



Audubon

NEW YORK

WORKING LANDS: EASTERN FORESTS

Covering nearly 400 million acres, forests of the Eastern United States create one of the most dynamic environments in the world. Serving as a vital habitat for an astonishing variety of plants and wildlife, including globally significant and priority bird species, the Eastern Forest is a key component of the Atlantic Flyway. And that's just the beginning. The Eastern Forest supports an ecosystem that provides up to 48% of our water supply and is crucial to maintaining erosion and flood control. As one of the principal carbon sinks in the U.S., the forest also helps mitigate the effects of climate change by absorbing and storing carbon.

New York's forests are an important component of the Eastern Forest, offering some of the largest and most intact forested landscapes in the Atlantic Flyway. Stretching from the Pine Barrens of Long Island, through the Hudson Highlands and Catskills, across the Allegheny Plateau, all the way north to the Tug Hill Plateau and the Adirondacks, New York's forests are home to more than three dozen bird species of conservation concern. A well-managed, resilient, and diverse forest ecosystem provides critical habitat for birds during all seasons.

Economically, the Eastern Forest in New York State contributes to a \$4 billion forest products industry and generates nearly \$14.5 billion in revenue related to outdoor recreation and tourism.* The Eastern Forest also provides related jobs and contributes to the overall viability of many local communities. Clearly, conservation of the New York Eastern Forest's natural habitat is important to the quality of life for people as well as birds and other wildlife.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

New York's forests face significant challenges: habitat loss, fragmentation, lack of diversity, and impaired health and resiliency. Breeding birds need dense forest understory to successfully rear their young but stressors such as invasive species, over-browsing by deer and a lack of natural disturbance or management have resulted in forests with little or no capacity to regenerate. These challenges are already having impacts that directly affect our forest birds. The populations of many priority forest birds, including songbirds like the Wood Thrush and Canada and Cerulean Warblers, are declining dramatically as breeding habitats decrease.

WHAT ARE WE DOING TO HELP?

Audubon New York is addressing these challenges through our **Eastern Forest Initiative – a priority project of our Working Lands conservation strategy for the Atlantic Flyway Program.** This initiative is a holistic conservation strategy focused on protecting forests from fragmentation while advancing stewardship efforts in the Adirondacks, Allegany, Catskills, Finger Lakes, Hudson Highlands, and Tug Hill regions. Our

WOOD THRUSH



Jeff Nadler

efforts in these areas, which contain large, intact forests that support a suite of forest birds, contribute significantly to our Atlantic Flyway goals to improve and increase protection of priority forest blocks comprising 35 million acres of breeding habitat within the entire Eastern Forest by the year 2020 through permanent protection, improved stewardship, and intentional forest management.

BIRDS, PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Of the nearly 19 million acres of forested lands in New York State, more than 14 million – roughly 75% – are privately owned. Another 3.7 million acres are publicly owned and managed. We encourage and engage landowners and communities in sustainable forestry practices that will deepen our conservation impact and help forest birds thrive. Building on knowledge and key opportunities, Audubon is:

- Partnering with land trusts, public agencies, and other organizations to maintain quality habitat, protect priority forest areas from development, and minimize forest fragmentation and loss due to competing uses.
- Conducting workshops to educate landowners and managers about improving forest bird habitats, the benefits of working with a professional forester on land management, and connecting them with public incentive programs to make bird-friendly stewardship feasible.
- Advocating for federal and state conservation policies and funding to conserve forest habitat and create new incentives for private landowners.

Through these efforts, Audubon New York is ensuring the continued health and protection of New York's portion of the critical and beautiful Eastern Forest ecosystem.

* Source: United States Forest Service
<http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/budget/2013/fy2013-overview.pdf>

SPOTLIGHT ON RHEINSTROM HILL

A strategic component of Audubon New York's forest conservation work takes place at Rheinstrom Hill Audubon Center and Sanctuary, located on 1,039 acres in the Hudson Valley. In this pristine corner of Columbia County, Ovenbirds, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Hermit Thrushes, Veeries, Black-and-white Warblers, Blue-headed Vireos, and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers thrive. This is the home of the Rheinstrom Hill Forest Demonstration Project, a model demonstration forest Audubon New York is creating under the guidance of a Forest Stewardship Plan. This living classroom serves as a hands-on teaching and training tool for community members, private forest landowners, public forest managers, and consulting foresters. Participants learn essential conservation and stewardship techniques, including sustainable forest management to improve bird habitat, control invasive species, and address the threat of overabundant deer to forest health. Audubon's forest management practices mimic naturally occurring cycles and help maintain ecological balance. A well-managed forest provides breeding, migrating and over-wintering birds with suitable habitat while maintaining forest health and resiliency in the face of forest pest outbreaks and other stressors.

Long-term forest management efforts are underway at the demonstration project, enabling Audubon New York to deliver even more programs and opportunities for education

and training. Our goal is to provide more landowners and managers than ever before the tools and knowledge needed to manage forest lands as bird-friendly habitats.

BLACK AND WHITE WARBLER

Larry Federman

