

Grassland Birding on old Strip Mine Sites near Sligo, Clarion Co, PA
Courtesy: Seneca Rocks Audubon Society
Updated 13 January 2010

Overview: Multiple lodging, dining, shopping and fueling facilities are available at Exit 62 (one of the Clarion exits) off Route 80. During your outing you may wish to get a quick meal at the Korner Restaurant (814-745-2660) at 405 Colerain St, Sligo; you pass it on Route 58 if you follow the directions below. BJ's Restaurant on the North side of Exit 53 (you pass it at the beginning) also provides quick and inexpensive meals. Tell them we sent you!

A portion of this outing goes through the nationally recognized Important Bird Area (IBA) #21 (Mount Zion/Piney Tract). The newly acquired PA State Game Land 330 resides within the IBA #21.

Getting there: Take Rt 80 to Exit 53 (Knox) and follow black-topped Canoe Ripple Road south across the Clarion River to the first left (Elliot Rd) after crossing the river. Before you get to the river, there is a sharp right curve with a smaller road going straight; stay on Canoe Ripple Road. Be careful turning left onto Elliot Road; it is at the crest of a hill. Elliot road becomes a dirt road. Follow it for a mile or so, until you reach the crest of a hill from which you can see the expanse of grassland (SGL 330) ahead. This is a good place to start birding! Look for both grassland and edge-habitat birds.

Details: Begin birding about 100 yards before the end of Elliot Rd. Then continue a short distance to the T onto Mt Zion Road, turn left (East) and continue ¼ mile to a parking area on the left (look for a brochure at the parking lot). The field across from that parking area has been good for grassland birds (especially Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrow and, at dusk, Short-eared Owl). Walk the gated road (south) across from the parking area. The recently scraped area on top of the hill was good for Horned Lark and Savannah Sparrow in 2009, and Vesper Sparrow was noted at the far eastern end of the field to the left. Several nesting pairs of Clay-colored Sparrows have been observed in a 1 mile section beginning about 0.5 mi from the gate.

Return to Mt Zion Rd. The pine stand on the other side of Mt Zion is good general birding. Continue on Mt Zion Road for about 0.6 mi to a T onto Limestone Flat Road; turn right and park in the parking area on the right. Henslow's Sparrows have been found in the field across from the parking area.

Continue South on Limestone Flat Road. After about a mile, notice Wyman Rd to the left. The Wyman Rd side trip can provide Vesper Sparrow and Short-eared Owl. The Vesper Sparrow habitat is on Wyman Rd after about a half mile and continuing almost to Stockdill Rd, but Vesper Sparrows are becoming less common as the habitat matures. Turn left on Stockdill and park in the parking lot to the left. Walking west from the parking lot will provide excellent grassland birding. The area further up the hill on Stockdill is also good, but on private land, so should be viewed from the road. Turn around and return to Limestone Flat Road.

Turn left on Limestone Flat Rd and continue to Rt 58. Turn right on Rt 58 (Sligo and the Korner Restaurant is a short distance to the left), and take the first left onto Morris Rd, which becomes Stewart Rd. When Stewart Rd reaches a fenced pasture area on the right, start looking for Upland Sandpipers. This area, which we call Mt Airy, is all private land and you should not wander from the road. Upland Sandpipers can be difficult to observe when they are nesting in June. Continue on Stewart Rd to Shannon-Tipple Rd; turn right, cross Mt Airy Road and continue to the first Right. This is an excellent spot for several grassland birds, including Upland Sandpipers and Short-eared Owls.

Return to Mt Airy Rd, turn left. Notice Murray Hollow Rd on left. Explore Murray Hollow if you want another look at the grassland you just observed, but from the other side. There are pull-off locations on the left side of Murray Hollow Rd. Continue on Mt Airy Rd past a farm house and barn to another great grassland.

Continue on Mt Airy to the bottom of the hill and to a T. Turn Right and continue to Rt 58. Turn left on Rt 58, continue through Callensburg and take the first left on Callensburg Rd. Take the first right on McCall Rd. Watch for grassland birds, go through a crossroad, where the road becomes Logue Rd. Continue about a half mile on Logue and park at a tiny (private) dirt road on the right. A short walk back the dirt road could yield Clay-colored Sparrows, among other grassland birds.

Conservation: If you are not from the Clarion area, we would appreciate being informed of your visit, because we want a measure of the interest in our grassland habitat and its impact on the local economy. Please visit our web site at www.senecarocksaudubon.org for how you can contact one of our current officers. We are interested in what you see, how long you stay, the number in your party, where you are from, and anything else you wish to pass along.