

# Niagara Falls State Park

*A gull and waterfowl Mecca—size: more than 400 acres  
A premier watchable wildlife site*



Lois Elling

Created in 1885, Niagara Falls State Park is the oldest state park in the United States. While visitors may be drawn here by the immense power and beauty of Niagara’s world famous cataracts, the park also boasts a surprising diversity of birdlife. The falls are a magnet for both tourists and huge flocks of gulls. Looking down from the edge of Niagara Gorge in autumn or winter, the air above the turbulent waters is at times white with wheeling and diving gulls.

Niagara’s waters provide the gulls with a smorgasbord of small fish, which become stunned by the churning water. With its steep-walled gorge, the river

corridor also protects the gulls from severe winter storms that sweep across the Great Lakes. The result is a “gull Mecca,” with 19 species seen here—more than half the varieties native to North America. Large flocks of waterfowl also come for the bounty of fish, and several species of songbirds and wading birds are seasonal visitors to the park’s shorelines as well.

Due to its importance for migrating birds, the Niagara River corridor was the first site named as a globally significant Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society in 1996. Forest and shrubland on the river’s shore are home to a variety of mammals, as well as birds.



ring-billed gull

Joe LeFevre

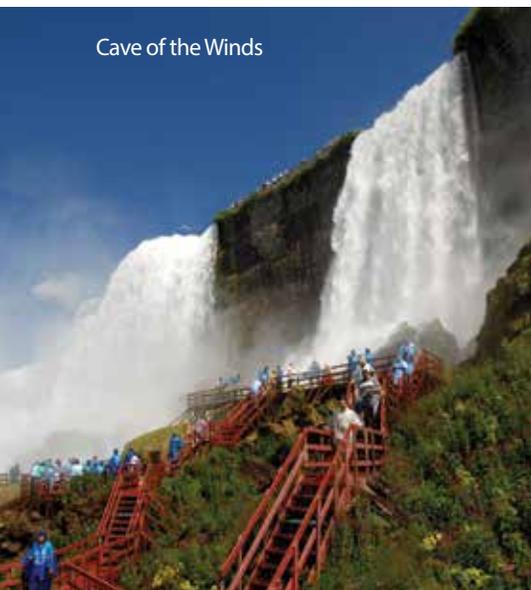
Common mergansers, female (left) and male (right).



## Wildlife to Watch

Bonaparte's, herring and ring-billed gulls arrive in the fall and stay through winter. In summer, a ring-billed gull breeding colony in the Cave of the Winds area is perhaps one of the largest in the region. Other gulls migrate to the falls from the far corners of North America and beyond. Glaucous, Thayer's, Iceland and Sabine's gulls fly in from the arctic; great black-backed gulls, laughing gulls and black-legged kittiwakes come from the east coast; California and Franklin's gulls arrive from the prairies and points

Cave of the Winds



farther west; and black-headed gulls migrate from Europe and the Canadian Maritimes. This past fall, sightings of a brown booby, a tropical species usually seen only off Mexico and Central America, created quite a stir among birdwatchers.

Globally significant populations of waterfowl, such as canvasbacks, common mergansers, common goldeneyes and other diving ducks, can also be seen here each winter.

While winter hosts the most spectacular bird gatherings in the park, spring and fall are excellent times to see many varieties of migrating warblers, including yellow, chestnut-sided, black-throated blue and black-throated green, Tennessee, Nashville, Kentucky, Cape May and blackburnian, among many others.

During spring and summer, visitors may see double-crested cormorants and wading birds like black-crowned night herons, green herons and great blue herons. Squirrel species are the predominant mammals seen in the park, including the familiar eastern chipmunk, gray squirrel (also in black and blonde phases), red squirrel, and the large fox squirrel (at the eastern edge of its range).



gray squirrel, black phase



## Site Features

**Site Notes:** The park and visitors center is open year-round, seven days a week. There is a vehicle entrance fee. Contact the park for hours and fees for other activities.

**Trails:** The park has a wide variety of attractions and amenities from which to choose. Roadway and pedestrian bridges connect the U.S. shore to Goat Island between the American and Horseshoe falls. Walking paths with scenic overlooks above the falls hug the shore. Interpretive signs describe the history and geology of the area, as well as plant and animal life found there.

A bridge connects to an observation tower with an elevator which provides a close-up view of the full length of the falls. Or you can follow the bridge down to the popular Maid of the Mist boats to view the falls from the river below. Stairways connect to the Crow's Nest and Cave of the Winds vantage points on both sides of the American Falls at the bottom of the gorge. Maid of the Mist and Cave of the Winds are open from early spring through mid-fall. Visit their websites at [www.maidofthemist.com](http://www.maidofthemist.com) and [www.niagarafallslive.com/cave\\_of\\_the\\_winds.htm](http://www.niagarafallslive.com/cave_of_the_winds.htm) for specific dates, as well as ticket prices.

**Accessibility:** This site has limited accessible features.

**Directions:** For directions and other information, visit [www.parks.ny.gov/parks/46](http://www.parks.ny.gov/parks/46) or call 716-278-1796

