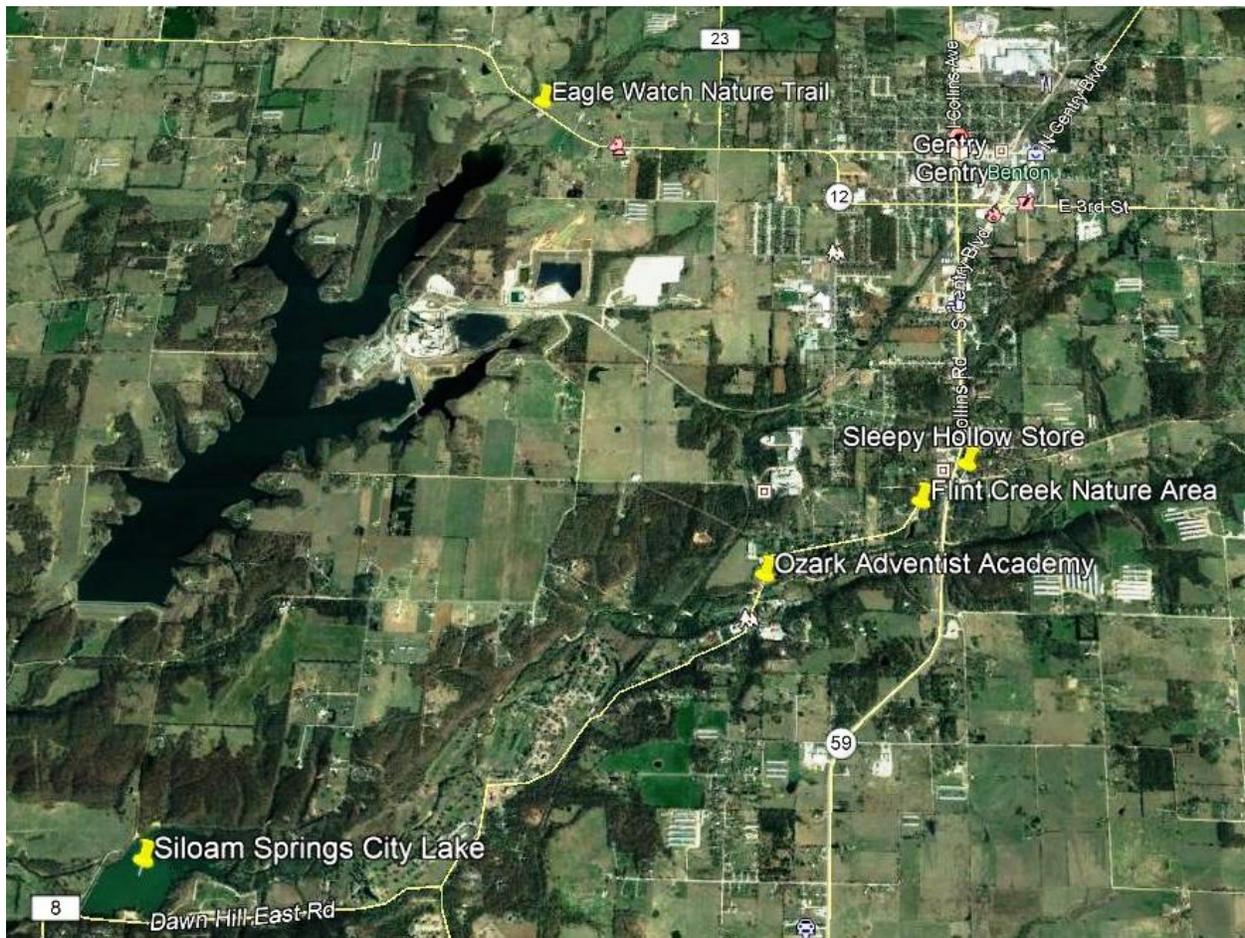


FLINT CREEK BIRDING TRAIL

4 (or 5) easy stops to birding glory



Flint Creek is one of northwest Arkansas's premier clear water streams. And though there is no formal "birding trail" as such – that is, no legal designation with signs and such -- there are at least four (or 5) wonderful stops with public access, plus interesting birds and native plants.

(STOP 1): Sleepy Hollow Store. First, let's get oriented on the map. If you are traveling west on Highway 412, notice intersection with Highway 59 just as you are getting into Siloam Springs. This heads north towards Gentry. Just before you reach Gentry, Sleepy Hollow Store is on the right. That might be your first stop, because this store sells homemade sandwiches, has its own bakery, and stocks many healthy foods.

STOP 2: The store is at the intersection of Highway 59 and Dawn Hill Road. For the next stop, get on Dawn Hill and head east. In just 0.2 miles you'll see parking for Flint Creek Nature Area. There are easy-to-walk trails, bottomland forest, a flowing spring and access to Flint Creek. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons nest somewhere in this area. This is a place to look for them in summer. I've also enjoyed seeing Ruby-throated Hummingbirds visiting dense stands of Spotted Jewelweed in late summer-early fall.

STOP 3: From Flint Creek Nature Area, continue east of Dawn Hill (left at intersection) for about 0.75 miles to a bridge over Flint Creek adjacent Ozark Adventist Academy. This bridge has been closed for a while. There's no telling if or when it will be replaced. But you can walk on it for good views up and down the creek. Everything here is private land, but you will probably not stir anyone up if you stay along the creek and don't dump trash! Louisiana Waterthrushes nest along Flint Creek. There have been fairly regular reports of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons from this location. My friend David Oakley found an unusual dragonfly here August 6, 2019: Interior Least Clubtail.

Since the bridge is closed here, you have to turn around and back track to Highway 59, then head south about 1.2-miles to intersection with Arkotex Road, then right again on Cozy Corners Road that rejoins Dawn Hill. Stay on Dawn Hill to Siloam Springs City Lake.



STOP 4: Birding opportunities abound at Siloam Springs City Lake. First there is the lake itself, interesting all year and in all seasons. Instead of going into a lot of details here, I encourage anyone interested to look at the eBird bar chart with its current total of 178 species:

<https://ebird.org/barchart?byr=1900&eyr=2019&bmo=1&emo=12&r=L635775>

You can drive and park along the lake shore line. The park has recently opened another parking area and trail along Dawn Hill Road. If you use this lot and get on the trail, in about 0.25 miles you'll come to a blind overlooking the upper swampy area of the lake. If you continue approximately another 0.2-mile (before the big powerlines) you'll come to where the trail turns north and drops down into the Flint Creek bottoms. A wonderful walking-cycling bridge spans quite a length of this bottomland. We had great views of Prothonotary Warblers from this bridge during a recent field trip. Red-headed Woodpeckers are common on the snags.

I would be remiss in sharing with birders Siloam Springs City Lake without mentioning an incredible ornithological find here. No, it wasn't an Ivory-billed Woodpecker (though Pileateds are common). One of Siloam's active birders, Daniel Mason, found a brilliant male Vermilion Flycatcher on March 18, 2018 – seen and enjoyed by many on subsequent days. Daniel and his family sometimes bird with good results the mountain bike trails on the lake's north side.

STOP 5: Eagle Watch Nature Trail on SWEPCO Lake. The lake is an impoundment of Flint Creek. The water is used to cool boilers at the electrical generating plant. The plant's cooling tower is 500 feet in height, making it quite visible. To get to Eagle Watch, you can drive north from Siloam City Lake on a series of paved roads, or you can backtrack to 59, head north to Gentry, then take Highway 12 west. The parking lot for Eagle Watch is right on Highway 12, about 1-mile west of Gentry.

Eagle Watch has so many things going for it as a great place to see birds it's hard to figure out where to start. It all started 20 years ago when the plant's chemist, Terry Stanfill, got permission from SWEPCO to put together a nature area with public access. Terry is a talented wildlife photographer. His photographs provided the facts that convinced those higher up in the company that Eagle Watch was an effort worth supporting. As a result, there are now two viewing blinds, an easily walked trail, and several acres of Tallgrass Prairie restoration. Eagle Watch was designation an Important Bird Area by Audubon Arkansas. eBirders visiting have found 175 species. Here's a link to a bar chart:

<https://ebird.org/barchart?byr=1900&eyr=2019&bmo=1&emo=12&r=L635775>

Here's a link to a write up about Eagle Watch from Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society:

<http://www.nwarkaudubon.org/placestobird.htm>

Here's Terry Stanfill driving Doug James down to the blind at Eagle Watch in January 2007:



(Prepared by Joe Neal, September 9, 2019).