

Waterfowl migration brings birders making frequent checks for this lake has produced Greater White-fronted Goose, Black Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, and Red-necked Grebe.

The island at the northwest end changes in size and vegetation depending on the number of years since the last dredging. Generally, when it is still a sandbar, a few migrating shorebirds stop, although the variety is limited. The choicest shorebird species on this lake's list (Black-bellied Plover, Piping Plover, Sanderling, and Short-billed Dowitcher) appeared in 1994 when the lake was being dredged. Late March and April frequently bring Bonaparte's Gulls, sometimes in large flocks. Increasingly, Bald Eagles are being reported year-round and Ospreys are occasional to regular in warmer months. The trees in the open space and the wooded area near the stream provide habitat for numerous migrant passerines. Barred Owls nest in the vicinity and both orioles are breeders. This lake, like Lake Elkhorn, is one of the best places in the county for night-herons. Particularly in July and August dusk often brings in one or more. Black-crowneds are the more frequently seen. Because they tend to perch in trees on the north shore or to hug the shoreline on that side, it may be necessary to go to the far west end and look back along the edge in order to spot one. They seem able to ignore walkers so long as people remain on the paths.

Highlights: The lake with its potential for the unusual.

Handicapped Access: The level path on the north side is in view of the water along its entire length. Park in the paved lot near the dam for close access to the paved path. The gravel lot requires walking across grass and down a slope in order to reach the path. The dam end contains steep slopes.

Compiler: Joanne Solem

This material is a digest. Further information, including complete species lists, photographs, and additional information can be found at <https://howardbirds.website/birding/birding-howard-county-md/site-guides/wilde-lake>.

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The Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

Wilde Lake Site Guide



Size: 22-acre lake with adjacent open space

Best Months: Late February through May; September and October. Even when most of this lake freezes, there is usually at least one hole where waterfowl gather.

Habitat: Suburban with mown grass, shrubs, and trees. A few brushy tangles. Trees in a parklike setting east of the dam and a wooded area along a stream at the northwest end of the lake.

Coverage Time: 20 minutes to one hour.

Trails/Path: The path around the lake is 1.46 miles. It is paved on the west, north, east, and half of the south side of the lake. On the southwest side, it becomes a mulched path for a short distance before swinging away from the lake edge to the street, skirting several houses before it returns to the paved path system at the west end of the lake.

Notable Birds: Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, Greater Scaup, Black Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Common Goldeneye, Red-necked Grebe, American Bittern, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Black-bellied Plover, Piping Plover, Sanderling, Short-billed Dowitcher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Glaucous Gull, Black Tern, Forster's Tern, Least Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Common Redpoll.

Amenities: A few picnic tables in the vicinity of the barn; and a few benches at various points around the lake.

Handicapped Access: Generally good along the north side. The east end near the dam has several steep inclines.

Operation and Hours: Columbia Association open space; 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Special Attractions: Flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls are an almost annual event during late March and early April. This lake is also one of the best places in the county for summer night-herons. Several dozen trees on the west side labeled with identifying information constitute the Wilde Lake Arboretum.

Habitat: The area surrounding the lake consists mostly of mown open space, scattered deciduous trees, and a few patches of undergrowth. When it exists, the sediment-caused island at the northwest end can have good edge for shorebirds.

Also at the northwest end, a stream flows into the lake from a deciduous woods.

Layout: The lake is oriented roughly east to northwest with the dam at the east end. The north side of the lake is the more public side (fishing is allowed on this side only). Unfortunately, the view across the water from this side requires facing morning sun. The north side contains several buildings (including a renovated dairy barn), a boat dock, and two parking areas—a small paved one and a larger gravel lot. The trail around most of

the lake connects to other parts of the Columbia Association path system to extend any visit. The path at the northwest corner heading uphill winds past deciduous trees, shrubby growth, and a stream. The wooded area near the bridge and the island following a stream has a few narrow trails.

Best Time to Visit: Even in winter there may be an opening or two in the ice so geese and a variety of ducks are likely much of the year. Because Wilde Lake has had its share of rarities (especially during dredgings), it is not safe to ignore this lake at any season. Almost every year turns up something unusual. Early morning and late afternoon/evening are usually the best times, but waterbirds can be present at any time of the day. In the summer, night-herons often visit at dusk despite heavy pedestrian traffic on the perimeter path.

Birding: Wilde Lake is birded by many people who live within walking distance as well as by drive-in birders. Like any body of water there may be rapid turnover of birds during migration periods or after storms; at other times, the same species may be present for weeks at a time.

Most viewing is done from the north side of the lake. Although it is possible to walk completely around the lake, one is not always in view of the water on the south side. A scope is helpful, especially if one is attempting to scan from either end without walking the perimeter or even all of one side. A consistent center of activity used to be a platform toward the west end. Originally positioned for the use of "Trumpling" Swans that were placed on Wilde Lake, the swans have been removed. There is now a vegetated tiny island used by occasionally by Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls, and Double-crested Cormorants, rarely a more unusual species.

During warmer months cormorants use the island in the company of basking turtles. Wintering waterfowl often hang around this end of the lake. Sometimes the collection of Mallards, Canvasbacks, Ring-necked Ducks, and a few Ruddy Ducks will move to the center of the lake. Hooded Mergansers are usually present during migration and sometimes in winter.