

BIRDING BEAVER LAKE NURSERY POND



Location: Benton County. From Rogers, follow Arkansas Highway 12 east for about eight miles to Key Road and turn south (right turn off 12 if you are traveling from Rogers). Travel about 2.4 miles to the gate. Park here. It's an easy walk of about 800 feet to the top of the pond levee. The levee is a loop ring about 0.9 miles in length. The walking is all on a graded 2-track road.

The 150-acre site includes short trails through oak-pine woodland, lake shoreline, and a 30-acre pond. There is a well-maintained ring levee loop around the pond with great views of the mountains, open sky, and Beaver Lake. Varying water levels sometimes create fine mudflats attractive to shorebirds.

If you're a person who likes natural scenery, there's plenty available. Catch that view across the lake of a dramatic bluffline. As Joan Reynolds put it, "I get lost in that bluffline sometimes. It seems as old as time and yet alive, part of time itself, past and future all at once, right now."

Below are two short articles I wrote for the Birds of Arkansas discussion list (ARBIRD-L) about recent field trips. These provide something of the flavor of what you can expect in these seasons. – Joe Neal June 2012



FINGERLING BIRDS AT BEAVER LAKE NURSERY POND May 4, 2012

"It truly IS a nursery pond," is the way Joan Reynolds put it this morning. We were at the Beaver Lake Nursery Pond, a fish-rearing facility east of Rogers. The 150-acre site, including the big, shallow 30-acre fish-rearing pond, juts dramatically out into the lake. It's also rearing fingerling birds. We spent a very brief time looking at a Killdeer nest on the pond levee. I'd seen 4 eggs on April 8. Today there were 2 still wet, just-hatched chicks, egg tooth intact, snug up against 2 visibly hatching eggs, and a frantically displaying adult.

Out in the pond were American Coots (3), Lesser Scaup (3), Blue-winged Teal (35), Northern Shoveler (2), Mallard (2), and American Wigeon (1 adult female), plus an adult female Wood Duck with flotilla of 8 recently-hatched ducklings. Not far away were at least seven adult male Wood Ducks. This area is full of snags and other nest possibilities, so I assume this may be the first of several Wood Duck flotillas to come. If so, it rivals the famous Boxley mill pond as champion northwest Arkansas Wood Duck incubator.

"Bluebird" boxes around the levee are full mostly of Tree Swallows, but also some Eastern Bluebirds. The swallows don't fly or fly reluctantly. Most were the classy-looking metallic blue-green, but one pair featured an adult of this plumage plus a "drab adult" (Sibley's term) that was mighty handsome brown above. Our impression was that incubation was underway, but we left the boxes, and their contents, in peace.

A mudflat was occupied by Lesser Yellowlegs (7), Spotted Sandpiper (8), Semipalmated Sandpiper (25), Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper (2), plus ducks, frogs, etc. There were also 10 adult Canada Geese and 2 family groups of yellow fuzzy goslings.

At least 4 Orchard Orioles were carrying on what appeared frenzied courtship. Snags included Prothonotary Warbler (2 spots) and Red-headed Woodpecker (1). We watched an adult male Yellow Warbler in willows; I wonder if they might be nesting here? Joan spotted 5 medium-sized white terns far out on the lake that were possibly Forster's.

The nursery pond, a joint effort by the Army Corps of Engineers and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, was built in 1987 with federal aid tax dollars. It's open to the public. And while its main business is fish, it is also great place to see birds and other wildlife.



FIELD TRIP TO BEAVER LAKE NURSERY POND MAY 31, 2012

Tree Swallows were feeding nestlings at Beaver Lake nursery pond this morning. It probably won't make the evening news, but it is pure drama nevertheless. The stars are Present and Future.

Present is an adult swallow weighing 20 grams. It cuts through the blue sky, seizes a bug, and sweeps to a nest box opening. Future includes two nestlings, heads poked out of the hole, mouths agape, chirping wildly. More bugs! Bring on the bugs!

Present has the bugs, sallies like some crazy space-walker to get one claw of one toe onto the box opening. Suspends there, defying venerable laws of settled physics. Then, in equilibrium temporary and awkward, stuffs bugs deeply into the mouths of Future.

The world changes from something it was to something it will be in this simple yet also complex way.

Professionally speaking, the nursery pond's mission is fish production, but a secondary mission is high quality wildlife habitat. You can just leave hiking boots in the car, because forested Ozark hills, a winding lake, and this expansive pond are readily accessible from a well-maintained ring levee. The Army Corps of Engineers and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission have provided us opportunity in a dramatic setting.

Extensive mudflats have formed in the pond as water levels have dropped in Beaver. This probably is not desirable for fish production, but it's great for birds. Today there were White-rumped Sandpipers (40), plus smaller numbers of Pectoral and Semipalmated Sandpipers. I counted 15 lounging adult Wood Ducks, plus two adult females with broods of 9 and 4, a brood of 7 hatchling Mallards and 9 adults, four male-female pairs of Blue-winged Teals, and a calico-plumaged variety of Little Blue Heron. Canada Geese were in the weeds with youngsters.

Snag habitat featured Red-headed Woodpeckers, Prothonotary Warblers, and fledgling bluebirds all stars and speckles, starting to blue-up in the primaries, and under close supervision by adults. Small trees and shrubs had Orchard Orioles and Warbling Vireos. There were overflights by Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks, and both vulture species.

This trip was also memorable in part for what it was not. Sometimes Beaver seems distractingly like an aquatics version of a rush hour freeway, with big boats and big engine noise, our local Indy 500. Not today. I never heard even one of those streamlined masses of brightly colored and molded fiberglass powered atop the lake by a 500 horse turbo jet. With the exception of birds, all was quiet on the lake front.