

Audubon Society of Northern Virginia

Ecological Appraisal/Survey Options: Salona Preserve, Fairfax County, Virginia, 2 Sep 2012

Summary.

The Salona Preserve contains a diversity of natural features that may/could offer habitat for a wide variety of native flora and fauna otherwise reduced or extirpated in surrounding suburban development. An approach to bringing this about begins with a systematic inventory of ecological areas and biotic communities by interested organizations and individual volunteers. The objective of such a survey would be an authoritative base line of biological data to support resource planning and management.

Present Situation.

This 40-acre site's existing mix of fields, hedgerows and woodlands provides native wildlife with sheltering, foraging, and breeding habitats that no longer exist elsewhere in this highly developed area. The particularly scarce open/old fields are attractive to numerous (but declining) grassland bird species as well as butterflies and other pollinators. Contiguous hedgerows should support many edge specialists, and the mature woods should attract several bird species as permanent and seasonal residents and migrants.

Surveys for Birds and Other Wildlife.

Since no formal, detailed inventory of Salona's natural resources exists, it should be useful to undertake a systematic survey to define ecological areas and related plants and wildlife.

Experience with other local area sites suggests such a survey should include the following:

1. Development, with Fairfax County, of a detailed map of evident ecological areas.
2. Definition of potential routes for bird and other surveys
3. Marking and clearing of trails to facilitate survey activities.
4. Recruitment of survey partners (e.g., FMN, Potowmack Chapt./VNPS, NVCT, ASNV, NVBC, Bluebird Society, Earth Sangha, etc.) and individual volunteers.
5. Determination of methodology for discrete (or combined) surveys for conspicuous species (i.e., birds, butterflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers, and others).
6. Establishment of a long term schedule of weekly, monthly, and seasonal surveys.
7. Institution of standardized data reporting/collating routines under centralized direction.
8. Possible integration of site-specific surveys with broader-area surveys and counts of birds (e.g., Christmas, Mid-Winter Waterfowl, Winter Raptor, and Migratory Counts), butterflies (NABA's Annual 4th of July Count), and others.
9. Possible inclusion of Salona among sites in ASNV's Northern Virginia Bird Survey.

Related Activities.

The following would be useful in enhancing the quality of wildlife habitat:

1. Clear identification of sensitive habitats and accessible public areas
2. Removal of invasive, non-native species.
3. Reintroduction of desirable, native species (particularly pollinator host plants).

Potential Outcomes.

Based on size and composition, and compared to other regional properties, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Salona's eventual inventory of wildlife species could be: Birds (100); Butterflies (50); Dragonflies and Damselflies (25); and Grasshoppers & relatives (25). Confirmation may occur of the presence or breeding of signal species like Northern Harrier, Am. Kestrel, Great Horned and Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireo, Wood Thrush, Prairie Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Field and Savannah Sparrow, Orchard and Baltimore Oriole, as well as key butterfly and dragonfly species. Survey findings may be helpful to habitat management (the extent/timing of cutting and mowing, invasive control, etc.). And, finally, this project may stimulate helpful interest among area naturalists, public officials and the general public.