

THE BLUEBIRD

The voice of MBS since 1934

December 2026
Volume 93, No. 4



The Missouri Birding Society
Missouri's Ornithological Society Since 1901

The Missouri Birding Society

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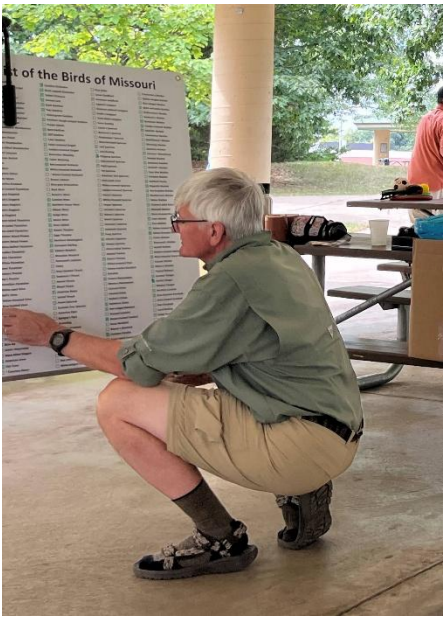
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Cover: Nelson's Sparrow, Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area, Boone Co, 26 February 2026. Photo Bill Blackledge

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 reflect those of The Missouri Birding Society, its officers, Board of Directors, or editors. Send address corrections to MBS, 2101 W. Broadway, PMB 122, Columbia, MO 65203-1261.

President's Corner – Mike Grant



I thank the Society's membership for the opportunity to serve as President. MBS has many programs, interfaces and agreements with other organizations, and a new undergraduate scholarship (thank you Dr. Easterla) to be administered with the previous ones along with our semi-annual meetings and presence at other gatherings. It takes a team for an organization like ours, thus I am happy to welcome Kathy Wann as secretary and Luke Schnieder and Tom Nagel to the board.

We still need to fill the position of Vice-president and I ask all current and past board members to consider this position.

The fall meeting was well planned and executed by the Columbia Birding Ladies Syndicate. It was also well attended, and the field trips scored 127 species despite a bit of rain Saturday morning. Friday evening Bill Clark provided an entertaining review of the history of the Society. Saturday evening Kristie Nelson increased our knowledge on the value and usage of CBC data, and then Marlee Malmborg explained the Kestrel Nest Box Monitoring Program that MRBO has been running for several years.

The weekend after our Fall meeting I represented MBS at the 60th anniversary meeting of the Missouri Prairie Foundation at Friendly Prairie which is about 10 miles south of Sedalia. Prairie walks with an emphasis on prairie plants were led by Bruce Schuette, whom some of you may know, as he is the compiler for the Clarence Cannon CBC. There was an open invitation to camp on the prairie that evening, and I took them up on it. Heard both Great Horned and

Barred Owls calling during the night and in the morning a Sedge Wren came so close that I got decent photos with my iPhone.

The **Dr. David A. Easterla Undergraduate College Avian Scholarship** was established this year through a generous donation by Dr. Easterla. A committee is working to develop the procedure to make an annual award available to undergraduate students in any Missouri four-year educational institution enrolled in an undergraduate program in wildlife, ecology, conservation, environmental science or related fields.

You can donate to any of the three MBS scholarship programs by check sent to MBS at 2101 W. Broadway, PMB 122, Columbia, MO 65201-1261, or online on the MBS website at https://mobirds.org/MBS/Scholarship.aspx by clicking on one of the buttons at the top of the page to select the scholarship you wish to support, scrolling down the page that loads, then clicking on the blue "Donate Now" box. When the donation form appears, fill in the fields and indicate where you want your gift to be applied in the "Select Donation Type" box.

-- President Grant

MISSOURI BIRDING SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE

The Missouri Birding Society membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. All MBS memberships other than Life Memberships are due for renewal now. If you are a new member who joined MBS after September 30, 2026, you do not need to renew until December 2027. You may renew your membership online or use the membership renewal form on the back cover of any recent *Bluebird*.

To renew online, go to MBS's website, www.mobirds.org/MBS/Membership.aspx and follow the directions.

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

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

This same online process is used for new memberships also.

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

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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 4th quarter of 2026.**

Michael Casey	**Adrian, MO**
John Tomlinson	**Elsah, IL**
Joan Means	**Fredericktown, MO**
Rylie Vardiman	**Kansas City, MO**
Cannon Gage	**Gardner, KS**
Carol Virkler	**Columbia, MO**
Steve Sagehorn	**Cuba, MO**
Emily Devlin	**Columbia, MO**
Kristen Heath-Acre	**Columbia, MO**
Dan Gomez-Palacio	**Columbia, MO**
Jane Beal	**Bates City, MO**
Kate McKenna-York	**Jefferson City, MO**

Subscribe to the MOBIRDS Listserv.

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

Join the active Missouri birding community by subscribing here:

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

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

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

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

Missouri Birding Society Mission Statement

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

MBS Scholarships to American Birding Association (ABA) Young Birder Camps 2027

The Missouri Birding Society is again sponsoring camp scholarships for Missouri young birders age 13-17. For the 2027 camp season we are offering two scholarships: one to attend Camp Colorado in Allenspark, CO, June 27-July 3, 2027; and one to Camp Delaware Bay, coastal Delaware and Cape May, NJ, July 29-August 4, 2027. [See reports from last year's scholarship winners in this issue.]

The camp scholarships include $20 for ABA Young Birder annual membership, full camp tuition of $2,375, plus $300 toward travel expenses for a total of $2,695 for each camp scholarship. Application are due **Friday, February 12, 2027**. Information about the scholarships and the application materials are downloadable on the MBS website at https://mobirds.org/MBS/Scholarship.aspx.

MBS has reserved the places for young Missouri birders at the camps with ABA. The MBS scholarship applicants **DO NOT REGISTER FOR THE CAMPS WITH ABA,** as MBS has already arranged and reserved the registrations. After selection by MBS, scholarship awardees will complete the registration details directly with ABA prior to March 11, 2027.

Camp Colorado birders will explore Colorado from grassland to glaciers, from the shortgrass prairie of northeastern Colorado to the aspen groves and alpine tundra of Rocky Mountain National Park. Camp Delaware Bay visits many of the mid-Atlantic's most celebrated birding hotspots during peak shorebird migration, from Bombay Hook and Prime Hook national wildlife refuges in Delaware to legendary hotspots in and around Cape May, New Jersey, birding the beaches, bayshore, marshes, and woodlands of the region.

More detailed information about the camps is at https://www.aba.org/camps/. MBS Youth Scholarships are made possible by proceeds from silent auctions at meetings and by generous donations. You can donate to the Youth Scholarship Fund at https://mobirds.org/MBS/Donate.aspx. Be sure to indicate "Youth Scholarship Fund."

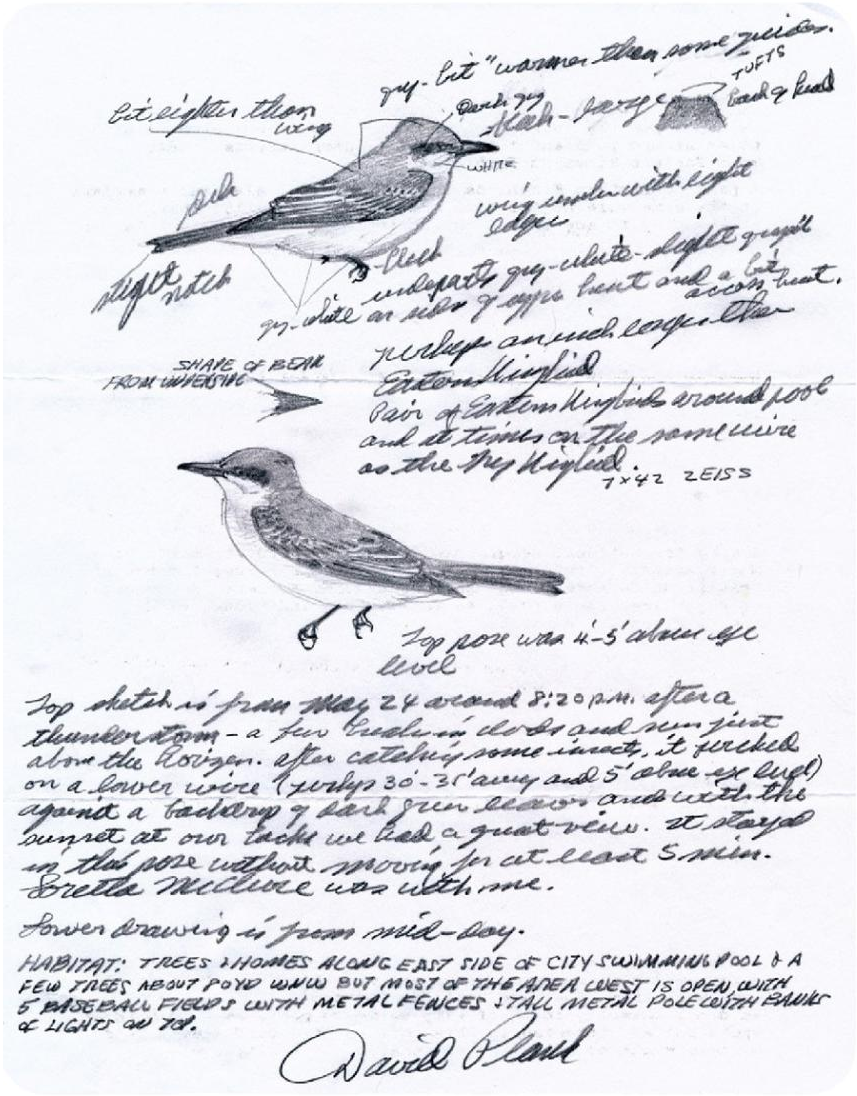
In Memoriam
David Plank

Edge Wade



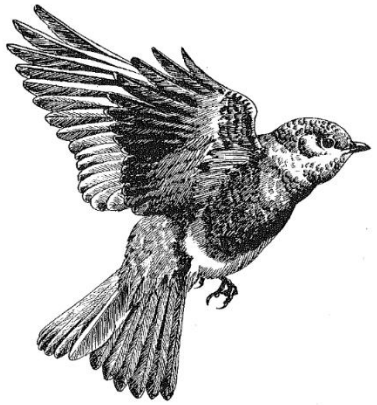
Salem, MO native David Plank, October 13, 1934-August 12,2026, was for decades Missouri's preeminent wildlife artist, best known for his bird studies. He was a gentle, caring soul whose dedication to portray with meticulous accuracy the birds he loved as they went about their lives in favored habitats was recognized by all who have seen his watercolors and sketches in pencil, or pen and ink adorning many Missouri homes or displayed in several art galleries and museums across the state.

David served as a photographer in the U.S. Army, when assignments often required hanging out of helicopters. Yet, he chose to create his works from life, rather than from photos. He spent hours studying birds in the field, working quickly sketching them in various poses as they moved about. An example of his technique illustrates the only record of Gray Kingbird in Missouri, in his submission documenting the bird seen on May 24, 2006, reproduced in *Birds of Missouri*.



Sketch of Gray Kingbird by David Plank

His depiction of an Eastern Bluebird about to land was for many years the logo of the Audubon Society of Missouri and was featured prominently on the cover of the society's quarterly, *The Bluebird*, for twenty years, March 1976 through June, 1996, when photos first



appeared on the journal cover. Since March 2007, *The Bluebird* covers, including this issue, have featured smaller versions of the Eastern Bluebird painting he gave to ASM in 2006 while serving on the committee planning the 2007 spring meeting held in Salem.

At that March 2007 meeting he was presented an award of appreciation for his 50 years of contributions to ASM. Those contributions included a workshop he gave at a fall meeting at Camp Clover Point in which he held individual sessions with those who wanted tips to improve their bird documentation sketches. He was helpful to several, and very kind to those who, like me, lacked any talent on which to base improvement.

David won the first Missouri Waterfowl Stamp Competition. His work was featured in *Missouri Life* and *Missouri Conservationist*. A painting of an Eastern Bluebird pair done in 1989 was chosen for the cover of Robbins and Easterla's 1992 *Birds of Missouri*, which features seven paintings, including ones of Harris' Sparrow, Bell's Vireo and Lark Sparrow (all first reported to science from Missouri). Others are four species of shorebirds, a Greater Roadrunner with collared lizard, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Bachman's Warbler, Bachman's Sparrow, and Painted Bunting—a diversity showing the variety of Missouri's avifauna and the knowledge and skill of the artist.

David's skill has been recognized well beyond Missouri. He illustrated the 1986 *Arkansas Birds: Their Distribution and Abundance*, by James and Neal, and was a contributor to *Bird Watcher's Digest*.

With the passing of David Plank, the Missouri birding community has lost an exemplar of the finest of qualities most appreciated among our fellows.

Remembering Phoebe Snetsinger

By Pat Lueders



Phoebe in Antarctica, 1997

Phoebe Snetsinger is a name familiar to some birders but unknown to many. Her life, 6/9/1931-11/23/1999, is chronicled in her autobiography "Birding on Borrowed Time" and later in 2009 by Olivia Gentile in her biography "Life List: A Woman's Quest for the World's Most Amazing Birds". Influenced by her life story, I developed a passion to travel the world to see as many bird species as possible.

Ironically, Phoebe, the daughter of advertising genius Leo Burnett, was given a bird's name. In 1965, she was 34 and raising a young family of four children in Minnesota, when seeing a Blackburnian Warbler changed her life forever. Until 1981, she was a casual birder when tragically she was diagnosed with a "fatal" melanoma and given a year to live. She decided to spend that year seeing as many birds in the world as possible; and, by 1995, she became the first person in the world to see and list 8,000 bird species. At the time of her tragic accidental death in 1999 in a van accident in Madagascar (the home to 110 endemic bird species and the families of Vangas, Mesites, Ground-Rollers, Asities, and Malagasy Warblers, families found nowhere else on Earth) her life list totaled 8,674.

At the time of her death, Phoebe lived three blocks from me in Webster Groves, moving to St. Louis when her husband David accepted a job with Ralston Purina. She soon became a regular birder with the Webster Groves Nature Study Society (WGNSS); and

in 1978, she set a Big Year Missouri record. After her death, the Webster/Kirkwood Times carried an article about her world record, and I found it fascinating that you could travel the world as she did to see so many different birds. The next spring, I enrolled in the Beginning Birding Class offered at the Missouri Botanical Garden taught by Bill Rowe, and the rest is history.

The opportunity to join a small private tour to Madagascar in September 2026 was one I couldn't pass up. Inspired by Phoebe, I had traveled throughout the U.S. and to thirty-five countries, seeing close to 4,000 species. Preparing for the tour, I reread her book, and it meant more to me now because I had been to many of the same locations. The last new species seen by her before her death was the Red-Shouldered Vanga, first described in 1997, and this became my target species. The first week of our 24 day tour, as our group walked the sandy trail south of Tulear off the Road to St. Augustine in southwest Madagascar, we heard the vocalization of the Vanga. It took the efforts of four local guides to maneuver the pair towards our group, and we had great looks at this small and elusive species.



Red-shouldered Vanga (*Calicalicus rufocarpalis*) in Madagascar

Nigel Voaden - https://www.inaturalist.org/photos/3801283

One of those guides was Mossa, the man who had led Phoebe's group in the same pursuit in 1999. Since then, the species had moved from

the Table Mountain area, where Phoebe had seen them, further South because of the continuing deforestation of the island by local tribes for charcoal.

Mossa and his son were also our guides during our stay in the Tulear area. We birded the famous Spiny Forest with its iconic Baobob Forest, seeing many of the same species Phoebe saw before her death. As we departed Tulear to drive for two days back to the capitol city of Antananarivo, we traveled the road where her accident had happened, and we weren't surprised by the tragedy. Driving in Madagascar is extremely dangerous with poor road conditions, carts being pulled by Zebu, tuk tuks, rickshaws, and hundreds of people filling the narrow streets.



From left to right: our guide Solohery Rasamison, Mossa's son, and Mossa

Pursuing her goal of seeing all of the birds of the world seems overwhelming today without the help of eBird, Merlin, Cornell, cell phones, and the internet. Phoebe was certainly a pioneer as she blazed a magical trail of birding the world for so many of us to follow.

End of the Year Reflections on Birders and Birding

Terry L. Miller

There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. *This essay describes* the delights and dilemmas of *birders* who cannot." *

* (A *modified* quote from Aldo Leopold from the Forward to A Sand County Almanac)

Soon, our new "Big Year" will begin, and the present "Big Year" will be logged into our memories. Well, for most of us, maybe neither one can be called a "true" Big Year. But both years have contained or will contain the hopeful aspirations and joy, along with the frustrations and disappointments, that come with being a "Birder". We willingly embrace these contrasting emotions because they testify that we are truly alive.

Unfortunately, so many people in our society are "dead" to our fascination and love of birds and of nature. True, they may feel an occasional appreciation of the natural world when it surprises or confronts them with its beauty. But being in nature for the general public, more often than not, simply represents a lack of modern luxuries and the presence of annoying insects. They may ask, "Why would anyone want to venture out and endure the heat, cold, rain, or snow?" And "Why should a person risk getting poison ivy or have some other type of allergic reaction by walking out in a woodland or a field?" They may also ask, "How can birds be as important as our daily concerns in the workplace, or politics, or following professional sports teams, or some other cultural hype?" Unconscious of the manipulation that occurs from a preoccupation with only these mentioned interests, unhealthy anxiety and undue stress may be the result. And who really likes being manipulated anyway?

Actually, birders do. We like our lives being manipulated by birds and to sense the effects that nature has on us…simply because birding is such a healthy activity. When we place less focus on worldly concerns and include, for instance, knowing birds and the natural world around us, we fill our lives with beauty, with witnessing grace in action, and with the truth and reality found in

interacting with nature. All these experiences will naturally lead to something even more beneficial: profound peace. More on that later.

As many people consider making New Year's resolutions, birders contemplate making Big Year resolutions (or at least Bigger Year resolutions) by reflecting on their present year of birding. What memorable adventures did this last year bring? What birds did we add to our life lists? What new birding friends did we make and/or what friendships grew? Did we visit any new locations or even discover additional places to bird near or within our commonly visited areas? Did we make progress in identifying warbler songs? Or with shorebirds? Did we focus enough upon bird behavior? Did we make mental notes of weather conditions, correlated with specific times of the year, that would increase the number and variety of species we may see? Did we bird as much as we wanted? With confidence, most of us can easily say…No.

We may continue to reflect and ask, "How many species did we end the year with?" "Was that more or less than last year?" "Was that more or less than we expect for the coming year?" These are all questions that birders of all levels may ask. Each birder knows the conditions and responsibilities they possess that either limit or free up their time to bird. Therefore, every birder usually has a continual interior struggle to justify the time and expense they spend pursuing their love of birding. Sometimes our birding is a prearranged activity, often it is opportunistic (binocs, scope always with us), but very often it involves scheming a plan to combine our responsibilities, travel, AND birding.

Since time always feels limited, we must habitually ask ourselves, "What is the real quality of my birding?" Is the number of species a person views in a year a good indicator of quality birding? Maybe. Could this type of "data" be similar to the varying number of trophies various hunters may have on their walls? Both totals are only a possible indicator of the actual time and effort spent in the field. As a professional taxidermist for the last 30 years, I have known many hunters who were blessed with harvesting a monster buck more by chance than with skill. And I know other hunters who intimately know the habitat, the deer population, and deer behavior so well that annual success is stacked in their favor. Is this analogy also applicable to birders and birding? Are the numbers of trophy deer, or of yearly birds seen, an adequate tool to evaluate either activity?

The number of species various Missouri birders see for the year might total from 50 to 300 plus. What is clearly not measured by these numbers is the quality of experiences that may have occurred. One specific tick on a birder's list for the year may be a Peregrine Falcon seen at quite a distance in a dead snag, or it may be an active male Blue-gray Gnatcatcher observed at eye level, within ten feet, for a few minutes, in perfect light. Another tick may be a Brown-headed Nuthatch newly re-established in the state, or it may occur with the first mob of House Sparrows overwhelming a bird feeder. There are so many unknowns when simply looking at someone's checklist or yearly totals. Which of those species provided that specific birder with the best look or best experience? Maybe it was the rarest bird or maybe it wasn't. The variety of special experiences with birds and nature seem too endless to try to mention them. So, in reality, only each individual birder can actually evaluate the quality of their own year of birding. If it was possible to "measure" gratitude, wouldn't that be a good, universal scale to use?

Happily, we all have different values that relate to our being grateful for opportunities and experiences while birding. Once we determine the actual time available, knowing the goal for each specific birding trip may help us maximize its quality. Is the goal a target species? Is it to see the greatest number of species? Is it to visit and become familiar with a new area? Is it to learn differences in similar species? Is it simply to enable a quality escape from the stress of day-to-day responsibilities and pressures? Or could it be just to enjoy the camaraderie associated with friends who are also passionate about birding?

If the time and availability exist, birding with friends can become a common occurrence. But, even for birders who comfortably form a covey of friends, birding is frequently a very solitary activity. And often it is in this solitude, while being surrounded by nature, that an interior peace of mind and soul is nurtured. This can occur as we are far away from the disorder and distractions that bombard us in our current culture. Quite the opposite, in nature, each species performs its own specific role and this results in an order and harmony that exudes peace.

Aldo Leopold, in his essay "Song of Gavilan", provided an excellent description of nature's depth. He states that with the Rio Gavilan,

"This song of the waters is audible to every ear, but there is other music in these hills, by no means audible to all. To hear even a few notes of it you must first live here for a long time, and you must know the speech of the hills and rivers. Then on a still night, when the campfire is low and the Pleiades have climbed over the rimrocks, sit quietly and listen for a wolf to howl, and think hard of everything you have seen and tried to understand. Then you may hear it…a vast pulsing harmony…its score inscribed on a thousand hills, its notes the lives and death of plants and animals, its rhythms spanning the seconds and the centuries."

Maybe as we pursue birds, we are actually pursuing something greater. Is the attracting beauty and intrigue that birds supply possibly an important component that can help us to be able to "hear" more and more of this inaudible music? Aren't there so many times, especially when birding alone, that we perceive how small we are and how beautifully grand and mysterious the natural world is? Are these times when we are sensing the music? And doesn't the awe we feel instill in us a strong motivation to fight to preserve natural areas? It is surely the reason that we try to enable the "music" to be heard by our family, friends, and acquaintances…despite the paradox that we will never be able to explain it with words.

In closing, isn't it a fact that even without awareness of my attempted explanation above, birders of all levels know that birding is a wonderful means to plumb the profundities of nature? And, although the amount of birding varies for each birder, due to their individual circumstances, every birder knows that each opportunity to bird adds to the quality of their lives. Thank goodness, with each new year, there will exist more challenges, for the beginner to the most avid birder, to attain a greater knowledge of birds. It is a major reason why birding is such a joyful pursuit and an activity that is filled with hope.

To Missouri birders and birders everywhere, may this new year be one filled with hope that we will be blessed to see new lifers, with hope to spend more time with fellow birders, with hope to visit new areas, and with hope to exceed our previous accomplishments. But, most importantly, with a hope that we will gain a greater ability to hear the inaudible "music" that is playing during each of our birding adventures.

Missouri River Adventure Camp

Lara Cox

2026 marked the 5th of Missouri River Relief's Missouri River Adventure Camp in its current form as a day camp. This year we welcomed 45 campers, aged 9–13, to experience the great outdoors in their own backyard. The jam-packed week includes boat rides, history lessons in Lupus, catfishing, invasive species removal, creek time, and generally the most fun a kid can have on a good, hot July day in the Midwest!



Of particular note, our campers experience the beauty of birding along the trail at the Missouri River Center in Huntsdale, MO. This year, Marlee Malmbourg and Melina Matheny from the Missouri River Bird Observatory kicked off the adventure with an introduction to birding, patiently walking campers through the ins and outs of binocular use. Once the bird excitement was good and bubbling, we commenced the walk.

Recently, we've found that a good way to structure this bird walk is to split campers into self-selected groups. Those who are very serious about seeing the most birds join the "Serious Birding" group—they walk along completely quiet, zoned into their surroundings. Other

campers choose the "Recreational Birding" group, which involves a lot more chatting—exclamations of bird excitement welcome.

As campers made their way along the Katy Trail, they kept their ears open for any signs of bird life along the Missouri River. Whenever a bird was spotted, the group paused for a closer look at some of the remarkable species that call this place home. During the day, campers observed an Indigo Bunting, a Ruby-Throated Hummingbird, an American Crow, a Northern Cardinal, an American Robin, a Turkey Vulture, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, an American Goldfinch, a Carolina Wren, and a Red-tailed Hawk soaring overhead.



Although the birding walk comprised just one day of Missouri River Adventure Camp, we find over and over that our curriculum intertwines across the days—showing the interconnectedness of the ecosystem. For example, our friends with the Missouri Conservation Corps pointed out that the berries on the invasive honeysuckle we removed are absolutely irresistible to our bird neighbors, but not

always the most nutritious. On the boat rides, we saw Turkey Vultures lazily riding the air currents of the river and discussed their importance to the cycle of death and life along the river.

Missouri River Relief would like to thank the Missouri Birding Society for helping make this amazing week possible. Every year, our goal is to send campers back into the world with a deeper love for the outdoors—some leave with a new passion for fishing, others start picking up litter in their own neighborhoods, and many carry forward the habit of listening closely and watching for a beautiful burst of blue wings in the canopy. Birding, like so many outdoor pursuits, connects us to the bigger picture of the natural world.

Adventures at ABA Camp Colorado

Darby Nugent



Photo Jennie Duberstein

It's a rare opportunity for a young birder to travel to a new place and find many new birds with a group of fellow birders. However, I was able to do just that this August thanks to the Missouri Birding Society's scholarship to ABA Camp Colorado 2026. Aside from the incredible birds that we saw, the unique ecosystems and non-bird wildlife of Colorado were truly extraordinary. It was also a great chance for me to meet both the experienced birders who led the camp as well as the equally passionate young birders who attended with me.

On day one of birding we went early in the morning to Wild Basin in Rocky Mountain National Park. Our main targets were American Dipper and a rare Pacific Wren that has been known to reside there. Despite a slow start, we were successful on both fronts. Getting my lifer American Dipper and Pacific Wren along a mountain stream with breathtaking views was an amazing experience, but that was only the beginning of the day. In the afternoon we drove to the Estes Park YMCA where Scott Rashid has a bird banding station. After a presentation and demonstration of his process, I was able to hold my

lifer Green Tailed Towhee before releasing it into bushes of the riparian valley.

On day two, we spent the morning at Rabbit Mountain, where we enjoyed a beautiful hike along the rolling foothills. Highlights from that walk included Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Canyon Wren, and Bullock's Oriole. However, the most memorable moment did not even involve a bird. A sunning Prairie Rattlesnake stole the show as we walked back to the vans. We observed from a safe distance, but we were still close enough to hear the classic rattle warning.

After two days of birding at elevation, we spent day three in the grasslands. We kicked the morning off with the very local Mountain Plover before setting out to Pawnee National Grasslands. I had the somewhat ambitious goal of seeing both Chestnut-collared Longspur and Thick-billed Longspur to complete my list of North American longspurs. During the drive, we not only found both longspurs, but we also found a Cassin's Sparrow among the many Brewer's Sparrows. After our grassland drive, we scoped a farm pond for some excellent shorebirds including Red-necked Phalarope, American Avocet, and Black-necked Stilt. The non-bird highlight from this day was definitely a Pronghorn Antelope that we saw during the drive.

Having caught our breath in the grasslands, we then spent the next two days on the tundra. To begin day four, we found a family of Dusky Grouse along a winding road with incredible and slightly frightening views. After an unsuccessful search for White-tailed ptarmigan on the wind-swept tundra, we were treated to nice views of Clark's Nutcracker flying up the valley towards the visitor center.

On day five, we returned to the tundra with the goal of finding the White-tailed Ptarmigan. After a long walk along the tundra revealed no ptarmigans, we were preparing to walk back when our camp leader Jennie Duberstein spotted a family of ptarmigans as they crested the horizon. We enjoyed incredible looks at the mom and chicks, before driving back down the mountain where a Pine Grosbeak briefly gave us a show. My last lifer of the trip was a pair of American Three-toed Woodpeckers that we observed for several minutes as they flaked the bark off of a pine tree. Afterwards, we returned to camp to gather up and reflect on our favorite parts of the week. With so many news birds, breathtaking views, and amazing wildlife, it was difficult to choose a favorite moment, and I think that

just goes to show how thoroughly enjoyable the experience was. As such, I would like to thank the Missouri Birding Society for enabling me to participate in Camp Colorado. It truly was an unforgettable experience only made possible by the generosity of the MBS, and I am very grateful that for the honor of being chosen to represent Missouri birders at Camp Colorado.



White-tailed Ptarmigan -- Photo Darby Nugent

ABA Camp Delaware Bay

Sylvie Purkis

I was out birding with my Dad in early March, scoping winter ducks and enjoying returning Tree Swallows, when my Mom called us and delivered the news that I had received the scholarship. I was beyond overjoyed, and even though we were dressed in heavy winter coats, my Dad and I stopped for celebratory ice cream. After that, I began preparing for the camp. Most excited for the shorebirding I hoped to do at the camp, I checked out *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World* by Peter Hayman, John Merchant, and Tony Prater from the library and began studying up. As the months passed, filled with their own exciting birding adventures here in Missouri, a part of me was restless until my family departed for the east coast to drop me off at Camp Delaware Bay in early August.

The first night perfectly set up how the rest of the camp was going to go. After settling into the lodging at the Virden center, we gathered for dinner and met the other campers and the instructor team: Holly Merker, the camp's director; Glen Davis, a very experienced birder and naturalist; Christina Baal, an amazing artist and birder who did the artwork for the 2022 bird of the year, the Burrowing Owl; Willy Hutcheson, another greatly experienced birder and naturalist; and Dalia Gonzalez, a wonderful birder and intern at the camp. After dinner and introductions, we loaded up into the vans and drove to the Point Beach at Cape Henlopen State Park. We observed the protected area of the beach, which was flooded with shorebirds which were mostly Sanderlings, but also Ruddy Turnstones, Piping Plovers, and Willets. We studied the Sanderlings in different stages of molt out of their breeding plumage, some still fully decorated, others with no remnants, along with many interesting in-betweens. We also observed Ruddy Turnstones doing a unique foraging behavior that involved digging holes to stir up and trap mollusks. One turnstone even dug a hole as deep as itself!

Further out on the beach was also a gathering roost of terns and gulls, which included my lifer Common Tern as well as Royal Terns, Least Terns, and Laughing Gulls. The next lifer of the evening was a Greater Black-backed Gull eating a horseshoe crab down the beach. Before heading back to Virden center, we wrapped up our

exhilarating evening with two Hudsonian Whimbrels flying right over our heads, their call identified by Glen.

The next day, I was up at 6 am for the optional morning bird walk. As we walked along a road leading to a saltmarsh behind Virden center, we enjoyed the dawn chorus of Blue Grosbeaks and Common Yellowthroats. We managed to pick out Glossy Ibis from flyover flocks of White Ibis, another lifer, and finished the morning walk with a Clapper Rail, my 5th lifer in only the first 24 hours of camp.

Energized from the exciting morning, we headed back to Virden for a hot breakfast before boarding the vans and setting off to Bombay Hook NWR. At the first pool, we studied a flock of yellowlegs, only to be delighted to pick out a few Stilt Sandpipers. We also studied a flock of dowitchers and managed to pick out a Long-billed in the sea of Short-bills. As we moved along we stopped to study groups of Semipalmated Sandpipers out on the mudflats, checking carefully for any rarities, especially the Curlew Sandpiper that had been reported in the past weeks. During one of these stops, a Clapper Rail wandered out onto the flats, providing me with even better looks than the ones I got earlier that morning.

After returning to Virden for dinner and down time, we set out once again for more birding. We returned to the same beach at Cape Henlopen State Park to see if we would see different birds during high tide. However, a storm brewing far off in the distance forced us away from the beach and inland near a coniferous forest. With the sky darkening and a chorus of nighthawks above us, we ventured into the pines in search of Eastern Screech-Owls. We stopped at one point on the trail where Glen used playback to draw out a young screech-owl. We listened to the owl call back at us for a few minutes from his perch in full view of the group. This was the first time I had ever heard an Eastern Screech-Owl, and the first one that I'd seen since 2023. On the way back, we stopped briefly to attempt to call a Chuck-Wills-Widow, but had no success. Nonetheless, the view of the screech-owl was enough to make my night.

The next morning we set out for Bombay Hook's sister National Wildlife Refuge, Prime Hook. Unlike Bombay Hook, which specialized in creating fresh and salt water habitats for shorebirds, Prime Hook was more wooded. We first stopped at Turkle Pond, a pool surrounded by woodland and a levee. We saw several woodland birds we had not

yet seen in the past days: Wood Ducks, Belted Kingfisher, and Cedar Waxwing, to name a few.

Next we walked down a gravel road surrounded by pine woodland. In this habitat we came across a mixed flock of Brown-headed Nuthatch (lifer!), Pine Warbler, titmice, chickadees, and wrens. The nuthatches were sneaky, providing only brief backlit views for me, but the Pine Warblers came right up into the road to forage. We got to study some of the various plumages they can come in, especially in the fall. Even though the obvious Pine Warblers were all yellow with gray wings and bold wing bars, we saw some entirely gray juveniles and intermediate females. As someone who has only seen the obvious adults in the spring, learning about the duller birds was very interesting.

Finally, came the day we all had been awaiting. Sunday was Cape May day, where we were going to spend all day in one of the best birding spots in the country. We woke up bright and early at 4 am for a 5 am departure. Since there were no ferry rides early enough for the time we were supposed to be there, we took the three hour drive up. While most campers slept on the ride up, I was thinking about the Red Knots and Black Skimmers I was hoping to see there. Halfway through our drive we stopped at a Wawa (a magical east coast gas station chain), where the highlight was not the delicious milkshake I had ordered there, but an adult Imperial Moth. Apparently, this specific Wawa is known for the Imperial and Luna moths that regularly show up there. After taking a hundred pictures of the moth, we boarded the vans and continued up to Cape May.

Around 8 am we arrived at Stone Point Harbor and met biologist Kashi Davis. She and her crew of interns and biologists were preparing to not only bird with us, but give us a close-up view of the team banding a young oystercatcher, part of a shorebird conservation project. After kicking our shoes off and heading down the beach, we reached the protected breeding area for shorebirds, including not only American Oystercatchers but also Piping Plovers and others. Kashi told us about how mammal predators such as foxes and raccoons posed a threat to beach nesters as they would eat the eggs and young. She told us about different strategies used to deter them, like boxes they leave near the nests that make startling sounds when they detect mammals and a special type of fencing decorated with large strips to make predators apprehensive about brushing against

an unknown medium. In addition to protecting nesting habitat, Kashi has also been able to engage the community in protecting beach nesters by stopping dogs, ATVs, and other disruptive things from being on the beach. Additionally, every day there is a volunteer at the beach, educating the public on beach nesters and the importance of protecting them. After talking about their work, Kashi and her team caught the juvenile oystercatcher and brought it out to the group where they weighed, measured, and banded it. For the most part, the oystercatcher was relaxed but would give calls and kick when his parents called out for him.

After the banding of the oystercatcher, we turned all our focus towards birding. The first big thing we encountered was a large flock of Red Knots. As we scoped them, we were able to study the different stages of molt they were in. Some retained their rusty red breasts from the breeding season, while others had fully entered their gray wintering plumage. My favorites were the ones in the midst of a molt, with red and gray flecks dotting their bodies. We also watched the flock move so synchronously it was as if they were one organism. In one motion, the knots would run out to the exposed mud when the waves receded then run back when they came crashing in.

Eventually we reached the tip of the beach and a highlight of the day, the Black Skimmer colony that Kashi and her team had helped protect. Most of the skimmer juveniles were fledged and were roosting or foraging with the adults on a sandbar; however, we did see one downy young in the colony begging at its parents. In addition to enjoying the skimmers, we also examined the terns roosting among them. We picked out uncommon Black and Least Terns, but nothing could have prepared me for what came next. Glen scoped a Roseate Tern among a flock of Common Terns. The tern was much paler overall and had a darker bill, giving it subtle contrast among the Commons. This was by far the best thing I had seen that day, especially after talking to Christina who said the camp has seen them only occasionally as flyovers.

We stopped at the pavilion adjacent to Cape May's famous hawkwatch for lunch, where we met former camper and biologist Aaron Reb. He showed us a dragonfly he tagged as part of an ongoing research project. While he said most of the dragonflies get eaten or struck by cars, they have had some interesting results from tagging them, including a dragonfly who flew from North Carolina to the

Bahamas without stopping. After wrapping up lunch and our time with the biologists, we stopped at the Cape May Bird Observatory headquarters to take a look at their gift shop. While I did not buy anything there, taking a look at their enormous used book section is something I would highly recommend to anyone visiting Cape May. They had so many niche books and journal publications, including books entirely dedicated to White-winged Doves and the mountain subspecies of White-crowned Sparrow! After we finished up there, we headed to chase the Wood Stork that had been reported around Cape May. A report from only a few hours earlier landed us in a neighborhood, where we found it on top of someone's roof preening and settling in for the night.

The ferry ride back to Delaware invited a time to focus on a whole new type of bird I had never had the opportunity to focus on before: seabirds. The Cape May-Lewes ferry is famous for its opportunity to spot Wilson's Storm-Petrels. In addition to the petrels, a Scopoli's Shearwater had recently been reported off the back of the ferry, yet another rarity to keep an eye out for. At the beginning of the ferry ride I mostly enjoyed watching the gulls that floated by the boat, getting so close you could see their feet. In addition to getting good side-by-side comparisons of both black-backed gulls, I enjoyed watching a Rock Pigeon that hitched a ride on our ferry continuously trying to fly away from it. The pigeon would make a good effort, flying a couple hundred yards away from the boat, managing to maintain the same speed as it, before circling back and ducking into the undercarriage.

When the ferry was further out, we began to see Wilson's Storm-Petrels. While I was only able to spot three, other people in the group reported having up to seven. The first one I saw was flying low in the water, too far out to tell any real details, but close enough to see the white rump. The second one I spotted while scanning the horizon. I solely ID'd it by its small size, swallow-like shape, and close flying to the water; any other details were too far to tell. Before I could point out my find to the rest of the group, a third petrel swooped in front of the ferry, giving the best looks that evening.

After returning to Virden with 4 new lifers (Red Knot, Gull-billed Tern, Roseate Tern, and Wilson's Storm-Petrel), countless new memories, and a glimpse into bird conservation in action, it is safe to say Cape May was my favorite day of camp.

After finishing our exciting day in Cape May, we jumped right into a new one. On Monday, the target was Seaside and Saltmarsh Sparrows. Even though my many searches for the sulky grassland sparrows back in Missouri are often fruitless, I still love the challenge of looking for these species. The first place we visited was Marvel Tract, a boardwalk out into a saltmarsh. We saw several sparrows darting over the marsh, but none ever stopped to perch. We moved to another section of the boardwalk and positioned ourselves to look out on a section with more bushes and perches. Sure enough, I got a backlit look at my lifer Seaside Sparrow as it landed and briefly perched in a bush.

During our break for lunch at a pavilion, we met Mark Garland, a leading biologist in Monarch Butterfly study and conservation. He showed us how he tags Monarchs, with the same transmitters Aaron Reb used, and how they collect data. When telemetry tags for Monarchs were first developed, the only way to get data for them was through an app where a scanner had to be turned on. The scanner would ping nearby tagged Monarchs and give the data to scientists. However, this app was not used frequently, and when it was used very limited data came from it since nobody could run it all day. Because of this no quality data came from the tagging. That was until they were able to get officials on board with having the Monarch telemetry tags ping off any phone. Now, without anybody even knowing it, a tagged Monarch will ping off their phone. With this breakthrough, scientists were able to get thousands of pings within a day and harvest quality data on where Monarchs were migrating. This was a great example of how science is not always linear and even after a breakthrough, there can still be a lot of trial and error before any useful data comes out of it, which is why it is important to always keep trying. The manual scanner is still up on the Project Monarch app, which I have downloaded since it is still fun to see if the Monarch right in front of you is tagged.

Hoping for better looks at a Seaside Sparrow, we said goodbye to Mark and headed to Lighthouse Road and Dupont Nature Preserve. On one side of Lighthouse Road there is a saltmarsh, and on the other a channel of ocean water with muddy shores on both sides. Along the channel we were treated to a new bird, Black-necked Stilt, as well as close up views of Semipalmated Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstone. On the saltmarsh side of the road, we enjoyed great looks at three

Clapper Rails that bathed in a channel running through the marsh. Then, as we inched forward, both an adult and juvenile Seaside Sparrow emerged from the vegetation and perched for a long enough time that we were able to not only observe them, but get great photos. Truly a great experience! That evening thunderstorms rolled in so while the birding was cancelled, we enjoyed a night at our base of drawing, talking and relaxing.

The next morning we returned to Bombay Hook NWR to chase the Curlew Sandpiper that had reappeared the day before. Similar to our first day at Bombay, the first pool was filled with a flock of yellowlegs but this time they were joined by over 100 American Avocets. Further down we found a flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers, which we scanned many times but with no signs of the Curlew Sandpiper. But even seeing the Curlew Sandpiper would never have compared to the juvenile Seaside Sparrow that popped up out of the reeds and perched near us. Not only did it stay still long enough for me to get the scope on it, share the scope with other campers, but also get spectacular digiscopes of the bird. By far the best look I could have asked for, even outdoing yesterday's roadside birds.

After dinner, we embarked on the final birding outing to Oyster Rocks Road, positioned smack in the middle of a saltmarsh. On one side of the road several tidal pools hosted yellowlegs, dowitchers, Stilt Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-necked Stilt and many more, and on the other side we scoped for sparrows. Most of the sparrows moving around were too backlit to get good details. However, halfway through a fellow camper spotted a Saltmarsh Sparrow perched right next to a Seaside Sparrow way out in the marsh. Despite them both only being backlit silhouettes, their differences were obvious in the scope. The Seaside had a bulkier bill and build, while the Saltmarsh was slimmer and even though color was hard to see, the Seaside was dark while the Saltmarsh glowed buff. As the sun set, creating a beautiful array of pink and blue over the saltmarsh, Holly led the group in a moment of silence to listen to all the sounds of the marsh and just take in the last moments of camp. Take in those moments I did, as we heard the songs of Clapper Rails, Seaside Sparrows, and the soft lapping of the water as the tide came in, all of which had been drowned out while we were birding. While I was sad that this experience was coming to an end, I was happy with all the memories I had made and things I had learned.

By far, this camp was the best birding experience of my life. Not only did I get to see so many cool new birds, insects, and habitats, but I learned so much along the way from experts in the field. Learning about what Kashi Davis, Mark Garland, and the other amazing scientists had accomplished through small actions and community engagement, and how big an impact that had on conserving the natural world, made me want to do the same back in Missouri. It opened my eyes to how much impact these seemingly small steps in conservation can have, which can be hard to notice when there are so many big issues going on in the world. Down the line, when the time comes, I hope to have a career like theirs.

This camp also redefined for me what it means to be an expert. Since I rarely bird with others, I get the feeling I have mastered birding because I do not see others' perspectives. But after birding with Camp Delaware Bay's instructor team, I have learned that I still have a lot more to learn and room to grow as a birder. Christina made a great analogy while we were observing Semipalmated Sandpipers at Bombay Hook; she said that you can pick your friends out in a crowd of people because you're around them enough to learn their mannerisms, their appearance, their quirks. Well, the same applies to birds. If you spend enough time observing, learning, and being around birds, you start to recognize their mannerisms, appearance, and quirks, making them easy to pick out. I will definitely carry this idea with me for the rest of my life, and though I have not fully learned to recognize every bird in a crowd, I hope that someday I will have spent enough time around birds that I will be able to pick them out in a crowd, much like the instructors at Camp Delaware Bay. Overall, this experience made me want to learn more and become a better birder. I hope to attend more bird camps and bird with more groups to build on what this experience has taught me about birds and myself.

I want to thank all of the people at the Missouri Birding Society who made it possible for me to have this experience. And Luke Schnieder, specifically, a birding friend, who encouraged me to apply for the scholarship.

Birders' Guide

B. K. Leach Memorial Conservation Area

Bruce Schuette, 2026

4307 acres, Lincoln County. DeLorme 33, H-9
GPS 39.0981, -90.6944
Owned by Missouri Department of Conservation. For information call (636) 441-4554.

Directions:
The conservation area is divided into three main units (River Slough, Kings Lake and Bittern Basin), and there is an adjacent River Access (Norton Woods). All three units are accessed from Hwy 79 in northeast Lincoln County.

From the St. Louis area take Hwy 79 north into Lincoln County.

Between the towns of Foley and Elsberry, take Hwy M east for 2.15 miles to reach the Kings Lake unit and a parking area on the left. Past the parking area 0.35 miles you can turn south onto Marre Road for 1.1 miles and then go east on B.K. Leach Road to reach the River Slough unit.

You can also reach the Kings Lake unit and the Norton Woods River Access by taking Hatfield Road east from Hwy 79 within the Elsberry City Limits. After going 1.9 miles on Hatfield Road, turn south on Norton Woods Road, which will take you through the northern part of the Kings Lake unit and to the Norton Woods River Access. Note: a road through the conservation area also connects to Hwy M.

To reach the Bittern Basin unit, take Hwy P east from Hwy 79 in Elsberry. There are parking lots at 1.4 miles and 3.2 miles.

ADA Information: There is one disabled accessible waterfowl hunting blind.

When to Visit/Species to Expect:
B.K. Leach CA has become one of the premiere wetland birding sites in the St. Louis region with 270 species listed in ebirds.

River Slough (Original) unit: The River Slough unit was the original unit of B.K. Leach CA, acquired in 1985, with subsequent additions in 1993 and 2002. This is the most wooded part of B.K. Leach, with some nice bottomland forest, as well as cropped fields, shallow wetlands, sloughs and a deeper pond. As such, besides the seasonal abundance of waterfowl, herons, American White Pelicans and six species of swallows, you have your best chances of seeing nesting and migratory woodland and shrubland birds. Prothonotary and Yellow Warblers are common nesters, as are Warbling Vireos, Willow Flycatchers, Eastern Kingbirds, Blue Grosbeaks and Yellow-billed Cuckoos. Northern Waterthrush and many other warblers pass through in the spring and fall, bringing regularly seen warbler species to 20. Northern Shrikes have been reported several times during recent winters.

Kings Lake unit: This unit is the largest in the Conservation Area. The unit was mostly agricultural fields when bought and has been turned into a mosaic of semi-permanent sloughs and ponds, shallow marshes, grassland and some cropped fields. Though closed for waterfowl hunting in the fall (see limitations), this unit can have an abundance of geese and ducks, with 23 species regularly reported. American White Pelicans can be common. Most years shorebirds are well represented by up to 25 species regularly reported and in recent years including Black-necked Stilts. Other species often include gulls, terns and an occasional Common Moorhen. Summer species include wetland and grassland birds like Marsh and Sedge Wrens, Common Yellowthroat, Dickcissels, Eastern Meadowlarks and in recent years Sandhill Cranes. Mississippi Kites are around during the summer, probably nesting in the riverbank forest. Winter species include Short-eared Owls, Northern Harriers, LeConte's and Savannah Sparrows. Sometimes seen during migration are rails, White-faced Ibis, Merlin, and Bobolinks.

Bittern Basin unit: This is the northernmost and disjunct unit. The history and character of this unit is very similar to the Kings Lake unit. Birds seen in the Kings Lake unit are very characteristic of this unit too, although sometimes the water levels, available mudflats and

yearly vegetation response will dictate which unit may provide better birding for particular species at that time.

Features of interest to birders: There are no designated trails, but numerous field roads provide excellent access to the area for birding.

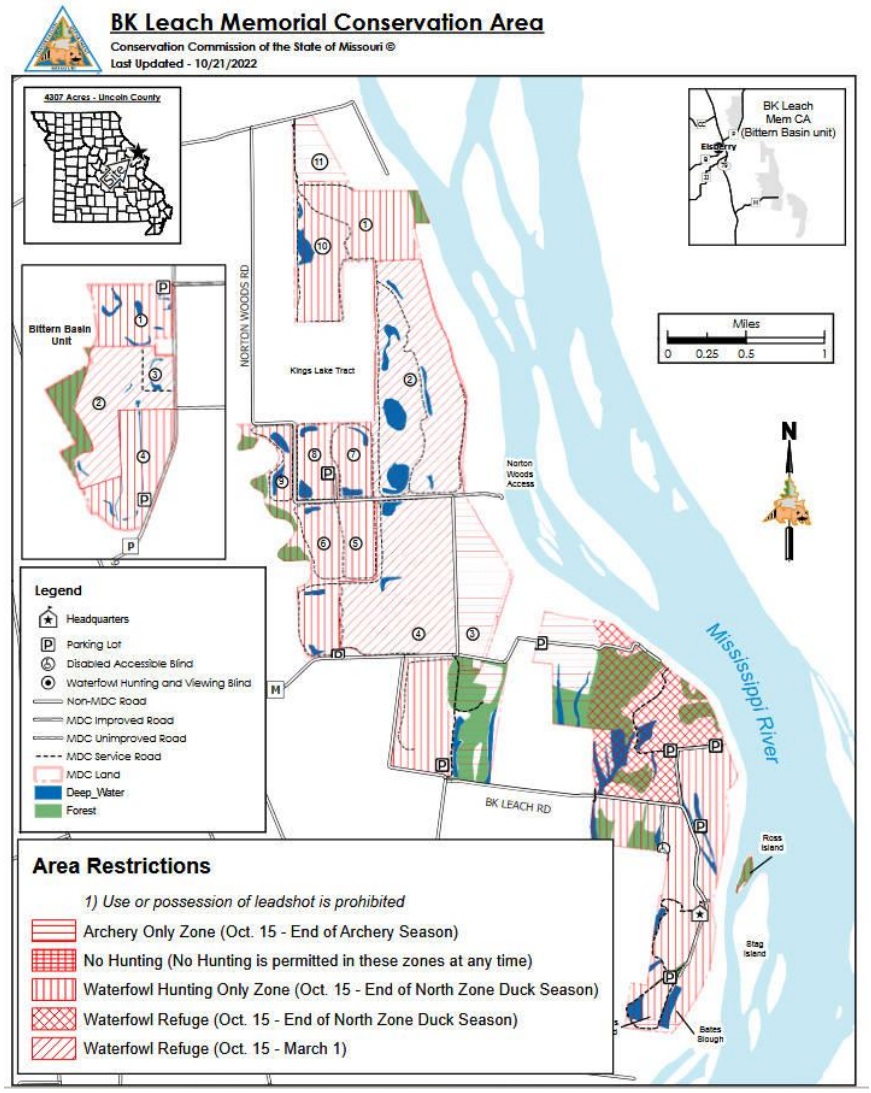
Picnic Areas: none

Toilets: None in the conservation area proper, but there are vault toilets in the adjacent Norton Woods Access and the nearby Prairie Slough Conservation Area.

Camping: none

Hazards/Limitations: Most of the conservation area is closed from October 15 to either the end of waterfowl season or March 1st (see area map).

Nearby Birding Sites:
Prairie Slough Conservation Area: part of the area can be reached by gravel road directly across from the northernmost Bittern Basin parking lot by going 0.7 miles east (wetland and bottomland forest habitats). Clarence Cannon National Wildlife Refuge: ~7.6 miles north (large expanse of wetland and bottomland forest habitats). Sandy Slough Conservation Area: ~7.3 miles south (bottomland forested island). Winfield Lock & Dam #25: ~11.6 miles south (large river and slough). Cuivre River State Park: ~19 miles southwest (large expanse of varied upland habitats). William R. Logan Conservation Area: ~18 miles west (varied upland habitats). William G. and Erma Parke White Memorial Conservation Area: ~20 miles west (varied upland habitats).


BK Leach Memorial Conservation Area
Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri ©
Last Updated - 10/21/2022
4307 Acres - Lincoln County
BK Leach Mem CA (Bittern Basin unit)
Bittern Basin Unit
NORTON WOODS RD
Kings Lake Tract
Norton Woods Access
Miles
0 0.25 0.5 1
N
Legend
Headquarters
Parking Lot
Disabled Accessible Blind
Waterfowl Hunting and Viewing Blind
Non-MDC Road
MDC Improved Road
MDC Unimproved Road
MDC Service Road
MDC Land
Deep_Water
Forest
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Stag Island
Bates Blough
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Archery Only Zone (Oct. 15 - End of Archery Season)
No Hunting (No Hunting is permitted in these zones at any time)
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Waterfowl Refuge (Oct. 15 - March 1)

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If you move to a new address or register a temporary address with the post office, please let MBS know. For an address change, just send me an email with your new address, or mail me a note. If you receive the print version of The Bluebird and it is a temporary address, do the same thing, but also let me know the date of your return and whether you want The Bluebird sent to your temporary address or held and sent after you return home. You can also change your address any time on your own by logging in to your profile at Mobirds.org. Thank you!

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