



Audubon IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

Barrier Island/Lagoon System

Northampton and Accomack Counties

Total Size: 105,249 ha (259,965 acres)

Elevation: 0 – 15 m (0 – 49 ft)



IBA Criteria Met

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Season</i>	<i>Source</i>
Species at Risk	Wilson's Plover	24 pairs in 2005; 100% of VA population	Breeding	Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Surveys
Species at Risk	Piping Plover	151 pairs in 2005; 100% of VA population	Breeding	Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Surveys
Species at Risk	Least Tern	703 pairs in 2003; 83% of VA population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Gull-billed Tern	304 pairs in 2003; 95% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Royal Tern	2058 pairs in 2003; 72% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Common Tern	843 pairs in 2003; 45% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Forster's Tern	1521 pairs in 2003; 61% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Black Skimmer	1679 pairs in 2003	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	American Oystercatcher	525 pairs in 2003; 90% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Wilke et al., breeding season status assessment
Species at Risk	Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow	110 individuals; population likely in the thousands	Winter	1. Christmas Bird Counts 2. estimate based on extent of habitat

Species at Risk	Little Blue Heron	249 pairs in 2003; 80% of VA population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Tricolored Heron	456 pairs in 2003; 90% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Black-crowned Night Heron	590 pairs in 2003; 92% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	American Black Duck	10 pairs in 2003; 20 pairs in 2005	Breeding	1. Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Black Duck Surveys 2. B. Arquilla - Black Duck productivity study
Species at Risk	Glossy Ibis	669 pairs in 2003; 82% of VA breeding population	Breeding	Center for Conservation Biology Colonial Waterbird Survey
Species at Risk	Brant	17,000 individuals in 2004	Winter	USFWS Waterfowl Surveys
Species at Risk	Marbled Godwit	71 individuals in 2001	Winter	Christmas Bird Counts
Species at Risk	Red Knot	9,356 individuals in 2005; 30% of migratory population	Migration	Watts and Truitt - Barrier Island Surveys
Species at Risk	Short-billed Dowitcher	46,000 individuals in 1995	Migration	Watts and Truitt - Migrant Shorebird Surveys
Species at Risk	Seaside Sparrow	122,000 pairs	Breeding	projection based on density estimate and extent of habitat
Species at Risk	Whimbrel	40,000 individuals in 1995; virtually 100% of migrating population along Atlantic coast	Migration	Watts and Truitt - Migrant Shorebird Surveys
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Barrier Island/Beach	Wilson's Plover, Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, Black Skimmer, Common Tern	Breeds	Breeding	references above
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Coastal Marsh	American Black Duck, Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow	Breeds	Breeding	references above

Congregations - colonial waterbirds	mixed-species flocks	Significant breeding and wintering area for several colonial waterbird species	Breeding/ Winter	references above
Congregations - shorebirds	mixed-species flocks	Significant staging area for Red Knot, Short-billed Dowitcher, and Whimbrel	Migration	references above
Congregations – migrant landbirds	mixed-species	Significant migration funneling point for multiple raptor and passerine species	Migration	references above

Description

The Virginia Barrier Island Lagoon System includes the seaward margin of the lower Delmarva Peninsula from the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay to the Maryland-Virginia border. This location is the most important bird area in Virginia and one of the most important bird areas along the Atlantic Coast of North America. The area has been designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Site with international status, is the site of a National Science Foundation Long-term Ecological Research site, and is the focus of a multi-organizational partnership dedicated to bird conservation. The area includes the most pristine chain of barrier islands along the Atlantic Coast, maritime forests, extensive salt marshes, inter-tidal mudflats, and open water.

Conservation and Management Units

A significant portion of the Virginia Barrier Island/Lagoon System is owned and protected to meet conservation objectives. Most of the habitat contained within the 14 barrier islands is owned by the Nature Conservancy (Virginia Coast Reserve), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Chincoteague NWR, Fisherman Island NWR), NASA (Wallops Island), and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Natural Heritage (Wreck Island Natural Area Preserve) with relatively few private inholdings. Much of the extensive tidal marsh within the site is owned by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR), and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (Mockhorn Island Wildlife Management Area). Indiantown Recreation Park, owned by Northampton County, manages a small park on the southern tip of the IBA.



Royal Terns

Photo by Deniz Aygen

Birds

This IBA supports the highest diversity and density of birds of conservation concern within Virginia. It supports significant populations of multiple sensitive bird species throughout the

year as well as significant Responsibility Species Assemblages for Barrier Island/Beach and Coastal Marsh bird communities. Several beach-nesting species such as the Piping Plover, Wilson’s Plover, American Oystercatcher, Gull-billed Tern, Least Tern, and Black Skimmer that are of high regional or national concern nest exclusively or nearly so within this system. The area supports the most significant breeding populations in the state of waders such as the Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Snowy Egret, Glossy Ibis, and Black-crowned Night Heron. Marsh-nesting species such as the Forster’s Tern, Seaside Sparrow, and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow also have their center of abundance here. During migration, the area is of international significance as a stopover area for Whimbrel, Short-billed Dowitcher, and Red Knot. In addition, the area supports significant wintering populations of Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Atlantic Brant, and Dunlin. Other at-risk species supported on the site below threshold levels include the Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Bald Eagle, and Northern Harrier.

Conservation and Threats

Four primary threats are currently of concern including predator impacts on nesting species, loss of habitat to invasion by Phragmites, human disturbance during the nesting season, and loss of habitat to sea level rise. Colonization of most islands by raccoon and red fox are believed to be at least partially responsible for documented population declines and low reproductive rates for some species. Current research and management programs are addressing this threat. Predation by Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls are also of concern, as is predation by introduced populations of Peregrine Falcons. Phragmites has spread rapidly throughout this system and is displacing several critical habitats. Strategic research and management is beginning to address this threat though the eventual outcome is uncertain. The increase in human visitation to portions of this system during the breeding season is an ongoing concern. Management activities and ongoing educational programs are designed to reduce this impact. As in many coastal systems, the loss of habitat to sea-level rise is a long-term concern.

Barrier Island/Lagoon System Detail Map

