

# Audubon New York's IBA Program Starts 2<sup>nd</sup> Round

By Dr. Michael Burger and Jillian Liner

IN OCTOBER, Audubon New York opened its second round of identifying Important Bird Areas (IBAs), five years after the first identification effort was successfully completed. Advancements in technology, avian and habitat data, and conservation science, along with the accumulated experiences of the New York and other IBA programs, will help ensure that this second round is even more comprehensive and just as successful.

The main goal of this second IBA identification effort is to fine-tune our network of IBAs, making sure it is as complete as possible by identifying sites that might have been missed in the first round due to a lack of supporting avian data or birders to nominate sites. We also are building on the considerable developments in bird conservation that have occurred since 1997, including Audubon's official partnering with BirdLife International, the exceptional growth of the United States IBA program, and progress toward international all-bird conservation through the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI).

These developments have placed new demands on state IBA programs. For example, we are striving to be fully integrated with the global approach of BirdLife International and to have IBAs as the focus areas for bird conservation. Collaboration among bird conservationists under the NABCI umbrella has resulted in an unprecedented accumulation of scientific information about priority bird species and habitats across all regions of North America. In addition, a framework has emerged that allows us to fully consider both continental as well as regional priorities and responsibilities. Thus, the developments of the past five years have raised the visibility of IBAs across North America and provided an opportunity for IBAs to represent focus areas for the implementation of bird conservation in New York and elsewhere.

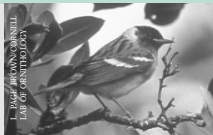
Audubon New York is responding to this opportunity by concentrating on these continental and regional priorities as we undertake the second round of identifying IBAs. To better address continental priorities, we are expanding the list of threatened species for which IBAs will be identified from only state-listed species to include additional species of conservation concern, such as those found on Audubon's national WatchList, which was revised in the fall of 2002. The WatchList identifies U.S. bird species that are facing population declines and/or threats such as habitat loss on their breeding and wintering grounds, or species that have limited geographic ranges and/or small populations. There are twenty-six WatchList species in New York that are not currently state-listed.

To better address regional priorities and responsibilities, sites identified as IBAs under our habitat criteria will target habitat-species suites identified through Partners in Flight (PIF) and NABCI planning efforts. The focus will be on areas capable of supporting significant populations of several bird species for which New York has a high responsibility for their long-term conservation, even if they are not currently declining or threatened. These "responsibility" species include those with a disproportionately high percentage of their total population in the continental bird conservation planning units comprising New York State. Selection of these IBAs will be based on avian assemblages within the habitat community types, not on the habitat community type alone. Large areas that support significant populations of several species that make up the assemblages will be favored. However, small remnants of exceptional habitat type that support fewer individuals or species may also be included.

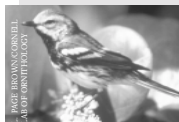
A critical part of our second IBA identification process will be a Geographic Information System (GIS) assessment to assist in the identification of potential sites. In addition to soliciting grassroots nominations, we will comprehensively evaluate bird habitats and populations on a statewide scale to help identify potential IBAs. The GIS-based assessment will involve assessing habitat and bird distributions utilizing existing statewide data, for example, data from the Breeding Bird Atlas, Breeding Bird Survey, and other avian monitoring programs. The habitat and bird data will be analyzed to determine important bird areas across New York. Emphasis will be placed on areas supporting populations of state-listed, WatchList, and "responsibility" species. Because GIS gives us the capacity to view the state on a landscape scale, we also will be able to identify contiguous swaths of habitat that may appear only as smaller, isolated patches from the ground.

In conjunction with the GIS-based assessment, Audubon New York will implement on-the-ground surveys at select sites in order to verify that the sites identified through the GIS process are utilized by priority bird species. We will coordinate the field surveys and train volunteers to submit data via eBird. Audubon and Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online data entry program (see "Announcing eBird" article on this page).

At the time the first round of IBA nominations was undertaken, New York was one of only two states with an IBA program. Today, there are IBA programs in 46 states, and the number continues to grow. By undertaking this second round, Audubon New York is again striving to advance the IBA concept and make the resulting network of IBAs universally accepted focus areas for achieving bird conservation in New York State.



The Bay-breasted Warbler is a National WatchList species found in New York State.



The Black-throated Green Warbler is one of New York's responsibility species because a disproportionately high percentage of its population is contained within the state.

# Criteria Needed For Wind Power Projects

By Jillian Liner

UNFORTUNATELY, as environmentalists fight to increase the percent of our energy supplied by alternative, "greener" sources, there is one alternative source that is not getting the immediate green light, even from environmentalists: Wind power. And one of the concerns is the potential risk to birds.

As with other structures, such as cell towers and buildings, the concern regarding birds and wind turbines is collision mortality. Overall, the death of birds at wind turbines is relatively low compared to other sources of avian collision mortality. It has been estimated that each year 60-80 million birds die due to vehicle collision, 98-980 million due to buildings and windows, 174 million due to power lines, 4-50 million due to communication towers, and 10,000-40,000 due to wind turbines. However, these numbers are closely associated with the density of these structures on the landscape. For example, there are roughly 4 million miles of road but only about 15,000 commercial wind turbines in the U.S.

Wind farm development is currently increasing in New York. And as the density of wind turbines increases so will the risk to birds. If there is an opportunity to guide wind turbine development in a way that will reduce avian mortality now is the time to become involved and influence the process.

Most bird deaths at wind turbines are a result of birds colliding with the structure while hunting or during migration. Various factors contribute to bird deaths at wind turbines, including how heavily used the area is in both migration and breeding seasons (migration corridor, geographic area, landscape features, prey abundance) and the design of the wind farm (design and height of turbines, lighting, and the way they are dispersed across the landscape). With this said, the overall literature on the impacts of wind turbines on birds is limited. Some people feel the estimated numbers of bird deaths caused by wind turbines are not great enough to have an overall impact on bird populations.

As with many conservation issues, the questions surrounding wind turbines and birds are not simple. The Audubon Council of New York State, delegates of local Audubon chapters in New York, is currently developing a policy resolution on wind turbines and other sources of bird collision mortality. One of the first steps we feel can be taken to reduce the risk of wind turbine to birds is to place turbines in areas that are not heavily used by birds. High-risk areas would include significant nesting and foraging habitat of state and federally listed bird species and also major migratory corridors.

To date, there is no criterion or mandate guiding the process of assessing a site prior to the development of a wind turbine farm. Therefore, the methods and time involved in surveying a site vary greatly. Applying a more comprehensive and consistent approach in performing avian assessments at proposed wind farm sites, including methods such as both field and radar surveys during the breeding, migrating, and wintering seasons, would help guide the siting of wind turbines in areas that are less likely to create conflicts. It would be one step closer to allowing environmentalists to come together on an issue that deserves our attention and support.



Wind turbines are pictured above.

## Announcing eBird!

By Jillian Liner

YOU NOW HAVE THE capacity to enter your bird observations into an online database no matter where you live, what kind of bird you may see, or how long you spent looking at it. Yes, you can be driving down the road and see a Rough-legged Hawk perched on the roadside and record that sighting online when you get home. It is the latest in bird monitoring—eBird.

eBird, a project developed by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, provides a simple way for you to keep track of the birds you see anywhere in North America and also contribute your sightings to the most ambitious citizen science effort yet. You can retrieve information on your bird observations, from your backyard to your neighborhood to your favorite

bird-watching locations, at any time for your personal use. You can also access the entire historical database to find out what other eBirders are reporting from across North America.

Audubon New York will be promoting the use of eBird for monitoring efforts at IBAs. eBird will soon allow users to customize monitoring projects so that organizations and bird groups will be able to create their own data entry system to collect the data they want using the protocols they want. The cumulative eBird database will be used by birdwatchers, scientists, and conservationists who want to know more about the distributions and movement patterns of birds across the continent.

You can participate in and learn more about eBird by visiting <http://www.ebird.org>.

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