

DBC Hotspot

Cantigny Park, Wheaton

Cantigny Park features stunning gardens, a world-class military museum, golf course and restaurants, walking trails, and excellent birding. The main entrance is on Winfield Road, just south of Roosevelt Rd. (Rt. 38). From I-88, take the Winfield Road exit and go five miles north.



Habitat type/site overview

Cantigny's 500 acres feature good habitat diversity, including open woodland, small wetlands, ponds, constructed native prairie, display gardens and golf course. The property is a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, a designation that its conservation-minded managers take seriously. Of course, being a public park with many attractions, Cantigny is a different kind of birding venue. It is not "wild" like a forest preserve. On nice days, it can be a very busy place!

Topography

Cantigny topography is flat with a few gentle inclines. Paved and crushed stone pathways are wheelchair accessible. A two-mile hiking trail is woodchipped. If desired, Cantigny can be birded without ever leaving a hard surface! Butterfly Hill, near the First Division Museum, overlooks the park and golf course and is worth the short climb. To see a map of the property, visit www.cantigny.org.

Birds



The all-time site list contains nearly 200 species. One of them is Wild Turkey—small groups are occasionally seen on the grounds, delighting even the nonbirding visitors. Cantigny is perhaps best known for two specialty birds: Red-headed Woodpecker and Purple Martin. The woodpeckers favor the golf course habitat with its large oaks. You might also find them in the oaks behind the First Division Museum. A thriving martin colony, located at Cantigny Golf, can be observed May through early August (enter on Mack Road). Fifty Eastern Bluebird houses dot the landscape as

well. The park's Chimney Swift tower, erected in 2012 and located in the Prairie View area, near the Idea Garden, has met with mixed success. For water-loving species, check the pond at the far northeast corner of the park, and around the edges of recently built wetland areas bordered by native aquatic plants—Gold Pond (north of the Visitors Center) and the water detention area that borders the south parking lot and golf course. Cantigny's colorful gardens—especially the Idea Garden and Pollinator Garden—are hummingbird magnets in summer and early fall.



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Best time to go

Monthly bird walks held March through December are popular, including walks that cater to birders with mobility issues. Registration for the walks is online at Cantigny.org. Annual birding activities include a visit to the Purple Martin colony in July, and a Big Sit on Butterfly Hill in September. Birding is best when the park first opens. Hours vary by season—check the park website or call 630-668-5161.



Amenities

If the birding is slow, Cantigny offers other options. The Visitors Center has a café, information kiosk (ask for a map) and a small movie theater that plays a short orientation video. Restrooms are located inside the Visitors Center, along the Oak Colonnade, in the picnic area, and at the Education Center. Admission to the impressive display gardens and First Division Museum is included with parking.

Access

Cantigny is open to the public. Admission fees vary by season—check Cantigny.org. Parking is always free on the first Wednesday of the month, and for those arriving on foot or on bike. For safety, birding on the golf course is not permitted, except during guided walks. The Purple Martin colony at Cantigny Golf may be observed any time without charge (entrance on Mack Road). Use the lower golf parking lot and walk across the lane.

Site contributor

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