



THE BLUEBIRD

The voice of MBS since 1934

**September 2025
Volume 92, No. 3**



***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 — Lesser Goldfinch, Stone Co. 8 Feb 2025. Photo Jim Malone.

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



One September day, many years ago, I found a small warbler lurking around the bushes in front of my office building in Warrensburg. It was the middle of the day and I was beyond excited to see a **WARBLER!** this close to me. I dashed indoors to grab my camera and returned to watch it for a while. When not in the bushes, it was hopping around beneath the concrete bench and near the steps, so I snapped a few serviceable photos.

I did not have my Sibley with me, and the internet

resources at that time were insufficient to assist. And since I was at work I needed to satisfy my curiosity quickly. So I sought help from some of my learned professors who assured me that it was a first-year Common Yellowthroat.

Now, by that time I had been birding for a number of years, but my confidence and knowledge had not reached the intersection point to produce a satisfying answer and make it stick in my mind. Even today I still struggle with some bird IDs, and I suppose that I'm not alone. Especially when it comes to first year birds, especially sparrows.

But help is on the way! For me and for all who register for the Fall Meeting at the south Hilton Garden Inn in Springfield later this month. I'm pleased to share with you that Kendell Loyd will present a program on Missouri's Fall Sparrows following the welcome social on Friday, September 19.

On Saturday evening we will conduct our annual business meeting during which we will hold elections for the board and hear from Pete Monacell on the Top Ten Missouri Birds of 2025. We will also learn

about the proceedings of the 2025 American Ornithological Society (AOS) meeting, which took place in St. Louis last month. Tommy Goodwin will report, as he was able to represent MBS thanks to a complimentary registration as part of our sponsorship package.

All this leads up to the banquet and exciting keynote presentation on reclaiming the night for Missouri’s wildlife by Don Ficken, the founder of DarkSky Missouri and Lights Out Heartland.

All of this, plus the opportunity to wander the fields and wetlands of the region will make for a fine weekend. I look forward to seeing you there!

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 12 new MBS members in the 3rd quarter of 2025!**

Cynthia Hodson	Raytown, MO
Jared Cole	Gladstone, MO
Russell Starr	Belton, MO
Mandy Matchant	St. Peters, MO
Martin Bailey	Joplin, MO
Tracy Nelson	Polo, MO
David Gronefeld	Creve Coeur, MO
Julie Jedlicka	Kansas City, MO
Rachel McCoy	Warrensburg, MO
John Page-Cooper	University City, MO
Kate Sprague	Ballwin, MO
Brian Broderick	Solon, IA

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:

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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.

Jewelweed's Blessing

by Chrissy McClarren



Mike Treffert

Photo Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren

Meandering down a secret gravel road in southern Missouri, in a town called Bixby, I am searching for the rare Swamp Metalmark butterfly. My three seasoned companions—Mike Treffert, Joe Carter, and my life partner, Andy Reago—are scattered around me, each walking stealthily, paying close attention to movement in the understory. Softly gurgling, in no hurry, a creek flows alongside the road. Sycamores shade us from both sides as an improv session of bird song surrounds us, distracting our search, as we are also bird lovers, lovers of all things wild. White-eyed Vireos keep a steady throbbing beat, Wood Thrush offer caressing and soothing strains, Catbirds punctuate with apoplectic whines, and Yellow-throated Warblers pierce the jam with high notes.

When a two note 'bee-buzz' subtly slips into the mix, this jazz aficionado draws the attention of both me and Joe—a Blue-winged Warbler! Mike and Andy are unable to hear the soft sounds of this artist, a fella that even Miles Davis would envy in his ability to throw his notes around so skillfully most never know where they originate. Still, we try and locate him, for he's quite the dandy and

worth the effort. To our surprise, we find the elusive rascal, hidden in some low brush right in front of us along the water's edge, stunning, as always, decked out in mostly blues and yellows with some black eyeliner to accentuate his outrageousness.

As we're relishing these close glimpses, Andy sees we're onto something, follows the direction of our binoculars and immediately finds him, too. When Mike finally notices all three of us agog, he excitedly asks, "What are you looking at?"

Knowing he's going to require a lot of help to get on the bird, as he always had over the years, despite being way more experienced than any of us and usually the one doing the instructing, I lose my cool. With an unexpected explosion of meanness, I respond, deadpan, "A bird," and proceed to ignore him while continuing to watch the Blue-winged, refusing to be more helpful. My tone could not have been more contemptuous. There is an ominous pause. Everyone freezes. They're all shocked, even me, at my behavior. Feelings of unexpressed impatience had ebbed and flowed in reaction to Mike's inability to get on numerous birds during this trip, but nothing excused this.

Mike, red-faced, blushing with mortification, finally stammers, "Where? Wh-what kind?"

Joe is the first one to recover his wits and tries to help him find the bird. "A Blue-winged. In the bush with the yellow flowers at around 10 o'clock," he says, but the bird has already flown.

Aggrieved, Mike charges off down the road, hustling fast, walking as if in line with his platoon, on a drill, knees high with each step, determined to get as far away from me as possible. His pain is fierce, palpable. My mouth falls open, but I say nothing; I'm filled with shame. We scramble into the car and find him about a mile down the road, still marching. I'm too full of self-recrimination to say anything. Andy and Joe beg him to get into the car. Eventually he does, but I know I've crossed a line.

The two-hour drive back home to St. Louis is thick with silence, which Joe, in his good-heartedness, tries to cut through every so often, but unsuccessfully. We had spent two magnificent days exploring Greer Spring and the Mark Twain National Forest, where we'd encountered several Swainson's Warblers as well as hundreds of other gems. We should have been on an unstoppable high, remi-

niscing, but with Mike and me sulking, it's impossible. I struggle inwardly, battling with shame, trying to avoid the pit of self-loathing waiting for me. *Where had my patience gone? How had it inverted itself into something so ugly? Would he ever be my friend again?* I had ignored the conundrum of Mike for too long at a great cost to him and myself. As much joy as I had experienced being with Mike over the past eight years of our friendship, I knew I was also plagued by this troubling annoyance that would rise inside me when he couldn't get on birds. Years before this incident, in utter frustration, I thought I'd found a solution to his problem - his stubborn insistence on using a particular pair of tiny cheap binoculars.

After pointing out a Canada Warbler, a bird perched right in front of him, low on a branch, and giving meticulous details of exactly where the bird was, in just the way Mike appreciated, I was still not able to help him find the bird in time, even though she remained foraging for caterpillars for well over two minutes. In exasperation, I said, "Let me look through those binoculars." Bewildered, he handed them to me. Looking through them at a nearby Robin, I was appalled when my suspicions were confirmed. The view was so tiny and narrow, I could hardly make anything out, just a hazy brown and orange blob. My response was instantaneous, "Mike! These are horrible. No wonder you struggle to get on birds. Why are you using these? I'll give you an extra pair I have at home. You'll not only get on birds in no time flat, you'll enjoy the view!"

He remained silent as he took back his bins. Although well-intentioned, it dawned on me how offensive that probably sounded. I tried to backpedal, "Mike, I apologize. It's just that it doesn't make sense to me. Please help me understand. You've been birding way longer than any of us, since you were a kid. You walk around all day, every day, looking for birds. You're always helping others. You've got this encyclopedic knowledge of birds. I could rattle off the name of any bird on the planet and you could tell me their Latin name, the habitat they prefer, the countries they are found in, how many are left, and even who is currently studying them! Birds are your everything! You should have the best bins in the world. Why these?"

Joe, who'd been standing by at the time, said, "I've said almost the same thing, even offered to buy him a pair, but he won't let me."

Mike finally spoke up, "When I was deployed to Iraq, I bought these while in Kuwait when my old pair busted. I saw a White-eared

Bulbul in Iraq through these. A Spur-winged Lapwing mobbing a Ruppell's Fox. My first European Roller! Black-cheeked Bee-eaters!" Even though I wished better for him, I felt moved and dropped the issue – and was even able to find more patience with him for months after, but it hadn't lasted, as the lashing out in such a cruel way this day in Bixby proved.

My mind wandered further back to the first joyous time I'd met Mike. He'd walked up to me sitting and watching birds from a bench in Tower Grove Park one autumn afternoon. When he introduced himself, this tall thin man in his fifties, my age, with a slight stoop in his posture, probably from the heavy backpack he carried, there was a deference in his manner, but also a mischievous twinkle in his friendly gaze. The slight tilt to his head and shy smile seemed inquisitive, yet vulnerable. "Hi, I'm Mike Treffert. What birds have you been seeing?" He'd offered me his hand to shake.

I shook it immediately and responded, "Hi, I'm Chrissy. Did you say Mike Trafford?"

He corrected me, "No, Treffert. T-R-E-F-F-E-R-T. It's a palindrome." Dancing a lightening quick, almost imperceptible jig, a little stepping to-and-fro, he sing-songed, "Name's spelled the same way backward as forward." He introduced his friend Joe, who'd accompanied him, explaining Joe was new to the birds.

I said, "Me, too! I've only been at this for six months, since this spring, but I'm head over heels."

"I'm with ya, Sister!" replied Joe. "Mike opened up the world of birds for me. They're pure magic. And Mike's the best teacher. You can ask him anything."

I jumped on that, since I was puzzled by something. "Mike, can you tell me why I'm seeing so many female Scarlet Tanagers today, but no males. Is that odd?"

Putting his index finger on his chin and furrowing his brow, he purred, "*Piranga olivacea*," dramatically drawing out the melodic Latin name for Scarlet Tanager. There was no pretentiousness in his air, only playfulness. "Well, the males molt in the fall to look almost exactly like the females. You probably are seeing both females and males. Look for darker wings – that will be the male. Or the one that winks at you."

I loved this man immediately, this clever eccentric nerd with a wicked sense of humor. I knew Andy would love him, too. Joe and Mike sat down and joined me on the bench, each of us finding birds and pointing them out to each other, joking, getting high on the birds, Mike sharing with gusto what he knew about each species, plying me with wondrous facts until I was overflowing with awe. Soon we were birding everywhere together and traveling to far flung places around Missouri to find more birds.

Mike is the man I'd shared a blind with to view Greater Prairie Chickens boom at Dunn Ranch.

Mike is who I'd had the honor to witness Barn Owls with at Maintz Wildlife Preserve.

Mike is who I'd squealed in front of, seeing my first Greater Road-runner in Springfield.

Mike is who confirmed I'd found my first Long-tailed Duck, a lifer for him, too, at Riverlands.

Mike is the person that ignited my passion for butterflies, moths, dragonflies and frogs.

Mike rescues me when I get lost and fall at Hawn State Park in my crazed search for a Saw-whet Owl.

Mike calls me when an American Bittern was found at the top of a Bald Cypress at Tower Grove Park.

Mike is my punster, the man I laughed so hard with, we cried.

Mike is the one who imagined with me a raucous Church of the Wild one night as we sat around the table with Joe, his wife Mary, and Andy at a coffeehouse. We envisioned Mike, dressed in the formality of a pope, but with the regalia of an American White Pelican, leading the congregation, each member dressed in their favorite species finery. In a special kind of call and response, Mike would loudly chant the Latin name of a species. We, the worshippers, would repeat it back, while a choir, hidden in the trees, would imitate bird songs, frog calls, insect voices and other wild things, layering the sounds with those of wind and rain and whatever else we could dream up.

After we arrive back in St. Louis after that fateful day in Bixby, months go by without hearing from Mike. We usually received almost daily phone calls from him reporting on his sightings from walks in Jefferson Barracks Park. I am unsure how best to restore our connection, how to help us heal, but I decide to finally call and make a sincere and true apology. I needed to get in the right head space. My greatest weakness was my reactivity and defensiveness. Over the years, I'd alienated plenty of friends and family with it. To keep calm and focused, I study three basic tenets laid out by Buddhist teachers I resonated with. I need to take one hundred percent responsibility for my actions, show Mike I understand the suffering I'd caused him, and be willing to listen to what he needs to feel safe. Could I do all that? I was about to find out.

Sitting back in my recliner, where I feel most safe, I ring Mike.

He answers, "Hello."

Nervous and sweating, I say, "Hi, it's Chrissy."

Immediately, he reacts, "I don't want to talk."

Afraid he'd hang up, I quickly say, "What I did was so wrong in Bixby, Mike. I know I hurt you to the core. I regret it so much and I'm so deeply sorry. What can I do to repair this? Would you be willing to share your feelings and thoughts while I promise to just listen? I want to be held accountable, Mike."

Mike hesitates, but once he begins, a world of hurt pours out, "When you said 'It's a bird,' it told me you didn't give a s**t about me. I felt so angry the next day. I couldn't shake it for three months. I was so stressed and affected by it. Even the birds left a bad taste in my mouth. I couldn't get it out of my head. You never called to apologize. And it wasn't just that. I felt violated on other occasions, too. I don't forget. Once, when I was trying to get on a Black-throated Green, you gave up helping me and walked away, saying 'Find it yourself.' I sat at the base of a tree, hurt." He pauses.

"Mike, I am so sorry for what I've done. I've caused you so much anguish."

"I feel like this stuff with you has taken a couple years off my life. It felt like you tore my heart out. I felt like a doormat, bullied. You

were selfish and not in touch with how you affected me.”

He becomes more emphatic. “If I’m not respected, the birds don’t mean s**t. Birds are not as important as how I’m treated. 95% of the time you’re great, but 5% of the time you are unpredictable and I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

Encouraging him to keep sharing, I cling to my commitment to not get defensive. “You are so right. I have this Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde thing going on. I wish I wasn’t that way. I’m working on it. I’m so grateful you are sharing this with me. What I did was so abusive.”

“I’m impressed that you can admit that,” Mike offers. “It helps, but your behavior reminds me of the abuse I went through as a kid. My parents were toxic. It’s not easy for me to share this, but my dad would lose his sanity when he was mad. He would beat the s**t out of me every few months.” He stops for a second, as if remembering. “My mother did nothing. I was determined to turn out well, to spite them. The birds became my safe space. You took that away.”

I remind myself to breathe, and that nose-diving into feeling like crap about myself is not an option—that’s when Mr. Hyde often comes out for a rampage. Imagining what my best friend would say to me provides a measure of comfort. *Remember what a caring person you are. Be kind to yourself. What you’re doing is hard and you’re doing great. Your love for Mike shines through. Trust yourself. You’ve got this.*

“Oh, Mike, I’m so sorry about your dad. About me. Can you forgive me?”

“Well, I’ve closed that chapter on him and my mom. I need you to know that I feel better talking to you, I really do, but I don’t want to bird with you. I need to protect that space for myself. Maybe we can still eat out together on occasion, but just not bird together.”

For a minute, I can’t find my words. My heart breaks, losing my birding buddy. At the same time, the full impact of the gift he’s given me by sharing his truth profoundly touches me. I risk a moment of whimsy, “Of course. Of course. I want you to reclaim your safe space. Again, I’m so sorry you had to hold in that owl pellet for so long.”

He laughs a little. We say our goodbyes. A few months later, he

comes out to dinner with me and Andy. I feel how changed I am, softened, tender towards him, kinder towards myself, my love set free. He seems at ease. In the following years, he still calls to share news about bird and butterfly sightings. We meet for brunch, he comes over to our place to celebrate birthdays, and we enjoy each other's company. The changes in me remain deeply embedded.

Years pass with a sustained connection, but no birding together, until Mike calls one sunny day in early spring of 2023 to share the news that he's found three Willets at Jefferson Barracks Park, and he wants me to join him! He is trusting me in his 'safe space.' Elated, I rush over. I did not know that would be my last time seeing him. When Mary calls some months later to tell me he's been found dead in his room, I am devastated. Regrets come rushing back, and I think of Bixby again, but suddenly a sweet memory springs to mind.

That day at Bixby, shortly before I wounded Mike, when we'd all been walking along peacefully together, Mike had pointed out a plant to me called Jewelweed, with its bright orange flowers. He'd proclaimed the Latin name, of course, "*Impatiens capensis*! You can use the plant as a remedy for poison ivy. Just crush a few of the leaves and maybe a bit of the stalk and place the juicy mix like a poultice on the affected area."

Joe had piped up, "It really works!"

Impatiens capensis. 'Impatiens' hadn't registered at the time, but it did now. How perfect. It reverberates like warm rich tones of a steel tongue drum. Mike knew I needed a remedy for my itchy, blistering, poison-ivy like impatience. And he was it, unbeknownst to him.

In memoriam of Michael Allen Treffert, November 6, 1958 – January 24, 2025



Jewelweed, *Impatiens capensis*
Photo Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren

The Great Louisiana Photo Quest

Paul McKenzie

During the Christmas holiday season, my wife Becky and I travel to Baton Rouge, LA to see friends and relatives. This year our trip was 22 Dec. 2023 through 3 Jan. While there, I always take the opportunity to go birding with my good friend Dr. J.V. (Van) Remsen, Jr., retired and distinguished ornithologist at LSU. Prior to the trip, Van asked me to provide a “wish list” of the most wanted species I wanted to photograph.

We met at his residence in St. Gabriel, LA on 29 Dec. Van’s yard is landscaped with an abundance of flowering plants to attract wintering hummingbirds, and this winter his yard was home for no less than five species, including Buff-bellied, Rufous, Black-chinned, Calliope, and Ruby-throated. Buff-bellied Hummingbird was on my photo quest list, but initially we only heard its diagnostic calls and brief glimpses as it darted among the hummingbird plants. After a few trips through his yard, I was able to spot the bird on its perch.

On 30 Dec. we headed towards the SW LA coast in hopes of finding and photographing a Snowy Plover, a rare and regular winter visitor



Buff-bellied Hummingbird, St. Gabriel, LA
29 Dec 2023

at Johnson’s Bayou beach near the LA/TX state line. On the way, we were able to relocate and photograph a rare winter inland record Long-billed Curlew near Crowley LA, but the lighting was poor for good photos, so we proceeded SW towards Cameron Parish. We stopped along a roadside in Calcasieu Parish in an attempt to relocate a Burrowing Owl that had been photographed the previous day. While we dipped on the owl, I was able to get some good photos of Mottled Duck and Sandhill Cranes and later a photo of

Crested Caracara at the Cameron Prairie NWR.

The drive through Cameron Parish en route to Johnson's Bayou Beach was rather shocking and demoralizing for me due to destruction left by recent hurricanes. There were many dead live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) and some of the towns I used to bird in the 70s and 80s (e.g. Creole) had been completely destroyed. Similarly, Johnson's Bayou Beach was nearly unrecognizable following post-hurricane reconstruction efforts to reduce beach erosion. After viewing a few Sanderlings, Western Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, Piping Plovers, and Semi-palmated Plovers, we had a small group of Snowy Plovers join the mixed species flock. Finally, I got photos of one of my most wanted species. We then proceeded east to look for a Harris's Hawk that had been photographed the day before (and was again after our trip) but, as with the Burrowing Owl, we were unsuccessful in relocating the bird. We ended the day at Lacassine NWR, where White-tailed Kites had been photographed on previous occasions. While we did not observe any White-tailed Kites (three dips in a day!), the mesmerizing number of waterfowl and other water birds made up for it. Highlights included 1800 (Totally absent from LA in the 70s and 80s) Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, 12 Fulvous Whistling Ducks, 7500 Ring-necked Ducks, 18 Common Gallinules, 60 Roseate Spoonbills, and 19 Limpkins. Strong southerly winds prevented a larger list of land birds, but we were able to photograph a Vermilion Flycatcher.



Snowy Plover, Cameron Parish, LA
30 Dec. 2025

On 31 Dec. we headed east towards the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain near Mandeville, LA, where I was able to get my first LA photos of Common Loon and Black Scoter. We next visited sections of Big Branch Marsh NWR where Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were recently photographed. This, along with Snowy Plover, was one of my highest priority species to photograph but Van thought our chances of finding one were reduced due to time of day (noon). We were unsuccessful on Boy Scout Rd but found five birds near the Lucille and Bertha trail head, and I finally was able to get the photograph I so desperately wanted.

My last trip with Van was 2 Jan. 2025, when we birded with Tom and Claire Hanson at their residence in Acadia Parish, near Crowley, LA. Tom and Claire affectionately call their residence “A for Effort.” The highlight there was no less than five species of doves: Mourning, White-winged, Eurasian Collared, Inca, and Common Ground. Outside of possibly south Texas, I can think of few places in North America where you can see five species of doves at the same location. Another highlight of the trip was relocating and photographing a Lark Sparrow that Tom and Claire had found on the adjacent Caffee Rice Research Station.

As with any birding trip, Van and I were unsuccessful in relocating a few stakeout species, but obtaining my first photographs of Snowy Plover and Red-cockaded Woodpecker enabled the Great Louisiana Photo Quest of 2024/2025 to be an overwhelming success. All told, I recorded 133 species, and my trip report covering our visit can be viewed at: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/318182>.

[All photos in this article by Paul McKenzie. –ed.]



Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, Big Branch Marsh NWR
31 Dec. 2025

Warbler Watching in the Walnuts

Tom Nagel

As the oaks and hickories become fully leafed out in the spring, watching woodland warblers becomes more difficult as they flit in and out of view in the leafed out canopy. Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is one of the last trees to leaf out, with leaves and flowers emerging one to two weeks after the oaks and hickories. Emerging flowers and leaves are magnets for several woodland warblers which forage among them. This provides better views than might otherwise be had in other trees during the late spring warbler migration season.

Warbler species sometimes seen in walnuts include Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted, Magnolia, Blackpoll, American redstart, Tennessee, Nashville and Orange-crowned, among others. Locate some walnut stands in September and October when the early falling leaves expose the nuts still clinging to the branches which make them easier to spot. Then in the spring, when you think the warbler migration season is all but over, check them out for one last chance to see these woodland jewels before they continue their journey north.



Magnolia Warbler, Tower Grove Park, St. Louis 12 May 2023

Photo Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren

Why Spain?

Spring Birding on the Iberian Peninsula

Jean Leonatti and Edge Wade

Edge Wade and Jean Leonatti were on separate but similar spring 2025 birding tours of Spain. This is a narrative of their experiences.

Part one – Jean Leonatti

I have been asked “Why Spain?”. Although I have traveled in Europe, I have not birded in Europe. Over the last couple of years, I asked several guides and fellow travelers “If I can only afford to bird once in Europe, where and when should I go?” The answer was always Spain, in the spring.

I signed up for a 13-day tour of Spain with guides Pablo Perez and Nacho Barrionuevo through Eagle-Eye Tours. The tour started on April 21 in Málaga, a resort city on the Mediterranean Sea coast, and ended in Madrid. It focused primarily on southern and central Spain including several national parks, the Gredos mountains, and a pelagic trip. In total the trip recorded 190 species on 50 eBird checklists. We stayed in small, boutique, family-owned hotels and had fantastic, flavorful food. Breathtaking landscapes included coastlines, snow-covered mountains, steep gorges, grasslands, deep forests, and wetlands. Most exceptional of all – to view Africa from your hotel balcony in Spain!

This part of Spain had been experiencing 5 years of near drought. However, this spring they had abundant rains (although we only had one day of rain during our trip). There was an explosion of wildflowers everywhere! The guides were thrilled to see many of the wetlands full of water and teeming with waders, shorebirds, waterfowl, and passerines. The birding gods were smiling on us.

There were several birding “magic moments”:

While birding at Baelo Claudia, the wind suddenly stopped then changed direction out of the south. The guides yelled “load up”. They drove us a short distance to Mirador del Estrecho, a spectacu-

lar cliff top from which to watch migration. At this point, it is only about 7 miles across the Gibraltar Strait to the African coast. We watched birds catch the thermals on the African coast, kettle up, then glide toward us, go over our heads and into Spain. Short-toed Eagles, Booted Eagles, Black Kites, Griffon Vultures, White and Black Storks ---- by the hundreds. For about 90 minutes there were non-stop bird crossings. Spectacular!

Hiking up over a hill and finding thousands of Greater Flamingos fanned out across a shallow lake at Laguna de Fuente de Piedra. This is currently the largest breeding population of Greater Flamingos in Europe. It also contained thousands of waders and shorebirds.

Great and Little Bustards in courtship displays, sometimes jumping high in the air to be seen over the tall steppe grasses.

On top of a windswept, gorse-covered mountain at Peñas Negras we hunted for the elusive but much wanted Bluethroat. It was cold (which we were not prepared for), extremely windy, very hard to



Greater Flamingo, Donana National Park
Photo Pablo Pérez

hear bird calls. Skylarks were displaying, buntings and warblers were flitting in the gorse, but no Bluethroat. He was making us suffer! Finally, the guides said “enough” and we hiked back to the vans. As we were driving out, a Bluethroat popped up on a large boulder, sang lustily (including some bobbing) and posed for us --- less than 20 yards away and all from the warmth inside the van.

Early on our trip we visited Llanos de Libar. It is a mountain environment with steep valleys, shared by sheep and goat ranchers but few people. The only sounds were bird calls and the bells on the sheep. Occasionally a herder appeared carrying a traditional walking stick. No motorized sounds; it was a precious slice of bygone times. The birding was excellent – raptors, finches, buntings, Black-eared and Black Wheatears, Thekla’s Lark, Stonechat, Rock Sparrow, Serin, Melodious and Sardinian Warblers, Eurasian Wren and Blue Rock Thrush.

For me, a birding trip isn’t just about the birds – it is about the history, culture and geology of the region I am visiting. Our guides were steeped in that knowledge and willingly shared it.

Spain was historically part of the Roman and then Moorish Empires. These two cultures are still reflected in the architecture and foods of Spain. I didn’t remember that Gibraltar is still owned by Great Britain and that Spain governs two cities that are on the African coast. What a mix! We had many opportunities to experi-



Llanos de Libar — Photo Jean Leonatti

ence the culture ourselves.

We birded around the Roman ruins of Baelo Claudia . Excavations have uncovered the most complete Roman urban complex in the entire Iberian Peninsula including a basilica, a theatre, a market, factories, aqueducts, and the Temple of Isis. It is located on the north shore of the Strait of Gibraltar and served as a port. Processing tuna and salt mining were its major income. It was also noted for producing a salty oil liquid called “Garum” that was shipped back to Rome for the nobility. It is still a delicacy today.

The “white villages” of the Andalusian region cascade down the mountainsides. All structures have traditional clay tile roofs, are walled with inside courtyards, and are lime-washed in white to repel the heat. Other regions had stone homes (beige colored) with no walls and clearly visible front doors and steps.

We stayed overnight in the historic town of El Rocío. It is the gateway to the Doñana National Park and has sand roads throughout the town. Its claim to fame is La Virgen de El Rocío – a very small statue of the Virgin Mary that had several miracles attributed to it. It was just a coincidence that we were there the night of a special religious event celebrating the Jubilee Year of the Catholic Church. There was a perfectly orchestrated parade of different “brotherhoods” representing 100+ surrounding villages. Each brotherhood group (with male and female participants) was led by a standard-bearer and a single individual playing a traditional piccolo with one hand and beating a drum with the other hand. They entered from all corners of the town and gathered in the public square outside the stunningly beautiful church of the Virgen de El Rocío. So cool to witness this! This town also had many stores selling traditional flamenco dancing costumes, all on display in their windows.

One day we had lunch in a forested rural area at the Carrasco Goat Cheese Factory – factory would be an exaggeration. It was a shed for the goats and a shed for us! They raise goats in the traditional fashion. The goats are allowed to graze in the nearby forest, with a bell on the lead goat and a dog to bring them back home. The owners made artisanal cheese which we feasted on – with wine, of course. And, yes, we got to feed baby goats.

The food – the best foreign food I have ever eaten. It was savory and aromatic without being spicy hot. Our guides generally ordered a

variety of tapas (small plates) that we passed around so that we could all get a taste of the local cuisine. The specialties are all things tuna, olives, and ham. (Did you know that red tuna annually “run” — much like the salmon in the Pacific Northwest — into the Mediterranean Sea to spawn and raise young? When they return to the Atlantic Ocean they are depleted of energy and met by hungry pods of Orcas.) There are regionwide contests as to who can shave the ham so thin that you can read through it! We were told the ham comes from very special “happy, athletic pigs”. They love to run. As if to prove that statement, we later passed a large, fenced pasture dotted with oak trees --- and the pigs were running, almost galloping, from tree to tree.

Spain in the spring, definitely worth the trip!

Part two -- Edge Wade

Jean Leonatti asked if I was interested in joining her and Cathy Harris on a spring birding trip to Spain with Eagle-Eye Tours, a birding tour company we’ve both been pleased with before. I gave serious consideration to joining them, beginning with careful reading of Eagle-Eye’s tour description and itinerary. The price was well within the expected range for a two-week tour, the potential bird list showed many species that would be lifers, and the itinerary was full of sights I have dreamed of seeing. But there was one hitch: The Wallcreeper.

The what? The Wallcreeper is a Eurasian species of high elevations that has an endearing resemblance to a butterfly. I’ve had a secret obsession with it since seeing a photo many years ago. It was not on the bird list for the Eagle-Eye tour, so I looked for a similar one, beginning with WINGS, a company I’ve traveled with several times. And yes! WINGS offered a 16-day Spain in Spring tour including time in the Picos de Europa mountains, Wallcreeper habitat. But... (why is there so often a “but”?) the tour began the weekend of the MBS Spring Meeting.

A classic dilemma for sure. The MBS meetings always have field trips with good birding at sites I don’t get to often, and more compelling, they are the greatest way to catch up with birding friends I see too infrequently. Then, there’s the obligation I feel strongly to contribute to the organization serving Missouri birders—an obligation that is my way of acknowledging the joys Missouri birding has

brought. These thoughts brought me to the new set of MBS officers and Board members. They are well-equipped to guide us into the future without my direct presence. My absence at the meeting would be a clear message that MBS is in capable hands. I hit the “Register Now” button for the Spain in Spring tour.

Travel began with a 6:30 a.m. home pick up by the van shuttle service to St. Louis Lambert airport on May 2 (the day Jean left Spain). The delay at the beleaguered Newark airport meant an 80-year old’s version of a mad dash (more madness than dashing) to make the connecting flight to Málaga, Spain. Then we sat on the runway for further delay. The luggage and I arrived at Málaga at 7:30 a.m. May 3. A short taxi ride got me to the hotel about 10:00, with minimal sleep and a room not scheduled to be available for 5 hours. The empathetic desk clerk with better English than my poor, western hemisphere Spanish pointed to the tiny lobby area and suggested I wait there until a room was ready. I semi-dozed for about an hour, then was awarded a key card to a room and 5 hours of light sleep before the scheduled dinner meeting with the tour leader, John Muddeman, and the other four participants, two men and two women.

We had weather conditions very similar to what Jean described—most days were sunny, but chilly for Spain this time of year. Once at lunch I asked one of our group how many layers she had on. She silently counted, then replied, “Seven.” I, too, had on seven layers.

As Jean noted, a good international birding trip is an immersion into a multi-experiential collage of food, architecture, history, flora and fauna, and more...elements that have formed the fabric of the culture of the friendly, gracious people of the host country.

We stayed at some of the same small boutique hotels as Jean’s group. There were no elevators. One had 24 steps to my floor, another had 34. Breakfasts were buffet style. Lunches were at small tapas cafes or picnics with sandwiches we made of thin smoked meats, salmon or tuna, cheeses, fruit, cookies or pastries. At dinners we usually had two or three appetizer choices and three options for the main course. Tuna in various forms was a common option, others being trout, salmon, and pork, or more sparingly, beef dishes. Rolls or bread and olive oil were always present. Dessert choices varied, with flan my personal favorite. It was all delicious! I had no meal I wouldn’t order again.

As a history buff, there were sights I hoped we'd see. I wasn't disappointed. We saw the 2,000 year-old Roman aqueduct of Segovia, the walled city of Ávila, and a few of those medieval "castles of Spain" looked for in the song, *Far Away Places*, a favorite inspirational siren for this dreamer. There were picturesque villages, one with a pair of wooden clogs at the doorstep, another with a stone monument commemorating the building of a bridge in 1792 authorized by King Carlos IV.

The birding was its own special kind of deliciousness, beginning with coastal and inland sites in Andalucia, Spain's southernmost region with Portugal along its western border. We then drove north into the Extremadura region, and continued northward into Castilla y León, for our final birding adventures in the Picos de Europa of the Cantabria region, with the Bay of Biscay on the far side of those snow-capped peaks we explored. The 66 eBird checklists contain a group species total of 229. Mine is 227, as there were a couple I didn't hear or see well enough to count. The 80 lifers were a few more than I anticipated.

Birding sites were a mix of places from the spectacular to the seemingly mundane. Among the latter was patch of woods viewed from a parking lot, home to Europe's only remaining Common Bulbul. A



Picos de Europa — Photo Edge Wade



Bald Ibis and chick — Photo Jean Leonatti

pitted rockface along a well-traveled road is the preferred site of a breeding colony of Bald Ibis who have expanded from the relocation sites chosen by people in this successful reintroduction to Spain (and all Europe). Bald Ibis could easily make anyone's list of the world's 10 most ugly birds, but somehow that only makes them more attractive!

As to the spectacular, I wasn't prepared for the sheer beauty of most of our birding venues. Among them were the Strait of Gibraltar with its strong winds being traversed (in both senses of the word) laboriously by raptors heading to European nesting sites; marshes dotted with flamingos, spoonbills, ducks and shorebirds in breeding plumage; great stretches of steppe crisscrossed with miles of centuries-old stone walls, the territories of sandgrouse, bustards and larks; mountain slopes with grazing ibex, breeding territory for Dunnock, Bluethroat, and Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush; small white-water streams supporting dippers and wagtails; towering tors, home to Black Wheatears, Eurasian Eagle-Owls, and Rock Buntings; and the bleak peaks of the Picos de Europa enlivened with White-winged Snowfinch, Alpine Accentors, and a high elevation-loving corvid, the

Yellow-billed Chough.

And there were the wildflowers! The cool, wet spring produced carpets of red poppies, purple and yellow orchids, blue foxgloves, yellow buttercups, and white and pink blossoms of dozens of species, everywhere, in all habitats. It was sometimes difficult to focus on the birds. Even the flitting moths and butterflies caught my attention. European Rabbits, Iberian Hares, turtles and geckos, graceful Red and Roe Deer, Red Fox, and the Spanish Ibex showed frequently enough to keep us on the lookout for critters other than birds.

I echo Jean's final line, "Spain in the spring, definitely worth the trip." Yes, very definitely!

And the Wallcreeper? It was not to be. We ascended the first stretch by cable car, hiked higher and then along an almost level trail well above tree line for a period of four hours for about a 4-mile round trip. John, the guide, caught a glimpse of one at the upper cable terminal just before we descended, and later got brief looks through the scope as we watched from our picnic site near the lower cable station, but the bird didn't stay in the scope view long enough for the rest of us to see. We took turns watching that vicinity for a couple hours but were unsuccessful.

The disappointment of not seeing the Wallcreeper was offset to a great degree by the satisfaction of knowing I had tried, and though I was the last to reach the top and lagged occasionally farther along, I did not hold up the group.

With that in mind, do read the following note, *Group Birding Travel – Is it Right for You?*, a collaboration reflecting our international birding experiences.



Bluethroat, Gredos Mts.
Photo Pablo Pérez

Group Birding Travel – Is it Right for You?

By Jean Leonatti and Edge Wade

For many reasons, we personally enjoy international guided group bird tours. However, not everyone is suited to group travel. When you travel alone or as part of a private tour, you can pretty much control where you go and what you do. When you are with a group tour, your individual wishes might be compromised for the group needs. Here are a few tips to help you evaluate if the group travel you are considering is a good match for you:

Adjust your expectations. A good birding tour is a physical adventure; it is not a vacation. You will return home exhausted, not well-rested. Jet lag from long flights will add to that problem.

You can't always count on elevators or bellmen. Can you manhandle your own luggage? Carry it to your room, lift it in/out of the van? The key is to pack lightly and have clothes that can “multi-task”. On a birding trip, no one really cares if you wear the same outfit over and over.

Group travel requires a lot of personal flexibility. Can you “go with the flow” or does deviation from the schedule upset you? Can you get along with others or do people tend to get on your last good nerve? Can you adapt to very long days and short nights, or does that make you crabby?

Can you be quiet in the field (we mean SILENT; talking in a whisper is still talking)? Some people are very social and their instinct is to fill all silence with conversation. Most guides, on the other hand, are constantly birding by ear and require silence from participants – it is very distracting for participants to be talking and asking questions while the guide is trying to zero in on a bird. Wait until you get back in the van, then talk all you want.

Can you honestly and critically assess your physical ability to handle the unique demands of the trip you are considering? Do you have bad back/knees/shoulders/hips? Ladies, public bathrooms

aren't always available, can you squat in the woods and get back up? Can you bend over and crawl into the “way back” of the van (you aren't guaranteed the front seat—rotating seats is the common practice)? Breathing/heart issues? When did you last hike 3 to 4 miles? Prone to altitude/sea/car sickness? We all must eventually face our limitations.

Don't expect the group to adjust to your level of fitness. You should only select a trip you can physically handle, or be willing to make adjustments to your participation and expectations. Above all, accept missing species in a way that doesn't interfere with others' enjoyment. If you choose not to go on a planned hike, don't complain to the group about missing some special birds.

For international travel, buy travel insurance that includes medical services and evacuation. ***It is a must.*** You think it will never happen to you, but it can. We've been on international trips with participants' medical emergencies including a compound ankle fracture on a missed step, a peccary bite requiring 17 stitches, a dislocated elbow from slipping on a mossy sidewalk, back and leg injuries from a fall down a flight of stone stairs, a stroke requiring an extra 3 weeks in-country, and a heart attack with a second, fatal one while in a local hospital.

Group travel has many benefits and can result in wonderful friendships, but make sure it is the right choice for you. A person's unsuitability for group travel can ruin the trip for all participants.



View of Africa from Spain — Photo Edge Wade

Missouri River Adventure Camp 2025: A Big Muddy Thank You to the Missouri Birding Society

Five days. One mighty river. Endless adventures. For one week in July, 45 adventurous campers aged 9-13 traded screens for sunshine and discovered the Missouri River as their ultimate classroom and playground. Our campers experienced the transformative power of connecting with the Big Muddy through hands-on exploration, teamwork, and wonder.

Through boat rides, catfishing trips, visits to historic river towns, birding hikes, creek cleanups, honeysuckle removal, art projects, rock climbing, and community-building games, they learned reverence for the river and respect for each other.

As part of this journey, campers embarked on a birding hike at the Missouri River Center in Huntsdale, MO. Campers were treated to an introduction to birding led by Marlee Malmbourg from the Missouri River Bird Observatory and naturalist Laura Semken. They got up close and personal with some bird feathers and artifacts, then excitement buzzed as campers received binoculars and learned how to use them properly.

As campers began walking along the Katy Trail, they listened carefully for any signs of Missouri River birds. Once spotted, everyone got to get a closer look at some amazing species that call this ecosystem their home. Just some of the birds campers observed throughout the day were the Indigo Bunting, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, American Crow, Northern Cardinal, American Robin, Turkey



Photo by Lara Cox

Vulture, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Goldfinch, Carolina Wren, Red-tailed Hawk, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo!

The following day, campers worked with the Missouri Conservation Corps to remove invasive bush honeysuckle. They learned that the berries of this plant are like "bird junk food," which can negatively impact bird populations and brood survival rates. The campers felt accomplished, knowing their efforts were helping native plants thrive and provide essential nutrition for birds.

The mission of the Missouri River Adventure Camp is to connect young people with the Missouri River and instill a lifelong interest in stewarding the surrounding land and waterways. This mission was made possible by the generous support of the Missouri Birding Society. Their funding allows us to keep registration costs low, making the camp more accessible, and also provides financial aid to qualified families, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to attend.

This camp has become a sought-after summer experience—with registration filling in less than 15 minutes this year. It's clear that Missourians are looking to build a relationship with the Missouri River. Missouri River Relief extends a heartfelt Big Muddy thank you to the Missouri Birding Society for helping youth and families



Photo by Sarah Smith

connect with nature beyond their home and classroom walls. We look forward to a future filled with passionate birders and stewards of the Missouri River watershed.

To learn more about Missouri River Adventure Camp and other educational, recreational, and stewardship opportunities on the Missouri River, visit riverrelief.org.



Photo by Kristen Shulte

Missouri eBird Reviewing

Joshua P. Uffman

Missouri eBird Review Team: Missouri has three state-level eBird reviewers: Ryan Douglas (since 2010), Mary Nemecek (since 2016), and Joshua Uffman (since 2007). There are five regional eBird reviewers (those that only review a certain set of counties): Pete Monacell (since 2019, central Missouri); Kristie Nelson (since 2023, central Ozarks); Diane Bricmont (since 2019, St. Louis area); Marky Mutchler (since 2020, Kansas City area); and Lisa Berger (since 2016, Springfield area). As a team, we all work very closely with each other and interact regularly with the Missouri Bird Records Committee (MBRC) and Mark Robbins to ensure we are analyzing the records in a fair and consistent manner.

Missouri eBird Filters: eBird's data quality is managed through automated filters, ensuring a rigorous evaluation process. These filters provide a first line of review for all species entered in an eBird checklist. To best understand these filters, it helps to be familiar with their history. When I first started reviewing in 2007 it was clunky, with just a single filter for the entire state containing all Missouri's species. The presence and count limit for each species could only be set on a monthly basis. For example, permanent residents, like Northern Cardinal, were set to allow for as many as 100 individuals to be reported on any given day per checklist. However, the Carolina Chickadee filter was identical, thus not allowing for differentiation in northern Missouri where Carolina Chickadee is not expected.

Then, of course, there are migrant species. How does one set a filter to catch early dates for species that may not arrive until the middle of a given month? Take Eastern Wood-Pewee as an example, which typically arrives at the very end of April – Should the filter be set to include the entire month of April as an expected species, or should the filter be set at zero for April and 50 starting on May 1st? Additionally, in those days the filters were set to “zero” for only the rarest of birds (those listed as casual or accidental on the state checklist), not necessarily for the species that come with identification challenges. Photos and voice recordings could not be uploaded; instead, they were shared directly with the eBird reviewer.

Since then, and as more birders shifted to using eBird, the filters

have improved and changed greatly. Filters can now be set in blocks of 5 days at a time, versus a single value for the entire month. This feature becomes beneficial when trying to develop filters that match a bell curve for migrant species based on their arrival and departure dates.

Today, the original single state filter is now broken into 64 filters, and we are very close to having a filter for each Missouri county. The baseline for these filters starts with Mark Robbins’s *Status and Distribution of Birds in Missouri*, and from there, the filters are further refined to consider the region’s diversity (for example, Greater Roadrunner in the southwest counties).

Filter Example –Central Ozarks



At the same time, 64 filters and a state list of more than 400 species can present a daunting challenge to keep filters current. This updating of filters necessitates we re-run all prior observations through the new filters. These re-runs result in all observations that were not previously reviewed or were below the filter limit popping up and needing to be reviewed by the local eBird reviewer. As you can imagine, this can be burdensome, as many observers do not recall sightings from 10, 15, or 20 years ago.

Note on Hotspots: Hotspots do not have their own filters; instead, they share the filter of the respective county or counties.

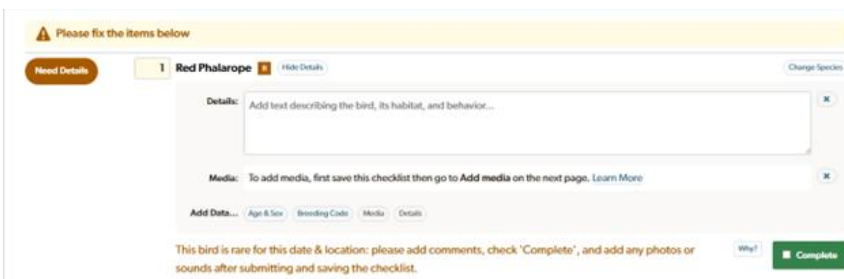
Flagged Species in eBird: Species that fall outside of these filter limits are referred to as “Flagged”. These are the species that exceed the current filter limits due to the following:

- Rarity – a species that is rare or unusual in the region;
- Out of season – a species reported outside its normal date range;
- High count – species count that exceeds the maximum one might

expect to find on that particular date in that region; or Combination of above.

When the filter is tripped, the “Needs Details” message pops up as indicated below (from the web version) requesting the user to add comments:

If a species is flagged on your list, congratulations, you found a rare species or tallied a higher-than-expected count! So, what do you? Please, if confident in your identification, don’t delete the rare

The screenshot shows the eBird checklist interface. At the top, a yellow banner with a warning icon says "Please fix the items below". Below this, a button labeled "Need Details" is visible. The checklist is for "1 Red Phalarope" with a "Hide Details" link. A "Details" section has a text box with the placeholder "Add text describing the bird, its habitat, and behavior...". A "Media" section has a note: "To add media, first save this checklist then go to Add media on the next page. Learn More". At the bottom, a red message states: "This bird is rare for this date & location: please add comments, check 'Complete', and add any photos or sounds after submitting and saving the checklist." There are "Why?" and "Complete" buttons at the bottom right.

species or lower the count to avoid tripping the filter. Instead, provide the requested details to support your sighting.

Here are several ways you can help ensure your flagged eBird sightings will be entered into the public eBird data:

Enter complete notes. A brief mention of field marks does not often tell the entire story or rule out similar species. Mentioning the similar species you considered helps the eBird reviewer and everyone seeing your checklist understand how you arrived at your conclusion. Also consider describing how well the bird was seen. Did you only have a brief glimpse of a backlit bird or did the bird give you clear views for several minutes? Were binoculars or a scope used for the sighting or was the bird observed while driving down a highway? Was the bird in poor light or was the lighting good? This information is not always apparent to others reading these descriptions.

I often think of how the observation will be interpreted 100 years from now. And I can assure you, most of my notebooks from my early birding days do not meet my own current guidance! Words or phrases such as “continuing”, “photographed”, “Merlin ID”, do not add any value to the sighting. It might be hard to believe, but on more than one occasion, “continuing” birds have been gone for several days and/or misidentified when reported to eBird.

Add audio/photo evidence (if available). If you have a photograph or audio recording (*e.g.*, from Merlin), take the time to upload it. If you're using the eBird mobile app and do not have time or the ability to add audiovisual evidence in the field, consider including in your comments "photos and/or Merlin audio will be added." I do this regularly when traveling while birding, as I often don't have the time to upload photos while traveling, and a note that I will do so later at least lets the local reviewer know this additional evidence is coming.

Do not blindly trust Merlin identifications. Merlin is an excellent tool for helping identify birds. But although its accuracy improves regularly, it is still frequently incorrect. If Merlin suggests a rare bird, please try to confirm the presence of the bird by sight and describe the visual field marks you observed. For the best accuracy with Merlin, make sure you have your location set correctly within the app.

And remember, although it's easy to think you are only trying to convey to the local eBird reviewer what you observed, everyone using eBird has access to this data and are coming to their own conclusions about your observation.

Request From eBird Reviewer for More Information on an eBird Sighting:

If you use eBird, you are almost certainly familiar with having received a request for more information from the local eBird reviewer. There are many reasons why an eBird reviewer might send this request, some of this has already been mentioned in previous section, but here is a list of the most common reasons:

- (1) Similar, more expected, species were not entirely ruled out;
- (2) Count method for how high count was estimated was not provided;
- (3) Merlin ID with no recording attached;
- (4) Notes say photographed but a photo was never attached;
- (5) Species is on filter as expected, but has never been reported for that location (typically a first record for popular eBird hotspots); or
- (6) A combination of the above, such as a rare species being observed in higher-than-expected numbers, but only one bird is described in comments.

Don't sweat the email from the reviewer. All of Missouri's eBird reviewers are passionate about birds themselves, trying to help us

all become better birders, and volunteering their time to ensure the integrity of the eBird public data.

eBird checklist and Distance Traveled: What about the distance of my eBird checklist? eBird's Pro Tip is as follows: *We recommend keeping Traveling checklists under 5 miles (8 km) and Stationary checklists under 3 hours for your sightings to make the biggest impact for science. However, limiting your checklists to less than one hour or one mile provides even greater checklist precision!*

For the most part, this is not often an issue in Missouri. However, where the Missouri eBird team does often see these problems pop up is in Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey data. As we get closer to Christmas Bird Count season, consider the following advice from eBird:

Make an individual checklist for each stop you make, and if driving between locations recording random species, choose incidental for those lists.

Similarly, eBird provides the following for conducting Breeding Bird Surveys:

We strongly recommend uploading BBS (or similar surveys) observations at the stop or point count level using the "Stationary" protocol in eBird. This maintains the finest level of spatial and temporal precision that is most helpful to eBird's Status and Trend products. Submitting checklists for each stop ensures that 1) birds are plotted in the habitats they were observed, and 2) birds are associated with specific time of day (species detectability changes throughout the day) and weather conditions during the survey. Uploading aggregated multi-stop checklists (e.g., 5, 10, or 50 stops combined) dilutes this extremely valuable precision in eBird. Also, BBS protocols do not record birds seen while driving between stops—observations that must be included when submitting a "Traveling" checklist of multiple BBS stops to eBird.

Why is my sighting not yet accepted for the public eBird database?

eBird reviewers are volunteers with jobs, families, vacations and other commitments that take precedence over eBird reviewing. Sometimes we are awaiting additional information (e.g., notes or audiovisual support) from the submitter before we can act on an

observation.

But what if you've provided the best details you can, maybe even a photo, and it's still not accepted for the public eBird database? Sometimes we must consult with outside experts or discuss your observation amongst ourselves, and we may conclude that the identification remains uncertain.

If you've reported a bird that requires documentation with the MBRC because it is especially unusual, and do not have audio, photo, or video evidence to support your observation, we will inform you that the bird needs to be accepted by the MBRC before we can approve the sighting for the public eBird database. The Missouri eBird team adheres to MBRC decisions on birds that require documentation. However, if we can unambiguously identify a bird that requires documentation with the MBRC from audio or photo evidence you provide, we will often accept your observation without awaiting MBRC approval.

Missouri eBird Wrap Up: Today, the eBird process, with its filters and its emphasis on details and evidence, serves as a source for all sorts of interesting bird records, including those that need documentation with the MBRC, and a source of data for Mark Robbins to use in future revisions of *Status and Distribution of Birds in Missouri*. Feedback on filters and the eBird review process is always appreciated. So, if you keep tripping a filter, please reach out and inquire about why that might be happening. You may have helped us to discover an error in the filter.

If you have any questions or ways your eBird experience can be improved, please let me know.

References:

eBird. (July 2025). eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application].

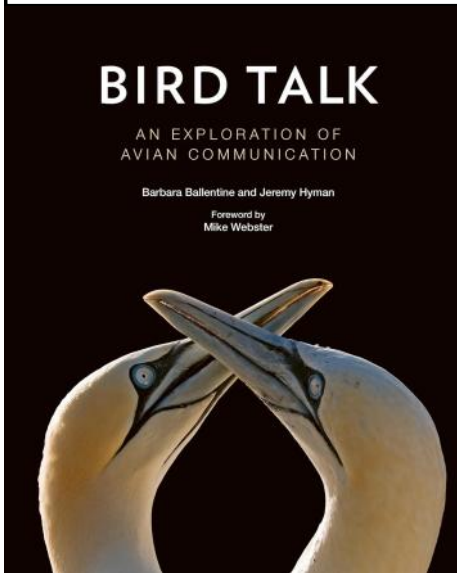
Acknowledgements:

Thank you very much to Ryan Douglas, Pete Monacell, and Bill Rowe for their comments and suggestions, which greatly enhanced the quality of the publication.

Book Review

Bird talk: An exploration of avian communication by Barbara Ballentine and Jeremy Hyman

Michael Taylor



Bird talk: an exploration of avian communication. 2021. Barbara Ballentine and Jeremy Hyman. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.

My first impression after browsing the pages of this coffee-table style book was, “Lots of nice pictures of birds with their beaks open.” Such photographs are appropriate for a book with “bird talk” as the primary title, but the key word is “communication.” Communication by birds is much more than songs and

calls. Birds communicate with their colorful feathers, their fanciful mating displays, their aggressive territorial defense, and the open, begging mouths of nestlings. Communication reflects the biology of birds.

The biology of communication is covered in the introduction (“What is Communication”) and chapter 1 (“Communication Channels”). The introduction briefly describes communication as an exchange of signals such as color or sound to exchange information. Color and sound are produced by the signaler. The signals are detected through vision and hearing of the receiver. Birds communicate in a colorful, noisy world, so their signals need to stand out from their background to be easily received. “Communication Channels” covers the biology of sound, plumage color, and smell. The authors use

clear, concise explanations, without getting overly technical, to explain how birds produce and learn sound, how pigments and feather structure impart different types of color and camouflage, and how smell and body language also contribute to communication.

The remaining six chapters cover specific types of communication, such as male-female communication (chapter 2), territoriality and dominance (chapter 3), and warning signals (chapter 5). Each chapter is divided into several discrete topics. The Territory and Dominance chapter begins with topics on Competition and Territory Defense, The Function of Song in Territory Defense, Song as Threat, Escalation, and so on. Each topic is typically 1–3 pages in length, which makes it easy to pick up the book, digest as much as you want in a single sitting, then return later to learn more. Each topic is accompanied by photographs that complement the topic. A few illustrations and tables are scattered throughout that book that also aid understanding. The body text is printed in a relatively thin font that caused some eye fatigue for me after just a few pages. This was the only flaw I perceived in this otherwise fine book.

Bird Talk is similar in dimensions to a college textbook but is just 192 pages. Unlike a textbook, the pages include many colorful photos of birds. The authors convey complex scientific ideas in clear language with minimal jargon, although some scientific terms are used where appropriate. For example, many species of birds have shades of red, orange, and yellow in their feathers. For most birds, these feather colors come from carotenoid pigments obtained from their diet. For parrots, however, their feather colors come from a group of pigments called psittacofulvins (you do not have to say it out loud) they produce through their physiology. The importance of dietary carotenoids is highlighted in Chapter 2. The carotenoids obtained by male House Finches when they eat influences the intensity of their red coloration, which in turn is important to the female when she is choosing among prospective mates. Thus, the occasional scientific terms are used effectively to help you bring together the biology and behavior.

The final chapter, "Communication in a Noisy World" puts bird communication in the context of natural and human-induced noise. Birds have always lived in a world of blowing winds, falling rain, and other singing animals, but human noise is a recent invention. Background noise has grown louder and more complex, from vehi-

cles, air conditioners, lawn mowers, and more. The authors include examples of how birds are adjusting to human-generated noise, but the full effect of our noisy world on bird behavior remains to be uncovered. Urban areas negatively affect communication in other important ways. Those birds that require carotenoids for their feather color? Birds that live in cities tend to be paler than their rural counterparts due to fewer plants with essential carotenoid pigments.

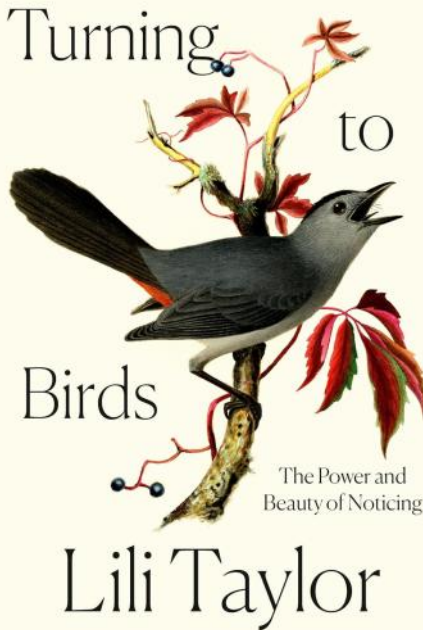
The book includes a "Further Reading" section. The authors recommend a few specialized books but also list the published scientific studies that form the basis of each chapter. The works are not cited in text, which improves the flow of reading, so you must skim the listed readings, arranged by chapter, to find the original work.

Bird Talk is an excellent book that any serious birder is likely to enjoy, but even kids and casual birders might become engaged by the photos. Many of us like to watch birds because they are colorful, because they have beautiful songs, and because they display fascinating behaviors. This book provides concise insights into nearly all aspects of bird communication that deepen our appreciation and understanding of the birds we watch every day.

Book Review

Turning to Birds: The power and beauty of noticing by Lili Taylor

Rebecca LaClair



Turning to Birds: the power and beauty of noticing. 2025. Lili Taylor. Crown Publishing, New York.

In a brave moment of earnestness and honesty, you may have found yourself trying, with all of the passion in your heart and mind, to communicate to another human being how much you love birding, how the flash of impossible color on a wing sings to you, how recognizing a bird song thrills you with a dopamine hit to the brain, how looking into a bird's eye and having it look back makes you feel more connected to, well, everything. And you may have failed in your efforts to communicate these feelings, this passion.

Well, if the object of your conversation will read a book, just hand them a copy of *Turning to Birds* by Lili Taylor.

This is a beautiful story of how one woman simply started to notice nature around her, and birds were her gateway drug. Detailed black and white line drawings of birds illustrate the beginning of each chapter, so take the time to notice the lines in the skin around the eye, the slight reflective glint, because that is what Lili wants you to do in your life. Notice.

Lili Taylor has a unique perspective, from being clueless about the birds around her in New York City, to seeking out and discovering new birds all around her as she moves around the world as an actress in movies and TV shows. When she was newer to birding, she was stunned to realize that she had been at her chosen natural site for an hour and a half, and walked only 0.05 miles. She learns, slowly, how to enjoy what the Greeks described as an autotelic activity, which is an experience that is worth having for itself. While worthy endeavors, you don't have to be counting to go birding, or do recordkeeping of any kind. She is very aware of birding for the joy of it, for the beauty of the birds themselves, and for the awe she feels outside, surrounded by living things.

My favorite chapter was Chapter 7, *Tribute in Light*. As a member of the National Audubon Society Board, Lili was invited to help count birds on the evening of September 11 at the site of the World Trade Center towers. For that night, huge columns of light spring up, bright ghosts of what stood there before tragedy, a fitting tribute for the lives lost there. Unfortunately, September 11th is also peak migration season, and every year, birds are caught circling "within a cage of light until they drop dead from exhaustion." She describes in exquisite detail how the beams of light fill, birds flying in a helpless circle as they drop lower and lower, towards those fatal lights. Her job was to count, and when the birds reached the critical number of 1000, or once a dead bird has been found on or by the lights, those radiant beams are shut down for twenty minutes, long enough for the birds to regain their sense of direction and fly on their way. Lili tells us that artificial light kills 300 million to a billion birds a year.

This book isn't just about birding. It's also about society's reaction to birders and the bonds we may build with each other along the way. It is about how interest in birds inevitably spreads to interest in insects or native plants. It is about caring enough to watch, to notice. This concept is beautifully illustrated here and accessible to anybody, even someone who has never taken the time to notice. Perhaps Lili's eloquence can help you communicate your passion to that non-birder in your life, or reawaken the wonder in your own heart.

Birders' Guide: McGee Family Conservation Area Terry L. Miller, 2025

1,032 Acres. Clinton Co. DeLorme 27, B-7

GPS: 39.54378020 Longitude: -94.42235580

MDC owned; for additional information call 816-675-2205 or 816-271-3100

Directions: From Kansas City, take I-35 North to Lathrop/Polo exit (Hwy 116) and travel east to Plattsburg (10.7 miles); turn south on Hwy C for 1.6 miles. From St. Joseph, take Hwy 169 south to Hwy 116, east to Plattsburg; turn south on Hwy C for 1.6 miles.

ADA Information: Birding is good from gravel roads and four parking areas. There are no paved trails.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: This former pastureland totals 800 acres and is being managed to re-establish warm-season (prairie) grasses. The 100+ acres of woodland are primarily found in patches and along the Little Platte River and ravines. A 7–8-acre lake is visible from Hwy C, and another 2–3-acre pond is interior and located a short distance south of the northeast parking area. From this same parking area, walk directly east along a former farm road, traveling down the hill to the river. This is a very good birding area. The lower section of the road is lined with trees and ends up in a large, grassy bottomland area. At the river, you may hike along it either to the north or to the south.

A very diverse avifauna has been seen here, totaling 164 species. A good variety of waterfowl including gulls and terns, along with cormorants and pelicans, use the larger lake during spring and fall migrations. The 7,200-acre Smithville Lake is only a few miles to the southwest and surely contributes to these water bird sightings. In the abundant grasslands, 17 species of sparrows have been recorded among other species including Yellow-breasted Chats, Blue Grosbeaks, Bobolinks, and Northern Bobwhite. In winter, the area usually hosts a few Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers. If you can visit in spring, soon after the controlled burns, significant numbers of raptors arrive, and in 2021 a high count of 22 Swain-

son's Hawks were observed. The large amount of grassland attracts a good variety of bird species year-round.

Picnic Areas:

None

Toilets:

None; There is a water-less latrine on the Little Platte River, Judge Birch Access just to the north of the area off Hwy C.

Camping:

Permitted only in designated area and is limited to 14 consecutive days in a 30-day period. Groups of 10 campers or more must obtain a special use permit.

Hazards/Limitations:

In season, precautions should be taken for mosquitoes, ticks, and chiggers.

Deer hunting is allowed with only archery and muzzleloading methods. Waterfowl and small game hunting are also permitted.

Nearby Birding Sites:

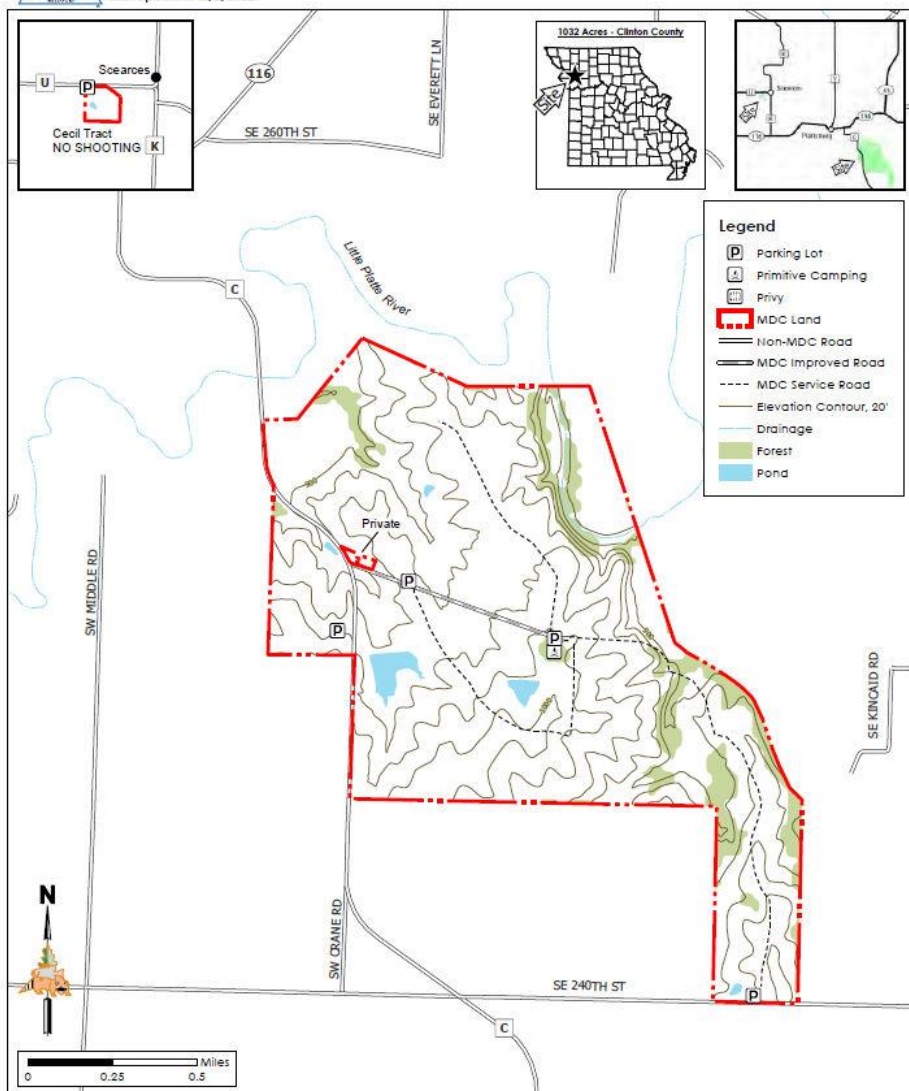
Smithville Lake, Trice-Dedman Memorial Woods, Hartell CA, Hwy 116 Wetland.

McGee Family CA – Cecil Tract (35 acres of virgin prairie); take Hwy C north to Hwy 116, go west 3 miles to Hwy K, go north for 2+ miles, and then west ½ mile on Hwy U.



McGee Family Conservation Area

Conservation Commission of the state of Missouri ©
Last Updated - 2/2/2022



Birders' Guide: Montauk State Park Conway and Christian Hawn, 2025

2,120.6 acres Dent Co. DeLorme 55, E-6

GPS: 37.44848°N, -91.69249°W

MDNR owned state park; for additional information call 573-548-2201

Directions: From I-44 take exit 168 at St. James south on MO 68 about 48 miles until it intersects with MO 32 in Salem. Turn west on MO 32 and go 11 miles and then turn south on MO 119 and go 11 miles to the park.

From US 63 in Licking take MO 32 1/2 mile east to MO 137, then south 2 miles to Highway VV and take it east for 10 miles turning right where it intersects MO 119, which leads to the park.

ADA information: There are several roads and parking areas throughout the park that provide excellent birding opportunities. Of particular interest is Montauk Lake, which may be accessed by driving to it after obtaining permission from the MDC hatchery building. Parking is available at the start of a paved pier that extends out into the lake. An accessible restroom is located across from the hatchery building.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Nearly 180 bird species have been recorded in the park. Spring and fall migration seasons are the best times to visit, when several beautiful warbler species migrate through the park. In fact, Montauk is one of the best locations in Missouri to see the Cerulean Warbler, which nests in the park. Walking the small creek next to the stone picnic shelter located on the right about a quarter mile after entering the park will almost certainly produce a Cerulean Warbler calling during spring migration. The wooded area behind the picnic shelter across from the Montauk Mill is another good location. Other warblers reported in the park include American Redstart, Black and White, Blue-Winged, Blackburnian, Hooded, Kentucky, Magnolia, Pine, Prothonotary, Worm-eating and Chestnut-sided, among others.

Features of interest to birders: This park is located at the headwaters of the Current River and features a spring that supplies over 40 million gallons of water to the river every day. The Current River starts in the park and has several walking paths worn down by trout fishermen along the river that are excellent places to walk and bird. It isn't unusual to see Bald Eagles, Osprey and chattering Belted Kingfishers along the river.

Montauk Lake is a small lake located north of the hatchery building that is a good location for waterfowl depending on the time of the year. Wood Ducks raise their young on this lake during the summer.

Surrounding the main park area is almost 2,000 acres of forest. 40 acres of the forest have been set aside as the Montauk Upland Forest that preserves a dry upland forest with several old shortleaf pines, oak and hickory. Several species of warblers may be found in this section of the park in the spring and fall.

The Pine Ridge Trail, which starts at the naturalist cabin located across from the hatchery building, is a well maintained and "birdy" trail that passes through a mile and half of the park and ends at a stone picnic shelter, which sits near a small spring fed creek on the edge of the Upland Forest. This shelter often has Large Brown Bats roosting in it and is a good place to sit and watch bird activity along this edge habitat.

Picnic Areas: Two picnic shelters are available along with scattered picnic tables throughout the park.

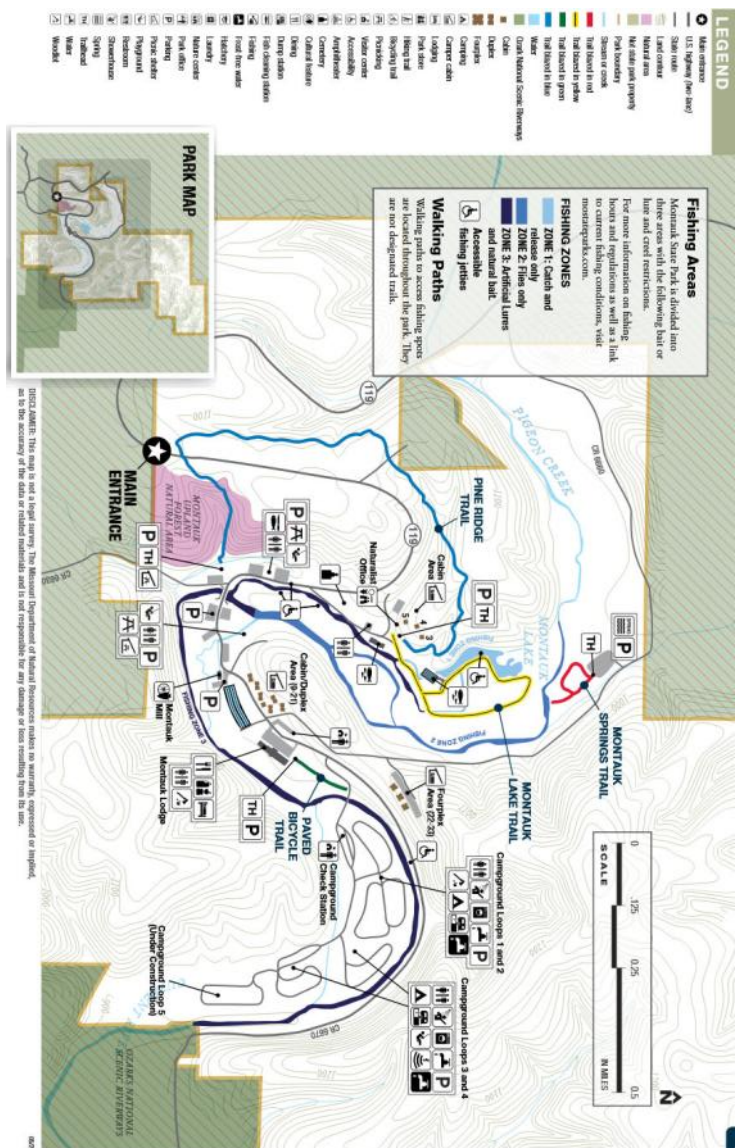
Toilets: Seven public toilets of which three are accessible. One is located at each campground area, one is located at each picnic shelter, one in the lodge and one across from the hatchery building.

Camping: The park has several campground sites available for tent camping and RV's. The sites are equipped with picnic tables and fire rings. Some sites have electricity. There are also several cabins and rooms at the lodge available for rent. Reservations may be made online or by calling 877-ICampMo (877-422-6766).

Hazards/Limitations: This is one of four trout parks in Missouri and is very busy on weekends. The start of trout season in the park is March 1. That day and the following week are extremely busy. Weekends during the summer months are busy as well. Kids fish free weekend, which is usually the first Saturday of May, is another busy time for the park. The park recently suffered record-breaking

floods in November 2024 from which it has mostly recovered. There are still several trees down, mostly along the Current River section of the park that create obstacles to walking side paths next to the river.

Nearby Birding Sites: Audubon Trails Nature Center in Rolla, White River Trace CA, Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Indian Trails CA, Echo Bluff SP, Current River SP



Birders' Guide:
Niawathe Prairie Conservation Area
Greg Swick, 2025

320 acres. Dade Co. DeLorme 51, D6

GPS: 37.51546876431355, -93.97120799232495

Owned by The Nature Conservancy and Missouri Department of Conservation. For more information, call (417) 895-6880.

Directions: From Lockwood, MO, head north on State Hwy. 97 for 8.4 miles. Turn left on St. Road E and go 1.0 mile. Turn right on County Road 61 and proceed 0.5 mile to parking area on the left. From Stockton, MO, take State Hwy. 39 south for 15 miles, turn right on State Road E and go 5.4 miles. Turn right on FR 61 and proceed 0.5 miles to parking area on left.

ADA Information: Birding Niawathe Prairie from a vehicle is nearly always possible, but the Conservation Area is not ADA accessible. There are no restrooms on site, and parking areas are pull-offs that provide minimal disruption to the prairie ecosystem. Closest public restrooms are in Lockwood 12 miles away. Hiking trails are nothing more than vehicle tracks through intact prairie.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Niawathe Prairie provides unique birding opportunities during all four seasons. The best times are the colder months of the year, when annually occurring Prairie Falcon, Merlin, Loggerhead Shrike, Western Meadowlark, Short-eared Owl, and Rough-legged Hawk are often observed. Rarely, Snowy Owl, Northern Shrike, Sandhill Crane, Say's Phoebe, Ferruginous Hawk, and Golden Eagle have been seen on or near the designated prairie acreage.

The spring and fall seasons bring the possibility for birders to observe a wide variety of grassland species, including Henslow's Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Sandhill Cranes, Upland Sandpipers, Burrowing Owls, and more. Expect the unexpected during these excursions.

Summer nesting residents include Bell's Vireo, Loggerhead Shrike, Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow and many other grassland and edge species.

Features of interest to birders: From the MDC website:

Niawathe Prairie is a “remnant prairie, composed of prairie grasses and forbs, dissected by various brushy draws. Management efforts focus on minimizing competition from woody species and encouraging native forbs. This is achieved through various regimes of haying, grazing, and prescribed burning. This prairie contains one of the most diverse plant communities in Missouri, which makes it attractive to many grassland bird species.” (<https://mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/places/niawathe-prairie-conservation-area>)

Also of interest to birders is the fact that nearby Shelton Memorial CA and Penn-Sylvania Prairies have respectively high counts for Short-eared Owl (125, Charles Burwick et al., 31 Jan, 2010), and Merlin (7, Becky Swearingen and Richard Locke, 3 Mar, 2017).

Picnic Areas: None

Toilets: None

Camping: Prohibited

Hazards/Limitations: Roads are not readily cleared after snowfall and can flood during high precipitation events.

Nearby Birding Sites: Regional birders mark Niawathe Prairie as the northern boundary of an area we refer to as the “Golden Rectangle”, which extends from State Hwy. 97 on the east to Dade County FR 41 on the west, and from FR 42 on the north to FR 122 on the south.

FR 51 and FR 61, extending from FR 122 northward, or from FR 42 southward, can be highly productive during transitional and winter months. This birding route includes several public conservation areas, numerous private grassland remnants, and expansive agricultural lands. After a fresh snow, Lapland Longspur and Short-eared Owl are more easily detected, and Harris’ Sparrow, Brewer’s Blackbird, and Rusty Blackbird are frequently seen. Whimbrels and Long-billed Curlews have also been reported along this route during spring migration.

Additional eBird hotspots nearby include Stony Point CA (5 miles NW), Hedeman Lake (14 miles S), Providence Prairie (20 miles south), Golden Prairie (20 miles SW) and Stockton Reservoir (15 miles E).



Niawathe Prairie Conservation Area

Dade County - 320 Acres - Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri © 04/25

Legend

- Parking Lot
- Non-MDC Road
- MDC Lands
- Water
- Natural Areas



MAP DISCLAIMER: Although all data in this map have been compiled by the Missouri Department of Conservation, no warranty, expressed or implied, is made by the department as to the accuracy of the data and related materials. The act of distribution shall not constitute any such warranty, and no responsibility is assumed by the department in the use of these data or related materials.

Birders' Guide

Rocheport River Walk

Edge Wade

eBird Hotspot: Rocheport River Walk

Linear trail, .25 mile round trip. Boone Co. DeLorme 37, 8-B

GPS 38.58384, -92.33591

Owned by City of Rocheport

Directions: In Rocheport, at the south end of Central Street (across 1st Street & Katy Trail). A one-car parking space is on the left at the trailhead, but there is ample room for a dozen cars along the gravel street south of the Katy Trail (the graveled end of Central St.).

ADA Information: The trail is level, but is natural surface. Some rough spots, puddles, etc., may be encountered.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: This trail is a transect, slicing through Missouri River bottomland woods along a levee, providing easy access to observe a wide variety of species in all seasons. Woodland year-round residents include Barred Owl; six species of woodpecker, and small passerines typical of similar mid-Missouri habitat. Migrating warblers and vireos are plentiful. Summer residents include Red-eyed, Warbling and Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Orchard and Baltimore Oriole, Yellow-breasted Chat, Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Prothonotary, Yellow, Yellow-throated and Kentucky Warbler, Summer and Scarlet Tanager.

Note: *The Inca Dove in the eBird Bar Chart is an error in a record submitted as historical. The Inca Dove, seen by many birders in March and April 1995, was observed in a yard, below feeders, about 2 blocks from this trail.*

Features of interest to birders: This straight-line shady levee trail provides an elevated view of bottomland woods, with a slough on the east side, and Moniteau Creek coming in alongside on the west. The slough is visited by waders and occasional ducks. The trail terminates at the Missouri River with a fine view of the river and opportunity to scan for swallows, gulls and terns. Birders may

enjoy the river view from a well-placed bench.

Toilets: None on site. Flush toilets are 4 blocks east on the Katy Trail.

Camping: None.

Hazards/Limitations: None noted.

Nearby Birding Sites: Katy Trail SP and portions of Diana Bend CA (adjacent), Big Muddy North Unit NFWR, 8 miles west; numerous sites in Columbia, 14 miles east; Franklin Island CA, 14 miles west; Boonville sites Rolling Hills and Harley parks, 15 miles west.

Peer-reviewed Article:

**Breeding population of Painted Bunting
(*Passerina ciris*) at Truman Reservoir,
Benton and Henry Counties, Missouri**

Zane Hostetler, Ricky Hostetler, and Mark B. Robbins¹

¹Corresponding author: MBR, University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute, 1345 Jayhawk Blvd., Lawrence, KS 66045. email: mbrob-bins@ku.edu

In the latter half of May 2017, Zane Hostetler discovered several singing adult male Painted Buntings near the Truman Reservoir dam, Benton County. During the following years he recorded this bunting at multiple sites along the reservoir with a high count of an astounding 24 singing adult males on 23 May 2023 from north of the dam south to where highway 83 crosses an arm of the reservoir south of Warsaw. On this latter date, he made systematic searches from a boat and estimated that he covered about 20 shoreline miles.

On 9 July 2024 all three authors recorded from a boat ten singing adult males in the Truman Reservoir dam area (data in eBird). To ascertain how far west birds were present on the reservoir, on 17 June 2025, from a boat, the authors checked likely (see below) sites as far west as Bucksaw Recreation Area, Henry County (data in eBird). At the latter site, a singing immature male was observed; this site is 22.5 main channel miles from the dam. A total of ten buntings, including a presumed female, were observed. During the 17 June 2025 survey, we did not check every site that looked appropriate for buntings, as our primary focus was to determine how far west birds were along the reservoir.

Almost all males observed over the course of the nine years (2017-2025) were adults. During the 2025 survey, we observed two adult males singing on territories at least 0.25 shoreline miles (measured straight line between singing posts) in length. Those males were observed flying that distance between singing posts. Typically, males were singing from the top of dead Eastern cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*) along cliffs that had open areas below or nearby. Moreo-

ver, live cedar stands were present in the vast majority of bunting territories. Unfortunately, sericea lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*) was abundant along the shoreline, and we noted that birds were not present in areas where there was an extensive carpet of sericea, suggesting that they require at least some herbaceous layer and brush. A very small number of birds were noted on small islands or points that had a few shrubs with stands of young willows (*Salix* spp.).

Prior to this discovery, the primary breeding distribution of Painted Bunting in Missouri was in the White River Glades section of the southwestern Ozarks from the Oklahoma border east to Oregon County, but in 2025, a few birds were discovered as far east as Scott County in the Mississippi Lowlands (eBird). Additionally, a few pairs have been documented north to Dade and Greene counties (Robbins 2020). A few isolated pairs have been documented as far north as Clay County (in 1956; Rising et al 1978), St. Clair County (in 1973; Norris and Elder 1982), and in Cole County (2006 to present, eBird). Recently, in 2024-25, Reggie Swartzentruber (pers. comm.) and Ricky Hostetler documented at least five singing males (4 adults, 1 immature) along 2.25 miles of road northwest of Stockton in Cedar County.

Thus, the discovery of a relatively large population of Painted Buntings along the shoreline of Truman Reservoir was totally unexpected. Given the population along Truman Reservoir, it is surprising that this bunting has not been found breeding along the shores of Stockton and Pomme de Terre reservoirs (Z. and R. Hostetler, pers. ob.). Additional surveys are needed at those reservoirs as well as Lake of the Ozarks and along some of the other arms of Truman Reservoir.

Given this discovery in addition to the new records highlighted above and the multitude in eBird, we believe the Painted Bunting no longer merits being listed as a Species of Conservation Concern (Missouri Natural Heritage Program 2024), as its status exceeds the criterion of “21-100 occurrences.” In fact, that criterion was surpassed years ago.

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Missouri Natural Heritage Program. 2024. Missouri Species and Communities of Conservation Concern Checklist. Missouri Department of Conservation. Jefferson City, Missouri. 47 pp.

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- Robbins, M.B. 2020. *The Status and Distribution of Birds in Missouri*. 2nd edition. *KU ScholarWorks*. University of Kansas Libraries. <http://hdl.handle.net/1808/30959>



Painted Bunting, Taney Co 9 Jun 2022
Photo Paul McKenzie

Winter 2024-2025 Seasonal Report

Kendell Loyd

Colder than average winter seasons have become increasingly rare in Missouri, with the past three decades dominated by a warming trend. However, the winter of 2024–2025 provided a notable exception. Following a warm December, both January and February recorded below-average temperatures, making this one of the coldest winters Missouri has experienced in over a decade. January 2025 was particularly notable, as it was the coldest January since 2014, with sustained arctic air resulting in statewide average temperatures 2–4°F below the long-term norm (1901–present). February continued this pattern, with temperatures running 3–4°F below average. In contrast, December 2024 saw mild conditions overall, despite a few brief cold spells, including a strong cold front mid-month that brought gusty winds and a quick freeze across the state. Nevertheless, December’s overall average remained above the historical norm.

Preceding the winter, Missouri had experienced lingering drought impacts, particularly in the southern half of the state. While October and November brought some needed moisture, total precipitation heading into winter remained below average in many areas. December brought mixed results: the northern half of the state remained dry, while the south saw a few modest rainfall events. At the end of December, water levels along major rivers remained low.

January brought two significant snow events. The first occurred on January 15–16, affecting the central and northern regions with 4–8 inches of accumulation. The second system, on January 22, brought 6–10 inches across southern Missouri and caused hazardous travel conditions. February was generally drier, but a notable snowstorm on February 18 dropped over 6 inches in parts of southwest Missouri. This storm also brought very cold conditions with high temperatures in some areas being in the single digits. Despite these snow events, overall winter precipitation was below average, continuing moisture concerns across the region.

In Missouri this winter season, 187 species were reported. No

species was reported in all 115 county-level areas. The season saw amazing records, such as 1st winter record of **Wilson's Phalarope**; 2nd winter record of **Wilson's Warbler**; 3rd winter records of **Barn Swallow**, **Black-and-white Warbler**, and **Vermilion Flycatcher**; 4th winter record of **Nashville Warbler**; 5th winter record of **Spotted Sandpiper**; and 9th winter records of **Red-necked Grebe** and **Cape May Warbler**. In addition to these seasonal rarities, the state's 11th record of **Lesser Goldfinch** was well documented. Subspecies of note from the season include "**Pink-sided**" **Dark-eyed Junco** and "**Audubon's**" **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. Overall, healthy cone crops in the boreal forest kept most irruptive finch species to the north of the state.

The data used to compile this report came primarily from eBird. Any inconsistencies or exclusions from this report were unintentional. Birders are encouraged to submit their observations through eBird, though submitting personal seasonal reports directly to seasonal editors is equally encouraged, as commentary and perspective are often difficult to ascertain from eBird checklists alone. This report spans the winter season, which is defined as 01 Dec 2024–28 Feb 2025. In Missouri, the winter residency period, as defined by the MBRC, is 14 Dec–20 Feb, meaning some migratory movements may still be occurring outside of this range, though this varies by species and location.

Unique to the season, winter hosts the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). There were 34 active counts in the state—the highest number in history. Annually birders take part by counting every bird they encounter within a single day within the designated count area. This is the largest and longest running bird population study in the state, having collected data since 1900. This report benefits from the hundreds of participants that allow for increased coverage during the winter season.

In this report, sightings marked with an asterisk (*) require documentation with the MBRC, but no documentation has yet been received. Observers involved with such sightings are encouraged to submit documentation for the sighting to be kept within the state's written records. Sightings marked with a dagger (†) have had documentation submitted, and those marked (acc.) have been accepted by the committee.

A key for any abbreviations used in this report can be found at the

end. For online readers, if a sighting is notable and diagnostic photos were submitted to eBird, the eBird checklist has been linked within the report where possible. It is acknowledged, however, that some links may not connect, as they rely on a third-party site and the maintained publication of the linked eBird checklists.

Waterfowl

Snow Goose numbers were above 100,000 at a few areas across the state, with peaks of 360,000 birds at Loess Bluffs NWR, Holt Co, in late February (CG). **Ross's Goose** was also reported across the state, with the seasonal high of an estimated 6500 reported from Loess Bluffs NWR, Holt Co, 10 Feb (Steve Kolbe, Sean McLaughlin). A **Snow x Ross's Goose hybrid** was reported in Texas Co 26 Feb (Christian Hawn, [ph.](#)). The high for **Greater White-fronted Goose** was 7000, Clarence Cannon NWR, Pike Co, 29 Dec (Ryan Andrews, Lori Andrews), and the high for **Cackling Goose** was 12, Barton Co, 03 Jan (Ryan Steffens).

Wintering populations of **Trumpeter Swan** continue to increase, with a high of 3500 reported at Loess Bluffs NWR, Holt Co, 17 Dec (Adam Midden-dorf, Lesley W). The all-time state record high of 1016 **Tundra Swan** was reported at Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary (Riverlands), St. Charles Co, 07 Jan (DD, JM, [ph.](#)). Low numbers of **Blue-winged Teal** persisted around the state into Dec. However, the species was only reported twice in Jan: Otter Slough CA, Stoddard Co, 01 Jan (Sam Lewis) and City of Columbia Wetlands, Boone Co, 17–19 Jan (Carol Weston, Joseph Bieksza). Birds seen in Feb likely represent early migrants. A **Gadwall x Mallard hybrid** was reported at Clarence Cannon NWR, Lincoln Co, 30 Dec (HG). **American Black Duck** was reported in 11 counties with a seasonal high of 20, Clarence Cannon NWR, Lincoln Co, 30 Dec (HG). Individual **Mallard x American Black Duck hybrid** were reported at Clarence Cannon NWR too, 30 Dec and 10 Feb (HG).

Continuing into the winter season, Brenda Kay Sand Quarry in Scott Co hosted all three expected species of scoter. Single **Surf Scoter** (19 Nov–03 Dec) and **White-winged Scoter** (21 Nov–03 Dec) accompanied up to 9 **Black Scoter** (22 Nov–15 Dec) (TK; Keith Brink, [ph.](#); m.ob.). In addition to the birds at this location, all three species were seen elsewhere in the state. Individual **Surf Scoter** were reported at Stockton Lake, Dade Co, 16 Dec (ZH, KL) and at Riverlands, St. Charles Co, 30 Dec–11 Jan (BR; m.ob.), with 2 birds also seen at Riverlands, 08 Feb (Ceresa Munjack-Khoury, Chris W). A single **White-winged Scoter** was reported at Smithville Lake, Clay Co, on 01 Dec (DW). **Black Scoter** was seen in two other locations in the state. The first at Riverlands, St. Charles Co, where up to 7 birds lingered 26 Dec–13 Jan (Andy Reago, Chrissy McClarren, BR, m.ob.). The second report was of a single male bird at Fellows Lake, Greene Co, 09–10 Jan (NS, KL, ZH). Individual **Long-tailed Duck** were present at Riverlands, St. Charles Co,

21 Nov–10 Dec (Cornelius Alwood; JM, [ph.](#); BR; m.ob.), and Mingo NWR, Stoddard Co, 03–14 Dec (Ben Lambert; Reva Dow, Sally Hancock, [ph.](#)). A **Bufflehead x Common Goldeneye hybrid** at Juden Creek CA, 09–15 Feb (Mark Haas, Katie Haas, Brian Hass) is an apparent first state record of this hybrid in eBird. Another hybrid, a **Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser hybrid** was photographed at Smithville Lake, Clay Co, 09 Jan (DW). Interestingly, this species combination has been recorded every few years at this location.



Bufflehead X Common Goldeneye (hybrid)
Juden Creek CA, Cape Girardeau Co
9 Feb 2025. Photo Mark Haas

Doves through Grebes

Up to three **White-winged Dove** were seen throughout this season in their usual area in Kennett, Dunklin Co (KF). **Greater Roadrunner** was reported in five counties—Christian, Laclede, Oregon, Ozark and Taney—with the farthest north being Greenfield Lake, Laclede Co, 07 Dec (ZH, [ph.](#)). An immature female **Rufous Hummingbird** was seen at a private residence in St. Louis Co, 28 Nov–14 Dec (BR, [ph.](#); JU; DBr; Tom Parmeter; Matt Rowe). The bird was captured and banded, confirming the species identification. Unusually, this was the only record of the species for fall or winter in Missouri.

The City of Columbia Wetlands, Boone Co, hosted up to 8 **Virginia Rail** throughout the season. This is a known and consistent overwintering site. Additionally, this location also held up to 4 **Sora**, 15 Dec (PM, PMc, JT). **Sandhill Crane** were reported in 10 counties with highest numbers at LBNWR (up to 22) (Breanna Bartlett, Caleb Nelson, m.ob.) and Grand Pass CA (up to 19), Saline Co (Bill Clark, Bob Schreiber, m.ob.).

The 1st winter record of **Wilson's Phalarope** was located at Maryville Sewage Lagoons, Nodaway Co, 11 Dec–04 Jan (David Easterla; Lisa Owens, [ph.](#); acc.). A **Spotted Sandpiper** was reported at Little River CA, Dunklin Co, 29 Dec (†James Armstrong). Individual **Lesser Yellowlegs** were found in Pemiscot Co, 29 Dec (Scott Steele) and at Little River CA, Dunklin Co, 14 Jan (Jeremy Capps). Outside of the Bootheel where **Greater Yellowlegs** is more expected in winter, the species was recorded at three other locations: 1, Four Rivers CA, Vernon Co, 17 Dec (MR); 1–11, Webb City WWTP, Jasper Co, 08 Dec–23 Feb (SB, JC, CG, m.ob.); and 1, Winfield Dam, Lincoln Co, 24 Jan–25 Feb (†BR, [ph.](#); m.ob.). **Dunlin** (5) was only recorded in the Bootheel, Dunklin Co, 17 Jan (KF). **Least Sandpiper** was seen in eight counties with a seasonal high of 32, Winfield Dam, Lincoln Co, 05 Dec



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

(Cornelius Alwood). A still impressive 20 birds were still at this location by 18 Jan (Rob Francis, Christopher Stapleton), and birds continued throughout the season, though numbers decreased with time.

A Franklin's Gull was seen at Stockton Lake, Dade Co, 02 Dec (KL), and a **Glaucous Gull** was recorded at

Smithville Lake, Clay Co, 24–26 Feb (DW, [ph.](#); Don Arney). **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was reported in eight counties. The all-time state high number, 11, were at RMBS 1 Feb (Jonah Eckels). Records away from the Mississippi River include at least 1 adult and 1 immature, Stockton Lake, Dade/Cedar/Polk Co, 01 Dec–29 Jan (KL, ZH, AM, DM, SM); 1 apparent third-cycle, Long Branch SP, Macon Co, 04 Jan–25 Feb (Greg Leonard, Lesa Beamer, Jean Leonatti, PMo, m.ob.); and 1 immature, Smithville Lake, Clay Co, 25 Feb (DW). **Iceland Gull** was found at Riverlands, St. Charles Co, 19 Dec–25 Feb (JE, TB, TG, DBr, DD, JM, BR, m.ob.); Long Branch SP, Macon Co, 25 Feb (PMo); Smithville Lake, Clay Co, 28 Feb (DW).

A pair of **Red-necked Grebe** was found at Stockton Lake Dam, 27 Dec–25 Jan (Brian Nelson; KL, [ph.](#), acc.; m.ob.). A third separate bird was seen offshore from the same location, not associating with the pair, 02 Jan (TB, DN, TN). The season's high of **Horned Grebe** was 134, Stockton Lake, Dade Co, 09 Dec (KL). **Eared Grebe** was seen at Longview Lake, Jackson Co, 21 Dec–01 Jan (Karen Davis, Sherry Leonardo, m.ob.); Stockton Lake Dam, Cedar Co, 01–03 Jan (ZH, KL, AM, BBI, DBI); Stockton Lake, Dade Co, 01 Jan (ZH, KL, AM); Table Rock Lake, Stone Co, 23 Dec (AH, DM, SM); and College of the Ozarks, Taney Co, 04 Dec (Ian Hearn).

Loons through Owls

A **Red-throated Loon** was at Fountain Grove CA, Livingston Co, 28 Nov–02 Dec (JT, [ph.](#); Steven Romo; Jeff Folkerts; Terry McNeely). Then, a pair were seen at Stockton Lake Dam, Cedar Co, 02 Jan–09 Feb (DN, TN, Asher Nugent, Eugene Nugent, [ph.](#), acc.; m.ob.). A **Pacific Loon** was present at Stockton Lake Dam as well, Cedar Co, 28 Dec–16 Jan (MR; ZH; †KL; AM; KO, [ph.](#); m.ob.). **Common Loon** numbers were highest at Stockton Lake

Dam with about 70 birds, Cedar Co, 28 Dec (MR).

A few, 1–5, **Plegadis sp. (dark ibis)** were recorded at Otter Slough CA, Stoddard Co, 02–12 Jan (Dewey Heppe, Daniel Fisher). Though White-faced Ibis is the more likely species, many fall and winter dark ibis cannot be differentiated from Glossy Ibis and remain unidentified. **American Bittern** was reported at Hornersville, Dunklin Co, 05 Dec (KF). Outside of a small overwintering population of **Black-crowned Night Heron** at the St. Louis Zoo, a single immature bird was at Eagle Bluffs CA, Boone Co, 16 Feb (†Shelby Thomas, [ph.](#)).

A few **Osprey** lingered just into the season with single birds at Lake Jacomo, Jackson Co, 01 Dec (Aaron Mitchell, Shawna Mitchell) and Stockton Lake, Dade Co, 04 Dec (KO). Another bird was reported later at James A. Reed WA, Jackson Co, 26 Dec (Sheridan Hardy, [ph.](#)).

Golden Eagle was reported in twelve counties with sightings more or less spread evenly across the state: Prairie SP, Barton Co, 02 Dec (Doug McWhirter); near St. James, Phelps Co, 04 Dec (Scott Alford); Dunn Ranch area, Harrison Co, 07 Dec and 14 Jan (DW), 20 Feb (Chris Jerome), 27 Feb (Ben Baldwin); Clarence Cannon NWR, Pike Co, 12–19 Dec (Dave Haenni, Mike Thelen, m.ob.); Schell Osage CA, Vernon/St. Clair Co, 18 Dec (Ryan Steffens) and 02 Jan (AM); near De Soto, Jefferson Co, 22 Dec (Shawn Pfautsch); near Sedalia, Pettis Co, 30 Dec (Brenda Morris); Putnam Co, 31 Dec (JU); near Falcon, Wright Co, 04 Jan (ZH); Big Tree Campground, Carter Co, 26 Jan (Reva Dow); Ted Shanks CA, Pike Co, 10–13 Feb (Mike Thelen, DBr, DD); BK Leach CA, Lincoln Co, 11 Feb (SH Green). **Ferruginous Hawk** was reported at Shawnee Trail CA, 03 Feb (†JC, m.ob.) and 06 Feb (†Krista Smith, SB), likely representing the same bird. **American Barn Owl** was only reported in five counties: Bates, Barton, Dade, Lawrence, and Pemiscot.

Passerines

While **Eastern Phoebe** is a relatively common winter resident in the south of the state, the species is considered casual in the north. There was one such record for the season: 1, Adair Co, 10 Jan (Kondrashov, acc.). The prevalence of **Say's Phoebe** has increased in the past few decades. This winter saw two records, both of single birds at private residences: Montgomery Co, 01 Jan (Nathan Banfield) and Polk Co, 17 Feb (DM, SM). A male **Vermilion Flycatcher** was present at a private residence in Johnson Co from “early Dec” through 03 Jan (†AM, [ph.](#); JT). **Northern Shrike** is seen relatively regularly in the north and west of the state, but is casual in the southeast: 18 Dec, Mississippi Co, (Chris Barrigar, acc.; TK). The last **Tree Swallow** of fall was reported at Brenda Kay Sand Quarry, Scott Co, 03 Dec (TK). The first migrants arrived in Stoddard Co by 09 Feb (Mark Hahn,



Vermilion Flycatcher, Johnson Co 2 Jan 2025
Photo Alex Marine

Mary Hahn), and individuals were recorded as far north as Callaway Co by the end of Feb. Likewise, a few **Purple Martin** had arrived in southeastern counties by the last few days of the season. **Barn Swallow**, accidental in the state in winter, was seen foraging over Stockton Lake, Polk/Dade Co, 27 Dec–04 Jan (TB, acc.; AM; KL).

Brown-headed Nuthatch continue to be seen at the introduction site at Current River Pinery, Carter Co, where successful nesting has occurred. This population seems to be the source of three birds—one of which was banded—seen in the Pioneer Forest, Shannon Co, 02 Oct–17 Nov (Steve Paes, m.ob.). One unbanded individual was still seen 25 Jan (N. Humke) and 03 Feb (Joseph Mosley, [ph](#)). This new location is about 30 miles from the Current River Pinery. **Northern House Wren** was recorded four times, all single birds and all in the Bootheel where the species is known to sometimes overwinter in low densities. **Sedge Wren** are casual in winter outside the Osage Plains and Bootheel area. One bird was recorded at Riverlands, St. Charles Co, 20 Dec–08 Jan (†JE, †TB, Noah Canada, Rad Widmer, TG). Another bird (*) was seen at Loess Bluffs NWR, Holt Co, 19 Dec (MR, Paul Pearson). **Gray Catbird** was seen at Tower Grove Park, St.

Louis City, 04 Jan (Rachael Caballero) and at a private residence, Greene Co, 09–15 Feb (Ben Caruthers, [ph.](#)). **Eurasian Tree Sparrow** is common in the St. Louis metro area and north along the Mississippi River, though 1 bird was reported at a private residence, Johnson Co, 18 Dec, Johnson Co (D. Cowell, acc.). The only **Red Crossbill** of the season as a calling flyover in Stone Co, 02 Jan (AH) highlighting the often-ephemeral nature of the species. Much more sedentary was Missouri's 11th record of **Lesser Goldfinch** (acc.). To the delight of many, the male visited a window feeder at a private residence in Stone Co consistently from 21 Dec—about 02 Mar (Anne Baggot, KL, PMo, PMc, acc.; JU; m.ob.).

Smith's Longspur was reported at Prairie SP, Barton Co, 01 Dec (AM) and Penn-Sylvania and Coyne Prairies, Dade Co, 20 Dec–08 Feb (KO, Greg Swick, AM, KL, ZH, IG, Klee Goes, NS). Two **Snow Bunting** were seen at Jefferson Barracks Park, St. Louis Co, 15 Jan (Kyle Hawley). A **"Pink-sided" Dark-eyed Junco** was documented at the Montrose Power Plant, Henry Co, 05 Dec (MR, [ph.](#)). This subspecies has been reported on a few occasions, but this seems to be about the 3rd confirmed record in the state. **Spotted x Eastern Towhee hybrid** were seen at Shawnee Trail CA, Barton Co, 03 Jan (AM, [ph.](#)) and Liberty School Rd, Franklin Co, 08 Jan (Sam Belley, [ph.](#)). A **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was at Shawnee Trail CA, Barton Co, 28 Feb* (SB, JC, Becky Wylie, Sally Urdang). Three **Baltimore Oriole** were present this season, both at private residences: an adult male,



Summer Tanager, Bonnots Mill, Osage Co 24 Dec 2024
Photo Paul McKenzie

Cole Co, 03 Dec (Steve Garr, [ph.](#)), a female/imm. type, Greene Co, 20 Jan (Diana Sheridan, ZH, KL, [ph.](#)) and a female/imm. type, Greene Co, 19 Feb (Janice Greene).

This winter saw a number of warbler species. The state's 3rd winter record of **Black-and-white Warbler** was seen at the Gateway Arch NP, St. Louis City, 29 Dec (Patty & John Werth, acc.). The 4th winter record of **Nashville Warbler** was at a private residence, Clark Co, 05 Dec (Katie Leonard, [ph.](#), acc.). **Common Yellowthroat** was present at Forest Park, St. Louis City, 02 Dec (Ellie Bruns); Four Rivers CA, Bates Co, 17 Dec (KL, NS); and Sam A. Baker SP, Wayne Co, 26 Feb (Michelle Soenksen). An apparent male **Cape May Warbler** at a private residence, Jefferson Co, 16 Feb (Janet Prasuhn, [ph.](#), JU, acc.) represents the state's 9th winter record. A single female-type "**Audubon's**" **Yellow-rumped Warbler** was seen at a private residence in Jasper Co, 29 Dec* (CG, [ph.](#)). A **Wilson's Warbler** at Heman Park, St. Louis Co, 16 Dec (Chris W, [ph.](#), acc.) represents the state's 2nd winter record. There were two **Summer Tanager** records for the season, both at private residences. The first (*) was in Clayton, St. Louis Co, 08 Dec–20 Dec (anonymous, [ph.](#)), and the second was in Bonnots Mill, Osage Co, 23 Dec–06 Jan (Paul Nelson; PMc, [ph.](#), acc.).

Observers

Theo Bockhorst (TB), Barbara Blevins (BBl), David Blevins (DBl), Diane Bricmont (DBr), Sheila Burns (SB), Jeff Cantrell (JC), David Dean (DD), Jonah Eckels (JE), Kent Freeman (KF), Chad Gardner (CG), Isaac Goes (IG), Tommy Goodwin (TG), Henry Gorski (HG), Zach Haring (ZH), Austin Hess (AH), Tim Kavan (TK), Kendell Loyd (KL), Jim Malone (JM), Alex Marine (AM), Paul McKenzie (PMc), Pete Monacell (PMo), Darby Nugent (DN), Tobias Nugent (TN), Kelly Ormesher (KO), Mark Robbins (MR), Bill Rowe (BR), Nathan Steinbach (NS), Jacob Tsikoyak (JT), Josh Uffman (JU), Doug Willis (DW)

Abbreviations

CA = conservation area; CBC = Christmas Bird Count; ch. = eBird checklist link; CR = county road; Hwy = highway; imm. = immature; MBRC = Missouri Bird Records Committee; m.ob. = multiple observers; NWR = National Wildlife Refuge; ph. = photograph link; SP = state park

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