

# Hardin County's "Rock Route"

By Eric Walters

As I sat in the gazebo up on a rocky point overlooking the Ohio River, the cool spring breeze along with the dawn song of the nearby Purple Martin colony nearly lulled me to sleep. It was difficult to pull myself away from this beautiful river view, with the potential of something interesting flying by at any moment. However, I knew the Hardin County 'Rock Route' was on the morning agenda and I was certain it would produce.

I've named the birding portion of this trip, "Rock Route" since it goes through Tower Rock, Cave-In-Rock State Park, and Battery Rock, but another name could be "Poor Man's Pomona" for those familiar with that rich birding location.

This small section of southeastern Illinois offers a great opportunity to enjoy productive birding while still having time for other local activities that might interest a non-birder with you. I've named the birding portion of this trip, "Rock Route" since it goes through Tower Rock, Cave-In-Rock State Park, and Battery Rock, but another name could be "Poor Man's Pomona" for those familiar with that rich birding location.



*The Chestnut-sided Warbler is a common migrant in Hardin County in spring. Photo by Emil Martinec.*



*The Pine Warbler breeds in Hardin County along the "Rock Route." Listen for its high-pitched trill high in the pine trees. Be careful to differentiate between the song of Chipping Sparrow and Pine Warbler, which sound similar. Photo by Emil Martinec.*

Starting from your overnight location in Elizabethtown, head northeast up Route 146. Where a road turns east, look for a group of pine trees where Pine Warblers breed. Take the road east about one-half mile where you'll find a few homes with nectar feeders which attract hummingbirds during migration. The first two miles of this road travel through rolling countryside, after which you'll cross Peters Creek. Stop anywhere along this road to look for birds.

When the road splits, turn east on Tower Rock Road. In about one mile, you'll enter the town of Tower Rock. Turn south into the wooded hillside on the Ohio River. This entrance area is on the northern downward slope while the campground (\$5/night, almost always empty) is on the southwestern side of the bluff facing the Ohio River. Since the sun might not penetrate into the deep woods until well after sunrise, it's best to drive all the way down to the Ohio River boat launch parking lot to get a sense if migrant songbirds are working the trees as they move along the river. If migration is occurring, the trees