

Forestry for Maine Birds

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PRIORITY SPECIES

Maine is a haven for breeding birds. We have more forest species breeding here in Maine and the Northeast than in any other part of the country.

Many forest birds come to Maine every summer from South America or the southern U.S. to nest and raise their young. Why do they come so far? Because we have extensive, diverse forests; abundant food; and long days for gathering food.

Many of these songbirds are of conservation concern. For some, a large percentage (12-32%) of their global population breeds here. Others have declined dramatically in the past 10-50 years. Still others have limited ranges in the U.S. and are found only in these northern forest types.

This mural features a few of the many species that have been identified as priority species for conservation from a variety of state and national bird conservation programs.

MATURE FORESTS

Older forests look messy – they are multistoried with lots of living and dead trees of varying sizes and ages. The ground is uneven, with thick layers of dead leaves, branches, and fallen trees. Big, old, tall trees cover most of the sky, but there are small gaps in the canopy where old trees have fallen over and young seedlings and saplings are growing up.

Lots of tree trunks, branches, leaves and needles means lots of places for birds and other wildlife to find food, shelter, and nest sites. Over 70% of Maine's vertebrates use mature forests, including many of our migratory songbirds.

Historically, mature forests covered 80-90% of the landscape in Maine, but today mature forests are hard to find - forests with trees over 150 years old cover only 1% of the landscape and most of Maine's forests are much younger (less than 60 years old).

WHAT ALL BIRDS NEED

Cover: Dense vegetation and piles of brush provide places to hide from predators.

Food: Insects are high in protein needed by growing baby birds.

Nest Sites: Each species chooses a different spot, from treetop to ground and trunk to outer limb, and everything in between.

Territories: Males attract mates and defend their territories by singing from perches. In forests with abundant cover, food and nest sites, territories are smaller and more species and individuals can live there.

WHAT SOME BIRDS NEED

Woodpeckers: large dead trees

Black-throated Blue Warblers: hobblebush or other low shrub

Northern Parulas: old man's beard lichen

Scarlet Tanager: tall oak trees and a closed canopy

Canada Warblers: thick shrubs near water

Thrushes: thick leaf litter

Peewees: small gap openings



AVIAN SUPER-HIGHWAY

Migration is risky. Along the way birds need places to rest and feed to build up their strength for the next flight. Sometimes their breeding, migrating or wintering grounds have been altered or have disappeared altogether. Sometimes they get blown off course by a big storm. Some birds make it and some don't. Here are the tales of three different species with three very different migratory pathways.

American Woodcock
Maine populations travel to and from the Gulf States in a broad band along the Eastern Flyway. They are a "short-distance" migrant that travels during the night at a leisurely pace, singly or in small flocks.

Scarlet Tanager
Tanagers are "long-distance" migrants that fly in stages from Maine across the Gulf of Mexico to wintering grounds in northwestern South America. They typically migrate at night over several weeks.

Blackpoll Warbler
Blackpolls are a small warbler with a very big migration! They breed in boreal forests stretching from northern Maine across Canada and into Alaska. In the fall, most blackpolls fly east to Maine and the Canadian Maritimes, where they jump out over the Atlantic Ocean to fly south to Puerto Rico or northern South America. The flight over open water averages 1,864 miles and takes up to 88 hours nonstop. Before leaping out, the Blackpoll nearly doubles its body weight. During spring, blackpolls fly slowly up through Central America or the Caribbean and across the Gulf of Mexico before heading north along either the Atlantic or Midwest Flyways.

HOW WE CAN HELP

Many birds are in trouble around the world from the loss of breeding, migrating, and wintering habitat; pesticide use; invasive species; mortality from cats, windows, towers, and tall lighted buildings; and a changing climate. But don't be discouraged - you CAN help!

IN YOUR BACKYARD

- Plant native shrubs and trees that will provide cover, food and nesting sites.
- Provide water for drinking and bathing.
- Set up nesting boxes for cavity nesters.
- Keep your cat indoors.
- Avoid pesticides; use organic fertilizers.
- Conserve energy to reduce your climate change impacts.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Lead your neighbors in a campaign to plant native shrubs and trees and to conserve energy at your local town hall, community center and/or school.
- Join your local land trust or conservation commission to create and care for a town forest and protect existing mature forests.
- Accompany a naturalist on a bird walk.
- Buy organic and sustainably-grown food from local farmers and fishermen.

AROUND THE WORLD

- Buy shade-grown or bird-friendly coffee and chocolate to protect wintering habitat.
- Buy furniture, flooring, and toys made from sustainably harvested wood.
- Support renewable energy projects to reduce global impacts from climate change.

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