

# BIRD CONSERVATION

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## CONNECTICUT RIVER STUDY ENTERS 50<sup>TH</sup> YEAR



The Virginia Rail is a widespread and fairly common inhabitant of larger freshwater tidal marshes of the Connecticut River.

On this 50th year since studies began on the birds of Connecticut River tidal marshes, investigations will commence in early May—the beginning of the breeding season for these infrequently

studied birds. Their secretive nature and occupancy of inhospitable habitats have left them among the most poorly known of North America's birds.

This spring, we will be

repeating quantitative population surveys undertaken in 1999–2000 (see results of this study here: <https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/species-area.pdf>). Study sites are

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# RIVER BIRDS

## *-CONTINUED*



This photo of Pratt Cove in Deep River, CT was taken in 1974—the first year of studies on tidal marsh birds of the Connecticut River. Rattling Valley Hill (right background) was uninhabited at the time, although there are now several houses present on it.

**“In the 1974 observations, the DDT-affected Osprey had been reduced to a single infertile pair.”**

eight freshwater tidal marshes present along the lower Connecticut River in the towns of Portland, Cromwell, East Haddam, Lyme and Deep River. These sites were also visited in 1974, the 1980s and the 1990s. Hence, a long series of observations exist for them.

In the 1974 observations, the DDT-affected Osprey had been reduced to a single infertile pair—its population low point. It has since recolonized the river in large numbers

and has even moved far inland to occupy freshwater lakes and rivers. During that year, the Bald Eagle was absent from the lower river, with the first one not appearing on a census until 1999. It now nests at a number of spots along the river. The enigmatic Black Rail was also absent in 1974, with breeding individuals not appearing until 1987—their first recorded breeding on the river since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Important discoveries

from our 1999–2000 study were that rarer species tended to accumulate at the largest study sites. In addition, even common species occurred only at marshes above a certain minimum size. Our present study will investigate how general these findings are and how much the species present have changed over time.

# PACIFIC ISLAND BIRDS: LIFE HISTORIES



This Golden White-eye from Aguiguan in the Mariana Islands chain is likely the first one ever measured and photographed.

Officiating at the extinction of species is how previous conservation efforts on behalf of endangered Pacific island birds have been described (see BCR's first publication: <https://www.artsandacademic.net/pdf/white-eye.PDF>). These efforts rarely went beyond periodic population surveys. This has changed, however, with significant investigations launched to understand the ecology of endangered species like the Mariana Crow and Saipan Reed-warbler. In addition, actual management efforts like translocating species to uninhabited islands have

been undertaken.

Still, the basic biology of many Pacific island species remains largely unknown. There have been few studies of behavior, breeding ecology, foraging ecology or population dynamics for most species. In addition, existing life history compilations for these birds have been nominal at best.

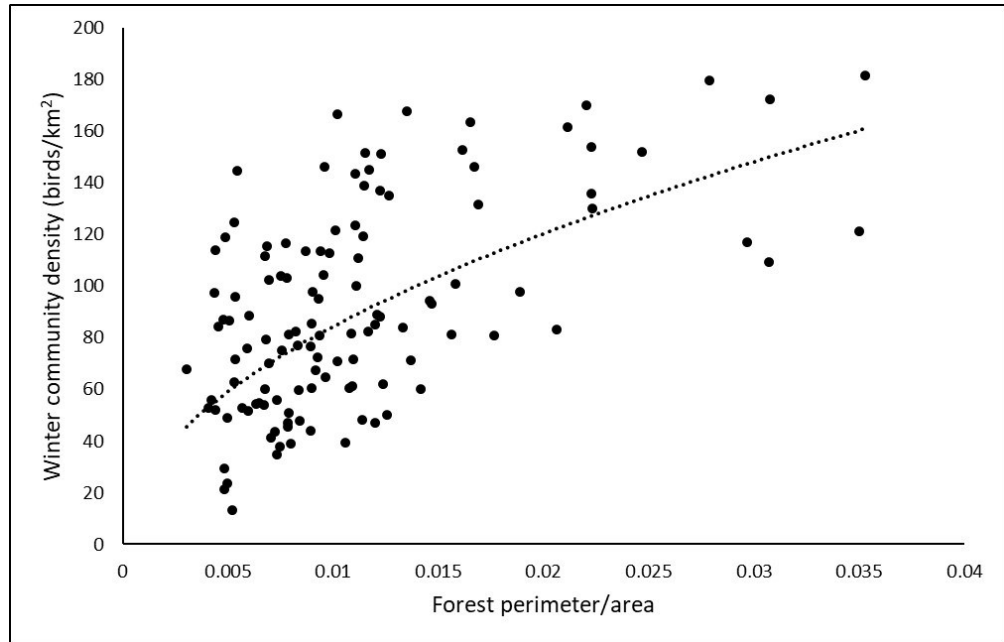
To help expand our knowledge of these birds, we have undertaken preparation of comprehensive life history syntheses for them. In a number of cases, much of what is known about them remains in old,

unpublished field notes. We do this work in conjunction with Cornell University's *Birds of the World* initiative.

To date, we have published a life history of the Rota White-eye (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/rotawhite-eyebirdsoftheworld.pdf>). In addition, we have posted preprints for the Saipan Reed-warbler ([https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/reed-warbler\\_BNA.pdf](https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/reed-warbler_BNA.pdf)) and Golden White-eye (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/goldenwhite-eye.pdf>).

“...the basic biology of many Pacific island species remains largely unknown.”

# FOREST FRAGMENTATION



“...winter bird populations strongly increase as fragmentation increases.”

Unlike breeding forest birds, those present in winter respond positively to forest fragmentation with increasing population densities, as most are opportunistic generalist species.

Our studies on the effects of forest fragmentation on bird communities (<https://birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/forest%20fragmentation.pdf>) have demonstrated that population densities of birds decline as fragmentation increases. In contrast, winter bird populations strongly increase as fragmentation increases.

We measure fragmentation as forest perimeter divided by forest area. This measure grows as

fragmentation increases.

The difference between these two seasons relates to the different natural histories of species present in them. In summer, the number of species present is great (we recorded 123 summering species), and much specialization exists in terms of microhabitat use and feeding ecology. In winter, in contrast, comparatively few species are present (we recorded 63 wintering species), and many are best characterized as being ecological

generalists—species at home in a variety of landscapes. Winter is also a time of limited food availability, so being able to make a living in multiple ways is an advantage.

# FIELD STATION MANAGEMENT



The border of our field is choked with non-native shrubs and trees, which we are now clearing. Yellow-flagged shrubs are natives to be incorporated into our new border plantings.

Work is underway to remove alien vegetation from our field border so that it may be transitioned to native species as well as wildlife-friendly but non-invasive exotic plantings. To date, we have been removing invasive hybrid butternut trees and soon we will be clearing away all alien shrubs and vines.

Such species as Japanese Barberry, Russian Olive, Multiflora Rose and Winged Euonymus are widespread. However,

mixed among the aliens are some natives as well as several other desirable species. Particularly the flowering and fruiting native Spicebush is well-established in the border along with such other natives as Yellow Birch, American Beech and Eastern Redcedar. Several exotics, including Bird Cherry and Norway Spruce will also be preserved during clearing.

We are presently gathering a variety of plant species with which to replace aliens. These

include such heavily fruiting small trees as crabapples, dogwoods, cherries and viburnums. In addition, we are planting such conifers as larch, incense-cedar and white-cedar. Our goal will be to create an environment that will attract early successional forest-associated bird species.

**“Our goal will be to create an environment that will attract early successional forest-associated bird species.”**

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# Bird Conservation Research, Inc.

## Membership

\$25 Regular member  
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The Bald Eagle is now a regular nester along the Connecticut River, with its breeding commencing in February.

## MEMBERSHIP

It is time to renew your membership for 2024. If you have not yet become a member, you may do so online through GoFundMe ([https://](https://www.gofundme.com/f/1nqlss)

[www.gofundme.com/f/1nqlss](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: <https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/membership.php>.