

PEA RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK



LOCATION: Pea Ridge NMP is located on highway 62, about 10 miles north of Rogers in Benton County. **Note:** there is a \$5.00 per car entrance fee. The park is open yearly from 8-5, with extended summer hours (6 AM-9 PM).

HABITATS: Big fields at the center of the Civil War battle were former grasslands of the region's tallgrass prairies. Pea Ridge protects the largest grassland habitats in public ownership in northwest Arkansas. The park also includes riparian forest and oak-hickory forests typical of the region.

A decisive Civil War battle for control of what was then the western United States was fought at Pea Ridge on March 7-8, 1862. The park's 4,300 acres preserve woodlands, streams, pastures and abandoned farmlands associated with this battle. The diverse habitats are attractive to numerous species of birds. On the drive out, look for the Eastern Kingbirds and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers that perch on fences and powerlines adjoining open fields.

STOPS BEFORE THE PARK HEADQUARTERS: Traveling on highway 62 from Rogers, note the intersection for the Avoca community (park entrance is about 4.2 miles further). From the traffic light at Avoca, continue another 1.3 miles. Note Brightwater Church and just beyond and turn right (east) onto Sugar Creek road. A 0.6 mile drive on this road brings you to the area where earthworks were built by Federal soldiers on the ridge top. Park in the lot and walk on the trail to the wooded hilltop. You can also walk the road in either direction to sample birds

along the stream. Common summer residents include Kentucky Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Northern Parula, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Acadian Flycatcher and more. Also, migration during early May can be productive. Return to highway 62 and continue north toward the park headquarters.

But here's another stop before you reach park headquarters. At about 2.3 miles northeast of Avoca, make a left (north) onto state highway 72. Parts of the Leetown battlefield lie across 72 less than a mile from where you turned off 62. This provides access to the west side of the Pea Ridge battlefield and to open grasslands that can be very productive for birds. You can stop here and bird watch and listen along the road without paying the entrance fee, but if you walk into the fields, the fee is required. It is productive for birds like Northern Bobwhite, declining elsewhere, Field Sparrows, Dickcissels and others. (In past years we have found Henslow's Sparrows in the fields and soaring over, an occasional Swainson's Hawk.) These fields were once part of the region's tallgrass prairies and prairie restoration efforts are visible.

PARK HEADQUARTERS: Finally, be sure and tour the battlefield. The quiet loop road through the battlefield is a nice hike, and fun on a bicycle, too. The loop provides access to birds as well as historical sites. Woodlands at the Leetown stop, for example, host Summer Tanagers, Yellow-throated Vireos, Acadian Flycatchers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Black-and-white Warblers. Parts of the next stop, Leetown battlefield, include old fields, with Blue-winged Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats, Field Sparrows, Northern Bobwhites, Eastern Towhees and Prairie Warblers. The west overlook stop provides a vast panorama of the Boston Mountains with Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed hawks and a Broad-winged Hawk may soar over while Summer Tanagers and Indigo Buntings sing from the edge. Views of white-tailed deer and Wild Turkeys are possible in the early morning.



There are trails and big fields in the vicinity of restored Elk Horn Tavern, at the battlefield's center. Look for Grasshopper Sparrow and Dickcissel in the big grassy fields near park headquarters. We have found Henslow's Sparrow here, too. Bobolinks have been found here in spring migration.