

Important Bird Areas Program

Bird Blitz 2009: Somerset-Wicomico Marshes IBA

The Somerset-Wicomico Marshes IBA extends along the Chesapeake Bay shore from near the Virginia line at Pocomoke Sound north to the town of Nanticoke, and includes all salt marsh within Somerset and Wicomico Counties. These marshes, along with the vast marshes of neighboring Southern Dorchester County IBA, constitute one of the largest complexes of salt marsh on the Atlantic coast of North America. In order to assess the possibility of this area qualifying as a globally significant site for its population of the globally vulnerable Saltmarsh Sparrow, Audubon staff and 2 volunteers conducted two surveys at the Irish Grove Sanctuary, owned by the Maryland Ornithological Society, covering 3km of transects during 5 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). There were 7 at-risk species recorded, including a count of 49 Saltmarsh Sparrow. This exceeds this species' global IBA threshold of 10 pairs or 30 individuals and indicates a globally significant population.

Many thanks to Greg Butcher and Linda Fuller who volunteered their time to conduct Bird Blitz surveys at this site. These data will assist in the review of this IBA for global status.

Table 1. Bird Blitz 2009 survey effort for Somerset-Wicomico Marshes IBA.

Participants	Surveys	Distance (km)	Time (hr)
3	2	3	5

Table 17. Bird Blitz 2009 survey results for Somerset-Wicomico Marshes IBA.

At-risk Species¹	Total	Assemblage
American Black Duck	39	Salt Marsh
Bald Eagle	3	--
Northern Harrier	5	Salt Marsh
Clapper Rail	13	Salt Marsh
Saltmarsh Sparrow	49	Salt Marsh
Seaside Sparrow	144	Salt Marsh
Swamp Sparrow	2	Salt Marsh
(Coastal Plain ssp. <i>nigrescens</i>)		
Secondary Target Species	Total	Assemblage
Virginia Rail	6	Salt Marsh
Willet	18	Salt Marsh
Marsh Wren	28	Salt Marsh
Eastern Meadowlark	4	Grassland

¹Species highlighted in red had counts which indicate globally significant populations exceeding Global IBA thresholds

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