

Common Yellowthroat, Parula Warbler, Gray Catbird, White-eyed Vireo, Baltimore Oriole, and Palm Warbler to my list.

Soras call from the marsh, and one flies from the edge of the road to a broken limb just above water in the ditch. In the past I've watched Green Herons foraging for food from this limb, and Judy has seen Least Bitterns here.

A Vesper's Sparrow stays in the shrubs by the first boat launch on the east side of the lake. When I stop in the woods, I hear a Wood Thrush, Great Crested Flycatcher, Ovenbird, Yellow-throated Vireo, Summer Tanager, and Black-and-white Warbler.

I pull in at the picnic area for lunch just in time to hear an American Bittern's "o-ka-chunk" calls. I finally get a close-enough look to identify two Forster's Terns. Two Spotted Sandpipers feed among rocks on the levee, and a Solitary Sandpiper wades in the muck along the edge of the flooded woods while Common Mergansers nap.

Tips for Birding Mermet Lake

A five-mile, one-way levee road circles the 452-acre Mermet Lake where anglers fish for largemouth bass, channel catfish, and panfish. The Conservation Area stays open 24 hours. An extensive cattail/lotus marsh grows along the levee's east side. The woods opposite the lake in the northeast corner, where the road starts, is a good spot for migrating warblers. The road from here angles away from the water and passes a marsh, woods, wildlife food plots and prairie restorations. At one point, the road dissects a woods.

Woods grow on both sides of the first boat launch. Farther along, a lane leads through inundated woods to the water. The next boat launch has picnic grounds and a pit latrine. No running water is available at the lake.

From the south corner of the lake, the road runs along the top of the levee, giving a broad view across the lake on one side and into the 43-acre Mermet Swamp Nature Preserve, and the duck-hunting areas on the other.

A half-mile trail loops through the preserve, with signs identifying trees and a boardwalk making a detour into the swamp. Herons, egrets, and shorebirds frequent the three dikes branching off the levee. Graveled pull-off parking pads occur at regular intervals where the road borders the lake.

Some rare birds have been seen here. Site superintendent, Chris McGinness, said a Golden Eagle visited in the winter of 1995/96, and that a pair of Bald Eagles has nested nearby at Round Pond. Bald Eagles come periodically for a few days at a time. Twenty-six Ospreys

Then comes the highlight of my year: I pull off across from cattails near the main gate and hear "kiki-bur" from the cattails. A Black Rail! One of the rarest wetland birds in Illinois!

June 29, 1997. On a fishing trip with my family, I add Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-breasted Chat, Prairie Warbler, Brown-headed Cowbird, Eastern Wood-Pewee, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

September 4, 1997. American Lotus flowers dot white above the layer of leaves. Smartweeds and swamp milkweeds bloom while Acadian Flycatchers call at each stop. A Red-eyed Vireo sings its abrupt phrases. The water level is low from the usual summer drought. Heron Lane is dry and filled with smartweed. I had hoped for mudflats, shorebirds and more migrants; instead I listen to the fiddling insects while watching cloudless sulphur, red spotted purple, monarch, tiger swallowtail, and common sulphur butterflies. This trip brings my total to 103 species for 1997.

stopped at the lake at the same time in 1995. Hudsonian Godwit, American White Pelican, Tundra Swan, and Common Gallinule have also been seen. In the past, the cattail marsh near the south end of the lake has been the only known nesting site for the Purple Gallinule in Illinois. Two Purple Gallinules were seen in 1997 and a pair successfully raised young in 1998 (see a future issue of *Meadowlark* for details.).

Mermet is becoming a popular place to bird. Between 30 and 50 birders come each week to search for water and land birds here. Note that the lake is closed to the public from two weeks prior to waterfowl season (not goose) until the end of December; the dates vary yearly. Birders and nature photographers may obtain permission to walk in after 1 p.m. daily when the hunters quit for the day.

For the birder traveling south to reach Mermet Lake Conservation Area, take I-57 to I-24 and then exit on U.S. 45 just north of Vienna. Follow U.S. 45 south for approximately 11 miles to the small community of Mermet where a sign marks the entrance to the Mermet Lake Conservation Area.

Camping is available at Fort Massac State Park near Metropolis. You can also find a Best Inn, Comfort Inn, Players Motel, and a Days Inn in the town of Metropolis as well as a Ramada Inn in Vienna and a Best Western in Ulin.

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