



VIRGINIA IS FOR BIRDERS — AND BIRDS: Fairfax County, which borders the Potomac River and Washington, D.C., is home to many places to find birds. Great Falls Park (left) features a breathtaking waterfall, and Meadowlark Botanical Gardens is a favorite spot to take in the beauty of cherry blossoms.

A bird's-eye view of Fairfax County, Virginia

Lovely scenery, beautiful trails, and plenty of wildlife keep me coming back

I've outrun eagles in Elizabeth Hartwell National Wildlife Refuge. I've soared with the hawks over the meadows and wetlands of Huntley Meadows Park. I've perched with Snowy Owls in Riverbend Park and then witnessed the stunning view of majestic waterfalls at Great Falls Park. They look better from the ground, in my humble opinion. But what do I know? I'm just a bird. A bird that stops in Fairfax County, Virginia, every year as I migrate along the Atlantic Flyway.

Why Fairfax County? That's a much more interesting question. Let's start with Huntley Meadows Park, named a Hotspot Near You by this very magazine. A combination of forests, meadows, and wetlands all spread out over 1,500 acres. Huntley Meadows offers some of the best year-round birding in the entire Washington, D.C. region. I've seen over 200 different species here, which makes for a very active social life.

Another favorite stop is Mason Neck State Park. I love it because the humans will get into these long skinny boats and come right up to you. Truly fearless creatures these humans are. Mason Neck is near Elizabeth Hartwell National Wildlife Refuge, which is the very first refuge established specifically for the American Bald Eagle. You can also find herons, Wood Thrush, and more than 211 types of my fine feathered friends here.

When I'm in the mood to glide along the Potomac, I usually make my way to the Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve. The Preserve features 485 acres of freshwater tidal wetlands, one of the largest remaining wetlands in the D.C. region. I come here to hob-knob with waterfowl, warblers, sometimes hummingbirds (but they tend to mumble), and Marsh Wrens. Actually,

not so much the Marsh Wrens, they are usually a little moody ... seeing as this is their breeding ground and all. In fact, it's the only place they get amorous in all of Northern Virginia.

From Dyke Marsh, the next stop is farther up the Potomac: Riverbend Park. Here you can get in some good people watching as Riverbend connects to Great Falls Park, an incredible part of the National Park Service. It's just so satisfying to land on a branch and see a whole group of people whip out their binoculars. All to get a glimpse of me! But, I digress. Riverbend Park sprawls over 418 acres and is great for catching up with the American Woodcocks along with 191 other species. I've never counted how many species of humans pass through there, but that's not really my thing.

If you listen closely, from Riverbend you can hear the sound of woodpeckers up in Great Falls Park. As you make your way toward the cascading falls, you're likely to come across some of my favorites: the Tundra Swans. But if they aren't there, you can check out over 160 different types of us beautiful birds. And as I mentioned before, check out the falls. Gorgeous. Breathtaking.

And when I am ready to make my way down the coast, I stop in at Pohick Bay Regional Park to hang with beavers, Osprey, deer, and bluebirds, to name a few. They're a pretty active bunch, so for me, a little goes a long way. But always worth it to stop in and say hello.

I truly do hope that you'll have the opportunity to migrate on over to Fairfax County, Virginia. You won't egret it. Sorry. Bird humor. We're known for our bad puns.

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Great Blue Heron at Huntley Meadows Park