

Audubon At Home in New York

By Sean Mahar and Heather Hanson

WITH THE USE OF LAWN CARE PESTICIDES and herbicides, primarily for aesthetic purposes, continuing to proliferate at an alarming rate in New York, and across the United States, the risks to birds, other wildlife and their habitats continue to become clearer. Pesticides and herbicides harm birds in three ways: through direct and secondary ingestion, depletion of food supplies, and destruction of essential habitat. Typically, birds and other wildlife that ingest these toxic chemicals are more susceptible to predation and disease, their fertility rates have been known to decrease, they become neglectful of their young and can even abandon nests. Pesticides don't discriminate, attacking any insect unlucky enough to be where the pesticides are, regardless of their impact on the lawn or garden. For birds, this means less food. Lastly, the use of herbicides in destroying "pest" plants, can degrade and destroy essential habitats for many bird species, and destroy many beneficial plants that birds rely on. In all, the impact on birds is staggering, resulting in the deaths of an estimated seven million birds annually.

While few argue the impacts on pesticides and herbicides, few have committed to a lifestyle that eliminates their use, as any drive through suburbia will convince anyone that the American lawn is not going quietly. The Audubon New York *Audubon at Home* Campaign acknowledges that reality, and seeks to promote the usage of alternatives to these chemicals. The goal of this campaign is to not just inform, but to provide an interactive outreach experience filled with inspiring tips, techniques, and how-tos aimed at inspiring homeowners to embrace a new "lawn ethic". We seek to empower homeowners to transform their lawns into their own pesticide free backyard habitats, which will ultimately lead to an environment that is better for flora, fauna and people.

A healthy, bird-friendly backyard habitat consists of a diverse range of native plant and grass species, which naturally require less maintenance and care as they are already adapted to the local environment. These native plants also attract

more birds, and beneficial insects that can lead to a healthier lawn, by balancing any pest problems that may occur. The reality is, however, that non-native plant species, pesticides, herbicides, and other lawn chemicals don't create a healthy backyard habitat for birds, wildlife, plants, and people. They create monoculture lawns that consist of a single grass species, which are more susceptible to disease and create a dependence on chemical fertilizers to stay healthy. These toxic chemicals drive away many of the same bird and beneficial insect species that help keep lawns healthy, which cause the need for increased time and money for lawn and garden maintenance.

To reach our goal, we are encouraging homeowners throughout the state to make informed decisions about the products they use on their lawns and around

their homes, and to eliminate their use of pesticides. Local Audubon Chapters and Audubon centers are at the forefront of this initiative, serving as hubs to obtain information, and in some instances, view demonstrations of pesticide free backyard habitats. Currently the Bedford Audubon Society and the Saw Mill River Audubon Society have developed demonstration areas, where visitors to their sanctuaries can learn first hand the values, benefits and ease of managing your lawn and garden in a healthy, bird-friendly way. Visitors can learn ways to eliminate pesticide use, view a diverse range of native plants, discover fun and easy tips to make their backyards more inviting to wildlife, and learn what they can also do to conserve water, protect water quality, and remove exotic plant pests. Soon other Chapters and Audubon Centers will host similar demonstration areas.

We strongly encourage Audubon members and other citizens to help us to inspire a new lawn ethic across the state. Please contact our offices if you are interested in obtaining copies of our educational materials on pesticides and creating bird friendly backyard habitats, or if you are looking for any speakers for chapter or other local events on our program. To learn more please visit the Audubon at home website, http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/



Bylane Farm, home of Bedford Audubon Society

Audubon Calls for Increase in Conservation Funding

By Al Caccese

NEW YORK STATE has been fortunate to have a Governor, George E. Pataki, and a legislature that have demonstrated a palpable commitment to conservation funding. The 1996 Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act and consistent funding of the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) at \$125 million annually speaks volumes about this commitment.

Unfortunately, the Bond Act funds have been largely committed, and the EPF has remained stagnant over the past six years, while at the same time the state budget grew from about \$70 billion to over \$100 billion annually. It was with this in mind that Audubon New York appeared before the Joint Legislative Committees on Finance in the spring of 2003, and again in 2004, to promote the idea of a new \$2 to \$3 billion Legacy Bond Act, which would assist in addressing the huge demand for such issues as open space and farmland protection, clean water, park infrastructure and environmental education. Happily,



Audubon is now part of a coalition of more than 90 local, state and national conservation groups who are calling on Governor Pataki to continue his commitment to the environment by tackling the unmet environmental needs in next year's budget.

Audubon is not insensitive to the daunting deficits that are facing the State. We recognize, especially in the areas of education and transportation, that there are significant mandates and demands on the state's financial resources. It is with this in mind that the Friends of New York's Environment coalition has provided a menu of funding options to soften the impact of increased spending, especially in the '06 Fiscal Year. One idea is to create a \$125 million per year Clean Water, Open Space Trust Fund for ten years, backed by Environmental Facility Corporation (EFC) bonds. This can be

used to supplement the EPF and also for some assistance in state agency staffing. Another plan is to increase the EPF funding to an annual level of \$250 million over the next three years. This cost can easily be recouped from rapidly increasing revenue associated with the Real Estate Transfer Tax.

In addition to another Bond Act, and these funding mechanisms, other revenue opportunities including expanding the provisions of the Bottle Bill, or reinstating fees for wetlands permits could, and should, be explored.

Just a few years ago New York was investing 1.6 cents of every dollar to protect our environment. Today that number has dropped to 1.2 cents per dollar. We have to reverse that trend and reestablish our commitment to the quality of life, not only for today's citizens, but also for those who will follow.