

# BIRD CONSERVATION

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## PACIFIC ISLAND FOREST BIRDS



The Mariana Fruit Dove, endemic to the Mariana Islands, has for the first time been recorded colonizing on its own another island in the chain.

And now, for something completely different...

In the early years of BCR, we were still writing up results from bird studies performed on some of the most remote island chains on Earth. We have, of course, since moved on

to studying bird communities here in the Northeast. However, due to recent advances in analytic techniques, we are revisiting these earlier studies to extract new information about the largely unknown and often highly endangered bird communities of the

tropical Pacific.

From 1990 to 1993, BCR Director Craig performed a series of seasonal population surveys on the forest birds of the Mariana Islands. Only a portion of the data has ever been

*(Continued on page 2)*

# ISLAND BIRDS

## *-CONTINUED*

**“Perhaps the most notable finding is how human activity over the past multiple thousand years has altered the structure of Mariana Island bird communities.**

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The more diverse bird communities of the extensive, unbroken native forests of the Palau Islands provides a model for what prehistoric bird communities were like in the highly altered Mariana Islands.

analyzed, but now, by using new techniques, we have learned new facts about the dynamics of this system that have important implications for wildlife conservation. Among these are that there is little seasonal change in population densities throughout the year even though many species appear to have peak seasonal breeding times.

Perhaps the most notable finding is that human activity over the past multiple thousand years has altered the structure of Mariana

Island bird communities. At least half of the original fauna has become extinct since human arrival. Of the remaining species, the three most ecologically versatile ones have built populations to levels where they now overwhelmingly dominate these communities.

The comparatively pristine Palau Islands of the far western Pacific provide a model for original Mariana conditions. Most all of the extinct Mariana species are still present

in Palau. It appears that the presence of additional community members prevents species from reaching the high densities achieved in the Marianas. Instead, the community exhibits greater evenness in species abundances. A “preprint” draft of this work may be viewed at <http://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/forest%20birds%20of%20marianas.pdf>.

# WINTER STUDIES AT YALE FOREST



The White-breasted Nuthatch (above) was joined by its northern cousin, the Red-breasted Nuthatch, as common forest birds this winter.

Winter is a quiet season in the high elevation forests of Yale-Myers Forest in Union, Connecticut. As demonstrated in *Forest Birds of Connecticut and Rhode Island* (<http://www.artsandacademic.net/pdf/Forest%20Birds%20of%20CT%20&%20RI%202.pdf>), birds tend to leave these forests for lower elevations at the Connecticut/ Rhode Island coast. However, winter is quite variable in terms of forest bird communities,

and this past winter was notably different from that of previous years.

Last fall had the largest incursion of northern finch species into our region in years, with huge numbers of particularly Pine Siskins moving through southern New England. Although by winter many of these birds had left, especially crossbill species remained. Consequently, even though bird numbers at Yale Forest were generally low, both the Red- and

White-winged Crossbill occurred consistently on survey transects.

Another species present in larger numbers than in most winters was the Red-breasted Nuthatch. In contrast, the Golden-crowned Kinglet, abundant in some winters, was largely absent.

**“...although bird numbers at Yale Forest were generally low, both the Red- and White-winged Crossbill occurred consistently on survey transects.”**

# FIELD STATION UPDATE

“Another focus of our planting has been on adding species that produce persistent fruits that provide food for our native fruit-eating species...”



The alien thickets of our hay field borders are being systematically opened and underplanted with native trees and shrubs.

**A**s the ground finally begins to thaw completely, we are moving ahead with early spring planting of native trees and shrubs into our field borders. These field borders are presently dominated by alien shrubs and vines, so periodic control measures are required to give the new plantings a chance to become established. Some species have been planted in previous years, and our weed control activities

have permitted other natives to establish themselves on their own.

This year, we will also begin adding American Chestnut trees to the border as part of a larger strategy to repopulate this species in our region. This tree was once dominant particularly in drier forests of eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island. It was also once one of the most valuable trees for wildlife throughout its entire range.

Another focus of our planting has been on adding species that produce persistent fruits that provide food for our native fruit-eating species, like Cedar Waxwings, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers and Mockingbirds. Species of viburnum and dogwood have been among those planted.

# CONNECTICUT IS NOW A THREE CROW STATE



The Common Raven is now a lawn bird in southern New England.

Once confined to the most remote wilderness forests of New England's far north, the Common Raven began its rapid expansion south in the 1980s, when a pair first appeared in Northeast Connecticut's Yale Forest. Since then, it has expanded its range and numbers south to the coast. This much larger cousin of the American Crow has greatly expanded its use of habitats over the same period and now routinely co-occurs with its relative in farmlands and even back yards.

During the same years, the smaller and southerly distributed cousin of the American Crow, the Fish Crow, has gone from

being an uncommon resident of the coast to occurring even far inland. Although its range expansion has not been as dramatic as that of Common Raven, it has still made impressive incursions away from salt water environments to freshwater interior areas. It does still seem to be primarily associated with water, however.

The Fish Crow has long been an early spring migrant through particularly eastern Connecticut and Rhode Island, as individuals move north toward Cape Cod. Now, however, the species may be found in inland areas even in mid-summer. All three crow species have appeared

at BCR's Pomfret field station.

Even the ubiquitous American Crow has undergone substantial albeit largely un-noticed population changes in recent decades. During the early 2000s, numbers plummeted when West Nile Virus first appeared in New England. Crows proved particularly vulnerable to the disease. The extent of the population decline and its subsequent recovery is documented in *Forest Birds of Connecticut and Rhode Island* (<http://www.artsandacademic.net/pdf/Forest%20Birds%20of%20CT%20&%20RI%202.pdf>).

**“All three  
crow species  
have  
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Pomfret field  
station.”**

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# Bird Conservation Research, Inc.

## Membership

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25 Regular member  
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*Don't forget to renew your membership. Also don't forget to chase your chickens out of the kitchen.*

## MEMBERSHIP

It is time to renew membership for 2021. Existing members have received renewal forms in the mail. If you have not yet become a member,

you may do so online through GoFundMe (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/1nqlss>). Memberships remain one of our principal means of

funding the projects that we conduct, so please consider joining us. Membership applications and contribution options are also available on our web site.