

to get a good view if you've got a scope. Also note that it can get hot on some dog day afternoons, so have bottled water along with you. Often, at these locations you'll be far from the nearest stores and restaurants.

Here, then, are some of the sod fields in Illinois and the greater Chicago region that birders have had success in finding the coveted Buff-breasted Sandpiper and other "grasspipers."

Wind Lake Sod Fields, Wisconsin

This expansive area is nearer to Milwaukee and farther from the Chicago area but worth a visit, due to the area's peat layer and dike system that provides a rich source of undersoil for sod. Andy Sigler and Robert Hughes of Chicago found the fields by grabbing the yellow pages one day while in Racine County. Many an Illinois and Wisconsin birder has

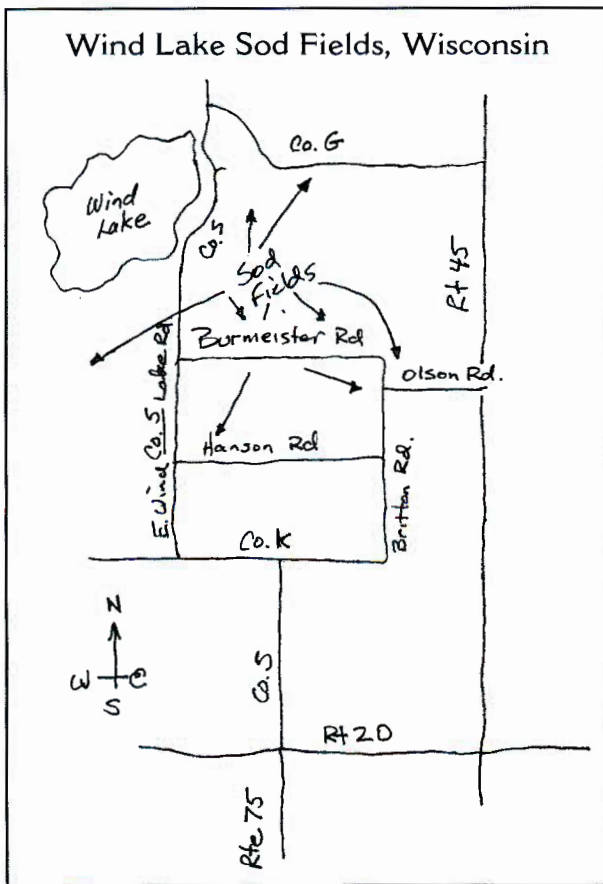


American Golden-Plover is another species that frequents sod farms. These three plovers were photographed 17 August 2002 at the HESOD Farms in McHenry County.

added Buff-breasted Sandpiper to their Wisconsin life list as a result of Sigler and Hughes' discovery. Buffies are best at this location along County Roads S and along Burmeister, Britton, and Hanson roads as they make a complete loop connecting back to County S. American Golden-Plovers are often found along County G on the way into Wind Lake proper and anywhere there's black soil from stripped sod. Upland Sandpipers can be anywhere but generally like any "blonde grass" areas. These are patches of turf that have dead straw-colored grass in them. Killdeer, Horned Lark, and

European Starling can be abundant here. One specialty, too, is the Brewer's Blackbird that nests along the irrigation ditches throughout the sod fields. All six swallows are common here in the fall. Expect the unexpected like American Pipits and Lapland Longspurs. Both Long-billed Dowitcher and Ruddy Turnstone have been noted, and even a Caspian Tern. Also, don't forget to check out Wind Lake for ducks and other waterbirds.

Directions: Drive north from Highway 20 on County S until you reach County K, which is a T intersection. Turn west on County K (also County S here) until you reach E. Wind Lake Road (in 1 mile). Turn north on E. Wind Lake Road or County S until you reach the first sod fields before Hanson Road. Continue north either to Wind Lake or County G. Wind Lake Road and West Loomis Road will get you to the lake. Be sure you travel the loop off County S east to Burmeister, then Britton south to Hanson Road, then west back to County S. This loop has been the most reliable location for Buff-breasted and Upland Sandpipers in recent years.



McHenry County Sod Fields, Illinois

This sod field has nesting Western Meadowlarks and also has held spectacular numbers of American Pipits (apparently 1,000 plus one October). On a "grasspiper" trip in early July 2003, an observer had 16 singing Western Meadowlarks, and no Easterns. Both Buff-breasted Sandpipers and American Golden-Plovers regularly frequent the fields from mid-August to mid-September. Counts of 15 or more Buff-breasteds and 75 or more golden-plovers have been observed. Nearly all the other "grasspipers" including Upland Sandpiper; Black-bellied Plover; Semipalmated Plover; both yellowlegs; Solitary, Pectoral, Semipalmated, and Least Sandpipers; and Wilson's Snipe have also been seen.