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Connecticut River Studies Continue

Although comparatively small, the Whalebone Cove marsh complex has a mixture of open water, tidal flats and marsh that is appealing to a variety of water and wading birds.

The Connecticut River is lined with a series of large tidal and non-tidal marshes from near its mouth to nearly the Massachusetts border. These river marshes have been a focus of bird study since 1974, and this long-term perspective has given us a view of habitat associations and population trends among some of the state's least known bird species.

Because marshes tend to be rather inhospitable environments, studying the birds that live within them is particularly challenging. Seasonal and tidal flooding, deep mud and dense vegetation make

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TIDAL MARSHES -CONTINUED

In 1974, a single pair of infertile Ospreys was present on the entire Connecticut River. After the close of the DDT era, birds repopulated and are now numerous and widespread, with over 1000 nests present in Connecticut.

"...ongoing studies this year will be aimed at locating some of the state's most secretive and poorly documented species."

conducting surveys and making observations on their secretive inhabitants difficult.

During the course of these studies, species like the American Black Duck have gone from being widespread at most sites to being largely restricted to brackish portions of the river. During summer 1974–1994 studies of birds observed/10 hr, there were 8.0 in 1974, 6.1 in 1983–1984, 4.8 in 1986–1987 and 1.9 in 1994. Since the 1990s, birds have been completely absent from freshwater study sites until in 2025 a pair reappeared at Cromwell Meadows in Cromwell. Indeed, there is now independent evidence that the species is beginning to reclaim some of its lost Connecticut range.

This year's ongoing studies will be aimed at locating some of the state's most secretive and poorly documented species. Last summer and fall, efforts were directed at locating members of the rail family—a group of birds that rarely fly and infrequently vocalize. Our efforts in the fall demonstrated that large numbers of some of these species, particularly the elusive Sora, migrate unseen through these marshes from August through November. Breeding birds of several rail species also occupied some of our study sites.

Forest Birds of Rhode Island

Rhode Island forests have to a large extent developed on glacial sand and gravel, which has led to species like Pitch Pine being comparatively common there.

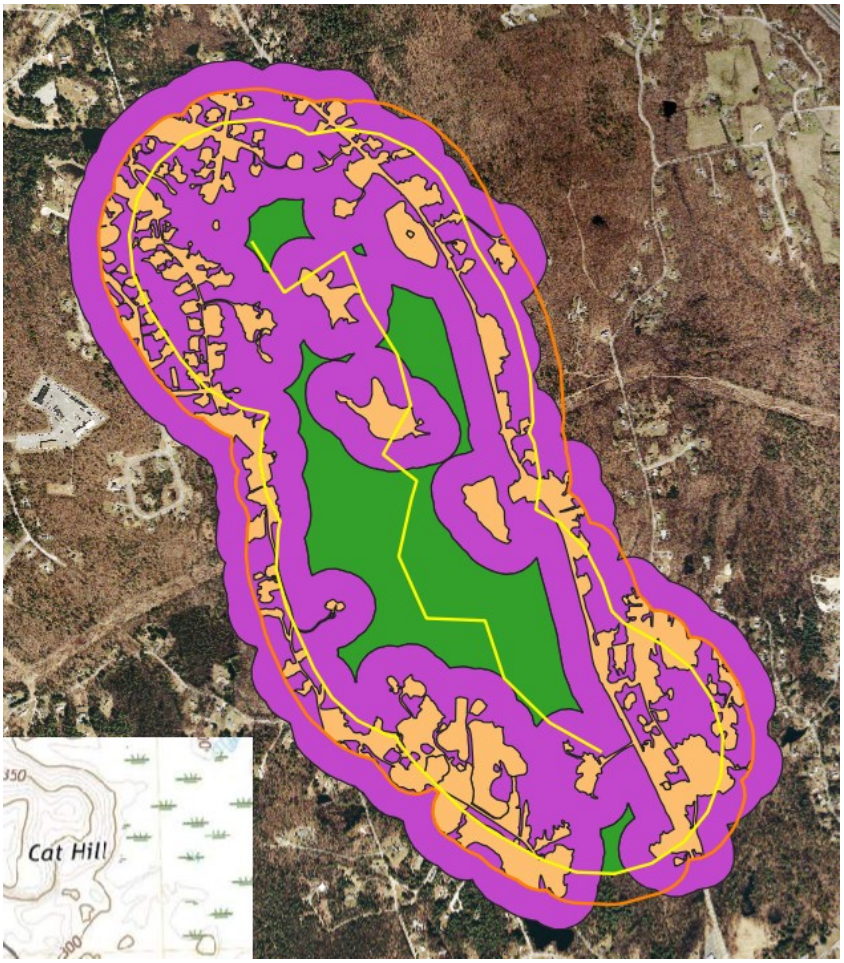
"Despite being directly adjacent to Connecticut, Rhode Island's forests exhibit some distinct differences from those in most of Connecticut."

As part of our large scale investigations into the effects of forest fragmentation on bird populations, we are presently examining how Rhode Island birds are being affected by fragmentation effects. We are using data from our Rhode Island forest bird surveys as a check on results we obtained for Connecticut birds.

Despite being directly adjacent to Connecticut, Rhode Island's forests exhibit some distinct differences from those in most of Connecticut. A greater proportion of Rhode Island is covered with nutrient poor glacial sand and gravel compared with Connecticut. This has led to more widespread development of forests that are characteristic of dry coastal plain environments, as sand and gravel do not hold water well.

Conifers are particularly widespread in Rhode Island's forests, including the Pitch Pine, which is a poor site specialist. It is joined in forests by Eastern White Pine, which also tolerates poor soils. Other evergreens like the American Holly and Smooth Holly are widespread understory trees and shrubs, particularly in southern Rhode Island. Even wetter sites have tree species more characteristic of coastal plain environments. Species like the Atlantic

Rhode Island Birds -*Continued*



This study site in North Smithfield, RI illustrates how little core forest (green areas) exits at many highly suburbanized locations.

White-cedar and American Rhododendron may be found in these environments.

Such differences between Connecticut and Rhode Island forests lead to changes in the types of birds found in them. Species like the Blackburnian Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler and Red-breasted Nuthatch are particularly widespread in Rhode Island. Hence, these sorts of differences provide an opportunity to assess the generality of conclusions reached about forest fragmentation in Connecticut. We are asking questions like, do forest bird species respond similarly to having their forest environments broken into smaller pieces, or do changes in species composition change the community's response to fragmentation?

"… differences between Connecticut and Rhode Island forests lead to changes in the types of birds found in these forests."

More Island Bird Studies Now Available

The Mariana Fruit Dove has proven that it is capable of colonizing new islands far from existing populations.

Our efforts to produce life history studies for some of the United States' most poorly known species have now yielded seven reports. These include the Pacific island-inhabiting Rota White-eye, Bridled White-eye, Golden White-eye, Saipan Reed Warbler, Mariana Crow, Micronesian Rufous Fantail and, most recently, Micronesian Myzomela. All are published through Cornell University's Birds of the World initiative, which may be found at: https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/ home.

A number of species remain to be examined in detail. These include the Mariana Fruit Dove (above), White-throated Ground Dove, Mariana Kingfisher, Micronesian Megapode, Micronesian Starling and Tinian Monarch.

The life histories review all aspects of the species biology: systematics, molts and plumages, distribution, habitats, vocalizations, behavior, food/foraging, populations and conservation. In many cases, little is published about these topics, so we must consult our own field notes to fill in gaps in our knowledge.

Our next efforts will be directed toward investigation of the two species of doves, which have received little study other than periodic population surveys.

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The Herring Gull has greatly declined as a summer resident along the Connecticut River.

MEMBERSHIP

It is time to renew your membership for 2026. If you have not yet become a member, you may do so online through GoFundMe (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/membership.php.