

# Audubon Onward!

AUDUBON'S IMPACT IN VERMONT

2024



# Audubon Onward!

## DEAR FRIENDS,

This report invites you to look more closely at our collective impact over the past year to protect birds and the places they need in Vermont. *Audubon Onward!* provides important updates and conservation gains to address the mounting threats of climate change and biodiversity loss—threats that not only impact birds, but people and the planet, too. The following pages underscore an urgency of now, and Audubon’s bold response.

Over the past half-century, we have lost 3 billion birds in North America—an alarming trend skewed heavily toward migratory species. This precipitous loss is a powerful statement about the condition of our planet and a harbinger of things to come if we don’t act strategically and decisively.

Here in Vermont, birds like the Bicknell’s Thrush face a dire future if the current pace of climate change continues. This is just one species likely to disappear from Vermont in most of our lifetimes if we do not scale our work to meet the size and severity of these threats.

It is this urgency that led us to launch our *Flight Plan*, Audubon’s bold five-year strategic plan, which codifies our evolution into a truly hemispheric organization.

***Flight Plan* is about protecting birds, and at the same time, protecting people and our planet by advancing a generation-shaping agenda to the forefront of conservation.**

Beyond boundaries and across vast distances, most migratory birds only spend a fraction of their annual cycle in our state. To protect them, we need to literally meet them where they are. By studying their migrations and extensive breeding ranges, we can zero in with precision to address the dizzying array of conservation challenges they face.

It is your investment and our shared impact in Vermont that will allow us to achieve hemispheric outcomes—this is how we will bend the bird curve.

Thank you and onward!

**Jillian Liner**

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION

## BIRDS TELL US. THIS IS HOW WE LISTEN.

Thanks to game-changing science and new digital technologies, we are narrowing knowledge gaps that have long plagued the world of bird conservation. The Lesser Yellowlegs, for example, makes an annual round-trip migratory journey from the Boreal Forest in Canada to Chile—a round trip of nearly 20,000 miles.

Last year, four Lesser Yellowlegs originally tagged in Colombia’s Cauca Valley with transmitters—four single birds spread against the mammoth skies of the Western Hemisphere—flew past Audubon-installed Motus towers located in Michigan and Pennsylvania, similar to towers located at Dead

Creek Wildlife Management Area and Buckner Preserve in Vermont. These towers captured critical data revealing secrets of the birds’ migratory adventures, giving new revelations and insight into where, when, and how long they sought habitats needed to provide safe rest and food.



**Peregrine Falcon.**  
Photo: Cristy  
Carlson/Audubon  
Photography Awards

# Audubon’s *Flight Plan*:

A Powerful and Dynamic Story of Migratory Science, Climate Action, and Community Building

**THE SCIENCE IS CLEAR.** We have a unique opportunity to make a positive impact for birds, people, and the planet. While challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss are significant, we can bend the bird curve together. The window of opportunity remains open—if we seize this moment and act now.

The most ambitious strategic effort in our history, Audubon’s *Flight Plan* establishes our vision for shaping a world where birds and people thrive, elevating Audubon as a global conservation leader. *Flight Plan* sets five-year milestones in key areas to track progress towards our long-term vision to ‘bend the bird curve,’ in other words, to halt and reverse the alarming decline of birds. Our recognition of the interconnectedness of people, place, and climate led to the development of four milestones we intend to reach over the next five years: Habitat Conservation, Climate, Policy, and Community Building.

## MILESTONES:

*Flight Plan* harnesses the full power of Audubon—including on-the-ground staff across the Western Hemisphere, centers and sanctuaries, and local chapter partners—by focusing on a set of shared outcomes for greater collective impact towards our vision.

### HABITAT CONSERVATION

Using science to identify, protect, and conserve 300 million acres of bird habitat across the Americas

### CLIMATE ACTION

Deploying 100 gigawatts of renewable energy and storing 30 billion tons of carbon through natural climate solutions

### POLICY LEADERSHIP

Pairing diplomacy with advocacy to develop and implement bird-friendly solutions

### COMMUNITY BUILDING

Creating a diverse network of bird lovers working together to advance our shared vision

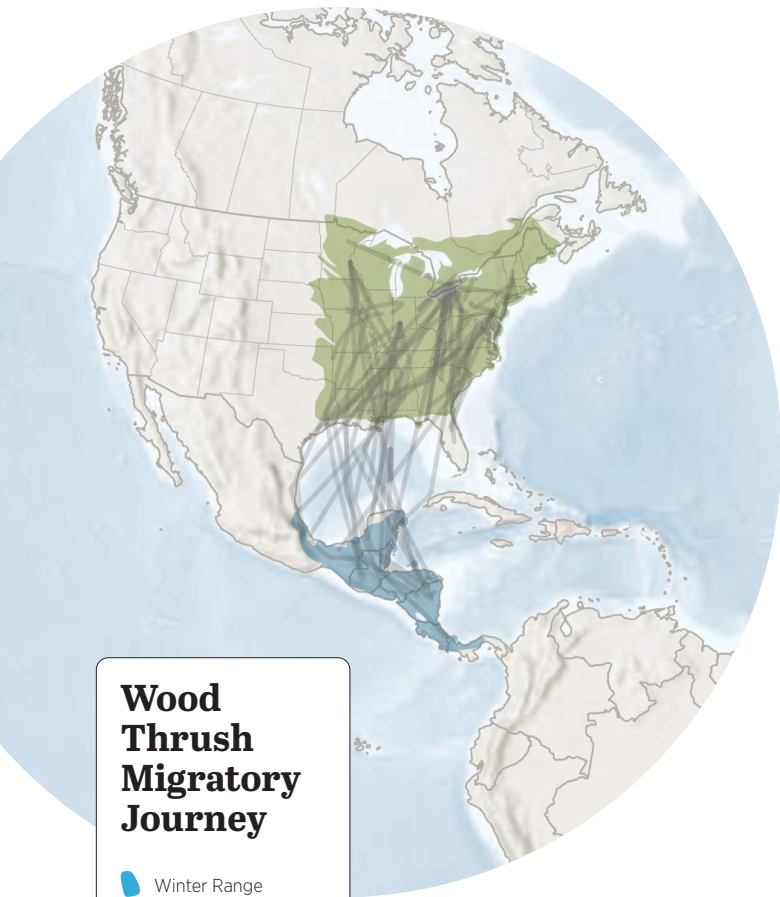
**AUDUBON'S HEMISPHERIC APPROACH TO CONSERVATION** directs our efforts to the places where birds need us most and to all the places they call home; their seasonal migration across the Western Hemisphere means Audubon also works from boreal Canada to Vermont to Chile and beyond.

We have made tangible progress towards all our milestones and developed detailed operational plans that drive where we work, what we do, and how we do it. In the past year, Audubon has demonstrated its readiness for *Flight Plan* achieving significant progress towards each of the milestones—many of which touched down in Vermont.

Guided by our *Flight Plan*, we are engaging in conservation activities on 116,650,000 acres across the Americas and influencing 50 renewable energy generation and transmission projects totaling 34 gigawatts—enough energy to power roughly 25 million homes.

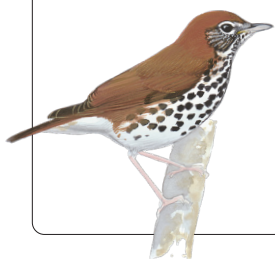
**HIGHLIGHTS OVER THE PAST YEAR INCLUDE EFFORTS TO:**

- **Launch Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program in Wisconsin,** building on our success in fourteen other states where more than 100 ranches covering nearly 3 million acres have earned status as Audubon Certified bird-friendly land.
- **Fund seven new projects for protected areas in Perú and six in Bolivia** through *Conserva Aves*, totaling over 1.9 million acres.
- **Break ground on the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion, the single-largest ecosystem restoration project in U.S. history;** this project will restore and strengthen up to 28,000 acres of wetlands in Louisiana, providing climate resiliency benefits to local communities.
- **Begin new engagement on a \$10 billion transmission project** spanning seven Midwestern states representing up to 20 gigawatts of renewable energy.
- **Deliver 10,000 acre-feet of water to benefit Great Salt Lake and Jordan River** through local partnerships and co-management of the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust.
- **Convene 11 Indigenous Guardians and leaders from five First Nations,** key partners on our work in Canada, at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine for knowledge exchange and training opportunities.



**Wood Thrush Migratory Journey**

- Winter Range
- Summer
- Year-Round
- Journey of a Tracked Bird



Audubon's Bird Migration Explorer provides a clearer-than-ever look at bird migration and the incredible journey of individual species. Here we see how the iconic Wood Thrush requires us to work beyond our borders to ensure it remains safe and healthy throughout its annual cycle.

ILLUSTRATOR: DAVID ALLEN SIBLEY

Through innovative strategies to protect forest and grassland habitat for birds and people, Vermont is ahead of the game and leading Audubon's *Flight Plan* by amplifying our voice and implementing innovative conservation efforts aligned with our hemispheric vision to identify connected, climate-resilient places across the hemisphere where we are focusing our efforts for the greatest impact.

# Audubon’s Work in Vermont. Unified by the Power of Birds.

Through our *Flight Plan*, we commit to achieving significant milestones that will demonstrate measurable impact on the climate and biodiversity crises. We are pleased to report back to you that your investments supported the following impact over the past year:



→ **Bobolink Project:**

A collaboration of Audubon Vermont, Massachusetts Audubon, New Hampshire Audubon, and the University of Vermont, the Bobolink Project provides farmers with economic assistance to delay their mowing schedules so grassland nesting birds can complete their breeding cycles. Nine-hundred acres were enrolled in 2024 (up from 800 in 2023), with an estimated 734 young Bobolinks produced.

 **HABITAT CONSERVATION**

## Conserving quality, connected, and climate-resilient bird habitat

→ **Bird Friendly Maple Program:** Audubon received a \$2 million federal grant to expand this collaborative initiative and deepen the impact of the program across multiple states and partners. We will explore third-party certification to ensure consistency and credibility, as well as a better understanding of the social dimensions of the initiative.

Audubon Conservation Program Manager Mark LaBarr stokes the fire in the Green Mountain Audubon Center’s sugarhouse. Photo: Kim Guertin/Audubon Vermont

→ **Wood Thrush nanotagging:**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service deployed more than 550 nanotags on Wood Thrush across their breeding range. Audubon Vermont took part and banded and tagged Wood Thrush in Vermont. The data collected will help us to better understand this bird’s migration patterns and habitat requirements to inform vital conservation interventions.



**White-breasted Nuthatch.** Photo: Tig Tillinghast/  
Audubon Photography Awards



CLIMATE ACTION

## Accelerating renewable energy and restoring forests, grasslands, and wetlands

→ **Promoting ecological forestry on public lands:** Working with partners, we provided comments on a Green Mountain National Forest project to promote the use of ecological forestry to enhance bird habitat, forest health, and resilience. The recommendations we provided have the potential to be a precedent-setting contemporary approach to the management of our national forests.

→ **Advancing natural climate solutions:** We protect and enhance bird habitat that also stores and sequesters carbon and provides a range of other ecosystem services that benefit people and communities. This past year, in Vermont, we provided direct support to more than 80 landowners and managers of farms and forests, as well as the organizations and professionals they turn to for assistance, advancing conservation efforts on over 10,000 acres of habitat.



POLICY LEADERSHIP

## Advancing our *Healthy Birds, Healthy Planet* policy agenda

→ **Banning neonic pesticides:** Audubon Vermont’s advocacy helped pass a bill limiting neonic pesticides, protecting birds, farms, and communities. Even at low doses, neonics harm songbirds’ migration, weight, and reproduction. Vermont is now the second state, after New York, to enact such a ban.



Audubon Vermont Staff join the Vermont Pollinator Coalition at “Swarm the Statehouse,” an event to support the passage of H706, a law that bans the use of pesticide-treated seeds. Photo: Margaret Fowle/Audubon Vermont

→ **Improving Vermont land use:** After years of intense negotiations and despite a veto by the governor, Bill H.687 passed, marking a monumental update to Vermont’s land-use and development law. The bill streamlines environmental reviews; fosters development in growth areas, such as downtowns and village center; promotes well-planned housing; minimizes forest fragmentation; and protects critical natural resource areas. This reform balances the urgent need for housing while protecting the environment.

→ **Providing workforce development programming through Serve, Learn, and Earn:** Securing state funding for the Serve, Learn, and Earn program is another significant achievement. This workforce development initiative provides Vermonters with meaningful opportunities to engage in community service, gain valuable work experience, and develop leadership skills. Vermont’s \$2 million investment in the program delivers a clear message about the importance of workforce development and empowering youth and young adults to be the leaders of tomorrow.



Above: AmeriCorps member Kyra Monsam shows an Eastern Newt to children in Audubon's Forest Playschool. Photo: Emily Kaplita

→ **Nature education programs:**

We engaged 3,550+ people, mostly children, in environmental education programs. Our day camps, Nature Playgroup, school field trips, Forest Playschool, and Forest Classroom programs helped participants understand their place in nature and how they can help protect it, while building deep, lasting connections between students, the Audubon Center, and our staff. Pride Hikes continued to be a popular partnership between Audubon Vermont and local organizations that support the LGBTQIA+ community and our naturalists, and extend our reach well beyond the Audubon Center.



**COMMUNITY BUILDING**

## Working together across the hemisphere to advance our shared vision

→ **Building the next generation of conservation leaders:** In 2024, we hired 38 teens and young adults, including Junior Conservation Technicians (JCTs) and Counselors-in-Training, Interns, Seasonal Educators, and AmeriCorps members. Participants were paid while they engaged in hands-on, work-based learning opportunities that helped Audubon carry out education programs and conservation work. We completed twice as many trail and conservation projects than in previous years.



Volunteers from M&T Bank plant native plants in a riparian area at the Green Mountain Audubon Center. Photo: Kim Guertin/Audubon Vermont

→ **Community-led Audubon Center clean-up:**

More than 25 local volunteers helped Green Mountain Audubon Center recover after the Huntington River overflowed its banks and flooded hay fields and forests, destroyed sections of the River Trail, and left behind an enormous amount of debris.

**We are deeply grateful** for your continued commitment to Audubon and our mission to protect birds and the places they need—in Vermont and beyond. In the first year of *Flight Plan*, we have made significant progress towards our habitat and climate milestones. We could not have gained such momentum without you. The challenge before us is clear. Act now or risk a future with skies silenced with loss. With your help, we will bend the bird curve and make a sustainable impact for birds across the hemisphere. **This is our moment.**

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**Scarlet Tanager.**

Photo: Tim Lenz/Flickr  
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Cover: **Wood Thrush.** Photo:  
Lance Leonhardt/Audubon  
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