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Audubon Society of Rhode Island

REPORT



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VOLUME 51, NO. 1

WINTER 2017



CLIMATE CHANGE

Turning Our World Upside Down

Rhode Island Birds in Peril

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

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From the Desk of the Executive Director



The Environment Needs a Strong Team – Now More than Ever

We're a team. Audubon members, supporters and staff share a mutual appreciation for birds, wildlife, and other living things. We share a concern for the environment and understand the importance of conservation, environmental education and advocacy.

So I imagine that, like me, you must be feeling some level of angst over the major setbacks in national environmental policy we are witnessing in Washington. We now have people at the highest levels of our government who appear determined to unravel what environmental progress we have made – especially regarding climate change. It is vital that we are able to both communicate with the public regarding its causes as well as take action to reduce the impacts on our planet.

In this era of “alternative facts” we all have an obligation to learn the truth, to understand current events and to be even more vocal about defending the things we value. Let's discuss the local impacts of climate change and what it means to us as well as the birds and wildlife that we strive to protect. Let's work together as a team to find ways to deal with this important issue.

Climate change will be the focus of the next four issues of the Audubon Report. Rhode Island based environmental writer Todd McLeish will be covering various issues under the climate change umbrella. The first topic is the impact on birds, the next issue will focus on sea level rise and the effects on salt marshes and coastal habitats. The third and fourth issues will explore ways to help reduce carbon emissions and discuss nature-based solutions that help mitigate increased flooding and storm surges caused by changing and unstable weather patterns.

Thank you for your continued support of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island and for lending your voice to a growing chorus of people who will speak out in defense of nature. We're all in this together. We're the Audubon team.

Sincerely

Lawrence J. F. Taft
Executive Director



Superheroes Needed to Save Mother Nature

Growing environmental concerns show the need for a strong, active Audubon ... today and forever!

Traditionally, heroes are seen as powerful, brave and protective. For the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, our donors are nothing short of heroes – they sustain, inspire and allow Audubon to thrive.

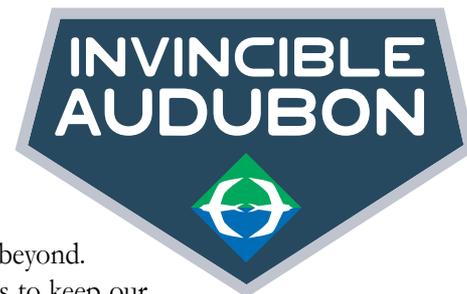
But now Audubon is in need of superheroes – people who go above and beyond.

Our current endowment provides only one-third of the necessary funds to keep our organization impactful and dynamic. The Invincible Audubon Campaign will provide needed funding to permanently advocate for nature, to educate children on the importance of our environment, and to protect and defend our nearly 9,500 acres of wildlife habitat. In short ... to make Audubon Invincible.

The Invincible Audubon campaign is different than our annual fundraising. Invincible Audubon is meant to provide permanent funding that we can rely and plan on for decades to come.

Audubon is asking you to take the leap and become a SUPERHERO.

For more information please visit www.invincibleaudubon.org or call 401-949-5454 extension 3017.



Rhode Island Birds on the Brink

Confronting the Challenges of Climate Change

By Todd McLeish

Part One of the Audubon Report 2017 Series on Climate Change

DURING A QUIET MID-WINTER WALK

through Audubon's Fisherville Brook Wildlife Refuge in Exeter, Scott Ruhren pointed out evidence that numerous creatures were still active despite the cold, evidence that would have been easy to miss if he hadn't been paying close attention. A mouse had scampered across the trail and drew a straight line in the fresh snow as it dragged its tail. A deer had dug into the leaf litter beneath towering white pines in search of acorns or vegetation to nibble on. And a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker had recently drilled holes in the bark of a red pine, hoping for a meal of sap and trapped insects.

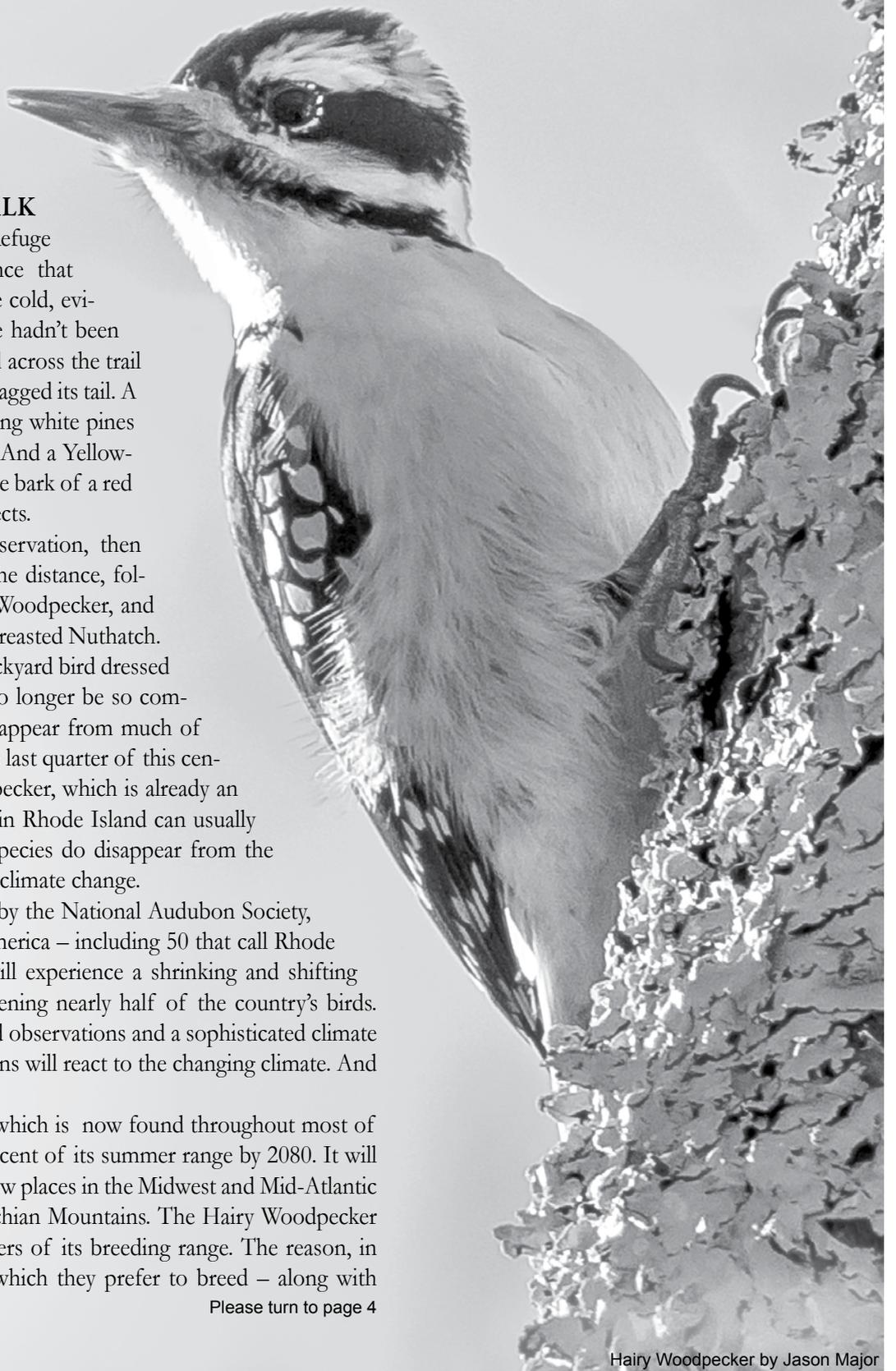
Ruhren, Audubon's senior director of conservation, then noted a small group of chickadees calling in the distance, followed by the tapping sound made by a Hairy Woodpecker, and the distinctive nasal yank-yank call of a White-breasted Nuthatch.

The White-breasted Nuthatch, a common backyard bird dressed mostly in gray-blue and white plumage, may no longer be so common in a few decades. In fact, it may even disappear from much of Rhode Island during the breeding season by the last quarter of this century. And the same is true of the Hairy Woodpecker, which is already an uncommon species but one that birdwatchers in Rhode Island can usually find in the state's abundant forests. If these species do disappear from the Ocean State in summer, the cause will likely be climate change.

That's the prediction made in a 2016 report by the National Audubon Society, which found that 314 bird species in North America – including 50 that call Rhode Island home for at least part of the year – will experience a shrinking and shifting of their breeding and wintering ranges, threatening nearly half of the country's birds. Using data from hundreds of thousands of bird observations and a sophisticated climate model, the report predicted how bird populations will react to the changing climate. And the results were grim.

The White-breasted Nuthatch, for instance, which is now found throughout most of the U.S. and Canada, is predicted to lose 79 percent of its summer range by 2080. It will no longer breed anywhere in the South and in few places in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic States, except at high elevations in the Appalachian Mountains. The Hairy Woodpecker is also expected to lose more than three-quarters of its breeding range. The reason, in both cases, is that the climatic conditions in which they prefer to breed – along with

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Hairy Woodpecker by Jason Major

Rhode Island Birds on the Brink

Continued from page 3

much of their preferred breeding habitat – will shift northward considerably as the Earth continues to warm. And that’s expected to be true for hundreds of other bird species as well, threatening many of them with extinction.

• • •

The changing climate, due largely to a build-up of carbon dioxide and other gases from the burning of fossil fuels and contained in industrial emissions, is expected to cause dramatic changes to the global environment. And it’s already happening. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Rhode Island has already warmed more than 3 degrees Fahrenheit over the past century, and extreme precipitation events are on the rise. What’s more, sea level has already risen more than 9 inches since 1930, faster than the global average, and it is projected to increase another 1 to 4 feet by 2100.

These changes are certain to lead to considerable damage to the human built environment, as homes and businesses become flooded, destroyed by storms, or fall into the sea as the coastline erodes. The impact on wildlife, especially migratory birds, will be equally devastating.

Shifting and shrinking ranges aren’t the only impact that local bird populations will experience, however. According to ornithologist Charles Clarkson, who serves on the Audubon Society of Rhode Island board of directors and coordinates the Rhode Island Breeding Bird Atlas, the changing climate is already causing what he calls a “phenological mismatch” between birds and the food they need to survive and reproduce.

“Birds go through an annual cycle of carefully timed events – when they breed, when they molt, when they migrate – which defines their phenology,” he explained. “The timing of these events is set by environmental cues that are now rapidly changing.”

Most birds feed on insects, he said. Because they are cold-blooded, insects emerge and become active each year based largely on the temperatures in the local environment. Birds, on the other hand, are warm-blooded and rely more on daylight length to trigger migration. But what happens when warming temperatures change the timing of the emergence of insects in Rhode Island and the birds wintering far to our south don’t get the message? Those birds may show up too late to take advantage of the insect abundance they need to fuel their breeding activities.

Clarkson said that short-distance migrants,



American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)

Ed Hughes



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

Ed Hughes



Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*)

Jennifer Zartarian



White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)

Jason Major



Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*)

Ed Hughes



Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

Jennifer Zartarian

like American Robins and Red-winged Blackbirds, which mostly winter in the southern U.S., are probably able to fine tune the timing of their migration by picking up on local environmental cues. As a result, many of these species are arriving on their breeding grounds in Rhode Island earlier and earlier.

“They’ll be better able to acclimate to the more variable temperature regime, since they don’t move huge distances during the non-breeding season,” he said. “They’re able to shift the timing of migration so they’re not behind the curve on temperature and insect availability. They’re predicted to do better in the face of climate change.”

But long-distance migrants that winter in Central and South America will find that more difficult. They’re too far away to realize when Rhode Island is experiencing a warm winter or spring and shift the timing of their migration accordingly.

“If those birds are still en route to Rhode Island and miss the peak abundance of insects or fruiting and flowering plants, then they’ll be met with energetically expensive activities like nest building, egg laying and feeding young but won’t have the energy to accomplish these things,” Clarkson said. “They’ll be out of step with the resources they rely on.”

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Change is in the Air

Audubon's Kingston Wildlife Research Station Records Bird Population and Migration Data

By Hugh Markey

The paths through the woods and grass are littered with yellow leaves. After a few unusually warm days at the 80 degree mark, the October temperature has returned to the 50s and a cool breeze removes any doubt that fall has arrived. Making her way from net to net, lead bird bander Julie Shieldcastle carries cloth bags in which she will carefully place the captured birds. This is a routine she has maintained seven mornings a week since August 7 and one that will end on October 31, when the nets will be taken down and stored for another season. Shieldcastle is the most recent in a line of bird banders that reaches back to the early 1960s at one of the oldest banding stations in eastern North America. It is a hidden gem inherited by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island from longtime supporter and Board Member Doug Kraus: the Kingston Wildlife Research Station in Kingston, Rhode Island.

The banding schedule has remained the same since the 1950s, when University of Rhode Island professor of chemistry Doug Kraus balanced a full time teaching position with daily bird captures and banding. An avid birder and naturalist, Kraus used the 86-acre parcel of land surrounding his home as a banding station. When Kraus passed away in 2000, he left his property and an endowment to Audubon with the intent to conserve the natural habitat found on his property as well as to continue his bird-banding operation. That same year, Audubon entered into a partnership with URI to manage the station, and for seventeen years URI professor Peter Paton and a team of students have worked together to carry on the work that Kraus began. "Peter Paton was instrumental in ironing out the agreement between URI and Audubon," explained Audubon Executive Director Lawrence Taft. "We both recognized the value of the Kingston Station and worked together to form a partnership that benefited the objectives of both organizations. Audubon continues to manage the fields and orchard on the property to help reduce invasive plants and improve the habitat for birds."

"There are a number of banding stations in the region, including one on Block Island and the Kingston station," explained Paton. "Both

locations have shown a similar story about migration patterns. There are also a number of long established banding stations that occur across America. The advantage of the Kingston station is that it is one of the longest running in eastern North America. Kraus began banding in about 1958 and began keeping regular, long term data in 1960. He officially began a breeding bird survey there in 1966, which gave a good indication of what was happening in terms of bird populations in the 1960s. We compare those figures to what we see now."

"The birds don't take a day off."

Bird banding involves the use of mist nets, so named because of their gossamer appearance. Rising some ten feet in the air and stretching forty feet or more, they look a bit like oversized badminton nets. Each one is placed in an assigned location, which remains the same year after year for

the sake of consistency. Nets are unfurled about a half hour before sunrise. When a bird flies into the net, the thin material flexes and gently wraps itself around the bird, safely trapping it. The bird will remain there until the bander comes to remove it, which is the way the process has gone for years.

"Every fall we hire a bander to run the station," said Paton. "That's to mimic what Doug did. He was a chemistry professor at URI and he taught classes, but still was able to band every day of the week. Back then, because of the abundance of the birds in the 60s, he could only run four nets. When we started the operation with student helpers, we added six more for a total of ten. We still maintained his four original locations. To maintain that record, that's what we do."

Professor Paton feels lucky to have this year's bander on the job. "Nowadays we advertise

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A bird bander checks the fat content of a Catbird at the Kingston Station.

Change is in the Air

Continued from page 5



Bird bander Julie Shieldcastle with volunteer Joanne Riccitielli.

nationally and we get very skilled banders to run the banding station,” Paton says. “Julie’s banded about 500,000 birds and has tons of experience.” Shieldcastle, who traveled from Ohio for the season, brings 28 years of banding experience to the job.

The process goes on seven days a week, with only rain interrupting banding. Although she could request a day off, Shieldcastle rarely does. “What would I do?” she asks. “Besides, birds don’t take a day off.”

Changes is in the Air

In the seventeen years that Audubon has partnered with URI, Paton has noted two major changes in bird records: a reduction in the abun-



A Tufted Titmouse is removed from the mist net.



A Tufted Titmouse is banded in October.



A Red-eyed Vireo banded at the Kingston Station.

dance of birds and changes in migration patterns. Neither trend is a good one.

Although the variety of species is roughly the same, the sheer number of captures has dropped drastically. Paton points to another long time banding station on Block Island to illustrate his point. “You talk to older birders about Block Island, and they’ll say that you used to be able to go out and there were birds all over the place. Now you can still find the species but there are far fewer birds.” The data recorded at both Block Island and the Kingston Station support what had only been anecdotal evidence. “The number of species captured per year has not changed much over time, but total abundance (the actual number of birds caught per day) has really declined dramatically. Even a decade ago, a really good day would capture 80 to 100 individual birds. These days you’re doing well to get 20 to 30 birds. It’s amazing how quickly something like that can take place.”

(It should be noted that, while this story was being written, Shieldcastle reported a one day total of 55 birds, six of which were recaptures. However, that number is unusually high.) “A bird like the Myrtle Warbler (sometimes called a Yellow-rumped Warbler) used to be captured at the rate of 50 to 60 per day. They’re just much less common than they were a decade ago. If I were to speculate about what’s driving that, it’s possibly the result of changes in the forests of their Canadian habitat, but even that may not be enough to

“New England is becoming milder and milder, and it means that birds are sticking around longer. That’s one of the signals of climate change.”

URI PROFESSOR PETER PATON

account for the decline in numbers. I can only speculate, but I suspect that development along the coast may be what’s driving the decline.” He compares the trend to that of the monarch butterfly. “We’re down from thousands to a trickle. That can change pretty quickly. We have a better handle on that cause, but the whole phenomenon (of abundance decline) is very similar.”

Paton blames the decline on “... a whole host of factors: cat mortality (domestic cats that are allowed outdoors and end up killing migratory birds); birds striking buildings, windows, cars. Also, there are habitat conditions that have changed, either on their breeding grounds or their wintering grounds. More important are changes in migration stopover habitat.” Birds often stop to rest and feed as they make their journey to and from their breeding grounds. Eastern birds often fly over water for much of their migration, making stops along the coastal areas. The human influx to the coast has not made life easier for migratory birds. “As people flooded to the east coast, there has been a decline of habitat availability.”

Paton notes another major change in the trends at the station: records indicate that the birds are migrating later and later each year as a result of global warming and changes in the climate of the region. “New England is becoming milder and milder, and it means that birds are sticking around longer. That’s one of the signals of climate change.”

Records from the Kingston Wildlife Research Station augment the hunches of experienced birders with hard facts when it comes to migration departure times. “You talk to the old time birders and they say, ‘Oh, I think the birds used to depart earlier,’ and this just puts data to the feeling they had in their bones. It’s showing that what people are saying is true.” Paton points to one record, that of the Red-eyed Vireo, as an example. “If you look at the average date for the Red-eyed Vireo, when the peak numbers were captured in the 1960s versus now, the migration changes about 3 days per decade. The fact is that

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Rhode Island Birding Trails

Over 60 Places to Watch Birds in the Ocean State

Published by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island

Find out where the birders ... bird!

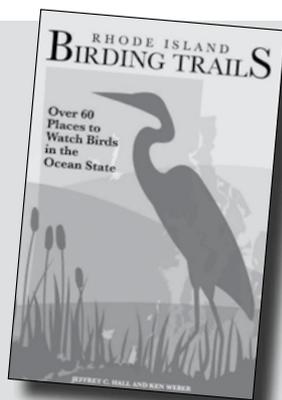
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Audubon Receives Grant for Public Education on Climate Change

By Senior Director of Education Lauren Parmelee

An EPA-funded initiative under the Obama administration entitled “Building Climate Action Communities” partners the Audubon Society of Rhode Island with Mass Audubon and Connecticut Audubon to educate the public about climate change. Twenty-seven educators from the three independent Audubon organizations and five sub-grantee organizations are working together to weave climate change messaging into popular public programs. The goal is to reach audience members who will be inspired and empowered to take positive action in their communities. Ultimately, this project will serve as a model for public program providers across the country.

Interested in learning more about what you can do to combat climate change? Sign up for one or more of these Audubon spring programs:

- Combating Climate Change: Greening Your Home: March 2 or May 3
- Maple Sugaring and Pancake Breakfast at Caratunk: March 4
- Birding for Beginners: Six sessions in April and May
- Free Wednesday Morning Bird Walks: Every Wednesday through June

Visit the events calendar at www.asri.org for details on these and other programs.

We would like to thank our sub-grantee partners in Rhode Island for joining us in this effort: Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council and Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.

Birds and Climate Change

Audubon invites both beginners and experienced birders to learn more about our feathered friends and the challenges of climate change.

BIRDING THE NEXT STEP PART II: TAKING FLIGHT

Six-week Session Begins March 14, 2017

Experienced birders delve into avian anatomy and physiology, the dynamics of migration, and learn how birds will cope with a changing climate. Field excursions included. Led by Audubon Board Member and ornithologist Charles Clarkson.



BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS

Six-week Session Begins April 15, 2017

Learn a basic understanding of bird biology, identification, and discuss the impacts of climate change. Outdoor excursions included. Led by Audubon Senior Director of Education and expert birder Lauren Parmelee.

Audubon Environmental Education Center, Bristol, RI
Advance registration is required.
 For details and to register please visit www.asri.org.

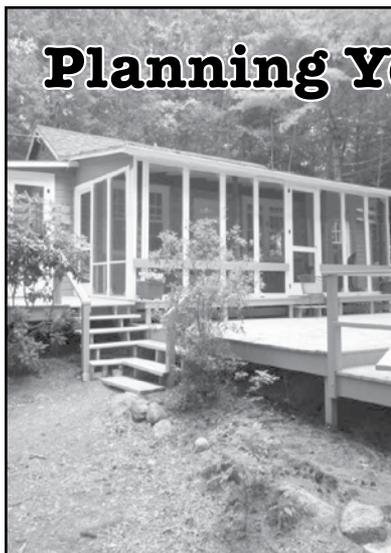
Planning Your Vacation?

MAXWELL MAYS COTTAGE

Enjoy bird watching, paddling, hiking and the seasonal changes at a two-bedroom artist's retreat on the 300-acre Maxwell Mays Wildlife Refuge in Coventry, Rhode Island.

Reserve now for best availability.

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(401) 949-5454 ext. 3005
www.lakehousevacations.com
 page 662.html



Shown above are the attendees at the December 1, 2016 EPA workshop “Building Climate Action Communities” at Mass Audubon’s Oak Knoll Sanctuary in Attleboro, MA. The group was comprised of staff from Audubon Society of Rhode Island, Mass Audubon, Connecticut Audubon as well as representatives from Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Boston Food Forest, Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, and New Haven/Leon - Sister Cities.

LET'S GO BIRDING

By Laura Carberry

Together We Can Combat Climate Change

Climate change has been nagging me. It's been in the back of my mind for a while, something I knew I should pay attention to, but it seemed too depressing and overwhelming. After all, what could I possibly do to make a difference? How would I even start?

That changed for me in December. After sitting in a two-day workshop sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency, the moderators convinced me that people CAN make a difference.

Remember the 70s rally to close the hole in the ozone layer? People made a change and we saw results. Not just one person or just a small group of people, but we ALL worked together. I didn't have to let it consume my life. I just had to give up my hairspray!

Tackling climate change won't be that easy, but I am asking if each of you will join me in taking personal actions to combat climate change on behalf of birds.

Let's not do it alone -

but as a group. It may be something as simple as reducing your energy at home, taking public transportation, or carpooling with a friend. How about planting a tree, native wildflowers or reducing the area you mow in your yard? Could you leave that dead tree standing or put in a bird bath? You will have the added enjoyment of watching the birds up close!

Perhaps you could donate your time to Audubon to help preserve habitat or assist teaching students about nature. Join a citizen's science project to collect data that will help scientists follow trends in migration and populations such as the Osprey Monitoring Program or the RI Bird Atlas. Can you write your legislators to stress the importance of reducing greenhouse gases?

Or it could be making a donation to Audubon to help preserve habitat and educate the next generation about our environment. There are actions both big and small - they not only help reduce our carbon, but they are good for our personal wellbeing.

And finally please talk. Talk to your neighbors, talk to your friends and family. Share this issue of the Report. Explain why we need their help. Invite them to an Audubon program. Give them a gift of membership. Teach your children and grandchildren the importance of caring for this great Earth. It's the only one we have.



Audubon naturalist Laura Carberry (second from right) leads the popular Wednesday Morning Bird Walks.

In 2017 I will be working with my Wednesday Morning Bird Walk group to come up with ways we can contribute to reducing our carbon emissions. I have the pleasure of leading this group every Wednesday for 10 months of the year. We are going to share ideas and come May we will develop a service project to help birds. If you haven't joined us on any of these walks, we invite you! It is a great group of dedicated people who love and care for the environment. As we search for birds we sometimes clean up the trash along the paths, share stories about nature, and on a couple of occasions even performed bird rescues! We CAN make a difference. We just need to try....

Birds First

for the ethical observation of birds and wildlife

Birding and wildlife photography might seem like benign endeavors but they sometimes stray from innocent to disruptive unless a basic understanding and respect for nature is maintained.

To provide guidance in ethical bird and wildlife observation, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island recommends the following:

- View wildlife from a safe distance. Respect the animal's spatial needs. If wildlife interrupts its behavior (resting, feeding, mating, etc.), then you are too close. When a bird flies away from you, it is because you are disturbing it. Research has also shown that in some instances human presence may cause a condition where a bird may become nearly paralyzed with fear, to a point that could injure or put the bird in peril.
- Never crowd, pursue, prevent escape, or create deliberate noises to distract, startle or harass wildlife. Never disturb animals engaged in breeding, nesting, or caring for young.
- Stay on roads, trails, and paths. Do not harm the natural habitat.
- Respect the rights of others. Do not enter private property without the owner's explicit permission. Always be careful about where and how you park your car. Never park on someone's lawn or in anyone's driveway. Never block a gate, road, path, or other access.
- Being quiet is a simple courtesy especially in residential areas before 9:00 a.m. Be careful not to point optics toward people or houses.
- When there is an unusual bird in the state, we all want to hear about it and observe it. However, we must make certain that our conduct is above reproach. Evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area before spreading the word on its location. The sites of rare nesting birds should be divulged only to the proper conservation authorities.
- It is best not to use bird recordings in the field. Using recordings may be harmful to birds during times of reproduction, or when weather conditions are difficult and they strive for survival. A bird disrupted by a recording will often expose itself by leaving cover, and its natural vigilance towards predators can be seriously affected.
- Behavior by excited birders "anxious" to get a closer look or a better photograph can disturb not only the birds but also the other birders watching nearby. Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites.
- Migratory birds are protected by federal law with fines as high as \$15,000 and prison. Those who see birders or photographers harassing or threatening birds in Rhode Island should report the incident to the Department of Environmental Management, Division of Fish and Wildlife at 401-222-6800 or after-hours at 401-222-3070.

The thoughtless actions of one overzealous birder or photographer jeopardize the reputation of others. Be a role model and educate others through your actions.

Adapted from the America Birding Association's "Birding Code of Ethics."

CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE OCEAN STATE

What Causes Climate Change?

Human activity, such as transportation, energy production and manufacturing, burn fossil fuels that release carbon and other gases into the atmosphere. These gases form a heat-trapping blanket that warms our air and oceans.

What are the results?

Unstable Climate Patterns



In Rhode Island heavy storms with flooding are on the rise.

- Annual precipitation has increased 6 to 11% since 1970.
- Intense rainfall events have increased 71% since 1958.
- Between the years 2020 and 2099, expect 18 to 20% more precipitation and twice as many extreme weather events with severe flooding will occur.

Air and Water Temperatures Rise



Humans, birds, animals, fish and plants will all struggle with ecosystem change.

- The average annual air temperature in Rhode Island has risen 3.0°F over the past century.
- In Narragansett Bay, the average water temperature has risen 2.5°F over the past 50 years.
- Between the years 2020 and 2099 expect to see warmer winters with 22 to 45 fewer days below freezing and hotter summers with 13 to 44 more days above 90°F.

Rising Sea Levels

Our shores will be impacted by melting ice and thermal expansion of warming water.

- Rhode Island has seen a 9-inch increase in sea level since 1930.
- Loss of salt marshes, habitat and shoreline erosion will result.



What can you do?

- Reduce energy use. Drive less (walk, bike and use public transportation) and create an energy-efficient home.
- Stay informed. Support legislation and community efforts that reduce carbon emissions. Sign up for advocacy emails by contacting Meg Kerr (mkerr@asri.org)
- Purchase green power to heat and cool your home and insulate it well.
- Support land conservation. Forests both emit and remove CO2 to balance the environment and provide critical habitat for birds and wildlife.
- Landscape and garden with native plants that provide food, cover and nesting materials for birds and wildlife.



Birds on the Brink in Rhode Island

National Audubon scientists have used hundreds of thousands of citizen-science observations and sophisticated climate models to predict how birds in the U.S. and Canada will react to climate change. Their work defines the climate conditions birds need to survive, then maps where those conditions will be found in the future as the Earth's climate responds to increased greenhouse gases.

Learn more at climate.audubon.org.

The list on page 11 provides a sample of climate threatened and endangered birds of Rhode Island.



Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*)



Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)



Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)



Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*)



Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)



Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)



Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*)



Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)



Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)



Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*)



Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*)



Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

CLIMATE THREATENED AND ENDANGERED BIRDS OF RHODE ISLAND

Bird Names	Summer Range Lost	Winter Range Lost
Horned Grebe - <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	100%	46%
Merlin - <i>Falco columbarius</i>	98%	66%
Blue-winged Warbler - <i>Vermivora cyanoptera</i>	96%	
Scarlet Tanager - <i>Piranga olivacea</i>	94%	
Ring-necked Duck - <i>Aythya collaris</i>	93%	11%
Hooded Merganser - <i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	92%	65%
Gadwall - <i>Anas strepera</i>	92%	9%
Red-necked Grebe - <i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	91%	57%
Veery - <i>Catharus fuscescens</i>	90%	
Purple Finch - <i>Haemorhous purpureus</i>	89%	59%
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - <i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>	88%	3%
Northern Harrier - <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	86%	5%
Willow Flycatcher - <i>Empidonax traillii</i>	84%	
Redhead - <i>Aythya americana</i>	83%	25%
Red-breasted Nuthatch - <i>Sitta canadensis</i>	82%	42%
Red-breasted Merganser - <i>Mergus serrator</i>	82%	51%
Wood Thrush - <i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	82%	46%
Double-crested Cormorant - <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	80%	28%
Bobolink - <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	80%	
White-breasted Nuthatch - <i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	79%	36%
Brown Creeper - <i>Certhia americana</i>	79%	20%
Bufflehead - <i>Bucephala albeola</i>	79%	42%
Hairy Woodpecker - <i>Picoides villosus</i>	78%	30%
Common Redpoll - <i>Acanthis flammea</i>	77%	38%
Mallard - <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	75%	9%
White-throated Sparrow - <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>	74%	19%
Bald Eagle - <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	74%	58%
Hermit Thrush - <i>Catharus guttatus</i>	74%	31%
Yellow-throated Vireo - <i>Vireo flavifrons</i>	73%	52%
Pine Warbler - <i>Setophaga pinus</i>	73%	8%
Common Merganser - <i>Mergus merganser</i>	72%	39%
American Kestrel - <i>Falco sparverius</i>	72%	2%
Ring-billed Gull - <i>Larus delawarensis</i>	71%	32%
Golden-crowned Kinglet - <i>Regulus satrapa</i>	70%	17%
Wood Duck - <i>Aix sponsa</i>	70%	40%
Swamp Sparrow - <i>Melospiza georgiana</i>	69%	17%
Lesser Scaup - <i>Aythya affinis</i>	66%	20%
American Wigeon - <i>Anas americana</i>	66%	17%
American Black Duck - <i>Anas rubripes</i>	63%	64%
Tree Swallow - <i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	61%	57%
Red-throated Loon - <i>Gavia stellata</i>	61%	44%
Common Goldeneye - <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	61%	35%
Pine Siskin - <i>Spinus pinus</i>	60%	42%
Common Loon - <i>Gavia immer</i>	56%	75%
Wild Turkey - <i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	49%	87%
Herring Gull - <i>Larus argentatus</i>	38%	56%
Greater Scaup - <i>Aythya marila</i>	32%	55%
Baltimore Oriole - <i>Icterus galbula</i>	25%	68%
Purple Sandpiper - <i>Calidris maritima</i>	54%	
Northern Saw-whet Owl - <i>Aegolius acadicus</i>	100%	

Change is in the Air

Continued from page 6

they're now departing ten days later than they were in the 60s. It's pretty amazing that these kinds of changes have taken place in such a short period of time."

Clothespins and cloth bags

Back at the station, Shieldcastle removes the first capture from the net on this round, a Tufted Titmouse. Shieldcastle says that uninformed people on social media platforms have been causing a bit of a stir around the practice of bird banding. They see pictures of the birds caught in the nets, being handled by humans, even simply with their mouths open, as signs that the animals are being harmed. In reality, the use of mist nets for any purpose other than scientific is against the law. Would-be banders must undergo rigorous training under the watchful eye of a master bander, a process that may take several years. These rules are designed to minimize the chance of harm to any bird. Still, controversy like this worries her. "It would be a shame to shut down this scientific tool."



A Yellow Warbler has its wing measured at the Kingston Wildlife Research Station.

Each bird is removed carefully from the net and placed in a cloth bag and an old style clothespin is attached to it. The clothespin has a number on it, a low tech but effective method of keeping track of which of the ten nets captured the bird. She brings this round of captures to a tiny wooden shed that serves as the banding station. Joanne Riccitelli, the land protection director of the South Kingstown Land Trust, is in her second year of volunteering at the station and records the information that Shieldcastle quickly gleans from examining the bird. The pair stand at a wooden shelf built into the shed, working quietly and efficiently. One bird, a Gold Crowned Kinglet, is in his first year. Shieldcastle measures the wing and ascertains the fat content (and thereby its health) by blowing aside the feathers covering its lower breast. Each bird is examined in less than two minutes, and is soon released. Some birds are more cooperative than others, and the banders groan a bit when the time comes to examine a Cardinal. The same beak that is so impressive to look at and so efficient at cracking open sunflower seeds also packs a nasty bite.

History in the Making

Throughout the seventeen years of the official working relationship between Audubon and URI, as well as before the agreement was in place, the Kingston Wildlife Research Station has been a valuable educational resource. Peter Paton's ornithology classes have visited twice every year for 21 years. Paton estimates that over 100 students have had a chance to actually gain experience with banding. Scott McWilliams, professor of wildlife ecology and physiology, supervised a student who used the facility for part of a doctorate and Rhode Island's current Deputy Chief of Wildlife for DEM, Jay Osenkowski, produced a paper focused on the station as part of his master's degree.

Paton puts it this way: "The Kingston Wildlife Research Station is definitely making contributions to the education of students at URI."

Audubon Society of Rhode Island

2016 PHOTO CONTEST

Congratulations to the following photographers whose images were selected as the winning photographs.



FIRST PLACE: Butch Lombardi (*Water droplet on a Lupine*)
Audubon Claire D. McIntosh Wildlife Refuge, Bristol, RI



SECOND PLACE: Bernard Creswick
Audubon Caratunk Wildlife Refuge, Seekonk, MA



THIRD PLACE: Nicolaas Strik
Audubon Caratunk Wildlife Refuge, Seekonk, MA

Many thanks to the photographers who submitted such a wide range of wonderful images. Audubon received over 75 contest entries.

.....

Audubon thanks professional photographers Kris Craig and Glenn Osmundson for taking on the difficult task of judging the photo contest.

Let's Do It Again!
Look for the 2017 Photo Contest details in May.



HONORABLE MENTION: Kevin Winn
Audubon Claire D. McIntosh Wildlife Refuge, Bristol, RI



HONORABLE MENTION: Abesalom Zerit
Audubon Caratunk Wildlife Refuge, Seekonk, MA



HONORABLE MENTION: Randy Clarkson
Caratunk Wildlife Refuge, Seekonk, MA



HONORABLE MENTION: Jennifer Hill
Audubon Fisherville Brook Wildlife Refuge, Exeter, RI



HONORABLE MENTION: Randy Clarkson
Audubon Caratunk Wildlife Refuge, Seekonk, MA

Thank You!

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- New England GreenStart
- Perfect Supplements
- Rhode Island PBS
- United Natural Foods Inc.

Gifts in Honor

The people listed below have been honored by family and friends who found a gift to the Audubon Society of Rhode Island to be the most meaningful way to celebrate someone important in their lives.

In Honor of: Kathleen Anderson
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In Honor of: Oscar Waugh
From: Thomas Waugh

Memorials

Memorials serve and support the conservation and protection of Rhode Island's environment. During the past quarter, the families and friends of people listed below have chosen to remember their loved ones through a gift to the Audubon Society of Rhode Island.

In Memory of: Mildred Anderson
From: Douglas McGungle
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In Memory of: Henry and Mary Brousseau
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Join the Audubon Team... VOLUNTEER!

Citizen Science: Join Audubon's 2017 Osprey Monitoring team and observe the nest activity at an assigned location near you. Learn more by attending one of the following orientation sessions from 2:00 to 4:00 pm:

March 5, 2017: Audubon Environmental Education Center, Bristol, RI

March 12, 2017: Audubon Powder Mill Ledges Wildlife Refuge, Smithfield, RI

March 19, 2017: Kettle Pond National Wildlife Refuge, Charlestown, RI

Wildlife Refuge Conservation: Spring brings a long list of conservation projects. Locate boundary markers, remove invasive plants or monitor a refuge.

Camouflaged Egg Hunt, April 8, 2017: Help with activities, craft table, hiding eggs and passing out treats. Three locations to choose from:

- Audubon Environmental Education Center, Bristol, RI
- Audubon Powder Mill Ledges Wildlife Refuge, Smithfield, RI
- Audubon Fisherville Brook Wildlife Refuge, Exeter, RI

School Vacation Week, April 17-21, 2017: Help children with activities and crafts at the Environmental Education Center in Bristol.

Internships: Gain experience in conservation, marketing or advocacy.

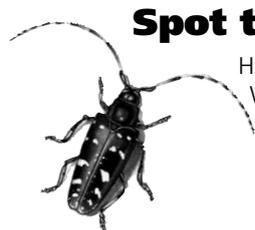
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Rhode Island Birds on the Brink

Continued from page 4

He points to the Cerulean Warbler as a prime example. The population of this elegant Neotropical migrant is declining throughout its breeding range in the Great Plains, Midwest and Northeast, and studies have shown that its reproductive success is tied to the abundance of soft-bodied caterpillars.

“We know that the caterpillar bloom is coming earlier each year,” he said. “Knowing that they are so tightly tied to that resource, some of their population decline could be attributed to this phenological mismatch.”

Those bird species that succeed in avoiding the mismatch may actually benefit if they extend the length of their breeding season by a week or two by arriving earlier and departing later, providing them with greater opportunities to raise their broods.

A 2011 study by University of Rhode Island ornithologist Peter Paton, also a member of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island board of directors, found that some birds are already delaying their southbound migration in response to the changing climate. Based on data from birds captured between 1960 and 2007 at Audubon’s Kingston Wildlife Research Station – which is owned by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island and staffed by URI – he found that half of the short-distance migrants he analyzed and 38 percent of the long-distance migrants had delayed their migration by an average of 3 days per decade.

Beyond the warming temperatures and the concurrent shifts in bird ranges and migration timing, climate change is delivering other climate anomalies that are placing bird populations at additional risk. Melting glaciers and the thermal expansion of warming waters is causing sea levels to rise, for instance, reducing shoreline habitat and flooding salt marshes where numerous species have already been dwindling in number due to the loss of nesting habitat. (This topic will be examined in greater detail in the next issue of the *Audubon Report*.) And the increasing severity of storms, particularly in the summer, has the potential to destroy a wide range of habitats and cause nesting failures from strong winds and heavy rains.

“Hurricanes come during biologically active



Audubon’s wildlife refuges provide forests that balance the carbon in the environment and vital habitat for birds and wildlife as they face a changing climate.

periods of the year, so they have more of an impact because they happen during the breeding season and can wipe out entire nesting seasons,” explained Clarkson. “They can also destroy nesting habitat in one fell swoop that may be critical for the successful breeding of particular species. That habitat loss could be more damaging to a bird population than the failure of one nesting season.”

• • •

Back at the Fisherville Brook Wildlife Refuge, which protects the headwaters of the Queen River and encompasses an impressive variety of habitats, Scott Ruhren continued to point out signs of wildlife activity, like beaver dams, turkey tracks and the frozen vernal pools where wood frogs and spotted salamanders breed each spring. He also noted the numerous bird houses scattered around the property that provide nesting sites for Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Purple Martins, American Kestrels and other species.

As he did so, he explained the important role that Fisherville and all of the other Audubon refuges play in mitigating climate change and supporting the needs of the region’s birds as they strive to adapt to the rapid changes.

“The most obvious thing we’re doing is managing the habitat where the birds live,” he said. “Without that habitat, there would be no birds.”

As a major landowner and land manager in the state, Audubon – through its refuge system – helps to store carbon and other greenhouse gases by managing healthy forests and other ecosystems, reducing the buildup of the gases that are causing the climate to change. And the Society’s numerous wetlands not only protect biodiversity but also mitigate flooding during extreme storm events, which are expected to be more frequent in the years to come.

“Wetlands act like kidneys by taking in large quantities of water and then slowly releasing it,” he said. “During big storms, they may get flooded, but the water quickly recedes without causing damage. Wetlands also filter out contaminants that may accumulate from roadway run-off.”

Managing invasive species at Audubon refuges will also be increasingly important as the climate warms, particularly since few invasive plants and shrubs provide beneficial food or habitat for native birds.

“We know that poison ivy thrives in an enhanced CO2 environment and creates super poison ivy plants,” Ruhren said. “The same is true of other pest species. We’ll continue to work to reduce the impact that these species have on the environment and our bird life.

“Our eyes are also opening to what else to expect from climate change,” he added, “and we’re

“Our eyes are also opening to what else to expect from climate change and we’re prepared to take whatever steps are necessary.”

SCOTT RUHREN, AUDUBON SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION

prepared to take whatever steps are necessary.”

Although it may feel that there is little an individual can do to reduce the effects of the changing climate, Charles Clarkson says there are steps that all of us can take to help birds manage the changes they are facing.

“Birds have three energetically expensive periods in their lives – molting, migrating and breeding,” he said. “Providing them with the resources to make any or all of those periods less costly is exceptionally important for a bird.”

Offering food to birds throughout the year helps them to have the necessary energy to molt and grow better feathers, which translates into a more efficient migration. Providing nest boxes, nesting materials, protection from predators and safe areas to raise their chicks reduces the energy they need during the demanding breeding season. In addition to maintaining bird feeders, Clarkson recommends planting native plants that provide food, cover and nesting materials; removing invasive species that compete with native plants and provide little value to wildlife; and managing your property for a diversity of habitat types.

“These are all things that will make the life of a bird easier,” he said. “Whether it translates into an easier breeding season or an easier molting period is irrelevant. If you can reduce their energy budget at any time in their lifecycle, you’re giving birds a leg up during these changing times and helping them be more successful.”

It’s the least we can do.

—Todd McLeish is a life-long birder, freelance science writer and author of several books about wildlife, including *Narwhals: Arctic Whales in a Melting World*.

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Make it a Little Easier... Provide Nesting Materials for the Birds

Many songbirds are construction experts, intricately weaving twigs, leaves, grass and moss into sturdy nests. Even inside those birdhouses, nests will be built. Leaving nesting materials in your yard will attract birds and give them a helping hand during a time when they expend a huge amount of energy. Consider stuffing fabric strips, yarn, dog hair, and grass into a suet feeder, giving birds an array of materials to choose from.

TWIGS When small branches or twigs fall from a shrub or tree, leave them for birds, preferably in lengths under 4 inches.

FLUFF Some birds use fluffy material such as seeds with silky attachments. Milkweed is a good choice – and it also attracts monarch butterflies. Please do NOT use dryer lint as it may contain chemicals.

MUD In that pesky spot in your yard that refuses to grow anything, add a little water. Mud is a favored nesting material for swallows and robins.

DRY GRASS When you trim your landscaping, leave dried grass stems cut 2 to 4 inches long.

MOSS If you have a shady spot in your yard, let the moss grow! It is a favored building material of some hummingbird species.

DOG HAIR Is your pup shedding in spring? After brushing, leave dog hair for the birds.

STRIPS OF CLOTH, STRING AND YARN Put the strips (less than 6 inches in length) where birds will find them.



Christine Longo



Ed Hughes

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For more information on this endowment campaign including details on how YOU can become a superhero, please visit www.invincibleaudubon.com

AUDUBON SOCIETY OF RHODE ISLAND
1897 SOCIETY



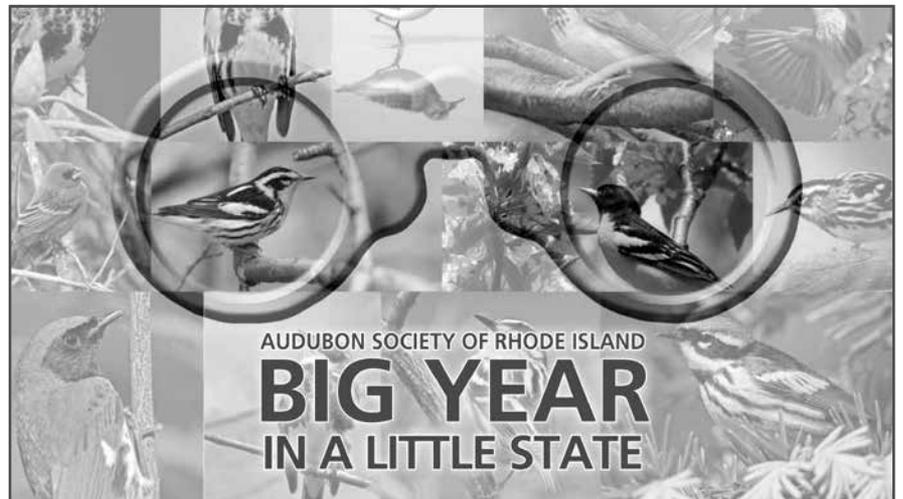
Named for the year of the Audubon's founding, the 1897 Society honors those whose leadership gifts enable the Audubon Society of Rhode Island to advance its mission of protecting birds, other wildlife and their habitats through conservation, education and advocacy. Our donors can take satisfaction that their contributions have an immediate and lasting impact on the people, wildlife and natural beauty of Rhode Island.

The 1897 Society celebrates donors who give annually at the \$1,000 to \$10,000+ level as special contributors to our ongoing mission and shall be recognized at the following levels:

- Leader — \$1,000 to \$2,499**
- Advocate — \$2,500 to \$4,999**
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If you wish to join the 1897 Society and help promote the values and mission of Audubon, please contact Jeff Hall at 401-949-5454 ext. 5017.

In recognition of their philanthropic charity, members of the 1897 Society enjoy a variety of exclusive benefits, including invitations to member-only events and special communications.



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Advocating for Smart Energy Policies

By Senior Director of Policy Meg Kerr

Audubon's mission to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats can lead us to work on issues that may seem very far afield from the natural world. Climate change is the ultimate threat to wildlife and people, and our advocacy work includes helping Rhode Island implement and support smart energy policies. During the next months, our work will include the following initiatives. If you sign up for Audubon advocacy emails, you will be alerted when there are hearings or events related to policy. Your support and help is always appreciated!

Fighting Invenergy: No new fossil fuel infrastructure. Audubon was a key partner in the coalition that passed the 2014 Resilient Rhode Island Act. This Act sets greenhouse gas reduction goals for the state: 10% below 1990 levels by 2020, 45% below 1990 levels by 2035 and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. These goals are ambitious, and current research would say they are not sufficient. The December 2016 report by the Rhode Island Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (RI EC4), "Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Plan," finds that Rhode Island is well positioned to meet the 2020 goal, but meeting the 2050 reduction goals will be challenging. The report states, "An 80% greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction by 2050 would likely require a near-zero carbon grid coupled with significant electrification of residential/commercial space heating and on-road vehicles." To meet this critical goal, Rhode Island must invest in renewable energy and stop investing in fossil fuel infrastructure.

In late 2015, Invenergy Thermal Development, LLC proposed a very large (1,000 MW) gas fired power plant in Burrillville. Audubon is working with the state's environmental community to oppose and defeat this power plant. Our opposition to the Invenergy plant is two fold – it will have significant negative impacts on protected wildlife and habitats and it will make it impossible for Rhode Island to meet the Resilient RI greenhouse gas reduction goals.



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

During the 2017 legislative session, Audubon will be supporting two clean energy bills that were in play last year but did not pass:

Energize Rhode Island: Carbon pricing to strengthen the economy and reduce GHG. This act would establish a fee on companies that sell fossil fuels in Rhode Island, paid at the point of sale within the state for consumption or distribution within the state. This act would put a price on carbon that accounts for the pollution it produces. The price will be paid by companies that sell fossil fuels in Rhode Island. The funds would be disbursed through rebates to all residents and businesses in the state as well as allocated to climate resilience, energy efficiency, energy conservation, and renewable energy programs that benefit Rhode Islanders, particularly low income residential properties and small business properties.

Renewable Energy Growth Program Extension: This bill extends the Renewable Energy Growth Program for an additional 10 years. It is an important component of the state's renewable energy plans and will help diversify Rhode Island's energy mix and improve system reliability.

Please contact me if you would like to be added to the advocacy email list or if you would like to know more about Audubon's advocacy work: mkerr@asri.org.

AUDUBON SOCIETY OF RHODE ISLAND REPORT

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The Report is the Audubon Society's
member newsletter and updates members
on the current issues and actions of
the Society, its staff and volunteers. We
encourage your participation and you
may send items that will be considered
for publication to: Hope Foley, Managing
Editor, Audubon Society of Rhode Island,
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or by email to hfoley@asri.org.

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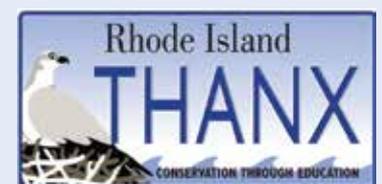
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