

## ARKANSAS IBA SITE REPORT FORM

**A. Date:** 16 February 2004

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### **B. SITE NAME:**

Three tall grass **Blackland Prairie** preserves in southwestern Arkansas in close proximity to one another.

1. Rick Evans **Grandview Prairie** Wildlife Management Area and Conservation Education Center—4, 885 acres
2. **Columbus Prairie** Preserve—120 acres
3. **Saratoga Landing** Blackland Prairie Preserve—208 acres

### **C. Nearest Town(s) and County(s):**

1. Western edge of **Grandview Prairie** Wildlife Management Area is one mile north of Columbus, Arkansas, in Hempstead County on County Road 35.
2. Eastern edge of **Columbus Prairie** Preserve is one mile north of Columbus on County Road 35 in Hempstead County, Arkansas.
3. **Saratoga Landing** Blackland Prairie Preserve is located between the railroad tracks and the shore of Millwood Lake about a half mile southwest of Saratoga, Arkansas. The northern half is in Howard County and the southern half of the preserve lies in Hempstead County.

### **D. Section, Township, Range:**

1. **Grandview Prairie** occupies most of the middle 9 sections, T11S, R26W.
2. **Columbus Prairie** includes the western half of the southwestern quarter of S17 and joining to the east a small part of S20, both sections are in T11S, R26W.
3. **Saratoga Landing** Prairie overlaps the southwestern part of S31 and the southeastern part of S32, T11S, R27W, joining a northeastern part of S5, T12S, R27W.

### **E. Latitude and Longitude at Center of Areas:**

1. **Grandview**, 33° 48' N Lat., 93° 47' W Long
2. **Columbus**, 35° 48' N Lat., 93° 44' W Long
3. **Saratoga Landing**, 33° 45' N Lat., 93° 55' W Long

**F. General description of the site (road mileage from nearest town, habitat, prominent features, ownership, and other helpful information).**

*The three sites, in nearby proximity, support tall grass prairie vegetation. The dominant plant community covering the sites is open grassland consisting of tall and mid grass species, particularly on the northern part of the Columbus Prairie Preserve and the western part of Grandview Prairie Wildlife Management Area. Shrubby woody vegetation has invaded in some places especially the southern part of the Columbus Prairie Preserve and throughout much of the Saratoga Landing site. The areas are penetrated by rows of trees along fencerows and waterways and there are imbedded woodlots too. The prairie community owes its existence to calcareous substrates of Cretaceous origin that weather to produce a tight very black soil, from which the name Blackland Prairie is derived. These same calcareous bedrocks exist from northeastern Texas including southwestern Arkansas and picks up again in northern Mississippi and Alabama producing strips of prairie in these primarily forested areas.*

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**G. IBA Criteria (check all that apply): Please read accompanying detailed criteria for site selection before completing this section.**

X Criterion AR-1: Regularly supports significant densities of one or more of the bird species considered by Audubon as vulnerable in Arkansas (see attached Arkansas Birds of Conservation Interest list). Explain below.

*The three prairie sites support populations of 12 bird species that are included on the list of Arkansas Birds of Conservation Interest. These species are : Mississippi Kite, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Bobwhite, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell's Vireo, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Prairie Warbler, Bachman's Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Harris' Sparrow, and Painted Bunting as well as Dickcissel which is not on the Arkansas list but is included on several other lists of bird species at risk that have been compiled for North America.*

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X Criterion AR-11: Site includes one or more outstanding examples of the following special bird habitats. (see attached habitat definitions)

- Prairies
- Shrub-Scrub Habitat

**Explain below.**

*The blackland tallgrass prairie habitat and its associated shrubland was originally widespread in southwestern Arkansas but had all but disappeared due to agriculture and other developments by the mid 1900s. The few patches of prairie now preserved are due to action taken by conservation organizations in the latter part of that century. (See attached article by Tom Foti).*

**X** Criterion AR-13: Site provides important, bird-specific educational opportunities. Explain below.

*Part of the title designating the Grandview Prairie Wildlife Management Area is the phrase “and Conservation Education Center.” Therefore, the site serves as a significant educational center focusing on the prairie ecosystem, its flora and fauna including birds. There are splendid facilities for accomplishing this mission including meeting rooms and classrooms plus a dormitory and dining room for overnight lodging. Students and adult groups are accommodated for various educational opportunities.*

*The roads through the area are dotted with educational plaques at turnouts. These plaques are portraits depicting prairie scenes including indigenous prairie birds complete with accompanying descriptions of the prairie ecosystem, its flora and fauna.*

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**H.** Why is this site important for Arkansas birds? Provide additional details.

*The three prairie areas collectively play host to 12 avian species that are included on the list of Arkansas Birds of Conservation Interest. None of the birds are very abundant on the prairies, but that is their nature in Arkansas and reason for their listing. Most of the species are uncommon in Arkansas because their habitat has been diminished. That is why the prairie areas described herein are so important, providing some last remnants of the habitat these birds require.*

*The Dickcissel is very abundant on the Grandview Prairie. Although not on the Arkansas list of birds of concern, it is on many other such lists compiled by entities in the eastern United States.*

*Moderate numbers of Eastern Meadowlarks occur in winter and summer on Grandview Prairie, which is of interest because this species is decreasing. Since 1996, it has decreased by 68% across its range shown by results from the nationwide Breeding Bird Survey, and it has decreased by 29% as indicated by results from the Christmas Bird Counts.*

## ORNITHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

**I. List the species for which this site is important, the season(s) for which the site is important, average or maximum numbers (estimates are accepted), the years on which this count or estimate is based, and sources of information.**

Species	Season	Which Years (?)	Sources
<i>Sharp-shinned Hawk</i>	W	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Mississippi Kite</i>	B	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Northern Bobwhite</i>	BW	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Loggerhead Shrike</i>	BW	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Bell's Vireo</i>	B	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Sedge Wren</i>	W	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Marsh Wren</i>	W	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Prairie Warbler</i>	B	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Bachman's Sparrow</i>	B	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Henslow's Sparrow</i>	W	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Painted Bunting</i>	B	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Harris' Sparrow</i>	W	1990s and 2000s	2,3
<i>Dickcissel</i>	B	1990s and 2000s	2,3

Season: B=Breeding, W=Winter, SM=Spring Migration, FM=Fall Migration

Sources: 1=published reports, 2=surveys (bird counts, etc.), 3=personal observation

### **Average Number Per Season:**

*The numbers observed of the species listed are characteristically low. If there were more complete surveys of the total prairie area there obviously would be higher numbers. The important thing is that the species are indeed there sequestered in their special habitat, a habitat now protected from disappearing entirely. The prairies are a refuge for these species of conservation concern in Arkansas.*

*The Dickcissel, which is not on the Arkansas list, is abundant on the Grandview Prairie and is included here because that species is named on several other lists of birds of conservation concern (see appendix).*

*There are lists showing the birds found at Saratoga Landing and Grandview Prairies, compiled by The Nature Conservancy. These lists show only that the species named are present and do not give numbers of individuals.*

**Specify Sources:** *Personal observations by several people including partial surveys have been compiled through the 1990s and 2000s. These observers include Doug Zollner, Bill Shepherd, Herschel Raney, Bill Ho-imon, Charles Mills, Doug James, and Andrea Green.*

## HABITAT AND LAND USE

**J. Major Habitat Types: Please estimate the percent (%) of the total area that is made up of the following general habitat types. (see attached habitat definitions)**

- 1% Lowland Hardwood Forest
- 4% Upland Hardwood Forest
- 89% Prairie
- 6% Shrub-Scrub Habitat

**Explain below.**

*The area is primarily prairie with invading shrubby vegetation. The habitat is managed with periodic prescriptive burning. Surrounding forest types are also included at the perimeters of the area and even extending into the prairie along waterways and fencerows.*

**K. Major Land Uses: Please estimate the percent (%) of time that the proposed site is used for the following purposes:**

- 40% Nature and Wildlife Conservation
- 50% Hunting/Fishing
- 10% Other Recreation or Tourism

**Explain below.**

*By far the largest of the prairies, Grandview, is managed by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and hunting is encouraged. That same prairie has a splendid facility for classes, short courses, and workshops that emphasize prairie and wildlife conservation. Tourists including birdwatchers often visit the area.*

*The other prairies, Columbus and Saratoga Landing, are small compared to Grandview, are difficult to access, and are off limits to hunting. They function solely as preserves for conservation of their biota.*



**Is landowner or land manager aware of the IBA program?  Yes or  No**  
**Explain below.**

*Arkansas Game and Fish Commission was contacted through Commission employee Catherine Rideout. Lance Peacock of The Nature Conservancy was contacted directly with regard to both Columbus Prairie and Saratoga Landing Prairie. The latter is held by the Army Corps of Engineers but managed by The Nature Conservancy and the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission. The Army Corps of Engineers was contacted when the Millwood Lake IBA report was prepared. The Saratoga site is part of the Millwood Lake property that is held by the Corps.*

### **CONSERVATION AND OTHER RESOURCES**

**M. Primary Conservation Issues: Please note threats to the site as Serious (S), Minor (M), or Potential (P).**

- |                          |                               |                          |                                 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| S                        | Invasive or Non-native Plants | <input type="checkbox"/> | Development                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Introduced Animals            | <input type="checkbox"/> | Disturbance to Birds or Habitat |
| M                        | Cowbird Parasitism            | <input type="checkbox"/> | Hydrologic Changes              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Predators                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | Off Road Vehicle Use            |
| S                        | Habitat Conversion            |                          |                                 |

**Describe primary conservation issues, their seriousness, and any steps being taken to address them.**

*Invasive plants and habitat conversion can be aspects of the same problem. Invading woody vegetation occurs all over the prairie sites, particularly at Saratoga Landing and in the southern part of Columbus Prairie. If left unchecked, these invasions will convert the prairie to shrubland and forest through ecological succession. Fortunately, these prairies are being managed against this eventuality through periodic prescriptive burns.*

*The surrounding pasture land, fencerow trees and scattered woodlots produce foraging and roosting habitat for Brown-headed Cowbirds. Consequently, cowbird nest parasitism on prairie bird species is expected.*

**Other resource issues—social, economic, historic, etc. (Describe below.)**

*The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is to be commended for developing a splendid educational facility at Grandview Prairie, one that targets the general public with regard to important conservation issues. The easy access to the vast prairie habitats there enhances the enjoyment and education of hunters, nature lovers, and regular tourists that visit the site.*

**Is habitat restoration or enhancement of this site needed?  Yes or  No**

**If the site needs restoration, what actions need to be taken (e.g., fencing, planting, stream bank stabilization, erosion checks, exotic species management, timber thinning, etc.)?**

*Proper stewardship of the prairie areas requires constant vigilance against invading woody plants prevented through use of periodically limited prairie fires. This procedure already is in practice.*

*Eastern parts of Grandview Prairie is a degraded prairie grassland due to former agricultural practices there. This area needs attentive management to restore prairie grasses, and this process is being implemented.*

**N. List local individuals and/or groups with an interest in this site. Provide names, addresses, and phone numbers.**

*Tex-Ark Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 6985  
Texarkana, TX 75505*

*Arkansas Audubon Society  
14300 Chenal Parkway, Apt. 7473  
Little Rock, AR 72211  
501-225-6589*

*Charles Mills  
P.O. Box 145  
Ogden, AR 71853-0145  
870-898-3483*

**O. Supporting documentation is required (topographic maps, photos, field notes, checklists, etc.) Attach supporting materials and return to Audubon Arkansas Important Bird Areas Program, c/o Rob Fisher, Director of Conservation; Heritage West, Suite 450; 201 East Markham Street; Little Rock, AR 72201; phone: (501) 244-2229; fax: (501) 244-2231; email: [rfisher@audubon.org](mailto:rfisher@audubon.org).**

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6-25-02

- 1. Blackland Prairie Preserves Species on Lists of Birds of Conservation Interest (page 9)*
- 2. Maps of areas (sent separately)*
- 3. "Those Mysterious Blacklands" article by Tom Foti (sent separately)*



**BLACKLAND PRAIRIE PRESERVES SPECIES ON LISTS OF BIRDS OF  
CONSERVATION INTEREST**

<u>Species</u>	<u>List(s)-see below</u>
Sharp-shinned Hawk	ABCI, ANHC, CH
Mississippi Kite	ABCI, OUNF, PIF-CP, PIF-MAV, PIF-OO, WGCP
Northern Bobwhite	ABCI, CH, OUNF, PIF-CP, PIF-MAV, PIF-OO, WGCP
Loggerhead Shrike	ABCI, ANHC, CH, OUNF, PIF-OO, PIF-CP, PIF-MAV, USFS, WGCP
Bell's Vireo	ABCG, ABCI, ANHC, CH, PIF-CP, PIF-MAV, PIF-OO, NASW, USFW, WGCP
Sedge Wren	ABCI, ANHC, CH, PIF-MAV, USFW, WGCP
Marsh Wren	ABCI, PIF-MAV
Prairie Warbler	ABCG, ABCI, CH, OUNF, PIF-MAV, WGCP
Bachman's Sparrow	ABCG, ABCI, ANHC, CH, NASW, OUNF, PIF-CP, PIF-MAV, PIF-OO, USFW, WGCP
Henslow's Sparrow	ABCG, ABCI, ANHC, CH, NASW, OUNF, PIF-MAV, PIF-OO, USFW, WGCP
Painted Bunting	ABCG, ABCI, ANHC, CH, NASW, OUNF, PIF-CP, PIF-MAV, PIF-OO, USFW, WGCP
Harris' Sparrow	ABCG, ABCI
Dickcissel	ABCG, NASW, PIF-CP, PIF-OO, USFW

ABCG=American Bird Conservancy Green List

ABCI=Arkansas Birds of Conservation Interest List

ANHC=Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission Birds of Special Concern

CH=Central Hardwoods Bird Conservation Priority List

NASW= National Audubon Society Watchlist

OUNF=Ouachita National Forest Plant Species Viability Concern List

PIF-CP=Partners In Flight-West Gulf Coastal Plain List

PIF-MAV=Partners In Flight-Mississippi Alluvial Valley

PIF-OO=Partners In Flight-Ozark-Ouachita List

USFW=U.S. Fish & Wildlife Birds of Conservation Concern 2002 List

WGCP=West Gulf Coastal Plain Bird Conservation Region List