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SEARCHING FOR THE ESKIMO CURLEW



These Cape Cod dunes were once important resting sites for migratory Eskimo Curlews.

The search for surviving Eskimo Curlews began in an unrelenting rain that rolled off the north Atlantic the last week of August. In a time now well past living memory, such storms were known as curlew weather. The easterly winds blew migratory birds off their ocean course and onto the outermost portions of

Cape Cod. When clear weather returned, the curlews disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared.

The propensity for curlews to arrive almost solely in inhospitable weather provides some hope that they may still survive. Virtually no observers venture out under such conditions despite

the Cape being a prime bird watching destination. A hundred birds could be nestled in a dune hollow somewhere along the miles of coastline and no one would know.

The Eskimo Curlew is a difficult species to identify under the best of

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“A distant flock would likely be passed off as Whimbrels with hardly a second look being given.”



Fall fruiting beach plums on the Cape Cod dunes are a potential food source for curlews .

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conditions. In driving rain and wind, making the critical distinctions between it and sister species is difficult at best. A distant flock would likely be passed off as Whimbrels with hardly a second look being given.

Although curlews may still be present, finding them amounts to looking for a very small needle in a very large haystack. There are vast expanses of habitat for remaining individuals to lose themselves in. Combined with the species' ephemeral appearances on the

Cape, the challenges associated with locating individuals are daunting.

The key to success in any endeavor such as this one is persistence. Persistence was key to the completion of our recent forest bird survey—the product of eight years of intensive effort.

Another parallel to our present endeavor was the quest for Connecticut Black Rails. In 1974, BCR Director Dr. Robert Craig began searching for evidence of a Connecticut breeding population. Fourteen years later and long after anyone re-

membered that he was even looking, he found the first summering birds known in the state in over a century—also, by the way, during a cold, driving rain.

Despite the challenge before us and the slim odds for our success, documenting the presence of surviving Eskimo Curlews is a critical first step in developing a continental conservation plan for them. The importance of our effort has been recognized by the National Park Service, which is our partner in this study.

BEACHES VIDEO NOW AVAILABLE



The beach at Napatree Point, Rhode Island is the subject of BCR's latest video.

Thanks to our recent grant from the Norcross Wildlife Foundation, we have completed our second video production— *Beaches*. It highlights the beach and dune communities of Napatree Point, Rhode Island— one of the best preserved coastal habitats on the south shore of New England.

Like all the planned videos in our series on New England habitats, it is designed specifically to fit into the

Advanced Placement curriculum for Environmental Science. As such, it explores the geological processes that produce the beach, the physical factors that shape the beach environment, the vegetation of intertidal, dune and marsh habitats, the wildlife that occupy these habitats, and the historical development of life at the ocean's edge.

A key weakness of existing educational video

resources is that they are limited in their depth of coverage and in the sophistication of the issues they consider. Moreover, there are few videos that deal specifically with New England topics.

Our video series helps to fill such gaps. As we move forward, we also plan to incorporate more learning theory into the structure of the productions.

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THE FOREST BIRD SURVEY AND *THE CONNECTICUT STATE OF THE BIRDS*



Yes, this really is Connecticut— near one of our forest transect routes through Union. Species like the northern-affiliated Canada, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Nashville, Black-throated Blue and Blackburnian warblers inhabit these white pine-hemlock forests.

The eight-year long forest bird survey of Connecticut and Rhode Island produced 50,172 bird observations as well as 19,980 habitat measurements. These measures ultimately will lead to the production of an atlas of the population distributions and habitat affiliations of nearly 100 forest bird species. The survey has already produced two technical publications (one still in the review stage), and other technical works are planned. Preliminary work on the atlas has be-

gun as well. Our new state-of-the-art quantitative bird data can at last replace the existing repackaged, reshuffled and statistically weak data too often used in regional conservation planning.

The magnitude of our efforts has resulted in our being recognized as the regional authority on forest birds. We have provided data and opinions for conservation planning to the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Connecticut Fund for the Environment

and the Rhode Island Audubon Society as well as to town conservation commissions.

In recognition of our leadership role in forest bird science, the Connecticut Audubon Society has tapped us to contribute to their 2011 *Connecticut State of the Birds* report. Our contribution highlights the status of forest bird species and conservation considerations about forest environments.

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