

Broad-winged and Cooper's Hawks have nested in recent years. Often they sit quietly and do not flush until after you've gone past their nest. If you're lucky, you may even spot the nest. But please be careful not to disturb these birds.

The trail meanders through a bottomland hardwood forest with the pine hillside to your right. Depending on what time of spring you visit, April or May, this area should have tremendous numbers of Northern Parula, Yellow-throated, Cerulean, Blue-winged, and Pine Warblers, plus Louisiana Waterthrush and American Redstart. Red-breasted Nuthatches are also usually flitting in the pines.

In early spring, this area attracts Hermit Thrushes, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and both Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. If you don't get a great view of a Pileated Woodpecker on this trail then I'd have to believe you were blindfolded! Several pairs of them breed here and are often too busy to notice you; therefore, viewing opportunities can be superb.

In spring and summer, you can also often find Red-eyed, Yellow-throated, and White-eyed Vireos here.

Eventually the trail gets really wet and you'll consider it time to return to your car. Good choice! Moving farther to the east usually requires knee boots, is tough walking, and has been known to contain more than one cottonmouth! Yes, snakes are common at Pomona, but if you pay attention to where you step, you should be safe.

I usually retrace my steps back to my car and then venture east down the old railroad bed, where in late April and May, I typically find White-eyed Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Redstart, Northern Parula Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat. These species breed here, so you'll likely find them in June and July, too. Walk about one mile to a forest trail that is at your right and goes uphill a short distance and into an area of pines. Take this trail if you want, or continue heading east down the old railroad bed.

The trail that goes south into the pine forest leads to a pond. Beware, as the pond is home to many cottonmouths. This is where I've had my closest calls with the moccasins. It's good to have your heart beating extra fast sometimes. And it's good when the snake goes the other way, too.

This pond can be very rewarding for birds. Black and Turkey Vultures sometimes roost in the trees near the pond. Red-shouldered Hawks should easily be found, and likely you have already discovered several before reaching the pond. Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, and Mallard can be found along with Great Blue Heron and Green Heron. Swallows, especially Northern Rough-winged, Purple Martin, and Tree, are commonly seen

catching insects above the pond's surface. Yellow-throated and Pine Warblers are usually found in the pines along the way. Stay alert for breeding Summer and Scarlet Tanager, too. Often, both species are in the same tree.

One of my favorite warbler species is the Prothonotary. At Pomona, and especially just southwest of the pond a few feet, you can usually get an excellent view of this golden-headed bird.

Near the pond is where the last Swainson's Warblers were detected in the early 1990s. I haven't seen or heard them at Pomona since the late 1980s. It's unfortunate, but habitat destruction, both in the tropical wintering areas as well as the breeding grounds in North America, has significantly depleted this species' numbers.

After enjoying the quiet retreat of the pond area, it's likely time to return to your car. By now, you've probably added another 10 species to your day list and that Poptart, white-powdered donut, or granola mix is sounding really good! Or maybe, a close encounter with a cottonmouth to go with your 10 species and growling stomach have suggested it's time to move on.

You'll find many other interesting species at Pomona. Over the last few years, Mississippi Kites have been regular, even attempting to nest in recent years.

In spring and summer, Blue Grosbeaks are almost right off of Illinois Route 127 as you exit for Pomona. Usually you will at least hear them. Other specialties include Kentucky Warbler, Carolina Wren, Fish Crow, Carolina Chickadee, and Acadian Flycatcher.

All in all, Pomona offers fairly easy walking, decent access, serenity from the urban life, spring wildflowers galore, and birding that's hard to beat.

Don't forget your bug spray. Ticks and mosquitoes thrive. And yes, the snakes. However, don't let them scare you away. Actually, most snakes encountered here are non-poisonous. Don't forget the turkey hunters. In season, they're out there. They have rights, too, so be courteous.

If you want more information on Pomona, or southern Illinois birding, in general, please check W. Douglas Robinson's book, *Southern Illinois Birds* published by Southern Illinois University Press (1997). It includes detailed migration chronology and historical records for all species recorded in southern Illinois. The bonus is a location guide that Doug included, which should be valuable to birders for years to come. Tune in to a future issue for more southern Illinois birding. Until then, good birding!

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