

The Mudhole Area in Russell County

The Mudhole (N36° 54.559' W81° 58.575') is a popular birding area near Elk Garden, VA, in Russell County. To reach it, turn east off US Highway 19 at Hayters Gap Road (VA Route 80) and go about 2 miles to Elk Garden Road (route 656) and turn right. Along the way, be sure to watch the fenceposts for Eastern Meadowlark and Bobolink and the sky and power lines for Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel. Lots of other species may be spotted here as well. When you reach the turn (N36° 54.589' W81° 58.156'), check the fence lines for sparrow species. In the winter, there is a large population of White-crowned Sparrows along here.

In less than half a mile, you'll see the Mudhole on your left. It's a seasonal water hole in a pasture. The people who lease the land for cattle have, unfortunately, chosen to fill it in. The good news is that it still holds water in the winter if there's sufficient rainfall, but it will dry up in summer. It attracts a variety of waterfowl and other birds. Species observed there include Mallard, Wood Duck, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, Red-breasted Merganser, Canada Goose, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Wilson's Snipe, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Whimbrel, and many others. The area just past the Mudhole where the road crosses Elk Garden Creek is great for various swallow species in the summer while the trees along the right side of the road can produce several warbler species in the spring.

Nearby is the old Mill Pond (N36° 54.555' W81° 59.032') for the Elk Garden Mill. This is directly across Elk Garden Road from the Governor Stuart Mansion. The Mill Pond is another good spot for waterfowl, waders, and shorebirds. Observers have seen Snow Goose and Hooded Merganser here in addition to many of the same species found at the Mudhole.

If you turn onto Green Valley Road (route 657), you'll soon cross Elk Garden Creek (N36° 54.337' W81° 58.729') again. The areas along the creek are good for Wilson Snipe while the creek can produce waterfowl.

Shortly after you cross the bridge, you'll be in an area where Loggerhead Shrike are often seen. There are several thorny locust trees (N36° 54.170' W81° 58.770') that are popular with them here. You can often find one or more perched in the trees, on the power line or telephone line, or on the fenceposts in the area.

All these spots are marked on the map below. Note that if you are coming north on US Highway 19, you can exit on Elk Garden Road (route 656) (N36° 54.970' W82° 00.416') and save a few miles. Be aware that Elk Garden Road is a narrow, curvy, country road.

