



Best Parks and Places

If you've read [Northern VA – What and Why](#), you know this area is one of the best in the country for dragonfly watching. Reviewing [Habitat Tips](#) will give you an idea of what makes good dragonfly habitat and the secrets to finding them.

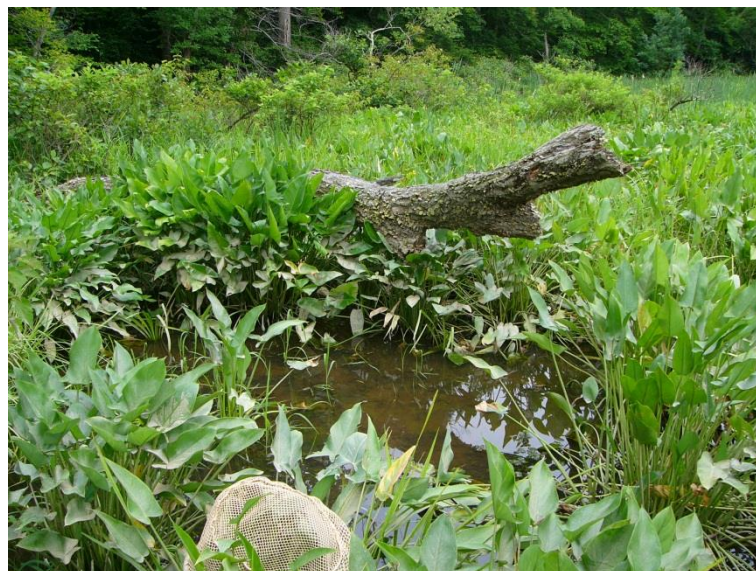
Maybe you've already found a great dragonfly park or natural area in your neighborhood, or have a list of rivers, ponds and meadows you're excited to visit and explore. Following is a list of parks and places in Northern VA I consider some of the best sites for watching dragonflies. I'm sure I've missed many excellent sites, and encourage you to add to my list with your own explorations and favorite places. I've also purposefully left off a few sites due to issues with public access, property ownership, and/or fragile ecosystems with especially vulnerable flora and fauna.

Please remember, wherever you explore, tread with respect and long-term conservation in mind. Let's be stewards *first*, and collectors, photographers and listers *second*.

Get to Know Your Community

I live in Reston and have been impressed and excited to find 40 species within its borders! I'm sure thorough searches by fellow dedicated dragonfly geeks in and around other Northern VA communities could find similar results. Leesburg, Vienna, McLean, Quantico, Dumfries – every town has its hidden watershed jewels and biodiversity reservoirs. Sometimes it's a wooded hillside and tiny stream system behind the local soccer field, maybe a protected natural area on the edge of your HOA with a marshy seep, or perhaps an unexplored swampy corner of some park or military base – see what secrets you can uncover.

Explore **your** neighborhood, and then start branching out to new sites. Repeated visits to the same park throughout the year are an excellent way to see different dragonfly species, and to get to know the site's plants and animals. Don't forget to take notes and photos to record your adventures and discoveries!



**Don't forget – acquire necessary permits
and property owner's permission if you plan on collecting.**

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**Be a good conservation steward –
practice environmentally responsible behavior.**

**A Few
Tips and Protocols for
Visiting Parks and other Protected Natural Areas:**

- ✓ **Ask for advice, programs, and volunteer opportunities** – Make a connection and get to know park staff! Ask them about their dragonfly populations, best areas to look, cool dragonfly programs they offer and any volunteer opportunities – maybe they need a dragonfly survey, or some great photos?
- ✓ **Conservation** – Try to use the park gently: be aware of environmentally sensitive areas, wildlife activity, dog leash and scooper laws, etc.
- ✓ **Neighbors and other park visitors** – Remember to share the trail, park in designated areas and be sensitive to programs, field trips and other park activities.
- ✓ **Trails and maps** – Get copies of the latest park maps
- ✓ **Permission** – Most parks don't allow collecting, so if you plan on doing so you'll need permission from whoever manages the park or protected natural area. Ask – they might not mind.



Best Dragonfly-watching Sites – three Viewing Categories:

- ❖ **Arrive and See** = Easy Access and Viewing for Groups and Families
Great for anyone, from die-hard dragonfly geeks to beginners, or families with young children. These sites are easily accessible and provide almost guaranteed close-up views of dragonflies, along with parking, bathrooms, trails and just a short walk from the car to the water.
- ❖ **Arrive, Explore and See** = Great for Exploring:
These sites are also great for families and group field trips, but may require slightly more walking and effort to find dragonflies. Facilities may not always be quite as accessible and complete as at the **Arrive and See** sites.
- ❖ **Arrive, Explore, Search and See** = Great for Patient Exploring:
Excellent dragonfly sites (some of the best in fact), but may require a time-investment and willingness to explore off-trail. Access, parking, bathrooms and trails may be absent or limited at some of these sites.



Loudoun County

Arrive and See:

- *Claude Moore Park*, http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Claude_Moore.htm

Arrive, Explore and See:

- *Bles Park*, http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Bles_Park.htm
- *Elizabeth Mills Riverfront Park*,
http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Elizabeth_Mills.html
- *Algonkian Regional Park*, http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Algonkian.htm
- *Kephart Bridge Landing*, http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Kephart.html
- *Philip A. Bolen Memorial Park*, <http://www.loudoun.gov/index.aspx?NID=1284>

Arrive, Explore, Search and See:

- *Banshee Reeks*, http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Banshee_Reeks.htm
- *Keep Loudoun Beautiful Park*, <http://www.visitloudoun.org/Experience-Loudoun/Recreation/Recreation-Attractions/Keep-Loudoun-Beautiful-Park>
- *Rust Sanctuary*, http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Rust_Sanctuary.htm
- *Phillips Farm*, http://www.loudounwildlife.org/Great_Places_Phillips_Farm.html
- *WO&D Bike Trail (Ashburn Rd to Hatcher Ave.)*, <http://www.wodfriends.org/map7.html>

Fairfax County:

Arrive and See:

- *Meadowlark Botanical Gardens*,
http://www.nvrpa.org/park/meadowlark_botanical_gardens
- *Huntley Meadows Park*, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/huntley/>
- *Jackson Miles Abbott Wetlands Refuge (Fort Belvoir)*,
<http://www.rundc.com/Doc/VA/Fairfax/JacksonMAbott.htm>
- *Ellanor C. Lawrence Park/Walney Pond*, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/ecl/>



Arrive, Explore and See:

- *Riverbend Park*, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/riverbend/>
- *Lake Fairfax Park*, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/lakefairfax/>
- *Lake Accotink Park*, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/lake-accotink/>
- *Runnymede Park*,
http://www.herndonva.gov/Content/Parks_rec/Parks_Trails/default.aspx
- *Walker Nature Center to Stewarts Bridge*,
<https://www.reston.org/ParksRecreationEvents/Nature/WalkerNatureEducationCenter/NatureHouse/>
- *Dyke Marsh*, <http://www.fodm.org/>
- *Occoquan Regional Park*, <http://www.nvrpa.org/park/occoquan/>
- *Bull Run Regional Park*, http://www.nvrpa.org/park/bull_run/
- *Willow Ponds Park* (located at the intersections of Stringfellow Rd., Willow Dr. and Lee Highway/Rt. 29)
- *South Run District Park to Lake Mercer*,
<http://www.rundc.com/Doc/VA/Fairfax/SouthRun.htm>
- *Eakin Park*, <http://www.rundc.com/Doc/VA/Fairfax/Eakin.htm>



Fairfax County, cont.:

Arrive, Explore, Search and See:

- *WO&D Trail (Hunter Mill Road to Vienna/Rt. 123),*
<http://www.wodfriends.org/map11.html>
- *Accotink Bay Wildlife Refuge (Fort Belvoir),*
<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/site.asp?trail=1&loop=CMN&site=CMN05>
- *Twin Branches Trail to Glade Stream Valley (WO&D Trail to Soapstone Drive),*
<http://www.reston.org/LinkClick.aspx?qenc=ShZJAGgkmlpNgsrVnrtSHw%2biRfXgKkBXaz5uYNuOTi4%3d&qenc=HzT9ACzZbNs%3d>
- *Sully Woodlands and Cub Run Stream Valley Park,*
http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/rec/wcrec/sully_gateway/wcrec-sully.htm and
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/maps/cubrunsv.pdf>
- *Mason Neck State Park,* http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/mas.shtml
- *Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge,* <http://www.fws.gov/masonneck/>
- *Hemlock Overlook Regional Park,* http://www.nvrpa.org/park/hemlock_overlook/
- *Meadowood Special Recreation Area,*
http://www.blm.gov/es/st/en/fo/lpfo_html/nature_at_meadowood.html or
<http://www.us-parks.com/blm/meadowood-special-recreation-area/meadowood-special-recreation-area.html>
- *Bull Run Marina Regional Park,* http://www.nvrpa.org/park/bull_run_marina/

Arlington County:

Arrive and See:

- *Long Branch Nature Center to Overlook of Sparrow Pond (mile marker 2.1 W&OD Trail),*
<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/parksrecreation/scripts/parks/LongBranch.asp>

Arrive, Explore and See:

- *Gulf Branch Nature Center to Potomac River,*
<http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/parksrecreation/scripts/parks/GulfBranch.aspx>
- *Cherry Valley Park (explore small pond and adjoining fields),*
<http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/parks/CherryValleyPark.aspx>
- *Barcroft Park (explore fields and wood-edge near stream),*
<http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/parks/BarcroftPark.aspx>
- *Theodore Roosevelt Island,* <http://www.nps.gov/this/index.htm>

Arrive, Explore, Search and See:

- *Pimmit Run (Richmond St. area to the Potomac River/Chain Bridge)*
- *Fort C. F. Smith Park,*
www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/ParksRecreation/scripts/parks/FortCFSmithPark.aspx



Prince William County:

Arrive and See:

- *Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge*, <http://www.fws.gov/occoquanbay/index.html> and <http://www.pwconserve.org/issues/conservation/obnwr/index.html>
- *Julie J. Metz Wetland Bank*, <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/site.asp?trail=1&loop=CPW&site=CPW03>

Arrive, Explore and See:

- *Silver Lake Regional Park*, <http://www.pwcparks.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Tb2kZDxaz5c%3d&tabid=59>
- *Catharpin Park*, <http://www.pwcparks.org/Portals/0/OpsDiv/PDF/Sud2%20copy.pdf>
- *Manassas National Battlefield Park*, <http://www.nps.gov/mana/index.htm>

Arrive, Explore, Search and See:

- *Prince William Forest Park*, <http://www.nps.gov/prwi/index.htm>
- *Merrimac Farm Wildlife Management Area*, <http://www.pwconserve.org/merrimacfarm/index.htm>
- *Chopawamsic Wildlife Viewing Area (Quantico Marine Base)*, <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/site.asp?trail=1&loop=CPW&site=CPW06>

