

CURRENT RIVER STATE PARK

Edge Wade, 2017

780 acres Shannon Co. DeLorme 55, G-8

GPS: 37.331603, -01.420191

DNR owned. May not be open to the general public on all days, especially in winter. Birders may be given access by prior permission. Call: 573-858-3015.

Current River State Park is within the Current/Jack's Fork Watershed Important Bird Area. See <http://www.audubon.org/important-bird-areas/current-jacks-fork-watershed-45> for a description.

Directions: From Salem at the intersection of MO 32 and MO 19, go 26.2 miles south on MO 19 to the entrance road, CR19-D with a large cantilever sign on the right (west).

From Eminence, go approximately 17 miles north on MO 19 to the well-marked entrance on the left on CR 19-D.

The best map for this park is in the park brochure. Brochures are at kiosks in parking lots along the entrance road.

This park is the heart of the former Alton Box Board Company's employee retreat facility. The buildings and impoundments are registered historical structures. Much of the park is within the scenic easement restricted development area of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. These restrictions work to the benefit of birds and other wildlife by limiting additional disturbance to a fine example of Current River country habitat/terrain mix.

ADA Information: There are no ADA accessible facilities. The areas around the upper lake and below the historical buildings in the central area of the park are relatively flat and have good birding conditions. Trails are not recommended for people with balance problems or difficulty walking.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: The likelihood of uncomfortably muggy weather, typical of Ozarks climate, limits pleasant birding opportunities to early morning or late evening in summer. Even with this in mind, birding here in any season is full of promise.

In spring, the full array of mid-continent passerine migrants passes through the park. An impressive portion of them stays to nest. Among these are Scarlet and Summer Tanager, orioles (especially Orchard), Great-crested and Acadian Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, vireos and at least 12 species of warblers. Birders may want to prepare for the variety of vireos and warblers here by reviewing field marks and vocalizations before a spring (or early fall) trip.

Cerulean Warblers are possibly as numerous here and as easy to see as anywhere in the state, perhaps outnumbering Northern Parula. American Redstart, Ovenbird, Pine, Yellow-throated and Kentucky Warbler and Common Yellowthroat are common to abundant. Check glades and powerline cuts for Blue-winged and Prairie Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Turkey Vultures are expected, but watch for the opportunistic Black Vulture soaring over the bluffs. Raptors are probably underrepresented in the occurrence records due to the canopy and so much to watch for below the tree line.

Watch along the river for herons, kingfishers and swallows. Listen carefully for the raspy tones of Yellow-throated Vireo, as the speed of the song may approach that of the Red-eyed. Listen, too, at dusk and dawn for Eastern Whip-poor-will and Chuck'will's-widow.

In autumn the reverse migration brings more opportunities to view flycatchers, vireos, thrushes and warblers aplenty. The small "lakes" occasionally attract waterfowl.

Resident woodpeckers, Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice and White-breasted Nuthatches may be joined in autumn and winter by Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers and kinglets.

Features of interest to birders: The riparian corridor, oak-pine forest, glades and other karst features, and small impoundments of this park in the midst of the Ozarks host an extraordinary diversity of bird species. The roads, trails and maintained grounds combine to make birding access here as good as it gets in this region. The restricted development that makes the park perhaps less attractive to many park visitors provides birders with a quiet venue to explore with far less human activity than most Current River area accesses and park sites.

Fine birding may be experienced in many ways here. The designated trails below are described from a birding perspective. The park brochure (available at roadside trailheads) has maps and additional information on the trails. More tips for the best birdfinding areas in the park follow the trail descriptions.

Park entrance area and along the road. From the point you turn off MO 19 you may encounter birds anywhere along the road. Just watch for traffic as well as birds. A good strategy for birding the road is to park in one of the small lots and walk the road. This is also a good strategy for doing short jaunts along the trails and returning to the road.

Jones Hollow Trail (4 mile loop, blazed in yellow, rated moderate). This trail gives access to dry woodlands and dolomite glades. Two trailheads are along the road into the park. One is at the first (uppermost) parking area with the porta-potty. A good birding strategy for those who don't want to do a 4-mile hike is to begin on the east side of the lot between two boulders. There are options: go as far as you like, then backtrack to this lot, or continue to the white connector to loop back to the road at the second parking area (a point on the road below where you entered). A walk along the trail on the west side of the road will lead through woods. Backtrack to the road or continue to the second trailhead lot.

Centennial Bluff Trail (1.4 mile loop, blazed in blue, rated moderate). This is a reasonable length loop trail for birding, much along a ridge top through post and black oaks and shortleaf pine with some glade-like portions. It can be done as a full loop or in sections. One trailhead is at the third lot from the park entrance (across from the upper pond). Check this area for glade and scrub species. Another trail entrance is near the road at the two stone pillars into the main grounds, and a third on the hillside behind the gymnasium.

Ninebark Trail (2.6 mile loop length includes the portion coming up from the river level trailhead that is not within the loop, blazed in red, rated moderate). The trailhead is at the end of the road/track past the skeet range. This is just above river level at about 700'; the crest (with a large dolomite glade) is a little above 1,000', reached by several switchbacks. The section coming up from the river is excellent for warblers (especially Ovenbird) and vireos in nesting season. Listen even up here for Cerulean Warbler and Yellow-throated Vireo. The trail crosses the powerline cut, which adds an opening in the canopy attractive to many species. The trail may also be reached via the white connector from the Jones Hollow Trail.

Current River Trail (5.25 miles, blazed in orange, rated rugged). Note that this is not a loop, and leads out of the park, across MO 19 and into Echo Bluff SP. It shares some sections of the Jones Hollow and Centennial Bluff trails. This is a trail more suited for hiking enthusiasts, than for birding.

Non-designated Trail birding areas (in the order they are encountered as you enter the park:

Upper Lake Area. This may be the birdiest area in the park, as it is a fine example of an ecotone. In this area, several plant communities/habitats converge. Many bird species are found here as they exploit the diverse habitats for nesting and feeding.

Coming down the road from the entrance, you may take the right fork at the vee to park near a picnic table near the dam. *Do not drive across the dam.* You must turn around and get back on the main road when you leave this area.

You may also begin birding this area from the parking lot (Centennial Trailhead) across the road from the dam. This side of the road is dry scrubby habitat, especially along the powerline as it turns away from the road at the lot. Look for Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat and other scrub-loving species. These often cross the road toward the dam, so watch and listen for them even as you bird lakeside.

Between the main road and dam is a savanna-like area with large oaks and pines and no understory that is favored by Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Orchard Oriole, Acadian Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Redstart, and Yellow-throated Warbler. But don't stop watching these trees when you've found those, because many others may appear.

From along the dam you are likely to see Eastern Phoebe and Eastern Kingbird feeding from snags in the lake. Swallows may be feeding above.

The scrubby brush areas near the big trees and near the dam ends may hold Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, and other skulkers.

Below the Upper Lake, along the road is an area that may form a small, shallow lake or just be very wet. It may be viewed from the end of the dam or from the road. Watch for any water-loving species, including Green Heron.

Lower Lake and Buildings Area. Near the stone pillars is a footpath across the waterway that feeds the lower lake. It is a trailhead for the Centennial Trail. Look here for Louisiana Waterthrush.

Along the road and lakeside grasses Chipping Sparrows, Mourning Doves, and American Robins will catch your eye. Barn Swallows and Eastern Phoebes nest in the lake house and nearby.

The large oaks, pines and sycamores, including the ones immediately in front of the upper dorm (lodge) and near the gymnasium are frequented by Cerulean, Yellow-throated Warbler and Northern Parula, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Orchard Oriole, Red-eyed Vireo, Eastern Phoebe and more.

In the grassy, tree-lined area just above the river from near the amphitheater to the end of the road at the kiosk for the Ninebark Trail in spring and summer you are likely to find Chipping Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, more Ceruleans and Northern Parula, American Redstart, and Kentucky Warbler (and Carolina Wren, so listen carefully). Especially on the upper side with the pines, watch and listen

for Pine and Yellow-throated Warbler, and keep an eye open for goldfinches and Cedar Waxwings.

Below this area, along a tree-studded sandy stretch on the river, accessed from near the amphitheater at one end and from the kiosk at the other, you may find more of the same species mentioned above, but also have a good view of the river. Watch along and over the river for Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Red-winged Blackbird and Common Grackle, as well as Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher and other birds using the river as a highway. Among them may be American and Fish Crows (listen carefully and don't be fooled in early summer by the nasal calls of immature American Crows).

Old Nature Trail. Just below the low retaining wall at the upper dorm (lodge) parking area is the entrance to a short nature trail (about .1 mile) with some tree species marked along it. This footpath follows the river downstream and ends at a slightly elevated very small, secluded clearing with two stumps to sit on and take in the sights and sounds. Watch and listen here for all the above-mentioned species. Listen, too, for woodpeckers and Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Toilets: Two porta-potties: One at the Jones Hollow trailhead parking area (the first parking area encountered along the entrance road); one at the lodge parking area.

Camping: None.

Hazards/Limitations: Rough trails and the expected ticks and chiggers should be prepared for. Note that the park may not be open every day, especially in the "off season." A call before a visit so birders will be expected is a good precaution in late fall/winter.

Nearby Birding Sites: Echo Bluff SP*, Montauk SP, Ozark National Scenic Riverways (along Current River, Alley Spring, Round Spring, etc.) Blue Spring Natural Area*, Buttin Rock Access* and Chilton Landing* (both at Eminence), Rocky Creek CA (woodland restoration project unit)*.

*Indicates Birders' Guide available when this guide was written. See <http://www.mobirds.org/Locations/SiteGuides.aspx> for these and additional guides.