

Seton Falls Park is a 35-acre wetland, woodland, and bird sanctuary located in the Bronx neighborhood of Eastchester at East 233rd Street and Baychester Avenue. It is immediately surrounded by schools and high-density and low-density housing. (The ratio of children to parkland for this neighborhood is 3,061 per park/playground).

It derives its name from the prominent waterfalls built in the park by the Seton family in the 19th century. The Park was formerly the family estate called "The Cedars" for the many red cedars on the land. It was later transformed into a working farm with two ponds. Rattlesnake Creek was encased in a masonry trough inside the estate and formed a waterfall that gives its name to the present-day park. The creek was named after the abundant rattlesnakes that were once found in the area.

The site was widely used for recreation in the early 1900s, although it was not officially a park. On June 10, 1914 the city acquired thirty-two acres of the former Seton estate for the Department of Health to build a hospital for contagious diseases. Twenty-nine acres of this parcel were assigned to Parks on June 11, 1930, following fifteen years of community resistance to the hospital plan. The remaining three acres were annexed in 1932. Additional lands were assigned to Parks in 1983 and 1985.

The western portion of the park has been preserved by New York City Department of Parks & Recreation as mature forest, mostly undisturbed since the time of the American Revolution. Floodplain forest dominated by silver and red maple, and pin oak trees is present along Rattlesnake Creek. Other

habitat systems are cattail marsh and sedge meadow, both are at the bottom of a sheer, rocky ravine. Floodplain forest grows on mineral soils in the lowlands of the stream floodplain. This area is characterized by its flood regime: low elevation areas are annually flooded in spring, whereas higher areas are flooded irregularly.

Above the high, water-carved banks, which hint at the creek's original force, oak-hickory and successional forests are dominant. Oak-hickory forests of red and white oaks, American beech and bitternut hickory occur on well-drained sites, often on ridge tops, upper slopes, or south and west facing slopes. The soils are usually loams (mixtures of clay, sand, silt and organic matter). Successional forests grow on sites that have been disturbed, often by arson.

These areas have fewer trees and little groundcover. Black locust and black cherry have colonized recently disturbed areas, particularly along the parks borders.

The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) annually makes a long and perilous journey thousands of miles south to escape the harsh winters of North America. In September/October, this butterfly can often be seen on the lawn area adjacent to the pumping station in Seton Falls Park.

For additional information on Seton Falls Park: www.nyc.gov/parks. Click on Your Park/Historical Signs and type in Seton Falls.

Text by Marielle Anzelone, Natural Resources Group, NYC Dept. of Parks & Recreation.



Seton Falls Park suffers from vandalism and abuse, but still boasts a vital forest. Photo courtesy of Natural Resources Group, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation.

Metro Forest Council

P.O. Box 365, New Rochelle, New York 10804-0365
203-365-7577 ♦ info@metroforestcouncil.org

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