

# Citizen Science Takes Off at Centers

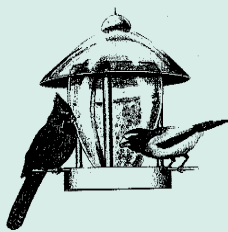
By Chuck Remington

PROGRAMS INCORPORATING citizen science activities are burgeoning at Audubon Centers across the state, helping to teach children about science and to gather data vital to monitoring Important Bird Areas and other habitat crucial to birds.

Audubon New York's education and science staff have worked together to develop protocols for novice bird watchers that provide valid data for scientists. Mike Burger, Ph.D., Audubon New York's director of bird conservation, has also worked individually with Center education directors to identify monitoring needs at each of the Center sites, in order to track patterns of bird and other wildlife populations.

Last spring, Audubon New York forged a formal partnership with the Education Division of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The Lab is renowned for its premiere citizen science programs such as Classroom FeederWatch. In exchange for promoting their programs at Audubon New York Centers, our education staff is benefiting from Cornell's experience in the development of their own programs that teach students the process of science.

## PROJECT FEEDERWATCH



Help scientists study backyard birds

A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and the Canadian Nature Federation

At Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center, bird watching weekends have introduced families to feeder monitoring protocols and citizen science activities were incorporated into summer camp programs. This year an Oyster Bay school will include citizen science program components into their year-long curriculum.

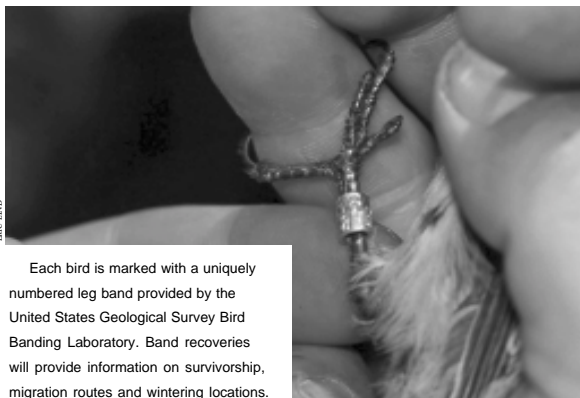
At Constitution Marsh Audubon Center, summer interns were trained to perform a number of research projects including the monitoring of key species at a superfund site next door. The Marsh is now accredited as a MAPS station (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) and bird-banding observations will be included in future education programs (*see story to the right*).

Over half of the new school programs developed at the Prospect Park Audubon Center incorporate citizen science and inventory activities - counting everything from dragonflies to macroinvertebrates in the nearby

lake. The Center is creating a fascinating experiment of its own: pitting expert birders from the Brooklyn Bird Club against a series of school groups in the monitoring of twelve key species - including the threatened Pied-billed Grebe.

By the end of the year, all Audubon Centers will be able to use E-Bird, the Internet based database for bird counts. The E-Bird project, a partnership between Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is a state-of-the-art software program that not only allows people to input their bird sighting information from any site in the United States, but to retrieve, manipulate, compare and analyze their data in myriad ways.

Citizen science programs at Centers support school performance standards, show children that science has practical applications right in their own neighborhoods and that counting & monitoring birds, other wildlife and their habitats can be FUN!



Each bird is marked with a uniquely numbered leg band provided by the United States Geological Survey Bird Banding Laboratory. Band recoveries will provide information on survivorship, migration routes and wintering locations.

# Bird-Banding Station Established at Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary

By Eric Lind

THE PRE-DETERMINED meeting time on July 19 was 4:00 am, at the Audubon Center. I was a few minutes late, but I could excuse my slight tardiness, after all it was still an hour and a half before sunrise. As I gathered up my gear, I noticed our high school intern, Rebecca, age 15, had already arrived and was patiently waiting for the rest of us to get started. Her presence was a surprise as it was strictly voluntary. Considering the very early hour, she would need a ride from one of her parents, and the fact that high school students generally need a lot more sleep than the rest of us, I did not expect to see her. I thought, "Wow! She must really want to be here." The other staff did not have the sleep-in option, and they were soon ready too.

It was a banding day, one of several at Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary this summer. We had started a "Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship" (MAPS) program designed to monitor the trends of breeding songbird populations here on a long-term basis through mist netting and banding. Funding for this first year was provided by The Hudson River Foundation.

The MAPS program was developed by the Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes, California and includes over 500 participants throughout North America. Pooled data from these stations provide important information on songbirds and aid in identifying the causes behind population trends documented by other major monitoring programs, such as the Breeding Bird Atlas and the Christmas Bird Count.

In North America, and in the Hudson Valley, birds continue to face a number of environmental threats such as climate change, habitat loss and pollution. As stewards of Constitution Marsh, we felt the need to formally monitor birds in order to predict future population levels and identify species of concern. Breeding birds in and around this station will be monitored over time and this information can be cross-referenced with

environmental changes in the area. It is hoped that this information will aid in the development of better long-term management plans for Constitution Marsh and other important natural areas.

We are motivated to conduct this work by observing the commitment made at our sister sanctuaries, the Sharon Audubon Center in Connecticut and the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center in Long Island. The staff at the Sharon Audubon Center oversees an ambitious seven MAPS stations, including one at the Buttercup Farm Audubon Center in Dutchess County. Theodore Roosevelt operates two stations, and one of them, called Warbler Woods, has been collecting data for over 10 years.

This project also provides the opportunity for volunteers and interns to learn more about bird conservation and contribute to meaningful field research. Was this Rebecca's motivation for getting up at that very early hour? Probably not. But my guess is that she, like the rest of us, could not resist the desire to be closer to the wild birds we love. We all wanted to be there for that.



This Common Yellowthroat was one of over 200 birds banded at Constitution Marsh this summer.

