



Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC)

Location: Edgewater, MD

Address: 647 Contee's Wharf Road, Edgewater, MD 21037-0028

Phone: 443-482-2200

URL: <http://www.serc.si.edu/>

SITE DESCRIPTION:

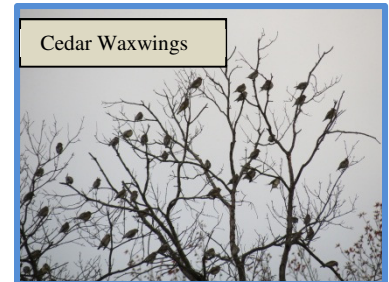
The SERC is a 2800 acre research facility on the Rhode River which is owned and operated by the Smithsonian Institute. It was initially founded with the donation of the 365 acre Java daily farm in 1964. It has been used by the Institute as a research facility since that time. The facility opened its visitor center to the public in 1975 and offers a variety of educational programs to the public for both adults and children.



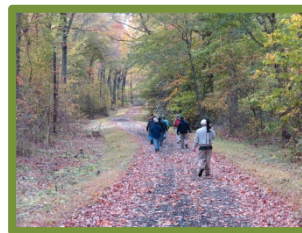
Visitor Center

Directions: From Annapolis, take MD 2 South/Soloman's Island Road. Turn right onto MD 214 East/Central Avenue. Turn right onto MD 468 East/Muddy Creek Road. Turn left onto Contee's Wharf Lane and continue onto Contee's Wharf Road until you reach the visitor's center.

REVIEW: This is a preserve that I had very much wanted to visit but had not taken the time to find out how to get there and felt that it would be best to go there the first time with a guide. So we waited until the AA Bird Club had a "walk" there and signed up with much anticipation. That worked for us but it is not at all necessary. The SERC has a lovely visitor center and is open to the public from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM, Monday – Saturday throughout the year excluding holidays. Visitors are asked to check in at the visitor center and I would highly advise that you do. I have visited preserves and refuges across the US and I do not believe I have ever encountered security anywhere that is as prevalent as it is at the SERC. I suppose this is because this is part of the Smithsonian Institute and security may be handled by the Federal Protective Service. At any rate, I have never encountered armed security guards at too many preserves before – forest rangers maybe, but not really security guards. And these guards keep an eye on you while you are at the facility. There are more than 2800 acres combined of several old farms with access roads which makes for some very good hiking and walking in various types of ecosystems – forest, tidal marshes, wetlands, cropland, pastures, etc. The old farm driveways and access roads are particularly nice for easy walks through the fields and down to the River. You can probably find just about every kind of bird or wild creature imaginable somewhere on the property. So check in at the visitor center so that they know where you are hiking and so the security guards do not think you are someone up to no good. If you do access the property at a site other than the visitor center, there are signs clearly posted with a number to call to let security know where you are on the property.



Cedar Waxwings



As noted above, we went to the facility with the AA Bird Club and a very knowledgeable guide – he knew where to find the birds and made the walk very enjoyable. We actually started out on the southern side of the area and walked an old farm access road for about a mile past the old farm house and down to the river. We had good birding and tallied hawks and bluebirds and bald eagles and kinglets and quite a few sparrows in the marsh area on the road. We also saw a large flock of cedar waxwings and robins feasting on spruce berries along the way. There wasn't much action at the pier and the old barn did not have an owl as was hoped. The group then left this area and drove up to the visitor center and Contee's Wharf. There were not too many birds there, just a few Royal Terns and, in the distance, on the river, some buffleheads and a few mallards.



We parted from the group at this point – my knees do not yet permit me to take long walks and there were picnic tables by the visitor center where we sat for some time birding the hedges bordering the trailhead for the Java History Trail. We were rewarded with a golden crowned kinglet who was hunting in the leaves near the pathway. All in all, we spotted 28 species of birds while we were with the group and the Club later reported more than 52

species of birds were spotted on the whole walk.



Royal Terns

The SERC is well worth the visit and we will, no doubt, enjoy many more trips to this hotspot in the future. It is very convenient to Annapolis and relatively easy to find. There is a very nice visitor center and the attendant at the Center was very knowledgeable and helpful. There are indoor bathrooms at the Center although you will not find facilities of any kind if you are hiking out in the preserve away from the visitor center. The trails were wide and easily navigated although they are not all paved. We visited two piers, both in very good shape and easily accessed. However, the overall feel of the place is that it is primarily a research facility with a focus on research and science. There is public access but the main objective of the preserve is not to accommodate

visitors. The security is tight and can become a bit obtrusive. As we drove out of the area, we noticed quite a bit of bird action in a field to the right on Contee’s Wharf Lane. We pulled over to scope the area and spotted northern flickers, crows, red-bellied woodpeckers, starlings, grackles, eastern bluebirds, northern mockingbirds, and red-winged blackbirds – a very hotspot at that moment. We were not there more than 5 minutes when the security guard showed up to see why we had stopped on the side of the road. There was absolutely no traffic on the country road and nothing stirring except the birds. This level of security and oversight can be a little bit off-putting for birders and nature lovers.



Java History Trail

Site Amenities:

Boardwalk		Visitor Center	♪	Fee	
Paved Paths		Bathrooms	♪	Vending	
Difficult Paths		Porta-Potties		Snack Bar	
Benches	♪	Pier	♪	Parking Lot	♪

Birds Spotted: Ruby Crowned Kinglets Golden Crowned Kinglets
Northern Flickers Cedar Waxwings
Royal Terns Bald Eagle

UP Side: Convenient to Annapolis, MD. Easy to find with GPS. Nice visitor center with indoor bathrooms Nice variety of educations programs for both adults and children. There are paved hiking trails and old farm access roads that allow for more accessible birding.

Down Side: Primarily a research facility that allows public access. Some paths are paved but not all. A very large facility that would be a great place for a nature drive allowing more accessibility.

BirdingBoomer Rating:  