

Lansing Iowa—A Birding Hotspot

Ric Zarwell, renowned ornithologist and Lansing resident, recommends the following sites:

Approximately 150 annually active Bald Eagles nests are relatively easy to find in Pool 9, the 93-square miles of refuge between Lock and Dam 9 to the south and Lock and Dam 8 to the north of Lansing. Maps of Upper and Lower Pool 9, within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, which is immediately adjacent to Lansing, may be downloaded from this link: <http://www.fws.gov/nwrts/threecolumn.aspx?id=2147484334> .

Approximately 11-miles south of Lansing on Hwy X42, the heavily wooded nearly 9,000-acre Yellow River State Forest is Iowa's largest and most outstanding publicly owned forest. An extensive and inviting trail system offers birding, hiking, photography and camping opportunities, and trout fishing is excellent. Specific details are found here: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Destinations/StateForests/YellowRiverStateForest.aspx> .

A scenic drive about 7-miles further south on Hwy X52 and 76, one will find Effigy Mounds National Monument, <http://www.nps.gov/efmo/index.htm> Here, like other locations the birding is very good in all seasons, but is optimal during spring and autumn migrations. Birders will find an excellent visitors center, introductory programs about Native Americans and the habitats of the area, and a fine bookstore. A large number of trails among over 200 protected American Indian effigy mounds are located in one of the most picturesque sections of the Upper Mississippi Valley. Forested birding trails reach from near the Mississippi River to the tops of bluffs reaching in excess of 500 feet in elevation. Of course, woodland birds are abundant.

The combination of Yellow River State Forest and Effigy Mounds National Monument make up another local Globally Important Bird Area and Bird Conservation Area as recognized by the Audubon Society and Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity Program. Among several hundred bird species that depend on these landscapes, is newly documented populations of the rapidly declining Cerulean Warbler.

North of Lansing only about 3-miles on Hwy 26, the 2,000-acre Lansing Wildlife Management Area is publicly owned land open to birders and other wildlife-oriented individuals. This area offers a diversity of forested, grassland and open field habitats that support an abundance of birds and other wildlife. For a map of birding opportunities and access information, visit: <http://mapcarta.com/22074032>.

Just slightly further to the north along Hwy 26, one will find the unique sand dominated habitats of Fish Farm Mounds State Preserve and Fish Farm Mounds Wildlife Area. These areas together provide a total 580 acres of birding opportunities. For a map of access points, contact: http://www.iowadnr.gov/portals/idnr/uploads/wildlife/wmamaps/fish_farm_mounds.pdf?amp:tabid=1220 .

Eleven miles north from Lansing on Hwy 26, the friendly community of New Albin offers an abundance of accessible habitats and therefore, many birding and wildlife viewing opportunities. Take the "Army Road" east of New Albin for perhaps the single best access route to the wildlife-rich wetlands and riparian forests anywhere on the entire Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Immediately north New Albin, and easy driving distance from Lansing, Minnesota offers an ongoing abundance of birding opportunities on or near the Mississippi River.

A short drive from Lansing to the east, on the Wisconsin side of the great river, excellent birding habitats are easy to access and enjoy. Among the best and nearest of these are: 1.) Rush Creek State Natural Area, a 2,460-acre landscape of highly diverse riparian and upland forest habitats, just 5-miles from Lansing. Details for these locations can be found here:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/naturalareas/index.asp?SNA=170>. 2.) Battle Bluff Prairie State Natural Area, a 348-acre native grassland, only about 7-miles from Lansing. Details here:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/naturalareas/index.asp?SNA=177>. And, 3.) Black Hawk Park, a large Army Corps of Engineers facility with 177 campsites, located amid floodplain forest on the Mississippi River, approximately 14-miles from Lansing.

Birding locations in Lansing include Mt. Hosmer Veterans Memorial Park with its majestic overlooks of the Black Hawk Bridge, three states and the town itself. Mt. Hosmer is easily accessible by car or on foot, and is hiked on a regular basis by many local residents. One Lansing resident has recorded 189 different species of birds from his own small property, a clear indication of the abundance of birds in the local area.