

Bird new sites and help advance migratory bird conservation this spring!

Audubon New York and The Nature Conservancy are looking for experienced birder volunteers from all around the Lake Ontario basin to help survey sites for the spring 2010 season of the Migratory Stopover Project. See the attached map for the project area, which runs along the Lake Ontario lakeshore from east of Buffalo to west of Syracuse and southward into the Finger Lakes.

Audubon and TNC have been working together on a study to help identify and protect critical stopover habitats in the Lake Ontario basin of New York, as well as to improve our understanding of why birds choose to stop in certain places. You may have seen our posts before. This past spring and fall, the study team and a group of dedicated volunteers surveyed birds at an array of sites during the migrations, piloting the sampling methods and establishing the first set of study sites. Our intrepid volunteers logged over 5000 birds thus far during 172 site visits, and saw 114 species including high numbers of Blackpoll, Black-Throated Blue, and Chestnut-Sided Warblers; Ovenbirds, Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks, and Scarlet Tanagers. Volunteers also recorded uncommon species like Olive-Sided Flycatchers. Sampling sites are located throughout the region to test hypotheses about the relative importance of proximity to the lakeshore, landscape context (like how much forest is around a site) and habitat structure in determining migratory bird abundance and diversity.

This spring, we need your help to add to that body of knowledge for the existing sampling sites as well as new ones—this is part of a multi-year, 5 migration season study. Join now to be part of an effort that will help guide conservation, and land and shoreline management for migrating birds.

Why we need your help:

- We are poised to expand the study to a greater number of sampling sites covering a greater geographic range (see attached map), and we need your help! More sites, more sampling, and more coverage will strengthen the dataset and improve our power to yield strongly supported guidance on where and how to protect and manage migratory stopover habitat.
- We have had a successful first year, but the study has really just begun—we need your help sustaining the effort through the next year and beyond.
- Our effort here in Western NY will have impacts beyond our borders, as it is one of the only projects in the Great Lakes region mounting a field-based effort to understand and better predict what stopover habitats are utilized. Lessons learned from this study will be used by related conservation efforts throughout the Great Lakes.
- Volunteers serve as ambassadors for our organizations by talking to landowners and others about the projects and helping to develop a groundswell of support for our work.

Why are we studying this?

- Recent research indicates that migration is the period of highest mortality for neotropical migratory songbirds, and the conservation of these birds requires protecting a network of stopover sites, particularly in the highly-altered Lake Ontario watershed.
- Currently, there is only anecdotal information about important stopover sites, and no tool to predict where they occur.
- There are increasing demands on our shoreline (and elsewhere), and having rigorous and accepted information about how migrating birds use the lakeshore is critical for influencing shoreline management and conservation.

What does volunteering entail?

- Attending a training session to learn the protocols
- Going out at least 2 times (and ideally more) during a 5-6 week migration season, sampling specific sites
- Visiting as few as 2 sites or as many as 6 different sites during a season, depending on your availability, location, and interest
- Counting all of the birds you see and hear as you walk along a transect and at a point in response to playback of a mobbing call
- Logging your data via a web portal

What will Audubon and TNC use this information for?

- To help refine a predictive spatial model of stopover habitat for the NY portion of Lake Ontario's watershed (we've built a model based on expert opinion, the literature, and previous work in our region and elsewhere, but we need local, on-the-ground data to increase the leverage for conservation work).
- To guide the development of Audubon's future Important Bird Areas and The Nature Conservancy's on-the-ground protection work
- We will create materials and conduct outreach to individual and corporate landowners and municipalities in order to enlist their help in protecting and managing important stopover sites
- We will work with agencies to incorporate information on stopover sites and ecology into shoreline management and permitting, energy siting, land management, and conservation.
- All of the project's data will be entered into eBird, contributing to the Avian Knowledge Network, so that they can be accessed and used by researchers around the world.

