

Route 1. Or you can continue south along 13500 E past 1250 N. There is a small (15-20 pairs) Cliff Swallow colony under the small bridge over the channelized ditch running east/west just south of 1250. The sod fields here and along 1250N are two of the better places to find the few breeding Western Meadowlarks in this area. The best areas for “grasspipers” generally are to the east along 13400E and 13500E and 1250N. Where sod has been removed is often where you can find American Golden-Plovers and “buffies.” During the fall of 2002, during a hot September day, Baird’s Sandpiper, “buffies” and American Golden-Plovers were all crowded into a watery pool just along side 1250N, literally right outside our car window.

Schneider and Hanna Sod Fields, Indiana

One of Indiana’s best locations for “grasspipers” is along U.S. Route 41 north of Schneider. Hanna, nearly 40 miles to the east, although less attractive for “grasspipers” in recent years, has had Brewer’s Blackbirds. At Hanna is the Shamrock Turf Nurseries, 15 miles east of Valparaiso off IN Route 39. All of the “grasspipers” can be seen at these locations.

Directions: From Route 2 drive south on Highway 41 and bird far off the shoulder. Side roads north of Schneider will take you off the busy highway but you’ll need a telescope for this spot. To reach the Shamrock Turf Nurseries travel back to Route 2 east to Route 8 and go north on Route 39 and view the sod fields just north of Route 30. Co. Rd 1300S on the north side of the sod fields is also a good viewing area.

Sod farms are generally smaller and fewer in number outside of Chicagoland. Below are a few known to attract “grasspipers.”

Champaign County Sod Farm, Illinois

In recent years, a small sod farm, discovered by the late Bob Chapel, just southeast of Champaign/Urbana and just west of the Salt Fork Forest Preserve (Homer Lake) has produced a few Buff-breasted Sandpipers, American Golden-Plovers and Pectoral Sandpipers. As usual, Killdeer, Horned Larks and European Starlings are usually the most abundant birds, along with good numbers of swallows, especially Barn, in migration and summer.

Directions: Take IL 74 east from Champaign to the Ogden exist. Go south on IL Route 49. Watch for the small “Salt Fork River Preserve” sign and turn right or west onto 1350N, which is County Highway 14. After

passing the forest preserve and Homer Lake, look for 2500E, which only goes north. The sod farm begins just a short distance down from 2500E, on the east side of the road.

Grieder Sod Farm, Illinois

Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers have been recently noted at the Grieder Sod farm near the town of Carlock in McLean County. See page 42, D-1/2 in the newest DeLorme.

Directions: The Grieder Sod Farm is located near the town of Carlock, which is approximately 8 miles northwest of Bloomington off of I-74. To get to the farm, take the Carlock exit. Take the main road east through town, which will become U.S. Route 150. Just outside of town (around 1/2 mile) take a right (south) on 800 E. This road is just after the green sign giving distances to the next towns. Just for reference, 800 E crosses I-74. The sod farm is at the intersection of 800 E and 1800 N.

Acknowledgments

As “grasspiper” birders we owe a debt of gratitude to Andy Sigler and Robert Hughes who late one summer day in the 1970s grabbed the yellow pages on sod farms while in Racine County—and found Wind Lake Sod fields, launching sod farm birding as we know it today in the Midwest. Sigler said, “go down Burmeister Road—you’re bound to find buffies.” I did—and—I did (find buffies that is). Sigler and Hughes also found the Will County Sod Fields and the Indiana sod fields at Schneider and Hannah. I would also like to thank Steve Bailey, Jeff Chapman, Scott Cohrs, Sheryl DeVore, Travis Mahan, Robert Montgomery, Darrell Shambaugh, and Dan Williams for providing information on some recently discovered sod field sites in Kendall, Kane and McHenry counties. Also thanks to Steve Bailey for providing information about a lesser-known sod field in central Illinois. And thanks to former Illinois birders David Mandell, Howie Neilsen, and John O’Brien as well as Andy Sigler and Robert Hughes for so passionately loving “grasspiper” birding that made it available for others to enjoy. Thanks also to Joel Greenberg and Lynne Carpenter for providing a detailed site guide and maps (A Birder’s Guide to the Chicago Region, 1999) to some of the locations mentioned in this article.

— David B. Johnson
504 Crown Point Road
Buffalo Grove, IL 60089
djohnsoda@attbi.com