

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

Ozark National Scenic Riverways--Blue Spring Natural Area

Edge Wade, spring 2016

17 acres Shannon Co. DeLorme 55, H-10

GPS: 37.1660727,-91.1644152

Ownership NPS (along the river) and MDC (17 acres parking area Blue Spring Natural Area). For information call Ozark National Scenic Riverways 573-323-4236, or MDC 573-663-7130

Blue Spring Natural Area is within the Jack's Fork/Current River watershed, a part of Shannon County, recognized as a globally significant Important Bird Area.

Directions: From Eminence go 16 miles east on MO, turn right (south) on gravel CR 535 (may be unmarked). Follow CR 535 for 3 miles through NPS lands, staying right at the "Y", to the Blue Spring parking area. From the parking area, follow a .25-mile trail downstream to the spring.

Alternatively, From Eminence stay on MO 106 for 14 miles, turn right (south) to the NPS Powder Mill campground and parking area. From the trailhead sign at the boat launch area, walk the Powder Mill/Blue Spring Trail 1.5 miles downriver.

A third route is by canoe on the Current River, with a landing slightly upriver of the mouth of Blue Spring branch.

ADA information: There are no ADA compliant facilities. The trail to the spring and along the river upstream is narrow, with uneven surfaces.

Features of interest to birders: Blue Spring, Missouri's deepest known spring (300 feet), with a discharge of 90 million gallons per day, is the sixth largest. The depth gives the spring its striking dark blue color, reputedly acknowledged by the Osage people with the name "Spring of the Summer Sky". The deep blue water, bright green watercress, and white spray produced as the spring ripples over its rocky course create a mesmerizing scene with a spell perhaps only broken by a flash of color or snatch of song from a foraging bird.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Twenty-one warbler species have been seen in the parking area, nearby on the trail along the river, or along the spring branch. These include local breeders Louisiana Waterthrush, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Ovenbird, and Black-and-White, Kentucky, Worm-eating, Prothonotary, Yellow-throated, Pine, Hooded, and Cerulean Warbler, as well as the much sought after Swainson's Warbler.

Swainson's Warbler here is not limited to giant cane stands. It has been found on the fringes of the small clearing with the picnic table just off the parking area, and more frequently along the trail upriver less than .5 mile from the parking lot. Sightings range from mid-May through the first week of July.

Other birds to look for here in spring and summer include Eastern Screech-owl, Red-shouldered Hawk, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will's Widow, Belted Kingfisher, Acadian and Great-crested Flycatcher, Yellow-throated and Warbling Vireo, American and Fish Crow, and Wood Thrush.

In winter, early spring or autumn, birders may find Wild Turkey, Bald Eagle, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Fox Sparrow.

Toilets: 1 privy at parking area

Camping: One camping area at the parking lot with no amenities other than a picnic table and pit toilet.

Hazards/Limitations: No swimming is allowed in the spring or spring branch. Hunting and fishing (but not at the spring, itself) are allowed.

Nearby Birding Sites: Current River CA, Alley Spring, Round Spring, Current River SP, Buttin Rock Access and Eminence City Access.

