



BIRDS

Atlas 2000's first season

By Robert Budliger

A couple miles east of Fort Edward in a small industrial town on the Hudson north of Albany, an Atlas volunteer walks up a dirt farm lane listening intently. He hopes to hear the lisp-zee-lick of a Henslow's Sparrow that a birder reported a week earlier. This is one of his assigned blocks for the New York State Breeding Bird Atlas that started with the advent of the 2000 nesting season.

Our Atlaser, one of nearly 600 this season, agreed to visit a block that measures three square miles several times during the prime nesting season to look and listen for evidence of breeding. He got his assignment from a regional coordinator, who sent field cards and report forms. He then went to the Department of Environmental Conservation's website and downloaded instructions and a map, which he could have also gotten from the coordinator. He'll visit a variety of habitats in the block, watching for the behaviors of birds that indicate breeding (i.e. birds carrying nest material, food or fecal sacs; feeding young birds; defending territories; visiting nests.) The objective is to find 76 species in the block, and confirm 38 breeding species. Species will be assessed and listed as probable or possible breeders depending on the evidence. It is believed that an adequate job can be done in 10-12 hours of careful observation over several visits.

This morning two Henslow's Sparrows were heard singing. Other species found in this heavily

farmed block were Bobolinks, Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, Northern Harriers, the rare and secretive Sedge Wren, and two dozen common species. He recorded as many species as possible, checking that they were identified correctly on the basis that they were in the appropriate habitat at the right time of year.

During four subsequent visits, he confirmed (although with a measure of uncertainty) a number of species including Bobolinks feeding their young; American Robins and Barn Swallows sitting on nests, an Eastern Phoebe carrying food into a crevice in a canal lock stonework and a pair of Northern Harriers engaged in a courtship flight.

During each of the atlaser's visits, A Sedge Wren and the Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows were present and were reclassified as "probable" confirmations. Atlasers will also attempt to reconfirm these species next year.

This experience occurred in a block in the Fort Edward Grasslands, a several thousand-acre mosaic of farmland and creeping suburbia. NASNY designated the site an Important Bird Area (IBA) because of the high probability that it is a nesting place for several rare birds and it is an important wintering area for Short-eared Owls.

To facilitate the participation of Auduboners, Robert Budliger serves on the Atlas Steering Committee. He conducted a workshop on Atlas 2000 at the fall Audubon Council meeting (see story page 16) in Niagara Falls exploring the "hows and whys" of the Atlas, and he showed chapters ways to contribute. Bob is available to present a program to your chapter about Atlas 2000. Contact him directly at (518) 439-0006 or e-mail rbudliger@aol.com.

How CAN I GET INVOLVED?



For detailed information on the Atlas including how to get involved, the name of your regional coordinator, instructions, maps and more, visit the website at www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/wildlife/bba, or contact the project coordinator at Breeding Bird Atlas, Wildlife Resources Center, 108 Game Farm Rd, Delmar, NY 12054.

The Atlas is an additionally important conservation planning and management tool when considered in addition to IBAs and the Bird Conservation Areas.

This was the first of a five-year look at the breeding birds of New York. Atlasing is fun, but it is also a daunting task to adequately survey the 5,335 blocks in the state. This is why the Atlas needs you.

Gov. Pataki announces three new BCAs, 11 in total

By Michael Burger, Ph.D.

Since publication of the spring 2000 *Audubon Advocate*, three new state Bird Conservation Areas (BCAs) have been designated by Governor George E. Pataki, bringing the total number of state BCAs to 11. Profiles of the three new sites follow.

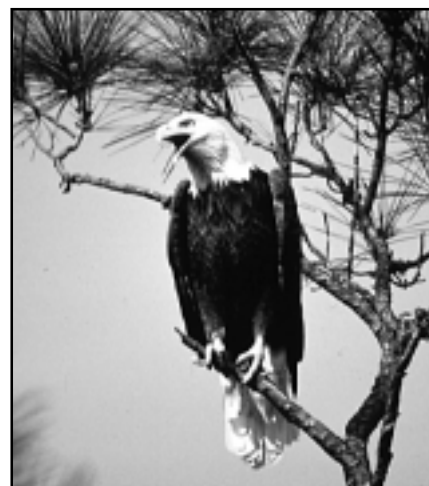
Bashakill Wildlife Management Area — This BCA, which includes the entirety of the Bashakill Wildlife Management Area in the Town of Mamakating in Sullivan County, was dedicated by Governor Pataki on June 16, 2000, at Audubon's national board meeting at Bear Mountain (See story on page 1.) Habitats at the site are primarily



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Bashakill Wildlife Management Area is a BCA that provides an enticing habitat for birds including the Canvasback Duck.

non-tidal emergent wetlands through which the Bashakill River meanders, but they also include the surrounding deciduous and mixed woods and some limestone caves. Many characteristic wetland-dependent species breed in the area, such as Great Blue Heron, Virginia Rail, Sora and Common Moorhen. In addition, the site hosts large fall concentrations of Canada Goose and Wood Duck and many state-listed species throughout the year, including breeding Pied-billed Grebe, American and Least Bittern, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk and Red-shouldered Hawk. Non-avian interests found at the site include one of the largest bat hibernaculums in the state with six species of bat and a number of rare plants and animals including Spreading Globeflower, Ironcolor Shiner and Long-tailed Salamander.

Mongaup Valley Wildlife Management Area — Mongaup Valley BCA, in Sullivan County, was designated by Governor Pataki on June 16, 2000, at Audubon's national board meeting at Bear Mountain. The BCA includes all of the Mongaup Valley Wildlife Management Area, which consists of a series of reservoirs, the Mongaup River and creeks flowing through the Mongaup River Valley to the Delaware River, all surrounded by relatively



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The Mongaup BCA hosts one of the largest Bald Eagle wintering sites in New York.

undisturbed and forested rolling hills. Rare communities found in this BCA include a perched bog, a floodplain forest and a pitch pine-oak-heath woodland. Mongaup Valley hosts one of the largest Bald Eagle wintering sites in the state, often with more than 150 eagles present, and also supports several active eagle nests. Rare species, other than birds, include Timber Rattlesnake and Spotted Salamander.

Fahnstock State Park Hubbard Perkins Conservation Area — This BCA is an area in Putnam County of oak and mixed hardwood forest with an understory of laurel that was dedicated by Governor Pataki on Sept. 29, 2000. Additional habitats include

large stands of hemlock and some white pine and several lakes, streams and marshes. The valuable habitats of this BCA support a healthy representative community of hardwood forest breeders including Broad-winged Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Barred Owl, Acadian Flycatcher, Whip-poor-will (a species of special concern), Northern Raven, Hermit Thrush, Black-throated Green Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Cerulean Warbler (a species of special concern), Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Canada Warbler, Northern Waterthrush and Dark-eyed Junco, among others.



Cornell Lab of Ornithology/Bill Dyer
The Fahnstock BCA is home to several hardwood forest breeders including the Cerulean Warbler.