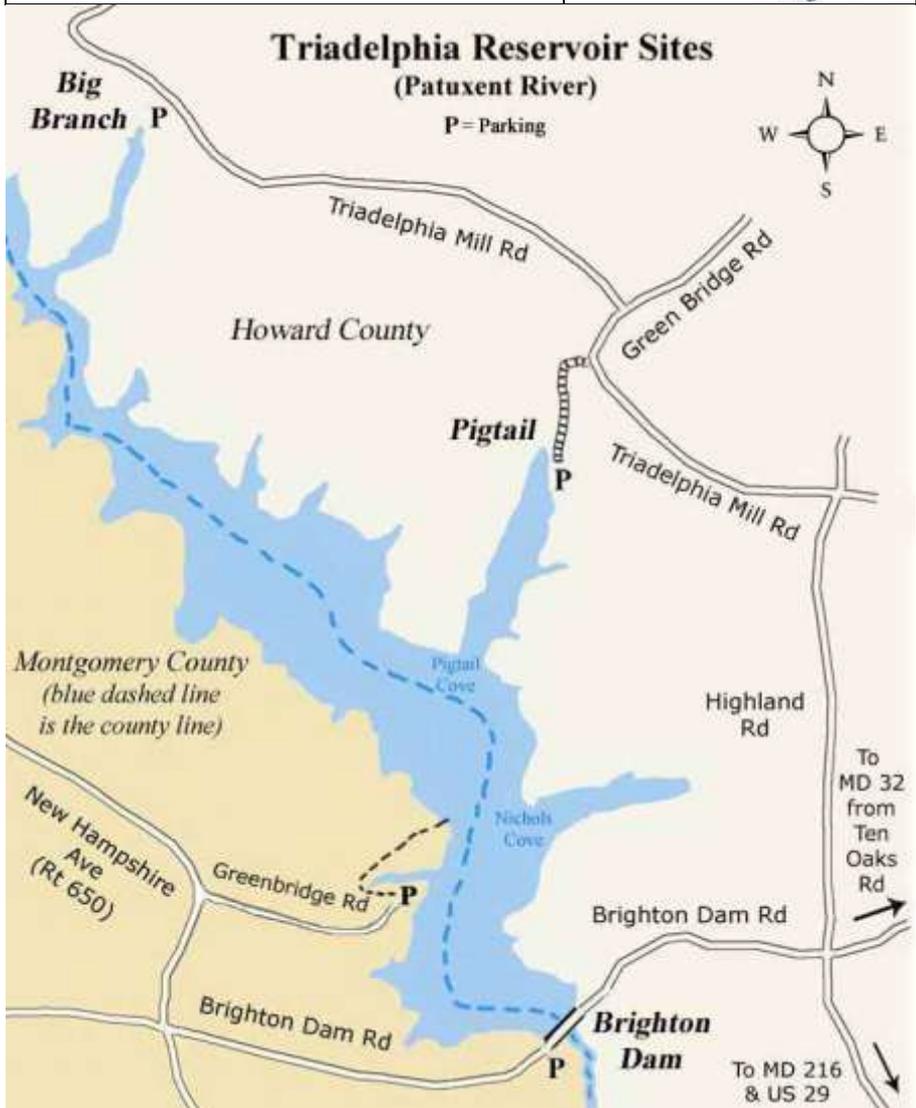
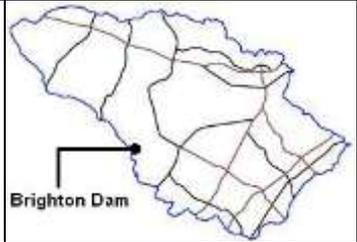


Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society
(MOS)

Brighton Dam Site Guide



Size: The dam spans the southern end of the reservoir. Brighton Dam Road runs along the top of the dam.

Habitat: Standing on Brighton Dam facing north, one is looking at a cove of Triadelphia Reservoir. The wooded edge on the east is in Howard County; the west side is Montgomery County. There may be unvegetated spits of land visible depending on the height of the water. A small section of the main reservoir can be seen in the distance. Both orange and white buoys serve as convenient perches for birds.

Best Months: Late summer to early spring is usually the most productive. Although the slowest time is late May through the first half of July, almost any period can be worthwhile.

Coverage Time: From a few minutes to several hours.

Trails/Paths: Parking is in a gated lot on the Montgomery (southwest) side of the dam. A sidewalk runs along the north side of the dam adjacent to Brighton Dam Road. There is no sidewalk on the south side facing the Patuxent River. A picnic area below the dam is reached through a gate from the parking lot. It is open in warm weather during daylight hours.

Notable Birds: Cackling Goose, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Greater Scaup, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Black Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Western Grebe, Glossy Ibis, Bald Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, Sandhill Crane, American Golden-Plover, Iceland Gull, Sabine's Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Glaucous Gull, Common Tern, Forster's Tern, Black Tern, Common Raven, and Cliff Swallow (colony on dam).

Amenities: Portable toilets in the paved parking lot. Free maps available in the information office (the cabin adjacent to the parking lot).

Handicapped Access: Problematic. Crossing Brighton Dam Road is not always easy. The water is only visible over the almost four foot cement barrier adjacent to the sidewalk. The sidewalk is usually not shoveled after snowstorms.

Operation and Hours: Triadelphia Reservoir is owned and managed by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) and security is their number one concern. The reservoir is closed to public access from November 15 to April 1. During the winter, the view from Brighton Dam is the only consistent location from which to view any of the water (or ice). Hours are no longer posted on the gates, but, in winter, they may be open as early as 7:00 a.m. This is important because birds may be gone by 8:00 a.m. Gates nominally close at 4:00 p.m. but 3:45 p.m. is more accurate. Hours are longer in warmer weather. Gates are closed on

Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Parking in front of the gates during off hours is at your own risk—you may be told to leave. Parking on the road near the dam is dangerous as the traffic is usually heavy and hills on either side invite high speeds.

Special Attractions: Besides the water, which is the main attraction, there is an azalea garden on the west side open for a few weeks each spring. It opens after waterfowl migration so the access doesn't gain much for birders trying to view the blind spot favored by ducks and mergansers, but the flowers draw many visitors.

Habitat: Mostly deciduous woods surround the southern end of the reservoir. Precipitation, water usage, and dam maintenance affect the water level—and the potential birds. During periods of low water, a spit emerges from the Howard side. Buoys in the water provide perches for some species.

Layout: Brighton Dam Road runs across the top of the dam. There is a sidewalk along the north side only. (It is not cleared, so in case of prolonged snow or ice it may be nearly impassible or, at least, treacherous.) From this vantage point, one looks out on an expanse of water constituting the southern end of the reservoir. In the distance, a small section of the main reservoir can be seen. The south side of the road contains only a curb from which the Patuxent River can be viewed. Because this is a busy commuter route, extreme caution should be exercised on either side of the road. Parking is on the Montgomery County side of the dam. Boating and fishing passes as well as maps may be obtained in the cabin. Birders do not need a pass. They are expected to observe all No Trespassing signs as only limited areas of the reservoir are open to the public. Between the parking lot and the river is a picnic area accessible during hours and seasons when the reservoir is open to the public.

Best Time to Visit: Late summer well into spring is the best period, although there may be times when nothing is visible. From November 15 to April 1, this is the only public access to the reservoir. If this section of the reservoir freezes over, bird activity is extremely limited; if any hole remains, however, waterfowl will be concentrated. Early morning and late afternoon are usually the most productive times; traffic and noise levels are lowest on weekends and holidays. During winter, parking gates close at 4:00 p.m. (they begin closing at 3:45 p.m.). The gate is usually open by 8:00 a.m., sometimes earlier; it is open every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years. During periods when the reservoir is open to the public, boats will be on the water soon after dawn.

Birding: The dam draws birders looking for ducks, geese, herons, grebes, loons, cormorants, gulls, terns, eagles, and Cliff Swallows. Besides these species, there is the potential for almost any waterbird possible in the Piedmont. Western Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Red-throated Loon, Sandhill Crane, Golden Eagle, Sabine's Gull,

and Common Raven are among the excellent recent finds. Although a scope is not a necessity, it is helpful as the distance to the Greenbridge boat ramp (visible in Montgomery County as a reference point) is deceptively distant. The sidewalk is wide enough to accommodate a tripod, but do not step off the curb without checking for traffic. Cliff Swallows nest on the dam. When they are present, they often offer a top-down view. From about mid-December into January, there may be a buildup of Common Mergansers (some years there are state-high numbers). If there is no ice cover, hundreds can be seen streaming into a cove out of sight to the west (left) by mid-afternoon and out again in the morning. Be sure to walk the length of the dam to look as far left as possible. Wintering Bald Eagles sometimes congregate here. Although numbers never approach those at the best state locations, as many as 27 have been observed at one time. Great Horned Owls can occasionally be heard just before dawn.

Highlights: Good views of sky and water combine to make this an attractive location for viewing many bird species. Adjacent to the dam on the Montgomery County side is the Brighton Dam Azalea Garden open for a few weeks each spring. A picnic area along the Patuxent River offers access to other habitats.

Seasonal Bird List: A complete seasonal bird list is on the HCBC's web page. There are also butterfly, dragonfly, mammal, amphibian and reptile lists. The URL for these lists is www.howardbirds.org/birdinghowardcounty/Triadelphia/triadelphia_species_lists.htm

Compilers: Nancy Magnusson and Joanne Solem

For complete species lists, photographs, directions, and additional information for numerous birding sites, check the following website: <http://www.howardbirds.org>. click on Birding Howard County, Maryland, Site Guides, Brighton Dam.

This material is a digest taken from the revised web version of *Birding Howard County, Maryland* by Joanne K. Solem. More than 40 sites are available at the above website.