Audubon vermont

CHAMPLAIN VALLEY'S COMMON BIRDS IN DECLINE

A State of the Birds Report Summer 2009

Many of our most common and beloved birds are experiencing precipitous population declines. Audubon has identified our nation's most vulnerable common birds after analyzing forty years of bird population data collected by citizen scientists for Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, combined, for the first time, with Breeding Bird Survey data from the U.S. Geological Survey. Additional analyses focused on state level trends. Some mirror the national picture, while others reveal local and regional differences. The birds below are suffering the some of the most serious population declines in Vermont. Along with their national Common Birds in Decline list mates, they showcase the need for vigilance in protecting local habitats and the health of our environment. Working together, we can make a difference. Visit http://stateofthebirds.audubon.org/CBID for the national findings.

CHAMPLAIN VALLEY'S VULNERABLE COMMON BIRDS

BOBOLINK (Dolichonyx oryzivorus)

This grassland bird migrates the farthest of all Vermont birds wintering in the grasslands of Argentina and Paraguay. Recent research indicates that an early hay cut with a delay of 60 days before the next harvest may allow Bobolinks to successfully breed in actively managed hayfields. (photo: US Fish and Wildlife Service)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (Sturnella magna)

Like many grassland birds, meadowlarks are threatened by changing agricultural practices, including monoculture farming and early season mowing. In addition, development of open fields is contributing to habitat loss. Smart growth strategies should encourage the retention

of open land. (photo: National Audubon Society)

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER (Vermivora chhrysoptera)

A petite songbird, the Golden-winged Warbler journeys thousands of miles between the New World tropics and North America in order to breed. Adapted to shrubby habitats, it thrived on our abandoned and overgrown farmlands a century ago. Maintaining scrub-shrub habitats and supporting shade-grown coffee production may help stabilize the declines.

(photo: Roy Pilcher)

EASTERN TOWHEE (Pipilo erythrophthalmus)

Large, secretive black, white, and rust-colored sparrows, Eastern Towhees flourish in brushy habitats. Towhees feed on the ground under bushes and shrubs, and can be helped by protecting brushy fields and forest understory from over browsing by deer and by planting additional patches of native shrubs as nesting, foraging, and roosting habitat. (photo: NAS)

COMMON TERN (Sterna hirundo)

An endangered species in Vermont, intensive restoration management conducted by Audubon Vermont over the last decade has been able to stabilize the population of Common Terns on Lake Champlain. Nesting on rocky island sanctuaries, the Common Tern forages for fish and is vulnerable to human disturbance and predation.

(photo: Roy Pilcher)

Percent Decline Since 1967

73%

91%

Vatchlist Species

98%

Down 70% in US





VERMONT HABITATS AT RISK

Vermont's Champlain Valley is a mosaic of fields, clay-plain forests wetlands, lakes and rivers that host a high diversity of breeding birds. This diversity of birds is attracted to the valley because of the regionally unique habitats found there, including open farmlands, shrub patches, large emergent marshes and the lake itself. However, the Champlain Valley's critical bird habitats face a number of threats. The Eastern Towhee and Golden-winged Warbler may be declining due to the lack of shrub-scrub forest. Meanwhile, populations of grassland birds like the Eastern Meadowlark and Bobolink are dropping due to building and agricultural development on open grasslands, as well as early-season mowing and conversion to row crops. Controlling invasive species such as Wild Parsnip and Chervil may also add to the challenge of creating and maintaining suitable breeding habitat.



WHAT AUDUBON VERMONT IS DOING

Vermonters care deeply about birds and their habitat. Audubon Vermont is working with individuals across the state to monitor bird populations and promote sound stewardship on the ground. With 80% of Vermont in private ownership, Audubon Vermont is hard at work providing landowners with advice and assistance on how to manage their lands in bird friendly ways. Our Champlain Valley Bird Initiative will be offering technical assistance to grassland and shrubland landowners by conducting bird habitat assessments and making recommendations on bird friendly management.

We are also monitoring grassland bird populations and have developed a grassland birds recovery plan for the state of Vermont. On Lake Champlain, our island sanctuaries and intensive restoration efforts are restoring a viable Vermont population of Common Terns. Our Important Bird Areas program is identifying critical bird habitat in the state and we are working directly with our chapters to promote the conservation of these areas.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Vermonters can help keep common birds common in a variety of ways. Landowners with open fields can delay mowing fields until after July 15th each year. Where possible, landowners should maintain old fields and forest edges in early-successional habitat. Backyards provide valuable habitat for common birds. Landscaping using native plants and using "Audubon at Home" practices will help many common birds.

Volunteers can play a critical role in helping us determine bird population trends by taking part in bird monitoring projects. Participating in the Christmas Bird Count, the Great Backyard Bird Count and entering bird observations into ebird are all important ways to help ornithologists track bird populations.

Audubon has seven local chapters around the state which carry out a number of local conservation and monitoring projects. Champlain Valley chapters are the Otter Creek Audubon Society, Green Mountain Audubon Society and Rutland County Audubon Society. For information on a chapter near you and how you can get involved visit our website at vt.audubon.org.