

Prairie Birding at Indiangrass Hills, Iowa County

By Michael C. Dooley

In the southwest quarter of Iowa County there is a property of over 600 acres of ongoing prairie restoration, called Indiangrass Hills, which is open to the birding public. This outstanding property was bought by a private group of conservation-minded folks who welcome birders there and who seek to keep track of the property's wildlife. Reliable summer species at Indiangrass Hills include Sedge Wren, Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrow, Bobolink, and Orchard Oriole. Most years there are one or two incidents of Loggerhead Shrike and Northern Mockingbird as well.



1) **REPORT YOUR BIRDS:** The owners would really appreciate it if you send them a list of the birds or any other interesting animal life you see while birding there. They quite reasonably suggest that informing them of the birds you see is a fair exchange for unimpeded access to this excellent property on which they've worked so hard. And let me reiterate, they really do encourage people to bird there, it's the sort of use for the land they intended with this project. It's not a problem if you are doing your own personal outing and simply show up and bird, and about half the times that I've birded there no one else was on the property (but see No. 2 below per burn seasons and group outings). The owners are a friendly bunch when they are there and always ask what you've seen. But send that list! -- Contact Judy Felder at jjfighATmchsi.com

2) **GROUP OUTINGS AND BURN DATES:** They welcome groups at Indiangrass Hills but would like to be informed a reasonable time in advance. Their main concern is safety, wanting to have some idea of where folks are on the property during burn seasons (March and into April; and the end of October into November). By letting them know in advance you'd like to bring a group out they can also let you know if it's just not a good date for a larger population to be on the property for logistical reasons, in or out of burn season. -- Again, contact Judy Felder at jjfighATmchsi.com

3) **HUNTING:** Hunting is allowed at Indiangrass Hills with prior permission, and they get a good number of hunters there, so be aware of the hunting seasons. You are asked not to bird during shotgun deer season. When birding during other hunting seasons, please wear blaze orange.

4) **TRAILS AND FLORA RULES:** The firebreaks throughout Indiangrass Hills double as good trails, though you are free to wander wherever you like with the following minor restrictions: (a) During the growing season Canada thistle patches, which the owners spray with herbicide, are marked with small pennants. It would be best to avoid walking through those marked patches; (b) For safety reasons avoid the old farm outbuildings on either side of the road near the entrances; (c) Obviously the plant life is a major part of this restoration project and no plant materials should be removed or added while on the property without express knowledge and permission of the owners beforehand.

5) **PARKING AND ENTRANCES:** There is a headquarters pole barn at 2549 I Ave. with a parking area where you should leave your car. When parking make sure you leave plenty of room for the comings and goings of the vehicles they work with which they keep in that building. Please do not park by simply pulling alongside the road there, and do not take vehicles anywhere else on the property. Entrance onto the east property is across the road from the pole barn. The less-visited but productive west property is reached by a trail starting behind the pole barn, to the left of the small woodlot.

ALSO WORTH CHECKING: 250th Street on the property's north border can be very productive for birding of the stand-next-to-your-car variety. There are views here onto grassland and brush areas on both sides. Mockingbirds have appeared (1) in the northwest corner of the property, where I Ave. curves into 250th; (2) on the north side of 250th near this same spot; and (3) farther east on

250th just past the Indiangrass Hills property (marked by a fence), in the pasture land on the south side of the road.

