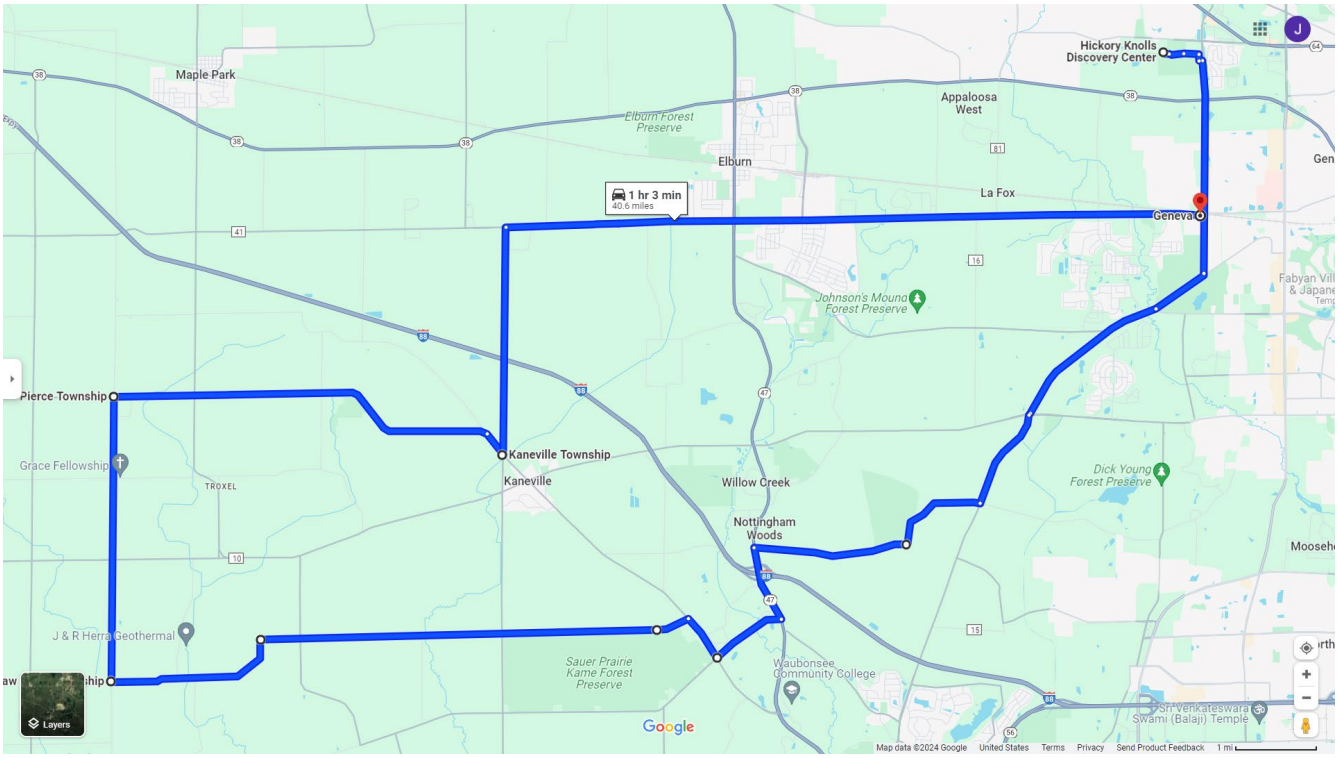

The route, as shown, is 40 miles, round trip, and will take about 2 hours at a birdwatching pace. A word of caution about "car-birding." Some roads are better than others. Luckily, rural back roads don't have a lot of traffic, particularly on weekends. Nevertheless, always be aware of traffic and never stop in the middle of a road. Pull over when you can, and use your flashers. Also, rural roads don't always get the same attention from plows as through-routes. Be mindful of ice and drifting snow.

For the purposes of the KCA-led trip, we started at Hickory Knolls Discovery Center in St. Charles (3795 Campton Hills Dr.), but the real birding begins at the corner of Fabyan Parkway and Seavey Road.

Head west on Seavey Road, drive slowly and keep an eye on the shoulders for Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur, Snow Buntings, Dark-eyed Juncos and sparrows. These mixed flocks can be a little skittish, so when you see them, pull over on the shoulder and look with your "bins." If you creep forward slowly, you can often get a little closer. As you near the Black Sheep Golf Club, watch the north fields for Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk and, if you're lucky, Rough-legged Hawk. Hunters have been known to leave goose carcasses, and raptors will scavenge on them. Also, check the utility wires and poles for American Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon.

From Seavey, turn left onto Illinois Route 47, then left on Scott Road, right on Harter Road, and left again on Lasher Road. Drive slowly along Lasher, looking for mixed flocks of winter birds. The initial section of Lasher borders the north side of Sauer Prairie preserve, so this can be a good area. We spotted a Rough-legged Hawk about midway down on Lasher, so keep your eyes open for raptors. Follow Lasher to Pritchard and turn right.

Take Pritchard north to Perry Road. We had a Rough-legged Hawk on Pritchard, as well, so be alert for soaring raptors. Turn right on Perry, which will take you past Lone Grove Forest Preserve. If the weather's not too bad, it's worth a stop for a short walk. Look for owls, Tufted Titmouse, and other winter residents. Continue west on Perry, then make a left onto Dauberman Road. Finally, turn right onto Keslinger Road, left on Peck Road, and back to Hickory Knolls.

That was our route. We'd love to discover others, particularly in northern Kane County. What are your favorite winter car-birding routes? Share your thoughts. Give me a call at 630-776-0924 or send me an email: tweetspro@gmail.com.