

Lake McElroy - a transient lake south of Bowling Green, KY

Submitted by Steve Kistler

Google Map coordinates:

36.867013, -86.505570

Habitat:

This area is a large, shallow, bowl-shaped field that floods following sufficient rain. Underground water sources release nutrients which result in the growth of invertebrates and small fish in the ponded area. The lake can reach several hundred acres in size at its peak capacity.

Birds and birder comments:

Cautions -

Birding at McElroy requires some common sense and consideration of the surrounding landowners. It is an amazing birding location, and complaints from drivers or nearby property owners could jeopardize public access to the site.

- Specifically, highway 884 is a busy road. It is a location where there have been a number of fatalities in recent years. Please do NOT stop in the road. The best approach is to drive to the gravel lane on the south side, listed in the directions below. Be very alert for oncoming traffic when turning left off 884 onto the gravel lane.
- This transient lake is on private property; birders should be aware of this and avoid trespassing. Specifically, stay away from the big red house and metal barns on 884 (at 36.872368, -86.506533...see satellite view), which you will pass on the way to the location listed below. They are nice enough to allow the public on their land, so please respect their wishes.
- Also, the land on the west side of 884 is privately owned by a different person, who does not want people on his property. Please do not step into the fields on the west side of the road.
- Watch for farmers working in the fields and moving equipment. When turning into the lane at the south end, please do not drive past the walnut trees if farmers are working in the fields. After turning into the lane from the road, pull into the grassy area to the right before the walnut trees and get completely out of the lane. It is ok to walk the lane from here.
- Once the fields around the lake around planted, do NOT walk into the fields.

Directions -

- Coming south of Bowling Green on Hwy 884 (Three Springs Rd.), you will see the lake on your left shortly after you cross Hwy 242, Richpond Rd. Continue driving, cross a culvert with water flowing through it, and turn left just before the first house you come to on the left. The house is at 36.865083, -86.511053 on Google Maps. There is a gravel road that turns left off of 884, just before the house (red brick), which adjoins the house's driveway. Be very alert for oncoming traffic when turning off 884

onto the gravel lane. This gravel lane runs east, across the southern end of the transient lake. For a better understanding of the situation, click on <https://www.google.com/maps/@36.8656063,-86.5047227,1227m/data=!3m1!1e3?hl=en> to see an aerial photo. Birders may hike or drive the length of the lane to a loop at the far end.

Birds -

There is rarely standing water in this area in the late spring through the fall, and the property owner usually plants corn or soybeans. If enough autumn rain falls, the water will rise, and shorebirds will stop on their way south. During peak migration times, hundreds of shorebirds of ten to fifteen species are possible. Fall shorebird numbers usually peak during the first half of September.

If the water levels remain high during the winter, flocks of waterfowl will arrive. A wide variety of waterfowl may be seen here, including grebes, teal, scaup, redheads, canvasbacks, n. shovelers, ruddy ducks, mallards, black ducks, ring-necked ducks, and bufflehead. Bald eagles and peregrines occasionally come by to dine on one of the thousands of coot.

If water is present during the spring months, shorebird migration can be outstanding. Rarities such as Ruff, Long-billed Curlew, and Hudsonian Godwit have been found, and Avocets and Willets are regular visitors among the hundreds or even thousands of sandpipers and plovers. Peak shorebird migration occurs between mid-April and mid-May. In the rarest of years when water persists into early or mid-summer, shorebird populations persist and may continue to produce rarities.

McElroy can be an outstanding birding area. A good birding scope is very helpful.