

**BUCK ISLAND ROAD**

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Those who have followed the MISSBIRD listserv for any length of time will have heard of Buck Island Rd. in Tunica County, Mississippi, just east of Robinsonville. Buck Island Rd. (34.813396, -90.290276) runs between Highway 713 at the north and Booth Rd. at its southern terminus. The northern half of the road runs due north-south until shortly after crossing Hambrick Rd. after which it jogs southwest before turning sharply to the southeast to meet Booth Rd.

The road's interest to birders is primarily during winter. With a mix of fallow and cultivated fields, Buck Island Rd. is in many ways a microcosm of winter birding in the Delta. Little more than a turnrow between soybean fields, Buck Island Rd. is most famous among Mississippi birders as a reliable location for Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*). During winter months a sunset vigil behind the industrial plant near the north end would usually be rewarded with at least one and, if you were lucky, perhaps as many as five owls. In 2016 the fallow area behind the industrial plant was plowed for the first time in recent memory, apparently destroying much of the favorable owl habitat. The owls, however, seem to have persevered and are still regularly reported along the road.

Other species of interest in winter include Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*), Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*), Western Meadowlarks (*Sturnella neglecta*), and Rusty and Brewer's blackbirds (*Euphagus carolinus* and *E. cyanocephalus*). The proximity of this road to the Tunica landfill also results in irregular visits by large flocks of gulls. Typically

these flocks are Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), but in larger aggregations a few other species have been found including Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*), Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), and Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*). Rare birds found at this site include fairly regular (but not annual) Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) sightings, a handful of Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) sightings, Ferruginous Hawks (*B. regalis*) in the winter of 2004-2005 and in 2012, and a Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) in 2014.

Also typical of the Delta, spring rains collected on plowed fields sometimes attract shorebirds such as Greater and Lesser yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca* and *T. flavipes*), Pectoral Sandpipers (*Calidris melanotos*), and Least Sandpipers (*Calidris minutilla*). In 2007 two Upland Sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*) were tallied at this site by Jeff Wilson and Gail King. Grasshopper Sparrows (*Ammodramus savannarum*) can occasionally be found in the tall grass of fallow fields during spring and summer, replaced by the congeneric and equally elusive LeConte's Sparrows (*A. leconteii*) in winter.

In winter one can generally park anywhere along the road and get out of the car to listen and use a spotting scope. Beware during spring and fall, however, as the road may be busy with agricultural equipment and farm workers. While the road is public, all of the fields along the road are private property and should be considered restricted access particularly when crops are in the field.

For dependable sightings of winter Delta specialties and a reputation for turning up rarities, Buck Island Rd. is a worthy stop in the northern Delta on any winter outing.