



Audubon Vermont Impact Report

WINTER 2022



Hermit Thrush.

Introduction

A Year of Innovation and Impact

Birds face an unprecedented number of threats—none more acute than climate change, which imperils nearly two-thirds of North American species. Audubon knows that protecting birds today and tomorrow requires substantial investments in the places they need most.

Through a powerful and innovative mix of policy, education and effective conservation, along with a strong commitment to partnerships and equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging, Audubon Vermont has made great contributions to local and national conservation efforts this year.

Our accomplishments were possible thanks to the hard work of our talented team of education and conservation professionals, dedicated volunteers, like-minded organizations, and the generous and visionary support of our private, institutional and governmental funders.

As an invaluable member of our flock, you contributed to our success, and we hope you will share in our excitement for the difference we have made, together, for birds, their habitats, and people.

Thank you,
David Mears
Executive Director,
Audubon Vermont
Vice President,
National Audubon Society

Three Key Priority Areas

This past year, your support of Audubon Vermont was more important than ever, and we're pleased to share this summary of what we have accomplished together in three key priority areas: Conservation, Education and Policy. As you read the highlights below, we hope you'll be struck by how integral collaboration is to achieving our goal of a better world for birds and people. It's going to take all of us, working together, to create the change we need, and we are grateful you have joined us.



Chestnut-sided Warbler.

Conservation

Audubon Vermont's Conservation Programs engage private and public landowners to create and maintain forest, grassland, shrubland and riparian habitats that benefit birds and ecosystem health.

Healthy Forests

Vermont's forests have some of the highest concentrations of breeding bird species in the country, making Audubon Vermont's Healthy Forests Initiative's collaboration with landowners, land managers, government agencies and private industry hugely important to ensuring the conservation and health of this critical habitat.

A highlight from the past year was the expansion of the Bird-Friendly Maple program, our signature market-based incentive strategy that is growing rapidly in the state and across the Northeast. To date, we have assessed 14,000 acres of sugarbush and enlisted 70 producers in the Bird-Friendly Maple program. In addition, through our partnership with Cold Hollow to Canada and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC), we worked with Barred Woods Maple, a sugarbush in Belvidere that is part of our Bird Friendly Maple program, to implement a new management plan. The plan not only expanded habitat for birds, but also allowed youth to get hands-on experience and training, and the landowner to complete an otherwise prohibitively difficult maintenance project.

Birds and Watersheds

We made strides in this new initiative to improve bird habitat along riparian areas and nearby uplands while also reducing erosion and increasing carbon storage. In partnership with the CT River

Conservancy and VYCC, we identified close to 100 potential riparian habitat restoration projects in the Connecticut River Watershed. In the coming year, we will refine the project list, identify landowners within those areas, and explore partnerships and funding to advance those projects.

Bird-and Bee-Friendly Farming

Our Bird- and Bee-Friendly Farming initiative experienced tremendous growth in the past year. In collaboration with the University of Vermont Gund Institute for Environment and farmers from across the state, we implemented economically and ecologically successful on-farm bird and pollinator friendly practices. We expanded our network of participating farms, including several high-profile farms alongside those managed by underserved communities.

The longstanding regional Bobolink Project, in which landowners learn to manage their hay fields to support nesting Bobolinks, had 23 landowners enrolled, 16 of them in Vermont. This year, 803 acres were enrolled in Vermont alone with 399 Bobolink pairs observed on those 16 farms and an estimated 1,113 chicks fledged in the state.

Priority Bird Conservation and Community Science

With the support of members and volunteers, Audubon Vermont monitors and stewards priority birds including Common Tern, Bald Eagle and

Peregrine Falcon. Staff and summer interns monitored Common Terns at Poppasquash and the surrounding islands in Lake Champlain. This was a successful year for the 190 nesting Common Tern pairs that fledged 105 chicks. It was a welcome surprise on the heels of a less productive 2021 season.

Peregrine Falcons continued their recovery. Forty-three peregrine sites were monitored and at least 65 young were fledged.

Volunteers are essential to monitoring Bald Eagle populations as part of our annual winter survey which has taken place since 1979. This year, forty eagle sites were monitored, 31 nested and at least 24 pairs fledged 42 young. There were at least three new nests documented this past year!



Peregrine Falcon

Education, Engagement, and Community

Green Mountain Audubon Center: Education, Outreach & Accessibility to Nature

Audubon Vermont has worked hard to take advantage of the recently increased availability of environmental funds from both public and private sources, and we are very grateful to the private and institutional funders who have provided matching funds that enabled us to do so.

We grew our education program offerings as we rebounded from the pandemic at the Green Mountain

Audubon Center. Our education team led school field trips, vacation day programs, afterschool programs, adult programs, teacher trainings, and a Forest Classroom and Forest Playschool program series. In total, we engaged 3,677 participants.

The Audubon Center helps to make nature accessible to all in our community. Visitors to the Audubon Center are enjoying new outdoor benches on some of our most popular trails and a new accessibility ramp has been installed on our Program Barn

this year as part of our ongoing efforts to improve access to our Center. In addition, our trail system remained free and open to the public daily.

This year we expanded enrollment at our summer day camp program to serve more families and offered several programs free of charge including a Nature Playgroup and an Urban Birding Club in Burlington. We initiated a sliding scale fee structure to many of our public programs to ensure no one is excluded from our programs due to cost.

Youth Conservation Leadership and Junior Conservation Technicians

Our Youth Conservation Leadership program continued to thrive in 2022. We successfully launched a new program for high school aged youth called Junior Conservation Technicians (JCT). This is an age demographic we had previously struggled to engage. Nine teens participated in the paid work opportunity to learn about local conservation issues, forest management, and bird conservation skills. They also helped with several habitat improvement and remediation projects at the Green Mountain Audubon Center. With their input, we are building programs that offer job training and first-hand experiences in field work alongside professional educators and conservationists. At the same time, our program offered a social networking opportunity for



Late Winter Hike

"Learning through experience is the best way to learn, so being able to experience nature and actually engage with what we're learning about has been a great boon to my understanding of nature in general."

—
JCT participant

the teens, which we have learned is highly valuable, especially in light of the isolation brought on by the pandemic.

'Serve, Learn, & Earn' Collaboration and Program

Audubon Vermont has partnered with ReSOURCE, Vermont Works for Women, and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) to secure a major grant from the State of Vermont through a program called 'Serve, Learn, & Earn.' With these funds we aim to create pathways to meaningful environmental careers by providing hands-on learning opportunities for youth and young adults. This year we were able to offer 54 paid service and learning opportunities including: internships in conservation, education, and policy; Junior Conservation Tech positions; Counselors-in-Training positions; seasonal Camp Instructor positions; a conservation fellowship and two full-year AmeriCorps positions. Young adults in these roles worked over 5,000 hours in conservation work and engaged more than 2,000 children in outdoor education.

Affinity Group Programs

Launched in June of 2018, our monthly Pride Hikes (a partnership between Audubon Vermont, the Pride Center of Vermont, and Outright Vermont) expanded their reach in Vermont this year and served as a model for other local non-profit organizations of how to hold space for the LGBTQIA++ communities. Shelburne Farms, The Nature Conservancy Vermont, the Intervale Center, the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, Burlington Parks, Recreation and Waterfront, the Cambridge Conservation Commission,

and Sleepy Hollow Ski and Bike Center all co-hosted Pride Hikes in 2022.

In addition to Pride Hikes, Audubon Vermont received a grant from the Vermont Community Foundation to provide a safe, inclusive environment that celebrates gender creative youth and sparks joy in outdoor spaces. This allowed us to host free Gender Creative Kids Outings in Huntington with Outright Vermont. These outings help create connections to nature and community for gender non-conforming youth and their families.



Children explore the pond at the Green Mountain Audubon Center.

Policy

Audubon Vermont has worked tirelessly to advocate for birds in Vermont. As Vermont considers policies to address the pressing issues of climate change and loss of biodiversity, we are making sure that the voices of birds are included.

Addressing Climate Change

Audubon Vermont continued to play an important role in advancing the importance of nature-based climate solutions – a vital strategy that builds on Vermont’s natural assets of green hills and silver waters. We advocated for greater public, private and philanthropic investment in ways of living on the landscape that are resilient to extreme weather such as floods and droughts, while also increasing the amount of stored carbon in our forests and fields. We also actively participated in the work of the Vermont Climate Council, and advocating for policies and legislation to invest in forest and grassland restoration, watershed health, and sustainable management of forests and farms.

Advocating for Forests and Habitat

Vermont’s 1970 land use and development law, Act 250, has dictated forest conservation policy since its passage over 50 years ago. This year, Audubon Vermont and other members of the Vermont Forest Partnership supported legislation to give this foundational piece of legislation a much-needed update including new protections for forest habitat blocks and greater protection for wildlife corridors. While this bill passed the General Assembly, it was vetoed by the Governor so we will be returning to this work in the 2023-2024 session.

Audubon Vermont also supported legislation to conserve thirty percent of Vermont’s land by 2030. Though this bill passed the General Assembly, it was also vetoed by the Governor. To further this important work, Audubon Vermont is working with other conservation groups to develop a comprehensive land conservation strategy for Vermont, and we look forward to reporting on the progress of this effort in 2023.

An important bill that Audubon supported and which did make it across the Governor’s desk, was legislation expanding the eligibility under Vermont’s “current use” law, which will provide a property tax incentive to landowners seeking to protect ecologically sensitive areas in forests and to promote an increase in

the amount of forests managed for old growth characteristics. Together with a coalition of committed advocacy organizations, and with the strong support of the Audubon Vermont members, we are continuing to move the needle towards strategies that are good for birds, and the places birds and people need to thrive.

Philo Ridge Farm

Restoring wetlands that serve as the headwaters for Mud Hollow Brook at Philo Ridge Farm is making a positive impact on birds, insects, and water quality. This past year, Philo Ridge Farm, Audubon Vermont, the Gund Institute, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Vermont Land Trust managed invasive species and planted over 200 native plants across a 7-acre riparian area to attract pollinators and produce food for nesting and migrating birds.

Migratory Bird Explorer

This February Audubon launched the [Migratory Bird Explorer](#)— a first-of-its-kind open-access digital platform consolidating data from scientists and partner organizations around the globe to provide a comprehensive look at bird migration. The Audubon Vermont team is proud to contribute data from our bird banding efforts as well as our ever-expanding network of MOTUS towers. We can see how the Black-throated Blue Warblers that delight us with their songs each spring make their journey to the Caribbean for the winter. And with the Explorer’s interactive maps, **users can visualize how our local conservation efforts are connected to conservation and advocacy throughout the Americas.**

Birds Don't Know Boundaries

While Audubon Vermont is working hard to protect birds and the places here in Vermont, we're fortunate to be part of a larger organization with which we can collaborate to protect "our" birds throughout their entire life cycles and migratory journeys—from Canada to South America.

On a national and hemispheric level, below are just a few of the ways the larger Audubon organization is helping to support our shared goals:

- In June CEO Elizabeth Gray provided testimony to support four pieces of conservation legislation before the U.S. Senate's Committee on Environment and Public Works.
- In September, we launched the Migratory Bird Explorer, a first-of-its-kind digital platform that brings bird migration to life, provides the most complete and up-to-date picture of

the full annual cycle of migratory birds, and reveals their epic journeys and the many conservation challenges they encounter throughout the year.

- Audubon helped advance the Recovering America's Wildlife Act through the U.S. House of Representatives. This legislation provides \$2 billion for conservation projects, will create 3,000 jobs, and will generate \$93 billion in economic activity.
- Partnering with BirdLife International and many other organizations, Audubon's Conserva Aves secured \$12 million from the Bezos Earth Fund to protect and strengthen bird habitats across 1.48 million acres in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Perú.
- Audubon helped secure a \$340 million investment from Canadian government in Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous Guardians programs.

Our mission and our message are clear: if we can protect birds and the habitats they need, we can secure a better climate future for all. During the pandemic, people across the hemisphere developed new interest in birds and joined the already 47 million bird lovers in the United States. For the first time, they tuned in to the joy of birds. This presents an enormous opportunity as we build the largest-ever bird constituency to protect the birds we love and the places they—and we—need.

Thank you for joining us in our mission to effect meaningful conservation outcomes as we strive to create a better future for all.



Common Tern

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Bald Eagle.