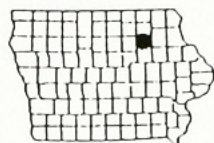


BIRDING BREMER COUNTY'S CEDAR BEND PARK

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Come spring, when the snow melts, the migrants pass through, and the spring ephemerals are in bloom, travel to the middle of the northeast quadrant of the state and visit Bremer County's Cedar Bend Park and adjacent Cedar Bend Wildlife Area. What you might find includes every species of woodpecker found in Iowa, bluebirds and Bobolinks, vireos and Veerys, and 26 (and counting) species of warblers. To reach Cedar Bend, first drive to Waverly via Highway 218 or Highway 3. These two highways meet and combine on Waverly's main street, Bremer Avenue. The park is reached by traveling 2 1/2 miles north and east from Bremer Avenue on 12th Street Northwest. The entrance to the park is north off of 12th Street, just east of the railroad tracks. The park is open for hiking year round, but open to vehicles from mid-April to 30 October. The total acreage of the park is 198 acres, with 180 acres in the park and 118 acres in the wildlife area.



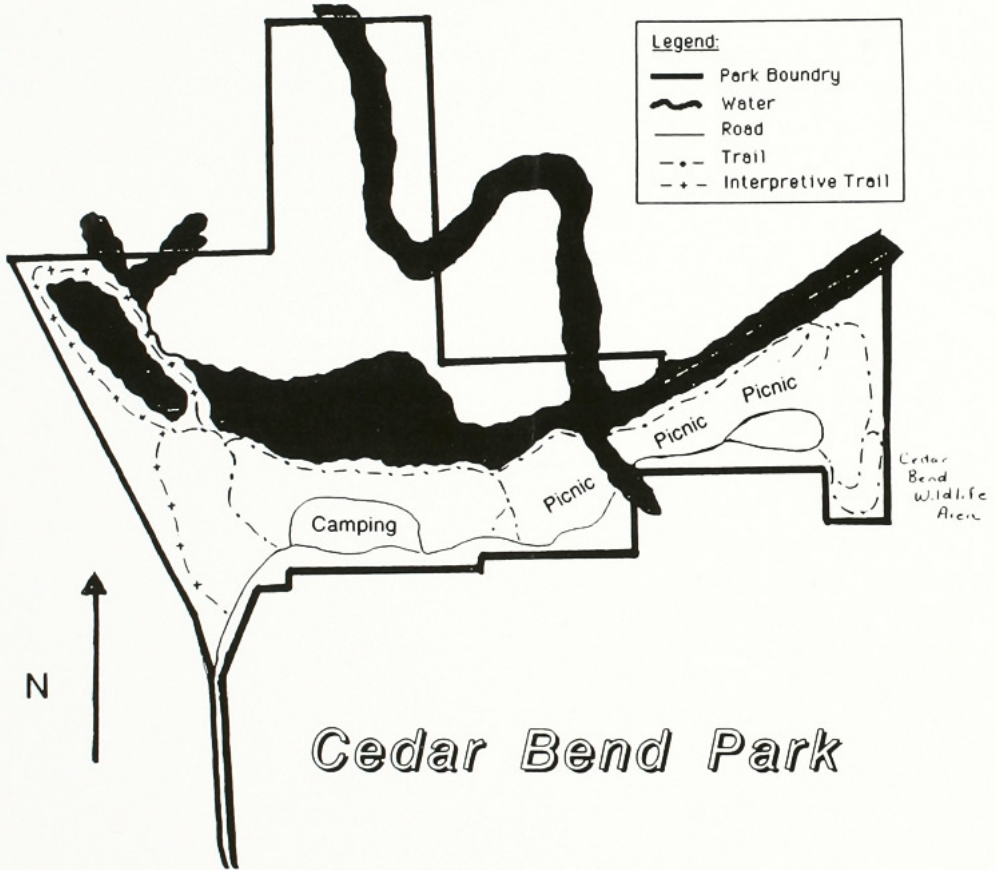
A variety of habitats including mature woodland riparian habitat, floodplains, and open grassy areas are found in the park, so the birdlife is varied. It is surrounded by croplands which, in the years they are left fallow, attract different species than found in the woods. Furthermore, the variety of wildflowers, especially in spring, is delightful, so that if the birding is slow, the flowers compensate.



Figure 1. Woodland trail in Cedar Bend Park.

Visitors can bird the park on a number of different routes depending on time and energy. If time is somewhat limited, drive into the park past the gate (or from midautumn to early spring, park at the gate and walk down the road) to the trailhead marked by an attractively carved wooden sign featuring a Wood Duck and Great Blue

Heron (both found in the park) that says "Interpretative Trail." You may park in the grassy area by this trailhead. From there follow the trail to the north. The trail will soon fork at a spot overlooking a pond. You may turn either to the right or left. The path makes a loop about the pond. For this guide, however, turn to the left. Here you will be hiking on a ridge above the pond until you reach the northern park boundary at which point the path bends to the right and drops down to the water. The water level of this pond varies considerably. When the Cedar River is high, it can rise to flood this whole area. When it is low, the pond is low and covered with algae. This variation in habitat keeps the birding interesting. Depending on the water levels, the pond may hold ducks, including Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shovelers, and Ring-necked Ducks. Great Blue, Green, and once Black-crowned Night-Herons, visit there. Spotted and Solitary sandpipers have also been seen here.



Cedar Bend Park

Many of the passerines may be expected on the trail through the woods. Both kinglets, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and all of Iowa's usual thrushes are found there in season. On the high road above the pond, a friend's black lab once flushed a Wild Turkey that was on the ground near the path. This part of the path is not too far distant from cropland, so listen closely for Northern Bobwhites and pheasants calling. Along this section of the trail is a creosote-soaked bridge. The woodlands near this bridge are a good spot botanically and a profusion of wildflowers are present, changing weekly in spring: Dutchmen's breeches, Virginia bluebells, perfoliate bellwort, giant jack in the pulpit, and nodding trillium. Nearby the trailside is festooned with false and true Solomon's seal, blue cohosh, mayapples, wild

geraniums, wild ginger, bloodroot, spring beauties, and columbines, all in their due season. About midway along the path between the fork and the turn to the east, a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers were observed flying in and out of a tree cavity and most likely nested. The tree is located just to the west of the trail next to the railroad track which forms the park's western boundary. However, it was easy to see from within the park. Just before the path bends to the east, be sure to look closely for showy orchis.



Figure 2. Bird study students from Wartburg College enjoying Cedar Bend Park.

Once you have turned to the east, you are walking along the edge of the park's northern boundary. Just beyond the boundary is a fallow farm field. At least, it has been fallow during the nine years of research for this article. The field is a reliable place for Bobolinks and fortunately they can be seen, and certainly heard, from inside the park, so no trespassing is necessary. Since this part of the path is close to the water, it is a good place to look for Northern Waterthrushes. After a short distance, the trail begins to loop to the south around the pond. Now you will mostly likely find water on both sides of you, except in very dry years. The water to your left is an old oxbow of the Cedar River, whose current course bends from the north to the east--hence the park's name--not too far to the east of this spot. Last spring a pair of Eastern Bluebirds were found in a hole of a dead snag by this stretch of water. This whole circuitous route is a fine warbler watching locale, but this area is especially good. As already mentioned, 26 species have been seen in the park, including Cerulean, Prothonotary, Mourning, and Hooded warblers. When you next come to a fork in the path, stay to your right and climb the hill to get back to your starting point. If time is not a problem, go left and when you reach yet another fork, you may continue straight and follow a path along the main body of the Cedar River or walk to the right and arrive at the campground and the park's lone road. Once on the road, you may turn right and head back to your car.

The riverside path will extend your hike through the woods and offer time to look for swallows over the water. The road also parallels this path, some distance away, so you might chose to return to your car and drive to the far end of the park for more birdwatching. At the far east end of the park, the road has a turn-around loop. To the south of the road, and easily accessible from it, are spots to pull over and study the open fields. Some birds that have been found in adjacent fields include Lark Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Dickcissel, Le Conte's Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, and Sedge Wren. Near the turn-around is a butterfly garden, a small teaching amphitheater, and picnic shelter. The shelter is on a knoll. From the knoll is a scenic vista of the river that is a fairly good hawk watching spot. From this picnic area you make take any of several trails directly to the east. You will descend a hill and shortly reach a sign identifying the Cedar Bend Wildlife Area. The county has only recently made paths into this section of the park, and it appears to offer more good habitat in the shape of open grassy areas and some ponds. Another route to take from the turn-around is to follow a trail heading southeast along a fence covered with grapevines. This leads to a less-mature area with smaller trees and open spaces. From it more grasslands are visible.

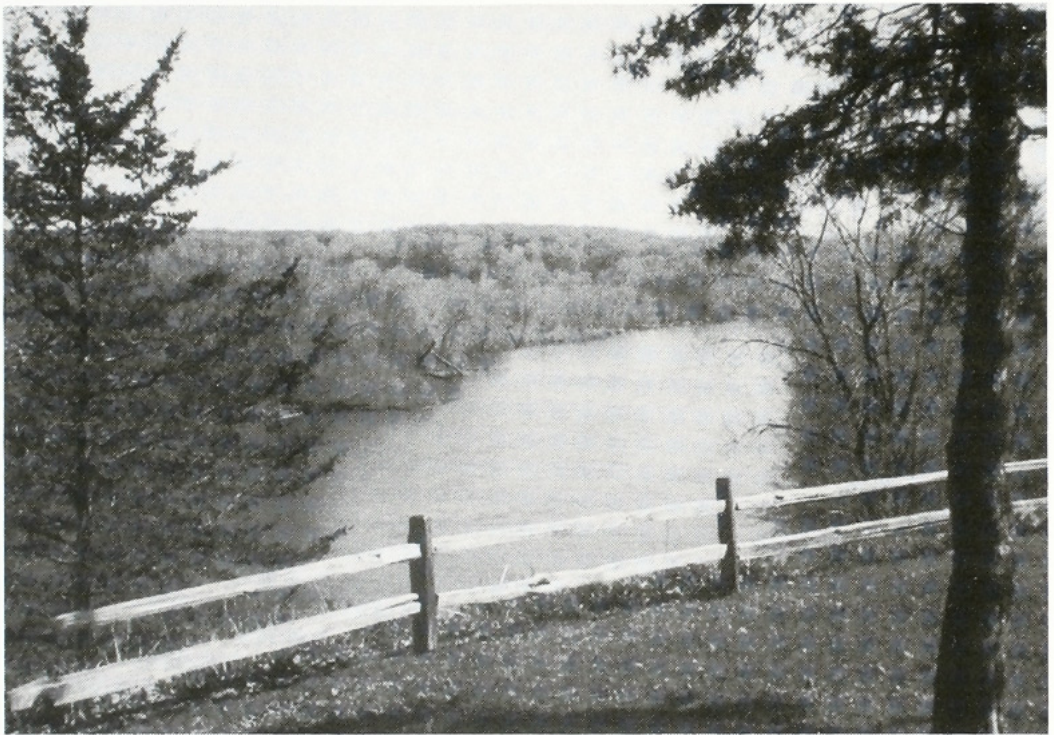


Figure 3. Overview of Cedar River at hawk watching site.

If you can't come in spring, you may try camping here in the summer, where Scarlet Tanagers are summer residents. (Yes, they fly about and sing directly above the campsites.) Or perhaps autumn is your preference, when it is time to find Winter Wrens and Fox Sparrows. Or maybe you want to wait until winter and bring your cross country skis. That is the time of year when Rough-legged Hawks and Snow Geese have passed overhead. Regardless, birds are waiting to be found at every season of the year.

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