

BIRDING AREAS OF STORY COUNTY, IOWA

The following compilation includes the majority of the most productive birding areas in Story County and also includes a few selected areas of importance that are easily accessible from Story County. About 275 species have been recorded in Story County and The birder who makes an effort to visit the cross-section of lakes, marshes, fields, river bottoms, and upland woods during the proper season should be able to list 200 species any year. All species mentioned as occurring in these areas have been observed by the compilers.

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March, 1970

RIVER BOTTOMS

BROOKSIDE PARK - This park is located in the Squaw Creek bottom just north of Sixth St. and is composed of about equal areas of open, wooded picnic grounds and fairly dense woodland. This park is excellent for warblers in spring and fall and has resident Screech, Horned, and Barred Owls. An Audubon nature trail runs through the north half. Thrushes and sparrows also appear in good numbers.

SQUAW CREEK PARK- is a smaller city park directly south of the Highway Commission headquarters that is good during migration.

RIVER VALLEY PARK- This recent large addition to the city park system is a greenbelt that extends about two miles north along the Skunk River from 13th St. Picnic areas and ball diamonds are interspersed with natural river bottom habitat and hiking trails. The main east entrance may be reached by driving north on the gravel road just east of the 13th St. bridge. Shortly after Macdonald Woods Park (a good small upland woods) is passed on the left and the Izaak Walton Park is passed on the right, the entrance to River Valley Park will be seen on the left. Other parts of this and adjoining parks may be reached from Ames by driving east on 20th and 24th Sts. The area is good year around. There are resident owls and red-tailed hawks.

INIS GROVE PARK- is located at the east end of 24th St east of Grand ave. in Ames and contains both river bottom and upland woods habitat and picnic areas. It is just across the river from River Valley.

SOPERS MILL ACCESS- is a county-owned 18 acre park 2 1/2 miles east of the Highway 69 Gilbert corner north of Ames. Located on the Skunk River, this another good warbler area.

OTHER AREAS

EMMA MCCARTHY LEE PARK- is just south of Ross Road in northwest Ames and is an excellent area for woodland birds all year.

PAMMEL WOODS- is a mature woodland reserve good for warblers and wildflowers. It is west of the ISU gold course.

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ROBISON'S ACRES- is a 58 acre undeveloped wildlife sanctuary composed of woodland and brushy fields maintained by the Story County Conservation Board. It is two miles east of Iowa Center and adjoins the Indian Creek Izaak Walton Park.

JENSEN'S ORCHARD- is an old, poorly maintained orchard just north of Ontario Road in northwest Ames. It is divided by railroad tracks and on the north is bordered by mature woods around Lynn Fuhrer Lodge. Waxwings and robins can often be found here in winter and the orchard is especially good for sparrows.

ZUMWALT RAILROAD PARK- This hiking trail on the bed of the abandoned Fort Dodge, Des Moines, and Southern railroad extends about two miles southwest of Ames from near the Towers dormitory complex south of the University residential area. Its terminus is the old brick depot and picnic area along a gravel road. This is an enjoyable spring birding walk.

ONION CREEK- By driving north of Highway 30 on North Dakota Ave. which is located about one mile west of Ames, about two miles or about one-half mile past the railroad tracks, Onion Creek is crossed. Park the car at the bridge and proceed east along the north bank about one-third of a mile. The entire creek bottom is good for migrants and the small grove of Red and White pines that is eventually reached usually holds a Saw-whet Owl in early and late winter and is a favorite roosting area for numbers of accipiters in the spring and fall, especially during the first two weeks of April. Woodcock perform their courtship flights in the large pasture just west of the pine grove during April and there is an active beaver dam on the creek not far west of the pine grove. An occasional Sharp-shin or Saw-whet spends the winter here.

PINE GROVES

There are a number of pine groves that are excellent during the winter months. Among these are the Ames Cemetery at the east end of Ninth St, the Nevada Cemetery on old Highway 30 in Nevada, the State Forest Nursery and Ames Nursery south of Ames on Highway 69, a large grove of pines south of the Ames High School, and a similar grove at the south end of South Franklin Ave. in west Ames.

NATURAL LAKES, MARSHES, AND PRAIRIES

LITTLE WALL LAKE- just outside of Story County and about two miles south of Jewell, Iowa on Highway 69, was once a natural marsh. It has been dredged and flooded and is now essentially an open-water lake. Nonetheless, it is a good area for diving ducks, grebes, and an occasional loon in early spring. As soon as motorboaters and fishermen begin using the area in the spring, however, most of the waterfowl fly about three miles north and join those on the following lake.

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ANDERSON LAKE- formerly called Goose Lake and now owned by a duck-hunting club, is an excellent marsh for waterfowl and other marsh species in the spring. It is located about one and one-half miles east and north of Jewell. Good views can be obtained from the gravel road along the east side and a walk along the railroad track at the south end will usually turn up shorebirds unless the water level is exceptionally high. Common Gallinules have nested.

TIEG'S MARSH- is a privately-owned marsh that covers most of a section three miles west of Story City. It is usually dry during the summer. Permission should be obtained to bird the area.

HENDRICKSON'S MARSH- is the largest marsh in the county and is located four miles south and four and one-half miles east of Colo. This marsh, one mile long, is maintained by the State Conservation Commission and is named after the late Dr. George Hendrickson, professor at ISU for many years. It is an excellent area for shorebirds and has concentrations of herons and Common Egrets in the fall. There is one cattle egret record. The marsh is rather open but still attracts large numbers of ducks and geese. Hunting is allowed.

GOOSE LAKE- is located five miles north and one west of Jefferson, Iowa in Greene County. Goose Lake's 400 acres of marsh and adjoining grass and woodland form one of the best birding areas in central Iowa. An attempt was made to drain the marsh in the 1920's but it was restored in the 1950's. A gravel road runs along the east shore and much can be seen from this, especially with a spotting scope. Rails can be flushed from the ditches along the lake side of the road. In addition to many species of nesting ducks, bitterns, grebes, herons, a number of rare species have appeared here in recent years. These include White-faced Ibis, Little Blue Heron, Peregrine Falcon, Caspian Tern, Snowy Owl, and LeConte's Sparrow. Traill's Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, and Swamp Sparrows nest in the thickets around the shore and owls may often be flushed from the pine grove near the north end. The marsh attracts thousands of ducks and geese during the spring migration and in years of low water, shorebirds abound. Hunting is allowed on this state-owned area.

DUNBAR SLOUGH- can be reached by driving south from Scranton on the blacktop and turning west on any of the first three gravel roads. The drier north end has nesting Upland Plovers and Savannah Sparrows and one cattle egret record. The middle road cuts across the slough and the birder finds open water on one side and marsh on the other. The area north of this road is closed to hunting during the fall and ducks can be found there if nowhere else. The south road leads past several small pasture ponds and the largest body of open water is reached here. Very often mudflats are exposed here with the result that such species as Golden Plover, Stilt Sandpiper, Sanderling, Avocet, and Northern Phalarope have been recorded. Pelicans, cormorants, and several grebe species often appear.

FINN POND- will be passed on Highway 30 two miles west of Jefferson and is a miniature edition of Goose Lake. Many ducks and geese can be easily observed from the shoulder of the highway.

BIRDING AREAS OF STORY COUNTY, IOWA (4)

AMES HIGH SCHOOL PRAIRIE- This 27 acre prairie was recently leased to the Nature Conservancy and is the finest example of an upland prairie in Story County. It is just west of Ames High School at 20th and Northwestern. This is a good area any time of year.

ARTIFICIAL LAKES AND LAGOONS

WASTE TREATMENT LAGOONS- are to be found just south of Roland and just east of Jewell and should not be overlooked for ducks and shorebirds during spring. Willets have been seen at Roland.

HALLET'S QUARRY - just north of Ames on Highway 69 often has diving ducks and mergansers and there is a wet, marshy meadow just south of the quarry and west of the highway that is good when wet.

MCFARLAND'S LAKE PARK- is county owned and consists of about 30 acres of woodlands, 60 acres of open fields, and an eight acre lake. Continue driving north past the National Animal Disease Lab and turn right at the T intersection on the gravel road to reach this park.

HICKORY GROVE PARK- located two miles southwest of Colo is owned by the county and contains a 98 acre lake that often holds diving ducks early in spring. All three species of mergansers have been seen here at one time and there is a Little Blue Heron record.

OTHER AREAS

MCHOSE CITY PARK- is located near the southwest edge of Boone in Boone County and is an excellent area for migrants. Woodlands and second-growth follow a small stream for nearly a mile and there are also some conifers.

LEDGES STATE PARK- By parking the car near where Pease Creek flows under the blacktop that winds down to the lower reaches of the park from the main entrance to the east and proceeding upstream away from the picnic areas the birder will be rewarded at any season. Spring is especially good for warblers but summer residents should not be overlooked as they include such species as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Veery, Scarlet Tanager, Yellow-throated Vireo, Gnatcatchers, Cerulean and Blue-winged Warblers, and Louisiana Waterthrush. In addition there are recent summer records of Yellow-throated, Parula, Kentucky, Hooded, and Worm-eating Warblers. Turkey vultures roost in dead trees near the southwest corner of the park just west of the gravel road north of the Lost Lake Nature Trail. They may be seen there nearly every morning with wings outstretched waiting for thermals to form and later in the day soaring over the park. Broad-winged Hawks have nested and several species of owls are residents. As many as a dozen woodcock have been seen performing their courtship flights over the prairie area just inside the main east entrance in late May and Henslow's Sparrows have been observed here also during migration. This is probably the most unique woodland area in the state and deserves more attention from serious birders.

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