

or nest if the habitat does not meet their specific requirements, which involve water depth, vegetative cover, and other factors. Whether the habitat they need is compatible with that needed by other wetland bird species could be answered by combining our data and Paine's.

These two mutually beneficial studies allow for a different view of the same system. The detailed account of one species and the overall insight into the community will allow for the rare perspective of an imperiled system at two different levels. The studies also will be producing crucial information needed to develop biologically sound conservation and development plans in north eastern Illinois and throughout the Midwest.

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BIRD FINDING GUIDE - Lake Mermet

Birding Lake Mermet Conservation Area

by Kathy Phelps

Trips to Mermet Lake Conservation Area in southern Illinois can either whet the appetite or satisfy the hunger of any birder. Indeed, it has done that for me as I visit Mermet Lake and record my observations during spring and fall migration and into summer.

Mermet Lake, an old cypress swamp developed into a waterfowl refuge in 1962, is on U.S. 45 midway between Vienna and Metropolis in southern Illinois. The lake serves as a reservoir and water supply to temporarily flood duck-hunting areas; the water is returned to the lake after the season closes.

I begin my trips here shortly after sunrise. What follows are some of my observations for 1996 and 1997, which I hope will inspire you to bird Mermet Lake.

March 12, 1996. I stop just after sunrise at the first pull-off parking pad to start my first trip of the year. A Great Blue Heron flies across the lake. Red-winged Blackbirds sing "ok-a-lee" from cattail perches. Sunlight eases over the chill that dipped to freezing. Canada Geese honk, and a Northern Cardinal repeats his "cheer, cheer, birdy-birdy-birdy" song.

I begin my driving loop of the lake. A Blue Jay squawks when I stop at the next pull-off. An Eastern Phoebe hawks insects from stubble only inches above the water, its breast looking quite yellow in the early sun.

A Red-bellied Woodpecker gives "kwirr" calls, and a Great-horned Owl hoots once. Common Grackles chatter. White on the head of a Bufflehead marks its location before it dives. A Pied-billed Grebe leaves a wake as it swims. Seven Canvasbacks swim and dive with three Lesser Scaups and two Ruddy Ducks.

A Killdeer's "kil-deeah" floats across the lake. Five Ring-billed Gulls fly along the opposite side of the lake, and a male Wood Duck swims toward the marsh.

The road goes between wet woods and a stretch of mown grass and food plots. A Song Sparrow sings from the highest perch of a brush pile. Two Common Snipes wade along the edge of a puddle as they probe for their breakfast. American Robins feed in the grass.

Bird songs fill the morning, a welcome change from the winter quiet. When I walk to the point beside the first boat landing, I disturb Song and Swamp Sparrows. A Mourning Dove coos. Yesterday's temperatures in the mid 50s didn't melt the ruffled skirts of ice on the north side of the cypress trees. Their reflections on the