

State-owned habitats recognized as IMPORTANT TO BIRDS, designated as BCAs



The Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) is known to breed at High Tor, New York's newest BCA.

By Michael Burger, Ph.D.

IN MARCH, two state-owned habitats were recognized for their importance to birds and designated as the two newest Bird Conservation Areas (BCAs) in New York. Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Erin Crotty announced the designation of the Champlain Marshes BCA at the Spring Audubon Council meeting in Saratoga Springs on March 9.

The 2,800-acre conservation area is comprised of six Wildlife Management Areas in Clinton, Essex, and Washington Counties, including Kings Bay, Montys Bay, Ausable Marsh, Wickham Marsh, Putts Creek, and East Bay. They contain large marshes, forested swamps, and shrub swamps in addition to upland forests, grasslands, and shrublands. These diverse habitats are important waterfowl, marsh bird, wading bird and migratory bird concentration sites and support priority species such as American Bittern, Least Bittern, Black Tern, Pied-billed Grebe, Osprey, Northern Harrier, and Short-eared Owl.

On March 12, Governor George E. Pataki announced the designation of the High Tor Wildlife Management Area as the state's eighteenth BCA. This 6,100-acre site in Ontario and Yates Counties consists mostly of deciduous forest, but important grasslands, shrublands, and wetlands are also found there. High Tor BCA is an important area for species associated with wetlands, such as Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, and Least Bittern, and for species associated with woodlands, such as Northern Goshawk, Cooper's Hawk, Black-billed Cuckoo, thrushes, vireos, and warblers. Many additional species rely on this site as stop-over habitat during migration.

New York's Bird Conservation Area program was established in 1997 and is based on Audubon's Important Bird Area program. To learn more about the BCA program and the sites that have been designated to date, turn to the DEC web site at <http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfw/mr/wildlife/bca/>.

Don't Miss Muckrace 2002!

Staff Report

THE SIXTH ANNUAL MONTEZUMA MUCKRACE will take place on Saturday, September 7, 2002, at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex in central New York. The 21-hour birding competition raises money to support bird conservation and research at the 47,000-acre complex, which was designated as an Important Bird Area of global significance by Audubon New York and BirdLife International in 1997 and a New York State Bird Conservation Area in 2000.

Teams compete to identify as many species of birds as possible from midnight to 9:00 p.m., but can use as much or as little of the 21-hour period as they like. Last year, more than 80 of the state's top amateur and professional bird experts competed in the event.

In addition to requiring knowledge of fall bird identification, the competition tests the abilities of birders to operate under sleep deprivation and the stress of keeping to a tight schedule of stops along a carefully planned route.

Teams consist of three or more individuals who bird together throughout the day. A registration fee of \$100 for an affiliated team or \$50 for an unaffiliated team is required. Prizes will include gift certificates, memberships, bird prints and more. Get your team together and register early.

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IBA News Briefs

By Jillian Butler

NEW YORK'S IMPORTANT BIRD AREA (IBA) PROGRAM is in its sixth year. Since its inception, 127 sites have been recognized as IBAs and numerous efforts and actions have been taken to ensure their proper management and protection.

Thank you for your help to protect the Shawangunk IBA!

The Shawangunk Grassland (formally the Galeville Airport) IBA is just one example of a recent effective grassroots effort to protect critical bird habitat. The area was recognized as an IBA because it is one of the most important grassland bird breeding and wintering areas in New York. The United States



The Shawangunk Grassland is an Important Bird Area because it offers significant area for grassland birds breeding and wintering in New York.

Fish and Wildlife Service considered opening the refuge to model airplane flying following requests from model airplane enthusiasts in 1999. In 2001 after internal review, the Service released a draft Determination of Compatibility (DC) report for public comment that found model airplane flying incompatible with the refuge's mission.

The Refuge received 222 letters in support of the draft Determination of Compatibility report. Letters echoed the concern that model airplane flying would not only negatively impact the unique wildlife that resides at the refuge, but also the visitor experience. The efforts of Audubon chapters and members, bird clubs, and others were successful in ensuring that on February 22, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Determination of Compatibility, which found model airplane flying incompatible with the mission of the Refuge, was officially approved. However, the issue is not over. Model airplane enthusiasts are pressuring the US Fish and Wildlife Regional Director to reconsider this determination. Fortunately, as a direct result of public comment and the support of United States Congressman Maurice Hinchey, we are optimistic that we can continue to protect this critical grassland habitat. For the most recent update and information on how to help, visit the Audubon New York website at <http://ny.audubon.org>.

The Birds are Back, Let's Monitor!

As Audubon New York continues to work on conservation issues such as those at the Shawangunk Grasslands, Audubon is also looking to implement volunteer monitoring programs at priority IBAs.

Last fall Audubon organized a monitoring program of shorebirds at Montezuma recording a daily total of 660 shorebirds.

This spring Audubon began monitoring Cerulean Warblers in the Hemlock and Canadice Lakes IBA. Portions of the Hemlock Watershed are proposed to be selectively logged in the upcoming years, and although Ceruleans prefer a structurally diverse habitat, the population of Ceruleans at this IBA is not well known. Data collected on Ceruleans at this IBA will not only benefit the birds and managers of this area but will also contribute to the larger body of knowledge on conservation of this priority watchlist species.



Cerulean Warbler

Do you know of a potential IBA?

The second round of IBA nominations will begin this fall. If you know of a site that may meet New York's IBA criteria, you can nominate it as an IBA. New York's IBA criteria are listed on the web at <http://ny.audubon.org/iba>. Nominating a site involves filling out a nomination packet and supplying data on bird use and information on the site's habitat, size, location, and ownership. A technical committee made up of ornithologists from around the state will review the nominations to see if the site meets the IBA criteria. If you are interested in nominating a site, please get in touch with Jillian Butler, IBA Program Coordinator, jbutler@audubon.org or (607)-254-2437.

Winners of the 2001 Montezuma Muckrace pose with their Golden Boot trophy, from left are Matt Medler, Matt Young, Matt Williams (holding the boot), and Matt Sarver.