

Audubon | VERMONT

Audubon Vermont Impact Report

2021



Evening Grosbeak

Welcome

With a focus on building connected, engaged, and resilient local communities, Audubon Vermont helped chart a brighter future for birds in 2021, and we've set the stage to expand our impact in 2022 and beyond. With the loss of three billion birds in the past 50 years and climate change posing an existential threat to the majority of North American species today, our work has never been more important. Through policy advocacy, powerful partnerships, innovative conservation strategies, and a strong commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (EDIB), Audubon is scaling our work in new ways and in new places—across the United States and throughout the hemisphere. Our national 2021 accomplishments include:

- Successfully defending the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA)—our most important bird protection law—from unprecedented attempts to gut it
- Establishing the foundation of a truly equitable Audubon by investing in leadership and other staff to drive our EDIB vision forward
- Releasing our Natural Climate Solutions Report, which will guide our work to protect birds from climate change and benefit people and communities at the same time



A forestry demonstration at the Bird and Barn Festival

As our priorities scale up nationally and internationally, Audubon Vermont's work is especially vital. This year we have continued to expand our remote and in-person education programs, collaborated with farmers and other land stewards to expand, and improve habitat for birds on farms and in forests, expanded our Youth Conservation Leadership Program, and helped to secure important policy wins in the state legislature.

Bird and Barn Festival

Thank you for joining us this September to celebrate birds and the completed renovation of our Education Program Barn! We were lucky to have a bright fall day to celebrate and enjoy the Green Mountain Audubon Center and some amazing birds. The renovations were completed with thoughtful attention to sustainability and to the preservation of the barn's historical character. We look forward to sharing the beautiful Education Barn meeting space with program participants and our community.



The interior of our newly renovated education barn

KEY PRIORITY AREAS

Conservation

Vermont's landscape is a wonderful tapestry of forests and fields, lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands that hosts a marvelous diversity of birds. This same landscape is also central to Vermont's identity and to our rural, working lands—supporting a wealth of opportunities for farming, forestry, and outdoor recreation. Vermonters strongly support protection of the birds that depend upon this landscape, for their natural beauty and because their presence reflects a shared prosperity. We also know that habitat loss, non-native species, and climate disruption all pose grave threats to birds and their habitat. Audubon Vermont's conservation team is hard at work to address these threats, finding innovative ways to work with public agencies, other conservation organizations, and private landowners to protect these vital resources.

Birds and Forests

Approximately 78% of the state of Vermont is made up of forests. Our forests, and others throughout New England, have some of the highest concentrations of breeding grounds for many bird species in the entire United States. Since roughly 80% of Vermont's forests are privately owned, we collaborate with landowners, land managers, government agencies, and private industry to improve the quality of habitat on privately managed lands. Programs to advance our forest conservation goals include the following:

Foresters for the Birds

Audubon Vermont has been a leader in protecting forests through programs such as our Foresters for the Birds training program that has been adopted by many other states. We launched a new Forester Endorsement Program, which teaches licensed foresters the latest bird-friendly land management practices so that they can serve as consultants to private forest owners statewide. In addition, we hosted a bird-friendly forest management walk in partnership with the Chittenden County Forester and Fellowship of the Wheel, a trail-based recreation non-profit, at the Hinesburg Town Forest. This year alone our work has made an impact on many thousands of acres of forest throughout the state.

Woods, Wildlife, and Warblers

Vermont's forest land provides critical habitat for millions of birds, including vulnerable species like the Golden-winged Warbler, Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, and Black-throated Blue Warbler. Our Woods, Wildlife, and Warblers program is a collaboration with seven partner organizations to help stakeholders improve bird habitats on privately owned lands. Undeterred by the pandemic, we hosted a variety of virtual events including a presentation in collaboration with Vermont Land Trust called "The Birder's Dozen"; a webinar co-hosted with the Vermont Woodlands Association; and a forest bird conservation workshop series presented in collaboration with the Regional Conservation Partnership, Highstead, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



Black-throated Blue Warbler

Bird Friendly Maple

This year we enrolled six new maple producers, collectively responsible for 648 acres of forests, in our Bird-friendly Maple Program. As part of an ongoing partnership with the Cold Hollow to Canada Regional Partnership we have provided 50 forest bird habitat assessments to date. Participating producers benefit from specialized product labeling and other marketing advantages, and birds benefit from improved forest management practices by landowners.

Birds and Fields

From the Champlain Valley to the Connecticut River, Vermont has a rich diversity of fields managed for hay or grazing, shrublands and other early successional habitat. As farms move in or out of active crop production, the amount of habitat available to our grassland bird species, and the many species that rely upon healthy watersheds, also changes. We are committed to working with landowners, communities, public agencies, and land conservation

organizations to implement strategies to protect these vital components of Vermont's lands. Two emerging examples of this work include the following:

Birds and Watersheds

Birds depend upon healthy river corridors, floodplains, and wetlands, as well as streams and headwaters. At the same time, we know that the restoration of these critical habitat features has many other benefits including clean water, resilience to flooding and other extreme weather exacerbated by climate change, and the storage of carbon. Through partnerships with local watershed organizations and land conservation organizations, and with the support of state and federal agencies, we are collaborating to restore bird habitat while also providing a full range of other ecological services. Our current priority area is the Champlain Valley, and we have recently started working with the Connecticut River Conservancy to assist landowners on the other side of the state.

Senior Conservation Staff

We'd like to recognize several members of our senior conservation staff for their accomplishments this year. Mark LaBarr celebrated his 25th year of bird banding. His work has been instrumental in protecting Vermont's threatened population of Common Terns, and he has been a leader in developing strategies to recover habitat for Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers. Biologist Margaret Fowle was praised for her leadership of Vermont's successful Bald Eagle recovery efforts in *The Rutland Herald*. After nearly two decades under her charge, the bird's population has grown large enough that they are now eligible for delisting. And Steve Hagenbuch was featured in *Northern Woodlands Magazine* for his role in launching our Healthy Forests Initiative as well as his oversight of the Bird Friendly Maple Project.

Savannah Sparrow

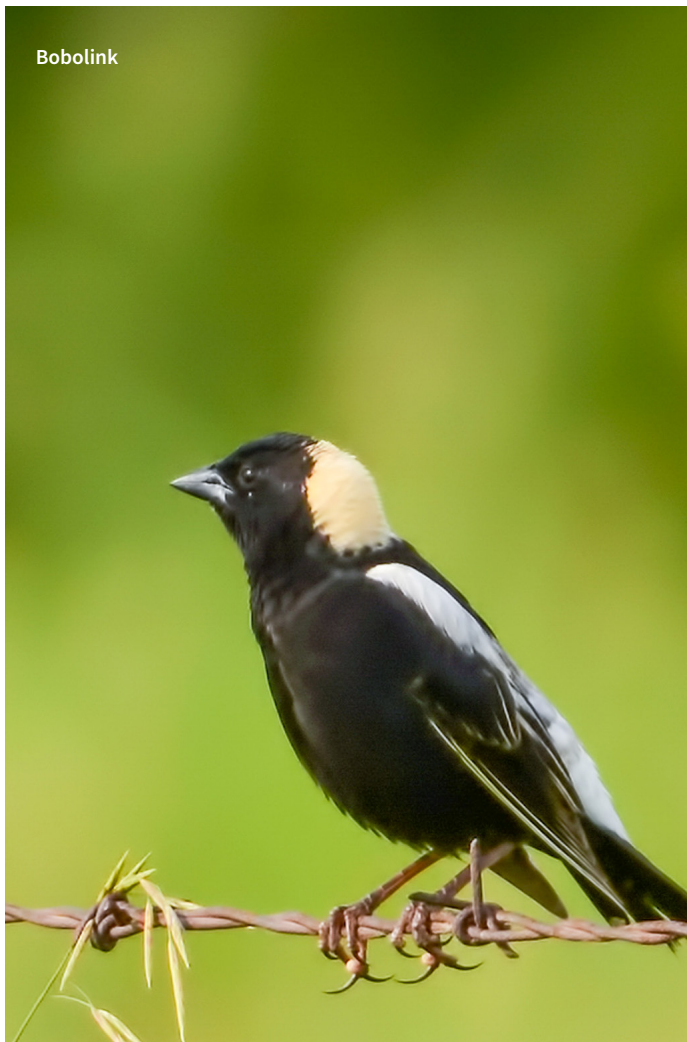


Bird and Bee Friendly Farming

Birds and bees are excellent indicators of a healthy ecosystem. When we protect them, we protect our soil and water and provide natural solutions to climate change. Incorporating a mix of native trees, shrubs, and perennials into the agricultural landscape turns farms into quality habitat for birds and pollinators to forage, breed, and shelter. In turn, the birds and insects provide natural services such as crop pollination and pest control.

Over a thousand acres of farmland, 800 of those in Vermont, are part of the Bobolink Project. Increasing the biodiversity on these farms has not only helped Bobolinks, but also other species of concern including Savannah Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows, Northern Harriers, and Eastern Meadowlarks, which have been identified during these surveys.

We have also partnered with UVM's Gund Institute to work with dairy farms that are part of Ben and Jerry's Caring Dairy Program. To date, we have helped farmers plant native trees and shrubs, designed a farm stand garden of native plants for birds, offered expertise on removing invasive plant species, and provided bird and bee friendly planting options to keep cows out of streams.



Bobolink



Pollinator expert Jason Mazurowski surveys bee populations at Isham Farm



Chickens are the only pest control used in the Christmas tree and blueberry fields at Isham Farm

Community Engagement and Education

Audubon Vermont is committed to deepening our connection to the local community through Education and Community Science programs offered at the Green Mountain Audubon Center and in the surrounding communities. Our conservation work both at the Center and statewide has been made possible largely through the support of community science volunteers.

Green Mountain Audubon Center

The Green Mountain Audubon Center has been a recognized asset of the Huntington community and Vermont for 57 years. As part of our continued commitment to public service, we recently renovated our Education Barn. The result of this work is a beautifully restored building and a highly functional space for learning and gathering. We celebrated the reopening of the Education Barn, after nearly a year of construction, at the Bird and Barn Festival. More than 200 guests came out to the Center on the last weekend of September. The event, sponsored by Main Street Landing and the Green Mountain Audubon Society, included a full program of birding, presentations by naturalists, nature walks, and art projects. Guests also enjoyed the 2018 Audubon Photography Awards show on display in the Barn and a slideshow documenting the year-long renovation process.

This year also marked a first step in recognizing the long and continuous history of indigenous stewardship of the land that Audubon helps to conserve. We worked with local Abenaki tribes to create a formal land acknowledgement. This statement, to be recited at the start of public events or included in published materials, is a way of emphasizing the continued relationships of Indigenous people to occupied land and acknowledging the difficult truth of how the land was acquired. We recognize that this acknowledgment will be just one of many steps towards correcting the erasure of the Abenaki people's connection with this land.

Education Programs

Serving Children, Families, and Students

We are proud to take an active role in educating the next generation of conservation leaders. The Green Mountain Audubon Center provides a variety of program offerings year-round including summer camps, K-12 school field trip programs, a Forest Playschool for preschoolers, an Unschool program serving our homeschool community, vacation day programs and a thriving, free nature playgroup for children ages birth to five years old that are accompanied by their caregivers.



Red Crossbill



Campers exploring with their counselor

The continued disruption of in-person learning due to the spread of COVID-19 was particularly challenging for children and families. In response, our education team expanded Audubon from Home, a collection of free, online educational activities, art projects, and resources encouraging caregivers and children to continue to spend time outdoors at home or in their community. Taking advantage of local public schools’ remote learning schedule, we were able to launch the new Forest Classroom program in September of 2020. Students enrolled in the program connected with our naturalists outdoors at the Audubon Center each Wednesday throughout the academic year. We were glad to be able to offer the program again this fall.

Schools slowly began requesting field trips again in May 2021 giving us hope that our school program schedule would return to something closer to “normal” this fall, and indeed it did. Throughout the summer and this fall we hosted more than 1,000 children from local schools and summer camp programs at the Audubon Center. Our own summer camp program also resumed this year with hundreds of campers from ages three to eleven exploring nature at the Center all summer long.

Youth Leadership

We mentor a steady stream of emerging conservation leaders each semester through our paid internship

program for young adults. Throughout the year we hosted conservation, policy, and education interns. Each intern engaged in a policy or conservation education project and wrote news articles for Audubon Vermont’s website on a wonderful range of topics including an Abenaki history of maple syrup and the mating behaviors of crows.

Our youth leaders also had the opportunity to direct conversations to the issues that resonate with them. Our summer 2020 policy interns highlighted equity and environmental justice by kicking off a series of webinars titled “Tough Conversations” to bring youth leaders together to share and discuss the intersecting challenges of advancing racial justice and fighting climate change. Their first two sessions had more than fifty thousand views on National Audubon Society’s Facebook live stream.

Priority Birds and Community Science

Our conservation efforts rely on the collection of scientifically sound data. This is only possible with the help of Audubon members and others who volunteer their skills. With the support of the community, we are able to include Common Terns, Peregrine Falcons, Bald Eagles, and Chimney Swifts in our Priority Birds conservation program. Community scientists contributed more than 900 hours and 7,500 miles to monitoring peregrines and eagles throughout the state.

Chimney Swifts have seen the benefit of other community conservation efforts. This gregarious aerial insectivore relies upon sightings from birders and casual observers from across the state to identify their nesting and roosting locations. In our third year of Chimney Swift Recovery Project, we hosted a Swift Night Out in Burlington and saw the creation of more Chimney Swift towers throughout Vermont.

Just two miles east of North Hero, VT on Poppasquash Island we worked this summer to document and restore the breeding grounds of Common Terns. Although this was a

difficult year for the Terns, with many abandoned nests and lots of early season predation, twenty-six tern chicks made it off the island successfully and tern populations continue to trend in a positive direction.

Bald Eagles are ready to soar off the Vermont endangered species list. From the first successful fledge in 2008 after being listed as endangered in Vermont in 1987, the number of successful Bald Eagle fledglings has grown to sixty-four this year. The eagle's successful rebound means that they will be delisted in 2022. For more than two decades, this recovery effort has been led by Audubon Vermont Biologist Margaret Fowle with support from the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Pride Hikes

Pride Hikes, a partnership between Audubon Vermont, the Pride Center of Vermont, and Outright Vermont, continued to hold space each month for the LGBTQIA++ community in the outdoors (as well as online during the lockdown months of the pandemic). Launched in June of 2018, Pride Hikes have become a model for inclusive, transformative engagement across Vermont and throughout the Audubon network. An Audubon Chapter in Texas recently started their own Pride Hikes series after being inspired by a Queering Nature webinar at which Audubon Vermont's Gwendolyn Causer was a panelist. In addition, we've also held two Gender Creative Kids outings so far and look forward to hosting additional outings each season throughout the year!



Button Bay Pride Hike in July



Visit to a Chimney Swift tower at August's Swift Night Out

Policy

Climate Change

As the threat of climate change looms larger, Audubon Vermont has taken up the mantle of advocating for birds as part of the State of Vermont's implementation of the Global Warming Solutions Act. We are actively engaged in the work of the Agriculture and Ecosystems Subcommittee to develop recommendations for addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation through measures that protect and restore our working and natural lands. These recommendations were incorporated into the Vermont Climate Council's Climate Action Plan and will be the source of dialogue with state officials in the coming legislative session.

Protecting Bird and Wildlife Habitat

Following a year in which the Vermont General Assembly passed H.683, relating to the protection of migratory birds, on a nearly unanimous tri-partisan vote, we have continued to work to build coalitions that cross political and ideological lines to protect birds and bird habitat. We are working with Audubon Vermont's network of informed and engaged members to influence Vermont state government to safeguard improved protections for key habitat categories such as forests and wetlands. We will continue to advance those goals in the coming session as the General Assembly and Agency of Natural Resources debate improvements to Vermont's land use law, Act 250, and our wetlands regulations.



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