



Dutch Gap Conservation Area

Location: Chester, VA

Address: 251 Henricus Park Road, Chester, VA 23831

URL: <http://www.chesterfield.gov/Parks.aspx?id=6442454866>



Birding Hotspot

SITE DESCRIPTION:

Per the Park website, “The Dutch Gap Conservation Area is 810 acres of diverse woods, wetlands and wildlife. Bordered by the beautiful and scenic James River, the area includes a blue heron rookery in the marsh.” The park also includes the Henricus Historical Park which is a living history museum showing an English settlement and Arrohateck Indian site on the James River. The park includes a tidal lagoon and tidal wetlands with a 4.5 mile hiking trail and a 2.5 mile lagoon kayak water trail.

Rating: 

Upside: Beautiful natural setting; various environments to bird including wetlands and a tidal lagoon; historical village that adds interest; indoor facilities; picnic area with lots of places to rest; very nice visitor center; kayak and canoe trail in the tidal lagoon for additional birding opportunities.

Downside: Access down to the river can be steep and difficult for those with joint problems or disabilities; additional benches on overlooks would be helpful.

REVIEW:

We found **The Dutch Gap Conservation Area** a bit by accident. We had been in southern Virginia visiting relatives and found ourselves a bit tired and decided to stop for the night near Chester, VA. As we were looking through some pamphlets for



Visitor Center

‘what to do in the area’, we spotted this park. You cannot always tell with parks – some turn out to be Little League fields which can be good for walking but are not really the best places to go birding. But add “conservation” to the name or “preserve” and there’s a good chance you have found a good spot for hiking and birding. Chester is right on the James River and the Conservation Area promised wetlands and a tidal lagoon – even better. We were not disappointed. The location could not be better – minutes from Interstate 85 – and



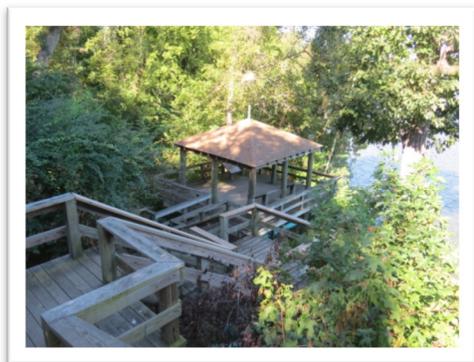
easy to find with the GPS. The road into the visitor center runs along wetlands on the James River so is good for car-birding. But do mind that it is a narrow road and well-traveled. There is a turn off to go to a public boat landing that also offers additional birding and walking along the river. We spent a very lovely morning at the park and barely scratched the surface of

the hiking and birding there. The park also includes a historical village – Henricus Historical Park – that allows you to explore the history of the area in addition to birding, hiking, or canoeing/kayaking. As noted, we focused on the path – a service road – around the historical village and out to the point overlooking the river. We had relatively good birding along the hedge by the road and then down by the dock on the river.

The trails along the ridge are flat and graveled and easy to follow.



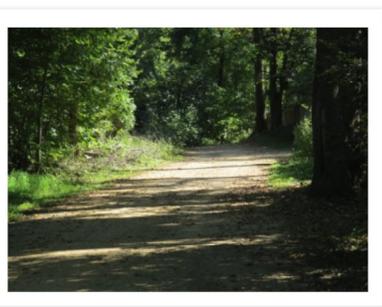
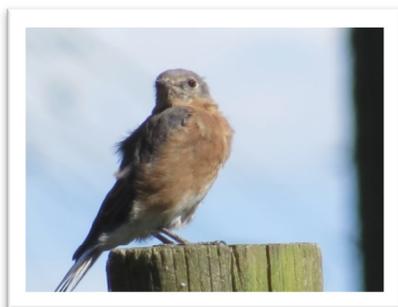
There is an inclined pathway down to the river to the dock that might be a bit treacherous for those with hip or knee problems. And, of course, coming back up would be difficult. There is also an overlook on the river with a series of stairs and platforms allowing you to go down to the river but the stairs are steep and there are no benches on the platforms to allow one to sit and rest. The view was quite beautiful on the headland and there are picnic tables and benches available for enjoying the view as you learn the history of the area on the various signs and monuments.



There is a very nice visitor center at the site and a lovely souvenir shop where I found everything I didn't know I needed and more. There is no snack bar but the souvenir shop sells

beverages along with a few snacks. There are indoor restrooms. The proprietor of the souvenir shop was very knowledgeable of the history of the area and the trails inside the park. The park offers a variety of nature programs and activities throughout the year. There was no fee to use the hiking trails but there is a fee to visit the historical village of Henricus.

We were on a relatively tight schedule so we did not get to the main trail within the Conservation Area, particularly the hike around the tidal lagoon. The trail map shows this 4.3 mile loop trail with several overlooks along the way providing views of both the river and the tidal lagoon and wetlands. We located the trail head and noted that the path was wide and graveled and very well maintained. There is no doubt that we will stop here again in the future and spend some time on the Main Loop Trail. As noted above, we had pretty good birding in the time that we were there.



Birds Spotted:

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|----------------------|-----------------|
| Eastern Bluebirds | Bald Eagle |
| Pileated Woodpeckers | Brown Thrasher |
| Carolina Chickadees | Tufted Titmouse |
| Osprey | Black Vultures |
| Carolina Wren | Cormorant |



Visitor Center



Parking



Boardwalk



Picnic Area



Restrooms



Canoe Launch



Marsh Wetlands



Scenic View



Hiking Trails