



Audubon MARYLAND-DC

Important Bird Areas Program

Bird Blitz 2010: Saltmarsh IBAs

Salt marsh habitat is globally rare with only 45,000 km² worldwide, 12% of which is found along the U.S. Atlantic Coast. Maryland supports some of the largest and most diverse salt marsh ecosystems in the world, and most of these are found within 3 saltmarsh IBAs on the eastern shore: Maryland Coastal Bays, Somerset-Wicomico Marshes, and Southern Dorchester County. Salt marsh wetlands are critical for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds, and are home to unique plants and animals, including the Saltmarsh Sparrow, which evolved in this tidal environment and is endemic to coastal wetlands of the Atlantic coast. Last year, in 2009, surveys were conducted at Southern Dorchester County IBA and Somerset-Wicomico Marshes IBA (with counts of 24 and 49 Saltmarsh Sparrow, respectively), in order to assess whether these sites qualify as Global IBAs for significant populations of the globally vulnerable (Audubon Watchlist, Category Red) Saltmarsh Sparrow. In 2010, additional surveys were conducted at these two sites and Maryland Coastal Bays IBA to obtain more population data for Saltmarsh Sparrow. Across all three IBAs, four volunteers and one Audubon staff member conducted 9 surveys covering more than 12 km of transects during about 22 survey hours (Table 1).

The results of these surveys are summarized below in Table 2. Remember that Bird Blitz survey totals represent minimum population estimates of breeding pairs. Actual populations are higher because not all available habitat was covered and because some birds along a route may not be counted (if they were silent and/or hidden while observers passed by). Counts of Saltmarsh Sparrow were surprisingly low across all three IBAs this year. Due to the importance of the lunar cycle and tides to the species' breeding cycle, the timing of these surveys may be the reason for such low survey totals. These results may also be an indication of how patchily distributed Saltmarsh Sparrow may be at these sites and in Maryland. Although these counts fall below the global IBA threshold (30 individuals) for Saltmarsh Sparrow, there is still an indication, when combined with 2009 data, that globally significant populations are supported at the Southern Dorchester County and Somerset-Wicomico Marshes IBAs.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who conducted Bird Blitz surveys at saltmarsh IBAs this year: Rebecca Lazarus, Henry Armistead, Becky Kern, and Sarah Warner. These data will be useful in the assessment of these IBAs as potential Global IBAs for Saltmarsh Sparrow.

Table 1. Bird Blitz 2010 survey effort targeting Saltmarsh Sparrow in saltmarsh IBAs.

IBA	Participants	Surveys	Distance (km)	Time (hr)
Maryland Coastal Bays	1	3	1.2	1.3
Somerset-Wicomico Marshes	2	4	6.6	13.5
Southern Dorchester County	2	2	4.4	7.3
Total	5	9	12.2	22.1

Table 2. Bird Blitz 2010 survey results for Saltmarsh Sparrow in saltmarsh IBAs.

IBA	At-risk Species	Total	Assemblage
Maryland Coastal Bays	Saltmarsh Sparrow	1	Salt Marsh
Somerset-Wicomico Marshes	Saltmarsh Sparrow	2	Salt Marsh
Southern Dorchester County	Saltmarsh Sparrow	4	Salt Marsh

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