



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

A.7692 (Englebright) / S.5937 (Kaminsky)

AN ACT to amend chapter 330 of the laws of 2014, amending the environmental conservation law relating to aquatic invasive species, spread prevention, and penalties, in relation to the effectiveness thereof

Audubon New York strongly supports A.7692 (Englebright) / S.5937 (Kaminsky), which would extend the Department of Environmental Conservation's authority to prevent the spread of aquatic species for an additional year.

Non-native, invasive plants, animals, and pathogens pose a serious threat to the aquatic ecosystems of New York State. New York has been more heavily impacted by invasive plants than many regions of the United States, with an estimated non-native biomass as high as 35%, due in part to the state's long history of settlement, trade, commercial agriculture, and horticulture. More recently, the state has been plagued by the ballast water discharges from large commercial ships that utilize the state's major waterways, which accelerates the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species such as the Zebra Mussel, Asian Carp, Eurasian Milfoil, and the Asian Shore Crab.

Invasive species have heavily impacted our birds and wildlife, replacing whole inter-related ecosystems of native plants with monocultures. The massive stands of Purple Loosestrife and Phragmites in our wetlands, which have crowded out the cattails and other indigenous plants that provided nutritious food, are a clear example. Zebra and Quagga Mussels threaten marine organisms and diving birds by concentrating toxins such as botulism and changing vegetation patterns. Water chestnut and hydrilla, invasive aquatic plant species, are impacting Central New York waterways by growing into floating mats of thick vegetation clogging lakes and rivers. These plants can also cause fish kills due to low oxygen levels under dense mats, and prohibit boater and angler access.

Removing aquatic invasive species helps support habitat for fish, birds, and other wildlife by allowing for the reestablishment of native ecosystems, and has the added benefit of improving recreational opportunities for boaters and anglers. This makes the extension of the current law requiring boat washing critical, as recreational water vehicles and equipment are one of the primary vectors for the spread of aquatic invasive species. Requiring owners to take reasonable steps to check, clean and dry recreational water vehicles is the easiest and most cost-effective means for limiting the spread of invasive species.

For these reasons, Audubon New York supports A.7692 (Englebright) / S.5937 (Kaminsky) and urges the Legislature to pass this bill.

Audubon New York works with a network of 65,000 members, hundreds of volunteers, 27 local Audubon Chapters, and dozens of other partners to achieve its mission of protecting birds and their habitats through science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation programs. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Erin McGrath, Policy Manager at Audubon New York at 518-869-9731 or emcgrath@audubon.org.

NYS Birds Under Threat



King Rail
Rallus elegans

Description: A chicken-sized marsh bird, the largest of our rails. Nesting in fresh-water marshes of the east, the King Rail has become an uncommon species as many wetlands have been drained. It remains locally common near the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, where it is not especially shy, often stalking about at the marsh edge in full view of observers. Closely related to the Clapper Rail, and may interbreed with it in zones where salt and fresh marshes meet.

Conservation Status: Has declined or disappeared in many areas because of loss of habitat. Also hurt by runoff of farm chemicals into wetlands. Numbers may be stable now at lowered population.

Habitat: Fresh and brackish marshes, rice fields, swamps. Sometimes salt marshes in winter. Will use a variety of habitats with shallow fresh or brackish water and dense cover. Important plants include cattails, bulrushes, spartina, and others. May be in brushy swamps with many willows, or in flooded rice fields.



Bufflehead
Bucephala albeola

Description: A diminutive diver, one of our smallest ducks, often very energetic in its feeding. Related to the goldeneyes and, like them, nests in cavities; but unlike other hole-nesting ducks, the Bufflehead is small enough to use unmodified old nest holes of Northern Flickers, giving it a ready source of good nest sites. Less sociable than most ducks, seen in pairs or small groups, almost never in large flocks. Takes wing easily from the water, flies with rapid wingbeats. The name "Bufflehead" is derived from "buffalo-head," for the male's odd puffy head shape.

Conservation Status: Evidently much less numerous now than historically, owing to unrestricted shooting early in 20th century and to loss of nesting habitat, but still fairly common and widespread. Current populations seem stable overall.

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, rivers; in winter, salt bays. Preferred nesting habitat is around ponds and small lakes in rather open mixed coniferous and deciduous forest, also burned areas and aspen groves; less often in pure coniferous forest, near rivers or larger lakes. In winter on sheltered bays and estuaries, also on lakes, ponds, and slow-moving rivers inland.



American Coot
Fulica americana

Description: Coots are tough, adaptable waterbirds. Although they are related to the secretive rails, they swim in the open like ducks and walk about on shore, making themselves at home on golf courses and city park ponds. Usually in flocks, they are aggressive and noisy, making a wide variety of calls by day or night. They have strong legs and big feet with lobed toes, and coots fighting over territorial boundaries will rear up and attack each other with their feet. Often seen walking on open ground near ponds. In taking flight they must patter across the water, flapping their wings furiously, before becoming airborne.

Conservation Status: Still abundant in many areas, although has decreased in recent decades in some areas, especially in east.

Habitat: Ponds, lakes, marshes; in winter, also fields, park ponds, salt bays. For breeding season requires fairly shallow fresh water with much marsh vegetation. At other seasons may be in almost any aquatic habitat, including ponds or reservoirs with bare shorelines, open ground near lakes, on salt marshes or protected coastal bays. Migrants sometimes are seen out at sea some distance from land.
