

## WatchList Focus: American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*)

By Michael Burger

WITH A CONTINENTAL POPULATION of only half of what it was in the 1950s, the American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) finds itself firmly on Audubon's WatchList of species of continental concern.

The American Black Duck is a large, dark dabbling duck in which both sexes have almost identical plumage. Most of the body is a sooty brown color, and the neck and head is a lighter brown. The bill of the adult male is yellow, while that of the female is olive green. The speculum (wing patch) is purplish-blue without white borders. Black ducks are readily identified in flight by the sharply contrasting dark body and white wing linings.

The American Black Duck breeds in a wide variety of wetlands across northeastern North America, from Labrador to the Great Lakes and mid-Atlantic US. The hen most often builds a nest on the ground in close proximity to water and lays a clutch of 6-12 eggs. Upon hatching, the ducklings, which can swim and feed almost immediately, are led to water by the hen. At the end of summer, black ducks congregate in small flocks in anticipation of fall migration. Primary wintering areas include coastal marshes and bays of the Atlantic Coast from Nova Scotia to the Carolinas.

Three factors are most often cited for the past decline of and continued concern for the American Black Duck: hunting pressure, habitat loss and degradation, and competition and hybridization with the Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*).

These latter two factors are related, as land clearing for agriculture and development has made habitats less suitable for black ducks while at the same time making them more suitable for Mallards. Game farming and release of large

numbers of Mallards in the east is believed to have exacerbated the hybridization threat.

Audubon New York has recognized several sites as Important Bird Areas because they regularly support significant numbers of black ducks, including the Montezuma Wetlands Complex and Cayuga, and Great South Bay on Long Island. Protection and proper management of these sites is central to the conservation of black ducks in New York.

In response to pressure from environmental organizations, the US significantly reduced hunting pressure on black ducks in 1983, and Canada followed a year later with moderate reductions in bag limits. In 1989, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan created the bi-national Black Duck Joint Venture to conduct research and monitor black duck

populations. Significant resources from government agencies and non-profit organizations have been spent in an effort to protect and restore black duck habitat in order to restore their population, and the results appear promising. The black duck population has stabilized over the past 20 years. Nonetheless, threats to this species persist and its conservation is not assured. For additional information, visit [www.audubon.org/bird/watchlist](http://www.audubon.org/bird/watchlist).



LANG HEILIGT/CORBIS LIAISON/GETTY IMAGES

## Wildlife Ecologist hired to lead grassland project

By Michael Burger

IN SEPTEMBER, Audubon New York hired Mike Morgan to assume leadership of the grassland bird conservation project that was initiated last year. Mike earned his Bachelor's degree in Fisheries and Wildlife from Utah State University in Logan, UT, and attended SUNY Brockport while earning his Master's degree and studying grassland bird breeding ecology under Dr. Chris Norment.

Mike comes to Audubon with considerable field experience, having been involved in surveys for everything from amphibians and vernal pools to woodcock and waterfowl and in radio tracking of black bears. He conducted grassland bird research and management projects at Iroquois and Montezuma National Wildlife Refuges as both an employee and volunteer, made compliance inspections regarding wetlands permits for NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and coordinated the MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship)



MIKE BURGER

station at Montezuma NWR for five years. Additionally, Mike taught biology courses and laboratories at Finger Lakes Community College and SUNY College at Brockport.

Mike is based at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology as a valuable part of Audubon New York's bird conservation department.

### Pre-order your IBA book!

We have begun final editing on the second edition of our publication *Important Bird Areas of New York*, which will be published this Spring. You may preorder this book before April 15 at a discounted rate of \$14.99 (including shipping!). Make checks payable to: Audubon New York, 200 Trillium Lane, Albany, NY 12203. Your book will be mailed to you upon release.



If you or your organization are interested in ordering multiple copies of the book, please contact Jillian Limer, [jlimer@audubon.org](mailto:jlimer@audubon.org) or 607-254-2437.

## Adirondack Birding Celebration

June 2 - 5, 2005  
Saranac Lake, NY

Field trips to bogs, wetlands, alpine summits and boreal forests in search of Bicknell's thrush, black-backed woodpeckers, spruce grouse and boreal chickadees. Guest speakers, birding workshops and plenty of vendors on hand as well as our fun banquet dinner with guest speaker David Bird of McGill University in Montreal. Live bird demo, Teddy Roosevelt Bird Challenge (a perennial favorite!) and nightly owl prowls will keep our participants busy all weekend.

All half-day field trips will be leaving from Saranac Lake on the 3rd and 4th. Saturday and Sunday afternoon activities will be located at the Adirondack Park Visitor Interpretive Center in Paul Smiths, NY.

The Adirondack Birding Celebration is hosted by the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and sponsors include: High Peaks Audubon Society, Audubon New York, Adirondack Park Agency Visitor Interpretive Center and Adirondack Park Institute.

For more information, contact event coordinator Brian McAllister @518-327-3000 or email: [bird64@yahoo.com](mailto:bird64@yahoo.com). More details will be forthcoming on Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce website ([www.saranaclake.com](http://www.saranaclake.com)) as well as Adirondack Park Visitor Interpretive Center website ([www.northnet.org/adirondackvic](http://www.northnet.org/adirondackvic)) this winter.

**Come "flock" to Saranac Lake this Spring!**