

BIRD CONSERVATION

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CONNECTICUT RIVER STUDIES COMPLETE



The lower Connecticut River remains largely in its natural state.

The 51st year of bird studies in the Connecticut River's freshwater tidal marshes proved to be a difficult one. Spring flooding lasted well into June, particularly upriver near the Middletown portion of the study area. Despite

the flooding, we were able to complete this year's surveys, and the flooding itself provided new insights into how marsh bird communities deal with such phenomena.

The river ecosystem has survived for ca. 6,000

years with its natural habitats remarkably intact, and this makes it an important laboratory for investigating the long-term dynamics of marsh bird communities. Marsh birds in general have been poorly studied due to their

(Continued on page 2)

CONNECTICUT RIVER

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This extensive water plantain/bullhead lily community was present at the vast Cromwell Meadows tidal marsh but was otherwise absent from study sites.

“...freshwater tidal marsh communities remain largely unstudied, so opportunities for making new discoveries about their inhabitants are considerable.”

secretive nature and inhospitable habitats. In particular, freshwater tidal marsh communities remain largely unstudied, so opportunities for making new discoveries about their inhabitants are considerable.

In 1999–2000 (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/species-area.pdf>), we learned that larger marshes tended to accumulate larger numbers of bird species, including wider-ranging and rarer species. In addition, some small birds seemed not to recognize smaller sites as suitable habitats even though their vegetation appeared

identical to that at larger marshes. However, population densities were not greatly different between large and small sites.

Our observations this year are making us re-examine some of these earlier findings. Extended river flooding made some larger marshes unavailable for certain songbirds to occupy, so they abandoned them in favor of smaller sites that experienced less flooding. In the case of the Swamp Sparrow, birds established territories in a small marsh where they were typically absent. We

observed similar patterns during 1984 flooding, when some birds did not arrive at the breeding grounds until July. Still, even during the present study, rare species continued to occur primarily at larger marshes. Species like the Least and American bitterns occurred exclusively at large sites.

FOREST FRAGMENTATION STUDY PUBLISHED

“This is by far the largest, longest-term, most fully quantitative study ever undertaken on this topic.”



The Northern Cardinal, once a rarity in southern New England, is now a typical component of edge/successional forest bird communities.

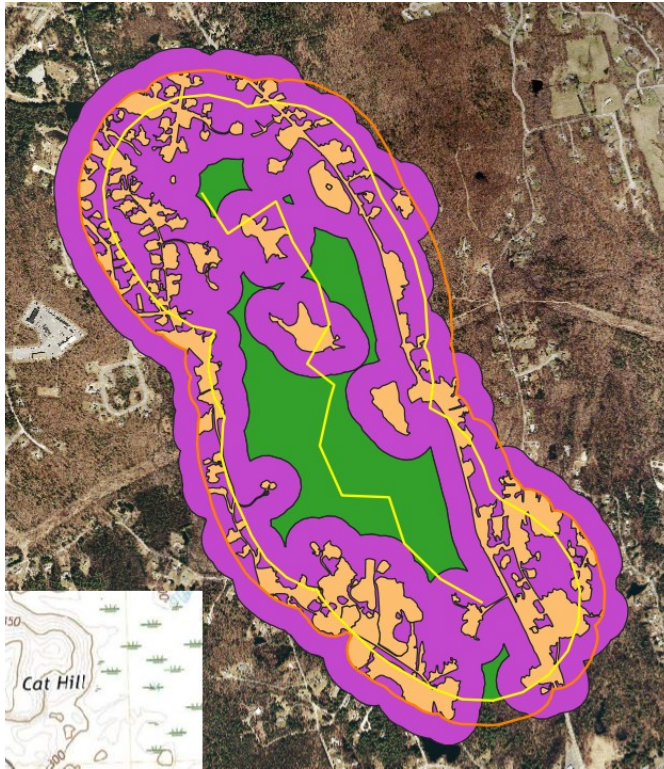
Our long-term studies into the effects on Connecticut's birds of forest fragmentation—the breakup of forest tracts into smaller pieces—have now been accepted for publication by the Ecological Society of America. The work should appear in print

over the next few months. In the interim, a revised preprint is available through the BCR website: https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/forest_fragmentation.pdf. This is by far the largest, longest-term, most fully quantitative study ever undertaken on this topic.

The study examines the entire forest ecosystem's bird communities, including those of mature interior forest and edge/successional habitats. Findings include that declines in bird community density occurred with increasing forest fragmentation. In contrast, the number of

FRAGMENTATION

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This study site (inside the orange line) in northeastern Rhode Island illustrates how highly fragmented forests are in this part of the state. Only the dark green portion of the image represents core forest (forest > 100 m from non-forest habitat).

species present was often more closely associated with local habitat conditions. Forest fragmentation did have the closest association with various summer community measures 81% of the time, strongly indicating that fragmentation effects were a predominant driver of community patterns. However, short-distance migrants, foraging generalists, edge/successional species, habitat generalists and Brown-headed Cowbirds showed little relationship

to fragmentation.

Despite the importance of fragmentation effects, community measures and individual species often tended to be more closely associated with habitat conditions than with fragmentation. In addition, few summer or winter community measures showed any significant relationships with natural forest breaks as opposed to human-associated forest breaks.

At present, we are in the process of comparing results from this study

with those for forest birds in neighboring Rhode Island. Even though Rhode Island is densely populated and has many highly fragmented forests, such as the one in the image above, it still has extensive tracts of unbroken forest in the western part of the state.

“At present, we are in the process of comparing results of this study with those for forest birds in neighboring Rhode Island.”

PACIFIC ISLAND BIRDS: LIFE HISTORIES



An upcoming life history study will be of the little-known Mariana Fruit Dove.

We have now completed six life history studies of otherwise largely unknown Pacific island bird species. These include the world's most endangered crow, the Mariana Crow (https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/Mariana_Crow_bow.pdf), the Micronesian Rufous Fantail (https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/rufous_fantail.pdf), Bridled White-eye (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/bridledwhite-eye.pdf>), Golden White-eye (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/goldenwhite-eye.pdf>), Saipan Reed Warbler

(www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/reed-warblerBNA.pdf) and Rota White-eye (<https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/rotawhite-eyebirdsoftheworld.pdf>).

In progress now is our life history study of the Micronesian Myzomela, a species in the Australasian honeyeater family that is similarly known only poorly. Remaining species to be investigated include the Mariana Fruit Dove (above) and White-throated Ground Dove. The myzomela is found on several Pacific island chains, although the doves are both endemic to the Mariana Islands of the western Pacific.

The life history studies detail each species' systematics, breeding biology, molts and plumages, behavior, habitat use, populations and conservation biology.

“The life history studies detail each species’ systematics, breeding biology, molts and plumages, behavior, habitat use, populations and conservation biology.”

The Newsletter of
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The Spotted Sandpiper is a rare but regular component of the Connecticut River's tidal marsh bird community.

MEMBERSHIP

It is time to renew your membership for 2025. 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 for 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>.