

BIRD CONSERVATION

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CONNECTICUT RIVER MARSH STUDY COMPLETES SEASON



This early July, 1986 photo of the Whalebone Creek study area shows an extensive floating-leaved marsh community of bullhead lily and pickerelweed.

On this 50th year since studies began on birds of the Connecticut River freshwater tidal marshes, field investigations began in early May and lasted into late June. Because some of the most secretive marsh

breeders vocalize at or before dawn, observations began by 4:45 a.m. each day. Particularly rail and bittern species are early vocalizers.

This study duplicates in

design the first study performed by BCR in 1999–2000, which used a standardized protocol to survey birds within 50 m radius plots. Over a five minute period, all individuals detected within

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RIVER BIRDS

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“Highlights of the field season were that some species have vastly expanded their ranges along the river since 1999–2000.”



This early July, 2024 photo of the Whalebone Creek study site shows only small patches of bullhead lily and pickerelweed, although wild rice, an annual species that matures in fall, is beginning to appear in the shallow, open water.

plots were recorded. Following the sampling period, recorded calls of secretive species were played in order to elicit responses.

Highlights of the field season were that some species have vastly expanded their ranges along the river since 1999–2000. These include the Osprey, Bald Eagle, Fish Crow, Great Egret and Double-crested Cormorant. Other notable appearances were by the Black Duck and Gadwall, which formerly were largely restricted to salt and brackish marshes.

Notable declines were by the Bank Swallow, completely absent from all sites although in the 1970s it was the commonest swallow on the river. Similarly, gulls were completely absent. In addition, rails, Swamp Sparrows and Marsh Wrens were all greatly reduced in numbers, apparently because of late spring river flooding. These three species did not even appear at some sites until near the end of the study period and at others they remained absent for the entire season. This same phenomenon occurred in 1986, when spring flooding also delayed the

breeding season.

Habitat changes also occurred since 1999–2000. The alien invasive purple loosestrife has been virtually eradicated due to release of a predatory beetle. In addition, floating-leaved and deeper water-associated emergent plants were greatly reduced compared with 1999–2000, as the photos above show. Only small patches remained this year, although wild rice, always present, had colonized the watery habitats occupied by these floating species.

PACIFIC ISLAND BIRDS: LIFE HISTORIES



This Bridled White-eye of Saipan in the Mariana Islands chain has within its tiny range among the highest population densities of any land bird.

The life histories of many Pacific island birds remain largely undescribed. Other than periodic population surveys, there have been few studies of behavior, breeding ecology or foraging ecology for most. Existing life history compilations for birds have been nominal at best.

To help expand our knowledge of birds in this region, we have begun preparing 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 life history studies for the Rota White-eye (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/rotawhite-eyebirdsoftheworld.pdf>) and Saipan Reed-warbler (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/reed-warblerBNA.pdf>). In addition, our study of the Golden White-eye is now in review (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/goldenwhite-eye.pdf>).

The next species to which our attention has turned is the Bridled White-eye, the

final white-eye species still surviving in the Mariana Islands (other now extinct species prehistorically inhabited these islands). In this case, there are several published studies on seasonal population dynamics, foraging behavior and flocking behavior, which make it one of the better studied members of this system. We expect to prepare a draft for this species in the next few months.

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HABITAT MANAGEMENT

“Beginning in early spring, we began removing these invasive exotics so that we could turn the border into one in which native plants predominated.”



Before clearing, this April photo of our woodland border shows a dense undergrowth of invasive alien shrub and vine species.

Field borders, particularly wooded ones, form important habitats for a variety of bird species in both summer and winter. However, many are choked with invasive exotic weeds. Such was the case with our wooded border.

Beginning in early spring, we began removing these invasive exotics so that we could turn the border into one in which native plants predominated. The border was filled with exotics like Russian olive, Japanese

barberry, Eurasian privet and winged euonymus. Exotic vine-like species such as Asiatic bittersweet, purple-flowering raspberry, wisteria, Japanese honeysuckle and multiflora rose were also present.

Once removed, native canopy trees like eastern hemlock, eastern white pine and sugar maple predominated. In addition, understory species like flowering dogwood and spicebush were released from competition. A number of sapling trees like Eastern Redcedar, American beech, black

oak, sassafras, black birch, white ash, tulip poplar, American elm and shagbark hickory were also revealed. Native vines like fox grape, Virginia creeper and the Connecticut River specialty, riverbank grape, were present as well.

Clearing the border also revealed that it has a robust native herbaceous layer. Natives discovered to date include white wood aster, Christmas fern, spinulose wood fern and white baneberry.

Our goal is to keep invasives under control and to underplant the woodland with wildlife-

HABITAT

-CONTINUED



After clearing, this June photo shows the woodland with remaining native shrubs and saplings growing in an environment in which they have been released from competition with alien invasive species.

friendly shrubs that in particular will attract birds. To date, the woodland supports such summer edge specialists as Yellow-throated Vireo, Great-crested Flycatcher, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Redstart, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, House Wren, Carolina Wren, Chipping Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee and Baltimore

Oriole. In addition, the southern Connecticut specialty, the White-eyed Vireo, is present. A Red-headed Wood-pecker made a brief early spring appearance, as did the American Woodcock.

In adjacent forested habitats, a variety of summer residents are also present. These included the Louisiana Waterthrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Pileated

Woodpecker, Veery, Wood Thrush, Eastern Wood Pewee and Acadian Flycatcher.

“Our goal is to keep invasives under control and to underplant the woodland with wildlife-friendly shrubs that in particular will attract birds.”

The Newsletter of
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Bird

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The Common Grackle is an inhabitant of open upland environments, although it also regularly forages in freshwater tidal marshes.

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). 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>.