

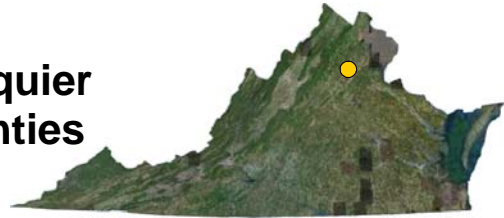


Culpeper Basin

Loudoun, Fairfax, Prince William, Fauquier
Culpeper, Orange and Albemarle Counties

Total Size: 131,355 ha (324,585 acres)

Elevation: 52 - 141 m (171 – 463 ft)



IBA Criteria Met

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Season</i>	<i>Source</i>
Species at Risk	Northern Bobwhite	24 individuals in 2007. Population almost certainly exceeds threshold	Year-round	IBA breeding bird surveys
Species at Risk	Barn Owl	At least 40 breeding pairs in 2002	Breeding	D. Ober and M. Causey nest box data
Species at Risk	Upland Sandpiper	1. 1 suspected regular breeding pair 2. At least 10 migrating individuals	1. Breeding 2. Migration	Virginia Bird listserv archives
Species at Risk	Northern Harrier	At least 6 adults in 2005	Wintering	Christmas Bird Count data
Species at Risk	Loggerhead Shrike	At least 5 adults in 2000	Year-round	1. Christmas Bird Counts 2. Virginia Bird listserv archives
Species at Risk	Henslow's Sparrow	1. 1 breeding pair in 2005 2. 1 singing male in 2004	Breeding	1. National Park Service Surveys - Manassas National Battlefield Park 2. Virginia Bird listserv archives
Species at Risk	Grasshopper Sparrow	66 males in 2007. Population likely in the thousands.	Breeding	IBA breeding bird surveys
Species at Risk	Field Sparrow	At least 120 males in 2001. Population likely in the thousands.	Breeding	1. USGS Breeding Bird Survey data 2. Audubon Society of Northern Virginia bird surveys - Manassas National Battlefield Park

Species at Risk	Prairie Warbler	At least 61 breeding pairs in 2001. Population very likely to exceed threshold	Breeding	Audubon Society of Northern Virginia bird surveys - Manassas National Battlefield Park
Species at Risk	Eastern Meadowlark	At least 202 in 2007. Population likely in the thousands	Year-round	Virginia IBA breeding bird surveys
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Grassland	Northern Bobwhite, Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark	Breeds	Breeding	References above
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Shrub	Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Kingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Field Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Indigo Bunting	Breeds	Breeding	References above

Description

The Culpeper Basin IBA occupies the southern portion of a flat, low-lying trough depression that extends from the northern Piedmont in eastern Loudoun County, southwest to a narrow terminus in Orange and Albemarle counties. Geologically and ecologically unique, the IBA contains over 300,000 acres of an ancient Triassic depression that formed over 200 million years ago as the present day North American continent pulled away from Africa. Unique soils originate from ancient volcanic activity and subsequent sedimentary soils that washed down from the Appalachians. These soils now support rare vegetative communities, including prairie-like grasses and shrubs, not commonly found elsewhere in the Piedmont. Although historically the area was likely forested in hardwoods, centuries of human disturbance such as logging, clearing, and burning have transformed the large, fertile Basin into a mosaic of farms, fields, and secondary woodlots. The combination of rare plant communities and the agricultural character of the land make the Culpeper Basin IBA a modern-day stronghold for grass and shrubland birds – many of them not commonly found elsewhere in Virginia.

Conservation and Management Units

Very little of the IBA is held in conservation ownership. The largest conservation landholder is the National Park Service, which owns and manages Manassas National Battlefield Park in the northern portion of the IBA. Other landowners include the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (Weston and C.F. Phelps Wildlife

Management Areas), the Virginia Department of Forestry (Conway Robinson Memorial State Forest), the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (Brandy Station), the U.S. Navy (Quantico Marine Corps Base), and the Prince William, Fairfax, and Fauquier County Park Authorities (several county parks). In addition, a number of private landowners have protected their property through conservation easements.

Birds

Several rare grass and shrubland bird species are regularly found within the Culpeper Basin IBA. In particular, this region is one of the Virginia strongholds for the Barn Owl, the population being partially supported by an active nest box program. At least 40 simultaneous nests have been active in boxes erected throughout the basin. Other common species throughout the IBA include the Field Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Prairie Warbler, and Northern Bobwhite. Loggerhead Shrikes are uncommon but regularly reported breeding and wintering throughout the basin. The only known and reliable Upland Sandpiper breeding location occurs near Remington Farms, where this species has also been observed in groups of up to 10 birds during migration. Both a singing male and a confirmed pair of the rare Henslow's Sparrow have been recorded in the breeding season in recent years. Short-eared Owls are regular winter residents and are found locally in groups of 2-10 individuals. Very little systematic bird data are available for this region and much research remains to be done.



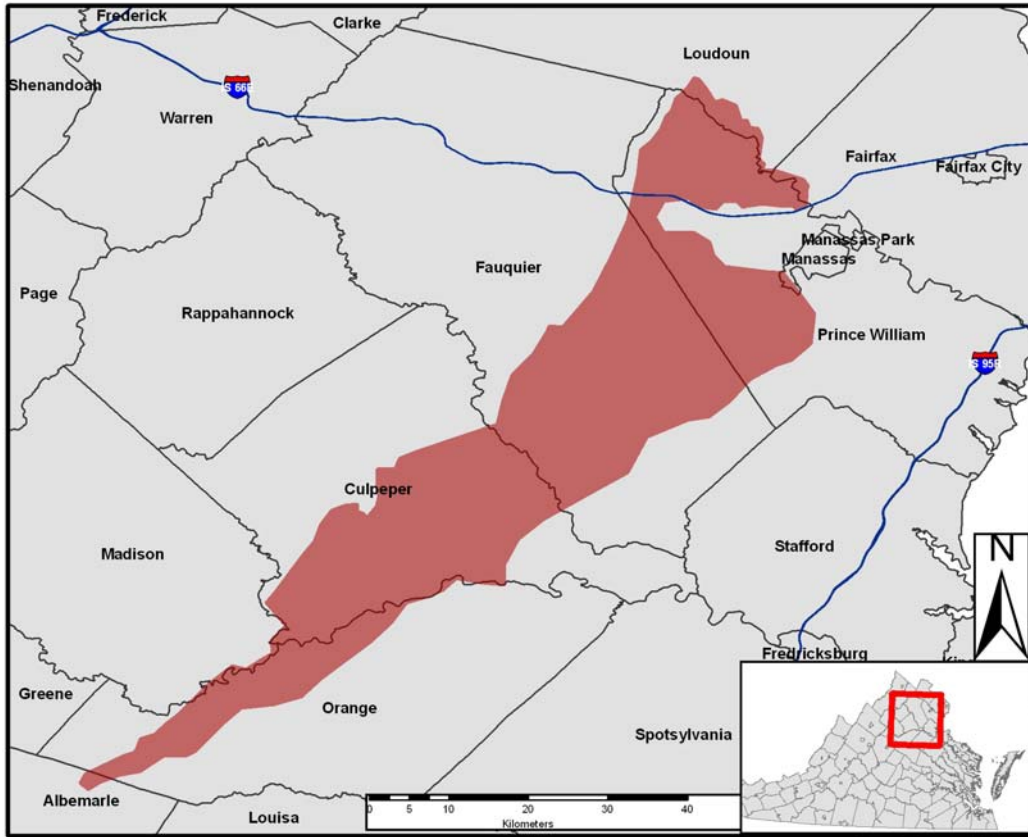
Barn Owl

Photo by Jerry Liguori

Conservation and Threats

Despite its tremendous value to Virginia's grassland bird species, only 3% of the the Culpeper Basin IBA is formally protected, the least of any IBA. Due to its close proximity to the rapidly suburbanizing areas along the I-95 and I-66 corridors, the greatest threats to the IBA are due to the widespread expansion of urban areas. Such development is placing enormous pressure on once rural farmland, changing both the rural character and natural value of the landscape for birds. Additionally, changes in farming practices that lead to more frequent mowing, larger fields with 'cleaner' field edges, the loss of large fallow fields and old farm structures that Barn Owls use to nest and hunt, and greater use of pesticides are also significant threats to birds within the IBA. Ensuring the future of these vulnerable species will depend on the involvement of local communities, farmers, landowners, and local decision makers.

Culpeper Basin IBA Map



For more information about this and other IBAs in Virginia please visit our website at:
<http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/virginia/>

Or contact Mary Elfner, the Virginia IBA Coordinator, at:
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