



## ASNV Birding Hotspot Fact Sheet

# GREAT FALLS PARK

**LOCATION:** 9200 Old Dominion Drive, McLean, Virginia 22101. The park is in Fairfax County, Virginia and borders the Potomac River.

**DIRECTIONS:** From the east, take Georgetown Pike (Route 193), Exit 44 on Interstate 495 (the Capital Beltway), west approximately 4.5 miles. Turn right at the light with the intersection of Old Dominion Drive and take the road to the fee booth. From the west, take Georgetown Pike (Route 193) to the intersection with Old Dominion Drive. Turn left at the light and take Old Dominion Drive to the fee booth.

**ACREAGE:** 800

**HISTORY:** Great Falls Park is part of the National Park system and is managed by the National Park Service. The park preserves sections of a canal built in the late 1700's by the Patowmack Company. The canal was built to skirt the falls at this point on the Potomac River and became obsolete when the C&O Canal was built on the other side of the river.

**ECOSYSTEM TYPE, HABITATS, & ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE:** The park straddles the Fall Line that separates Virginia's Piedmont from its Coastal Plain. The Great Falls overlooks are a major attraction of the park. The various habitats include mixed hardwood forests of various elevations, a grassy former quarry, swampland, and riverside flora. For safety reasons, there is restricted access to the latter. Animal life includes whitetail deer, raccoons, foxes, opossum, and various reptiles and amphibians.

**BIRDS AND BIRDWATCHING:** The Park has wonderful year-round bird watching activity. There is a 15-mile trail network within the park, including some that merge with trails in RIVERBEND PARK (separate Fact Sheet) that lies upriver from Great Falls Park. The park is a stopover for spring and fall migrants and is considered a Warbler hotspot including American Redstart, Black-throated Green, Blackpoll, Kentucky, Northern Parula, and Ovenbird. In addition to the numerous Warbler species, look for American Goldfinch, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Wood-Pee-wee, Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, and various species of Woodpeckers.

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Compiled by Jay Hadlock

Upriver from the falls, over wintering waterfowl include Bufflehead, Ring-necked Duck, Common and Hooded Merganser, Mallard, and Canada Geese. Tundra Swans are uncommon visitors to this section of the Potomac. The park has a free bird list of the over 160 species seen and the more than 85 species that have nested here. Volunteers lead an 8 A.M. Sunday morning bird walk that starts from the visitor center. The Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (ASNV) sponsors bird walks here, and the park is included in the ASNV annual Waterfowl Count. Check the ASNV Web site ([www.audubonva.org](http://www.audubonva.org)) or call the ASNV office (703) 256-6895 for information about scheduled walks or participating in the Waterfowl Count.

**CONSERVATION CHALLENGES:** The overall health of the Potomac River has gradually improved. Continuing development upriver is a cause for concern as are the swings between dry and wet conditions in the Potomac watershed. Thankfully, there is very little residential development pressure around park boundaries.

**CONSERVATION WORK AT THE SITE:** The National Park Service is responsible for conservation work in the park.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** The park telephone number is (703) 285-2965. Check the park Web site ([www.nps.gov/grfa](http://www.nps.gov/grfa)) for additional information.

**FEES AND HOURS OF OPERATION:** The basic entrance pass is good for three consecutive days, includes a park brochure with map, and costs \$5 per car. A 12-month pass for this park is \$20. All fees are subject to change. The park is open from 7 A.M. until dark every day except December 25. The entrance passes are also good for admission to the C&O Canal National Historical Park on the Maryland side of the Potomac. This park is also an excellent bird watching area.

**FACILITIES:** There is a visitor center, open 10-4 daily with extended hours spring, summer, and early fall. It includes a snack bar (seasonal hours for the latter), picnicking facilities, and ample parking. There are restrooms at the visitor center and near the junction of the Matildaville and Old Carriage Road Trails.