

Site Guide for Kress Lake and surrounding areas in Cowlitz County

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Kress Lake is located east of I-5 along Old Hwy. 99 South in southern Cowlitz County. To access it, take Kalama River Rd. Exit, or Exit 32, off of I-5 and then continue east over the I-5 overpass to the first road on your left, which will be Old Hwy. 99 South. Continue North on this road past a large playfield area until you arrive to the main parking area at Kress Lake, which requires a yellow public parking permit to access the lake for recreational purposes.

Kress Lake, in general, offers birders an ample variety of birding along a woodland trail that surrounds the entire perimeter of the lake. It is especially good during mid spring and again in late summer for migrant and nesting passerines, etc., then slows down the remainder of the year. The wooded trail is accessed directly from the north or south end of the parking area and a public restroom is available for public use. Kress Lake is quite heavily used by fisherman in season and is strictly a day use area for summer picnics, fishing, hiking and birding. A small boat launch is accessible for limited boating purposes, such as small outboards, fishing canoes, floats and rafts, and is often most heavily used during the weekends and during the best weather. Tall Black Cottonwood trees and other deciduous growth such as local, native Oak line the woodland trail and are most evident along the "first portion" of the northbound trail and during visits, it has been our observation that this "first portion" seems to produce the greatest diversity of species. The remainder of the trail covers additional thick deciduous and coniferous undergrowth and trees and the eastern portion of the trail hosts a nearly pure oak grove. A steep vegetated hillside is evident above the northern portion of the trail, where a small creek drains into Kress Lake along the northeastern corner of the lake. The woodland trail around Kress Lake is a "loop" trail and is essentially a side trip for birders to take if checking other nearby areas such as the Woodland area along Dike Rd., or the Ridgefield NWR and points beyond and we emphasize that the Kress Lake area is NOT a major stop for birding.

A morning visit to Kress Lake may be most productive in mid April to early May for various species of warblers, flycatchers and other passerines and in the past we have normally stopped here en route to other main areas for birding, such as previously mentioned. We personally began visiting this location in late spring while researching the lake for dragonflies, specifically for a dragonfly species called the Widow Skimmer. This species is very local and only known from a few western WA locations. It was only recently discovered to be located at Kress Lake.

Birding wise, this location has produced a few noteworthy species away from normal or regular sightings. To begin a spring visit on the 28th of April, 2001 produced a single Dusky Flycatcher and up to 2 Nashville Warblers, of which both species at the time represented a first record for Cowlitz Co. On the 21st of August, 2004 a single White-breasted Nuthatch was encountered amongst an active passerine flock north of the parking area along the woodland trail. This sighting represented a very scarce record for Cowlitz Co. in a location away from their usual haunts at the nearby Ridgefield NWR and Vancouver Lake area of Clark Co., despite good, ample habitat for this species at this location. Besides these 3 separate rare sightings, typical species in season of the area may be sought, including the potential for Red-eyed Vireo. We have encountered Chipping Sparrows at Kress Lake during spring and fall migration and probably occur annually to and from breeding grounds east of this location. Osprey and overhead soaring Turkey Vultures are a relatively common sight during spring through early fall. Osprey breed nearby and are often seen diving into the lake for fish during a given visit and are occasionally in competition with nearby nesting Bald Eagles that also use the lake for feeding purposes. Western Scrub-Jays are a common resident sound and sight at Kress Lake, and in periods away from major human activity such as during the winter months, waterfowl should be looked for at this location. We have never encountered seeing the lake at low levels so the potential for shorebirds during fall migration may not be evident since the lake is stream fed. Spotted Sandpipers can be occasionally noted along the immediate shoreline during spring through fall and most likely absent during the winter months. On the 21st of August 2004, a single Green Heron and a lone Solitary Sandpiper were observed at a wetland area immediately west of Kress Lake, which can be partially seen from Old Hwy. 99 across from Kress Lake. (Continued on Page 7)