

pipers, snipes, dowitchers, godwits, and peeps.

Bird watchers could spend an entire day exploring the area, driving and stopping to set up scopes. Probably the best way for the visiting birder to begin is to stop at the Wayne Fitzgerald Park visitor center off the Sesser exit and get a map.

Judy recalls stopping there on her first visit to the Rend Lake area. A ranger circled places on the map where she should search for specific shorebirds.

One place she visited was the north end of the lake at the goose viewing platform near the entrance to Nason Wildlife Refuge. When the lake level is high, the mud flats are limited, lying almost directly below the viewing platform, bringing the birds closer in view. Not only can you see some nice shorebirds, here, but you may also discover Bald and Golden Eagles, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Sandhill Crane, Ross' Goose, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Greater White-fronted Goose and White Pelican during fall migration.

Both Honker's Point and Ward Branch, another favorite spot, offer habitat far removed

from tree lines, wood lots, or other vegetation that can harbor predators. Shorebirds feel safe in these areas because they can easily detect trouble from a great distance.

Ward Branch is reliable annually for such species as Baird's, Buff-breasted and Western Sandpipers; Sanderlings and Ruddy Turnstones. At Ward Branch, we have also discovered Whimbrel, Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits, Piping Plover, Red Knot, American Avocet and Red-necked Phalaropes.

It is THE place to go in the area each fall to find Buff-breasted Sandpipers.

But you have to pay for your pleasure. In mid-summer to early fall you often have to wade from Ward Branch in mucky mud to get to the island where shorebirds abound. It's slippery although you are never more than ankle-deep in the mud. And you might feel a little woozy as the hot sun creates mesmerizing ripples on the water.

We succeed on that warm September day in remaining in a standing position and entering an area filled with Buff-breasted, Baird's and Western Sand-

pipers. At the edge of the island, a Sanderling walks as gingerly as we had.

We end the day having seen 23 species of shorebirds. We didn't break any record. We didn't see a Piping Plover. But, we weren't disappointed. You see, we discovered a Red Phalarope, the first record for the lake.

And so, it was a Red Phalarope kind of a day at Rend Lake that September morning. Who knows what kind of a day it will be next time? ■

*Editor's Note: To give you a taste of shorebirding Rend Lake, Todd Fink and Judy De Neal will lead an Illinois Ornithological Society-sponsored field trip at Rend Lake on Sunday August 23. To register, contact IOS Field Trip Chair Sue Friscia at (708) 371-2124.*

*The trip will begin at 8 a.m. at the visitor's center at Wayne Fitzgerald State Park. For more information on the Rend Lake area, call the park at (618) 629-2320. The Mt. Vernon area has moderately priced motels and hotels. For more information, contact the Mt. Vernon Chamber of Commerce at (618) 242-5825.*