

Killdeer are abundant, with numbers often in the 500 plus range. This may be one of the most reliable places to find Brewer's Blackbirds in the state. Recent observations indicate they very likely nest here (pers. comm. S. Bailey), as numbers of this species were seen here in early July 2003. This population likely represents the largest breeding population of Brewer's Blackbirds in the state (pers. comm. S. Bailey). Also, Lapland Longspurs have occurred here in fall.



Illinois birders covet the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and a good place to find them is at sod farms during fall. This "buffie" was photographed 17 August 2002 at the HESOD Farms in McHenry County.

A few other uncommon shorebirds seen here include Western Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher and Hudsonian Godwit (pers. comm. D. Shambaugh).

Directions: This area is northwest of Marengo and south of Harvard. Take Route 176 west to the town of Crystal Lake. Turn north on Route 14 from Crystal Lake. Several miles northwest of Woodstock, exit west onto Dunham Road. Continue west to where Dunham intersects with Route 23. The sod farms begin just west of Route 23 on Dunham Road. Look for the green and white striped building with the "HE SOD" farms sign. There is a gravel road going south a short distance past this building into the main body of the sod farms. Note that some birders recently have been denied access to the interior roads of these sod farms.

Additional sod fields, currently under ownership of Central Sod Farms, can be found south of this area. Return to Dunham Road and Route 23. Go south to Marengo and take Route 176 east to the sod fields on the north side of Rte 176 and south of the Kishwaukee River. This location is between Millstream Road and Union Road. Kunde Road also runs east and west and borders these sod fields to the north. Similar "grasspipers" as above can be expected on these sod fields. However, these farms are not as accessible as the HESOD farms and fewer species are typically seen here, possibly due to farming practices.

Kane County Sod Fields, Illinois

Sod fields at Kaneville in Kane County abound with Horned Larks and Killdeer, and Buff-breasted Sandpipers are often observed here in fall. Other sightings have included Stilt Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper and Least Sandpiper. Morning is the best time to visit.

Directions: Drive west on Main Street from the intersection of Main and Route 47. This is due west of

Batavia (approximately 8 miles) and in the town of Kaneville. The fields are on both the north and south sides of Main Street. This birder-friendly location has gravel roads on both sides of Main Street. There's also a nice side street that you can park on and walk across to view.

Another group of sod fields is in northwest Kane County on Melms Road between Walker and West County Line Roads. This sod field is best reached by taking Harmony Road south of Big Timber Road about 1/8 of

a mile to Melms Road. This area has been very productive in fall for Upland Sandpipers and American Golden-Plovers. Western Meadowlarks also occur here.

Joe Cooling Sod Farms, Boone County, Illinois

The most common birds here are Killdeer, Horned Lark and Barn Swallow. In August, they are joined by Buff-breasted Sandpipers and an occasional Upland Sandpiper. In fact, this is the most reliable place in the area to find Buff-breasted Sandpipers in fall.

Both Black-bellied Plover and American Golden-Plover have also been spotted here. The heat haze in the vast fields in August gets wicked by mid-morning, so earlier is better for distance viewing, and a scope is a must.

Directions: The Joe Cooling and Sons Sod Farm is on Wheeler Road, south of U.S. 20, and east of the town of Cherry Valley, Illinois. The sod farm is just on the east side of the Boone-Winnebago County line. The vast majority of sod field acreage is west of Wheeler Road, and bordered by Rossiter Road (a gravel road on the south) and Cherry Valley Road, a major paved road on the southwest. No access for viewing is available from either the north or west side of the fields. (See p. 18 of DeLorme.)

Cherry Valley Road is very busy and dangerous, with only one or two places with a gravel pad wide enough on which to park. Rossiter Road is used very little, and is a good place to park for viewing from the south side (but this is the narrowest section of the farm). The best viewing is from along Wheeler Road in the morning when you are looking west. Wheeler Road is also very busy (a blacktop road), but there are a few places where there are gravel pads used by the farm for accessing the fields, and a person can park on those and be completely off of the road. The shoulders of Wheeler