



**NEW JERSEY
AUDUBON
SOCIETY**

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Fall 2006 Conservation Report

NJAS Develops Newark Watershed Lands Forest Stewardship Plan

By : Troy Ettl, Director of Conservation

NJAS worked with Land Dimensions Engineering and Conservation Resources, Inc. to develop a forest stewardship plan for nearly 10,000 acres of the Newark Watershed Lands. The City of Newark owns over 35,000 acres in the Pequannock Watershed in Passaic, Sussex and Morris Counties. The project's partners developed a forest stewardship plan that emphasizes rare wildlife and their habitats and focuses on restoring, creating, and enhancing habitat for critical species through active forest management. Some key species emphasized include Northern Goshawk, timber rattlesnake, and Golden-winged Warbler as well as early successional and hemlock communities. The partners hope that this plan will help to initiate a dialogue leading to more active management of habitats on public lands throughout New Jersey. Preservation of New Jersey's natural resources and recovery of most of its rare plants and animals is dependent upon science-based stewardship. The focal species for this project clearly demonstrate that. For example, the core nesting habitat for Northern Goshawk in the watershed is disappearing rapidly, the result of an exotic insect that has destroyed most of the mature hemlocks. Hemlock ravines are the favored nesting site of goshawk and habitat for most of the Watershed's rare plants; yet these areas are being decimated by the invasive woolly adelgid. In addition, the New Jersey Highlands and Ridge and Valley Region have contained the last few locations for Golden-winged Warblers in New Jersey but the species continues to decline throughout the region. Without intervention, the species will undoubtedly soon disappear from the state. This project is part of NJAS's ongoing Forest Health Initiative supported by the Johannette Wallerstein Foundation.

Raritan Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership Plan Unveiled

By: Troy Ettl, Director of Conservation

The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation has awarded \$1 million towards implementation of the Grassland Conservation Plan for the Raritan Piedmont Wildlife Habitat Partnership. The Plan, written by NJAS, focuses on three regions in Central New Jersey that have historically included some of the largest grassland areas in the state and have supported breeding populations of each of the State's threatened and endangered grassland birds. The plan followed a discrete, science-based approach to set numerical population and habitat goals for each target species based upon national and regional conservation models supported by local data. Using these goals, the Partnership then conducted a GIS analysis to identify the most critical clusters of habitat and identified the owners of individual parcels within the key clusters. The plan emphasizes three primary objectives of implementation: 1) applying appropriate management of critical habitats to

public land, 2) initiating conservation projects on private lands by engaging private landowners through collaborative conservation agreements and other tools, and 3) targeted acquisition of parcels of critical habitat as determined by the plan. A version of the plan is viewable on the NJAS Stewardship webpage www.njaudubon.org/conservation/stewardship.html.

Habitat Restoration in the Mannington Meadows IBA

By Beth Cuzio, Conservation Planner

This fall, habitat restoration began at the Mannington Meadows Important Bird Area (IBA). Thanks to a group of dedicated landowners, a 2-mile section of the Mannington Meadows, located in the Mannington Township of Salem County, will be restored. Five tracts of private land adjacent to a tract of publicly owned land will be converted from Phragmites to native trees and shrubs. In addition, sections of agricultural fields adjacent to the Meadow will be planted in native vegetation to augment the existing riparian zone. Finally, 60 acres of land in the project area will be restored to native grasses. The restoration project is expected to benefit grassland birds, migrating waterfowl, pollinating insects, and improve conditions for reproducing fish!

The restoration activities are part of the implementation of the Mannington Meadows IBA Conservation Plan. The plan is available at: <https://www.njaudubon.org/Conservation/PDF/MannMeadowsConsPlan9-19.pdf> (*this file is 2.5 MB and may take several minutes to download*). The plan focuses on restoring habitat, maintaining the agricultural character of the community, and improving access to open space and outdoor recreational activities. Volunteers are needed for planting trees in the spring of 2007 and 2008. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Elizabeth Cuzio at 609-861-0700 ext. 24 or email: beth.ciuzio@njaudubon.org.

Wildlife and Rural Community Benefit in Warren County

By John Parke, Conservation Planner and Restoration Ecologist

It's been over a year since NJAS began working with farmers and landowners, in and around Harmony Township (Warren County) to preserve the rural culture of the last large agricultural landscape in the NJ Delaware Valley.

In this short time NJAS has been successful in helping to secure over \$334,013.00 in funding to landowners and/or farmers in the region. These monies from Federal and State agencies are assisting them with enrollment into various conservation programs that has protected, enhanced and/or created over 350 acres of suitable habitat.

Through this funding, NJAS has been instrumental in the planning and design of grassland habitat restorations in the region that already show positive results. The projects have brought back native grasses, wildflowers and grassland dependant bird species including the NJ State threatened bobolink to a region that is under constant pressure from invasive non-native vegetation encroachment and development.

Besides positive benefits to wildlife and habitat, NJAS has also facilitated local economic benefits to area residents by connecting landowners with farmers for hire to implement conservation practices. In addition, NJAS has provided free samples of native warm season

grass hay bales to farmers, assisted them with applications for financial assistance to enroll in conservation programs, provided free technical assistance and initiated and/or strengthened positive relationships between government agencies and the community. Furthermore, NJAS is currently developing a solid relationship with the Foodshed nature-based and agrotourism in the region.

With farmers and landowners standing on the frontlines against sprawling development, examples of improving the economic situation of the rural community are crucial to advancing conservation programs in local communities.

Quest to Save the Red Knot Continues

By Eric Stiles, Vice President for Conservation and Stewardship

New Jersey Audubon Society and its coalition partners are continuing efforts to secure the future of Red Knots and shorebirds reliant on the superabundance of horseshoe crab eggs on the Delaware Bayshore. The eggs are required to fuel the shorebirds' journey north to their Arctic breeding grounds. Governor Corzine and Congressman Frank Pallone deserve special praise for their strong leadership on this issue.

Delaware is considering adoption of more restrictive measures on the harvest of horseshoe crabs. Governor Corzine is asking for the state of Delaware to follow the leadership set by New Jersey in setting a bay-wide two-year harvest moratorium. This policy measure is strongly supported by prominent scientific publications.

Governor Corzine also deserves great credit for demonstrating the significant conservation gains which would be afforded to Red Knots if they were listed federally. New Jersey is actively protecting critical habitat through land acquisition, beach restoration and limiting public disturbance during May and June. In addition, it has adopted a horseshoe crab harvest moratorium and is devoting significant resources to research and recovery of this species.

Unfortunately, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) denied our coalition's petition for emergency listing of the Red Knot. They have elected to place the Knot on the candidate species list. While acknowledging the science demonstrating the imminent risk of extinction, the "candidate" status affords no meaningful protections. Under the current administration, species do not move off of this list, unless they go extinct.

Congressman Frank Pallone is leading a NJ congressional delegation effort asking for the USFWS to reconsider listing the Red Knot under its emergency provisions. In addition, our coalition is appealing the decision and will continue its legal efforts to secure federal listing. Special thanks is deserved for Rutgers Environmental Clinic whose attorneys are representing NJ Audubon Society.

Once again, science is in our corner. Peer review literature demonstrates that federally listed species are more likely to recover, receive habitat protection, gain increase status in the review of fisheries management and beach restoration and see an increase in funding for research and recovery efforts. The bottom-line is that the Endangered Species Act works!

To help save the Red Knot, please register for our free online action center at www.njaudubon.org.

NJ Highlands Coalition Formed to Protect NJ's Water, Forest and Wildlife

By Julia Somers, Executive Director, NJ Highlands Coalition

In 2004, the New Jersey Highlands Coalition (NJHiCo) was formed by more than 80 of New Jersey's environmental groups, large and small. Most of these groups were already participants in the regional, four-state Highlands Coalition. The four-state Highlands Coalition itself was founded in 1988, and New Jersey Audubon's Tom Gilmore served as the first President of the group.

NJHiCo was subsequently incorporated in 2006 as a non-profit organization whose mission is to advocate for the protection, preservation, and enhancement of the water, forests, wildlife, farmland and other natural, historic and cultural resources of the New Jersey Highlands, and to enhance the sustainability of natural and human communities and the quality of life for current and future generations.

In August 2004, the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act was signed into law, a tremendous victory for the members of the Coalition and for the 5.2 million people who rely on the New Jersey Highlands for drinking water. This victory was achieved through a remarkable, focused campaign operating at the grassroots and state level. Like the Pinelands Protection Act before it, this sweeping legislation aims to shape the future of New Jersey through a regional planning process, but unlike the Pinelands Act, the Highlands Act provides that only those municipalities with land in the Preservation Area are required to conform those areas to the Regional Master Plan (RMP) now being developed by the New Jersey Highlands Council. All but five of the 88 Highlands municipalities are located either entirely (36) or partially (47) in the Planning Area; these municipalities may, but are not required to, conform Planning Area lands to the RMP.

Presently, the New Jersey Highlands Coalition is monitoring and commenting on policies and decisions as they are considered and debated by the New Jersey Highlands Council to become part of the RMP. Further, the Highlands Act has encountered opposition from large landholders who see the Act as a direct threat to potential for speculative land sale expectations. Because the RMP conformance period is actually *a part of the planning process*, and because neither the public nor the Highlands municipalities fully understand the benefits of the Highlands Act or the RMP, there remains an enormous education and advocacy need to ensure that this legislation is implemented and the Highlands are preserved for current and future generations. This education and advocacy are two primary goals of the NJ Highlands Coalition.

The New Jersey Audubon Society is a committed founder and member of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition. Eric Stiles, Vice President of Conservation and Stewardship for NJAS, said "We are thrilled and fortunate to have Julia Somers as the new Executive Director. Her steadfast leadership will ensure the future of the Highlands' wildlife and forests for future generations."

Making More of Our NJ Meadowlands

By Lillian Armstrong, Director of Birding and Wildlife Trails

There are now *two* New Jersey Birding and Wildlife Trails guides! On August 8, 2006 New Jersey Audubon Society formally introduced the Meadowlands and More Birding and Wildlife

Trails guide at the monthly meeting of the NJ Meadowlands Commission. The room was packed, with four TV crews, several members of the media, and many of the generous individuals who provided their special insights to the area. We received terrific coverage – and the Meadowlands Commission responded to over 3,000 requests for the guide within the first week.

We could not have completed this project without our local friends, and our partners at the Commission, the Hackensack Riverkeeper and the Meadowlands Regional Chamber of Commerce. It was a team effort and we are truly grateful for everyone's cooperation and willingness to share their expertise.

Like the Delaware Bayshore guide, the Meadowlands guide is accompanied by a brochure to businesses in the area. But unlike any other guide of its kind, you can order the Meadowlands and More guide in Spanish, as well. ("Meadowlands y Más," en Español). Although this was a complicated and time-consuming undertaking, it was definitely worth it based on the response of Spanish-speaking residents in the area. NJ Audubon is committed to working with NJ's multi-cultural population to learn about, enjoy and conserve its nature!

If you've been reading the Trails updates regularly, you know we are always learning something new (like how to spell "wigeon"). This time we learned that practically every country in South America has assigned its own, different names to common birds; putting a kink into our ability to do a translation for a mixed audience in the NY metropolitan area. Thankfully, Kenn Kaufman published his popular guide in Spanish just last year, so we used that as our standard, and also created a brochure of English/Spanish/Latin names, for easy reference.

You can order a guide by calling 888-NJM-BIRD or pick one up on at your local NJAS Center. You can also retrieve all the same information (even the Spanish Meadowlands guide), on our website at www.njwildlifetrails.org.