In spring, thousands of azaleas bloom under moss-draped oaks of Avery Island's Jungle Gardens, about 30 minutes past New Iberia.

"The most interesting places in the gardens are the ones where you stop to see the alligators."

- Cindy Louviere, manager of Jungle Gardens

A cattle egret feeds its young in the bird sanctuary on Avery Island.

**At Eden’s gate**

**Family & Relationships**

**Story by Judy Stanford**

Jungle Gardens comprises about 250 acres of greenery that is home to all sorts of native animal species, from rabbits and squirrels to wild turkeys and black bears. And of course, there is the ever-present almost-native import - nutrias.

Visitors may tour the island attraction by car. "The most interesting places in the gardens are the ones where you stop to see the alligators," said Cindy Louviere, manager of Jungle Gardens.

For those who prefer a walking tour, miles of footpaths wind around the gardens. While you’re there, check out the bird sanctuary established in 1895 by Edward McIlhenny, known locally as "M'sieur Ned," years before he founded the Jungle Gardens. In a time when the snowy egret was being hunted almost to extinction for its plumage, McIlhenny captured and raised eight wild egrets. When they reached maturity, he let them fly. They returned the next spring and since then, thousands of egrets and herons have claimed the island rookery known as "Bird-City." Each spring.

"We have a lookout tower where you can see birds nesting," Louviere said. "You can see American egrets, cattle egrets and snowy egrets.

The island is green year-round, but from November to March, it comes alive with the color of thousands of azaleas and camellias. Six hundred camellia varieties are represented, including some from Japan and France and some developed by McIlhenny himself.

Another attraction is an 800-year-old statue of Buddha overlooking a lagoon. The Buddha was a gift to Edward McIlhenny in 1936.

Submit your lunch or pick up a couple of sandwiches on the premises and stop where you'd like along the trail to take in the sights close-up.

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**What:**

**Jungle Gardens**

- When: 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., seven days a week
- Cost: Free
- For Information: Call 369-6243

**Tabasco Factory**

- When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., seven days a week
- Cost: Free
- For Information: Call 365-8173