

STOCKTON LAKE STATE PARK

Edge Wade, 2016

2,175.9 acres Cedar Co. DeLorme 51, B/C-8

<https://mostateparks.com/park/stockton-state-park>

GPS: 37.6138235,-93.7524908

DNR, lease agreement with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE). Office open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday year-round. Phone: 417-276-4259.

A park map more detailed than the online version, and a map and booklet of the whole Stockton Lake area are available at the park office

Directions: from MO 32 in Stockton, go a total of 8.1 miles south on MO 39 and east on MO 215.

ADA Information: The park is fully compliant with ADA guidelines. Birders with limited walking ability will find this a great place to bird from, within or near a car along the paved roads or in parking lots.

Features of interest to birders: Stockton Lake (a COE impoundment) is a deepwater lake, dammed north of the confluence of the Big and Little Sac rivers. The arms form a vee, running due south and southeast of the dam. Because of the depth, open terrain (Springfield plateau), and the basically north/south orientation, this is a favored site for migrating and wintering waterfowl.

The park is on a peninsula jutting northward at the junction of the Big and Little Sac rivers (these form the two arms of the lake). Features of the Springfield plateau, Ozark hills and even some remnant tallgrass prairie aspects can be found within the park. Most of the undeveloped parts are oak-hickory forest with typical Ozark understory. There are no trails through rough, brushy terrain. Unfortunately, much of the fairly open areas (other than the mown lawn-type grass) are dominated by the invasive sericea lespedeza. Autumn olive has encroached into the brushy portions.

A good paved road system provides access to wooded and open areas, campgrounds, picnic areas, boat launches and beach, and affords several viewpoints of both arms of the lake.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: The 181 bird species list as of July 2016, is a bit misleading as it is derived from eBird data which include portions of the lake not visible from the park and/or habitats (shallow water shoreline of upper reaches of the lake) not found within the park. Most of the 21 shorebird species on the list at this writing were probably seen well southeast of the park in Polk or Dade County, most likely along the Aldrich arm of the Little Sac.

Stockton Lake SP is a premier locale for viewing waterfowl from late fall through

early spring. Because of its location, depth and orientation, water remains open here longer than at most Missouri reservoirs. Although the Brant was a one-season bird seen to the north of the park, the 18 duck and 3 goose species (missing Ross's) on the list are likely to be seen from the park. Expect Bald Eagles. Common Loon, Pied-billed, Horned and Eared Grebe are likely in winter. A spotting scope is essential, as the lake is wide at most points.

Birders may be missing good opportunities to observe migrating (especially spring) passerines. April and May reports here are few. The park sits on a peninsula jutting into the lake at the point the two waterways/arms converge. This is ideal, geographically, to form a spring migrant trap, as northbound birds are funneled by the prevailing southwest winds to the point, then face a good expanse of water to cross to continue their journey. The woods along the road to the beach and the area near the beach parking lot probably teem with migrants on days no birder is there to observe them.

Summer records are few. As of July 2016, June is virtually unrepresented. Even with the heat expected in this part of Missouri in late June, July, and early August, the birding in the park and surrounding lake sites is rewarding, especially in the morning and early evening.

Summer waders around the lake include Great Blue, Little Blue and Green Heron, Great, Snowy and Cattle Egret. All swallow species have been reported. Purple Martins stage at the lake in mid-late July. Kingfishers work shallow coves.

All woodpecker species may be seen (sapsuckers and flickers more likely fall-spring). Raptors at lakeside include Osprey, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's, Red-tailed, Swainson's (one record), Red-shouldered, and Broad-winged Hawk.

Breeding flycatchers include Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian and Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe and a good population of Eastern Kingbird. Five species of vireos probably nest in the park; Blue-headed and Philadelphia may be seen in migration.

Breeding passerines show a good mix of expected south Missouri species. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers bounce through the trees. Warblers include Prothonotary, Kentucky, Common Yellowthroat, and Northern Parula. Summer Tanagers seem to really like the area. Indigo Buntings are abundant. Orchard and Baltimore Orioles nest.

Toilets: One vault toilet is at the swim beach (north end of the park); one is at both the north and south picnic shelter; one is at each of the two picnic areas reached by short roads from off the west side MO 215; and one is at the Hartley Boat Launch area. Modern restrooms are in the campground and the marina.

Camping: Options include basic and electric sites (reservation suggested for high season), one-bedroom camper cabins and one- or two-bedroom duplexes with kitchenette, patio and grill. Campgrounds feature restrooms, showers, laundry and dumping station.

Hazards/Limitations: In warm seasons, ticks, chiggers and poison ivy may be present. There is a potential for many park visitors in summer and on warm weekends, most of whom are interested in water activities, leaving much of the park people-free for fairly quiet birding opportunities.

Nearby Birding Sites: Area maps show locations of other sites on the lake, designated as Public Use Areas (PUA). All have paved roads, open areas, woods, brushy fringes, and views of portions of the lake. COE sites along the west side, accessible from roads off MO 39, are Orleans Trail, Hawker Point, Mutton Creek, Ruark Bluff, and Greenfield Access. On the east side, accessible from roads off MO 32, are Old Mill, Crabtree Cove, Masters, Cedar Ridge and High Point.

The City of Stockton has a lease for Stockton Park PUA immediately south of town on Rt. RB. There are two large parking areas with a paved (abandoned road) nature trail.

The Aldrich arm (Little Sac River) at the southeast, upper reaches of the lake off MO 215, MO 123 and Rt. T, offers points to view shallow areas for waterfowl and shorebirds.

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