

Gull Area 7: Lake Shelbyville

Lake Shelbyville is a major central Illinois flood-control reservoir created in 1970 by an earthen dam built at the confluence of the West Okaw and Kaskaskia rivers. It covers over 11,000 acres and the extensive shoreline remains largely undeveloped. There are two major state parks in the area, Wolf Creek and Eagle Creek in Shelby County. Sabine's Gull has been seen here in the fall months. There are two major access areas, IL-32 between Windsor and Sullivan, for the east and north portions of the lake, and IL-128 north from Shelbyville for the south and west sections.

Because of the size and configuration of the lake, it is difficult to bird, but the rewards may be well worth the effort.

Gull Area 8: Springfield

Lake Springfield at the southeast edge of the city is a large flood-control and cooling-pond facility built for a power plant during the Depression. Stevenson Dam blocks Sugar Creek which eventually flows into the Sangamon River. Access is from IL-55 at the Stevenson Drive exit. Proceed east across the dam and circle the lake on Lake Shore Drive.

At least 16 species of gulls have been reported from the area, including mew, California, sabine's, and ivory. The only melanistic Bonaparte's Gull ever reported came from Lake Springfield (American Birds Fall 1993). It is an excellent location for all water birds.

Gull Area 9: Lake Decatur

Lake Decatur is a reservoir supplying water for the City of Decatur and the Village of Mt. Zion. Constructed in 1922, it consists of 3,000 acres crossed by several bridges. The dam blocks the Sangamon River and is adjacent to the Business Route of U.S.-51. Other bridges cross Lake Decatur on IL-105 and U.S.-36. It has hosted most of the winter gulls and jaegers. Most of Lake Decatur is accessible from city streets, and there are numerous municipal parks along the lakefront.

Gull Area 10: Baldwin Lake

Baldwin Lake straddles the Kaskaskia River and serves as a cooling pond for the Baldwin power plant at Baldwin in far southwestern Illinois. The Illinois Department of Conservation maintains a State Fish and Wildlife Area on the property and it has become a major center for attracting winter waterfowl. Gull activity consists largely of birds moving between the lake and the Mississippi River.

Access to Baldwin Lake is north from IL-154 on the Baldwin Black Top Road which runs along the east side of the lake.

Suggested Gull Readings

"Thayer's Gull in the Chicago Area." James E. Landing. The Indiana Audubon Quarterly 63:2, pp. 58-63.

"Gull Frequency in Northeastern Illinois." James E. Landing. Illinois Birds and Birding, 6:1, pp. 3-4.

"Unusual Gull Plumages Observed at Chicago." James E. Landing. Illinois Birds and Birding, 6:1, pp. 6-8.

Gull Area 11: Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge

Crab Orchard Lake was created in the late stages of the Depression by damming Crab Orchard Creek which flows into the Big Muddy River, and serves as a major flood-control project for southern Illinois. It is now a National Wildlife Refuge operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Although Crab Orchard is most noted for geese and other waterfowl, it also has nesting eagles, and the water surface is so extensive that it attracts many gulls. The main entrance to the refuge is on IL-13 west of Marion.

There are certainly other areas in Illinois to find gulls. All of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash rivers could be checked. The many local, federal, and state facilities along the Illinois River between Joliet and Grafton would be prime targets. There are other large water bodies in the state as well including Carlyle Lake, Lake Newton at Bogota, Rend Lake near Mt. Vernon, Otter Lake at Girard, and Sangchris Lake at Kincaid.

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Literature Cited

American Birds. Summer 1993; Summer 1989; Fall 1993.

Bohlen, H. David, The Birds of Illinois, Indiana University Press, 1989.

Mayfield, Harold 1949 Audubon Field Notes 3:171-72.