



SWALLOW FALLS, GARRETT COUNTY



KATHI FACHET

Few forests in Maryland can be characterized as old growth, meaning they survived the widespread cutting of trees that occurred in the eastern United States from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. Nestled within Swallow Falls State Park and hugging the Youghiogheny River is Maryland's oldest grove of eastern hemlock and white pine, some of which are reported to be at least 360 years old. A hike along the Canyon Loop trail leads visitors through these sentinels to the spectacular Muddy Creek Falls, a 53-foot cascade waterfall and the highest in Maryland.

In the summer of 1921, three men who changed our nation camped here beside Muddy Creek Falls. Calling themselves "the Vagabonds", Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Harvey Firestone found peace and solace in this natural sanctuary. Down the trail ahead, visitors will be treated to two other falls: the Lower and Upper Swallow Falls. Swallow Falls was named for the rock pillar that once housed hundreds of nesting cliff swallows. It is not clear as to why these social birds no longer nest there, but it is thought the swallows relocated their colony to an area with less human disturbance.

THE BASICS

- Facilities
- Entry Fee
- Marked Trails
- Visitor Center
- Information Boards

Flying Jewels

In May, hikers may be treated to the thin, high-pitched "zip-zip" or "teetsa" song of a male Blackburnian warbler staking out his territory. After the young have fledged, Blackburnians will gather with foraging flocks of chickadees, nuthatches, and kinglets in the mature evergreen forests. Even though cliff swallows may no longer be nesting at Swallow Falls Natural Area, visitors may spy another "swallow": the recently discovered Appalachian tiger swallowtail. This butterfly is found only in eastern mountainous regions and is much larger and paler than the eastern tiger swallowtail. An abundance of dragonflies patrol the Youghiogheny River, in their constant search for mosquitoes, flies and other small insect prey. Dragonfly seekers will likely see black-shouldered spinylegs and perhaps the rare sable clubtail (*Gomphus rogersi*).



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Blackburnian warbler



TERRY HIBBITTS

Sable clubtail



KEN THOMAS

An Appalachian tiger swallowtail sips minerals from a puddle.

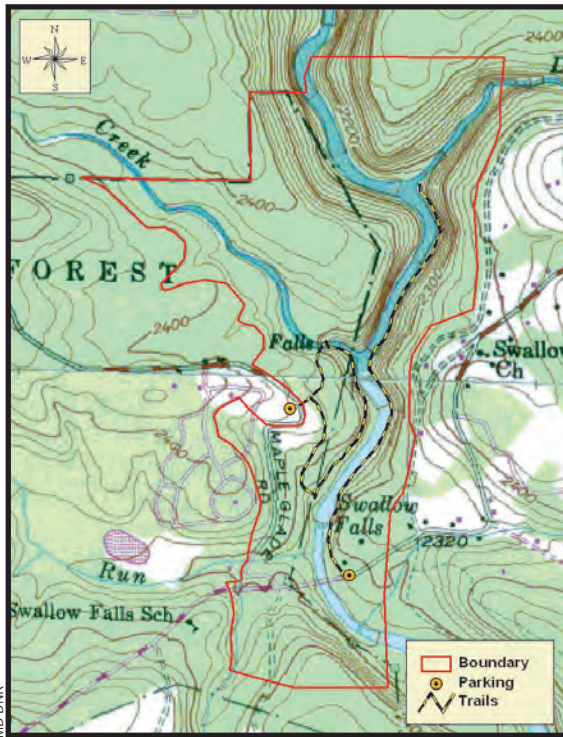


RICHARD ORR

A female black-shouldered spinyleg feeds on a moth after an active hunt.



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Directions

From Frederick: Take I-70 west to I-68 at Hancock. Continue on I-68 about 65 miles to Exit 14. Follow US 219 (Garrett Highway) south about 19 miles to Mayhew Inn Road (a few miles beyond Deep Creek Lake). Turn right and follow Mayhew Inn Road about 4.5 miles to its end at Oakland Sang Run Road. Turn left at the stop sign and continue 0.3 mile to the first right-hand turn. Bear right onto Swallow Falls Road and proceed 1.2 miles to Maple Glade Road. Turn right to the entrance for Swallow Falls State Park.

MD DNR

Swallow Falls Natural Area



WATCH OUT FOR!

- Mosquitoes
- Rushing Water
- Rugged Terrain
- Slippery, Wet Rocks



KEY ELEMENTS

- Waterfalls
- Sable Clubtail
- Blackburnian Warbler
- Cliff and Rock Outcrops
- Old Growth Eastern Hemlock Hardwood Forest

The Rarest of Rare Forests

Forests are generally considered "old growth" if they have not been logged or significantly disturbed by people since the 1700s. Of the 2.7 million acres of forest in Maryland, 2,000 acres are officially designated as old growth and 1.8% of that is hemlock forest. This park shelters the same precious 37 acres of hemlocks and white pines so loved as a camping spot by the Vagabonds. Not many old growth forests remain in the eastern U.S. and fewer still are as easily accessible to hikers. Though these trees escaped the

axe, they now face a tiny but deadly threat from the hemlock woolly adelgid, an Asian insect that literally sucks the life out of the tree by feeding on young twig tissue and its stored starches vital for growth. DNR efforts to save the 300 year old hemlocks began in May 2011 using predatory beetles similar to ladybugs, and soil and tree insecticide injections. Only time will tell if future vagabonds will find peace under the same treasured trees that once sheltered history.



CONTACT

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For more information:
<http://dnr.marylandgovs/publiclands/Pages/western/swallowfalls.aspx>



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A stand of the old growth eastern hemlock forest at Swallow Falls where the Vagabonds once camped.



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A sign at Swallow Falls informs visitors about the significance of old growth trees.