



## National Arboretum

**Location:** Washington, DC

**Entrance 1:** 3501 New York Avenue, NE, Washington DC 20002-1958

**Entrance 2:** 24th & R Streets, NE, off Bladensburg Road in Washington, DC

**Phone:** 202-245-2726

**URL:** <http://www.usna.usda.gov/index.html>

### SITE DESCRIPTION:

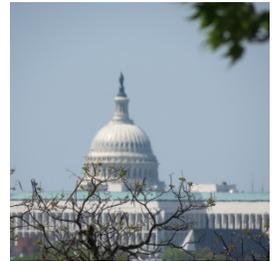
The National Arboretum was first envisioned in 1867 but was not established until March 4, 1927 with the passage of the National Arboretum Act. Per the Arboretum Strategic Plan found at the website, the purpose of the Arboretum was for research and education concerning tree and plant life. The Arboretum includes 446 acres which includes 12+ separate beautifully landscaped gardens displaying more than 16,000 varieties of plants with more than 650 cultivars of woody and herbaceous plants.

**Rating:**

**Upside:** Beautiful gardens which attract a good variety of birds. Paved and graveled paths throughout the park. Nice visitor center with indoor toilets. Great roadways for car-birding.

**Downside:** Raw sewage in the creeks and ponds. Steep paths going uphill & down in some gardens. Lack of parking in some areas. Schedule being reduced and possible admission fee added. Crowds on weekends.

**REVIEW:** The National Arboretum is mainly about trees and plants. It is a research site that is a part of the US Department of Agriculture. It includes twelve different gardens featuring thousands of different types of ornamental plants and trees. So why is this review included on a site about birding and birding hotspots? Because where there are plants, there are birds...especially where there are native plants. So where better to go looking for birds than in a garden which is one of the largest gardens in the US capitol. I have visited the Arboretum on several occasions, the most recent being on April 25, 2013. We picked this date



deliberately. The timing is great for seeing the masses of azaleas in bloom in the Arboretum's Azalea Garden, maybe catch a few blooms left on the camellias in the Camellia Garden, and coincidentally maybe catch a few migrating songbirds coming in for the season or even just stopping over where there are spring flowers blooming.



It was a chilly day but great for one of my favorite things – car birding. The National Arboretum is great for car-birding because the park includes plenty of areas to drive through that allow you to enjoy the gardens, meadows, trees, and public areas without getting out of your car. And you can drive slowly through the park stopping here and there to look for birds. This comes in handy on a cold day or any day when your arthritis is acting up a bit. One thing to watch for when car-birding though are the security guards. On the day we visited, there were very few cars moving through the Arboretum but, while we were on the road near the Azalea Gardens, we were “tracked” by a security vehicle for a while. I made an assumption that this was because larger crowds were expected in that area and security was on alert. As we left that area and drove over to the Asian Gardens, we were pretty



much left alone.

Per the website, the Arboretum also operates a tram that runs through the



park throughout the day but I have never seen it and did not see it in the three plus hours we were there for this visit in April.



But there are also plenty of walking paths, both paved and gravel all through the gardens just in case you want to get out of the car and walk (or jog). But I have to advise that there are some gardens to include the Azalea, Camellia, Korean, Asian, and Conifer Gardens that are planted over hill and dale and include relatively steep paths. In particular, the Asian Garden is spread downhill from the main road to the Anacostia River and the trail down the hill is long and winding. I expect going down might not be so bad but coming back up would be quite a chore especially when you are tired and the joints are aching. But there are benches placed throughout the gardens that help considerably for rest and meditation.



Unfortunately, there are very few parking spaces along the main road near the different gardens. While there are many parking spaces at the Visitor Center, the center is more centrally located and not really close to any particular garden except the Bonsai displays and the Azalea Gardens. In the past, you were allowed to park along the roadsides in the Arboretum but it appears now that the lines for the parking spaces are being rubbed out and signs in most areas on the roadside now announce

that no parking is allowed.

Again, per the website, more than 500,000 people visit the Arboretum every year. With that many people coming through the park, you can expect some parking problems and to feel a bit more security around the grounds...which is an excellent reason to pick your time for a visit carefully. Since most birders are out bright and early, this might not be a problem. According to the website, the hours are from Friday through Monday from 8AM to 5PM and the admission is free. At first, this seemed to be a mistake to me since that implied that the Arboretum was only open on weekends. I do not recall ever having gone on



weekends because it is terribly crowded and would not be fun to try to enjoy the gardens or do any serious bird watching with so many people out and about the place. As noted, we were last there on April 25<sup>th</sup> which is a Thursday. However, recent political events to include the infamous "Sequestration" have had an impact and a new posting solves the mystery. *Per the latest announcement, as of May 13, 213, the Arboretum will now be closed to the public each week Tuesday through Thursday.* And there goes my recommendation to stay away from the place on the weekends so you can do some peaceful birding during the week without battling the crowds. As noted, there is a large Visitor Center and there are quite a few programs going on throughout the year for both children and adults. I also noted that the admission was free but that appears to be changing too. It will be a shame to have to see a new admission charge associated with a facility that is pretty much 100% funded by Federal taxes. On the other hand, it is a beautiful facility and I would be the first to admit that the gardens will probably be worth the price of admission. Again, an admission charge might discourage birders from visiting the park.



Overall, the Arboretum is beautiful and well worth a visit. The paths are mostly paved or well graveled. There are only "mowed" pathways through the native flower meadows but that is to be expected. There are children's gardens and "bug" garden areas along the roadsides that attract birds even if some of the more ornamental plants (non-natives) might not. There are indoor bathrooms in the Visitor Center and we



noted a bathroom over by the Asian and Conifer Gardens. I did not spot any porta-potties but, again, with so many visitors per year, I would expect them to show up in busier months. My biggest problem with the



Arboretum relates to the very distressing “Raw Sewage” signs placed near all the ponds and creeks. It annoys me to no end that this Government cannot clean up its waterways and even more so inside the National Arboretum. I realize the Anacostia River nearby is polluted (don’t get me started on that) and there doesn’t seem to be a way to clean it up but the creeks inside the



Arboretum should be more manageable. Needless to say, it also annoys me that the birds, small animals, and waterfowl who might live or migrate through the Arboretum cannot find clean water. Which brings me to our number one sighting of the day – a beautiful wood duck sitting right in the polluted creek. Nuff said.

***Birds Spotted:***

- |            |          |           |                |           |         |
|------------|----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Catbirds   | Robins   | Blue Jays | Mourning Doves | Cardinals | Titmice |
| Chickadees | Swallows | Wood Duck | Hawk           | Vultures  |         |



Visitor Center



Parking



Hiking Trails



Restrooms



Picnic Area



Public Gardens