

becomes an island only during high water conditions, generally every spring.

A large portion of Meredosia Refuge was closed to the public until the mid 1990s, but now birders and others have much greater access. Note, however, that Meredosia Island and the Indian Creek Area are closed to the public from October 16 to February 15 to reduce the disturbance to migratory and wintering birds.

Members of the Morgan County Audubon Society have cataloged many rarities in the refuge including Sandhill Crane, Snowy Egret, Cinnamon Teal, Ross's Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, Least Tern, Peregrine Falcon, Sharp-tailed and LeConte's Sparrows, and recently – Fish Crow! A heron rookery is on private land on the north end of Meredosia Island. Due to timber harvesting and high tree mortality from the 1993 flood, Great Egrets no longer nest within this rookery, and the number of Great Blue Herons has been declining.

Sloughs and river bottoms

Each fall large numbers of waterfowl and herons utilize Meredosia Lake and backwater sloughs for their abundance of fish and aquatic vegetation. The forested river bottoms of Meredosia Island are comprised of black willow, silver maple, cottonwood, pecan, pin oak, and green ash, which provide natural nesting avities for Wood Ducks, Tree Swallows, and Prothonotary Warblers. Refuge staff also maintain a large number of Wood Duck nest boxes on Meredosia Island. Mockernut hickory, shingle oak,



Great Egrets breed at the Meredosia National Wildlife Refuge, although their numbers are declining. Photo by Dan Moorehouse.

and blackjack oak dominate the upland timber. Sand prairie offers habitat for grassland birds including: Lark Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird, Dickcissel, and Northern Bobwhite.

Some of the best bird-watching opportunities occur along Beach Road, although the road may be flooded during high water. To get to Beach Road from the north on Route 100/67, turn right (west) at County Line Road. Beach Road begins on the other side of the levee. From the south, on Route 100/67, turn left (west) on Arenzville Road and turn right (north) onto Beach Road. A small nature trail leads through the sand prairie at the Visitor's Contact Center and Maintenance Facility – north of Meredosia. The parking lot is on the south end of Beach Road, within the prairie. This trail winds through a grove of pine trees, planted by the previous owner, and onto a wooden boardwalk platform from which you can view a buttonbush swamp. From this overlook you might see a Black-crowned Night-Heron or Sora during the summer. The nature trail is accessible even during high water.

For those more adventurous birders, access to Meredosia Island (Feb. 16 - Oct. 15) from a gravel road north of Indian Creek (turn west off of

Route 100/67). This road is flooded or inaccessible for much of the year and the gate may be closed preventing access via dirt road across private land. The north entrance provides a view of the rookery during the summer. Another way to access the Island is from the south end, heading north to northwest from Meredosia along the shoreline of the Illinois River. This access does not have well-defined roads and may require some bush-wacking. A

third, a perhaps easier option, would be by boat or canoe across Meredosia Lake. A newly constructed boat ramp is found along Beach Road.

The best time to view birds at Meredosia Refuge is late summer through fall when the largest numbers of migratory shorebirds, waders, and waterfowl are found on Meredosia Lake. Shorebird migration generally begins the first week of July. Peak wader use occurs in late July and August. American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants are more frequently observed during late summer and early fall as well as during the spring. Ospreys (during the fall and spring) and Belted Kingfishers are frequently seen fishing in the sloughs and along the shores of Meredosia Lake. The peak of the waterfowl migration begins in mid October and runs through early December. Each year in January or February the Refuge hosts Bald Eagle Days in which staff are available to assist visitors with eagle viewing. An average of 20 to 100 Bald Eagles are seen during this event. Late spring and early summer offers the chance to observe breeding residents: Wood Ducks, Prothonotary Warblers, and various woodpeckers.