

## Constitution Marsh Designated State BCA

By Michael Burger, Ph.D.

On Friday, May 18 2001, Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary (CMACS) became New York's twelfth Bird Conservation Area (BCA.) The 270-acre fresh/brackish tidal marsh in Putnam County across from West Point is one of only five remaining large tidal marshes on the Hudson River. New York Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) Commissioner, Bernadette Castro, designated the marsh in conjunction with the ribbon-cutting dedication ceremony for Jim's Walk (see story front page.)

Like Audubon's Important Bird Area program, upon which it is based, New York's BCA program uses standardized criteria in order to determine which sites qualify for designation as a BCA. The marsh meets several of those criteria. It supports a large number of waterfowl as well as an exceptional overall diversity of bird species during Spring and Fall migrations; it is home to a whole community of marsh-nesting birds during the breeding season; and it hosts a number of New York state endangered, threatened, or special concern species, including Least Bittern, Pied-billed Grebe, Osprey, Bald Eagle, and Northern Harrier. In addition, Fall swallow concentrations at the marsh typically number about 20,000 individuals, but can reach as high as 100,000.

While OPRHP owns the lands within the marsh, Audubon New York manages the site and operates an environmental education center on their adjacent property. Prior to the latest BCA designation, the marsh had already been recognized for excellence by being designated by the New York Department of State as a Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat and a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance.

To learn more about CMACS, visit the website at <http://ny.audubon.org> and click on Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary or call the sanctuary director, Eric Lind, at (845) 265-2601.

### Bird Conservation Area (BCA) Designations

Existing BCAs – location and date of designation:

1. David A. Sarnoff Pine Barrens Preserve - Suffolk County, 8/31/98.
2. Eastern Lake Ontario Marshes BCA - Oswego and Jefferson Counties, 8/31/98.
3. Buckhorn Island BCA - Erie County, 8/31/98.
4. Iona Island/Doodletown BCA - Rockland County, 8/31/98.
5. Catskill High Peaks BCA - Greene and Ulster Counties, 6/10/99.
6. Nissequogue River BCA - Suffolk County, 4/28/00.
7. Montezuma Wetlands Complex BCA - Seneca, Wayne, and Cayuga Counties, 5/5/00.
8. Braddock Bay BCA - Monroe County, 5/5/00.
9. Mongaup Valley BCA - Sullivan County, 6/16/00.
10. Bashakill BCA - Sullivan County, 6/16/00.
11. Fahnestock State Park - Hubbard Perkins Conservation Area BCA - Putnam County, 9/29/00.
12. Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary - Putnam County, 5/18/01.

## Think Before You Drink — Coffee!

By Michael Burger, Ph.D.

This Fall, as you sit in the morning chill sipping coffee and watching migrant birds that have paused in their southward journey to forage in your yard, stop to consider how the coffee you are drinking can affect the quality of habitat toward which those birds are heading.

It's true. As far as birds are concerned, there are two types of coffee, shade-grown coffee and sun coffee. Shade-grown coffee is that which is grown in the traditional manner, i.e. cultivated under a forest canopy, or planted with a mixture of up to 40 species of overstory trees, including nitrogen-fixing trees and others that produce fruits or woods that can be harvested. In contrast, sun coffee is a relatively new variety of coffee that is grown in coffee monocultures in full sun.



The Wood Thrush is one of many neotropical migrant species that breed in New York and winter in shade coffee plantations in Mexico and Central America.

Shade-grown coffee plantations provides a structurally complex habitat that can be used by many species of birds, both tropical residents and neotropical migrants. At least two dozen species that commonly breed in New York have been found to utilize shade-grown coffee plantations during the winter, including Black-throated Blue Warbler, Wood Thrush, Ameri-

## In Search of Bicknell's Thrush

By Michael Burger, Ph.D.

We heard it before we even began the survey. The unmistakable flutelike thrush song that begins with a couple of short notes, then goes down, then up. We had just reached the lean-to where we planned to spend the night when the song floated out of the thick balsam firs and answered the question we had come to answer. "Are there Bicknell's Thrush in the Santanoni Range?"

*There were indeed Bicknell's Thrush in the Santanoni Range.*

Rich Merritt, Audubon New York's director of operations, and I had volunteered to find the answer to that question for the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) as part of their Mountain Birdwatch project. Throughout the evening, at least one Bicknell's Thrush continued to sing periodically and even visited us briefly in the clearing in front of the lean-to. Even though the official survey would begin in the morning, our trip was already a success.

Rich and I were up early the next morning and had begun the survey by



Dr. Michael Burger records data during the survey.

4:30 am. We heard a total of three Bicknell's Thrush during the course of the five point-counts, in addition to several Blackpoll Warblers, White-throated Sparrows, Swainson's Thrushes, and Winter Wrens — the other target species of Mountain Birdwatch. Many other high elevation/boreal species were noted as well, such as Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Boreal Chickadee.

According to Dan Lambert, VINS conservation biologist, our experience was not unusual for Mountain Birdwatch volunteers. Throughout the US range of the Bicknell's Thrush, from the Catskills and Adirondacks of New York, through the Green Mountains of Vermont and White Mountains of New Hampshire, all the way up to Maine, 140 survey routes had been adopted this Spring. Thirty-five of these were in New York by a total of 50 volunteers. So far, data have been reported for only 30 routes in New York, but Bicknell's Thrush were found on 24 of those! In general, Lambert says, sites where they were not detected tended to be smaller, more isolated patches of montane forest habitat than sites where they were detected. This is a familiar story in conservation research and the reason why habitat fragmentation is considered one of the main threats to species' populations.

Rich and I finished our survey at about 6:30 that morning and spent the rest of the day in a quest of a different sort. By the time we finished, we had put three more Bicknell's on the map for VINS, finding them from below 3000 feet all the way up to the Krumholtz zone above 4000 feet. Our twenty-plus mile hike yielded some highs and lows worth telling, but that's a story for another time. If you think you might want to adopt a Mountain Birdwatch survey route for yourself next Spring, you can reach me at (607) 254-2441. You won't regret it!



Rich Merritt presents the exceptional view of the Adirondacks High Peaks.

can Redstart, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Sun coffee plantations, in comparison, support only 5-10% of the species that shade coffee plantations support.

The difference is clear. If you are drinking shade-grown coffee, you are promoting responsible agricultural practices in the tropics that accommodate birds and protect biodiversity. By drinking sun coffee, however, you encourage the clearing of tropical forests for coffee monocultures that serve few birds or other types of wildlife.

To find shade grown coffee, you can look for brands like Café Canopy (see [www.cafecanopy.com](http://www.cafecanopy.com)) that have been certified as "bird friendly" by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, or investigate some of the uncertified, yet shade-grown, organic coffees offered by Equal Exchange.

Besides the tremendous benefits to birds and other wildlife, shade-grown coffee is also more likely than sun coffee to be grown organically and to be produced by small, independent growers who receive a fair price for their crop. In other words, shade-grown coffee can be enjoyed without guilt. Think about that with your next cup.