



Globally Important Bird Areas



Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge and Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Ornithological Highlight: Large breeding population of Black-capped Vireo

Location: southwestern Oklahoma, just northwest of Lawton

- *Central Mixed-grass Prairie* (NABCI Bird Conservation Region #19)
- *Osage Plains, Rolling Red Plains* (PIF Physiographic Areas #33, 54)

Size: 150,000+ acres (Wichita Mountains 59,020 acres; Fort Sill 93,000 acres)

Ownership: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Army

Habitats: mixed grass prairie, oak woodlands, intermittent streams, riparian areas, rocky outcrops and canyons, impoundments

Land use: hunting, tourism; military training

Site description: Arising sharply from the surrounding plains, the Wichita Mountains include several peaks over 2,000 feet. In the valleys between them are mixed grass prairies, oak woodlands, and riparian areas. Several impoundments were created in the 1930s, and there are a few natural streams and springs in the area. Immediately adjacent to the refuge is **Fort Sill Military Reservation**.

Birds: The refuge is the site of the largest breeding population of the endangered Black-capped Vireo in Oklahoma. About 200 pairs of vireos occur here, making it one of the larger breeding populations of the species anywhere. In addition, there are about 27 pairs on Fort Sill. The avifauna of the refuge and adjacent fort is a more characteristic of eastern than western North America, but several western birds (Rock Wren, Canyon Wren, Rufous-crowned Sparrow) are found here towards the eastern limits of their ranges. Chuck-will's-Widow and Painted Bunting are common breeding species

Conservation issues: The refuge is managed primarily for bison, elk, and longhorn cattle. Bison were reintroduced using animals from the New York Zoological Garden. Longhorn cattle were introduced to preserve a diminishing yet historically significant breed. Management of the rangelands includes burning to eliminate Eastern red-cedar, an invasive pest. Management for the endangered vireo includes monitoring of the population, trapping of cowbirds, and prescribed burning to enhance or create the habitat of oak shrubbery of a suitable height for the species' preferred nesting sites. As a result of management, vireo numbers are increasing there. There has also been some cowbird trapping on Fort Sill. On the refuge, the use of tapes to attract the vireo is forbidden and visitors in general are steered away from the critical breeding areas.

Visitor information: best times to visit is during spring and fall migration; to see the vireo, best time to visit is late April through mid-June. Contact the refuge at Rt. 1, Box 448, Indiana, OK 73552, tel. (580) 429-3222