

# A Day of Appreciation: The Great Swamp Celebration

By Jillian Butler

A DAY FULL OF ACTIVITIES was held in Putnam County on Saturday May 11 to celebrate International Migratory Bird Day and the dedication of the extraordinary Great Swamp as an Audubon Important Bird Area.

The day began at 4:30 a.m. as Barbara Butler and the Waterman Bird Club kicked off the spring bird census for Dutchess County by tracking down Whip-poor-wills and Owls. Additional morning bird walks were led by John Askildsen of the Bedford Audubon Society and Bill Wallace Jr. of the Putnam County Land Trust. Attendees were also fortunate to partake in a bird banding demonstration led by Dr. James Utter of Purchase College and Friends Of the Great Swamp (FrOGS) and Andrea Townsend of the Institute of Ecosystem Studies.

The Great Swamp was dedicated as an Important Bird Area because it is a high quality wetland that supports large concentrations of migrating birds, including more than 300 shorebirds and 100 wading birds, and because it provides habitat to state-listed breeding species such as the Least Bittern, American Bittern, and Red-shouldered Hawk.

During the dedication ceremony, Audubon New York recognized Dr. James Utter for the tremendous effort he has put into protecting the Great Swamp.

Beyond sharing this local treasure to numerous visitors by canoe and organizing events such as this one, Dr. Utter has led the effort to acquire funds for an approximately \$3 million conservation program for the Great Swamp.

Partners contributing towards this conservation effort include Bedford Audubon Society, the State of New York, Putnam County, FrOGS, Putnam County Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, the Open Space Institute, New York City DEP, Purchase College, Oblong Land Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, and the Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition. The partnership is led by a truly dedicated conservationist who continues to take the steps necessary to ensure that the values of the Great Swamp are preserved. Audubon thanks Jim Utter and Bedford Audubon for their leadership on this issue.



Nearly 40 people attended the dedication ceremony of the Great Swamp where Jim Utter, a representative of the Great Swamp was presented with an Important Bird Areas plaque. (Left to right) Jim Utter, Friends of the Great Swamp and Bedford Audubon, John Askildsen, President Bedford Audubon, Dan Niven, National Audubon Society's Important Bird Areas Coordinator, and Jillian Butler, Audubon New York Important Bird Areas Coordinator.

## Audubon New York broadens its GIS and Smart Growth Sights From Beaverkill/Willowemoc Watersheds to Development Surge Expected In Southern Catskills

By Graham Cox

AS AUDUBON NEW YORK'S open space mapping work continues in the 300-square-mile Beaverkill/Willowemoc watershed in the southern Catskill region, our GIS program is identifying key natural resources and threats to the area biodiversity.

Two major developments pose threats to the communities in Orange, Sullivan and Ulster counties. The first is the upgrading and reconstruction of the "Route 17 Quickway" to interstate standards, replacing many of the existing grade-level intersections with more elaborate expressway exit ramps.

Though the intent is to improve highway safety, it also focuses land speculation at new exit and entry ramps, increasing development pressures at these locations.

The State Department of Transportation is presently studying alternatives sites for these interchanges, one of which is on the crest of the Shawangunk ridge between Wurtsboro and the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area, a designated Audubon Important Bird Area.

The second category of threats comes from the three proposed major casino resort developments being considered for the southern Catskills. Though the state legislature has already approved the idea for these casinos, the exact locations and contracts with Native American tribes are still being negotiated.

Audubon New York, with community stakeholders, is interested in identifying natural resources that should be protected and avoided in locating these major resort complexes, and over

the longer term, identifying the kind of economic development that is compatible with the community character and community vision. In the end, we hope that our GIS mapping and open space project will play a major role in these issues.

Toward this end, Audubon New York was part of a regional panel discussion on May 18 to examine the issues for alternative development as part of the Shawangunk Region smart growth workshop. The workshop, "Planning for the coming surge of growth," aimed at local, county and state officials, was to explore various 'smart growth' approaches for encouraging appropriate growth while preserving the magnificent Shawangunk Ridge and contributing to the quality of life in the region.

Meanwhile, in the western Catskills, the proposed resort development with its two 18-hole golf courses on private lands on either side of the state's Belleayre Ski Center, continues to pose conservation concerns. The developer has submitted 3,000 pages of information to the New York State of Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) as the basis for a draft environmental impact statement.

Audubon will continue to monitor this proposal with bird conservation and habitat concerns in mind.

Audubon New York has invested significant resources to date on the current conservation issues facing the Catskill Region and hopes our efforts will ensure more protection of critical habitats.

## Audubon New York's Forestry/Wildlife Project Moves Ahead With Formation of Technical And Partnership Advisory Groups

By Graham Cox

AUDUBON NEW YORK has formed a broad partnership of forestry and wildlife interests to translate three years of field research into practical recommendations to forest land owners, loggers and professional foresters to "promote sustainable forest management decisions and practices" that support wildlife conservation.

In past editions of the *Audubon Advocate* we have reported on the progress of the field research in forests stands in the central, western and northern Adirondacks, in the Catskills and in Southern Tier counties. Forest ecologists and technicians have gathered data on bird species, amphibians and beetles and related their numbers and health to forest conditions after different types of harvesting. The challenge now is to interpret these field results into recommendations to the half million forestland owners across the state, many of whom are interested in protecting wildlife values as they make timber harvest decisions on the 14 million acres of privately-owned forest lands in the state.

Two working groups were formed to draft these forest management recommendations. The first group is a technical committee chaired by Dr. Ross Whaley, former president of the State University of New York Environmental Science and Forestry School and member of the Audubon New York state board.

The second group, the forest/wildlife partnership advisory group is chaired by Frank Dunstan, who is responsible for managing the State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DECs) forest certification program. Dunstan, for many years, headed National Audubon's wildlife sanctuary division.

Members of the partnership group include representatives from DEC's forestry and wildlife divisions and bureaus, and representatives from private and industry forest landowners, consulting foresters and professionals and academic institutions.

Much of the work is modeled on a successful Audubon Pennsylvania project guided by science consultant Dr. Jan Beyea, former chief scientist for National Audubon. The partnership group will develop outreach materials suitable for a broad variety of audiences based on the three years of field research and on a survey of related field research. These outreach materials will provide information about how logging affects species of conservation concern in addition to broad wildlife communities.