

## Rare plants and butterflies

In addition to bird-watching, Meredosia Refuge offer opportunities to experience unusual assemblages of wetland plants and a variety of colorful butterflies. The removal of the cabins along Beach Road created a disturbance to the soil, which has benefitted a population of the federally and state threatened plant, decurrent false aster. This plant has a short lifespan, and disturbance of the soil is essential to

the germination of new plants. The small daisy-like flowers with pale pink or white rays and a yellow center appear during August and September. Decurrent false aster is named for it leaves that lie decurrent (flat against the stem with winged edges hanging out on each side). Although this plant may appear extremely abundant at Meredosia Refuge during some years, it is a protected species because the only place in the world to find this plant is along the southern two-thirds of of the Illinois River and along the Mississippi River, immediately south of the Illinois River. If conditions do not remain favorable, populations of this plant will disappear.

The east shoreline of Meredosia Lake contains a wide variety of interesting wetland wildflowers, grasses, and sedges. Rose mallow, a member of the hibiscus genus, has large showy pink flowers that bloom in late summer. The water's edge is usually lined in a soft green carpet of marsh spikerush. Tiny bulrushes and nutsedges, not more than 2 or 3 inches tall are also found along the shore. Arrowhead or duck potato, mud plan-



*Decurrent false aster, a federally endangered species, blooms in August and September at the Meredosia National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Dan Moorehouse.*

tain, river bulrush, primrose-willow, cardinal flower, swamp marigold, sprangletop, and frog fruit are also found along Beach Road. My favorite shrub, buttonbush - often called buckbrush by local duck hunters, has perfectly round ball-shaped cream white flowers that provide protective cover for ducks. The seeds of many of these plants provide food for large numbers of waterfowl, blackbirds, sparrows, and finches.

During the mid-late summer, butterflies are attracted to the abundance of nectar from these plants. Some butterflies require wetland plants to serve as larval food sources for their young. Wetland butterflies common at Meredosia Refuge include: bronze copper, great copper, dainty sulfur, cloudless sulfur, little sulfur, viceroy, buckeye, banded hair-streak, Delaware skipper, dun skipper, and common sooty wing. The sand prairies may host the state-threatened regal fritillary, especially during years when the species is more abundant and widespread. This large orange and brown butterfly is generally found in sand prairies and is

primarily restricted to Mason, Cass, and Morgan Counties.

The Town of Meredosia offers travelers a choice of several restaurants and gas stations along the main road that runs east-west from the bridge (Route 104). While in the area, I recommend a visit to Meredosia Hill Prairie. This 30-acre hill prairie is owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and is located about 5 miles northeast of Meredosia. From Meredosia heading east on Route 104, turn left on

Routes 100/67 and travel north for 0.7 miles. Turn right on blacktop road and travel east to northeast for 2.5 miles. Meredosia Hill Prairie involves a steep climb, but the reward may be a sighting of Bell's Vireo and Yellow-breasted Chat, which both breed here. Blue Grosbeaks have also been reported at this site. Several rare plants are found on this hill prairie such as the pink milkwort and Hill's thistle.

## Acknowledgments

Thanks to Bill Atwood and Morgan County Audubon, for providing information on birding highlights for the Meredosia region.

## Information

Contact Illinois River National Fish & Wildlife Refuges (309) 535-2290; for details on the Meredosia Hill Prairie contact the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (309) 543-3262.

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