

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

CAPPS CREEK CONSERVATION AREA

Jeff Cantrell, March 2012

724 acres in eastern Newton County, DeLorme 60, D-5

MDC owned and managed. For area information, contact the MDC Neosho Office at 417-451-4158

Directions from Monett, Missouri: – drive 7 miles west of Monett on Highway 60 to Wallaby Road. Turn left (south) and drive south 1 ½ miles to the center of Capps Creek Conservation Area.

Directions from Neosho: Drive east on 59 Highway to Highway 86. Turn right (east) on 86 Highway, and drive to Newtonia, staying onto Highway EE. Turn left (north) onto Wallaby Road and cross Capps Creek, to enter the area from the south.

When to visit and what to expect:

Capps Creek is an allure to birders, wildlife photographers and families in general. Because it borders Jolly Mill and the surrounding roads, the timeworn iron bridge and parking lots makes wildlife viewing an ease.

Anytime is a good time to bird the Capps Creek area. The local region is well known for wintering bald eagles and Capps Creek holds its share. A winter visit between early December and late February will easily bring 5 – 20 eagles into view. Historically the Sarcoxie Prairie lay to the north and Oliver Prairie to the west so occasionally a rough legged hawk cruises by with the terrain looking like the land of the past.

The ample shrub cover on the north side of the area holds a good variety of sparrows including: Harris's, white-crowned sparrows, white-throated, Lincoln, and fox sparrows and towhees. An occasional spotted towhee may be seen in the winter. Late winter (late February to mid-March) bring timberdoodle displays. Woodcock can be plentiful in the twilight hours over the creek valleys and shrubby rolling hills.

There is a decent barn owl population in the vicinity and they have nested on the area and nearby. When you are driving through, spotting woodcock, or owling the area you may see one perched on a corner post or feeding on the side of the road.

Although there are no nature trails; it is an easy walk for migration birding along the riparian edge of Capps and Shoal Creek. Mid April through mid May will bring transient warblers such as orange crowned, American redstart, Wilson's, Nashville, and palm. The variety of shrub, forest and grassland habitat brings a full house of flycatchers. Olive-sided flycatchers seem to stay on for a week early in May and scissor-tailed, eastern kingbirds, pewee, great crested, phoebes and a willow are all confirmed nesters.

In a part of the state where shorebird habitat is rare a newly developed marsh has been a boon for pectoral, solitary, least sandpipers, greater yellowlegs and lesser yellowlegs. Dabblers and especially blue-winged teal utilize the marsh in the spring.

Features of interest to birders:

Jolly Mill borders Capps Creek Conservation Area on the NE corner. This charming park is free to the public and offers a slice of history, relaxation and facilities. The area has a wealth of fascinating history of civil war, pioneer, bluff dweller, woodland, Osage culture. A functional mill still runs on certain weekends and there are plenty of picnic tables to suit a birding group taking in a meal by the millpond, spring or creek. Most red-eyed vireos, yellow-throated warblers, summer tanagers ... go undetected by the picnickers in this quiet little park. Birders with a hankering to wet a hook enjoy a half mile of Capps and quarter mile of Shoal Creek for bass, sunfish and trout fishing.

Toilets: none on the area, but neighboring Jolly Mill Park has nice, clean facilities. Open daylight hours.

Camping: None

Hazards/Limitations: None noted. Avoid trespass on the inholding.

Nearby birding sites: Jolly Mill Park, Roaring River State Park, Roaring River Conservation Area, Chute Ridge Glades (adjacent to Roaring River SP), Diamond Grove Prairie, Morse Park (Neosho).