

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Back Bay

National Wildlife Refuge

Birds





U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Back Bay is one of over 545 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife management in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge is more than 9,000 acres and managed primarily for migratory birds, particularly wintering waterfowl, migratory shorebirds, and wading birds. Established in 1938 the refuge is situated around and within Back Bay and includes a barrier island typical of those found along much of America's Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The predominant habitats include beach, dune, shrub scrub, wooded swamp, low-lying fields, and emergent marshes, all of which offer great opportunities for birding.

Egret

© Mark Wilson

Welcome



This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

With such varied habitats as sand dunes, ocean beach, marsh, shrublands, and maritime forests, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge has a rich, diverse bird population. In the spring, colorful warblers and other songbirds stop over on their northward migration. Many stay and nest through the summer. Wading birds and marsh birds may be easily observed during the summer visits. In the autumn, large concentrations of many waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors occur. Wintering flocks of swans, geese, and ducks are common, while storms and cold fronts may bring rare birds to the area.

Established in 1938, Back Bay Refuge comprises approximately 9,000 acres and is located in southeastern Virginia on the mainstream of the Atlantic Flyway. Adjacent to the population centers of Norfolk and Virginia Beach, it has become a showcase for large concentrations of waterfowl.

This handout lists 306 species, as well as an additional 31 species of accidentals that have been seen only once or twice. Abundance indices are based on written records in the refuge files and obtained from ornithology researchers' files; however, nesting status is based on spring abundances and/or behavior. Common bird names are in accordance with the Seventh American Ornithology Union checklist.

Loons



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Most birds are migratory; therefore, their seasonal occurrences are coded as follows:

Season

Sp	Spring	March – May
S	Summer	June – August
F	Fall	September – November
W	Winter	December – February

Relative Abundance

Relative abundance indicates how frequently you might see a bird in its favored habitat.

a	abundant	a species that is very numerous
c	common	likely to be seen or heard in suitable habitat
u	uncommon	present, but not certain to be seen
o	occasional	seen only a few times during a season
r	rare	may be present but not every year

• Birds known to nest on or near the refuge

	Sp	S	F	W
Loons				
___ Red-throated Loon _____	u		u	u
___ Common Loon _____	u	o	c	u
Grebes				
___ • Pied-billed Grebe _____	c	u	c	c
___ Horned Grebe _____	u		u	u
___ Red-necked Grebe _____	o		o	r
Fulmars, Petrels and Shearwaters				
___ Cory's Shearwater _____		r	r	
___ Greater Shearwater _____		o	o	
___ Sooty Shearwater _____		o	o	
Storm-Petrels				
___ Wilson's Storm-Petrel _____		o		
Boobies and Gannets				
___ Northern Gannet _____	c		c	c
Pelicans				
___ American White Pelican _____	r		r	r
___ Brown Pelican _____	c	c	c	o
Cormorants				
___ Double-crested Cormorant _____	a	u	a	u
___ Great Cormorant _____	r		r	r

Bitterns, Herons and Egrets

- American Bittern _____
- Least Bittern _____
- Great Blue Heron _____
- Great Egret _____
- Snowy Egret _____
- Little Blue Heron _____
- Tricolored Heron _____

- Great Blue Heron* _____
- Cattle Egret _____
- Green Heron _____
- Black-crowned Night-Heron _____
- Yellow-crowned Night-Heron _____

Ibises and Spoonbills

- White Ibis _____
- Glossy Ibis _____

New World Vultures

- Black Vulture _____
- Turkey Vulture _____

Swans, Geese and Ducks

- Fulvous Whistling-Duck _____
- Snow Goose _____
- Canada Goose _____
- Brant _____
- Tundra Swan _____
- Gadwall _____
- Eurasian Wigeon _____
- American Wigeon _____
- American Black Duck _____
- Mallard _____
- Blue-winged Teal _____
- Northern Shoveler _____
- Northern Pintail _____
- Green-winged Teal _____
- Canvasback _____
- Redhead _____
- Ring-necked Duck _____
- Greater Scaup _____
- Lesser Scaup _____
- King Eider _____
- Common Eider _____
- Surf Scoter _____
- White-winged Scoter _____

Sp S F W

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- Black Scoter _____
- Long-tailed Duck _____
- Bufflehead _____
- Common Goldeneye _____
- Hooded Merganser _____
- Common Merganser _____
- Red-breasted Merganser _____
- Ruddy Duck _____

Sp S F W

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Osprey, Kites, Hawks and Eagles

- Osprey _____
- Swallow-tailed Kite _____
- Bald Eagle _____
- Northern Harrier _____
- Sharp-shinned Hawk _____
- Cooper's Hawk _____
- Northern Goshawk _____
- Red-shouldered Hawk _____
- Broad-winged Hawk _____
- Red-tailed Hawk _____
- Rough-legged Hawk _____

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Falcons and Caracaras

- American Kestrel _____
- Merlin _____
- Peregrine Falcon _____

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Osprey chicks



Gallinaceous Birds

___ • Northern Bobwhite _____

Rails

___ Yellow Rail _____

___ Black Rail _____

___ • Clapper Rail _____

___ • King Rail _____

___ • Virginia Rail _____

___ Sora _____

___ Purple Gallinule _____

___ • Common Moorhen _____

___ American Coot _____

Cranes

___ Sandhill Crane _____

Plovers

___ Black-bellied Plover _____

___ American Golden-Plover _____

___ Wilson's Plover _____

___ Semipalmated Plover _____

___ Piping Plover _____

___ • Killdeer _____

Oystercatchers

___ American Oystercatcher _____

Stilts and Avocets

___ Black-necked Stilt _____

___ American Avocet _____

Sandpipers and Phalaropes

___ Greater Yellowlegs _____

___ Lesser Yellowlegs _____

___ Solitary Sandpiper _____

___ Willet _____

___ Spotted Sandpiper _____

___ Upland Sandpiper _____

___ Whimbrel _____

___ Hudsonian Godwit _____

___ Marbled Godwit _____

___ Ruddy Turnstone _____

___ Red Knot _____

___ Sanderling _____

Sp S F W

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Sp S F W

___ Semipalmated Sandpiper _____

___ Western Sandpiper _____

___ Least Sandpiper _____

___ White-rumped Sandpiper _____

___ Baird's Sandpiper _____

___ Pectoral Sandpiper _____

___ Dunlin _____

___ Stilt Sandpiper _____

___ Buff-breasted Sandpiper _____

___ Ruff _____

___ Short-billed Dowitcher _____

___ Long-billed Dowitcher _____

___ Wilson's Snipe _____

___ American Woodcock _____

___ Wilson's Phalarope _____

___ Red-necked Phalarope _____

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Skuas, Jaegers, Gulls and Terns

___ Pomarine Jaeger _____

___ Parasitic Jaeger _____

___ Laughing Gull _____

___ Little Gull _____

___ Black-headed Gull _____

___ Bonaparte's Gull _____

___ Ring-billed Gull _____

___ Herring Gull _____

___ Iceland Gull _____

___ Lesser Black-backed Gull _____

___ Glaucous Gull _____

___ Great Black-backed Gull _____

___ Black-legged Kittiwake _____

___ Gull-billed Tern _____

___ Caspian Tern _____

___ Royal Tern _____

___ Sandwich Tern _____

___ Roseate Tern _____

___ Common Tern _____

___ Forster's Tern _____

___ Least Tern _____

___ Black Tern _____

___ Black Skimmer _____

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Auks and Puffins

___ Razorbill _____

r



Greater Yellowlegs

	Sp	S	F	W
Pigeons and Doves				
___ • Rock Dove _____	o	o	o	o
___ • Mourning Dove _____	c	c	c	u
Cuckoos and Anis				
___ Black-billed Cuckoo _____	r	r	r	
___ • Yellow-billed Cuckoo _____	u	u	u	
Barn Owls				
___ • Barn Owl _____	o	o	o	o
Typical Owls				
___ • Eastern Screech-Owl _____	u	u	u	u
___ • Great Horned Owl _____	u	u	u	u
___ • Barred Owl _____	o	o	o	o
___ Short-eared Owl _____	r		r	r
___ Northern Saw-whet Owl _____			r	o
Nightjars				
___ Common Nighthawk _____	u	u		
___ • Chuck-will's-widow _____	c	c	u	
Swifts				
___ • Chimney Swift _____	c	u	u	
Hummingbirds				
___ • Ruby-throated Hummingbird _____	c	u	o	
Kingfishers				
___ • Belted Kingfisher _____	c	c	c	u
Woodpeckers				
___ • Red-headed Woodpecker _____	u	u	u	u
___ • Red-bellied Woodpecker _____	u	u	u	u
___ Yellow-bellied Sapsucker _____	o		o	o
___ • Downy Woodpecker _____	u	u	u	u
___ • Hairy Woodpecker _____	o	o	o	o
___ • Northern Flicker _____	c	u	c	u
___ • Pileated Woodpecker _____	u	u	u	u
Flycatchers				
___ • Eastern Wood-Pewee _____	u	u	u	
___ Yellow-bellied Flycatcher _____	r		r	
___ Acadian Flycatcher _____	o		o	
___ Alder Flycatcher _____	o		o	
___ Willow Flycatcher _____	o		o	

	Sp	S	F	W
___ Least Flycatcher _____			u	
___ • Eastern Phoebe _____	u	u	u	u
___ • Great Crested Flycatcher _____	u	u	u	
___ Western Kingbird _____			r	
___ • Eastern Kingbird _____	c	u	c	
___ Scissor-tailed Flycatcher _____	r	r		
Shrikes				
___ Loggerhead Shrike _____	r		r	r
Vireos				
___ • White-eyed Vireo _____	c	c	u	
___ Yellow-throated Vireo _____	u	u	o	
___ Blue-headed Vireo _____	c		c	r
___ Warbling Vireo _____	r			r
___ Philadelphia Vireo _____			u	
___ • Red-eyed Vireo _____	c	c	c	
Crows, Jays and Magpies				
___ • Blue Jay _____	u	u	u	u
___ • American Crow _____	c	c	c	c
___ • Fish Crow _____	c	c	c	c
Larks				
___ Horned Lark _____	r	r	r	r
Swallows				
___ • Purple Martin _____	c	c	c	
___ • Tree Swallow _____	c	c	a	u
___ Northern Rough-winged Swallow _____	u	u	u	
___ Bank Swallow _____	u	u	u	
___ Cliff Swallow _____	o	o	o	
___ • Barn Swallow _____	c	u	c	
Titmice and Chickadees				
___ • Carolina Chickadee _____	c	c	c	c
___ • Tufted Titmouse _____	u	u	u	u
Nuthatches				
___ Red-breasted Nuthatch _____	r		o	r
___ • White-breasted Nuthatch _____	u	u	u	u
___ • Brown-headed Nuthatch _____	u	u	u	u
Creepers				
___ Brown Creeper _____	u		u	u

	Sp	S	F	W
Wrens				
___ • Carolina Wren _____	c	c	c	c
___ • House Wren _____	c	o	c	u
___ Winter Wren _____			u	u
___ Sedge Wren _____	u	o	u	u
___ • Marsh Wren _____	c	c	c	u

Kinglets				
___ Golden-crowned Kinglet _____	c		u	u
___ Ruby-crowned Kinglet _____	c		c	u

Old World Warblers				
___ • Blue-gray Gnatcatcher _____	c	u	o	

Thrushes				
___ • Eastern Bluebird _____	c	c	u	u
___ Veery _____	u		u	
___ Gray-cheeked Thrush _____	u		u	
___ Bicknell's Thrush _____	o		u	
___ Swainson's Thrush _____	o		u	
___ Hermit Thrush _____	u		u	u
___ • Wood Thrush _____	u	u	u	
___ • American Robin _____	a	c	a	u

Mimic Thrushes				
___ • Gray Catbird _____	c	c	c	o
___ • Northern Mockingbird _____	c	c	c	u
___ • Brown Thrasher _____	c	c	c	u

Starlings				
___ • European Starling _____	c	c	c	u

Pipits				
___ American Pipit _____	o		o	o

Waxwings				
___ Cedar Waxwing _____	u		u	u

Wood Warblers				
___ Tennessee Warbler _____	o		o	
___ Orange-crowned Warbler _____	u		u	u
___ Nashville Warbler _____	o		o	
___ • Northern Parula _____	u	u	u	
___ • Yellow Warbler _____	c	c	c	
___ Chestnut-sided Warbler _____	o		o	
___ Magnolia Warbler _____	u		u	

	Sp	S	F	W
___ Cape May Warbler _____	o		c	r
___ Black-throated Blue Warbler _____	u		u	
___ • Yellow-rumped Warbler _____	a		a	c
___ Black-throated Green Warbler _____	o		o	
___ Blackburnian Warbler _____	o		o	
___ • Yellow-throated Warbler _____	o	o	o	
___ • Pine Warbler _____	c	u	u	o
___ • Prairie Warbler _____	c	c	c	r
___ Palm Warbler _____	c	c	c	o
___ Bay-breasted Warbler _____	r		u	
___ Blackpoll Warbler _____	c		c	
___ • Black-and-white Warbler _____	u	u	u	r
___ • American Redstart _____	u	o	c	
___ • Prothonotary Warbler _____	c	u	c	
___ Worm-eating Warbler _____	u	u	o	
___ • Ovenbird _____	c	o	u	
___ Northern Waterthrush _____	c		c	
___ • Louisiana Waterthrush _____	o	u	o	
___ Kentucky Warbler _____	o	o	o	
___ Connecticut Warbler _____			r	
___ Mourning Warbler _____	r		r	
___ • Common Yellowthroat _____	a	c	c	u
___ • Hooded Warbler _____	u	u	u	
___ Wilson's Warbler _____	r		o	
___ Canada Warbler _____	o		o	
___ • Yellow-breasted Chat _____	u	u	u	u

Tanagers				
___ • Summer Tanager _____	u	u	u	
___ Scarlet Tanager _____	u		u	

Sparrows and Towhees				
___ • Eastern Towhee _____	a	c	c	u
___ American Tree Sparrow _____			r	r
___ • Chipping Sparrow _____	c	c	u	o
___ Clay-colored Sparrow _____			o	
___ • Field Sparrow _____	u	u	c	u
___ Vesper Sparrow _____	o		o	u
___ Lark Sparrow _____	r		r	r
___ • Savannah Sparrow _____	c	o	c	c
___ Grasshopper Sparrow _____	o	u	o	u
___ Henslow's Sparrow _____	r	r	r	
___ Le Conte's Sparrow _____			o	o
___ Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow _____	u		u	u
___ Seaside Sparrow _____	u		u	o

	Sp	S	F	W
___ Fox Sparrow _____	o		o	o
• Song Sparrow _____	c	c	c	c
___ Lincoln's Sparrow _____				o
___ Swamp Sparrow _____	c	u	c	u
___ White-throated Sparrow _____	c	u	c	c
___ White-crowned Sparrow _____	o		o	r
___ Dark-eyed Junco _____	c		c	c
___ Lapland Longspur _____			r	r
___ Snow Bunting _____			o	u

Cardinals, Grosbeaks and Allies

___ • Northern Cardinal _____	c	c	c	c
___ Rose-breasted Grosbeak _____	u		o	
___ • Blue Grosbeak _____	u	u	u	
___ • Indigo Bunting _____	u	u	c	
___ Painted Bunting _____	r			
___ Dickcissel _____			o	r

Blackbirds and Orioles

___ Bobolink _____	c		c	
___ • Red-winged Blackbird _____	a	a	a	o
___ • Eastern Meadowlark _____	c	c	c	u
___ Yellow-headed Blackbird _____	r	r	r	
___ Rusty Blackbird _____	o		r	o
___ Brewer's Blackbird _____				o
___ • Common Grackle _____	c	u	c	u
___ • Boat-tailed Grackle _____	a	a	a	u
___ • Brown-headed Cowbird _____	c	u	c	u
___ • Orchard Oriole _____	u	u	u	
___ Baltimore Oriole _____	c		c	r

Finches

___ Purple Finch _____	o		o	o
___ • House Finch _____	c	u	c	o
___ Pine Siskin _____	o		o	o
___ • American Goldfinch _____	u	o	u	u
___ Evening Grosbeak _____	r		r	r

Old World Sparrows

___ • House Sparrow _____	u	u	u	u
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Accidentals

The following species have been seen on the refuge one or two times:

Atlantic Puffin
 Audubon's Shearwater
 Black Guillemot
 Black-whiskered Vireo
 Blue-winged Warbler
 Brewer's Blackbird
 Cerulean Warbler
 Common Murre
 Dovekie
 Eared Grebe
 Fork-tailed Flycatcher
 Golden Eagle
 Golden-winged Warbler
 Greater White-Fronted Goose
 Harlequin Duck
 Lark Bunting
 Leach's Storm-Petrel
 Mississippi Kite
 Mute Swan
 Purple Sandpiper
 Ring-necked Pheasant
 Roseate Spoonbill
 Ross' Goose
 Sabine's Gull
 Sandhill Crane
 Snowy Owl
 Sooty Tern
 Swainson's Warbler
 Thick-billed Murre
 Western Tanager
 White-winged Crossbill
 Wood Stork

*Bald
Eagle*



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