

BIRDING IN THE MAYSVILLE AREA

Location: Maysville is in the extreme NW corner of Benton County, approx. 1 mile E of the OK line and 7 miles S of Missouri. **How to get there:** Highways 72 (from Gravette), 102 (from Decatur), and 43 (from Siloam Springs) intersect at or near Maysville. **What you need:** You will get best results using a Benton County map. This is a drive & stop tour. The mileages are approximations, which is why the map will be so useful! Consider these loops as a framework. Straight roads on your map are sure-fire old prairie, possibly as good as what we suggest.

Most of these comments involve trips during winter (November-February). Bird sightings for summer will be specifically noted.

Maysville is situated on the old Beatie Prairie, which also extends into OK. Historically, the AR portion was said to include an area of about 6 by 2 miles. Most native warm season Tallgrass Prairie grasses are gone, but they hang on along fence lines and other out of the way places. Main attractions for birders are the extensive grasslands, crop fields, and post oak barrens.

The directions here are fairly complicated, so the Maysville area is presented below in parts.

There is no really public land in this area, so basically everything below involves birding from the roadside along public roads. This is also an area with big poultry and cattle operations, so when you stop, leave room for the trucks.

SOUTHWEST MAYSVILLE – OK LOOP

We usually drive W towards Maysville on 102. In Decatur watch for Eurasian Collared-Doves. It's easy to see Bald Eagles perched and flying from Decatur W. You begin to see the former Beatie Prairie landscape near 102 & 43. There is a good place to pull off at the gravel dump located in the highway intersection. Tune in for calls of American Pipits, Wilson's Snipe and Killdeer in the wet fields. Savannah Sparrows are common along brushy edges. We saw large flocks of pipits and Savannah Sparrows feeding along the roadside (and in the road) during a snow Jan. 29, 2005.

Keep a good eye for hawks—Harlan's are common, and we found Rough-legged Hawks on a few occasions, but not for many years. Listen for songs of Western Meadowlarks among the much more common Easterns.

Continue W on 102 for approx. 1.5 miles. Watch for 10 big chicken houses on the S side of the road, which here makes a 90-degree bend to the N (headed into Maysville). Turn off 102 onto the gravel road going S. This is State Line Road. Welcome to raptor country: a Peregrine Falcon was seen in this area in January and the prairie form of Merlin in November. Everything W of the road is OK.

Along State Line Rd, watch brushy edges along the first half-mile for sparrows, including White-crowned (common) and Harris's (much less common than White-crowned, but still of annual occurrence), plus other small birds. As you travel S on State Line, watch for all manner of Red-tailed varieties, American Kestrels, and Bald Eagles perched and flying. Northern Harriers perch in the fields. We have found both Brewer's and Rusty Blackbirds (winter) in this area (concentrate your searches where cattle are

feeding). Continue on State Line for approx. 1.5 miles until you come to an intersection with a road going W into OK. (If you miss the turn and keep going S for an additional 0.2 miles on State Line, you come to Loux Road—named for Maurice and Theda Loux, who in the 1980s welcomed NWAAS folks who wanted to see flocks of Bald Eagles. Daughter Carol still lives on the place).

Once you make the turn W, it's all Oklahoma. Keep a good eye on the fields in this area (both AR & OK). Rare western open country birds are possible. A Merlin chased blackbirds and Horned Larks on Jan. 1, 2003. A Prairie Falcon pursue a mixed flock of perhaps 300 Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs on Feb. 8, 2003. Keep an eye out for Loggerhead Shrikes in the roadside thickets here (and elsewhere). Also, keep an eye out for Northern Shrike (winter)! Follow this road W for approx. 0.8 miles to a "T", then turn N and travel approx. 2.1 miles to a paved road. We have seen Great Horned Owl and Painted Bunting in the roadside trees (summer) and Grasshopper Sparrows in the big fields (summer). Singing Horned Larks can be expected throughout the area (late winter, presumably nesting). Turn E on the paved road and travel for approx. 0.6 miles to Highway 43. Now you are back in AR.



Turn N at 43. You are approx. 0.6 miles from downtown Maysville (intersection 43 & 72). Visit Maysville Handy Stop with gas, snacks, and a bathroom. More services are available in Southwest City, MO, approx. 8.5 miles north.

BEATIE LOOP

Referring to the Benton County map, note that much of this loop lies 1-2 miles north, and basically parallel to, Highway 72, N and E of Maysville. It provides a look at the grasslands and cropfields that have replaced the old Beatie Prairie.

We begin at the intersection of Highways 43 & 72 (downtown Maysville). Go N on 43 for approx. 1.0 miles (past the Baptist Church and Maysville Cemetery). There is a sudden right turn onto Scates Road at the hilltop. This is the "Wet prairie" of pioneer times. These huge fields can host lots of surprises during a winter birding trip: a Northern Shrike once, frequent Bald Eagles, and those perennially interesting dark morphs of the Red-tailed Hawk, including Harlan's Hawk. We found singing Bell's Vireos in this area in July 2004, perhaps because it was a wetter year than usual. Horned Larks were singing in a recently harvested bean fields in Feb. 2005.

Travel on Scates Road approx. 0.8 miles to the intersection of Austin Road (or alternately keep going N on Scates a short distance further to its intersection with Leonard Ranch Road). In either case, on Austin or Leonard Ranch, turn E and keep checking fields and skies. In approx. 1.3 miles, Austin "Ts" with Schoolhouse Road; turn N on Schoolhouse and go approx. 0.5 miles to Leonard Ranch Road. This system of

roads allows you to see the breath of the old Beatie. It's also the most likely place to find Swainson's Hawks (summer).

In July 2002 we found Swainson's in 3 places along this loop. On July 26, 2003, we saw 3 Swainson's together and 1 on July 11, 2004, all along Leonard Ranch Road. We haven't found a nest yet, but post oak barrens are common in the area. These barrens also host Painted Buntings (summer) and we have occasionally found Red-headed Woodpeckers in such habitat in both summer (2004) and at times in winter when they are hard to find elsewhere. Expansive grassy fields support Grasshopper Sparrows (summer) and there are Loggerhead Shrikes in scattered roadside thickets (all year).

Take Leonard Ranch Road E approx. 1.7 miles to a "T" with Pritchard Road. The turn S here returns to Highway 72 in approx. 0.9 miles. (Note also that you have the option of a N turn on Pritchard, which kind of doglegs a short distance to where Leonard Ranch continues E and soon junctions with Beatie Road, a straight shot N through the old prairie country all the way to the Missouri line—this is also probably worth investigating if you have time.) There were Bewick's Wrens in at least 3 spots in this area in summer 2009.

We go W onto 72 because of interesting big fields and side roads. It is about 4.7 miles from where Pritchard Road junctions with 72 and downtown Maysville. At about the halfway point, notice two side roads and just W of the side roads, note the "Camp Walker" historical marker on the N side of 72. The side roads provide a good way to see the big fields. The pull off at the Camp Walker sign is marginal at best, but is doable—just be aware of traffic here. We have seen numerous interesting birds in these fields over the years. Grasshopper sparrows sing in these fields (summer), as do Horned Larks. From this point you can return to Maysville or head E toward Gravette.

WET PRAIRIE

This could be considered part of the Beatie Loop. If so, it is sure an interesting part! You reach Wet Prairie Road (county road 404) just like the start of the Beatie Loop: begin at the intersection of Highways 43 & 72 (downtown Maysville). Go N on 43 for approx. 1.0 miles (past the Baptist Church and Maysville Cemetery). There is a sudden right turn onto Scates Road at the hilltop. Then, instead of making the turn onto Austin or Leonard Ranch, just keep going NORTH, up the hill.

Wet Prairie Road tops out and there are huge open fields. Some of them are wet in just about any weather. On the east side of Wet Prairie Road, beginning at approx. 0.5 miles NORTH of the intersection of Leonard Ranch and Wet Prairie, there is a field that is really wet – enough so that we have found Sedge Wrens there in late summer (possible nesting, but not confirmed). Sorghum grown in this field for a dairy farm produced enough spilled grain that Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, both meadow lark species, Brewer's Blackbirds, etc. couldn't get enough of it during the winter 2009-2010. There was a big flock of American Tree Sparrows in brush along the road.

The windy openness here is attractive to all manner of raptors throughout the year. We have seen occasional Peregrine Falcons in winter and Bald Eagles commonly perch in the isolated big trees (also winter). Take time to look carefully at all the perching birds in trees, on wires, fences, etc. – a big surprise is always possible.

In birding this area we usually drive Wet Prairie north to the intersection with Tim Lake Road, then WEST to the intersection with highway 43. There is a vast expanse of

former Tallgrass Prairie habitat lying south of Tim Lake, so take your time and check it all out, especially in winter. Then at 43, it's either back to Maysville (south turn) or NORTH to southwest City, MO. – Joe Neal June 2011