

DBC Hotspot

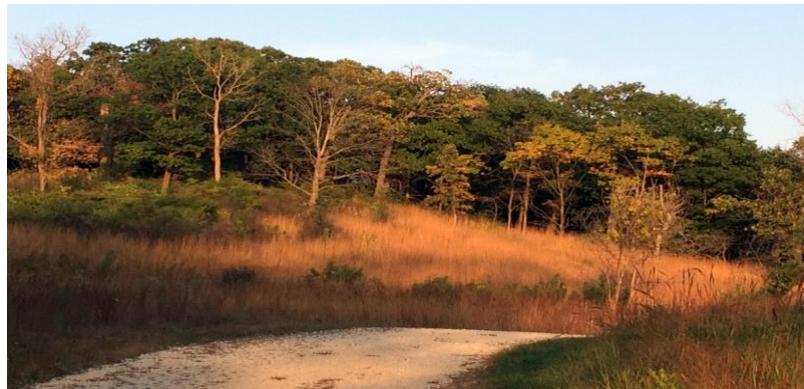
Waterfall Glen Forest Preserve, Darien

Waterfall Glen Forest Preserve is one of the most ecologically significant preserves within DuPage County, located at the southeast corner of Du Page County, between Cass on the east and Lemont Road on the west; I-55 on the north, and the Sanitary and Ship Canal on the south.

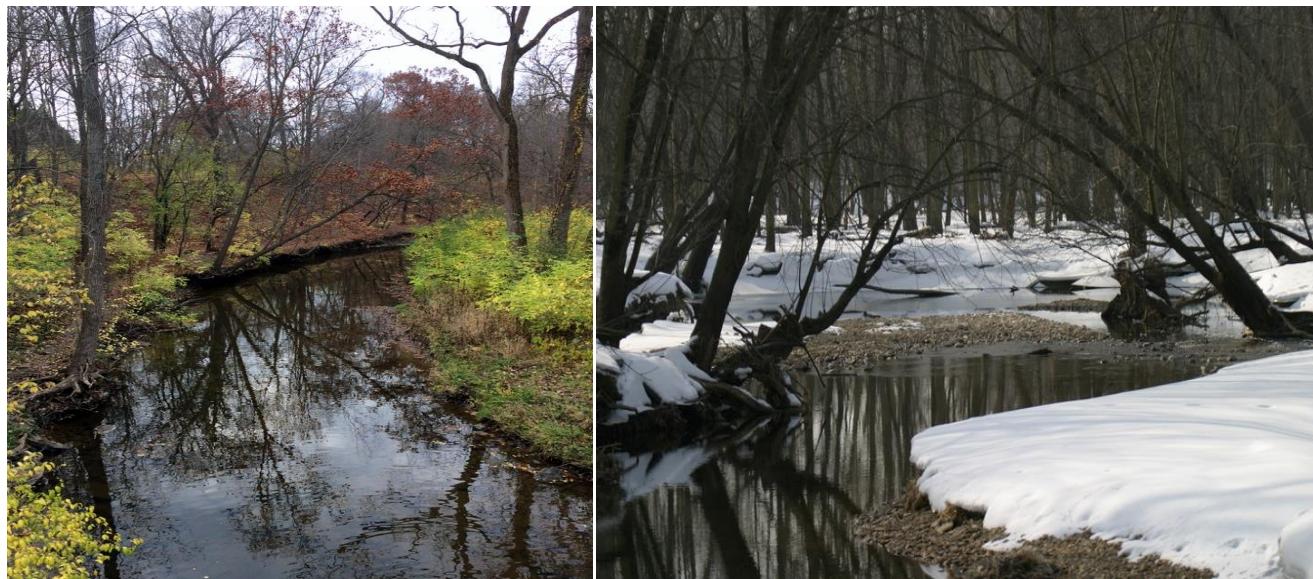
Habitat type/site overview

Waterfall Glen surrounds the 1,700 acre [Argonne National Laboratory](#) (ANL) in a 3,200-acre ring. Some describe Waterfall Glen as donut shaped, with ANL as the “donut hole.”

The preserve has a well-restored oak savannah stretching along the southern perimeter.



Riparian habitat can be found on the southeast side, along Sawmill Creek...



...and on the south side along the Des Plaines River. Poverty Prairie, named for the Poverty Oats Grass growing there, is on the southwest side of the preserve. Shrubland habitat, and the species using it, is spotted throughout the preserve.

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Topography

Waterfall Glen is a rolling site, with some steep, rocky trails. The main 9.5-mile loop trail is popular to bikers! When visiting on a weekend, plan to get there early and get off the main trail before 9:00 a.m. Many dirt trails parallel the main loop trail, where birders can have a quieter, bike-free walk to listen and look for birds; these get muddy during a drenching spring or summer rain.

Birds

In the Oak Savannah (start at the Cass/Bluff field station parking lot), birders may find Broad-winged Hawks and Barred Owls...



...Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Scarlet (and occasional Summer) Tanagers ...



... Carolina Wren, Wood Thrush, Hooded and Chestnut-sided Warblers, plus many other resident and summer breeding species are also present in the oaks and oak edges. White-eyed Vireo and occasionally Bell's Vireo nest along the

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shrubby power line right of way. On Poverty Prairie, expect to find Eastern Meadowlark, Henslow's Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue-winged Warbler, plus other common shrubland and grassland nesters.

Along Sawmill Creek, Louisiana Waterthrush is a reliable annual visitor and possible nesting species. On the south side, along the Des Plaines River, breeding Prothonotary Warbler, American Redstart, Acadian Flycatcher, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Sandhill Crane, and marshland birds nest in summer. In almost every pine plantation, listen and look for nesting Pine Warblers. It's possible to make a loop around the 91st Street Pond--the east shore can get muddy—and find numerous species of ducks, terns, warbler, flycatcher, kinglet, duck species, all the swallow species, and herons and egrets. The shrubland southeast of the pond, near the daycare center, is a good place to find different flycatcher species and Connecticut Warbler in migration. Well over 200 species have been recorded at Waterfall Glen, including many vagrants/rarities—Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, MacGillivray's Warbler and Black-headed Grosbeak among them.

A productive loop from the Poverty Prairie parking lot is to walk east on the main trail and bear right at the fork, which takes birders through a birdy oak grove, past Musk Turtle pond – check for ducks, grebes, swallows, shorebirds, herons and egrets – before venturing out on the prairie. If it's crowded, head north and east at the model airplane field and bird the prairie from that side. Then head south and east around the model airplane field to the overlook – a nice place to stop and drink water and look for Osprey, Bald Eagle, herons and egrets, terns and Black terns during migration, and nesting passerines down the slope. It is possible to stay on the service road to head back to the parking lot, instead of returning to the main trail; note this is a longer, four-mile loop walk. Bearing left from the (second) main trail fork at the Lemont Rd. parking lot takes birders north through a series of kettle ponds that are a must to check during spring migration.

Best time to go

During warm weather, arrive early and plan to leave before 9:00 a.m.; it gets very crowded. Spring migration can be spectacular, and summer nesting season is great. Fall migration is also good. If the trails aren't icy, Waterfall Glen can be a quiet winter birding destination, when Pileated Woodpeckers and Barred Owls may be more confiding.



Amenities

There are benches placed on the main trail, and a picnic shelter at the Youth Campground near the Cass/Bluff ranger station parking lot. There are pit toilets at the Cass/Northgate lot, the Cass/Bluff lot, and a porta-potty at the Lemont Road parking lot and model airplane field out on Poverty Prairie.

Access

The main parking lot is just south of I-55 at Northgate and Cass. It gets very crowded, particularly on weekends, but provides the closest place to walk to 91st St. pond, about 1 mile away.

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The parking lot for Poverty Prairie is located off Lemont Road, at 101st Street.

The parking lot for the southeast oak savanna/Sawmill Creek area is just east of where Cass Avenue bends east and becomes Bluff Road; this lot is currently closed so check the website before you go. There is no street parking open either.

Visit DuPage Forest Preserve website for an enlarged view of this map, www.dupageforest.org.

Site contributors

Content by Vicky Sroczynski and Bob Fisher. Bob's contribution is in memory of his wife and birding partner Karen, whose keen eyes spotted 218 species, many of them life birds for both, during 40+ years visiting Waterfall Glen in all seasons.

Photography by Vicky Sroczynski.

