

8. Lake Byllesby



Song Sparrow

Photo by Kevin D. Smith

As described by the ecologists with the IBA program Lake Byllesby is the largest body of water west of the Mississippi River corridor in our area. Because of this, migrating birds have found places on and around to rest and replenish fuel supplies before continuing on to breeding grounds. This reservoir is formed on the Cannon River by the dam near Cannon Falls. You reach Lake Byllesby and Dakota County Park by taking CoRd 88 out of Cannon Falls and then turn south at Harry Ave. where you can see the entry sign. An alternate route would be to take CoRd 88 off of Hwy 56 in Randolph and go east towards the main entry. Lake Byllesby Regional Park has a picnic area, campground, boat launch sites, restrooms and hiking trails where you can explore for birds any time of the year.

The highlight spot on Lake Byllesby is undoubtedly the west end access. You can reach this Dakota County park property by continuing on CoRd 88 from the main park or take same road about 100 yards east of Hwy 56 at Randolph. There is very limited parking in front of and past the RR tracks but the public is welcome to walk the County property towards the lake where you can view the mud flats on this end of the lake. In early spring the lake opens up and comes alive with migrating waterfowl. Thousands of geese and ducks of all kinds are seen here. The numbers and kinds change on a daily basis so come often to find the rare Ross's and Cackling Geese. Franklin's and Bonaparte's Gulls, Caspian Tern are possible and then come the shorebirds. Depending on the water levels most every species is possible during migration at sometime. Spring is very good but experienced birdwatchers know the fall migration starts early. Even in late July and August the shorebirds are migrating southward. If water levels are favorable these birds will find this place. This is such a good birding spot Dakota County Master Plan shows future improvements to the site including: better off street parking, improved birder access, a boardwalk out into the wetland and an observation platform.

A bonus site you will want to check when you are at Lake Byllesby is the Great Western Industrial Park. It is located a short distance north of the jct. CoRd 88 and Hwy 56 in Randolph. This remnant prairie site with stormwater ponds attracts many more special birds; both species of Meadowlark, Dickcissel, Sedge Wren, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Clay-colored and Grasshopper & Song Sparrow all can be seen here.



Western Meadow Lark

Photo by Jim Williams



Eastern Meadow Lark

Photo by Kevin D. Smith



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