



THE BLUEBIRD

The voice of MBS since 1934

**December 2025
Volume 92, No. 4**



**The Missouri Birding Society
Missouri's Ornithological Society Since 1901**

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Deadlines for submission of material for publication in *The Bluebird*

Manuscripts for *The Bluebird*—to the editor by:

Feb. 1 for March issue; May 1 for June issue;

Aug. 1 for Sept. issue; Nov. 1 for Dec. issue

Manuscripts submitted for peer review may be published in a subsequent issue.

Deadlines for submissions to the Seasonal Survey Editors

Winter (Dec. 1-Feb. 28)—to Kendell Loyd by Mar. 10

Spring (Mar. 1-May 31)—to Josh Uffman by June 10

Summer (June 1-July. 31)—to Joseph Mosley by Aug 10

Fall (Aug. 1-Nov. 30)—to Allen Gathman by Dec. 10

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Front Cover — Belted Kingfisher: Marquetry (wood inlay) artwork
by Brad Bernhard

Peer-reviewed articles in The Bluebird are noted by a header.

Species mentioned in articles not so designated may not have been subject to review.

THE BLUEBIRD is published quarterly by The Missouri Birding Society. The submission of articles, photographs, and artwork is welcomed and encouraged. The views and opinions expressed in this journal are those of each contributing writer and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of The Missouri Birding Society or its officers, Board of Directors, or editors. Send address corrections to MBS, 2101 W. Broadway, PMB 122, Columbia, MO 65203-1261.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER—MICHAEL O'KEEFE



May 1-3, 2026, Save the Date! This is for the Spring 2026 MBS Meeting to be held at the Drury Plaza Hotel St. Louis, Chesterfield. Registration will open in January, so plan to join your friends for a glorious weekend of birding in the Mississippi flyway! The celebration will include a keynote presentation from Noah Strycker, author of “Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, A Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World.” A committee is working on the details of the meeting which celebrates our 125th anniversary. If you live

in the area and would be available to assist in some fashion, please contact Mike Grant.

I thank everyone who attended the Fall Meeting in Springfield, MO, especially our trip leaders: Steve and Debbie Martin, Margie and Jerry Williams, Greg Swick, Kendell Loyd, Kelly Ormesher, and our friends with Greater Ozarks Audubon, Kaylee Carney, Ben Caruthers, and Laura Lanning.

Recent business by the MBS board includes the approval of \$3,880 in funding requests for the following entities: DarkSkyMissouri (\$2,500), for a partner project to develop and implement educational programs and sustainable practices that benefit bird habitats in Kirksville, Columbia, and Jefferson City; University of Missouri School of Natural Resources (\$750), to support the installation of a Peregrine Falcon Nest Box on the campus; and Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative (MoBCI) (\$630), to support student participation at the annual MoBCI conference next August. This donation will be drawn from General Funds, and the first two will be drawn from the CACHE/SPARKS funds.

I offer this reminder that MBS has an agreement with the L-A-D Foundation to develop bird occurrence data from two Shannon County eBird Hotspots, designated Pioneer Forest—Virgin Pine Randolph Tract and Pioneer Forest—Woods Hole. Birding on both tracts would increase our knowledge of wintering birds. In addition, Brown-headed Nuthatches have been detected on the Randolph tract. More visits are needed to assess their presence.

These birds are in Missouri thanks to reintroduction efforts led by the Missouri Department of Conservation. I was honored to join the 2025 effort to capture and relocate a number of the birds from the Ouachita National Forest to Missouri – along with about 40 others from University of Missouri, L-A-D Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service. Previous experience mist-netting with MDC and Missouri River Bird Observatory, qualified me to join the capture team in Arkansas. Missouri State Ornithologist Kristen Heath-Acre led the Missouri team in releasing the 84 birds delivered by airplane, banding all and tagging about half with electronic transmitters. When you go birding in the Pioneer Forest, keep an eye out for and report all Brown-Headed Nuthatches. Those from Arkansas will have multiple bands on their legs.

This eight-day adventure in late September was just a sample, but it gave me a better appreciation for the work that field researchers regularly do. Early mornings spent bouncing along service roads, enjoying sunrise before opening nets and waiting for the little birds to venture from the treetops and - hopefully - into captivity. Along the way my team encountered fresh bear scat and a frightened pygmy rattlesnake slithering under one member's foot. Once the birds were safely in the transport tubes, fed, and aboard the airplane, each team was sent back to the woods to scout for more birds to capture the next morning. In the evenings we spent time planning, birding, resting, eating and socializing. All birds, it should be noted, were captured and handled under state and federal permits. Kristen Heath-Acre wrote about the project in *The Conservationist*, which can be found online at <https://mdc.mo.gov/squeak-back>.

Thank you for all you do in the name of bird conservation, and I look forward to seeing you in St. Louis next May, if not in the field before then.

Michael



WE WELCOME OUR NEW MBS MEMBERS!

Greg Leonard

Remember, new members are our future. If a new member lives near you, say, "Howdy and welcome to MBS." In addition, recruit another new member. **Welcome to these 6 new MBS members in the 4th quarter of 2025!**

Bob Nieman
Sara Fohrell
Nadje Najar
Roslyn Hamilton
Marty Webb
Steve Cook

Lincoln, MO
Saint Louis, MO
Springfield, MO
La Grange, MO
Kansas City, MO
Oak Grove, MO

Subscribe to the MOBIRDS Listserv!

If you are curious about what birds are being seen around Missouri, have a question about a bird, enjoy sharing your birding experiences, want to know what field trips are coming up, want to meet other birders online, the MBS sponsored MOBIRDS listserv is for you.

Join the active Missouri birding community by subscribing here:

<https://lists.umsystem.edu/scripts/wa-UMS.exe?SUBED1=MOBIRDS-L&A=1>

Please note that MBS members are NOT automatically subscribed to the listserv. You must subscribe yourself by going to the link above.

Also, all listserv posts are retained in a searchable archive:

<https://lists.umsystem.edu/scripts/wa-UMS.exe?A0=MOBIRDS-L>

Missouri Birding Society Mission Statement

The society is dedicated to the preservation and protection of birds and other wildlife; to education and appreciation of the natural world; and to effective wildlife and habitat conservation practices.

MISSOURI BIRDING SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE

The Missouri Birding Society membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. All MBS memberships other than Life Memberships are due for renewal now. If you are a new member who joined MBS after September 30, 2025, you do not need to renew until December 2026. You may renew your membership online or use the membership renewal form on the back cover of any recent *Bluebird*.

To renew online, go to MBS's website, www.mobirds.org/MBS/Membership.aspx and follow the directions. Online renewal has an advantage in that you may use the online form and still write a traditional check, or you can pay directly, using PayPal. You do not need to establish a PayPal account to use this service. Yes, MBS pays a small fee (74 cents per membership) for this PayPal service. This online service saves the Membership Chair and the Treasurer (both volunteers) a lot of time and work. Further, this saves you the need for a stamp and envelope and makes the renewal process direct. PayPal sends an email receipt for the transaction to you.

Your membership is important. Membership dues support MBS's mission of conservation and education, and the services to enhance your birding experience in Missouri. If you have any questions or problems with the renewal process, please feel free to contact me. This same online process is used for new memberships also.

P.S. Please disregard this notice if you've already renewed... and thank you for renewing!

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In Memoriam **Bonnie Noble**

ASM/MBS and Greater Ozarks Audubon Society lost a valued, long-time member in September, 2025. Bonnie Noble, an accomplished Springfield birder, was known for her cheery outlook, despite severe health restrictions. She was highly respected and looked to as an example of the best in all of us.

Bonnie and her husband, Charlie, shared a passion for birds and were frequent participants on field trips, often contributing additional sightings to those of the more mobile members to round out the bird list. They were regulars among the volunteers to help with newsletter mailings and other GOAS activities.

GOAS members look forward to birding with Charlie, sharing the joys of the day and fond memories of Bonnie.

A Wintering Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) in Northwest Missouri at the Maryville Sewage Lagoons:

A First Record for Christmas Bird Counts in Missouri and the Midwest

David A. Easterla

Phalaropes are always fascinating because of their long migrations, especially Wilson's Phalarope, which normally winters in western and southern South America. Thus, it was a great surprise when, on a cold, windy afternoon (32-38 °F, wind 9-15 mph), I visited the Maryville, Nodaway County, Missouri sewage lagoons, December 11, 2024, and observed, with a large group of ducks, a small bird spinning on the water surface that could only be a phalarope! The bird was in the far SE corner of the second southernmost pool and was difficult to observe among all of the swimming ducks, with approximately one-fourth of the lagoon pools frozen over. Once the phalarope flew to the ice edge and perched with a Greater Scaup, but observing field marks in the winter weather was difficult. Since field guides show only the Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) as occasionally and rarely wintering on the southern United States coast, I assumed it was probably this species — what else could it be? During this time at the pool there were 14 species of waterfowl, including two Trumpeter Swans and one Tundra Swan.

After numerous phone calls, Lisa Owens was the only birder who was free the next day, hoping the phalarope would remain. Upon Lisa's arrival the next day, we carefully searched the lagoon pools and eventually discovered the phalarope. The bird was very wary, and after flushing several times, would disappear with the flying ducks, but eventually would appear again in another area of the same pool. Finally, with painstakingly slow steps, Lisa was able to approach and get photos. Others were able to get photos later, and I finally obtained good views of the bird in flight showing all dark wings with no wing stripe. It was apparent that the bird was not a Red Phalarope, but the least expected Wilson's Phalarope.

During the following days the phalarope was usually in the same pool and location. However, occasionally the bird was not there, and I thought it had departed, but upon checking the last pool I found it spinning there, where it apparently had found food.

Fortunately, on December 17, 2024, the phalarope was still present in the same pool for the Maryville Christmas Bird Count, when it was documented as a new species for the count. In fact, it is the first record of this species in any Christmas Bird Count in the entire Midwest, other than a count week record in Kansas in 2021. As on previous days, it was still feeding on late hatching and emerging Dipteran midges, undoubtedly an attractive food source encouraging the bird to remain.



Wilson's Phalarope, Maryville Sewage Lagoons, Nodaway Co
12 Dec 2024 Photo Lisa Owens

By December 23, the lagoon pools were frozen over except for one small space at the location where the bird was originally discovered, where it was now feeding on hatched midges frozen in the ice. The phalarope now allowed closer viewing, sometimes revealing its yellow legs. On Christmas Day the phalarope was still present, sharing an enlarged opening in the ice with 12 species of waterfowl including 3000 Canada Geese and 100+ Cackling Geese.

Surprisingly, the phalarope was still present into the next year, on January 3, now sharing a large opening in the ice with 17 species of water birds including a Double-crested Cormorant, 12,000 Canada Geese, and 140 Cackling Geese. The phalarope was still feeding on midges that were now made available by diving and dabbling ducks as they stirred up the water, creating upsweeping water currents with midges.

On January 4 the phalarope remained with the same water birds plus 14 Trumpeter Swans. Half of the lagoons were frozen over, with the bird feeding again on midges frozen into the ice sheet edges. During the following two days the area was blasted by a blizzard with 11 inches of snow and subfreezing temperatures, leaving only one tiny opening in one pool. On January 7, a visit revealed no Wilson's Phalarope and only six Mallards and four Gadwall remaining. On January 8, the same result, with only a Wilson's Snipe by the small unfrozen opening; the phalarope had departed and probably fled south. This hardy individual had a good chance of surviving, since it had always exhibited strong flight, including on January 4, the last day it was seen.

That a Wilson's Phalarope wintered in extreme northwest Missouri during some 25 days (Dec. 11- Jan. 4) seems miraculous. We will never know what factors contributed to this record, but it is obvious that it involved one available food – midges. However, the question immediately arises: why only during the 2024-2025 winter, and aren't there other water areas and lagoons with midges?

A review revealed the following records for late fall – winter Wilson's Phalarope in the Midwest.

Dec. 3-5, 1998: Cedar Point Chausee, Erie, OH, by Victor Fazio III.
No notes or photos.

Dec. 7-11, 2020: Fossil Creek Reservoir, Lorimer Co, CO by Jim Nachel and Greg Osland. Good notes, no photos.

Dec. 1-5, 2021: Blenheim sewage lagoons, Chatham-Kent, Ontario, by Barbara N. Charlton and Douglas Ouchterlony. No notes or photos.

Dec. 22, 2021: Cheyenne Bottoms, KS by Matt Gerlach.
No photos in eBird checklist, but "identified by consultation with experts from pictures." Count Week record in the Cheyenne Bottoms CBC for 2021.

Texas Records distant from the Gulf coast (no photos):

- Dec. 4, 2011: Greenbelt Reservoir, Donley Co (panhandle),
by Barrett Pierce
- Dec. 4, 2015: Buffalo Lake NWR, Randall Co (panhandle),
by Ross Barnes-Rickett
- Dec. 20, 2022: Lake Wichita, Wichita Co (borders Red River + OK),
by Jeremy Webster
- Dec 15, 2009: Hagerman NWR, Grayson Co
(borders Red River + OK), by Jack Chiles
- Dec. 17, 2023: Hagerman NWR, Grayson Co
(borders Red River + OK), by Sheila Sawyer

Some of the early December records may represent late fall migrants, and in eBird, the Maryville sewage lagoon is the sole January record for the entire Midwest. In summary, the photographic documentation of the wintering Wilson's Phalarope at the Maryville, Missouri sewage lagoons has no Midwest parallel for its dates and latitude.

A gracious thanks to Mel Cooksey, Corpus Christi, Texas, for his contribution locating past winter records of Wilson's Phalarope, especially for Texas; without his help this paper would have been incomplete.

Bird Brains

By Chrissy McClarren

Dear Ma,

I really flummoxed you this spring, didn't I? That day, as we sat chatting outside on your patio, I suddenly leapt out of my chair mid-sentence and ran down the two flights of stairs to the sidewalk below—without a word of explanation. Behind me, I heard your alarm. “What is it? Where are you going?” With no time to stop and respond, I followed the voices of the first Fish Crows of the season passing over your house and flying west. Rushing down the block after them, I flung my arms wide in joy, eyes to the sky, my view obscured by the towering old trees lining your St. Louis city block, branches leafing out again after waiting patiently all winter. Although I could not see the crows, I rejoiced nonetheless, still following their distinctive ‘uh uh’ calls all the way down the parkway, drawn by their gentle discussion. They paused overhead for a few minutes of louder and more involved banter, as if deciding something, before their voices faded in the distance.

When I returned to join you and Dad, I solved the mystery of my erratic behavior: “Fish Crows!”

“We were wondering what got into you!” Dad said.

Resonating with my happiness, you simply replied, “Cool!”

Little did we know how much ‘cool’ those much-adored Fish Crows would bring into our lives.

In the following weeks, I visited almost every other day, working on a puzzle with you, taking you to the doctor, or driving Dad to bridge or the grocery store. Each visit, I heard the Fish Crows in the parkway.

Desperate to catch them in the act of making a nest, I wandered the block, scanning the treetops. When I caught a fleeting glimpse of them in the great elm tree in front of your house, I ran inside to tell

you. Your “Yay!” mirrored the big grin of eagerness on my face.

The next week, I watched them flying back and forth from the top of the elm to the top of a nearby oak. My heart soared. “Mom, I think I might be right! I think the crows might be nesting in your park-way!” I announced. You cheered on my quest.

But after a few weeks, my zeal began to wane. I almost gave up searching. The only Fish Crow nest I’d ever found in the city had been hidden and too high to clearly view, almost one hundred feet up.

I worried this nest was going to be just as hidden, but after a few more weeks, a new determination took over. One afternoon as I pulled up outside your house, I heard their taunting voices. Imagining myself as the incarnation of stealth, I slowly approached them, but every time I seemed to get close, the crows stopped talking.

This time, instead of quitting, I nonchalantly walked away from their voices, while slowly backtracking and standing very still for about an hour. Faint calls finally reached my ears. I had stopped in exactly the right spot.

Looking up, I saw they were flying from the elm to a sycamore. One crow, jet black against the lush green leaves of the creamy trunked sycamore, moved about and finally perched—YES, on a nest! Then she carefully lowered herself into it, with just her head peering out, as if on eggs. There was only one small window through the branches to view this—and it was from that particular spot where I had fortuitously chosen to stand. This nest was much lower than the other, only forty feet high.

Like a lightning bolt of neighborhood bird news, I burst through your door and shouted, “We might get to see baby Fish Crows! I found their nest!”

“Oh, that’s what you were doing. I could see you out there,” you said, your voice flat. I knew you had probably observed that I hadn’t come to visit right away, as you are like a hawk, sitting in your chair by the window, working on your puzzle, watching the neighbors, particularly on the lookout for folks walking dogs, whom you often rushed out to greet and pet.

Deflated by your lack of enthusiasm, I slouched onto the couch and

joined you at the puzzle. A few minutes passed in silence before you asked, “What birds have you seen today?” Knowing you’d forgotten my exciting news, I repeated, as if for the first time, “I found a Fish Crow nest in the parkway!”

Your struggle with your memory had taught me a smidgeon of much needed patience. “Oh, that’s cool!” you exclaimed, as if hearing this for the first time.

We didn’t talk about your ‘cognitive condition.’ It was like a state secret everyone knew, but everyone pretended not to know. Your shame was so acute that it brought me great sorrow, yet I’d learned to honor your way of coping, even though I always wanted to say, “Ma, you have nothing to be ashamed of! Talk to me. You don’t have to be alone with this.”

After all, you didn’t just give me life sixty-one years ago; you had become my soulmate when I was a young adult. You handed me the keys to the worlds of literature, the arts, and a wondrous earth-based spirituality. We shared everything.

Then, after four tumultuous decades, when all felt lost in my life, you gave me the most precious gift of all – you sparked my passion for the birds and walked beside me, teaching me to cherish their wonders. Even now, you are still giving me powerful gifts, this time in the form of lessons in humility as you struggle to live with that word you hate: ‘dementia.’

I’m not fond of that word, either. What should we call it instead?
Hmm.

When you can’t remember something—Naughty Brain.

When making decisions is hard—Fickle Pickle Brain.

When you forget how to do things that used to be easy—Rebel Girl Brain.

When you repeat yourself—Keeping You On Your Toes Brain.

When you cleverly divert a question with “I don’t know, I’ll think on that”—Sly Brain.

When you lose interest in your art or your writing and feel only

weariness—Napping Brain.

And when you're reluctant to leave the safety of your home, even to visit your beloved Gaddy Garden to look for warblers—Full Stop Brain.

Really, even though everything has changed, much has remained the same. You've always been a naughty, rebellious, fickle, sly introvert keeping everyone on their toes. Okay, so your brain is taking way more naps than you'd like. Maybe we could poetically name that—Siesta Brain? But it's that Full Stop Brain that became the real challenge for me after finding the crow nest. I wanted to get you out of the house to see it.

Spring slid into Summer as I returned again and again to observe the nest with your much adored son-in-law, Andy. We were careful not to visit too often, for fear of distressing the crows. But in the first week of July, the day finally came—I saw the crowlets—three of them. My ecstasy knew no bounds.



I crooned to them as I gazed through the scope, “Hello, lovely darlings. So glad to see you.” The intimacy the scope afforded was priceless. We photographed and videoed them voraciously, despite the long-distance views, spending at least an hour at the intersection of your busy boulevard. Curious neighbors stopped to ask us what we were doing, and we eagerly shared.

The young crows were already huge, almost the size of their parents, distinguishable only by their large pink gapes. They looked on the verge of fledging—flapping, stretching, restless, moving around the edges of the nest, and timidly hopping along branches outside it.

I couldn’t put off attempting to get you out of the house any longer; the crows seemed to give me the courage and overwhelming desire to lovingly coax you out of hiding. You had to see them. That’s all there was to it.

Ringin’ your doorbell, I immediately realized there was going to be another challenge ahead—Dad’s sacrosanct schedule. No one dares mess with Dad’s routine, as you know. Mornings kick off at 7 a.m., when Dad wakes you up and prepares breakfast the exact way you love it: oatmeal with blueberries, a sprinkle of maple syrup and the perfect dollop of yogurt. After breakfast and morning meds, you both settle in for the daily talk show ritual: *Morning Joe* and last night’s late shows.

Between 9:30–10:30, Dad makes sure you take your blood pressure and weight, carefully jotting down the results in his trusty notebook. Then you get a little free time to work on a puzzle while he tackles laundry, filling bird feeders or whatever household mission he’s created.

Lunch is served at 11:30 sharp, always accompanied by an episode of some series. Afterward, it’s compulsory nap time from 12:30 to 1:30. Then comes the beloved cocktail hour. Who are we kidding? It stretches well beyond an hour. You sip wine, while Dad savors his Southern Comfort with Sweet Vermouth, and reserves this time to call family—mostly to ‘harass’ them, as Dad puts it, and that includes me.

Evenings are just as tightly orchestrated. Dinner prep begins at 4:30, with *Judge Judy* and two unmissable episodes of *Jeopardy* (one rerun, one current). Dad serves whatever he’s concocted for

dinner between 5:00 to 5:30. This must be the most trepidatious time of day for you, since you were the chef until about five years ago when Dad took over—despite never having cooked before in his life!

At 5:30, the national news comes on, followed by an episode of something and then a movie. There are more meds at 9 p.m., news at 10, maybe the opening monologue of Colbert, and finally bedtime. Whew. Dad runs a tight ship, but at least that always includes a nightly ice cream snack.

I bounded in at cocktail hour to find you at your puzzle table, sipping Chardonnay and working the border. Dad sat on the couch next to you, sorting the rest of the pieces. Dad working a puzzle has always amazed me, as he's legally blind, but he can see the colors well enough to sort, and he relishes it. He even corrects me if I do not use his 'method,' and you so enjoy his company.

This was a stroke of luck. Most of the schedule set by Dad for the day was set in stone, but I knew there was wiggle room during cocktail hour. Mustering my joy, I gushed forth, "Mom! That Fish Crow nest? There are three babies! You have to come see them!"

Dad piped up, teasing you, "Yeah, honey. Go and see them. Do you live under a log?"

A smile filled your face as you joked back, "Well, that's where foxes live!"

Awestruck at your display of spontaneous wit, I could have melted right there. But then you responded without hesitation, "Well, let's go!" Putting down your wine glass, you got up to come with me.

Caught off guard, expecting resistance, expecting Full Stop Brain to put a halt to this—I was encountering something new: Love Brain. I think you knew from my tone of voice how important this was to me for you to come share in my joy.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, I sputtered, "Yay! I'll drive you. It's only a couple hundred feet, but I know you worry about your balance—and your knee hurts you."

Carefully, you walked down the stairs to the car and got into the front seat the way I'd taught you: butt first and then swivel your

legs in, to put minimal torque on your knee. I drove a few houses down the block, turned left, and parked.

Andy waited there for us with the scope ready. Looking through it, you struggled at first, but I refrained from interfering. You steadied your gaze, stood still, and spoke the magic words, “I see them! Yes, I see one...two...yes, three.” Like an excited hen, I bobbed about,



watching them with my binoculars as you continued to look through the scope.

“I think a parent is coming. Mom! Do you see?” I asked.

You were quiet for a moment, then said, “Yes! She’s leaving now. The one baby looks unhappy. He didn’t get fed.” When I asked if I could take a look, you said, “Wait,” gently waving me away as you continued looking.

I was filled with delight at your desire for more, to continue to enjoy the babies. You weren’t just doing this for me. You were riveted, present, sharing my joy.

When you finally pulled yourself away, you declared you would walk home, that you didn’t need a ride. Stepping alongside me, you said, “That was so cool. I love you so much for being in my life.”

You stopped and gave me a shaky hug, neither of us willing to let go of the deep significance of all that had happened. Those birds inspired me to reach for you—and you reached back. Bird Brains, both of us.

[Photos in this article by Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren]

Barn Owl Box Project

Emma Knudson

Funds from the MBS grant provided to Mizzou Women in Natural Resources were used to purchase three barn owl box and pole installation kits to be installed around the Columbia, MO, area prior to the nesting season.

On May 3rd, 2025, the first box was constructed and installed on the property at Boone County Nature School. There was a large turnout for the first installation event, as many Mizzou students hoped to learn more about the project and help protect a species of interest in the area.



The next installation date occurred on May 16th, 2025 when the remaining two boxes were installed at Three Creeks Conservation Area and a remote private property in the northwest corner of Columbia, MO. Members of Mizzou Women in Natural Resources also came on the second installation date.

The project will continue into the 2025-2026 academic year, as a team within the organization has been working together to continue monitoring the boxes for nesting progress. While boxes have not been confirmed to have any nests at this time, data collection will still continue.

Collaboration with Columbia Missouri's Raptor Rehabilitation Project also helped make the entire project a success through their critical aid in supplying building tools and guidance in the data collection process.



Missouri Bird Lore: The Art of Divining Future Firsts

Jonah Eckels-Galbreath

Many may not know that birders partake in the occult arts. No, we don't wear macabre outfits decorated with dead birds (at least not anymore). Nor do we consult the innards of deceased birds (at least that's not what I think those museum drawers full of bird cadavers are for). No, no, we birders enjoy divining the future; sifting through endless possibilities in search of that next possible addition to the all-encompassing list.

Birders have long loved to predict the future; to peer into our crystal balls, attempting to foresee first records of rare birds. There are many mystics, oracles, and sages who've plied this prophetic trade in birding's long history, often leaving their predictions bracketed within the hope of possibility. But what does it take to summon the hypotheticals, those birds listed in brackets, into reality (and the record books)? This fall, I finally set out to practice these arts, seeking to divine the next first records for the state of Missouri.

I decided not to dive right into prophetic visions—that would be foolish—so I began my journey with a little research. There's a certain hubris in trying to predict the wanderings of winged things; just ask anyone who's set out to see a bird only to find that it's flown the coop. Yet, there's much fun to be had in seeking the future, as evidenced by the numerous predictions that have made it into print and the likely countless other mutterings of would-be prophets that simply became one with the stratosphere. While combing through the dusty digital volumes of prophecies long ago foreseen, I discovered a California-based oracle from the '80s, whom I hoped could provide some prophetic guidance.

Don Roberson, a Monterey-based mystic, authored one of birding's most accurate predictions to date back in 1988. With the help of a druidic circle of rare bird conduits and “just a little wine,” he sought to foresee the next first records for North America (north of Mexico). In what I imagine to be a cult-like ritual, these prophets summoned forth ten names, ten birds, ten hypotheticals. They then etched their predictions into the pages of *Birding* (the American Birding Associa-

tion's flagship magazine), preserving a record of their occult musings for posterity's sake. Fast forward to the present day, where nine of their ten predictions ring true and one is left to wonder if there may be something to a little wine and divine council consultation.

So, when I set out to make my predictions, I assembled my own circle of prophets. Discord—the group chat app, not the state of the world—served as this group's divination medium. Via this chat, a group of St. Louis-based birders and wannabe prophets made their best guesses this past April. One name that came up repeatedly was the Arctic Tern, a bird that showed up in the state for the first time in May. If I'd gotten this to print sooner, we'd already seem like professional fortune-tellers. My apologies, team. Outside of the tern, our Discord Divine Council reached no emphatic consensus. Based on this discord, I decided that if I truly wanted to foresee the future, I first needed to consult the oracles of Missouri's past.

Otto Widmann, first of his name, lover of birds, and the Sage of St. Louis, would be one such place to start. If you don't own a copy of his *Preliminary Catalog of the Birds of Missouri*, I highly suggest making the purchase, if for no other reason than the bracketed birds within. You see, Widmann was an oracle long before the Monterey Mystic. After immigrating to Missouri from Germany in 1867, he made it his mission to catalogue every bird in Missouri. He worked diligently, compiling a grimoire of all things birds. Unfortunately, a house fire destroyed his original manuscript, ruining decades of work. But like a mad mage, he conjured it all back from the flames, finally publishing his magnum opus in 1907. Within these hallowed, dog-eared pages were eighteen birds in brackets—his hypotheticals—the birds he foresaw turning up in the state sometime in the future.

Sixty-five years later, one James F. Comfort sought to resolve these predictions in a September 1972 article of the *Bluebird*. His findings revealed Widmann's prophetic prowess, as of the Sage's original eighteen predictions, thirteen had come true. The five he missed were the King Eider, White-tailed Kite, Great Gray, Boreal and Northern Hawk Owl. Of those five, only the kite has been recorded in the state during the intervening fifty years, leaving Widmann's record, so far, at fourteen of eighteen. The Sage was definitely blessed with the gift of foresight.

Tucked away at the end of Comfort's 1972 article were two more predictions. The author, Comfort, got in on the forecasting fun,

predicting the Northern Hawk Owl as the next first for Missouri. His editor, Richard Anderson, also couldn't help himself, tacking on an editor's note predicting a future sighting of a King Eider. Once again, there's much fun to be had in the occult art of divination.

To date, Comfort and Anderson's prophecies remain unfulfilled. But grant them grace, as there's no way they could have foreseen some of the mind-blowing birds that have turned up in Missouri over the past fifty years. For example, no one could have predicted the 1983 Slaty-backed Gull; the 2001 Smew lay beyond the reach of even the most spiritually in-tune diviner; and the Limpkin invasion of 2022-3—no one in their right mind would've thought of that. To properly foretell our birding future, I surely needed to tap even deeper into the occult arts.

So, when I finally sat down in the fall of 2025 to make my predictions, I sought to channel everything I'd learned. First, I donned my LA Rams jersey, conjuring the spirit of Roberson, the Monterey Mystic. He's still alive, but I don't have his number, so I felt like this was close enough. Next, I filled a stein of lager in a nod to Roberson's wine and in honor of the Sage of St. Louis's German roots. After partaking in an appropriate amount of libations, I threw on a Cardinals cap, hopefully tuning my rare bird visions into the proper Missouri-centric channels. I then consulted the Discord Divine Council's musings and my charts (eBird), sifting through all possible futures. Finally, with Nordic rock (Vikings were excellent seers of course) blasting in the background, I, in a trance-like state, created the following list of Missouri future first records.

[*Black-throated Gray Warbler*: how in the world does each and every state (all eight of them) that borders Missouri have a record, but not us?]

[*Ash-throated Flycatcher*: can we hold those 2020 Tennessee birders that saw one on the wrong side of the Mississippi River accountable for not scoping the bird from our side?]

[*Black-tailed Gull*: one showed up at Carlyle Lake in Illinois a decade ago; that's basically Missouri, right?]

[*Northern Wheatear*: if we systematically scan each and every empty cornfield come fall we will eventually find one; who's with me?]

[*Flame-colored Tanager*: I'm crossing my fingers that we're in the

flightline of another errant tanager like the one that ended up in Wisconsin in 2022; here's to hoping.]

With all my prophetic potential tapped, please check back with me in a decade. If you too seek to practice the occult art of rare bird divination, send your prophecies to the editor of *The Bluebird* and we'll see how you stack up amongst history's birding seers, mystics, and first record oracles.

References

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Roberson, Don. "The 10 Most Likely Additions to the ABA Checklist." *Birding* 20, No. 6, December 1988.

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Black-throated Gray Warbler, Arizona
Photo Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren

Immature Eastern Phoebe: Unusual Behavior

Edge Wade

On September 14, 2025, Betsy Garrett texted friends that while she was working on her laptop as she sat on her deck in south Columbia adjacent to Twin Lakes Recreation Area, an Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) flew low and touched the hair on top of her head, then landed on chairs nearby. Our response at the time was “hmmm..., interesting.”

On further inquiry, Betsy described the incident: “It swung back by and did it again and then sat 1-2 feet away from me at various times on chairs that were on either side of me. It also briefly lit on my shoulder. It’s possible that it was resting and enjoyed birdwatching and listening to my water feature as much as I did. For whatever reason this young Phoebe decided to do this, it was such a special moment.”



That inquiry into the details of Betsy's experience was prompted by a similar, but prolonged encounter with an immature Eastern Phoebe (see <https://ebird.org/checklist/S274935246>) beginning at 9:59 a.m., September 22, 2025, by a group of birders at 3M Wetlands, also in south Columbia, approximately 1 mile east of the Garrett home.

The 25-minute episode began with Carol Virkler taking photos of the immature Eastern Phoebe at 9:59 a.m. as it sat on a bare branch beside the footpath on the eastern side of the 3M site. Shortly thereafter, it landed on her camera, an action it repeated at 10:14, midway through the period it spent with the birders.

For 25 minutes, the phoebe brought reactions of surprise and delight as it moved among the rapt people, landing on shoulders:



Lisa Schenker's shoulder

On hats:

Marlyn Whitney's hat:



Nancy Bedan's hat.

On bare heads:

Lottie Bushmann's
head:



Vickie Park's head:



Atop cell phones being upheld
to take photos :



And even on a phone held close to (Edge Wade's) body.

As it sat on the various perches, it gently tugged on hair a few times, occasionally did some bill clacking, and three times gently, tentatively, pecked on a finger and wrist. Twice, an insect flew about waist high through the group. The phoebe followed the flight with its eye, but showed no interest in pursuing the insect, instead resuming its attention to the people.

We can only conjecture as to what prompted the immature Eastern Phoebe's behavior, but as the experiences on Betsy Garret's deck and at 3M Wetlands both occurred in the presence of images or reflections of the bird, *e.g.*, on a laptop, camera and phones, and the bird showed particular interest in the devices, it seems likely that the bird was attracted to the images.

**Giant cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*)
and the Swainson's warbler
(*Limnothlypis swainsonii*):
Implementing innovative monitoring
techniques for species of
conservation concern**

Gabriella Carroll

Giant river cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) once formed vast canebrakes across the southeastern United States but has been reduced to about 2% of its original range, making it a critically endangered ecosystem. Canebrakes once provided resources and habitat for nearly 70 animal species. Among those species is the Swainson's Warbler (*Limnothlypis swainsonii*), hereafter referred to as SWWA, one of the rarest migratory songbirds in North America. In Missouri, this bird species is currently listed as endangered, and we know little about its actual range within the state. This is likely because the species is rare and secretive.

We know of a few existing canebrakes in the Ozarks that could provide habitat for the SWWA, so we set out to discover if they were being occupied by the species. With funding from the Missouri Birding Society and Missouri State University, we obtained 29 Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) and distributed them throughout 13 different canebrakes in the Ozarks and 1 within Mark Twain National Forest during the 2024 breeding season (Figure 1). This latter site (Greer Crossing Recreation Area) was used to gather recordings from SWWA after visually confirming their presence.

The units were out in the field for several weeks and were set to record many hours. This generated an immense number of recordings for us to analyze, so we used a sound identifier to process them. BirdNET is an algorithm that has been programmed to automatically identify thousands of bird species based on their vocalizations. The program is trained with recordings from sources such as the Macaulay Library to inform its decisions on what species a certain vocalization belongs to. We input our recordings into BirdNET, and the algorithm made predictions about which species each vocalization belonged to much faster than a human listener could have.

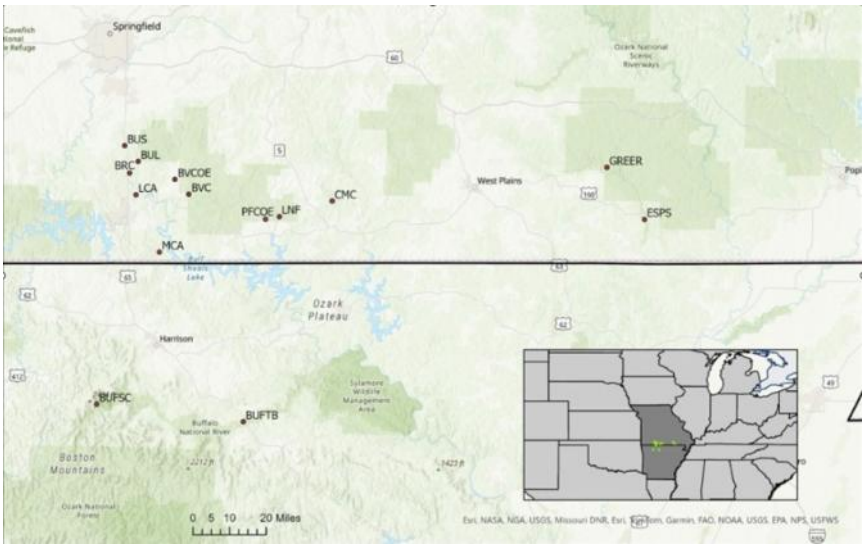


Figure 1. Map of the sites where ARUs were installed.

We found that every single one of our sites had many SWWA predictions. However, we quickly realized that some species were particularly confusing for the algorithm. The Indigo Bunting, White-Eyed Vireo, and Louisiana Waterthrush (LOWA) had songs which contained characteristics similar enough to the SWWA song, so that BirdNET repeatedly misidentified them as SWWA vocalizations.

One of the drawbacks of BirdNET is that the recordings with which it is trained tend to be high-quality and made in low-noise conditions. Since our recordings were made with lower-quality microphones in noisy environments (most of our sites were right next to streams), the mismatch with the training data may have increased our rate of false positives. We decided to train a custom classifier using the same algorithm but with a subset of our own recordings from the field.

We included Indigo Bunting, White-Eyed Vireo, and LOWA recordings from various canebrakes in our new training dataset. We also included SWWA recordings from Greer, since we knew those represented true positives. Our goal was to fine-tune the algorithm so it could better distinguish between these problematic species and true SWWA songs.

We found that truncated versions of the LOWA song are more than

confusing for the algorithm, being almost indistinguishable from the songs of the SWWA. We realized that we needed to take a step back and figure out how to differentiate one species from the other in a consistent way. To do this, we used 30 songs of each species from the Macaulay Library and obtained acoustic measurements from each song's notes. Despite running multiple statistical tests, we were unable to find notable and consistent differences between the songs.

While without further analysis we could not find ways to clearly differentiate between their songs, we did find that the SWWA has one version of its territorial song that is very common in our Greer recordings (Figure 2), the Macaulay Library, and Xeno Canto.

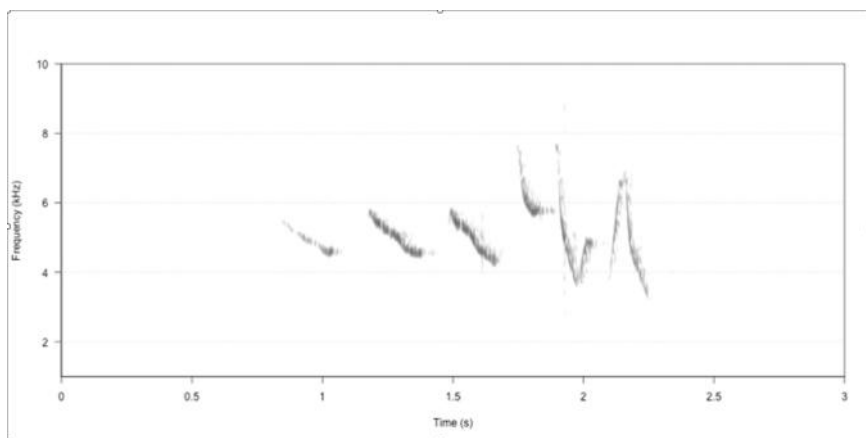


Figure 2. SWWA ARU recording from Greer.

Note the “number 4” note (second to last, shaped like the number 4) followed by the “weww” (last note, sharp overslur).

We found that SWWA are present at one of the canebrakes at Eleven Point State Park (Figure 3). Though their presence at this site is not surprising given the proximity to Mark Twain National Forest, we were able to use this site to show that our custom classifier works well at detecting SWWA when they are present. We had many predictions at other sites that we could not confirm or deny as true SWWA detections given their similarity to the song of the LOWA. To avoid false positives, we were very conservative in deciding which SWWA detections to confirm as “true”.

The results of this study suggest that the SWWA is confined to a

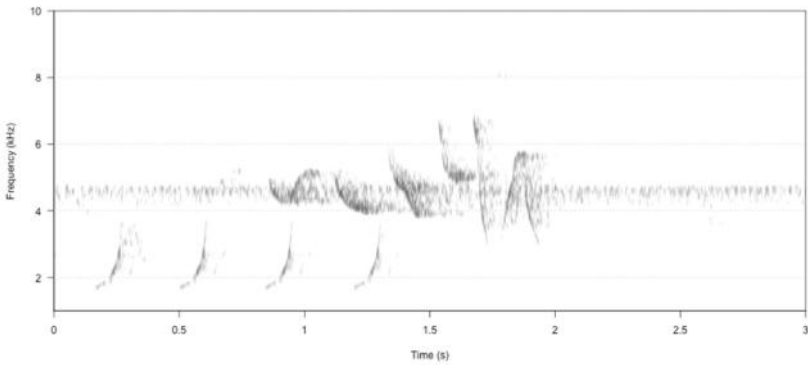


Figure 3. SWWA song recorded at Eleven Point State Park by ARU 1

relatively small portion of Missouri, with the species inhabiting the areas around and within Mark Twain National Forest almost exclusively. It is possible either that the canebrakes located in the southwest part of the state are not large enough to attract the species or that there are other constraining factors for this species' range. Further research is needed to determine why this species' range is so limited in Missouri.

The funds awarded by the Missouri Birding Society were essential to the completion of data collection for this project, as they were used to purchase several ARUs and aid in the expenses associated with travel. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Missouri Birding Society for their generous support of this study. The funded project formed part of a master's thesis at Missouri State University, carried out in Dr. Jay McEntee's lab with valuable support from MSU graduate and undergraduate students in the field.

CACHE/SPARKS Program Annual Recap

Edge Wade

December 2025 marks the 20th anniversary of the Conservation Checklist Project, (CACHE) begun under a Letter of Agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation. At the request of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks, a similar agreement, the State Parks Checklist Project (SPARKS) was added in 2007. We call these contractual arrangements the CACHE/SPARKS program.

A core element of the CACHE/SPARKS program is MBS members birding in conservation sites and state parks and submitting eBird checklists with the goal of improving our knowledge of bird occurrence. In recent years, MBS has earned \$6,500 from MDC and



Ha Ha Tonka State Park
Photo Edge Wade



Poague Conservation Area
Photo Edge Wade

\$5,000 from DNR State Parks annually, from these contributions to eBird-based data and additional activities specified in the contracts, such as writing birding site guides and maintaining the printable bird checklist for each state park available to park visitors.

Earnings from this program are used for MBS support of partnership projects in conservation-related activities and education, totaling more than \$169,000 to date. The twenty-year history of MBS partnership funding contributions is summarized in table form at <https://mobirds.org/MBS/Conservation.aspx>.

Projects funded in 2025 include Motus Wood Thrush tagging and monitoring; scholarships for GLADE, a resident camp experience for high school students; Motus detection equipment on Shannondale Tower at Echo Bluff SP; Missouri River Adventure Camp for youth; Barn Owl box construction and installation [See page 165 in this issue], lead partner Mizzou Women in Natural Resources; Peregrine Falcon nest box installation on the University of Missouri Columbia campus; and, bird friendly window treatment and responsible outdoor lighting education, lead partner DarkSky Missouri.

A frequently asked question is, “What do I need to do to have my birding visit included as part of the CACHE/SPARKS program?” The answer is: It’s simple, if you are an MBS member, just bird an MDC or state parks site and submit an eBird checklist. An algorithm created by Allen Gathman captures the checklists by MBS members so we can document our efforts. [As long as the name in your eBird account matches your name in the MBS membership list —AG]

Although all visits to MDC and state parks and historic sites by MBS members contribute to our bird occurrence data collection, both agencies have identified some priority sites. The monthly eNews sent to all members includes a listing of sites with weeks that a visit would fill in an empty slot in the database.



Lake of the Ozarks State Park
Photo Edge Wade

MBRC Top Ten Birds of 2024

1) BRAMBLING (*Fringilla montifringilla*): Adult male, 2–4 April 2024, private residence, Saddlebrooke, Taney Co. Sheila Hinshaw (documentation with photographs), Gail Hinshaw. Definitive, and first, state record of this Eurasian finch, which has occurred as a vagrant in many locations across the northern U.S. and Canada.

2) MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*): Adult female, 14 November 2024, Stockton Lake, Dade Co. Betty Daniel (documentation with photographs). Accidental transient; third definite record. The observer's photographs permitted separation from Great and Lesser Frigatebirds, which have occurred as vagrants elsewhere in the United States. Three other records of frigatebirds in Missouri could not be firmly identified to species.

3) SHORT-BILLED GULL (*Larus brachyrhynchus*): First-cycle bird, 29–30 January 2024, RMBS. Bill Rowe, Diane Bricmont, Pete Monacell, Paul McKenzie (documentation with photographs), Erica Ballard and students; additional photographs supplied for documentation by Jonah Eckels, David French, Seth Winkelman, and Samuel Belley. This bird was found 29 January on the Illinois side of RMBS, then on the Missouri side on 30 January. The world-wide species previously known as Mew Gull (*L. canus*) was recently split into the Short-billed Gull of North America (*L. brachyrhynchus*) and the Common Gull of the Old World (*L. canus*), which in turn has three subspecies, two of which have occurred as vagrants in North America (nominate *canus* of Western Europe and *kamtschatschensis* of Siberia). The photographs by several observers helped rule out those two forms and establish this individual as the North American species. Accidental; third state record.

4) BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*): Male, 11 April 2024, Chillicothe Access, Livingston Co. Steve Romo (documentation with photographs). Accidental transient and winter visitant; fourth record.

5) SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*), TWO RECORDS:

One, at least 19–23 October 2024, private residence, Buffalo, Dallas Co. Kendell Loyd (documentation with photographs), Bruce Blosser. Accidental transient and winter visitor; fifth record, moving the status to casual.

One, 24–26 October 2024, Columbia Bottom CA, St. Louis Co. Randy Schiller, Diane Bricmont, Bill Rowe (documentation with photographs), Matt Rowe, Connie Alwood, David Dean, Dave Haenni, Doug Hommert, m.ob. Casual transient and winter visitor; sixth record, and first outside the southwestern quadrant of Missouri.

6) COMMON GROUND DOVE (*Columbina passerina*), TWO RECORDS:

One, 1–8 January 2024, Weldon Spring CA, St. Charles Co. Found by Jian Xu (documentation with photographs); additional documentation with photographs by Kendell Loyd, Becky Lutz, Paul McKenzie, Pete Monacell, and Bill Rowe. Casual transient and winter visitant; ninth record.

One, 15 November 2024, Shawnee Trail CA, Barton Co. Kelly Ormesher (documentation with photographs). Casual transient and winter visitant; tenth record.

7) LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*), THREE RECORDS:

Female, 14 March 2024, private residence, Springfield, Greene Co. Klee Bruce (documentation with photographs), Becky Swearingen (photographs in eBird). Casual transient and winter visitant; tenth record.

Black-backed male, 12–14 May 2024, private residence, Buffalo, Dallas Co. Details submitted to the committee by Kendell Loyd on behalf of Rick Hostetler, Lyndell Hostetler, Paul Hostetler, Jeff Eigsti, Jody Headings, et al. Casual transient and winter visitant; eleventh record.

Male, 20 December 2024 through at least 17 February 2025, private residence on Table Rock Lake, Stone Co. Anne Baggott, Paul McKenzie, Pete Monacell, Kendell Loyd (documentation with photographs). This adult male appeared intermediate between the green-backed and black-backed subspecies, suggesting an origin in the intergrade zone located in Colorado. Casual transient and winter visitant; twelfth record.

8) GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*): One, 9–11 October 2024, RMBS. Jake Kickbohle (documentation with photographs). Casual transient and winter visitant; tenth state record, though only the second within the past thirty years.

9) WILSON’S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*): One, 11–17 December 2024, Maryville Sewage Lagoons, Nodaway Co. David Easterla (documentation), Lisa Owens (documentation with photographs). Discovered by David Easterla and included in Maryville CBC results for 15 December. First winter record. [See page 153 in this issue]

10) POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*): Juvenile, 10–11 January 2024, Stockton Lake, Dade Co. Kendell Loyd, Pete Monacell (documentation with photographs), Steve Martin, Debbie Martin, Zach Haring, Rick Hostetler. Accidental in winter; second winter record.

Birders' Guide:
Pioneer Forest—
Virgin Pine Randolph Tract
and Pioneer Forest— Woods Hole
Edge Wade, 2025

Shannon Co. DeLorme 55, H-8

GPS: 37.25075,-91.39952

Owned and managed by L-A-D Foundation

For more information, contact the L-A-D Foundation, Pioneer Forest, Box 497, Salem, MO 65560, ph. 573-729-4641.

Directions: From Salem, on Hwy. 19, go south past the road into Round Spring Campground, just south of the Spring Valley bridge, for 2.2 miles to Shannon County Road 225 (shown as 19-225 on some maps) on the east (left) side. A large *Virgin Pine and Interpretive Drive* wooden sign is at the junction. (Note: the Interpretive Drive is no longer signed with stops.)

CR 225 cuts easterly through the oak-pine forest toward the Current River. This road is usually in good enough shape for all but very low sedans, but can have limbs across it after storms.

The two eBird hotspots, **Pioneer Forest–Virgin Pine Randolph Tract** and **Pioneer Forest–Woods Hole**, are tracts within Pioneer Forest, owned and operated by the L-A-D Foundation, the legacy of Leo A. Drey, with management practices consistent with sustainable tree harvest while providing habitat for wildlife.

For the purpose of delineating the eBird hotspots, the pine/oak dominated **Randolph tract** extends for approximately 2.5 miles

from Hwy. 19, mostly along or near the ridge top, the locale preferred by shortleaf pines, to the Current River Ranch turn-off on the left. A large oak is on the left at the intersection, which is very near where CR 225 begins a greater degree of descent toward the Current River. The orange ranch gate is set back from the junction and may be missed if one is looking right or even straight ahead. A small vertical white US Boundary NPS sign high on a pine on the right is approximately 335 feet beyond the large tree at the turn-off.

The more riparian **Woods Hole** hotspot begins at the Current River Ranch turn-off 2.5 miles from Hwy. 19, as CR 225 descends into the bottomland along the Current River. An orange-topped white post labeled "Buried Cable" on the left, .5 miles from the ranch turn-off and 3 miles from Hwy. 19, is a good marker to alert birders to the wide flat area ahead that is a good place to park to begin exploration of this area on foot.

The river access is part of Woods Hole. The .1 mile dirt road to the access runs straight from the wide spot where CR 225 turns south. It is sandy, subject to rutting, and at times may not be drivable except by a high-clearance vehicle. It's worth the walk!

The approximately .25 stretch of CR 225 going south (parallel to the river) from the wide spot to where the road turns west at the end (south boundary) of the Woods Hole tract is best explored on foot to maximize its birding potential. This portion of CR 225 is mostly hard-packed dirt and may be impassible after a heavy rain.

Background

In 1951, Leo A. Drey began acquiring land that eventually totaled nearly 160,000 acres in six Missouri Ozarks counties. He called these lands Pioneer Forest. His plan was to operate a sustainable timber business using a method of logging called single-tree or individual-tree selection harvest in which single trees at the height of their maturity and value and other, defective, trees are felled, creating gaps in the canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the ground to

encourage germination and growth of varying aged trees. This was the preferred method of the U.S. Forest Service from the 1940's until it was replaced by clear-cutting in the 1960's.

Routine monitoring and measuring in 1/5 acre forest research plots, a component of Mr. Drey's management practices, and various research studies of animal species present, have shown clearly that individual tree selection promotes a healthy, diverse forest ecosystem with profitable harvest on about a 20-year rotation.

The L-A-D Foundation was established in 1962 as a Missouri private operating foundation. In 2004, Leo and Kay Drey donated 146,000 forested acres worth \$180 million, the largest private gift of its kind in Missouri history, to the L-A-D Foundation as a limited liability corporation.

Shortleaf pine covered more than 4 million acres in the Missouri Ozarks before the pineries were leveled beginning in the late 1800's. In 1940, the Missouri Highway Department, now Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT), bought a 200-foot strip of pine-covered land on each side of Highway 19 along a 1-mile stretch on a ridge just south of Round Spring to preserve it for scenic value. It became known as Missouri's Virgin Pine Forest. Core samples taken in 1993 revealed the dominant trees in Virgin Pine germinated in years ranging from 1781-1791. In 1996, the L-A-D Foundation purchased 41.4 acres of the Virgin Pine from MoDOT, leaving a 50-foot highway right-of-way.

With the exception of the Virgin Pine acres, the shortleaf pine and white oak on the Randolph Tract were cut in 1946 (prior to the Drey purchase), much of it used to build Ft. Leonard Wood. Some old pines were left to regenerate the forest. A fire on Easter Sunday, 1953, and the open canopy from the logging combined to promote germination of seeds from the old trees to create the habitat we see today, with open understory maintained by prescribed burns.

When to visit/Species to expect:

Virgin Pine Randolph Tract

Today, the Randolph tract habitat is an overstory dominated by shortleaf pine and oak. Fire and thinning are used to create and maintain widely-spaced trees with an open understory of native grasses, forbs and shrubs. This is the habitat that once supported Bachman's Sparrows, Brown-headed Nuthatches and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in Missouri.



Virgin Pine Randolph Tract

A Brown-headed Nuthatch translocation project began in 2020 with a planned conclusion in 2026, with birds from Arkansas introduced into the Ozark National Forest Current River Pinery Project area in Carter County. Birds from that project have been sighted on the Randolph tract. At least one was unbanded, indicating it hatched in Missouri.

NOTE: At the suggestion of the Missouri Birding Society, to reduce disturbance of this population, the L-A-D Foundation has posted a sign in the small parking area at the closed Virgin Pine Walk trailhead .1 mile from Hwy. 19 requesting that recordings of BHNU not be played. Please respect this request.

After the first mile along CR 225, the forest becomes increasingly oak-dominated, with a few young pines among the larger oaks. The expected shift in bird species includes more deciduous-preferring species such as woodpeckers, vireos, towhees, titmice, and chickadees.

There are several two-tracks leading from both sides of CR 225 within the Randolph Tract that are open to birding on foot. These provide easy access into oak-pine forest beyond the main road. Please be sure not to trespass onto private lands of Round Spring Retreat, indicated by RSR sign at the junction .6 mile from Hwy. 19, and Current River Ranch, 2.5 miles from Hwy. 19, both reached by roads leading north off CR 225.

A birder in this forest can expect a fine array of migrants and oak-pine permanent and seasonal residents. The Randolph tract is excellent for warblers, with 26 species reported. Here, in spring and summer, Yellow-throated Warbler, which birders often associate with sycamores, will be found in the shortleaf pines. Pine Warblers and Chipping Sparrows compete with similar sounds most of the year. Dark-eyed Juncos appear in colder months, but Chipping Sparrows may be lingering and should be checked for.

eBird checklists indicate this well-managed forest attracts an impressive spread of species. As birders continue to visit and report finds with multiple trips throughout the year, our understanding of bird occurrence here will be fleshed out.

What not to expect:

Bachman's Sparrow has not been seen in Missouri in summer (breeding season) since 2013. It is not expected to be seen here in the near future.

The five last known Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in the state were seen in the Virgin Pine Forest in June, 1946. Red heart disease, a fungal infection that weakens heartwood enough for the woodpeckers to drill cavities, likely will not occur here naturally, as most trees are harvested too young for the disease to take hold and soften the heartwood, a condition necessary for these woodpeckers, the only species to drill cavities in living trees. Successful translocation would require artificial cavities, a successful technique used in many sites in other states in the Southeast, where half of breeding population depend on them.

Woods Hole Tract

The sycamore and oak-hickory dominated woods of the Woods Hole tract have proven to be excellent for migrants and home to Hooded, Cerulean, and Swainson's Warbler in May and June.

Walking the .1 mile road to the access and the southbound stretch of CR 25 paralleling the river in spring will produce a list of migrant and riparian species to rival any similar habitat in the state.

Woodpeckers abound year round. In winter, expect Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers working their taps.

Toilets: None

Camping: None

Hazards/Limitations: The gravel road has limited maintenance and there may be limbs across it after a storm.

Nearby Birding Sites: Echo Bluff SP, Current River SP. Round Spring, Pultite Campground, and other portions of Ozark National Scenic Riverway,



Current River at Woods Hole Tract

Birders' Guide August A. Busch Memorial Conservation Area Diane Bricmont, 2025

6950.8 acres, St. Charles County, DeLorme 40, E-4
GPS 38.705, -90.740
Owned by MDC. For more information call 636-441-4554

Directions: From Interstate 64 in St. Charles County, take Highway 94 south to Route D. Go west on D for 1.5 miles to the entrance.

Overview: In the 1940s, the area was used by the US Army as a TNT munitions plant during the war. The Busch Conservation Area was purchased from the federal government in 1947. Mrs. August A. Busch, Sr. donated \$70,000 towards the purchase of the property in her late husband's memory. One hundred old munitions bunkers still dot the landscape of the nearly 7,000 acre conservation area. (To explore the history of the war effort in the area, visit the Weldon Spring Site Interpretive Center located at 7295 Highway 94 South, St. Charles, MO, 63304).

The conservation area consists of 3,000 acres of forest in addition to old fields, cropland, prairies and wetlands. There are 27 fishable lakes and ponds covering 550 acres. Dardenne Creek traverses a portion of the area adjacent to the largest lake, Lake 33. There are 8 miles of intermittent streams and 6 miles of permanent streams. The Busch Hiking and Biking Trail is the longest (3.2 miles) of the 7.3 miles of trails in the area. The Fallen Oak Trail is 0.7 miles long and partially handicapped accessible.

ADA Information: The visitor center offers handicapped accessible restrooms along with conference rooms and a gift shop. There are a number of accessible fishing lakes and fishing platforms scattered throughout the area.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Busch CA offers a wide variety of birding opportunities in all seasons simply due to its size and diversity of habitats. Most of the roads are gravel, and while not

maintained in winter, they still provide excellent opportunities for birding by car. The area's lakes and proximity to the Missouri River make it a great place to bird during migration.

Features of interest to birders: The prairie area behind the visitor center and the butterfly garden adjacent to the parking area are great places to find Yellow-breasted Chat, Eastern Bluebird, Field Sparrow, Orchard Oriole, Common Yellowthroat, Indigo Bunting and White-eyed Vireos. The Fallen Oak Trail can be a reliable spot for Pine Warbler, Brown Creeper, both kinglets and Red-breasted Nuthatch. The trail is heavily shaded and can be a few degrees cooler even on a hot summer day. Listen for singing warblers, vireos and flycatchers.

Lake 33 is the largest of the lakes. In winter look for Hooded Merganser, Bufflehead, Gadwall, Mallard, teal, scaup and Ruddy Ducks. Bald Eagles are seen frequently, along with Double-crested Cormorants, Egrets and Herons. If there's an Osprey or Neotropic Cormorant at Busch, it's likely on Lake 33. Keep an eye out for Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls. Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons are occasionally seen near the spillway. Listen for Pileated Woodpecker and Prothonotary Warbler here. Park near the spillway and walk the gated service road to find two large wetland pools adjacent to Kraut Run. This is known as the shorebird area, and when it's wet it can be good for Wilson's Snipe, Swamp Sparrow and dabbling ducks. Listen for the nasal sounds of Fish Crows calling from April through mid-October.

Lake 6 is always worth a visit. Walk the level access road listening for warblers, vireos and sparrows. Both orioles nest in this area, along with Eastern Kingbird and Yellow Warblers. The mowed trail on the southeast side of the lake is lined with sycamores and pines. This is another area good for Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, kinglets or the occasional Crossbill. Northern Waterthrush frequent this area in migration. Blue Grosbeak, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher and Eastern Towhee all nest here.

Lake 8 is a dog-training lake where fishing is prohibited. This generally translates to less vehicle traffic and fewer visitors. It frequently has an edge of exposed mud and can be a good spot for Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, both Yellowlegs, Least, Spotted, Solitary and Pectoral Sandpipers. The thickets lining the parking area appeal to mimids and towhees, and have been host to several

Spotted Towhees in recent years.

The Prairie Trail is a short loop trail where there can be large flocks of American Goldfinch, joined by Pine Siskin during irruption years. Field, Fox, Song, White-crowned, White-throated and American Tree Sparrows favor this trail, but it can also be an overgrown “ticky” mess. At those times, enjoy the birds by simply walking the adjacent gravel road. Gather at dusk with friends and camp chairs to be enchanted by the displays of the American Woodcock on cool late winter evenings. Listen for Blue-winged and Prairie Warblers, and Northern Bobwhite, singing here in May and June. Red-shouldered Hawk and Barred Owls frequent this area.

The Busch Hiking and Biking Trail is a heavily wooded loop trail that can be great for warblers, both in migration and during nesting season. The area is dominated by hardwoods and can be good for Hooded, Kentucky and Worm-eating Warbler, along with Ovenbird, Northern Parula, American Redstart and the occasional Mourning Warbler. All of the woodpeckers can be reliably heard, though not always seen on this trail, including the wintering Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Both Summer and Scarlet Tanager along with Rose-breasted Grosbeak can be heard singing here through much of the spring and summer. Listen for the ethereal song of the Wood Thrush while you hike the trail on a spring morning. Come back on a winter day to search for a Hermit Thrush or Winter Wren.

Eastern Red Cedar stands are widespread at Busch. Look for Cedar Waxwings, Yellow-rumped Warblers, American Robins and all of the mimids taking advantage of the abundant berries. Older cedars can be attractive to roosting owls and provide habitat for nesting Chipping and Song Sparrows. Blue Jays are found in good numbers throughout the fall, caching acorns that will be retrieved on cold winter days.

Picnic Areas: A large accessible picnic pavilion is adjacent to the visitor center. Picnic tables can be found at many of the area lakes, and at the shooting range.

Toilets: Handicapped accessible restrooms and water fountains are available at the visitor center. There are several recently installed accessible pit toilets at Lakes 6, 15, 33, and 35. Other primitive pit toilets are found at some of the other lakes.

Camping: Not permitted

Hazards/Limitations: Gravel service roads are generally walkable, but not well-maintained. Hunting is allowed in most of the area, so be aware of seasonal deer, dove and turkey hunting. Look for signs posted at the entrance to the conservation area, speak with the staff at the visitor center during business hours.

Nearby Birding Sites: Busch Greenway, Weldon Spring CA–Blue Grosbeak Trail, Weldon Spring CA–Lewis & Clark Hiking Trail, Weldon Spring CA–Katy Trail Access, Weldon Spring CA–Lost Valley, Weldon Spring Dept. of Energy Site/Howell Prairie, Darst Bottom Road, and Missouri Bluffs Park.

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