
Our increased efforts to conserve Connecticut's birds come at a time when global bird populations are in decline. According to BirdLife International, 2,005 bird species are "threatened" or "near threatened" – that's 20% of the estimated 9,799 bird species in the entire world.

Connecticut Audubon Society Ramps Up Conservation Efforts in State as Global Bird Populations Decline

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How does a single pair of Ospreys underscore our mission to conserve and restore Connecticut's bird populations?

Every spring many of you anxiously await the return of a pair of Ospreys to our Coastal Center at Milford Point. This same devoted pair of migrants has been returning to our nesting platform for a decade, and now provides thousands of people with an "insiders" look at the fascinating family life of Ospreys through our webcam at www.ctaudubon.org. Literally hundreds of people are tuning in every day, sometimes working around the Osprey Cam "box" on their monitors. (Unfortunately, we cannot bear responsibility for lack of productivity, so please advise your employers not to write or call.) With over 1,000 "hits" on some days, this webcam is one of the most popular of its kind in the country.

This year started out well for our Osprey pair, and the fertile female, without the assistance of reproductive clinics or specialists, produced a whopping four eggs. Mother Nature, however, was not kind to those creatures that must keep eggs warm and dry this spring, and long periods of wet and cold took a severe toll on our performing artists. In spite of decorating the nest with a bright blue teddy bear (!), only a single egg hatched and the remaining three are abandoned and left to one side of the nest. A quick check of our website reveals that the single juvenile continues to thrive, and, hopefully, better springs lie ahead.

Many bird species across the Northeast suffered the same fate this year as reports of failed or diminished bluebird and other nests trickle in. This amplifies the fact that there are two main forces at work that affect our bird populations: Man and Nature. Unfortunately, we can't control natural forces. As Mark Twain once quipped, "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." Although the rain and cold are out of our hands, we can and do apply management in the form of building Osprey platforms to help offset a lack of good nest sites for these birds.

There are many other things we can control and should do to assist bird populations and habitats – and that is exactly what our *Connecticut State of the Birds* report is all about. With publication of the first issue under our belt (see www.ctaudubon.org for a direct link to the PDF file), your Society is moving forward with plans to ramp up bird conservation efforts across the state. One of the ways we are doing this is to help improve our knowledge about birds in Connecticut.

Together with our partners and stakeholders, we are reviewing the way citizen science projects collect information about our birds, in an effort to improve what we know and how we know it. A key effort will be to develop easy-to-use, broad-based protocols for birders and others to use in the field, protocols that will enable the collection of useful information in a format that can not only predict trends and distribution patterns, but will be helpful to scientists in related fields such as botany, entomology and herpetology.

As we refine the way we collect this information, it will be important to expand the numbers of places we are collecting it. With easy-to-use standardized protocols in hand, we plan to increase the numbers of places we are currently looking at birds. For instance, there are over 80 land trusts across the state, each with its own group of devotees. If we can begin regular bird surveys at some of these with trained volunteers, we will amass new sets of information where none currently exist.

The refining and expansion of survey work by volunteers will enable policy and decision makers to construct positive legislation that can only help the birds and other natural resources we are trying to conserve. This is coming at a time when global bird populations are in decline. According to BirdLife International, the total number of species currently “threatened” with extinction now stands at 1,210 world-wide. When combined with those that are “near threatened,” the total is 2,005 bird species that are in serious trouble. This amounts to a frightening 20% of the estimated 9,799 bird species in the world. Currently 181 species are listed as “critically endangered.”

Although Connecticut is home to only one federally “endangered” species, the Roseate Tern, most of our state’s important bird habitats are in decline. 100% of Connecticut’s grassland birds are now in need of conservation action. Our shrubland species are among the fastest declining group of birds in the state. And even though our forests are growing, their increasing fragmentation by roads and development is resulting in lower productivity for forest-dependant species.

However, the news is not all bad. Ospreys, Bald Eagles, and many other raptors, as well as those forest-dependant species (like wild turkeys) that are able to adapt to human pressures, are recovering at a good pace. Other species that have adapted to man-made environments -- such as American Robin, Northern Cardinal and Tufted Titmouse -- also seem to be getting along just fine.

Bird populations, like our shoreline habitat of dunes and bars, are in constant flux in a changing environment. Climate and related habitat change move bird populations in and out of Connecticut. A severe hurricane is capable of wiping out our coastal nesting habitat – but it can also create acres of new dunes and sand bars, thus increasing nesting habitat for Least Terns and Piping Plovers.

Increasing our knowledge about birds and their habitats in Connecticut is, therefore, a critical step in conserving these fascinating creatures and our own quality of life. Connecticut Audubon Society will continue to work hard to protect them all.