



ASNV Birding Hotspot Fact Sheet

SKY MEADOWS STATE PARK

LOCATION: 11012 Edmonds Lane, Delaplane, Virginia 20144. Sky Meadows State Park is in Fauquier County, Virginia.

DIRECTIONS: From Northern Virginia, and the Washington, D.C. area, take Interstate 66 to Exit 23 (Route 17 North) and north seven miles to the park entrance on the left at State Route 710 (SR 710). Or, take U.S. Route 50 west to U.S. Route 17 South, then about two miles to the park entrance road (SR 710) on the right. It is about one mile to the Contact Station.

ACREAGE: The main park covers 1380 acres. The park includes an additional 486-acre equestrian area referred to by bird watchers as the Bridle Path area. The entrance to that facility is just north of the main park entrance on the east side of Route 17.

HISTORY: Philanthropist Paul Mellon donated the original 1132 acres for the park to the state in 1975. The land had been primarily farmland since Captain James Ball first purchased it from Lord Fairfax in 1713. The park opened to the public in 1983. Additional acreage to provide a corridor for the Appalachian Trail was added in 1987. In 1988 Mr. Mellon donated an additional 486 that became the Mountain Bridle Trail Area. The name Sky Meadows comes from former owner Robert Hadow, who named the property "Skye Farm" after the Isle of Skye in Scotland. Sky Meadows is now a part of the Virginia State Park system under the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

ECOSYSTEM TYPE, HABITATS, & ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE: The park is just south of Ashby Gap. U.S. Highway 50 traverses the Gap across the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Shenandoah Valley. The park is on the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge. It is open land and mixed hardwood forest that supports a wide variety of resident and migratory bird and animal life.

BIRDS AND BIRDWATCHING: Sky Meadows is a year-round bird watching site. It is known for a colony of Red-headed Woodpeckers that live in an Oak grove just past the Contact Station. Depending on the time of the year, it is almost certain that this and the other six species of Woodpeckers - Downy,

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Hairy, Red-bellied, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated, and Northern Flicker - commonly found in this part of Virginia will be present. American Bald Eagles are regular winter residents and are often seen at other times of the year. American Kestrel, Eastern Phoebe, Vesper, Fox, and White-throated Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Kingbird, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebird, and the occasional Wild Turkey can be found in the park. Warbler species are plentiful during spring and fall migration. Be on the look out for Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Worm Eating, Ovenbird, and Common Yellowthroat. During fall migration, birdwatchers often combine a visit to the park with one to the SNICKERS GAP Hawk Watch (a separate Fact Sheet) or vice versa. There is an extensive trail network in the main park that also includes a section of the Appalachian Trail. Birdwatchers usually have very good luck birding the Bridle Path area and the shorter of the two bridle trails. Periodically, the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia (ASNV) sponsors bird walks in the park. Please check the ASNV Web site (www.audubonva.org) or contact the ASNV office (703) 256-6895 for information about scheduled walks.

CONSERVATION CHALLENGES: Happily, there do not appear to be any immediate conservation challenges. This part of Virginia is still primarily agricultural, and any land re-development is presently restricted to larger lot sizes. Sometimes the state's support for the park system is affected by budget constraints within the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

CONSERVATION WORK AT THE SITE: Habitat stewardship and conservation activities at the park are the responsibility of DCR.

CONTACT INFORMATION: The park office telephone number is (540) 592-3556. Additional information about the park can be found at (<http://www.dcr.state.va.us/parks/index.htm>) and click on park locations.

FEES AND HOURS OF OPERATION: The daily entrance fee is \$3 per car weekdays and \$4 weekends. An annual pass is available for purchase. The park is open seven days a week from 8 A.M. until dusk.

FACILITIES: The Park has a visitor center and small gift shop with seasonal hours, restrooms, ample parking, a picnic area, a 12-site hike-in primitive campsite, and a primitive group campsite. The latter two are by reservation. Call 1-800-933-PARK for campsite reservations.