



Audubon IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

Upper Blue Ridge Mountains

Loudoun, Clarke, Warren, Fauquier, Rappahannock, Page, Madison, Greene, Rockingham, Albemarle, Augusta, Nelson, Rockbridge, Amherst, Botetourt, and Bedford Counties

Total Size: ~294,252 ha (757,112 acres)

Elevation: 250 – 1288 m (850 – 4,225 ft)



IBA Criteria Met

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Season</i>	<i>Source</i>
Species at Risk	Peregrine Falcon	2nd known breeding attempt in the Mountains of Virginia since the 1950s	Breeding	Rolf Gubler, Shenandoah NP, personal communication 2005
Species at Risk	Northern Saw-whet Owl	2 fledglings reported in two separate locations in 2002	Breeding	Shenandoah National Park MAPS data 2002
Species at Risk	Wood Thrush	Extensive habitat throughout area. Population likely in the thousands	Breeding	USGS Breeding Bird Survey data 1997-2002
Species at Risk	Cerulean Warbler	Average of 27 singing males from 1997-2005. Area very likely to meet population threshold	Breeding	1. USGS Breeding Bird Survey data 1995-2002 2. USFS Breeding Bird Survey data 1997-2002
Species at Risk	Winter Wren	3 singing males in 1998. Area very likely to meet population threshold	Breeding	USGS Breeding Bird Survey data 1997-2002
Species at Risk	Worm-eating Warbler	1. 111 singing males in 2001 2. Extensive habitat throughout the area. Population very likely to exceed threshold.	Breeding	1. USGS Breeding Bird Survey data 1995-2002 2. USFS Breeding Bird Survey data 1997-2002
Species at Risk	Louisiana Waterthrush	32 singing males in 2004. Area likely to meet population threshold	Breeding	1. USGS Breeding Bird Survey data 1995-2002 2. Virginia Society of Ornithology Breeding Bird counts 2004-2005

Congregations - Migrant Landbirds	Raptors	Seasonal average of 8,000-10,000 raptors during fall migration	Migration	1. Snicker's Gap hawkwatch counts 1995-2003 2. Rockfish Gap hawkwatch counts 1995-2004 3. Harvey's Knob hawkwatch counts 1995-2004
Congregations - Migrant Landbirds	Passerines	Area likely to support hundreds of thousands of passerines during migration	Migration	Technical Committee Consensus
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Forest	Peregrine Falcon, Whip-poor-will, Chimney Swift, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Black-and-white Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Canada Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Scarlet Tanager	Breeds	Breeding	USGS Breeding Bird Survey data 1995-2002

Description

The Upper Blue Ridge Mountains IBA follows a long but narrow forested corridor lying in a northeast/southwest orientation along the spine of the Blue Ridge escarpment. This mountain ridge overlooks the Virginia Piedmont to the east and the Shenandoah Valley to the west. Rugged peaks range in elevation from about 1000 feet to over 4000 feet and are primarily composed of resistant rocks such as granites and greenstone. Base-rich soils and a wide range of topographical gradients support diverse forests of mixed oaks and hickories throughout much of the IBA that give way to northern red oak forests at the highest elevations. In sheltered areas on moist, eastern-facing slopes, rich cove forests develop that contain a mixture of hardwoods such as basswoods, ash, and tulip poplar with lush herbaceous undergrowth. These areas also support local communities of eastern hemlocks. Such a wide range of vegetation not surprisingly supports an equally diverse forest bird community throughout the year, many of which are of conservation concern.

Conservation and Management Units

A large and important portion of the IBA is protected and managed to meet conservation objectives. Nearly 34% of the land within the IBA is owned by the National Park Service, the majority contained within Shenandoah National Park, with a smaller portion in the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail Corridor. The George Washington and Jefferson National Forest makes up an additional 29% of land in the southern region of the IBA. Other landowners include the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (G. Richard Thompson and Rapidan WMAs), the Nature Conservancy (Hightop Mountain Preserve), Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (Deep Run Ponds and Mount Joy Ponds SNAPs, Sky Meadows State Park), Virginia Department of Forestry (Lesesne State Forest), the Smithsonian Institute, the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship, Loudoun County Parks, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (numerous easements).



View of the Blue Ridge Mountains from Shenandoah National Park

Photo by Aimee Weldon

Birds

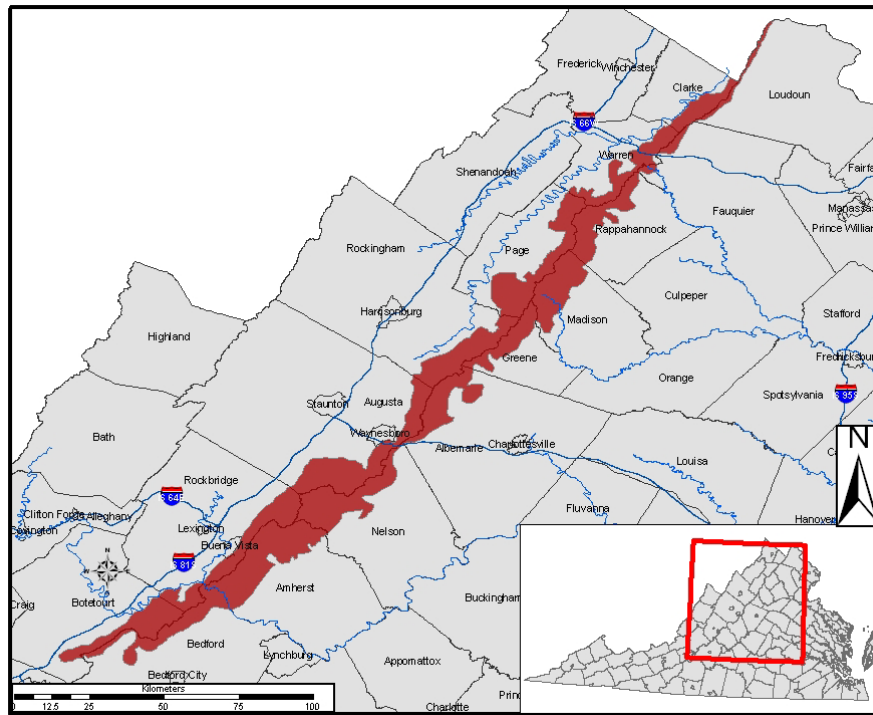
The Upper Blue Ridge Mountains IBA support an incredible abundance and diversity of bird species throughout the year. Virginia's only known Appalachian breeding pair of Peregrine Falcons nests on Stony Man Mountain in Shenandoah National Park. Several prominent rocky outcrops in this region played an historical important role in maintaining Peregrine populations prior to their demise in the 1950's due to DDT. Northern Saw-whet Owls are also known to breed in the IBA and likely exceed thresholds. Dry ridges and cove forests support what is likely the largest population of Cerulean Warblers in Virginia. The large extent and diversity of forest communities support significant populations of Neotropical migrants such as the Wood Thrush, Worm-eating Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush as well as a suite of mature deciduous forest species of regional responsibility. Due to the shape and orientation of this IBA along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the site is not only important for breeding birds but also as a movement conduit for both passerines and raptors. It is one of the most significant fall raptor flyways in Virginia, supporting thousands of raptors each year and also serving as important stopover habitat for hundreds of thousands of migrating passerines.

Conservation and Threats

The primary threat to this IBA is the widespread invasion of non-native species. Beginning with the loss of the American Chestnut in the early 20th century to Chestnut Blight, the forests of the Appalachians have been increasingly threatened by an onslaught of non-native plants, insects, and diseases. Non-native plants currently comprise over 23% of the flora in some portions of the IBA, threatening to permanently

alter the composition and availability of quality habitats for birds. Prescribed burns are implemented in the George Washington National Forest lands and in Shenandoah National Park to help control invasive species along with manual removal by staff and volunteers to help maintain the diversity of the natural plant community. The invasive hemlock woolly adelgid, an aphid-like insect from Japan, has infested the majority of the hemlock stands in the area, all but ensuring their loss. Although hemlock forest communities comprise a relatively small proportion of the IBA, the loss of these forests will have a locally significant effect on bird species that depend upon or are associated with hemlocks such as the Acadian Flycatcher, Blackburnian Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Canada Warbler. Overbrowsing of the forest understory by white-tailed deer, which reduces nesting substrates for ground nesting birds, is also a significant problem throughout the IBA.

Upper Blue Ridge 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:

melfner@audubon.org or 804-788-7660

