Birding in Winter

As the year comes to a close and starts the new year, there are still many interesting and fun things that you can do. One of those things is to start birding! Birding is one of the most famous outdoor recreation activities not only in the United States but across the world.

There are many ways to start your birding adventures. First, make sure you have all the appropriate attire for your trip. Second, find you a decent pair of binoculars. They don’t have to be super expensive and can generally found online for around $80. Lastly, map out your trip.

This can be in your own backyard, or you can take a drive to your local wildlife park. Babler, along with other conservation minded parks, is a great place to test out your birding gear and skills.

During the winter, look for birds that are not normally found in Missouri during the spring and summer. For example: there are some bird species that are year-round residents such as the cardinal and blue jays, however, other birds such as the dark-eyed junco and fox sparrows. Both of these birds are a winter transient that visit Missouri only during the winter months as they wait for the breeding season to start back up in the spring where they then fly northward to northern Canada and Alaska.

Birding in winter can be a mixed bag of easy and difficult due to the types of birds you are searching for. If you are looking for brightly colored birds such as the cardinal and blue jay, it will be easier to spot them against the snow or drab colors of winter. However, some birds can be super tricky to find such as the brown creeper who hangs tightly to the barks of trees.

Before heading out you may also want to bring a bird identification booklet with you. There are also lots of birding apps for your phone that you can take with you and some of them do not require you to have cell service to access them. Some of the more popular apps are: Audubon Pro, iNaturalist, eBird, etc. Some bird identification books are: Sibley Field Guide to North American birds, Stokes Field Guide to North American birds, and Golden Guide: Birds.

Birding is a great way to get families outdoors during the winter months and active. It is also a great way to train your brain to look for patterns. This winter join others in participating in the Audubon Christmas Brid Count project. This is a great way to learn more about your local birds.

-Dustin Hillis, Senior Park Specialist
Misunderstood Raptors

Have you ever heard an owl at night? Either the hollowed hoo-ing of a great horned owl or the spine tingling screech of a barn owl. Owls have been seen as mysterious birds for most of humanity’s existence. They have been charged with aiding in witchcraft, causing stories of haunted houses, and they have even been said they were to be the harbingers of death. What is it about these mysterious birds that creates such a fuss?

Owls are a very unique kind of bird that has adapted to the ability of hunting at night and sleeping/resting during the day. It could be said that these behaviors is what caused people to create such winding tales of owls and witches, death, and mystery. Even during medieval times it was thought that owls were evil spirits and if you saw an owl in a tree, you could kill it by walking around the tree as its head followed you. In reality, owls can only turn their heads 270 degrees in either direction. So this myth that owls can pop their heads off if you go around a tree is just that, a story. It is because of this adaptation that owls are able to listen in intently to their surroundings. Having a satellite dish for face doesn’t hurt either. An owl’s face is concaved. This allows for the sounds of the forest to be diverted to its ears for easier deciphering of where prey may be. Having their ears lopsided, or one higher than the other, also aids in creating a 3D hearing pattern for hunting. These winged hunters are super efficient at catching and eating rodents and other small mammals. Some of owls have also acquired the taste for “seafood.” The barred owl has been seen catching and eating crayfish from local streams. Owls can also be cannibalistic by eating either their siblings in the nest or by eating other owls. The great horned owl and barred owls have been documented catching and eating smaller owls such as the eastern screech owl. Which is just one of the reasons to be careful calling in owls. You never know whose dinner bell you may be ringing.

-Dustin Hillis,
Senior Park Specialist

Birdhouse Plans

You can find more bird house designs and blueprints at the following address:
https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/

Great horned owl with a chick perched above the nest in a hollow crag of a tree. Photo courtesy of Missouri Dept. of Conservation photographer Noppadol Paothong.

A barred owl sitting in a tree watching the park naturalist intently.

Bluebird utilizing a homemade bird house (left). House wren catching an insect by a bird house (above).
The Naturalist's Journal

Winter hiking and exploring can be some of best activities in state parks if you know what to look for. On your next hike, take a look around to see what things you can see, smell, hear, taste, or touch. Can you see signs of life in the barren snowfall or can you hear any animals calling at night? If you’re by a river, look for slide marks in the snow. These are telltale signs of tracks around your bird feeders. Keep a journal of what types of birds you can see or better yet, join a neighborhood Christmas Bird Count project. Just because it is cold and wet outside doesn’t mean that the fun has stopped. You just need to know where to look to find your next adventure.

Dustin Hillis, Senior Park Specialist

20/21 Celestial Events

• December 13, 14 – Geminids Meteor Shower. The Geminids is the king of the meteor showers. It is considered by many to be the best shower in the heavens, producing up to 120 multicolored meteors per hour at its peak. It is produced by debris left behind by an asteroid known as 3200 Phaethon, which was discovered in 1982. The shower runs annually from December 7-17. It peaks this year on the night of the 13th and morning of the 14th. The waxing gibbous moon will block out most of the fainter meteors this year. But the Geminids are so numerous and bright that this could still be a good show. Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Gemini, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

• January 2, 3 – Quadrantids Meteor Shower. The Quadrantids is an above average shower, with up to 40 meteors per hour at its peak. It is thought to be produced by dust grains left behind by an extinct comet known as 2003 EH1, which was discovered in 2003. The shower runs annually from January 1-5. It peaks this year on the night of the 2nd and morning of the 3rd. The waning gibbous moon will block out most of the faintest meteors this year. But if you are patient, you should still be able to catch a few good ones. Best viewing will be from a dark location after midnight. Meteors will radiate from the constellation Bootes, but can appear anywhere in the sky.

• February 27 – Full Moon. The moon will be located on the opposite side of the Earth as the Sun and its face will be fully illuminated. This phase occurs at 08:19 UTC. This Full moon was known by early Native American tribes as the Snow Moon because the heaviest snows usually fell during this time of the year. Since the harsh weather made hunting difficult, this moon has also been known by some tribes as the Hunger Moon.

20/21 Natural Events

• Dec 1 – Great horned owls are courting. Listen for “Hoo, hoo-oo, hoo-oo.”

• Dec 3 – Barred owls are courting. Listen for “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?”

• Dec 16 – The leaves of Christmas ferns are green on wooded slopes.

• Dec 24 – Watch suet feeders for woodpeckers; downy, hairy, pileated, and red-bellied.

• Jan 6 – Put Christmas trees in ponds for fish cover or beside bird feeders for wildlife cover.

• Jan 16 – Ozark witch hazel begins blooming after a few days of warm weather.

• Jan 23 – Snowy owls appear in northern Missouri when lemmings are scarce in the Artic tundra.

• Feb 1 – Black bear cubs are born in winter dens.

• Feb 14 – Watch for animal tracks in new snow.

• Feb 22 – Walleye move onto shoals for spawning through April.

Did You Know?

Missouri’s largest owl is the Great Horned Owl. With a wingspan of 4.6 feet it has been dubbed “The Winged Tiger” or “The Tiger of the Air.”

Explorer Corner

Winter is the best time for owl searching. Learn how to draw an owl and then mail it to us to be featured on our Facebook page.

© Art for Kids! Get more art for kid activities at ArtforKidsHub.com/subscribe!

We do school programs!

Contact Dustin Hillis, senior park specialist at Babler State Park at 636-458-3813 ext. 223 to schedule your programs.

Where to Mail?

ATTN: Dustin Hillis
Dr. Edmund A. Babler
Memorial State Park
800 Guy Park Drive
Wildwood, MO 63005

Did You Know?

Missouri has 8 total owl species that either live here full time or just visits our state. These species are the Barn Owl, Barred Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Long-Eared Owl, Northern Saw-Whet Owl, Short-Eared Owl, and Snowy Owl.
December 2020

Nature’s Décor “Facebook Live”
Saturday, December 5th
10 am
Deck the halls with boughs of holly...the holidays are just around the corner and we’re in the mood to decorate! We’ll use nature’s resources to create wonderful winter wreaths. Tune in to our Facebook page for the live presentation.

MO State Parks Explorer Program

Giving visitors a new appreciation and respect for the natural world and the historic setting around them, along with an interest in preserving them, is the main goal of the Missouri State Parks and Historic Sites Explorer Program. The patches and stars earned are visible symbols of a person’s commitment to preserving the living environment.

The program has three parts to complete to earn the patches:

1. Interpretive Study—complete two programs learning about an animal, building, or history related to the park or historic site.
2. Interpretive Programs—complete four programs: guided tours, evening programs, hikes, etc.
3. Identification—identify 10 significant things to a park interpreter (objects, people or other living things), giving the proper name and its importance to the park or historic site.

January 2021

First Day Hikes Challenge “Facebook”
Friday, January 1st
We’ve had to change things this year for safety reasons, but we are still offering the opportunity to hike in your favorite state park. We have changed our 1st Day Hike into a challenge instead of a guided hike. We challenge you to hike your favorite trail in the park and share your experience on our Facebook page. We will also be holding a virtual hike on the Hawthorn Trail so that you can journey with us through one of the most beautiful trails in the park. Don’t forget that when you are done hiking to stop by the front of the visitor center to pick up your 1st Day Hike t-shirt while supplies last (we will have staff available for questions and t-shirts starting at 10AM). Hike on out and see us!

February 2021

Tweets for Sweets “Facebook Live”
Saturday, February 6th
10 am
Join Babler in celebrating National Bird-Feeding Month by creating treats for our migratory winter bird friends. We will be making different types of feeders, from pine cone suet feeders to recycled bird feeders.

Special Event Schedule

All programs are FREE and open to the public
Please contact the visitor center at (636) 458-3813 for more program details or check our Facebook page!

All programs may be subject to changes/cancellation due to Covid-19 guidelines. All updates will be made available via the park’s Facebook page.
Babler’s Year in Review for 2020

Let’s Not Go There

This year was a weird and long ride. We’ve seen lots of things happen that we could only dreamed of happening. This has definitely been a year of firsts. The first year that park programs went completely virtual for months. First time that certain aspects of the park remained closed for most of the year. First time that the Visitor Center stayed closed for the entire season. Needless to say, we are glad that 2020 is on its way out and we hope to see you in the new year. Here’s to a better year in 2021!

New Management

We have a new Park Manager, Chris Ferree. Chris came to Babler from Mastodon State Historic Site, where he was the park historic site specialist. Chris’s first year at Babler was not all that typical with multiple changes due to Covid-19. However, with his leadership we have been able to make it through 2020 without much issues. We look forward to the future to see where he will guide us. If you see him out in the park, wave and say hi.

The Eagle’s Nest: Manager’s Comments

I write this on a cold, rainy, mid-November afternoon. It’s one of those days where I almost wish it was just a little colder and it were snowing outside my window. With that said and another turn of the season from fall into winter I find it a time to reflect. It can be easy to focus on negatives, and 2020 has had more than its fair share of those, but it was a year of accomplishments as well here at Babler.

The park has seen record numbers of visitors and campers (even with the campground being closed for 2 months). Staff stepped into the unknown and modified how we “normally” accomplished tasks. Be it developing virtual programing, being adaptive in how we clean and sanitize facilities, working with our guests on new camping and shelter reservation rules all while navigating with reduced staff and occasionally working from home. I applaud the Staff here at Babler for being resilient and innovative.

I also want to thank all of you for making Missouri State Parks a destination throughout the year. We are here to keep the gates open so everyone can enjoy some outside time, something I think we all need.

Looking forward we plan on working a few projects over the winter. Railing repairs at the Visitor Center, small shelter repair work at the Outdoor Education Center, electrical service upgrades to our well house to name a few.

I was really optimistic at the start of my time here back in January of 2020. I still hold that optimism in spite of everything. This is an amazing park with an amazing staff and volunteers that make it what it is and look to what it can be. My time with State Parks has shown me we all roll up our sleeves and press on. We hope to revisit an expansion of our Equestrian Parking lot, some campground upgrades, and continue to work with our partners in the park, including Parkway-Rockwood Continuing Ed that manages the Outdoor Education Center.

Looking forward to seeing you all in the park come 2021.

Happy Holidays!

-Chris Ferree,
Park Manager
Babler’s First Families: Puellmann

Born on January 8, 1802, Louis Puellmann arrived at New York City on September 29, 1837, with his wife, Dorothea, and young family Louis Jr. and Augusta. Their son Henry was born during the voyage across the Atlantic on the ship, Burmah. Louis’ occupation is listed as Turner, which is someone who used a lathe to fashion metal or wooden objects. Joining the family was Louis’ sister, Henrietta, who would marry Heinrich Frederick Gaehle in 1839. In 1846, Louis “Lewis” and Frederick purchased land just south of the present park boundary. The Puellmann family would go on to have 10 children, including Wilhelmine, who married Conrad Kroenung, and Dorothea “Doretta”, who married George Borland.

Around 1870, Louis’ nephew Charles (Carl) Henry Puellman arrived in the area from their native Hannover (now in the German state of Lower Saxony). In 1872 Charles married Wilhelmina (Minnie) Sophia Gaehle, his first cousin through his aunt Henrietta. By 1878, Charles owned 125 acres near the current service area in the park. The family home was located along the same ridge as the family cemetery, which is located just off the Paved Trail. All that remains of the house are a few scattered bricks and a partially filled in area where there was probably a cesspool or cistern.

Charles and Minnie had 8 children: Frederick (who married Meta Schritz in 1900, and Helen Beier in 1910), Henriette (who likely died in 1892 and may be buried in the family cemetery), Louisa (m. Ferdinand Weber, and with whom her brother Frederick was living in 1940), Sophia (m. Frederick Haussels), Wilhelmina (m. Charles Steines), Charles Babler's First Families: Puellmann

Grave marker for Minnie & Charles Puellmann off of the Paved Trail (above). Scattered bricks from the Puellmann house (page 9).

William (m. Rose Steckhan), Margaret (m. George Kramer), and Katherine (m. Fred Kramer, son of George Kramer).

In 1896, Charles’ father, “Uncle” Fred Puellmann immigrated to Missouri via Baltimore. He had been a brewer in Germany, and lived with Minnie and Charles until his death in 1917 at the age of 99. The article announcing his death was headlined - ‘Grim Reaper Claims Oldest Man in County’, and apparently he was quite popular in the area.
Babler State Park is on Facebook!

It is a great way to stay up to date on current program offerings, stay in contact with park staff, and post comments about the park. Please check us out on the social networking site at Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park and “Like” us.

Service Projects Available for Scouts

Park staff have recently compiled a new list of potential scout projects for the park. These projects include a variety of skill and time requirements, from a few hours to a full day, ongoing, group and individual projects. We even have Eagle Scout projects available. Contact the visitor center for more information!

Park Closure: December 12-13

Babler State Park will be totally closed to the general public for our annual deer hunt on December 12th & 13th. This deer hunt allows the park to control our rising deer herd and manage for high browsing rates in the park. This year the park will also be monitoring Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) by sampling the harvested deer within the park. This data will allow the Missouri Dept. of Conservation to know how far the disease has spread and will allow the park to monitor the health of our resident deer herd.

Volunteers Wanted:

Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park is looking for people to help in the Visitor Center. Volunteers will help with nature hikes, educational camps, school groups, and so much more.

Contact the park for more information at 636-458-3813.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a deadly illness in white-tailed deer and other members of the deer family, called cervids. CWD kills all deer and other cervids it infects. CWD is spread from deer to deer through direct contact and through contact with soil, food, and water that have been contaminated through feces, urine, saliva, or carcasses of infected deer. Potential for transmission increases when deer gather in larger, concentrated numbers. The disease has been found in Missouri and is slowly spreading. The Missouri Department of Conservation is working with conservation partners to find cases and limit its spread. CWD remains relatively rare in the state at this time. Currently the disease has no vaccine or cure.

For more information on CWD, visit: mdc.mo.gov/

Note: It is particularly difficult to research this family because of the variations in spelling. The original German spelling is Püllmann, which as you can see would be easy to mistake for Pillmann, especially in cursive. Variations that I’ve found during this research include Pillman and Poehlman among others. A branch of the Puellman family also lived off of Puellman Rd., adjacent to the park, where there exists another family cemetery on private ground.

-Carley Wright, Park Volunteer

Thank you for your support by continuously voting to renew the 1/10 of 1% Parks, Soils & Water Sales Tax.

It is through this constitutional tax, in which half of the funding generated is earmarked for the Division of Missouri State Parks. This provides about three-fourths of the division’s budget for the operation and development of state parks. All additional funding comes from revenues generated in the state park system and some federal funds.
Generations of Missourians have passed through Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park’s massive stone gateway for cookouts and family get-togethers or to spend time with friends. The park’s camping facilities, Civilian Conservation Corps architecture, and hiking, bicycling and equestrian trails help all visitors find their place to get away from it all, just minutes from St. Louis.

**Park Hours:**
April 1st –October 31st: 7AM-9PM
November 1st-March 30th: 7AM-6PM

**River Hills Visitor Center Hours:**
April-October: 8:30AM- 4PM—Wednesday-Sunday
November & March: 8:30AM- 4PM—Saturday & Sunday
December-February: CLOSED

**We’re on the web!**
www.mostateparks.com/babler
www.facebook.com/

First Day Hike: Hawthorn Trail

January 1st
Virtual Hike & Hiking Challenge