

## A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

### **LITTLE BLACK CONSERVATION AREA**

**Steve Paes & Cindy Bridges**

**2,970 acres, Ripley Co.**

**GPS: 36.755009,-90.803218**

**MDC owned; for information call 573-996-2557 or 573-226-3616**

Directions: From Doniphan go east on Hwy. 160 two miles and turn north (left) onto Hwy. 21. Go north 4.5 miles to the intersection of Hwy. K & 21. The two smaller tracts are accessed by turning east (right) on to Hwy. K and going 6 miles to County Road K-4. The Fern Nook Natural Area tract has a one lane gravel road from the NE corner to a gravel parking lot.

The large tract is accessed by continuing north on Hwy. 21 from the intersection with Hwy. K. 1.75 miles. A turn to the right on a gravel road (at the cantilever sign) will access the portion of the property south of the river. Continuing on Hwy. 21 will take you to the intersection of Hwy. NN and a road system on the north side of the river. The gravel road crossings of the river and Barton Branch Creek should only be attempted with a pickup or a SUV with good ground clearance.

Habitats: Most of the large tract is upland oak and oak-pine forests that are 65-75 years old. To diversify the habitat, approximately 1/3 of the acreage is having woodland restoration work that consists of thinning and control burns. This restoration is in various stages of completion, but almost all of it has been control burned at least once. Most of it has been thinned with one timber sale still in progress. When the restoration work was initiated a goal was to start seeing red-headed woodpeckers. The dense forests prior to restoration was excellent habitat for pileated, red-bellied, downy and hairy woodpeckers, No red-headed woodpeckers had ever been observed on the property. Red-headed woodpeckers were observed in the restoration area in the fall of 2013 and during breeding season in the spring of 2014.

The largest acreage of the woodland restoration is between Overcup Fen Natural Area and the gravel road to the north. Other habitats are bottomland forests along the river and small fields. The most accessible field is on the south side of the river near the picnic table. (blue winged warbler, common yellowthroat, woodcock).

The smallest tract, on Hwy. K, is mostly pine forests with some hardwood. The unmanned fire tower usually has vultures roosting on it.

The Fern Nook NA tract has mature oak, pine and bottomland forests on most of the acreage. An old field with considerable woody plant invasion is in the river flood plain on the east side of the river. The steepest slope west of the river has a virgin stand of white oak that has the oldest known white oaks in the state, some dating back to the 1590's. Access to the high quality sites of mature trees is poor, that is one reason they still exist.

Facilities: There are no restrooms or privies on the area. The closest restrooms are at a small store and restaurant at the intersection of Hwy. 21 and K.

Primitive camping is allowed, a popular spot is at the picnic table on the south bank of the South Prong Little Black River. There are other picnic tables at the archery range.

Hazards: The archery range does not have heavy use but could be potentially hazardous to people walking around paying attention to what is in the trees instead of the people shooting arrows.

Nearby birding sites: Mudpuppy CA is just downstream but is about a 20 minute round-about drive. This area has a large field and bottomland forests along the river that are easily accessible by car. River cane is present that should be good Swainson's habitat, but so far none have been documented here. A small wetland is along the gravel road.



### Little Black CA

