

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

CONFLUENCE POINT (EDWARD 'TED' AND PAT JONES) STATE PARK

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1,118 acres St. Charles County DeLorme 41, C-9

Owned by DNR

Directions: From I-270 in north St. Louis County, take exit 31 and go north toward Alton, IL, on MO 367 (becoming US 67 beyond Lindbergh Blvd.). As you approach the Mississippi River bridge to Alton, take your last right-turn opportunity at a gas station. Drive past the station and continue on Riverlands Way for 2+ miles to a fenced equipment compound on the right. Just past this compound, make a right turn onto a gravel road signed for the state park. NOTE: This road is gated and opens at 8:00 a.m., assuming no malfunctions.

The gravel road leads through private agricultural land that provides open-country birding from the roadside (larks, longspurs, raptors, etc.). After nearly 3 miles, a large sign indicates that you are entering the state park, and it is then 1.5 miles to a parking area at the end, near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.

Birding opportunities: The entry drive is the only road in the park, with roadside habitat of grasses, weeds, brush, or young cottonwoods and other trees that apparently will be allowed to grow into forest over time. Much of this can be explored on foot by pulling over wherever conditions look promising; there are no established trails except at the point (see below). Regular birds include blackbirds, sparrow of many species, nesting Dickcissels and Common Yellowthroats, migrant Bobolinks, and raptors, with the occasional rarity like the Northern Shrike that appeared one winter.

At times, ponds and mudflats, some of them close to the road, have appeared due to flooding and have lingered for long periods, producing some unusually high counts of wading birds (e.g., 100 Snowy Egrets) and adding a great diversity of ducks, shorebirds (29 species), and other water-related species to the area list, including a Mottled Duck in August, 2011. At this writing, the area is basically dry, but a good "spring rise" might create these conditions again—and also might close the road for a while, as it has in the past.

From the parking area at the end of the drive, a short trail leads up and along a levee through a patch of woodland. This trail, originally all paved and handicapped-accessible, is now deteriorated in places due to repeated flooding, but it is still an easy walk. It leads to a rocky point that angles right down into the water at the confluence, opposite the viewing platform in Columbia Bottom CA, on the other side of the Missouri. The small woods here, including a cluster of willows at the point, offer the chance for some passerine diversity, especially in migration, when warblers and vireos can accompany the Black-capped Chickadees and Tufted Titmice.

Moderately well birded over the past few years, Confluence State Park has a bird list that currently stands at a healthy 184 species; nonetheless, there are still many species left to add that certainly must occur. Despite the limitation on access to most of its acreage, the park offers good possibilities in any season, either as a primary destination or as an addition to a trip to Riverlands, through which you must travel to reach it.

Toilets: There are relatively nice pit toilets at the parking lot, along with a roofed kiosk display of information about the confluence and its history.

Camping: None, one picnic table under the roofed display area at the pit toilet.

Hazards: None except for the usual poison ivy and mosquitos in season.

Nearby birding sites: A few stops in Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary are almost mandatory on your way to or from the state park; also recommended is the Audubon Center at Riverlands, with fine displays, large viewing windows, and multiple feeders. Close by is the Cora Island Unit of the Big Muddy National Wildlife Refuge, about a 10-minute drive from the park's entrance-drive gate. A 20-minute drive to the south and east will bring you to Columbia Bottom CA, and by heading west on MO 94, you can reach Dresser Island CA in about 20 minutes and Marais Temps Clair CA in about 30 minutes. Additional good sites can be reached by crossing the bridge into Illinois.