

# BIRD FINDING GUIDE

## Birding McLean County Part 2: Bloomington-Normal

by Michael L.P. Retter

Believe it or not, Bloomington-Normal offers some great birding if you know where to go. Great birds and a virtual lack of crime make Bloomington-Normal a great place to bird. Below is the continuation of an article that covered birding locations in rural McLean (pronounced mik-LANE) County in Vol. 8 No. 2 of *Meadowlark*.

The following is a list of sites that offer the best birding within the urban confines of Bloomington-Normal. In addition to describing the birds of interest and the habitats present at each location, I've also included a set of directions that offer the easiest route for an out-or-towner to access each location. Each spot is also rated on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) for the quality of birding it usually offers; the rankings were determined by using the diversity of species you are likely to encounter together with the likelihood of encountering a rarity.

### 1. EWING PARK (East-Central part of the City)

**Key species:** Migrating passerines (warblers, vireos, flycatchers, etc.), Broad-winged Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Green Heron, Carolina Wren, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl.

**Rating: 5.**

A large park including both second-growth woods, thickets, and parkland functioning as a migrant trap. During spring migration, Ewing Park offers perhaps the best *land birding in the county*,

although Moraine View State Park is quite good this time of year, too. During fall migration, no location in the county can compare to Ewing in either diversity of species or ease of viewing. Ewing has on more than one occasion been called "The Montrose of McLean County." Park in the lot and walk to the west away from Towanda Avenue along the trees to your north for about 100 yards. You'll come to Hedge Apple Woods. There are trails in the woods. On the other side (west end) of the woods is a meadow-like area. Although the whole park is fair game for birding, the woods, and the parkland areas on the east and (especially) west sides of the woods, and the service road along the north edge of the woods are best for passerines in general. For some reason Ewing seems to be the only spot in the county where Black-throated Blue and Hooded Warblers appear annually. During late May and late August to early September, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is easy here, and you can usually find an Olive-sided Flycatcher or two. Broad-winged Hawks may be found roosting early in the morning and returning to roost in the evening during April and May. A pair of Carolina Wrens usually has a nest along the south edge of the park along the mulched path that runs west out of the woods. A Belted Kingfisher or Green Heron can often be found along Sugar Creek, which traverses the northern section of the park.

Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl both nest in the park or nearby residential property. On one exceptional day in May 1999, Painted Bunting, Mississippi Kite, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Mourning, Connecticut, and Black-throated Blue Warblers were all observed!

**Directions:** From the corner of Veterans Pkwy. (Business I-55) and Vernon Ave. (Steak & Shake here). Proceed west on Vernon. Then turn left, south, on Towanda Avenue. The parking lot to Ewing Park is on the right (west) side of Towanda at the bottom of the hill; you'll see a crosswalk at the bottom of the hill.

### 2. STATE FARM CORPORATE SOUTH (Southeast Edge)

**Key species:** Migrating/wintering waterfowl.

**Rating: 3.**

A good-sized man-made lake. Great views of a nice diversity of waterfowl.

**Directions:** From the corner of Empire St. (IL-9) and Veterans Pkwy, proceed south on Veterans to Ireland Grove Rd. Turn left to go east on Ireland Grove. Proceed through the first stoplight (Loop Road), and take your first right (to go south). You will see the lake on your left. Parking is available.

### 3. ANGLER'S (Southeast)

**Key species:** Migrating passerines, Carolina Wren, Green Heron.