

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

FOREST PARK, City of St. Louis

Deepa Mohan, summer 2013

For information, contact Forest Park Forever, <http://www.forestparkforever.org/>

Or call the visitors' center during working hours: 314-367-7275

Directions: Forest Park's official address is 5595 Grand Dr., St Louis, MO 63112.

However, since the park spans 1,371 acres, it can be entered from several points (see the map at the website above).

Birding opportunities: Forest Park is a large area and offers excellent opportunities to both the beginner and the experienced birder. On a good day, even the "common" birds are of quite a variety. For an urban park, it has a surprisingly long bird checklist. See the list at <http://www.forestparkforever.org/experience/thingstodo/bird-watching/>

The interconnection of the various water bodies in the park makes for good riverine habitat for many birds, and the presence of large trees, a carefully-cultivated prairie/savannah area, and mown grass of three golf courses draws many birds to the various habitats.

The pumps installed in the water bodies, and the gradation of the landscaping, ensure that there is water in even the driest of climactic conditions, as in the summer of 2012.

Some highlights:

A. From the Denis and Judith Jones Visitors Center, walk down towards the Muny (Municipal Theatre), and keeping the Muny on your left, turn towards the St. Louis Zoo area. The large cottonwoods, and the area near them comprised of young woods (behind the World's Fair or Spanish Pavilion) are home to two Great Horned Owls. In recent years, they have nested and bred successfully, and have augmented the population of these owls in the park. The Muny area is also a good place to watch many varieties of sparrows, and the trumpet flower plants in the Steinberg Plaza of the Muny is a great place, in summer, to watch the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. The building also has many Barn Swallow nests that can be watched in summer.

B. The interconnection of the various water bodies in the park, including Post-Dispatch Lake, Jefferson Lake, and the creek leading from the Muny, is excellent for waterfowl; various ducks (especially teal and mallards), herons and egrets can be found taking advantage of the crayfish, fish, and other water fauna. Belted Kingfishers can be seen, too, fishing in the creek. Several kinds of woodpeckers are in the tall trees.

Many land birds also use the water, especially in the summer months, and it's delightful to watch American Goldfinches and House Finches bathing in the shallow waters near the Suspension Bridge (Location: http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM2TQ1_Forest_Park_Suspension_Bridge_St_Louis_Missouri)

C. Kennedy Forest is a wooded area. The southwest area of the Park, including the conifers, is particularly good for migrant birds, especially warblers. It was voted "the best place to bird-watch, 2000" by the RiverFront Times: <http://www.riverfronttimes.com/bestof/2000/award/best-place-to-bird-watch-30749/>

This listing by Randy Korotev says that 107 species of birds, mostly passerines, pass through in April and May: <http://levee.wustl.edu/~rlk/wgnss/nn99kf/> (Location: http://levee.wustl.edu/~rlk/wgnss/nn99kf/kf_map.gif)

D. Additionally, the areas near the St. Louis Zoo are also very rewarding. In fact, several wild birds are often to be seen in the zoo itself. The regular and reliable availability of food is no doubt a large factor. Entrance to the zoo is free; parking in the zoo lot is \$12.

Winter is a better season than others to see raptors in the park, because of better visibility. Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and American Kestrel can be seen near the visitors' center and Jefferson Lake area.

For an illustrated list of the common birds that one can spot in the park, see http://www.forestparkforever.org/files/landbird_brochure.pdf

This list can be picked up as a brochure, at the visitors' center, too.

Toilets: There are facilities at the visitors' center, and scattered around the park; but early in the morning, expect these to be closed.

Water: There are water fountains scattered over the Park, but it's better to carry one's own bottle of water while on birding outings.

Camping: None.

Hazards: None except for the usual mosquitoes in season. But jogging, running, walking, hiking and biking are popular, so it's a good thing to check at the visitors' center if there are events happening, as the area can be very crowded and it may not be a good time for birding.

Do check the weather on www.weather.com before going, as it is not fun to be caught in the open parkland during a sudden thunderstorm.

Nearby Birding Sites: There are many parks and conservation areas within easy driving distance. Among these are birding favorites Carondelet Park (checklist at <http://www.mobirds.org/CACHE/AreaChecklist.aspx?site=1334>), and Tower Grove Park.