

BIRD CONSERVATION

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WINTER SURVEYS UNDERWAY IN RHODE ISLAND



The Rhododendron swamps of southern Rhode Island are one of the forest habitats being surveyed this winter

Surveys of Rhode Island are documenting the density, distribution and habitat use of every forest species wintering in the state. To date, about half the 60 miles of survey routes have been visited, and by late February every site will have been investigated.

Winter presents challenges for birds and bird surveyors alike. The recent intense cold has required that censuses be con-

ducted at temperatures approaching -10° F. However, birds are active even at such temperature extremes as these. In fact, our winter resident birds seem far more capable of dealing with winter's harshness than any human.

Some of the same patterns observed during previous winters are again being observed. Wintering thrushes (Robin and Her-

mit Thrush) are predominantly distributed in more coastal areas. Similarly, Tufted Titmice and other "permanent resident" species appear to have shifted their distributions to southern Rhode Island for the winter. Species diversity itself increases from north to south, much as it did in neighboring eastern Connecticut.

Other notable findings of this winter's surveys in-

“Critical habitats are more than simply unusual places or places where endangered species are found.”



The American Holly forests of coastal Rhode Island are also being surveyed

clude the large number of “winter finches” that have appeared in the region. These species, particularly the Pine Siskin and Common Redpoll, have invaded southern New England from their breeding grounds in the far north. Even a few Red Crossbills

have appeared in area forests.

Rhode Island’s habitats differ in some ways from those next door in eastern Connecticut. Two evergreen relatives, American Holly and Smooth Holly,

become important species in the understory of some forests of the southern portion of the state. Moreover, the also evergreen Rhododendron is more widespread in Rhode Island.

CRITICAL HABITATS OF CONNECTICUT

Sixteen of Connecticut’s habitats, termed “critical habitats,” are being highlighted in a new book by BCR Director Dr. Robert Craig. The book, published by Perry Heights Press of Wilton, will be available at area bookstores this spring.

The book’s outlook on the subject of critical habitats represents a major departure from previous consid-

erations of the subject. In the words of Dr. Craig, “I would argue that critical habitats are more than simply unusual places or places where endangered species are found. They also are those places critical for keeping our major natural systems operating. They are the ones responsible for maintaining such system attributes as biodiversity, and system processes like nutrient cycles

and productivity. The really critical habitats are also those we take for granted: the common ones.”

In this book, the critical habitats of Connecticut include everything from the widespread oak-dominated forests of much of the state to an unusual variant of pine-oak communities called sand plains.

FOREST BIRDS OF THE LAST GREEN VALLEY

BCR's first book, *Forest Birds of the Last Green Valley: the density distribution, habitat ecology and conservation of the forest birds of eastern Connecticut*, is scheduled to be printed this February, and should be available for distribution by

early spring.

The book details the winter and summer ecology of 84 species of forest birds occurring in the region. It is intended primarily for the natural resource planning community, including land trusts and town conserva-

tion commissions.

Publication has been funded by gifts and species sponsorships.



One of the least common habitats of Connecticut is the Pitch Pine Sand Plain

SPECIES SPONSORS

Because changes to manuscripts can now be made right up to the day of printing, there is still time (albeit just a few weeks) to sponsor a species in *Forest Birds of the Last Green Valley*.

Most of the 84 species listed

in the book already have sponsors, but some remain to be taken. Sponsorships assist with publication costs.

The list of species that can be sponsored and a sponsorship form may be

downloaded at www.birdconservationresearch.org. Sponsor names are listed at the end of the species account. Each sponsor also will receive a copy of the book.

Species Sponsorship

For *Birds of the Last Green Valley*
(sponsorships are \$125; please select a first, second and third choice)

Species Choice:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

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MEMBERSHIP

Memberships become more important to us than ever as our research program progresses. BCR is

funded completely by memberships, gifts and research grants. Please help bird conservation by

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