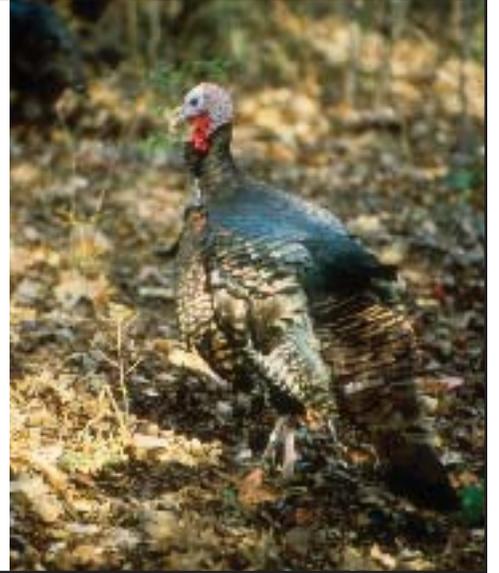




Top Ten Birds: Thrill Sightings



General Bird Information

The 15,000 acre piedmont forest of Prince William Forest Park provides excellent habitat for a great diversity of avian species. In addition, the park has recently limited its roadside mowing to promote the growth of meadows and grassy areas which provide habitat for many grassland birds. Bird surveys have determined that Prince William Forest Park is an integral part of neotropical migratory songbird routes because it has remained a large, contiguous land base. Although no threatened or endangered birds have been identified nesting in the park, Bald Eagles frequently fly over the area. Three species ranked by Partners In Flight as being moderate to high priority in their vulnerability rankings are present in the park, including the Worm-eating Warbler, the Kentucky Warbler, and the Woodthrush. Approximately 90% of all bird species have been inventoried in Prince William Forest Park through the hard work of park volunteers and the efforts of USGS volunteers working on the annual North American Breeding Bird Surveys. Some of the most exciting and interesting birds you may encounter in the park are described below.

1. Bald Eagle

- Only eagle unique to North America making it a good choice for the United States' national emblem.
- Opportunistic feeder that prefers fish, but will also hunt large birds and mammals as well as scavenge carrion (i.e. dead animals).
- Nests in large trees near large bodies of water that are often reused over many years.
- The use of the pesticide DDT caused population numbers to drop drastically, threatening the species with extinction in the lower 48 states. Population numbers were increased with help from reintroduction programs and protection under the Endangered Species Act. In 1995, the Bald Eagle was reclassified as Threatened and there is discussion now of possibly delisting the eagle from the Endangered Species List altogether.

2. Barred Owl

- Nocturnal bird that hides in dense foliage or in a tree cavity during the day and hunts from a perch at night.
- Preys mainly upon small mammals, but is an opportunistic hunter and will take various other prey including birds, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates such as crayfish.
- Known for its distinctive call that is sounds like "who-cooks-for-you, who-cooks-for-you-all".
- An owl's eyes are fixed in place because their large size provides no room for muscle. To compensate for this, it can turn its head in almost any direction and angle, including the ability to rotate its head nearly 280 degrees. By comparison, people can only turn their heads a mere 90 degrees!
- Another resident of Prince William Forest Park, the Great Horned Owl, is their only natural predator. Barred Owls will avoid areas where Great Horned Owls are present.

3. Wood Duck

- Considered one of the most beautiful waterfowl.
- Found in forested wetlands and along rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds.
- After hatching, the young jump from the nest cavity and make their way to the water where their mother calls to them. The leap from the nest may be as high as 290 feet!
- Have a broad diet of seeds, fruits, acorns, and aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates.
- One of only a few cavity nesting ducks in North America. Nests in natural tree cavities, cavities made by larger woodpeckers such as the Pileated Woodpecker, and man-made nest boxes often in close proximity to water. The nest is lined with down feathers from the mother's breast.

4. American Woodcock

- Unlike other shorebirds, prefers habitat consisting of forests with open areas.
- Encountered most often at dusk in spring while males are performing their elaborate aerial display in an attempt to attract females. The displays are carried out in open areas where the male begins with a series “peent” vocalizations. Eventually, the male will take flight, rising upward in a spiral, before descending in a zig-zag diving motion. During this descent, a twittering sound is produced both vocally and by air passing

over modified wing feathers.

- Diet mostly consists of earthworms and other invertebrates that are acquired by probing the dirt and leaf litter with their bill. The bill has a sensitive flexible tip that is used locate and grasp worms and other food items without opening its entire bill.
- Nests are nothing more than a shallow depression in the ground.

5. Belted Kingfisher

- One of only a few bird species where the female is the more colorful of the two sexes.
- Found along streams, rivers, and lakes.
- Eats mostly small fish but also consumes aquatic insects, amphibians, reptiles, and crustaceans.
- Looks for prey while perched or hovering over clear water, and then dives head first into water to catch

prey with its bill. The Belted Kingfisher will often kill prey by beating it against a branch.

- Nests in burrows in banks along waterways in which both parents excavate the tunnel, incubate, and feed the young.
- Often give a loud rattling cry making them sometimes easy to detect.

6. Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

- Only species of hummingbird that breeds in eastern North America.
- Eats flower nectar, small insects, spiders and sap. Use their long extendable tongue to feed from flowers and feeders. They may consume up to twice their body weight each day.
- All hummingbirds have a unique figure eight motion of wings during flight that enables them to hover and fly forward, backward, sideways, down, up, and even upside down for brief periods.

• During flight, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird beats its wings 53 times a second and is able to reach speeds of 60 miles per hour!

- When deprived of food or confronted with cold temperatures, hummingbirds are able to almost completely put body functions on hold and enter a state known as torpor. During this state, they are able to reduce their body temperature to 55°F from the normal 104°F to 111°F.
- Have very small feet that inhibit them from walking.

7. Wild Turkey

- Largest of the upland game bird species. They were nearly eradicated by the early 1900s due to hunting and habitat loss. Reintroduction programs helped to bring the Wild Turkey population back to a healthy size.
- Found in hardwood and pine forests with scattered openings.
- During the day, they forage along the ground for acorns, nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetation, insects, and oc-

asionally small vertebrates such as salamanders.

- Adult males, called gobblers or toms, are much larger than females, have a long beard made of modified feathers growing out of breast, spurs on the back of their legs, and a bare white, blue, and red head and neck.
- During the breeding season, toms gobble to announce their presence to females and other males. The gobble can be heard up a mile away!

8. Pileated Woodpecker

- Largest woodpecker in most of North America with the exception of the rare Ivory-billed Woodpecker.
- Lives in deciduous and coniferous forests with large trees and excavates large nests in cavities of generally dead trees. Usually excavates a new nest each year, creating habitat for other large cavity nesters such as Eastern Screech Owls, Northern Flickers, and Wood Ducks.
- While foraging for food, Pileated Woodpeckers

often cut out large rectangular holes in trees. Small trees can sometimes break in half as a result of these foraging practices.

- Woodpeckers have stiff tail feathers that act as a brace while they cling to sides of trees and a long barbed, sticky tongue to help capture prey deep inside crevices and tunnels in wood.

9. Brown Thrasher

- The Brown Thrasher is able to mimic up to 3000 different songs! Other members of the Thrashers family which are also found here at Prince William Forest Park include the Northern Mockingbird and the Gray Catbird.
- Searches for insects by using its bill to sweep leaf litter and debris away.

- Nests on or close to the ground in dense vegetation often with thorns.
- Both parents incubate the eggs and feed the young.
- Aggressively defends its nest and has been known to strike people and dogs with enough force to draw blood.

10. Cedar Waxwing

- One of few bird species in North America that specializes in eating fruit and berries.
- Named for waxy red “droplets” on the tips of secondary flight feathers and their affinity for the fruit of the Eastern Redcedar. The “droplets” come from pigments in the fruit that they consume.

• Humans have also affected the Cedar Waxwing’s coloration. They have been observed with orange tail tips rather than the normal yellow tail tips. This is a result of a red pigment of the berries of an introduced honeysuckle plant. If a waxwing eats the berries while molting its tail feathers, the tip of the feather will be orange.