

CONTRIBUTED PAPERS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9 ♦ 1:15 PM - 3:00 PM

Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Eastern Forest Birds Project

MEETING ROOM: YORK

Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Eastern Forest Birds Project: An Integrated Program to Protect and Improve Habitat for Forest Birds from Maine to Florida

Session Organizer: Mike Burger, Audubon New York; Jim Shallow, Audubon Vermont

Since the release of its strategic plan in 2012, Audubon has been organizing and prioritizing its work along major flyways. The Eastern Forest Birds project is a flagship project of the Atlantic Flyway that strives to increase the proportions of forest focus areas that are protected and managed so as to provide quality habitat for forest birds of regional responsibility. These focus areas were identified as the largest, most intact forested areas in the U.S. portion of the Atlantic Flyway that support that highest richness and abundance of "responsibility" birds identified following PIF's species assessment process. Although guided by a network of focus areas identified through a collaborative mapping process and working towards the same long-term conservation goals, many aspects of implementing this program vary from state to state as a result of differences in land ownership, attitudes, capacity, and opportunities. The presentations that compose this session will address the elements that unite this flyway-scale effort, as well as those that are unique to how it is implemented in different parts of the flyway. Ideally, the discussion following this series of presentations would focus on ways to improve and strengthen this effort, as well as identification of other individuals or groups that might want to get involved.

1:15 PM	<p>Mapping Priority Forest Sites <i>Jim Shallow, Conservation and Policy Director, Audubon Vermont</i></p> <p>Audubon's forest conservation efforts along the Atlantic Flyway seek to improve breeding, migration stopover, and wintering habitat in order to stabilize population declines of forest birds of conservation concern breeding in the eastern United States. To guide our on-the-ground conservation activities, Audubon has mapped and prioritized existing major forest blocks in the U.S. portion of the Atlantic Flyway. To do this, we used Breeding Bird Survey and forest land cover data to create a map of the Atlantic Flyway's highest quality, most intact forest blocks that are best for priority forest breeding birds. The identification of these landscape-scale sites is based partly on the intactness of the forest and partly on the diversity and abundance of forest-breeding birds that they support. These blocks include public lands that are already protected from many forms of development but that might benefit birds more through different management, as well as privately owned tracts. This map of prioritized forest blocks is being used to identify Important Birds Areas for biome and regionally restricted birds. Audubon will be conducting site-specific conservation assessments and draft plans to determine which actions are needed to improve breeding habitat within each block. Actions may include advocating for increased protection of these forest blocks (through acquisition and conservation easements), collaborating with the owners of these tracts to improve their condition as bird habitat, and even restoration to increase the intactness of the forested landscape.</p>
1:35 PM	<p>Moving Forest Owners Toward Bird-focused Stewardship : The New York Approach <i>Michael Burger, Audubon New York</i></p> <p>As part of Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Eastern Forest Birds project, Audubon New York has been working with public and private landowners to improve forest habitat for a suite of forest-breeding birds of regional conservation responsibility. This suite includes several species that require early-successional forest habitat for nesting, as well as others that nest in mature forests but need patches of dense, young forest nearby for post-fledging habitat. Much of our stewardship effort goes toward education of landowners and managers about the habitat requirements of these birds and how they can manage their forests to create a landscape that is approximately 10% young forest (less than 15 years old) and more than 75% mature forest with good vertical structure, which should support the entire suite of birds.</p>

	<p>For the past three years, Audubon New York has conducted workshops through which we have reached the owners and/or managers of more than 2 million acres of forest. Although much of the information presented in the workshops is of interest to foresters and landowners with experience in forest management, the workshops are particularly geared towards newer, inexperienced, and often absentee forest owners. Topics covered include Forestry 101, bird habitat requirements, the importance of considering the landscape when deciding how to manage a particular stand, Conservation Easements 101, the importance of having a forest stewardship plan and working with a qualified forester, and where to go for additional resources. Classroom sessions are followed by field walks to show participants examples of stands that resulted from different management approaches.</p>
1:55 PM	<p>Foresters for the Birds: The Vermont Approach <i>Steve Hagenbuch, Audubon Vermont</i></p> <p>The 2013 USFS award-winning Foresters for the Birds project promotes the use of ecologically based silvicultural techniques to engage forest land owners who want to include songbird management as a priority in conjunction with timber management. Ecologically based silviculture is used to achieve many structural and habitat goals while developing a resilient and economically productive forest. This project prioritizes habitat enhancement and protection for interior forest nesting bird species that are characteristic of a given region, while producing sustained yields of forest products and services. The program which began in Vermont has been introduced in several other New England States as well as South Carolina. Outcomes of the project have included workshops and presentations that have engaged over 600 foresters, landowners, students, and other natural resource professionals, creation of a “Foresters for the Birds Toolkit” designed for forestry professionals, and development of 10 demonstration sites in Vermont and New Hampshire.</p>
2:15 PM	<p>Making Working Lands Work for Birds and People: The North Carolina Approach <i>Curtis Smalling, Director of Land Bird Conservation, Audubon North Carolina</i></p> <p>Audubon North Carolina’s western region staff is reaching out to private landowners to help them develop cost-effective strategies for making their properties more bird-friendly. They are meeting with landowners, assessing their property and its birdlife, and writing management plans that provide strategies for maintaining or restoring bird-friendly habitats, as well as suggesting sources of funding and tax incentives for management activities. Audubon North Carolina is also engaged in connecting with and providing training for consulting foresters, certified arborists, and county foresters in bird friendly forestry practices.</p>
2:35 PM	<p>Bird-Friendly Bottomland Forest Recommendations: The South Carolina Approach <i>Matt Johnson, Education Manager, Audubon Center at Francis Beidler Forest or Brandon Heitkamp, Resource Manager, Silver Bluff Audubon Center & Sanctuary, Audubon South Carolina</i></p> <p>For more than forty years, Audubon has acquired and now manages more than 15,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forest in South Carolina. Over this time, we have identified the bird species which benefit most from various bottomland types and conditions. Many of these birds are species of high conservation concern which breed in the bottomland forests of the southeastern United States, including Swallow-tailed Kite, Prothonotary Warbler, and Swainson’s Warbler. Audubon has now partnered with state and federal conservation agencies, other private conservation organizations, consulting foresters and private landowners to promote a set of Bird-friendly Bottomland Hardwood Forest Management Practices. These practices include ways to manage bottomland hardwoods to create and sustain habitat vital to birds in the greatest need of it, while also generating revenue for landowners. In the past year and a half, we have reached hundreds of foresters and private and public landowners by conducting ten outreach events. These events include half- and full-day workshops for private landowners and foresters, presentations for the state forestry commission and local forestry clubs, Society of American Foresters field trips, and online webinars. Our portion of this session will highlight the work that Audubon South Carolina has done to contribute to flyway-scale management and outreach for priority forest birds, and suggest future needs for priority species in the state.</p>
2:55 PM	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>All presenters will field questions from the audience and explore ideas about how to improve and strengthen this collaborative effort, including identifying other individuals, organizations, and agencies that might want to get involved.</p>