



Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative Newsletter

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From the Editor

Welcome to the third edition of the WBCI newsletter. This newsletter is a project of the Outreach Committee and it is our intention to use it to provide updates on WBCI related activities and bird conservation in general for the benefit of our partners and the public. Each issue will contain announcements, upcoming events, featured columns, and other topics of interest. We will also provide information on the many ways you can contribute to conservation here in Wisconsin as well as on national and international fronts. We invite you to submit articles, photos, upcoming events, and suggestions on how we can improve future issues to **Lynn Ratkowski** (lynn@typea.net), Editor. For more information about WBCI,

please visit our website at: <http://www.wisconsinbirds.org>

Birds in the News

contributed by Joel Trick



Kirtland's Warblers in Wisconsin!

The federally-endangered Kirtland's warbler was found nesting in central Wisconsin in 2007, the first ever documented breeding of the species in Wisconsin, and the first nesting outside of the State of Michigan since the 1940's. The birds were discovered on Plum Creek Timber Company land by Dean

DiTommaso, an environmental consultant working on a major pipeline project. In all, Dean was able to find a total of 8 singing males and 3 females, in addition to finding 3 separate nests.

The appearance of nesting Kirtland's warblers in Wisconsin is the direct result of management actions conducted over many years on the main nesting grounds in Michigan. The species population has increased to the point where the available habitat in Michigan is mostly saturated, resulting in the pioneering of new habitats such as Wisconsin. In 2007, the annual Kirtland's warbler census documented an estimated 1,697 singing males in Michigan alone, a significant increase over the 1,478 counted in 2006.

This is the highest total ever recorded for the census, which was started in Michigan in 1951 and has been conducted annually since 1971. Given the serendipitous way in which the species' presence came to light, it seems possible that Kirtland's warblers could be found at additional locations in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin DNR is planning to conduct a more widespread and organized census effort in Wisconsin in 2008. We are now soliciting for volunteers to look for Kirtland's warblers in potential habitat identified using available forestry data. If you are interested in volunteering for this effort, please contact Kim Grveles of the Wisconsin DNR at 608-266-0822 or Kim.Grveles@Wisconsin.gov.

Coordinator's Corner

contributed by Andy Paulios

As you read this latest installment of the WBCI newsletter, meadowlarks are busy fattening up for their migration back to their spring haunts in Wisconsin while Upland Sandpipers and Bobolinks are lazily sunning themselves in agricultural fields in Argentina. Many of you are aware of the conservation challenges that migrant birds face across their annual life cycle but none may be as great as that of grassland dependent birds. As a guild, this group of birds is declining faster than any other habitat guild in North America. As agricultural and development pressures have intensified in our rush to feed and now fuel the world, birds like the Henslow's Sparrow have declined by as much as 9%/year in Wisconsin since 1966.

Addressing landscape-scale challenges for suites of species requires an incredible amount of coordination and partner effort. WBCI was created in part to offer a way to coordinate efforts to address these challenges. The WBCI grassland bird conservation symposium and series of workshops this summer is WBCI's first attempt to provide leadership to implement the All-bird Conservation Plan. Look for more updates on this project in future newsletters and through other WBCI communications channels or contact me to learn how you can get involved.

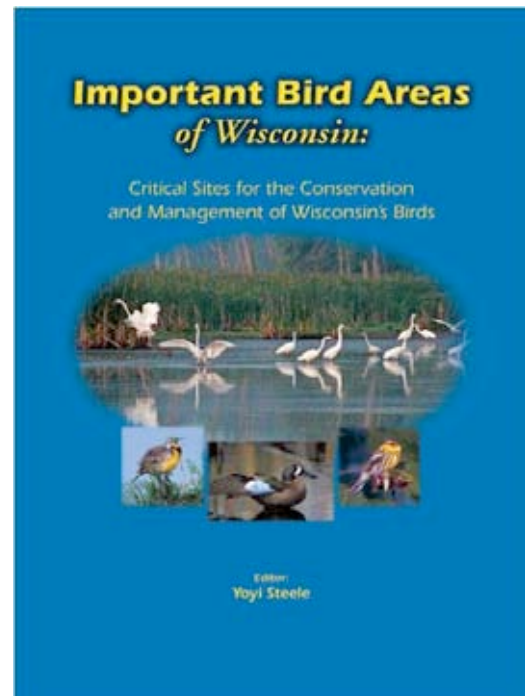
Grassland bird conservation is not our only challenge in Wisconsin. With the impending completion of WBCI's All-bird Conservation Plan and the maturation of many of WBCI's early efforts, the WBCI Steering Committee will be working to revise its strategic direction. WBCI partners will have an opportunity to help shape this direction in upcoming Steering Committee meetings and through participation in committee activities. I encourage you to contact me, watch our website and read the WBCI listserv and newsletter for ideas on how your group can join in the effort.

Announcements

- The Wisconsin IBA Program is pleased to announce the publication of "**Important Bird Areas of Wisconsin: Critical Sites for the Conservation and Management of Wisconsin's Birds**". The 240-page full color book is an essential reference for land managers and

landowners, conservation practitioners, policy-makers, birders, and nature lovers. It features: detailed site descriptions of 86 IBAs across Wisconsin, including habitats, birds, and management/stewardship issues; maps and a site index; an overview of the IBA Program and explanation of how sites were selected; and many lovely photographs of birds and habitats.

Books are \$21.50 each plus postage. Ordering information is on the IBA website, at <http://www.wisconsinbirds.org/iba>. Or, contact IBA Coordinator Yoyi Steele at 608-266-8169 or yoyi.steele@wisconsin.gov



- Birds Without Borders** – a project of the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation and the Zoological Society of Milwaukee, is proud to announce the completion of our manual for Belize and Mesoamerican landowners: *The Birds Without Borders – Aves Sin Fronteras® Recommendations for Landowners: How to Manage Your Land to Help Birds*. You can also download a pdf copy at <http://www.zoosociety.org/bzlandowner>

Our manual is the result of more than seven years of field research in Belize by Birds Without Borders – *Aves Sin Fronteras®* staff. It provides information on habitats and plants that we have found to be

important to birds. It also includes other information on how to help birds. We are distributing the manual free-of-charge in Belize and have a limited number of copies that can be mailed to those who will use the manual for conservation in other Mesoamerican countries. Please contact Vicki Piaskowski at vickip@zoosociety.org if you need a copy of the manual or the Spanish summary mailed to you.

- The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin recently announced the launch of their new **Bird Conservation Campaign**, in partnership with the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative and Department of Natural Resources. Through this annual giving program, NRF aims to develop substantial financial resources for “big picture” conservation programs that will protect and enhance Wisconsin’s bird populations and their habitats long-term. Priority projects will be established by NRF, WBCI, and DNR on an annual basis, which will include a mix of long- and short-term initiatives. NRF will then seek funding from individuals, foundations, organizations, and businesses to support specific projects or the general campaign. This campaign will offer donors a variety of interesting and continually changing informational resources and opportunities over the years. Donors will also be informed about WBCI projects and programs.

Through the end of 2008, the Bird Conservation Campaign aims to raise \$230,000 in support for the following projects:

- Whooping Crane reintroduction program
- Important Bird Areas – conservation planning
- Conserving migratory bird stopover areas in the Great Lakes basins
- Osprey surveys and management
- Wetland bird surveys and monitoring (including Trumpeter Swans)
- Conserving important wintering areas in four South/Central American countries
- Great Wisconsin Birding & Nature Trail guidebooks
- Reprinting *Checklist of Wisconsin Birds*

Visit www.wisconservation.org to donate or find more information on this campaign. Questions should be directed to Barb Barzen at 608-261-4381.

- Don’t forget to pick up your copy of the **Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Wisconsin**. Copies are still available. For further info see <http://www.wsobirds.org>

- **Wing Your Way through Wild Wisconsin – Central Sands Prairie Guide**. The Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail is your invitation to observe the fascinating and diverse world of wildlife that exists in every corner of the state.

The Guide covers seventeen Wisconsin counties in the center of the state and includes 78 waypoints from the massive 43,000-acre Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in the west to High Cliff State Park in the east. The initiative is based on grassroots support from the public, many partners, and state and federal agencies.

The project is a mapped auto trail that will reach into every area of the state. Free, full-color viewing guides with maps and descriptions of every site will lead the nature traveler to warblers, shorebirds, eagles, loons, cranes and all manner of mammals found in some of the state's premier wildlife venues.

Outstanding natural resources help make the Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail exceptional. To date, completed birding and nature trail segments with full-color viewing guides are the Lake Superior/Northwoods, Mississippi and Chippewa Rivers, and Lake Michigan regions. Guides are available at DNR Service Centers and Wisconsin Welcome Centers across the state or viewed on the WBCI website www.wisconsinbirds.org

- **New low price for the Birds of Wisconsin Placemats!** The price of these colorful placemats has been reduced to \$2.47 wholesale and \$4.99 retail while supplies last. The placemat illustrates 32 common Wisconsin birds on the front and fun facts about them on the back. For further information, contact Lynn Ratkowski at 262.492.4329 or lynn@typea.net



- On Oct 25, 2007 the **Horicon Marsh International Education Center** held their ground breaking ceremony! It was a glorious day and even the geese turned up in terrific numbers to “honk” us on. Much of the credit goes to the Friends of the Horicon Marsh International Education Center. President Bob Weiss introduced members of the group and explained how they have worked tirelessly for over 12 years to make a world class education center at Horicon a reality.

The fundraising committee for the group raised over 2 million dollars of the total 4.8 million dollar cost of the facility. Bob acknowledged a long list of board members and volunteers who are instrumental in supporting environmental education related to Horicon Marsh. Special thanks goes to [Bill Volkert](#), Wildlife Educator, Horicon Marsh, for his extreme hard work, vision, and dedication to developing a tremendous wildlife educational program that showed the need for a world class education center. Bill provided thoughtful reflections and special thanks during his remarks. [Secretary Matt Frank](#) congratulated all of the participants and highlighted why Horicon Marsh is so special to not only Wisconsin, but the world. He highlighted a few things in the state’s budget (like additional nonpoint funding) that will help protect the Marsh into the future.

- Wanted - Outreach Committee Members.** Are you looking to contribute some volunteer time for a worthwhile cause? Are you recently retired and find yourself with some extra time on your hands? Are you a birder that would like to give something back? If so, please consider joining the WBCI Outreach Committee.

The committee helps to get important information out to our partners and the public via newspapers, e-mail, radio, workshops, and conferences. If you are interested, please contact Karen Etter Hale, masoffice@mailbag.com or 608-255-2473.

- Costa Rican Bird Route moves towards opening in 2008**

The Costa Rican Bird Route: Section San Juan- La

Selva (CRBR), a project that was recently endorsed by WBCI, continues to advance and is working toward opening in 2008. This birding trail in the northern Sarapiquí / San Carlos region of Costa Rica will consist of 13 reserves within 12 official Costa Rican Bird Route sites. In total the Costa Rican Bird Route, a project of the Rainforest Biodiversity Group and focal project of the WBCI International Committee, encompasses 5001 hectares (12,253 acres). The development of the CRBR has directly led to the new protection of 1,297 hectares (3,178 acres), as well as secured the protection of 340 additional hectares (833 acres) of bird habitat by enrolling the new reserves into the Costa Rican Private Reserve Network.

All of these sites are now under contract to participate in this route for at least 3 years. Sites are either considered Remote or Portal. Portal sites are those that have established tourism at their site and offer tours to Remote sites. Remote sites are sites that are not receiving tourism at the moment and are privately, or in one case community, owned. In November 2007, a certificate of recognition as an official Costa Rican Bird Route was presented to each site during a meeting and presentation for all of the sites of the CRBR.

Portal Sites are:

Selva Verde Lodge
La Selva Biological Station
El Gavilan Lodge
Tirimbina Rainforest Center
Laguna Lagarto Lodge
Mi Pedacito de Cielo

Remote Sites are:

Bosque Tropical del Toro and Finca Paniagua
Maquenque Eco-lodge
Albergue El Socorro
Lomas de Sardinal
Finca Pangola
Quebrada Grande Reserve

The Costa Rican Bird Route website, www.CostaRicanBirdRoute.com is now up and running. On the site you can find information on each site, a preliminary map of the CRBR, a general description of the Route and links to some of the sites’ own web pages. The Costa Rican Bird Route Bird List, which has been finalized at 520 species, is posted as well.

There are many other additional advances of the Bird

Route. These advancements are summarized on the Costa Rican Bird Route website. There is work still underway that will lead up to the opening of the CRBR in 2008. In the coming months the Costa Rican Map and Guide will be produced, the route operation plan will be published, community outreach programs will be conducted and a Bird Route Coordinator position will be filled. Funding for a coordinator of the Costa Rican Bird Route is still necessary. Please contact the Rainforest Biodiversity Group (RBG) www.greatgreenmacaw.org at rainforestbiodiversitygroup@riseup.net for more information on the CRBR or to make a financial contribution. Look for an official opening of the route during Earth Week 2008, to be followed by a Grand Opening event later in the year.

Upcoming Events

Spring Events

MAR 14-15 Bird Monitoring Conference

University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

This conference will highlight exciting new opportunities for birders and wildlife enthusiasts to help monitor and conserve Wisconsin's birds. Friday will feature a birding field trip along Lake Michigan guided by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Chris Wood, a former Wisconsin birder and current WINGS Birding Tour leader, and a dazzling presentation on Wisconsin's birds in the tropics by Craig Thompson, chair of WBCI's International Committee. Saturday morning talks will emphasize new citizen-based bird monitoring opportunities in Wisconsin, such as secretive marsh birds, nightjars, and Kirtland's Warblers, and the afternoon will include hands-on workshops on eBird and the Wisconsin Birder Certification Program. The lineup of speakers and workshop leaders features such notables as Noel Cutright, Chris Wood, Bob Howe, and others.

For more information, including the conference agenda and registration form (it's free!), please visit www.wisconsinbirds.org

APR 5 (10a.m. –noon) Bird Survey Protocol Meeting

NE WI Bird Club Land Trust Bird Survey Protocol Meeting
Join members of the Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust for a training session on monitoring birdlife on trusted properties in northeast Wisconsin. Trained volunteers will then survey properties on May 3 and June 7 with possible alternate dates due to weather conditions. Rare opportunities to bird on pristine lands

normally not accessible to the public. The goal is to gather baseline data for the landowner for sound stewardship practices. For further information call Steve Petznick. (920)779-6433 petznisi@co.outagamie.wi.us For more information on activities, monthly meetings, memberships and field outings provided by the Northeast Wisconsin Birding Club (NEBC) visit www.newbirdclub.org

APR 18-20 Annual Prairie-Chicken Festival

Activities for all ages throughout Central Wisconsin, featuring Greater Prairie-Chicken viewing, birding tours, children's crafts, wildlife talks and demonstrations, nature art and book sales, and Saturday's Wisconsin Literary Bash. Reservations required for birding tours and Prairie-Chicken viewing. A nominal wristband fee grants entry to all featured locations. For further information call (715) 343-6215 or visit www.prairiechickenfestival.org

APR 19, 5:30 a.m. –7:30 a.m. Annual Midwest Crane Count

(For all of Wisconsin and the Midwest. See www.cranecount.org to find coordinator information for your county. Coordinated and run by the International Crane Foundation.)

Mosquito Hill Nature Center

Sites are located throughout Outagamie County. Training session and site allocation on March 15 1 – 2 p.m. For more information contact Jessica Miller at (920) 779-6433. No charge.

APR 19 – MAY 24 (7 a.m.-10 a.m.) Saturday

Morning Bird Walks at Mosquito Hill Nature Center. Meet at the building. No charge. For more information, see http://www.co.outagamie.wi.us/parks/mh_home.htm

MAY 10 International Migratory Bird Day

There are lots of ways for you to get involved in bird conservation. Please check out the bird day website for details on activities going on in your area. www.birdday.org

MAY 15-18 Wisconsin Society for Ornithology Convention Mequon, WI

For more information see WSO's website www.wsobirds.org/2008_wso_convention.pdf

Join the WBCIng Yahoo Group!

WBCIng is a discussion group created for WBCI partners and other bird enthusiasts as a means to communicate bird conservation news, questions, events, etc. in real time. For more information visit: www.wisconsinbirds.org/

WBCI Partner Profile *contributed by Amy Staffen*

The Prairie Enthusiasts

The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) is a conservation non-profit with seven chapters in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois. Our mission is to preserve native fire-dependant ecosystems of the Upper Midwest such as prairie, savanna, and oak woodlands, through inventory, protection, restoration, management, and education. To date, TPE has protected 2,066 acres (980 by easement; 1,086 by title).

Grassland and savanna birds, both of which have experienced severe declines due to loss of habitat, benefit directly from TPE's initiatives. This includes breeding habitat (potential if not confirmed) for Northern Harrier, Northern Bobwhite, Upland Sandpiper, Short-eared Owl, Horned Lark, Eastern Bluebird, Bell's Vireo, Dickcissel, numerous sparrows (Clay-colored, Field, Vesper, Savannah, Grasshopper, Henslow's), Bobolink, Eastern and Western Meadowlark, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Orchard Oriole. Northern Shrikes, Rough-legged Hawks, and other winter migrants from the tundra utilize these grassland habitats as well. Management considerations encompass both local and landscape scales, and may incorporate non-native grasslands and degraded savannas to maximize habitat for area-sensitive birds.

Of note is TPE's significant role in the 50,000-acre Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (MRPHA) in southwestern Wisconsin, which has been identified as the best place in the state for retaining and recovering habitat for grassland birds on a landscape scale. TPE currently owns 560 acres of grassland/savanna habitat in the MRPHA, holds 103 acres in conservation easement, and manages approximately 2,000 additional acres on private lands.

Volunteers can learn about native prairie and oak savanna plant and animal communities through field trips, workshops, conferences and a quarterly newsletter, and about their management through hands-on work parties. For more information, go to: <http://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org>

Note: if you would like your organization's or agency's profile to appear in a future issue of the newsletter, please send a brief write-up to Lynn Ratkowski (lynn@typea.net), editor.

All Bird Plan Update *contributed by Kim Kreitinger*

Have you ever wondered how muskegs differ from bogs? Do northern sedge meadows support the same bird communities as southern sedge meadows? Are there ways to reduce your impact on wetland habitats and wetland-associated birds? The Wisconsin All-bird Conservation Plan can answer these questions and provide additional conservation information on the state's wetland habitats. Nearly 70% of Wisconsin's priority bird species use wetlands during some part of their life cycle. American Bittern, Red-necked Grebe, and Black Tern are a few species that depend on wetlands for nesting and raising young. Many species also require wetland habitats during fall and spring migration, such as Greater Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, and other shorebirds that stop over for refueling.

Despite their ecological importance, our state has lost almost half of its wetlands to agriculture and other forms of development. In order to prioritize future conservation and protection efforts, WBCI identified nine wetland types important to state bird populations: Northern Sedge Meadow and Marsh, Southern Sedge Meadow and Marsh, Open Bog-Muskeg, Emergent Marsh, Wild Rice, Inland Open Water, Great Lakes Beach and Dune, Great Lakes Open Water, and Forested Ridge and Swale. Detailed accounts within the Wisconsin All-bird Conservation Plan describe the ecological characteristics, disturbance regimes, and state distribution of these wetland habitats as well as recommended management actions, research needs, and their overall importance to birds. Each habitat account can be viewed at the following Wisconsin All-bird Conservation Plan web page: <http://www.wisconsinbirds.org/plan/habitats/list.htm>.

All-bird Plan Species Profile: Henslow's Sparrow contributed by Andy Paulios

Why are we concerned?

The Henslow's Sparrow is one of the Midwest's most imperiled species due to its small population size (est. 80,000 individuals) and dependence on grasslands with high litter layers and limited disturbance. In addition, this species appears to winter in open pine savannas in the gulf coastal states, a habitat that has been severely compromised by forest succession, agriculture and development. Populations globally and in Wisconsin have been in significant decline since the start of the Breeding Bird Survey in 1966.

It's estimated that 6% of the world's Henslow's Sparrow population occurs in Wisconsin, mainly south of the tension zone. Although there are viable populations on the Buena Vista Grasslands, Military Ridge, and other publicly-owned Important Bird Areas, most probably persist on private lands enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Recent research confirms that CRP has been largely responsible for bolstering remaining populations of this grassland bird. However, Wisconsin and many other states within the range of this species may lose large amounts of CRP with impending agricultural changes and demand for biofuels.

Biology in Wisconsin

Henslow's Sparrows arrive in mid to late April and undergo nesting activities through August. They prefer late-successional grasslands containing dense and tall to moderately high grasses, in either uplands or lowlands. They occur in grass dominated CRP fields, larger native prairie remnants or idle warm-season grass fields. Nests are placed in thick litter at the base of a clump of grass and usually slightly elevated from the ground. Henslow's Sparrows favor large grassland areas and thus large tracts may be needed to sustain populations. Sample and Mossman (1997) list this species as moderately area-sensitive.

Conservation Action

Partners in Flight (PIF) estimated the range-wide population at approximately 80,000 individuals and established a conservation goal of doubling the population to help recover to 1966 levels. To accomplish this goal, the Upper Mississippi/Great Lakes Joint Venture has set habitat restoration,

protection, and maintenance goals of 3,500 square kilometers of grassland for Henslow's Sparrow and other grassland birds. That totals 865,000 acres of habitat! This will require a coordinated effort across the WBCI partnership. Key actions will include increasing the amount of permanently protected grasslands on public and private properties within appropriate ecological landscapes.

For more information

See the WBCI website for results from the grassland conservation symposium and for information on how you or your organization can participate in this effort.

Wisconsin All-bird Plan:

www.wisconsinbirds.org/plan/species/hesp.htm

WBCI Grasslands Symposium:

www.wisconsinbirds.org/grassland.htm

Sample, David W., and Michael J. Mossman. 1997. Managing habitat for grassland birds - A Guide for Wisconsin. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Madison, WI, PUBL-SS-925-97. 154 pp. www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/wiscbird/index.htm



Henslow's Sparrow photo by Scott Franke

Featured IBA: Leopold Reserve-Pine Island contributed by Yoyi Steele, IBA Coordinator

"In the marsh, long windy waves surge across the grassy sloughs, beat against the far willows... On the sandbar there is only wind, and the river sliding seaward. Every wisp of grass is drawing circles on the sand. I wander over the bar to a driftwood log, where I sit and listen to the universal roar, and to the tinkle of wavelets on the shore."

So wrote Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac*, describing a windy fall day on the Wisconsin River. He was almost certainly sitting that day somewhere within the Important Bird Area (IBA) that now bears his name, a site which encompasses the Leopold shack and farm (now part of the Leopold Memorial Reserve) that inspired his most famous work, as well as a collection of other lands connected by the Wisconsin River as it flows between Wisconsin Dells and Portage.

The Leopold Reserve-Pine Island IBA is 11,000 acres of river islands, shores, sloughs, marshes and sedge meadows, floodplain forest, shrub swamp, restored prairie and savanna, upland forest, and agricultural fields. This diversity is characteristic of the transitional zone the IBA occupies between two of Wisconsin's major ecological landscapes: the Central Sands and the Western Coulee and Ridges. A rich mix of bird species occupies these varied habitats, including numerous species of conservation concern. Blue-winged Teal, Virginia Rail, Black Tern, Red-shouldered Hawk, Black-billed Cuckoo, Red-headed Woodpecker, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Wood Thrush, Veery, Blue-winged Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Bobolink, Dickcissel, Eastern Meadowlark, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak all breed here. Thousands of Sandhill Cranes gather on river sandbars in the fall, making the IBA one of the most significant fall crane staging areas in the state.

Land ownership within the IBA provides an additional layer of diversity. The five major tracts that make up the IBA are owned and managed by a variety of federal, state, and private entities: Leopold Memorial Reserve (Aldo Leopold Foundation, Sand County Foundation, and private landowners); the Pines property (Phill and Joan Pines); Pine Island Wildlife Area (WDNR); Lower Baraboo River Waterfowl Production Area (USFWS and NRCS); and the Lower Baraboo River Floodplain Forest (USFWS and private landowners). This

unusually varied mix makes for a dynamic partnership and has positioned Leopold-Pine Island to become a flagship of public-private conservation for Wisconsin IBAs.

The importance of private lands within this IBA was symbolized by the gracious offer of major landowners Phill and Joan Pines to host a dedication ceremony on their property. This took place on October 13, 2007, attracting a lively gathering of many partners and stakeholders and such distinguished guests as WDNR Secretary Matt Frank and Nina Leopold Bradley, daughter of Aldo Leopold. The dedication added excitement and momentum to an initial partner meeting in May, 2007. The partnership is now in the process of discussing future collaborations. IBA-wide bird surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 have provided an excellent dataset for exploring bird distributions and habitat relationships across the IBA, and will be a critical tool for partners as they consider management, monitoring, and stewardship of this central Wisconsin gem.



Wisconsin River from Phill and Joan Pines' Property



Pine Island dedication group

Endowment for Important Bird Areas contributed by Yoyi Steele

The Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (WSO), a statewide association of professional scientists and birdwatchers, recently created an endowment with the Natural Resources Foundation to support Wisconsin's Important Bird Areas. The newly created Important Bird Areas Fund will provide annual support to select sites throughout the state that provide essential habitat for birds.

Dr. Noel Cutright of Ozaukee County, a renowned birdwatcher and long-time board member of WSO, undertook an ambitious journey in summer 2004 to raise funds for bird conservation. He spent 33 consecutive days doing 33 breeding bird surveys in a four-state area, securing over \$53,000 in sponsorships that were gifted to WSO.

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program is a global initiative that links local and state conservation efforts to national and international efforts to identify and protect important bird habitat. Although the program places special emphasis on birds, IBAs also benefit other non-bird species that share the same habitat. Horicon Marsh in Dodge County became Wisconsin's first IBA in October 2004. Wisconsin currently has 50 official, 47 approved and 11 nominated IBA sites, and a Wisconsin IBA book has just been unveiled. (*see announcement on p. 2 of this newsletter*)

"Maintaining these habitats for birds into the future is the most important part of the IBA process", says IBA Coordinator Yoyi Steele. "We are deeply indebted to Dr. Cutright for this effort to secure the long-term future of Wisconsin IBAs."

"Now that so many Important Bird Areas have been identified and approved in Wisconsin, it is imperative that conservation and management strategies be implemented for long-term conservation of these priority bird species and their habitats," says Dr. Cutright. "Creating the Important Bird Areas Fund through the Natural Resources Foundation will provide critical, long-term financial support for this program, including development of public education and outreach opportunities."

The Natural Resources Foundation offers individuals and organizations the opportunity to endow a conservation issue of their choosing through the Wisconsin Conservation Endowment. Donors can create an endowed fund for a particular region of the

state or habitat, a specific species of wildlife, a conservation program, or organization.

"We are very excited to hold this Important Bird Areas Fund," says Charlie Luthin, executive director of the Natural Resources Foundation. "Our state is fortunate to have a rich diversity of bird habitats, and numerous individuals - from casual observers who enjoy attracting birds to their homes to those who pursue field study or ornithology professionally - care deeply about the preservation of our native bird populations."

The Natural Resources Foundation (NRF) is a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for individuals and organizations who care about Wisconsin's lands, waters, and wildlife to: deepen their understanding and appreciation for these resources; support state and local conservation programs; and create conservation endowments. For more information on NRF, visit www.wisconservation.org or call (866) 264-4096.

Albino Pine Grosbeak, photo by Susie Fox, Spread Eagle



The Wisconsin Golden-winged Warbler Campaign Launched

contributed by Craig Thompson

Did you know Wisconsin supports 25% of the world's breeding population of Golden-winged Warbler? No other bird species has a higher percentage of its population in our state. Do you know where this smart looking wood warbler spends the winter?

Each fall, thousands of Golden-winged Warblers undertake a long, arduous journey from their breeding grounds in the United States to their wintering grounds in the mountains of Central America (Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama) and northern South America (primarily Columbia and Venezuela) where they spend the non-breeding season.

Every year there is less wintering habitat available for our flagship warbler. The reason? Oak forests preferred by this stunning bird grow in rich volcanic soils at an elevation conducive to agriculture. Land at that elevation has been widely cleared by expanding human populations, with as little as 7% of the original forests remaining.

Our little feathered friend is in trouble. The Golden-winged Warbler is considered one of the most critically-threatened, non-federally listed species in eastern North America. Populations in the Midwest, including Wisconsin, core of the species' global range, have declined by approximately 10% over the last decade. Declines of eastern populations have been more precipitous - 22% in New York, 26% in Pennsylvania, and 35% in West Virginia

Major hypotheses for declines include habitat loss on breeding and non-breeding grounds, migration mortality, hybridization with Blue-winged Warblers and climate change

If we want to save the Golden-winged Warbler we need to undertake conservation action at both ends of the bird's hemispheric range. The Wisconsin Golden-winged Warbler Campaign is the nation's first statewide campaign focused on a flagship species. Efforts to conserve wintering habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler will also benefit 14 additional bird species of conservation concern in Wisconsin including Cerulean Warbler, Canada Warbler, Eastern Wood-Pewee and Swainson's Thrush, as well as 31 Latin American bird species of global conservation concern.

Embracing the concept of full life cycle stewardship, the campaign goal is to raise \$50,000 over the next two years to help survey, identify and protect key Latin American wintering areas for the species. Partners in this endeavor include WBCI, the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, the American Bird Conservancy, Fundacion ProAves-Colombia and Partners in Flight.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!! Please send your campaign contribution to:

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin
P.O. Box 2317
Madison, WI 53701-2317
Specify: "GWWA Campaign"

For more information about how you can help save Wisconsin's flagship warbler, visit the WBCI website (www.wisconsinbirds.org) or contact Craig Thompson, (608) 785-1277, Craig.Thompson@wisconsin.gov.



Golden-winged Warbler wintering range, American Bird Conservancy

Golden-winged Warbler, photo by Dennis Malueg



Coordinated Bird Monitoring Plan contributed by Ryan Brady

As part of WBCI's continuing effort to deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation, the Research & Monitoring committee has revived its work on a Coordinated Bird Monitoring Plan that will address long-term and short-term monitoring needs for all species of birds in Wisconsin. This CBM plan aims to guide monitoring efforts in the state by:

- identifying species and groups of birds that currently are well-monitored and those that are not;
- recommending new programs to fill identified monitoring gaps; and
- highlighting priority research and management questions directly related to bird conservation in the state. Modeled from similar recent efforts in the northeast U.S. and Intermountain West, the plan is intended to be a dynamic document that will be updated as new programs are implemented and new issues are identified.

In the past year, the Research & Monitoring committee has worked to identify and prioritize current gaps in long-term population monitoring of Wisconsin bird species. Working groups associated with these gaps have formed and some have already begun taking actions toward improving bird monitoring in the state. Moreover, while the written plan is still in development, I am proud to report that implementation of some newly-recommended monitoring programs is already underway.

In summer 2007, we piloted a successful statewide nightjar survey that targets Common Nighthawks and Whip-poor-wills, both poorly-monitored and declining species and the latter a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. This volunteer-based survey was developed in conjunction with similar efforts recently established in the northeastern U.S. and will be expanded in summer 2008. Wisconsin also was recently selected as one of two states in the U.S. to pilot the framework for a national marshbird monitoring program being developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Patuxent. Marshbirds such as rails, bitterns, and grebes are among the most poorly-monitored bird groups in North America and our state will now play a major role in advancing continental efforts to adequately monitor these secretive species and their

wetland habitats. Study design is well underway and surveyors will be on the ground (or in the muck!) conducting marshbird surveys in spring and summer 2008.

The future of bird monitoring in Wisconsin is bright. We will continue to see implementation of new monitoring programs as a result of the developing CBM plan. In addition to nightjars and marshbirds, WBCI partners will continue work towards filling monitoring gaps for other bird groups in Wisconsin, such as southern interior forest birds, northern swamp conifer birds, colonial waterbirds, and others. Discussions of priority research and management issues impacting Wisconsin's birds also continue. Stay tuned for updates on the final CBM plan. If you have any comments or questions, contact the plan's coordinator, Ryan Brady at 715-685-2993 or ryan.brady@wisconsin.gov.

Mindo Birdathon a Huge Success!

In August 2007, the WBCI International Committee sponsored its second tropical birdathon to South America. By all measures it was a smashing success. Twenty-two birders traveled to Ecuador to participate in a high altitude birding adventure on the Equator. The event was designed to support conservation efforts of the Mindo Cloudforest Foundation (MCF) www.mindocloudforest.org, a grassroots, non-profit working to promote "avitourism" and protect rare bird habitat in the Chocó Bioregion of northwest Ecuador.

The "Chocó" is considered one of the planet's biodiversity hotspots, supporting enormous numbers of plant, insect, reptile, amphibian and bird species and hosting the highest number of endemic bird species (58) in the western hemisphere. The area is highly threatened by conversion of native forest to palm oil plantations and cattle pasture.

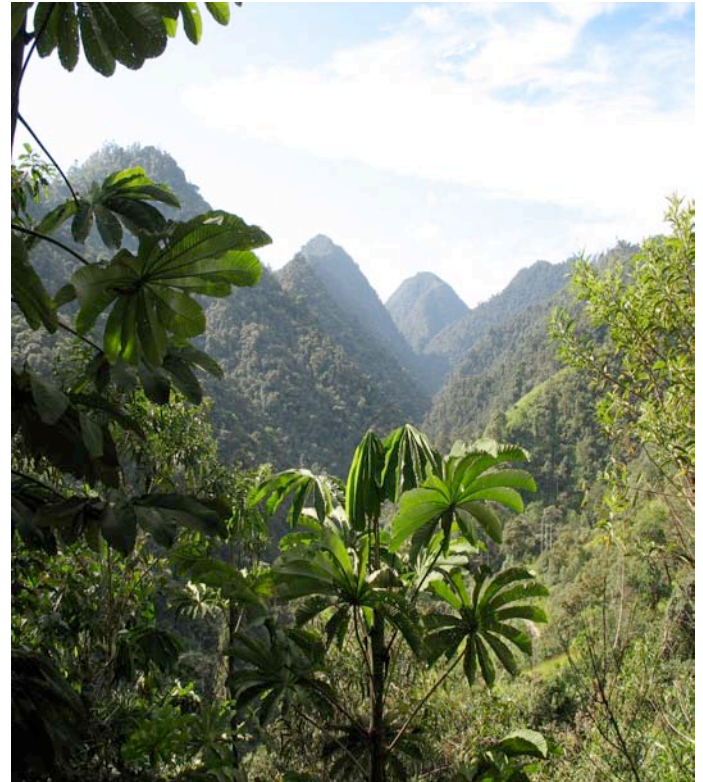
Based at the Tandayapa Bird Lodge www.tandayapa.com, a remarkable facility situated in the lush Andean foothills, the group was treated to world class birding in an area considered the global epicenter of avian diversity. Hummer feeders at the lodge attract more than 30 species of the pint-sized dervishes, while fruit feeders host a parade of gaudy birds including Red-Headed Barbet, Blue-winged Mountain Tanager and Chestnut-capped Brush Finch. By the time the dust (and feathers!) settled we tallied

365 species, including 39 hummers, 54 tanagers and 56 species of flycatchers! Highlights included terrific views of Ocellated Tapaculo, Plate-billed Mountain Toucan, Toucan Barbet and a Giant Antpitta named “Maria”. To say the birding was fast and furious is an understatement! You can read the full trip report at [August 2007: Mindo Cloudforest Birdathon](#)

Even more important, we raised almost \$19,000 to support expansion of MCF’s bird sanctuaries. Their reserves are vitally important for myriad native species, as well as for many of Wisconsin’s neotropical migrants - Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Black-billed Cuckoo, Swainson’s Thrush, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Canada Warbler, Connecticut Warbler and a host of others. Special thanks to **Tropical Birding** www.tropicalbirding.com for sponsoring our birdathon.

Interested in immersing yourself in Latin America culture, having more fun than you thought possible and seeing more great birds than you can shake a stick at, all while supporting conservation of important bird habitat? There may be a tropical birdathon in your future! If you’d like more information, contact Craig Thompson at Craig.Thompson@wisconsin.org.

Plate-billed Mountain Toucan, photo by Jose Illanes



Footbills habitat near Tandayapa Lodge, photo by Craig Thompson

Birding MCF's Rio Silanche Reserve, photo by Craig Thompson



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FEB 1 Newsletter release

Summer/Fall Issue

MAY 1 Call for submissions
JUL 1 Submission deadline
AUG 1 Newsletter release

