

# Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve, Naperville

Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve is in the southwestern portion of DuPage County and located south of 75<sup>th</sup> Street and just east of Route 59 in Naperville. It is bounded on the north by 75<sup>th</sup> Street and on the south by 87<sup>th</sup> Street, which is the DuPage-Will County Line. The eastern boundary is Modaff Road, and it runs west almost to Route 59, but is divided by both Plainfield-Naperville Road and Book Road.



## Habitat type/site overview

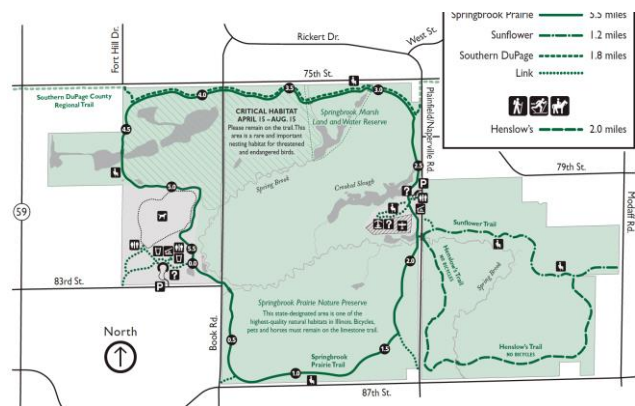
Springbrook Prairie is a large preserve (1,800 acres) that is predominantly open grassland with a number of small wetlands, marshes and ponds, as well as its namesake stream, Springbrook Creek. The open



grasslands are a combination of cool-season nonnative grasses and restored prairie. There also are a few small woodlots – primarily along the stream – as well as some successional shrubland and young wooded habitats located east of Plainfield-Naperville Road. The site is known for its grassland birds in the spring and summer, its wintering raptors, and some of its marsh birds. It is not a great place to see lots of warblers in the spring or fall.

## Topography

Springbrook Prairie is relatively flat with some steeper topography leading to the stream valley in the central part of the prairie. There is a 5-mile standard limestone loop trail around the perimeter of the site as well as one that connects Plainfield-Naperville and Modaff roads. There is one 1.5-mile grass trail east of Plainfield-Naperville Road that makes a loop with the limestone trail. The limestone trails experience heavy jogger and cyclist use during the warmer months of the year. Some of the best birding at Springbrook requires off-trail travel to get away from the busy limestone trails. Although there generally are no restrictions on off-trail foot traffic (but no dogs off-trail), certain parts of the preserve are closed to the public (including birders) April 15- August 15 during the nesting season for grassland birds. Those areas are posted and noted on the preserve map. Ticks can be a problem at Springbrook



## DBC Hotspot

from April through July. Visit the DuPage Forest Preserve website for an enlarged view of the map, [www.dupageforest.org](http://www.dupageforest.org).

### Birds

Springbrook Prairie is primarily known for its grassland bird community, hosting essentially all of the grassland bird species expected in northern Illinois. Springbrook also is a great place to see shrubland birds and marsh birds from April through July, and raptors over the winter.



**Grassland Birds.** From April through August, Springbrook is one of the best places in DuPage County to find grassland bird species. Its large size and expansive grasslands attract the full suite of grassland birds. This includes Sedge Wren, Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Dickcissel, and Savannah, Henslow's, and Grasshopper Sparrows.

You can find most of the grassland birds in any of the open fields at Springbrook, but it is best to walk off the perimeter limestone trail to do so. One good place is west and north of the model airplane field and Crooked Slough. Other good places include fields west of Book Road, but note that you need to stay on the limestone trail since that area is closed to off-trail visits during the nesting season. See map below.



**Shrubland Birds.** The shrubby and secondary successional woody habitats at Springbrook Prairie provide great habitat for shrubland birds. The best areas are east of Plainfield-Naperville Road. Species to look for there include Willow Flycatcher, Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, Bell's Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Field Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Orchard Oriole.

Look for these birds along the Henslow's Trail, which is the mowed grass trail east of Plainfield Naperville Road from April through September.



**Marsh Birds.** The several man-made and restored wetlands at Springbrook provide some great habitat for marsh birds. Best places are Crooked Slough, some of the wetland areas along the stream in the central prairie area, and the recently constructed wetlands west of Book Road. Some dabbling ducks are present in these wetlands in early spring and fall, while nesting marsh birds such as Virginia, Sora, and King rails; Pied-billed Grebe;

American Coot; Common Gallinule; American and Least Bittern; Marsh Wren; and Swamp Sparrow are often present throughout the nesting season – but some are difficult to see.

## DBC Hotspot



**Winter Raptors.** In most years, Springbrook is a good place to look for wintering raptors hunting over the open grasslands. Species to look for are Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, and Short-eared Owl together with the more abundant and resident Red-tailed Hawks. Springbrook is also the only site in DuPage County that has recorded nesting Northern Harrier and Short-eared Owl.

Good places to look for these species are the fields north and west of Crooked Slough as well as the grassland fields west of Book Road. To find the Short-eared Owls, you need to go out and scan the fields at dusk. Springbrook also is a good place to find Northern Shrike during the winter months.

### Best time to go

As is the case for most sites in DuPage County, late April through mid-June is the best time to visit Springbrook Prairie. Mid-May is the peak birding time at Springbrook since most of the sought-after grassland and marsh species have arrived, and there is still an opportunity to pick up some migrants as well.

Earlier in the morning is best, so plan to arrive as early as you can and avoid the crowded parking and trail conditions when all the joggers and bicyclists come out.

For raptors, winter is best from late December through February. Late morning or early afternoon is a good time to look for hunting and soaring hawks. Short-eared Owls are best seen at dusk as they come out to hunt just past sunset.

### Amenities

There are latrine-type bathrooms at the Model Aircraft Parking Lot off of Plainfield-Naperville Road and modern flush toilet bathrooms at the Main Parking Lot off of 83<sup>rd</sup> Street. Both of those locations also have a few picnic tables and a shelter. The main parking also has some drinking water. There are trails with location signage and a few interpretive signs along the trail, but no other educational component or buildings at Springbrook.

### Access

There are three parking lots at Springbrook Prairie: two along Plainfield-Naperville Road, and one along 83<sup>rd</sup> Street between Book Road and Route 59. All the parking lots connect to the main limestone trail. Generally, starting out at the Model Aircraft Parking Lot on the west side of Plainfield-Naperville Road is the best access point for most birding. It provides easy access to Crooked Slough for wetland birds, good grassland bird habitat to the west, and to the woody and shrubland areas on the east side of the preserve. This parking lot is also generally open 24-7.

### Site contributor

Content and photography by Joe Suchecki.