

BIRD CONSERVATION

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FOREST SURVEY EXPANDED



The scrub forests of Block Island, Rhode Island will be added to the list of sites included in the Forest Bird Survey of Southern New England.

The Forest Bird Survey of Southern New England will be completing its fourth year this winter, and as we do so we will be adding several additional sites to help round out our view of regional forest bird distributions.

After some late summer reconnaissance we have made plans to establish new survey transects in Douglas State Forest,

Douglas, Massachusetts, Block Island, Rhode Island, and possibly one additional eastern Rhode Island location.

With much more extensive examples of coastal scrub forest than are present along much of the southern New England coastline, Block Island presents an opportunity to more fully characterize the rather distinctive bird life of this habitat. To date, our sur-

veys have covered coastal forest primarily at Ninigret and Trustom Pond refuges in Rhode Island. The habitat is poorly represented along the Connecticut coastline, although some examples may be found in the vicinity of Barn Island, Stonington.

Scrub forests tend to be dense, stunted and with abundant vines, a consequence in large part of damage to the system

caused by hurricanes, winter storms, and salt spray. Small trees like Shadbush, Sassafras, and Black Cherry are present, along with Winged Sumac, Groundsel Tree, and Bayberry.

On Block Island, several fine examples of scrub forest have been preserved, and remnant

stands of Scarlet Oak have persisted at some locations. Scarlet Oak was likely more common in these forests before the conversion of the landscape to agriculture during colonial times.

The forests of Douglas, Massachusetts are also characterized by the presence of Scarlet Oak. The

extensive Douglas forests are much like those of northwestern Rhode Island, which the Forest Bird Survey already has examined during previous years. The Douglas area is part of the Quinebaug-Shetucket watershed, and is thus a natural part of the system we have studied since 2001.

“On Block Island, several fine examples of scrub forest have been preserved”

CONNECTICUT RIVER STUDY NEARS COMPLETION



Tidal marshes of the Connecticut River have been the focus of long term investigations.

Studies of the Connecticut River system and its bird life began in the spring of 1975. The system remains under study, and our present investigation is examining the effects of marsh size on bird diversity.

Begun in 1999, this work

has now reached the final stages of analysis. We are presently in the process of explaining exactly how marsh size effects the occurrence of individual bird species.

One of the key goals of this work is to provide guidance to land conser-

vationists as they make choices about preserving wetland parcels. Determining how habitat area affects bird communities involves complex analyses of long term data.

GREAT DAY TRIPS TO CONNECTICUT'S CRITICAL HABITATS



Griswold Point, by Barbara Lussier

Tidelands

an exhibit of paintings of the Connecticut River Marshes, will be at the Brick Gallery, Main St., Essex, CT from October 13-18.

The book **Great Day Trips to Connecticut's Critical Habitats** is available at area book stores and also online at www.birdconservationresearch.org and www.cttrips.com. An excerpt from the chapter on freshwater marshes follows:

Like the surface of Venus through a small telescope, the marsh appears alien and unknowable. As with Venus's clouds, there is no detectable surface. There are no paths, as water is no more conducive to leading a way than are clouds. They are watery deserts inhabited by the non-human: beings for whom our perspectives are irrelevant. From the moment of entry one is lost, as there is nothing familiar, nothing definite. There is the feeling upon entering of being ferried across the Styx into an underworld. There

are mist-shrouded mornings, sulfur vapors; there are sounds that waft through their atmosphere that would unsettle a departed soul. I can think of no human analogy to explain adequately their nature of existence. As with God's pronouncement to Moses, "I am, who am," so the marsh simply is.

Morning on the marsh is an approximation. There is no morning in the sense that those of us with conscious existence view it. Dark and light matter little. The inhabitants begin their day before light, if we can assume that they end their day also, which we cannot. During my explorations, I chose as well to begin before light. I indeed found that my mornings became progressively earlier like the other inhabitants of this realm. I realized I understood Herman Melville's character, Bartleby the Scriv-

ener, who increasingly remained at his post until he never left it.

Before I would submit each day to my duties as scientist, I sat in the dark, staring into it and being enshrouded by it. I came to require the dark, the wet and the cold of this time and this place, and found also I increasingly resented having to leave it. It wasn't that the marsh was pleasant, as it was not. As time passed I accumulated infections, welts, stings, bruises. My equipment failed; boots tore, binoculars disappeared, clothes disintegrated, everything human failed. But I had begun to see, or more precisely hear, a glimmer of something else...

"Like the surface of Venus through a small telescope, the marsh appears alien and unknowable."

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Membership is something that we at BCR are pleased and impressed to see just keep growing. If you haven't yet joined our expanding family, we hope that you will do so soon. We

are funded entirely by memberships, grants and gifts.

Membership applications and payment options are now available online at

www.birdconservation-research.org. Credit cards are accepted.