

Northern Parulas will be singing their rising high-pitched songs in Jackson County during the IOS Annual Meeting the end of April. Emil Martinec took this photo of a Northern Parula at Montrose, Cook County, 20 May2006.

songbird cacophony starts at the bridge at about the same time. Here Little Kinkaid Creek, a tributary of Kinkaid Creek, provides a respite for migrating warbler and thrush species and a summer home for Louisiana Waterthrush and Prothonotary Warblers. Immediately across the bridge the trail turns south and starts its slow climb up through a wet woodland leaving Little Kinkaid Creek but meeting up with and paralleling one of its tributaries. A pasture grown over into young woods borders to the west. Spring wildflowers abound; larkspur, yellow dogtooth violet, and wake robin to name a few. Along this rising trail birders will encounter migratory Tennessee and Black-and-white Warblers as well as breeding, Prothonotary Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, American Redstart, and the resident Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers.

The trail splits at approximately 275 yards. Although an enticing stand of pines looms to the west, it's the trail to the southeast (left) that leads up to the wildlife opening. Both Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Northern Parula can be seen and heard in spring and summer along the trail as it bends to the east. A part of the trail here shows telltale signs of a homestead where daylilies struggle under the now closed canopy.

As the trail gets closer to the wildlife opening more species make their presence known. In spring and summer, Yellow-throated and Black-throated Green Warblers and Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos join the



Carolina Wrens, Pileated Woodpeckers, and other year-round residents associated with forest edge.

The 22-acre wildlife opening at the end of the wooded trail is a combination of grassy and scrub/shrub habitat, depending on when the Forest Service last control-burned the area. Tall pines that appear to have been planted as part of the 1940s Civilian Conservation Corps forestry project encircle it. Here can be found Prairie, Pine, Palm, Yellow, Blue-winged, and Chestnut-sided Warblers in spring and summer, along with Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Eastern Towhee and Field and Song Sparrows. Blackberry brambles hide catbirds and Brown Thrashers. Wild Turkey and Cooper's Hawk use this area as well. Because Kinkaid Lake is less than three miles southeast as the crow flies; heron, egrets, waterfowl, and Fish Crows occasionally cross overhead.

This trail might not appeal to all birders but those looking for a more secluded birding hike should give it serious consideration. The time spent on this trail will vary with birding success but expect to spend an hour plus hiking the trail's length and back. Be mindful of the mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers, and venomous snakes (timber rattlesnakes and copperheads) found here and throughout southernmost Illinois.

Wilkinson Island

In addition to the aforementioned public lands, a relatively new national wildlife refuge has opened on the western side of Jackson County. The Middle Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Wilkinson Island Division was designated in 2000. Wilkinson Island, nestled between the Mississippi River and the Mississippi River Levee Road, was created as a result of the 1993 Mississippi River flood. The 2500+ acres of floodplain were acquired from folks who decided that it was no longer worth their efforts to farm the land.

The 1993 flood broke through a historical agriculture levee on the river side of the acreage carving out (blowing out) the ground behind the ag levee. The force of the water formed several "blow hole" impressions that held water. After the flood, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reinforced the agricultural levee to prevent future erosion but left open sections for water to escape into during higher river water stages.

The office for the Middle Mississippi NWR is located off site at 1293 Rocky Hollow Road in the village of Rockwood. To get to Wilkinson Island take IL Rt. 3 southeast 1.5 miles from Rockwood to the junction of Rt. 3 and Levee Road at the village of Cora. A drive of approximately 5.5 miles south on the Levee Road will take you to the Wilkinson Island. Signage is minimal but USFWS boundary markers define the refuge.

During daylight hours, visitors to Wilkinson Island can hike one of several natural surfaced trails through river-sculpted habitat. The species to be found at Wilkinson Island are those expected at scrub/shrub, bottomland woodlands, and floodplain wetlands. Resident songbirds include Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, and Eastern Towhee. Belted Kingfishers, Wood Duck, and various wading species inhabit the blow holes. Blue Grosbeak and Yellow-breasted Chat nest here. The area begs further exploration during spring warbler