

# State Adds Four New Bird Conservation Areas

By Michael Burger

ON OCTOBER 22, 2002, Governor George E. Pataki announced the designation of four new Bird Conservation Areas (BCAs), highlighting the importance of these State-owned sites for many species of birds, including several listed as endangered, threatened, and special concern in New York. These new designations bring the total

ment Bureau; and Department of State; with assistance from Audubon New York. Guidance for the program is provided by an Advisory Committee of State and private wildlife experts from across New York.

## THE FOUR NEW BCAS ARE:

**Carter's Pond Wildlife Management Area** – Carter's Pond is an extensive marsh and upland complex within the Battenkill River watershed in Washington County. The mix of habitats is important to breeding and migrating American Woodcock; waterfowl; and marsh species such as Virginia Rails, Common Moorhens, Soras, and State-threatened Pied-billed Grebes and Least Bitterns. In addition, the site supports an overall exceptional diversity of bird species. At Carter's Pond, New York State DEC maintains parking areas, a trail, rowboat and canoe access sites, and a marsh overlook structure.

**Oak Orchard/Tonawanda Wildlife Management Areas** – Oak Orchard and Tonawanda WMAs sandwich the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge on the east and the west in Niagara, Orleans, and Genesee Counties. Together, these sites are one of the most important wetland complexes in western New York, consisting of marshes, swamps, grasslands, and forests.

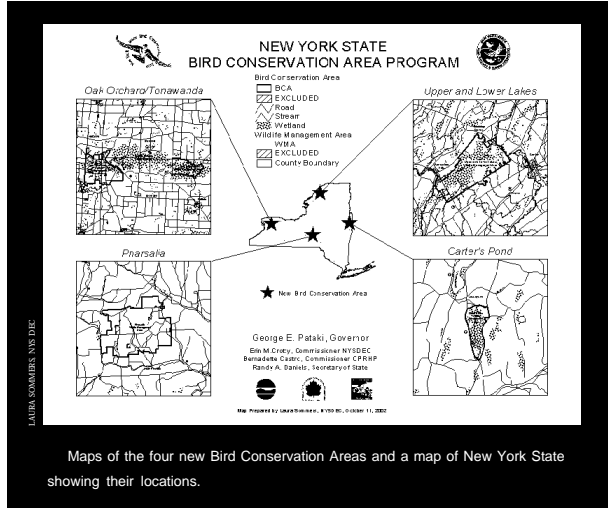
The sites are important to breeding wetland-dependent birds and support large numbers of migrating waterfowl and water birds. Extensive grasslands provide breeding habitat for waterfowl and other species such as Grasshopper Sparrows and Bobolinks. Several State-listed species are supported at the complex, including Black Terns, Pied-billed Grebes, American and Least Bitterns, Osprey, and Cerulean Warblers.

**Pharsalia Wildlife Management Area** – Pharsalia WMA is a 10,000-acre high-elevation forest surrounded by farmland in Chenango County. The forest is mostly deciduous, however, conifer plantations and mixed woods also provide important avian habitats at this site. Pharsalia WMA's primary importance to birds is the largely un-fragmented breeding habitat it provides to forest species, including Swainson's and Hermit Thrushes; Veery; Northern Goshawk; Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Scarlet Tanager; Eastern Wood-Pewee; and Canada, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, and Magnolia Warblers. Several of these species are listed as threatened or special

concern in New York. Cone crops of significant red pine and Norway spruce plantations support winter finches during incursion years. Species include Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill, Pine Siskin, Pine Grosbeak, and Common Redpoll.

**Upper and Lower Lakes Wildlife Management Area** – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA is part of the extensive Lisbon Grasslands Important Bird Area in St. Lawrence County. The BCA includes open water surrounded by marsh, shrub-swamp, shrub-scrub, grassland, and forest habitats. The wetland complex supports several breeding State-listed species such as Black Terns, Pied-billed Grebes, Least and American Bitterns, Northern Harriers, and Sedge Wrens.

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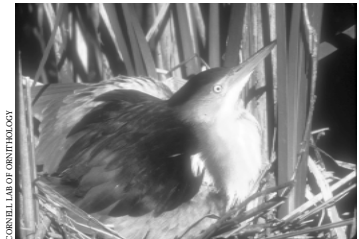


number of BCAs in New York to twenty-three, creating a network of sites encompassing more than 175,000 acres of some of the most important avian habitats across the state.

Governor Pataki said, "Birds have always been a source of inspiration and fascination to people of all ages. Through designation of Bird Conservation Areas, we can focus greater attention on bird conservation needs, including research and education initiatives to improve the management of critical bird habitats. This is an important step in protecting resident and migratory birds and maintaining the environmental quality of their habitats."

New York State's Bird Conservation Area Program was created by the Legislature and signed into law by Governor Pataki in 1997. The law, the first of its kind in the nation, authorizes the designation of State-owned lands and waters that meet stringent avian criteria, thus recognizing the importance of the sites to birds. Those criteria are based on Audubon New York's Important Bird Area criteria, and pertain to sites that support threatened species, significant congregations of various types of birds, and assemblages of species that characterize New York's most significant habitats.

The BCA program is administered by a working group comprised of staff from the Department of Environmental Conservation's Non-game and Habitat Unit; Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's Environmental Manage-



The Least Bittern, listed as threatened in New York State, is a wetland species that can be found at Carter's Pond, Upper & Lower Lakes, and Oak Orchard/Tonawanda BCAs.



The Black Tern is a State-endangered species found in significant numbers at Upper & Lower Lakes and Oak Orchard/Tonawanda BCAs.

## Loons Over Cayuga

By Julie Hart

ALMOST EVERYONE is familiar with the Common Loon as a symbol of northern wilderness and solitude. What many people do not know, however, is that loons are seabirds that have evolved to breed in isolation on northern freshwater lakes. Each fall, adult and juvenile loons migrate to the sea, mainly over land, to live in large flocks off our southern coasts.

During the fall of 1992, a significant migration route was discovered over Cayuga Lake in New York State's Finger Lakes region. A Loon Watch was established at Taughannock Falls State Park the following year. Ever since, bird enthusiasts from Ithaca and as far away as England have experienced this "fall migration spectacular."

The numbers of loons counted are impressive: 6,400 loons on November 10, 1997, and over 13,000 for the year of 1995! Each day's flight is concentrated in the morning beginning at dawn and ending about two hours later. As many as 1,400 loons have been counted in a 15-minute period.

The Loon Watch operates from mid-October to early December, with the peak normally being in mid-November. Everyone is invited to participate—the more the better. This is not, however, your typical loon watching experience. The loons fly quite high overhead and at speeds of 60 mph or more. The best mornings tend to be following a cold front — so dress warmly.

4 Cayuga Lake is recognized by Audubon New York as an Important Bird Area because it supports high concentrations of waterfowl and waterbirds, a high diversity of birds, and threatened species.



Common Loon in winter plumage.

## Great Backyard Bird Count

Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

announce the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Great Backyard Bird

Count. We invite you to join us February 14-17,

2003. Become a citizen scientist and help scientists

define the status of winter birds. All ages and skill

levels are welcome. Do your part for bird conserva-

tion by visiting [www.birdsource.org](http://www.birdsource.org)

