

BIRD CONSERVATION

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Winter surveys</i>	1
<i>Student projects</i>	2
<i>Endangered species</i>	3
<i>Memberships</i>	4

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SOUTHEAST CONNECTICUT SURVEYS NEAR COMPLETION



Ice hangs in the air on a morning bird survey in North Stonington.

Winter surveys of Southeast Connecticut this year will complete a four year study of year-round bird populations in eastern Connecticut. Both the north-eastern and southeastern portions of the state have been surveyed twice.

To date, 10 of the 25 sites have been visited, with the remainder to be studied before the end of February. Several sites will also have surveys duplicated in order to assess day to day changes in census results.

Several trends noted in previous years are proving

consistent. Most notably, winter populations and species diversity appear greatest toward the coast. Species like the Blue Jay, Hermit Thrush, Robin, Cat-bird, Towhee, and Yellow-rumped Warbler are particularly concentrated at the coast.

The most unusual finds for the winter have been a Common Yellowthroat and Magnolia Warbler inhabiting coastal thickets at the mouth of the Connecticut River. Common Ravens also continue to appear at additional locations across the region. Four were pre-

sent at Portland at the beginning of January.

A species that has shown some differences in occurrence from previous winters is the Tufted Titmouse. At about half the sites visited to date, numbers have been lower than during 2003 surveys of Southeast Connecticut. Low numbers have been particularly noticeable toward the northern end of the area. Populations at the coast have remained high, and at some locations they have been higher than previously recorded.

STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN BCR PROGRAMS



The forest bird survey team for the Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor.

“Temperatures hovering near zero were no deterrent to research...”

Temperatures hovering near zero were no deterrent to research activities conducted by students of Uxbridge High School in Uxbridge, Massachusetts. These students participated not in a laboratory exercise, but gathered real data as part of the BCR survey of forest birds in southern New England.

One of several planned transects through the Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor, the site investigated extends BCR studies into forest tracts that are contiguous with those already surveyed of Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Student researchers were members of one of six teams. In addition to counting birds at 200 m intervals (Team 1: census and global positioning),

other teams evaluated habitat conditions: Team 2) forest canopy cover, Team 3) tree diameter, Team 4) tree species composition, Team 5) moisture

regime, and Team 6) shrub density.

The first third of the survey route took students through the well developed floodplain forests of the Blackstone River. The survey then continued into the rocky upland forests that occupy the hills above the river.

Because the forests surveyed were north of those previously studied in Connecticut and Rhode Island, students observed that forest conditions showed signs of diverging from more southern forests. Notably, white pine was a more common species than it was in survey transects to the south.

Students also discovered



Measuring diameter of trees at sample locations assists with assessment of habitat characteristics.



Picnicking at 10 degrees kept lunches fresh, although having drinks remain in a liquid state proved challenging...

that the bird population density and species diversity they recorded was low compared with regions closer to the coast.

Despite the cold, students were enthusiastic about their field adventure, with several declaring that their studies constituted the "best field trip ever." Based on this recommendation, plans are being developed to extend these studies into future years.



Trudging on to the next sample point in the bleak winter forests of Uxbridge, Mass.

“One of the key missions of BCR is to develop tools useful in protecting our bird resources”

ENDANGERED SPECIES

One of the key missions of BCR is to develop tools useful in protecting our bird resources. One component of this mission is to gather data on regional bird populations. Another is to examine the philosophy that forms the underpinning of regional conservation practice.

In 2002, BCR developed a position paper on the regional designation of endangered status. This pa-

per called for re-assessment of how state governments determine whether birds are endangered within their boundaries. Existing procedures were demonstrated to be logically flawed, and a revised protocol for determining endangered status was proposed.

Because the study challenged practices carried out over much of the nation, debate over this new view has been extensive and ongoing (see www.birdconservationresearch.org/publications

[birdconservationresearch.org/publications](http://www.birdconservationresearch.org/publications) for some of this debate). However, the ideas in this paper have also attracted scholarly interest, and as a result the paper has been selected for the inaugural issue of a scientific journal devoted to new approaches in conservation: *Avian Conservation and Ecology*. The text of the paper will be available online shortly at www.ace-eco.org.

The Newsletter of
Bird Conservation Research, Inc.

90 Liberty Highway
Putnam, CT 06260

Phone: 860 928-2178

E-mail: mail@
birdconservationresearch.org

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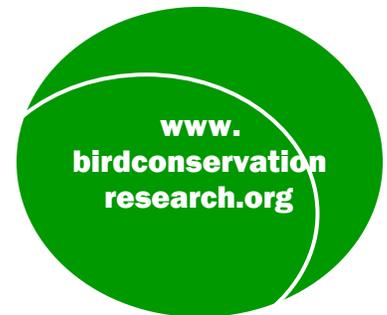
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Even SpongeBob participates in winter surveys with BCR.



MEMBERSHIP

It is time once again for our annual membership campaign. Members form the backbone of our organization, and provide a significant portion of our annual operating funds.

Membership has doubled over the past few years, and in order for us to expand our programs we hope to double it again.

Please help BCR by becoming

a member. Membership applications and payment options are available at www.birdconservationresearch.org.