

# BCA NEWS: Schodack Island designated, Law amended

By Michael Burger, Ph.D.

ON JUNE 19, 2002, an 864-acre portion of Schodack Island State Park was designated as New York's newest Bird Conservation Area (BCA) by Governor George E. Pataki and Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno, along with Commissioners Bernadette Castro and Erin Crotty. The island, which is located on the Hudson River, 10 miles south of Albany in portions of Rensselaer, Columbia, and Greene Counties, supports state-listed species as well as a significant congregation of wading birds. More than a dozen Cerulean Warblers, a species listed as Special Concern in New York, have been known to breed within the BCA portion of the park, and several Bald Eagles regularly use the area adjacent to the Hudson River for foraging. In addition, a Great Blue Heron rookery

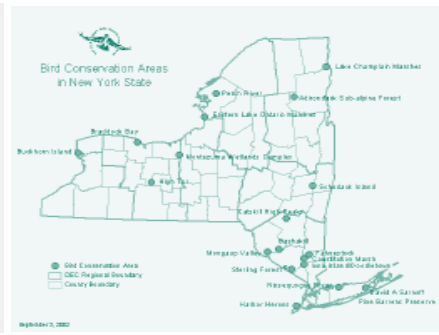
consisting of 50 or more nests is located in the new BCA.

The BCA is predominantly forested, with large trees providing habitat for the Cerulean Warblers, but there are also sizeable areas of wetlands, including tidal wetlands, on the island. The park's Master Plan carefully balances recreational uses with protection of these important habitats. Intensive recreation, such as the boat launch location, will take place outside of the area designated as a BCA.

In other BCA news, the State Legislature passed and Governor Pataki signed amendments to the State Bird Conservation Area Law. The bill accomplishes two important modifications to the BCA Law. First, it allows any state-owned lands or waters to be designated as BCAs, eliminating the



Map of Schodack Island a newly designated Bird Conservation Area.



Map of Bird Conservation Areas in New York State.

previous restriction to only Department of Environmental Conservation or Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation lands and enabling the state to recognize and manage many more important bird habitats across the state. Second, it requires publication in the Environmental Notice Bulletin and a thirty day public comment period prior

to the designation of new BCAs or removal of existing BCAs. This provision will ensure that BCA designations are not rescinded without adequate discussion and public input. In addition to these amendments to the BCA law, the amendments also create a Natural Heritage Area program similar to the BCA program.

## Ripley Hawk Watch Hits a Grand Slam

By Julie Hart

IN THE SPRING of this year volunteers at the Ripley Hawk Watch observed what they called a Grand Slam—four rare raptors flew by on migration. The four rare raptors were Ferruginous Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Mississippi Kite, and Black Vulture. All sightings were approved by the Buffalo Ornithological Society. The Ferruginous Hawk sighting is quite possibly the first on record for the State of New York and is awaiting review by the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC). Ferruginous Hawks are the largest hawks in the United States and typically occupy the western half of the nation.

With only 193 observer hours, Ripley volunteers recorded 11,134 raptors this past season. The largest portion of sightings was of Broad-winged Hawks - 5,132. As high as this number may seem, on a good viewing year you can see twice as many broad-

wings. This year there were days of rain followed by complete cloud cover. Then came days of clear blue skies allowing hawks to fly extremely high. Both weather patterns prevent the hawk watchers from seeing big flights.

The Ripley Hawk Watch is on the southern shore of Lake Erie about 60 miles west of Buffalo, New York, and 20 miles east of Erie, Pennsylvania. The Watch began in 1985 and consists of six privately owned sites. "Because the escarpment comes close to Lake Erie at the Forsythe Road area, the raptors come into this narrow section of the Lake Erie plain and can be seen kettling and streaking out on their trip to Canada," said Len DeFrancisco, a coordinator of the Watch.

The best times to see spring migrating raptors are when there is a strong southerly wind and little or no precipitation. The Watch was recognized as an Important Bird Area by Audubon

New York because the site is a raptor migratory corridor and because many of the raptors are federally or state-listed species. Over the last ten years, the site has seen an average of over 17,000 raptors each spring.

For more information about the Ripley Hawk Watch, you may call Len DeFrancisco at (716) 665-4999,

email Dave Feliciano at [lynn@madbbs.com](mailto:lynn@madbbs.com) or Mike Ceki at [mseci@cecomet.net](mailto:mseci@cecomet.net).



Ripley Hawk Watch Observers who identified a Ferruginous Hawk. From left, Tom Simmons, Leonard DeFrancisco, and Bill Dietz.

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## Why Monitor?



(Above) Steve Kelling monitors shorebirds at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex

By Jillian Liner

MONITORING takes many forms. If trekking through the woods with a headlamp in the middle of the Adirondacks searching for Bicknell's Thrush doesn't sound appealing, maybe you'd rather scan the mudflats at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex with a scope looking for shorebirds. Or maybe you'd rather follow transects through the woods at Hemlock Lake with a compass and record all the birds you see and hear. These are just some of the monitoring programs currently instituted at New York's Important Bird Areas (IBAs.)

### Do you know of a potential IBA?

The second round of Important Bird Area (IBA) nominations is officially open. If you know of a site that may meet New York's IBA criteria, you can nominate it. New York's IBA criteria are listed on the web at <http://ny.audubon.org/iba>. To nominate a site, fill out a nomination packet and supply data on bird use and information on the site's habitat, size, location, and ownership. If you are interested in nominating a site, please contact Jillian Liner, IBA Program Coordinator at [jbutler@audubon.org](mailto:jbutler@audubon.org) or (607)-254-2437.

To gain an understanding of how Audubon New York is doing at conserving New York's bird populations, we must know what birds we currently have and observe their populations into the future. As it stands now, we have an excellent idea of what birds are found in New York, but we have few active monitoring programs that result in good estimates of bird populations. And, for the most part, these programs are designed to monitor state-listed and game species, but these birds are not the only ones on which Audubon should focus.

There are additional species that conservationists should be monitoring. For example, these are species that may be relatively abundant in New York but are experiencing serious declines, such as the Wood Thrush and Savannah Sparrow; or species that have a large percent of their global population found within New York; and we, therefore have a high responsibility to maintain, such as the Black-throated Blue Warbler and Scarlet Tanager.

Audubon New York's IBA Program can serve as a tool to obtain data on New York's birds and we will continue implementing monitoring programs at IBAs.

"It is important to collect data on species composition and abundance for natural areas," comments Matt Medler, an Audubon volunteer. "Without knowing what we have, there is no way to know what we might be losing, and what we should be working to conserve. It is also a challenge to go to a totally new spot and see what is there."

Whether you are an individual or a group, if you have an interest in watching or searching for birds, please contact Jillian Liner, IBA Coordinator at [jbutler@audubon.org](mailto:jbutler@audubon.org) or (607) 254-2437, to learn about how you can get involved in monitoring at an IBA.