

Birding McLean County

By Michael Retter

Birders often pass through McLean (pronounced mik-LANE) County, at the intersection of Interstates 55, 74, and 39, without stopping. At first glance the area appears to be an agricultural wasteland, but numerous oases within the county act as migrant traps. In fact, 302 species including some specialties have visited the county and its thousands of corn and bean fields.

All locations mentioned in this article are rural; which makes it easy for a quick birding detour. For those willing to brave the traffic, a birding guide to Bloomington-Normal proper, including the famous Ewing Park, will appear in a later issue of *Meadowlark*. If you're traveling through or on an interstate, consider combining some of the following stops for some good birding.

1. Funks Grove is a remote, moist prairie grove in the southwest corner of the county. Originally, it was an unusually moist oak-hickory forest with an understory predominated by stinging nettle, but the closing of the canopy has led to the predomination of maples in the grove. Birding is best during spring migration. Most notable is the number of thrushes seen then. One spring, up to 50 thrushes including all species were seen in a few hours along the roads on a drive through the area. The trees overhanging the roads can be spectacular for spring warblers if conditions are right. Look and listen in the interior moist woods for Louisiana Waterthrushes in early spring.

The DNR tract on the south end was once one of the best spots in the county for Yellow-breasted Chat and Bell's Vireo, but recent excursions have not produced these birds. You can reach the grove by going north about 5 miles on old U.S. 66 from the McLean exit on I-55.

2. Moraine View State Park is one of the best birding locations in the county. Its most noticeable feature is Dawson Lake, which is good in all seasons (except summer) for waterbirds. The exceptionally deep water has hosted many unusual visitors including Common and



Lapland Longspur at Chicago's Montrose Harbor, Cook County. 13 September 1998. Photo by Eric Walters. This species is a regular winter visitor to McLean County.