

3. Mississippi River Flats/Lock & Dam #2



Sand Hill Crane
Photo by Jim Williams

Here is the real gem for birding in our city! The River Flats area includes the land between the Mississippi River and Lake Rebecca from Jaycee Park to Lock and Dam #2. Historically the area was a mix of oak savannah and flood plain forest. The Lock & Dam changed the original habitat but through important partnerships made with the city a large amount of natural area has been preserved. The Parks Department maintains trails that provide access to the restored

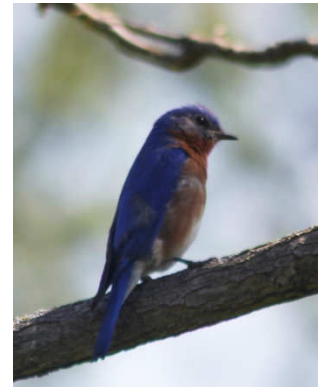
prairie, riparian, flood plain forest and emergent marsh near the north end of Lake Rebecca. Park at the Mississippi River Jaycee Park boat launch and walk the trail upriver to a viewing platform. You can use your own optics or help yourself to the high powered binocular scope for viewing water birds on the Mississippi. Every year many American White Pelicans can be seen from here. These majestic birds are non-breeding individuals that use the river for feeding and refuge. As you continue on the trail to the dike between Lake Rebecca and Spring Lake be sure to scan the emergent marsh. It is a real treat to hear and see the Sand Hill Cranes return to this marsh area each year. They have successfully raised young at this metro area site! Several pairs of Bald Eagles have nests that can be seen from the trails and all winter long you can see Eagles perched in large Cottonwood trees along the Mississippi River as they scan for food below the Lock & Dam. The Army Corps of Engineers has a viewing platform we like that gives an elevated second view of the river. From here you can look for Peregrine Falcon hunting along the river or watch in winter for rare waterfowl such as Long-tailed Duck in the open water below the dam.

Spring and fall migration times are exceptional for finding many species of birds. Bird watchers who have spent time at the Mississippi River Flats have recorded many cool species like American Pipit, Rusty Blackbird & Barrow's Goldeneye in addition to the Yellow Warbler, Turkey Vulture and tons of Baltimore Orioles.

Parking is also available close to Lock & Dam #2 and the restrooms are open every day. This is the primary place to start your outing and you don't want to miss a chance to explore the variety of birding habitats found here.



Bald Eagle
Photo by Kevin D. Smith



Eastern Bluebird
Photo by Kevin D. Smith



Hastings River Flats