



ASN Birding Hotspot Fact Sheet

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge

LOCATION: 13950 Dawson Beach Road, Woodbridge, Virginia 22191

DIRECTIONS: From Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., take I-95 South to (left hand) Exit 161 (Woodbridge), then on Route 1 to a left turn at the light onto Dawson Beach Road, and follow the road about 0.7 of a mile to the refuge entrance. Alternatively, from 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. Follow the directions as noted above to the refuge. From northbound I-95, take Exit 160, and follow Route 123 South to U.S. Route 1. Turn right and take Route 1 to at left turn at the light onto Dawson Beach Road and the refuge as noted above.

ACREAGE: 643 acres

HISTORY: The land was most recently a U.S. Army installation that closed in 1994. In 1998, it was acquired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and became part of the national wildlife refuge system. Members of the Fairfax Audubon Society (FAS), now the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (ASN), 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 63 species of butterflies and over 60 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. Fully 240 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,

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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 opportunities to observe bird banding. Please check the ASNV Web site (www.audubonva.org) or contact the ASNV office (703) 256-6895 for information about walks, etc. Occoquan NWR is part of the Potomac River NWR Complex which includes nearby Elizabeth Hartwell-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.

CONSERVATION WORK AT THE SITE: The USFWS is responsible for conservation work at the site. This includes "...mowing and burning to maintain the grasslands, reduce woody vegetation, combat invasive species, and to reduce ground litter".

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: A daily fee of \$2 is charged. In lieu of that, the Federal Duck Stamp or Interagency Pass is accepted. The refuge is open daily 7 A.M.-5 P.M., Oct.-Mar. and 7 A.M.-7 P.M., April-October. The refuge is closed Christmas Day.

FACILITIES: There is ample parking in the center of the refuge. Toilets are located there and at various places on the refuge. Bring your own water and snacks. Food and fuel are available along Route 1 and in the Town of Occoquan.