



WINGBEATS

Audubon Society of the Capital Region



Audubon Uses GIS To Identify Important Bird Areas in New York State



Audubon New York is a non-profit organization that conserves birds, other wildlife, and their habitats through education and advocacy, based on sound science. A major component of Audubon's efforts is the identification, protection and proper management of Important Bird Areas (IBAs).

Important Bird Areas represent critical habitats for the survival and conservation of birds. An IBA is a site that provides essential breeding and / or non-breeding habitat for bird species (or a group of bird species) of conservation concern. To be designated an IBA, a site must meet at least one of several criteria relating to its significance for threatened bird species, congregations of birds, and / or habitats important to assemblages of birds for which New York State has conservation responsibility.

The IBA program began in Europe in the mid-1980s. Today, IBA programs are underway on six continents and in 146 countries. In 1996, New York became the second U.S. state to initiate an IBA program. Sites were nominated by a broad audience of interested individuals, and today there are 127 IBAs recognized in New York, representing more than 800,000 hectares of critical nesting, breeding, and

foraging habitat.

However, the original nomination process relied solely on the observations of birders and ornithologists. Though birdwatchers in New York are very knowledgeable, there are large areas of viable habitat that birders do not visit. This is evident because many IBAs were clustered in areas of high population. Audubon conservation staff saw a critical need to reassess the IBA nomination process by incorporating a landscape analysis of bird habitat variables across New York.

To address this need in 2003, they expanded the IBA site identification process to include analysis of spatial habitat data at a landscape scale using GIS (Geographic Information System). Audubon New York IBA coordinator Jillian Liner notes that "the use of GIS and spatial analysis has been a crucial component in identifying IBAs in an unbiased manner; it has allowed us to comprehensively assess the state to identify the most critical areas for birds." In 2001 Audubon New York acquired new computer equipment and GIS software through a grant from the Conservation Technology Support Program.

Audubon New York's GIS analysis targets habitat of forest, shrub and grassland species assemblages for which New York has a high conservation responsibility. Species under New York's conservation responsibility were identified using the Partners in Flight species assessment process and include species with a large proportion of their populations found within the North American Bird Conservation Initiative's Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) that make up New York. The IBA program does not designate every site where a species under conservation responsibility breeds as an IBA, because these species tend to be fairly common. Rather, taking a reserve system approach, it sought to identify the most important 10 percent of habitat for each assemblage.

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Audubon Society of the Capital Region



**Cordially Invites You To Attend Our
Year 2004 Programs & Field Trips**



Audubon Programs

All Programs To Be Held At:

*William K. Sanford
Colonie Town Library*

Thursday, September 9, 2004, 7:00-9:00 pm

***Pajaros Y Ruinas: Birds and Mayan Temples
of Yucatan Mexico and Belize - Joint***

Program with HMBC

Speaker: Gregg Recer

There's more to the Riviera Maya than the beaches of Cancun and Playa del Carmen. The eastern Yucatan Peninsula is a wonderful combination of the Caribbean, dry tropical forest and numerous archeological sites. Spending a week there is an easy way to become introduced to birding the neotropics, with the bonus of exploring fascinating Mayan ruins sites ranging from the huge and well-known such as Chichen Itza, to many obscure and barely excavated sites. While climbing pyramids, you can start adding entire new bird families such as Motmots, Puffbirds, Ant birds, and Jacamars to your life list!

Join Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club past president Gregg Recer for a slide presentation describing his family's recent travels to this beautiful area.

Thursday, October 14, 2004, 7:00-9:00 pm

***Crackers, Conchs, and Con Men, or Who
Stole Florida***

Speaker: ASCR's Very Own Bob Budliger!!

Numbers of herons, egrets, and ibises are a

Refreshments will be served. As always, we encourage you to bring your friends and family. For directions or details, call Greg Rucinski at the Colonie Library at (518) 458-9274.

mere tithe of what they were when Miami was a trading post. South Florida is over-run with exotics — parrots, coquis, walking catfish, cajuput trees. And the Mouse is King!

Bob will present a slide-illustrated tale of the changing natural history of this tropical former paradise. He will share his personal observations of environmental changes and how they have impacted native plants and animals.

Bob Budliger is past president of the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, and the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. This native Floridian has taught high school on Long Island and worked as a Park Ranger at Fire Island National Seashore. Following that, Bob worked for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, serving as the first Director of Five Rivers Center, and later, as chief of environmental education.

Join Bob and Audubon on October 14 for his insightful window into the history and future of south Florida.

Audubon Field Trips

Saturday, October 2, 2004, 2:00 p.m.

The Painted Forests of Fall at Thacher Park

Leader: ASCR President, Craig Thompson

Like the rainbow that mediates between sun and storm, the forest paints a glorious landscape as summer inexorably yields to fall. Join ASCR President and DEC Educator Craig Thompson for a field study of the chemistry of fall foliage, as we revel in the riot of color. Meet at Paint Mine Picnic Area (off Rt. 157). Call Craig Thompson (518-756-3610) for more information or to confirm in the event of inclement weather.

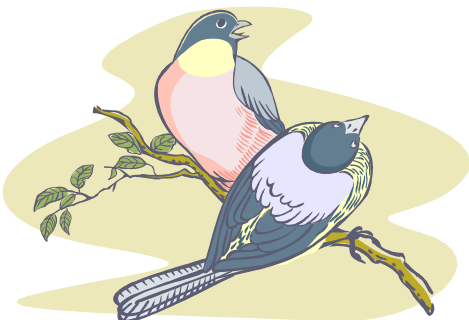
Audubon Uses GIS, to Identify IBAs, continued from Page 1...

"Most important" habitat was defined as the largest, least fragmented patches of habitat supporting the highest richness of species comprising each assemblage, with the greatest chance of long-term protection. Habitat identification was stratified across New York's BCRs and eco-regions to capture important ecological variation and ensure that potential IBAs were not clustered in one part of the state.

The Audubon New York staff built its analysis on land cover data, species predicted breeding habitat distributions, and stewardship lands from the New York Gap Analysis Program. Ancillary data included major and minor road overlays from the NYS Department of Transportation. Using ArcView Spatial Analyst, the staff developed habitat and species richness indices at multiple scales and created spatial models to integrate these indices.

Bird presence was ground-truthed by utilizing data from the New York Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) and via field surveys. BBA provides recent (2000-2003) data on the presence of breeding birds in 5 km x 5 km squares across the state. IBAs not adequately covered or surveyed by BBA were targeted for field surveys that were conducted by Audubon staff and qualified volunteers.

For more information, call Jillian Liner, Audubon New York IBA Coordinator at 607-254-2437 or e-mail at jliner@audubon.org



Wetlands Protection Legislation in New York

By Sean Mahar

The New York State Legislature ended its 2004 session on August 12, 2004 without taking action on many Audubon supported initiatives. The most important measure not addressed this session is the Clean Water Protection / Flood Prevention Act, which decreases the size threshold for DEC regulation of freshwater wetlands to 1 acre or larger, thus increasing the states ability to protect these ecosystems. Since this was not passed, New York remains the only state in the northeast to impose a size limitation on wetlands regulation.

Regardless of size, freshwater wetlands are an integral part in the functioning of ecosystems throughout New York State. Each individual wetland community is highly intricate, with most containing a diverse range of plant and animal species, including some species that are exceptionally rare. They provide essential habitats for many species of migratory waterfowl, for numerous threatened, endangered, or species of special concern, such as the bald eagle and osprey, and for countless other amphibian, avian, fish, and wildlife species to nest, breed, and feed. The loss of these vital habitats have been linked to population declines in many amphibian species.

Numerous freshwater wetlands can be found on Audubon Important Bird Areas (IBAs) throughout the state. Some of these IBAs, like Visser Ferry Nature Historic Preserve located in Saratoga County (<http://ny.audubon.org/iba/visser.html>), are host to very unique wetland habitats.

These wetlands not only provide critical habitats for many plant and animal species, but provide countless other environmental benefits from flood protection and storm water runoff control, to filtering pollutants, pesticides and sediments from the water. These countless benefits clearly illustrate the need for the state to protect these freshwater wetlands to the greatest extent possible.

Currently, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has the authority to regulate wetlands 12.4 acres or greater that are mapped, while the federal government (EPA and Army Corp.) has authority over the rest. However, a 2001 Supreme Court ruling in Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. United States Army Corps of Engineers held that the federal government did not have the authority to regulate "isolated, non-navigable" wetlands under the Clean Water Act. "Isolated wetlands" are wetlands that are not connected by navigable surface water to waters of the U.S. Since that time, the federal government has backed away from protecting these extremely important areas. As a result, 20% of New York's freshwater wetlands have been left unprotected according to the DEC. New York State needs to step in and ensure these vitally important areas are protected.

The Clean Water Protection / Flooding Prevention Act sponsored by Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli and Senator Carl Marcellino decreases the size threshold for DEC regulation of freshwater wetlands to 1 acre or larger, thus increasing the states ability to protect these ecosystems. This legislation also greatly increases the state's ability to properly manage these habitats for the benefit of all New York's citizens, birds, and wildlife by removing the requirement of wetlands to be mapped for regulation. Without this increased level of protection, the health of all NY's water bodies is put at risk.

Even though this legislation was not passed this year, we are still pushing hard to have it addressed next session. You can stay informed on this issue, and other Audubon legislative priorities by visiting our website ny.audubon.org; or by sending your name, address and email address to nyaction@audubon.org to be put on our activist newsletter list.



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Audubon New York Co-Sponsors National Wilderness Conference

The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, in cooperation with Audubon New York and other wilderness advocates, will be co-sponsoring members and friends to The National Wilderness Conference, to be held in Lake George on October 10-13, 2004. This historic conference will focus on the history, present-day realities, and future of our National Wilderness Preservation System. The conference will be held in New York's Adirondack Park at the Fort William Henry Resort & Conference Center located on scenic Lake George, one hour's drive from the Albany International Airport and just a short distance from some historic, scenic and highly accessible wilderness locations within the "Forever Wild" Adirondack Forest Preserve. The conference gets started on October 10 with field trips, and runs until October 13 with speakers and panelists representing the great diversity of national wilderness thought and perspective.

Check out the conference website, on the internet at:

www.Wilderness40th.org

...for the latest updates, including:

- Opportunities to become conference supporters
- Program details, including speakers and sessions
- Field trip descriptions and photos
- Additional lodging opportunities
- Registration for displays and exhibitors

***** For Programs, Field Trip, & Further General
Environmental Information, Visit Us on the Internet at:**

www.CapitalRegionAudubon.Org



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