



The Orange-crowned Warbler can sometimes be heard singing at the end of April along Cave-in-Rock Road. This is a great place to learn how to distinguish between Chipping Sparrow, Pine Warbler, and Orange-crowned Warbler songs in Illinois. Photo by Emil Martinec.

along the edge could keep your attention for a while. The best Tower Rock birding location seems to be the woods along the entrance road (starting at the Tower Rock Camp and Picnic Grounds sign) south to the northern side of the campground.

You can hike to the top of Tower Rock, which should produce a few more of the treetop warblers and tanagers and perhaps the wonderfully noisy Pileated Woodpecker. You can access the start of the trail just north of the boat launch parking area. As this path winds up the hillside, you'll see beautiful wildflowers in spring, and at the top of the rock, you'll be rewarded with an incredible view of the Ohio River valley. Besides looking for territorial Barred Owl, Cooper's Hawk, Acadian Flycatcher, and Pileated Woodpecker, also seek out migrant warblers and other songbirds here.

During weekdays, you'll likely have the whole place to yourself, so stopping and even parking temporarily along the road shouldn't create any traffic issues.

When you leave Tower Rock, you'll turn east back on the same road, which is now called Cave-in-Rock Road. In essence you'll now be traveling along the first ravine north of the Ohio River where breeding and migrant birds appear to find food and safety in the valley.

The first half mile features more woodland habitat along with roadside scrubby edges. Stop anywhere along the road to bird. When you cross a large bridge over a creek (1.9 miles from Tower Rock entrance), check for waterfowl in early spring and shorebirds in late spring.

Farther down the road, you'll notice a white picket fence, which is the edge of a subdivision that borders the Ohio River. Turn south into the Riverside Bluff subdivision road where there are small long ponds that have held a few waterfowl and shorebirds in season. You can park along the road in one of a few spots to get a view of these watering holes.

Continuing east from this subdivision along Cave-in-Rock Road will bring you through more woodland on both sides of the road, offering more opportunities to see breeders and migrants at close range. At least two Barred Owl territories are along this road into town and they have been heard calling mid-morning.

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Here's a short list of the number of singing males along this route on 29 April, when I made a two-hour early morning foray: 2 Wild Turkeys; 3 Barred Owls; 7 Pileated Woodpeckers; 17 White-eyed Vireos; 8 Yellow-throated Vireos; 20 Red-eyed Vireos; 12 Wood Thrushes; 4 Blue-winged Warblers; 3 Golden-winged Warblers; 1 Orange-crowned Warbler; 21 Northern Parulas; 5 Yellow-throated Warblers; 6 Prairie Warblers; 5 Prothonotary Warblers; 8 Louisiana Waterthrushes; 1 Hooded Warbler; 9 Kentucky Warblers; 4 Yellow-breasted Chats; 4 Scarlet Tanagers; 3 Summer Tanagers; 50 White-throated Sparrows; 1 Blue Grosbeak; 4 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks; and 5 Orchard Orioles.

In 1.4 miles you will arrive into the Cave-in-Rock city limits. Head south to the Ohio River Ferry Launch to get a quick view of the flowing river, most of which is on the Kentucky side of the state line. Turn back north a block to Park Road and head east, which will take you into Cave-In-Rock State Park, a half mile away.

This small 204-acre state park, with its 60-foot-high wooded hills and river bluffs, was home to river pirates living in the on-site cave. This area isn't as birdy as Tower Rock or the woody ravines along the road you just left. But you'll still be able to get additional views of many of the species already found. For the best this park has to offer, take the short Hickory Ridge Trail, which travels through mixed woodlands with some undergrowth and has been good for Kentucky Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker and Barred Owl. Also look for both tanagers and Worm-