



Birding Hotspot Fact Sheet

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge

LOCATION: 14013 Dawson Beach Road, Woodbridge, Virginia 22191

DIRECTIONS: From Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., take I-95 south to (left) Exit 161 (Woodbridge). Travel south about one mile on Route 1 and turn left on Dawson Beach Road, and the refuge entrance is .7 of a mile. From Western Fairfax County, take the Fairfax County Parkway (Route 7100) to the exit for Route 123 (Ox Road) South. Follow Route 123 to U.S. Route 1. Turn right and take Route 1 to the intersection with Dawson Beach Road and follow the directions as noted above. From northbound I-95, take Exit 160, and follow Route 123 South to U.S. Route 1. Turn right and take Route 1 to Dawson Beach Road and the refuge as noted above.

ACREAGE: 643 acres

HISTORY: The land was most recently a U.S. Army installation. After the Army closed the site in 1994, it was acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and became part of the national wildlife refuge system in 1998. Members of the Fairfax Audubon Society (FAS) led the effort that resulted in the land being transferred to the USFWS.

ECOSYSTEM TYPE, HABITATS, & ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE: This site is unique for its diversity of habitats. Situated on the Occoquan and Potomac Rivers with terrain varying from shoreline and tidal marshes to upland meadows and hardwoods it contains at least twenty distinct vegetative habitats including one of the last, large undeveloped grassland areas in Northern Virginia. This diversity affords places for food, rest, and nesting for numerous resident and migrant bird species, other wildlife, and has hosted 70 species of butterflies and nearly 50 species of dragonflies and damselflies.

BIRDS AND BIRDWATCHING: The refuge has a fine network of marked roads and trails offering plentiful opportunities to view wildlife throughout the year. More than 230 bird species have been recorded here. Depending on the season, the meadows and edges host a great variety of sparrows as well as Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Eastern Meadowlark, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Towhee, Blue Grosbeak, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel. Great Horned and Barred Owls nest in the woods. Wetlands and open water offer terns, gulls, egrets, herons, and many waterfowl species including Gadwall, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Scaup, Bufflehead, three Merganser species (Hooded, Common, Red-breasted), plus nesting Wood Ducks. Raptors are particularly conspicuous during the winter. Bald Eagles may be seen throughout the year. Numbers and species swell dramatically during migration. This is a particularly good place for transient and nesting flycatchers and warblers, e.g., Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Parula, Yellow, and Prothonotary Warbler. A map

of the refuge, available at the gate, shows currently open trails and roads. A 1.5-mile driving route from the main parking lot to an exit gate is limited to automobiles and bicycles with no parking or getting out of vehicles. There are frequent bird walks and other activities at the refuge, including counts and observing bird banding. Please check the FAS Web site (www.fairfaxaudubon.org) or contact the FAS office (703) 256-6895 (office hours are 8-4 M-F) for information about walks, etc. Occoquan NWR is part of the Potomac River NWR Complex which includes nearby Mason Neck NWR. It is also near LEESYLVANIA STATE PARK and the JULIE J. METZ WETLANDS BANK (separate Fact Sheets).

CONSERVATION CHALLENGES: Infrastructure and conservation related development continues at this refuge. While this work continues, some of the refuge is closed to the public

CONSERVATION WORK AT THE SITE: Fairfax Audubon Society, in cooperation with refuge staff and the Girl Scouts Council of the National Capital, has been involved in various types of conservation work at the refuge, including erosion control projects, tree planting, trash pick-up, and invasive plant removal.

CONTACT INFORMATION: For more information, contact the refuge at (703) 490-4979 or write them at Occoquan Bay NWR, 14344 Jefferson Davis Highway, Woodbridge, VA 22191.

FEES AND HOURS OF OPERATION: The refuge is open to the public, without charge, Thursday-Sunday. Summer hours (April-September) are 7 A.M.-7 P.M. and winter hours (October-March) are 7 A.M.-5 P.M. The refuge is closed Christmas Day and in poor weather. At some point in the future this might become a U.S. fee area.

FACILITIES: There is a small visitor center just outside the refuge entrance gate with irregular hours of operation. There is ample parking in the center of the refuge, and porta-john type restrooms are located there and at various places along the trails. Bring your own water and snacks. Food and fuel are available along Route 1 and in the Town of Occoquan.