Lane comes in from the south (.6 miles west of 1185 Rd, or 1.9 miles east of MO 43), hiking directly north to the top of the small hill will give a good view of the best grassland areas. Henslow's Sparrow have nested in this area, but they move around from year to year to satisfy their specific nesting requirements. Watch for Upland Sandpiper on the tops of fence posts. Look carefully at soaring hawks for the occasional Swainson's.

From the first lot (0.4 mile) north of Zodiac along 1185 Rd., hiking short distances into the grassland may yield species missed elsewhere.

Willow Lake can be reached by walking about a quarter mile from the lot 0.6 miles north of Zodiac (sign indicates lake access route). Look for Henslow's Sparrow in the area directly north of the dam. This lake is a refuge area and several waterfowl species may be present, depending on season. There is some excellent marshy habitat around the south end of the lake. Be alert for White-eyed Vireo in the brush near the lake and for Sedge Wren in the drainage runs.

Along Yucca Rd, leading to Bushwhacker Lake, watch the grassland on both sides for Northern Harrier. The shorter grass areas are particularly good for fall sparrows.

The center of the north parking areas generally provides the most extensive view of the lake and waterfowl, waders, or shorebirds.

Hiking the lakeside trail will usually be productive, unless fishing activity is particularly high. Both orioles can usually be found near the lake, as well as Tree Swallow, White-eyed Vireo and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Hiking northeast from the lake dam to Little Dry Wood Creek can produce many of the same birds found near the first lot on Zodiac/NW100 Rd..

Toilets: 3 privies, all located along the west side of Bushwhacker Lake.

Camping: Primitive camping sites are on the west side of Bushwhacker Lake, accessible from Yucca Rd.

Hazards/Limitations: Hiking is not advised during turkey or deer hunting seasons.

An unmanned archery range is near the intersection of Zodiac Rd. and 1185 Rd.

Nearby Birding Sites: Osage Prairie CA, Comstock Prairie CA, Prairie SP, Shawnee Trail CA, Clear Creek CA.