

BIRD CONSERVATION

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FOREST FRAGMENTATION STUDY NOW PUBLISHED



This view from West Rock looking toward New Haven illustrates one of the categories of forest breaks: human-associated ones related to urban development and agriculture.

After a long process of editorial review, our long-term studies into the effects of forest fragmentation on bird communities will soon be available in the Ecological Society of America's

Ecosphere. When posted, it will be at: 2025;e70378; <https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.70378>. The preprint can be viewed at https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/forest_fragmentation.pdf.

Ecosphere is an open access journal, so it will be freely available to all.

We have been highlighting some of the study's many findings in

(Continued on page 2)

FOREST FRAGMENTATION -CONTINUED

“...wintering birds were far less affected by fragmentation than their summer counterparts.”



The Gray Catbird is a fairly common inhabitant of forest openings in summer and a rarer inhabitant of such places in winter.

the last few issues of *Bird Conservation*, but there are still a number more to share. One of the unique features of this study is that it examined fragmentation effects not just during the breeding season but also in winter.

Winter field studies in Connecticut's forests are particularly challenging so few are performed. During this study, winter temperatures dropped to -15° F on occasion and snow depths could exceed three feet. Ice also proved a particular problem, especially when it coated steep slopes upon which survey points were located. Standard

equipment for winter surveys was, therefore, snow shoes and crampons. Avoiding frostbite also was an ongoing issue on especially cold mornings, as mittens had to be removed in order to record details of observations.

Despite the challenges, winter surveys shed important light on how winter birds respond to forest fragmentation compared with those of summer. Few species are able to overwinter in Connecticut, and most species that do may be categorized as generalists.

Consequently, wintering birds are far less affected by fragmentation than their summer counterparts. Some species actually show population increases with increased fragmentation.

MARSH BIRD STUDIES

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



Despite river flooding persisting into early June, this freshwater tidal marsh in Portland was home to Soras for only the second time.

Our long-term studies into the community ecology of the Connecticut River's freshwater tidal marshes are complete for this year but much remains to be done. During the next season, we plan to visit still additional sites to compare observations at them to those from the last two years. We also have much work to do concerning mapping the distribution of plant

communities at our study sites. We have some evidence that the types of plants found in marshes can affect the types of birds inhabiting them.

The principal types of plant communities present include especially those dominated by River Bulrush. Much of the background in the above photo falls into this category. In the foreground, still another

association dominated by Tussock Sedge can be seen. In the deeper water along the tidal creek and pond in the background, floating-leaved plants like Pickerelweed and Bullhead Lily predominate. In the right background of the photo, a stand of the tall, non-native and invasive Common Reed can be seen. To the left of this photo, a stand of the tall, native Narrow-leaved Cattail is found. Still other communities include

MARSH BIRDS

-CONTINUED



By late summer, Red-winged Blackbirds flocks congregate in freshwater tidal marshes to feast on wild rice.

those dominated by Water Horsetail and Sweet Flag.

Less visible during the height of the bird breeding season is the native annual grass Wild Rice, shown in the photo above. It grows in the same wetter environments as floating-leaved plants and is widespread in freshwater tidal marshes along the river. By late summer, it provides an abundant food source for a variety of bird species, including the Red-winged Blackbird, which in the

photo can be seen feeding on its seeds.

Another species well-known for feeding on wild rice is the secretive and seldom seen Sora, which was absent from study sites last year but which appeared at two this summer. It occurs only infrequently in freshwater tidal marshes, although we have found it in these habitats in Portland and Cromwell. It is more typical of non-tidal freshwater marshes near the Connecticut River, although it becomes a common migrant through

tidal marshes in fall.

Unlike the Sora, the also secretive Virginia Rail is a fairly regular inhabitant of freshwater and even brackish tidal marshes. In this study, we found them in Lyme, Deep River, East Haddam, Cromwell and Portland. It even can inhabit some of the smaller freshwater marshes along the river.

“Another species well-known for feeding on wild rice is the secretive and seldom seen Sora.”

CONNECTICUT'S CHANGING FORESTS



The Mockernut Hickory is a characteristic species of coastal forests.

Uncommon inland but rather common toward the coast, the Mockernut Hickory is still another southerly-distributed species that may be poised to expand its populations in Connecticut's forests. It and other coastal-associated species that have been highlighted here are likely being released from climate-associated phenomena like minimum winter temperature viability.

The Tulip Poplar is one species that already has

expanded its populations across the state. One of the more primitive of Connecticut's flowering trees, it produces enormous numbers of seeds that are easily dispersed by animals and even by wind. It can grow to considerable size quickly.

As forests change in response to a moderating climate as well as to diseases and pests of tree species like American Beech and White Ash, we may expect to see forest bird communities evolve. Several of our recent

studies have documented considerable long-term changes occurring in our forest birds: https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/NECT_forest_birds_publication.pdf and https://www.birdconservationresearch.org/pdf/Yale_Forest.pdf.

“Several of our recent studies have already documented considerable long-term changes occurring in our forest bird communities.”

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The Great Black-backed Gull, although still a summer resident along the Connecticut River, is not nearly as widespread as it was in the 1970s.

MEMBERSHIP

There is still time to renew your membership for 2025. If you have not yet become a member, you may do so online through [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/f/1nqlss)

(<https://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/>