

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

SCHELL-OSAGE CONSERVATION AREA

Edge Wade, spring 2015

8634.39 acres Vernon and St. Clair counties. DeLorme 42, F-5

GPS: 38.003878,-94.059326

Area Map: <http://extra.mdc.mo.gov/cgi-bin/atlas/gis4media.cgi?area=5701map>

MDC owned, for information call 417-432-3414

Directions: From El Dorado Springs, go 6 miles west on US 54, then north on Rt. AA for 12 miles, then east (right) on Route RA for 1.5 miles (last half mile is gravel) into the east side of the area. Or, also from El Dorado Springs, go north on MO 82 and continue north on Rt. H, then left on Rt. Y into the southeast corner of the area.

From Rich Hill on I-49, go east on Rt. B, then south on Rt. M to Schell City (about 42 miles), then right (south) a short way on Rt. AA, then left (east) onto Rt. RA into the area.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Schell-Osage CA has been designated an Important Bird Area. Approximately 280 species have been reported. Waterfowl migration seasons (especially March, early April and late October/November) can bring any species of duck to the area. American White Pelican, Snow and Ross's Geese, and Horned Grebes may be present then. Shorebirds are best found here from late March through April, especially in the Evelyn Johnson Wetland area along the north side of Schell Lake, easily viewable from the road.

Eared Grebe and Black-billed Cuckoo should be watched for. Fish Crows have become regular. In migration, warblers can be plentiful here. There is good sparrow habitat. Mississippi Kites may be seen from June through August. Red-breasted Nuthatch occurs in invasion winters. Rusty Blackbirds have been reported, most often in March, but also in December. Watch for Great-tailed Grackles.

Especially notable sightings have included Neotropic Cormorant (2009), Brown Pelican (2002), Lewis's Woodpecker (2001), Snowy Owl (pre 2000), and Cinnamon Teal (several).

In winter, look for Long-eared Owls near 9-acre Bell Pond, southwest of the headquarters. Bald Eagles were hacked at Bell Pond as part of MDC's successful effort to bring the species back as a breeding bird in Missouri. There are active Bald Eagle nests on the area.

Features of interest to birders: The network of roads with 28 parking lots and several boat ramps provides very good viewing access to the excellent variety of habitats, many of which are chronically underbirded. In addition to the two large lakes (Schell Lake is 461 acres; Atkinson is 461), there are a dozen small ponds, a stretch along the Osage River, nearly 1,800 acres of seasonally flooded wetland, approximately 2,500 acres in

crops and old fields, about 1,900 acres in forest and woodland, nearly 300 acres in non-prairie grassland. The 42 acres of remnant prairie is composed of five small prairies, which have been augmented with an additional 170 acres of restored grasslands. More restoration is in progress.

Toilets: 3 privies, all just off the extension of Rt. RA that bisects the area going east/west. One is at North Campground on Schell Lake; one at South Campground on Atkinson Lake; and one is across the road from the headquarters at the lot near Shaw Pond.

Camping: Two campgrounds (North on the south side of Schell Lake, South on the north side of Atkinson Lake) with privies, only. South Campground is closed October 15 through January 31.

Hazards/Limitations: Typical precaution in a hunting area should be heeded. The office is staffed only in waterfowl hunting season.

As of spring, 2015, intensive grassland restoration management is underway to improve habitat for many species of wildlife including, quail, rabbits, grassland songbirds, and pollinators like monarch butterflies and native bees. Management efforts include large-scale removal of invasive trees, controlling invasive plants with herbicide, and seeding native prairie plants. Portions of the area may be posted as closed for public safety during these efforts.

Nearby Birding Sites: Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie, Taberville Prairie CA, Four Rivers CA.