



Globally Important Bird Areas



Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and Dare County Air Force Range, North Carolina

Ornithological Highlights: The extensive pocosin habitat on the refuge provides nesting habitat for significant numbers of neotropical migrants.

Location: Mainland of Dare County; bordered by Alligator River, Croatan/Pamlico Sound, and Albemarle Sound.

- *Southeastern Coastal Plain* (NABCI Bird Conservation Region #27)
- *South Atlantic Coastal Plain* (PIF Physiographic Area #03)

Size: about 200,000 acres (NWR - 152,195 ac; Air Force Range - 46,621 ac)

Ownership: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Air Force

Habitats: pocosin, bogs, fresh and brackish water marshes, hardwood swamps, Atlantic white-cedar swamps, natural lakes and waterways, and farmland

Land use: Hunting, fishing, canoeing, wildlife observation; military exercises

Site description: The refuge has much pocosin habitat; these are wetlands with deep organic soils resulting in peat deposits. Under dry conditions they are susceptible to wildfire and long-lasting subsurface fires. Plant species of the bogs and pocosins include carnivorous plants such as pitcher plants and sundews, while swamps include Atlantic white-cedar, pond pine, black gum, and red maple. Mineral soils on the refuge support a non-alluvial wet hardwood habitat type. The refuge is the first reintroduction site for the red wolf. The refuge encloses the Dare County Air Force Range, jointly used by the Air Force and the Navy.

Birds: Concentrations of several thousand ducks and swans are found there during the winter, plus many wading birds, shorebirds, and neotropical migrants are found during migration and breeding. Breeding bird surveys routes run between 1993-96 counted 75 Prothonotary, 90 Prairie, 27 Worm-eating and 2 Swainson's warblers; the surveys were done from roads and total numbers of birds in the area are very likely to be considerably higher. There are three known clusters of Red-cockaded Woodpecker on the refuge, with the possibility that as many as 10 may exist there. The Red-cockaded Woodpecker clusters are in remote and hard-to-reach parts of the refuge. Several woodpecker clusters are also found on the Dare County Air Force Range.

Conservation issues: Much of the pocosin habitat in the Carolinas has been destroyed by timbering for old-growth bald cypress and Atlantic white-cedar and by draining for agriculture. The Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge was established through a donation of 118,000 acres by Prudential Life Insurance Company and the cooperative effort of The Nature

Conservancy and federal and state agencies. A major objective there has been to restore the former hydrologic regimes, through plugging up drainage ditches and installing water level management structures. This will reduce adverse impacts from catastrophic fires to which drained and dried-out pocosins are susceptible. Some farmland is managed for waterfowl through water level manipulation, encouraging production of moist soil plant species and cooperative farming to provide a winter food source; at time of flooding in the fall and draw-down in late winter/early spring, these areas receive some use by shorebirds. A survey to determine current condition of regenerating Atlantic white-cedar has been completed and the need for release work is being assessed. Also, efforts are underway to re-establish quality hardwoods on non-alluvial wet mineral soils. Hurricane damage, insect/disease outbreaks, and wildfire are among the principal threats for most habitat types on the refuge.

Visitor information: Access is restricted on the Dare County Range. However, many miles of logging roads in the Refuge are open to vehicles and hikers; best time to visit is fall through spring. Be prepared for wet, muddy roads. Contact Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 1969, Manteo, NC 27954; tel: 252-473-1131.

References:

<http://alligatorriver.fws.gov/>