

Lower James River

Hopewell City, Chesterfield, Charles City,
Henrico, and Prince George Counties

Total Size: 47,841 ha (118,218 acres)

Elevation: 0 – 58 m (0 – 190.3)



IBA Criteria Met

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Season</i>	<i>Source</i>
Species at Risk	Bald Eagle	42 breeding pairs in 2006 - area accounts for 10% of state population; 287 over-summering migrants in 2006; 110 over-wintering migrants in 1999	Year-round	Surveys by B. Watts, M. Watts, M. Byrd, M. Wilson, and D. Whalen
Species at Risk	Loggerhead Shrike	Last stronghold for wintering birds in coastal plain; also last known breeding record in coastal plain	Year-round	1. Christmas Bird Counts 1991-1992 2. Observations by B. Watts
Species at Risk	Prothonotary Warbler	524 pairs in 2004	Breeding	Banding data from Dr. C. Blem and Dr. R. Reilly
Species at Risk	Barn Owl	6 breeding pairs	Breeding	Nest Box evaluations by B. Watts and D. Whalen – 2005
Species at Risk	Eastern Meadowlark	Extensive habitat throughout area. Population likely in the thousands	Breeding	B. Watts - personal communication
Species at Risk	Grasshopper Sparrow	Extensive habitat throughout area. Population likely in the thousands	Breeding	1. B. Watts - personal communication; 2. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys
Species at Risk	Field Sparrow	Common breeder in area; Population likely to meet threshold	Breeding	1. B. Watts - personal communication 2. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys

Species at Risk	Prairie Warbler	Common breeder in area; Population likely to meet threshold	Breeding	1. B. Watts - personal communication 2. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys
Species at Risk	American Woodcock	Extensive habitat throughout area. Population likely meets threshold	Breeding	B. Watts - personal communication
Species at Risk	Red-headed Woodpecker	Area almost certainly meets threshold; 20 individuals in 1998	Winter	Christmas Bird Counts 1998-1999
Species at Risk	Rusty Blackbird	Area very likely to meet population threshold	Winter	Christmas Bird Counts 1998-1999
Species at Risk	American Black Duck	5 breeding pairs in 1995	Breeding	B. Watts - personal observation
Congregations - Colonial Waterbirds	Great Blue Heron, Great Egret	1. 688 breeding pairs (7% of VA population) of Great Blue Herons 2. 24 breeding pairs of Great Egrets	Breeding	2003 Colonial Waterbird Surveys - B. Watts
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Grassland	Northern Bobwhite, Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark	Breeds	Breeding	References above
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Forest	Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Carolina Chickadee, Wood Thrush, Prothonotary Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler	Breeds	Breeding	1. Henricus surveys by A.Warfield 2. References above
Responsibility Species Assemblage - Shrub	Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Kingbird, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Field Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee	Breeds	Breeding	1. Henricus surveys by A.Warfield 2. References above

Description

The tidal fresh reach of the James River included in this IBA extends from Brandon just above the mouth of the Chickahominy River to just above Dutch Gap east of I-95. The area contains most of the tidal fresh reach of the James River, associated emergent and forested wetlands, and the surrounding rural landscape that includes extensive farmland and mixed forest. Land use is primarily farming with an increasing component of residential and urban development.

Conservation and Management Units

An important portion of the IBA is owned and protected to meet conservation, management, and educational objectives. Much of the protected area is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in three separate land holdings (James River NWR, Presquile NWR, and Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery). Portions of the upper reaches of the IBA are owned by Chesterfield County (Dutch Gap Conservation Area, Brown and Williamson Conservation Area) and Henrico County (Deep Bottom Park). Friends of Chesterfield's Riverfront and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation co-hold the Brown and Williamson easement. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries manages the Kittewan Wildlife Management Area on the eastern end of the IBA and Virginia Commonwealth University owns the Inger and Walter Rice Center east of Presquile NWR. Several private plantations dot the shores of the James River within the IBA and provide large tracts of valuable bird habitat.

Birds

This portion of the James supports the densest piscivorous bird community in Virginia. The area supports large and growing populations of breeding Bald Eagles, migrant Bald Eagles, breeding Ospreys and breeding Great Blue Herons. The area is one of the most significant Bald Eagle areas along the Atlantic coast and supports one of the largest concentrations of migrant Bald Eagles in eastern North America. The IBA also contains extensive forested wetlands that support significant populations of



Prothonotary Warbler

Photo by Al Warfield

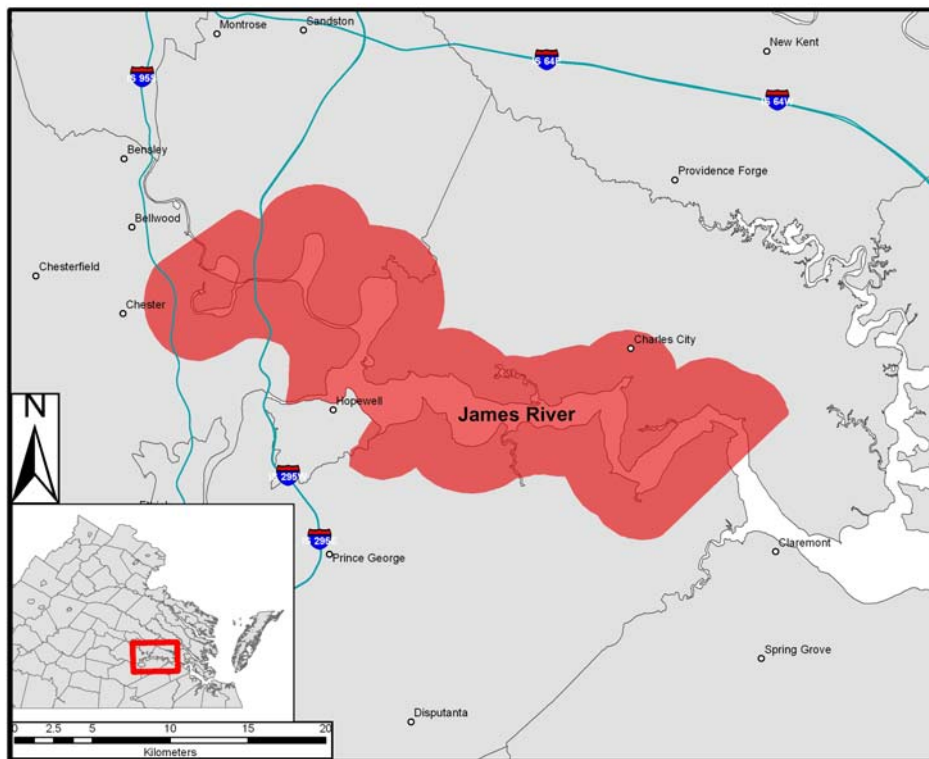
Prothonotary Warblers, Yellow-throated Vireos, and other species within the habitat suite. The surrounding uplands are composed of rural farmland that supports some of the largest grassland bird populations in the Coastal Plain. This area includes the last stronghold for wintering Loggerhead Shrikes in the coastal plain and provides important habitat for other priority species that depend on successional habitats such as the Northern Bobwhite, Prairie Warbler, and Field Sparrow.

Conservation and Threats

Three primary threats are currently of concern, including 1) contaminants within the fishery used by piscivorous birds, 2) conversion of open land to residential, and 3)

expansion of recreational boating access to sensitive portions of the river. This portion of the river has a history of contaminant problems that led to the decline of all fish-eating birds within the lower James River. Because of the position of these birds within the food web, they will always be vulnerable to new contaminants entering the system. Due to the role that this location plays in the ecology of Bald Eagle populations along the entire Atlantic Coast, vigilance is warranted. The urban centers of Richmond, Williamsburg, Hopewell, and Petersburg have begun to coalesce and impact the rural lands surrounding the area. Waterfront property is particularly vulnerable to future development. Since many of the species that depend on this area are sensitive to development, caution is warranted. Bald Eagles have been shown to be very sensitive to boating activity. Increases in boating activity and the number of boat access points within this stretch of the river will negatively impact migrant eagles.

Lower James River IBA Detail Map



For more information about this and other IBAs in Virginia please visit our website at: www.audubon.org

Or contact Mary Elfner, the Virginia IBA Coordinator at: melfner@audubon.org or 804-788-7660



Virginia Coastal Zone
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM