

## Maine Audubon Lists 22 of the Most Important Places in Maine for Vulnerable Birds

Birds find Maine attractive for many of the same reasons we do—the state offers a unique blend of landscapes spanning from mountains to the sea, with forests, grasslands, rivers, marshes, and long coastlines in between. Where we find beautiful places to hike and kayak, camp and relax, birds find the habitat they need for their survival.

But while Maine’s diverse habitats serve an important role for over 400 bird species—some threatened, endangered, or of regional conservation concern—the state’s not immune to a growing list of threats that puts these birds at further risk. Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation due to development, toxins such as mercury and lead, oil spills on the coast and inland waters, and climate change are top among them.

In the face of these threats, a crucial step in conserving Maine’s birds is to identify the areas of the state that are most important for breeding, wintering, and migration. After several years of working toward that goal, Maine Audubon has recently completed the first phase of its Important Bird Areas (IBA) program, identifying 22 areas across Maine that are vital to state—and even global—bird populations.



MIKE FAHEY



HANS TOOM



ERIC HYNES

Eight of the rare birds used to identify IBAs in Maine (clockwise from left): Short-eared owl, black-throated blue warbler, least tern, common moorhen, scarlet tanager, harlequin duck, saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow, and razorbill.

### Important Bird Areas in Maine

(Note: Several sites make up each IBA)

#### Batson River IBA

Batson River, Sampson Cove

#### Cape Elizabeth IBA

Great Pond, Spurwink River

#### Casco Bay Islands IBA

Flag Island, Jenny Island, Mark Island, Outer Green Island, Upper Green Island

#### Deer Isle IBA

Hardhead Island, Scraggy Island, Scraggy Ledge, Shabby Island, Shingle Island

#### Duck Islands IBA

Great Duck Island, Little Duck Island

#### Freeport/Brunswick IBA

Brunswick Naval Air Station, Maquoit Bay, Harraseeket River

#### Gerrish Island IBA

Fort Foster, Portsmouth Harbor

#### Greater Isle au Haut IBA

Isle au Haut, Great Spoon Island, Little Spoon Islands, John’s Island, Heron Island, Spirit Ledge, The Cowpens/Whitehorse Island/White and Green Ledges

#### Intervale Marshes IBA

Morgan Meadow Wildlife Management Area

#### Isle of Shoals IBA

Appledore/Smuttynose/Duck Islands

#### Kennebunk Plains IBA

The Plains

#### Lower Kennebec IBA

Bates-Morse Mountain Conservation Area, Popham Beach State Park, Reid State Park

#### Machias Bay IBA

Machias Bay, Sprague Neck, Old Man Island, Libby Islands

#### Milbridge to Addison IBA

Narraguagus River and Bay/Back Bay, Mill River/Flat Bay/Blasket Point, Harrington River/Pleasant River, West River/Indian River

#### Mount Desert IBA

Mount Desert Narrows, Bass Harbor Marsh, Egg Rock, Ship Island/Trumpet Island/Barge Ledges, The Thrumcap

#### Muscongus Bay IBA

Hog Island, Wreck Island/Franklin Island, Eastern Egg Rock

#### Outer Penobscot Bay IBA

Matinicus Rock, Metinic Island, Seal Island

#### Petit Manan IBA

Green Island, Petit Manan Island, Jordan’s Delight, Over Point, Trafton Island

#### Scarborough IBA

Scarborough Marsh Wildlife Management Area, Western Beach, Pine Point Beach, Higgins Beach, Stratton Island

#### Thomaston IBA

Marblehead Island, Weskeag Marsh

#### Upper Penobscot Bay IBA

Belfast Harbor, Flat Island, Howard Mendall Wildlife Management Area, Sandy Point Wildlife Management Area, Penobscot River near Bucksport/Fort Knox

#### Wells IBA

Crescent Surf Beach, Laudholm Beach, Marginal Way, Mousam River, Rachel Carson/Webhannet/Wells Bay salt marshes

Next stage of project to focus on identifying northern forest IBAs.



Maine IBA Criteria

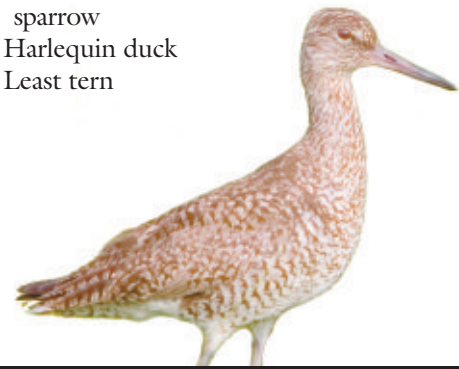
Three primary criteria were used to evaluate possible IBAs during the first phase of IBA identification.

1. Threatened and Endangered Species

Areas that regularly support birds listed as endangered or threatened at either the state or federal level. Areas ideally include at least 1 percent of the state population in a season, or are one of the three to five areas in the state with the highest regularly occurring numbers.

Species include:

- American pipit
- Arctic tern
- Atlantic puffin
- Bald eagle
- Black tern
- Golden eagle
- Grasshopper sparrow
- Harlequin duck
- Least tern
- Peregrine falcon
- Piping plover
- Razorbill
- Roseate tern
- Sedge wren
- Upland sandpiper



2. Species of Conservation Concern

Areas that regularly support species of conservation concern due to vulnerable and/or declining populations, either locally, regionally, or globally. Areas ideally have at least 25 breeding pairs, 5 percent or more of the state population, or are one of the two or three areas in the state with the highest regularly occurring numbers.

Species include:

- |                                |                               |                                |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| American coot                  | Cooper’s hawk                 | Red-necked phalarope           |
| American three-toed woodpecker | Dunlin                        | Red-shouldered hawk            |
| American woodcock              | Eastern meadowlark            | Ruddy turnstone                |
| Baltimore oriole               | Eastern screech-owl           | Rusty blackbird                |
| Barrow’s goldeneye             | Eastern towhee                | Saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow |
| Bay-breasted warbler           | Field sparrow                 | Scarlet tanager                |
| Bicknell’s thrush              | Great cormorant               | Short-billed dowitcher         |
| Black-billed cuckoo            | Laughing gull                 | Short-eared owl                |
| Blackburnian warbler           | Leach’s storm-petrel          | Vesper sparrow                 |
| Black-crowned night-heron      | Least bittern                 | Whimbrel                       |
| Black-throated blue warbler    | Loggerhead shrike             | Whip-poor-will                 |
| Blue-winged warbler            | Long-eared owl                | Willet                         |
| Bobolink                       | Louisiana waterthrush         | Wood thrush                    |
| Canada warbler                 | Nelson’s sharp-tailed sparrow | Yellow rail                    |
| Cape May warbler               | Northern goshawk              | Yellow-throated vireo          |
| Chestnut-sided warbler         | Northern harrier              |                                |
| Common moorhen                 | Olive-sided flycatcher        |                                |
| Common tern                    | Orchard oriole                |                                |
|                                | Prairie warbler               |                                |
|                                | Purple sandpiper              |                                |

3. Substantial Concentrations of Birds or High Species Diversity

Areas that regularly support high concentrations of one or more species at some point during the year. Sites should meet suggested thresholds for water birds, seabirds, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors, or migratory land-birds. Areas that do not meet thresholds can be considered if they have exceptional concentration, diversity, or unique combination of bird life compared to other areas.



JOHN MORESSO



CHARLES WARREN



USFWS

About IBAs

An IBA is a location that provides important habitat for one or more species of breeding, wintering, or migrating birds. The program focuses on birds of conservation concern, large concentrations of birds, and birds associated with unique or exceptional habitats.

BirdLife International started the IBA program as an effort to identify globally important bird areas. Coordinating with Audubon in the U.S., 48 states have started IBA programs, developing criteria and identifying sites important to birds in their states. To date, over 2,000 IBAs have been recognized in the United States.

Work on Maine’s IBA program started in 2001. Maine Audubon, along with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, formed a technical committee of over a dozen birders, biologists, and state agency representatives to develop IBA criteria. Drawing from extensive birder observations and compiling existing state and federal bird survey data, the team then assembled a database of potential IBAs.

Next, committee members spent more than a year weighing the candidates against criteria to see if they met population thresholds for threatened and endangered species, species of conservation concern, and large concentrations of birds, particularly raptors, water birds, and migratory land birds. They finalized the initial list of the 22 most

important areas after the difficult process of comparing and prioritizing sites.

“At this stage we focused on identifying the most important spots along the coast and major wetlands in southern and central Maine,” said Maine Audubon biologist Susan Gallo, who headed the project. “We have islands and shorelines, as well as coastal wetlands, which are really critical to a number of species, especially migrating shorebirds and seabirds.”

Gallo said the next stage is to work on identifying IBAs in northern forest habitats.

Pending a review by a national committee, several Maine IBAs could be classified as globally important. Sites on the Batson and lower Kennebec rivers and in Cape Elizabeth, Freeport, Wells, and Scarborough Marsh met global population thresholds for piping plover and saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow. Gerrish Island and Scarborough Marsh are also being considered for their importance to the declining rusty blackbird, as is the Isle au Haut IBA for harlequin duck.

“Having an IBA program in Maine benefits the state in a few ways,” Gallo said. IBAs help prioritize conservation efforts, complement existing conservation programs, like Beginning with Habitat Focus Areas and designated Significant Wildlife Habitat, and include regionally important species not covered by other programs.



PAUL GARRITY



STELLA WALSH



Piping plover



**A cornerstone  
of the IBA  
program is  
citizen  
engagement.**

## Engaging Citizens

“What really makes the IBA program a good match for Maine Audubon is that it’s a great avenue for engaging the public, which is something we are always trying to do,” Gallo said. “It shows people that the special places they care about in Maine are also important for birds.”

Audubon’s National IBA Program Director John Cecil couldn’t agree more. “We see this as a locally driven, grassroots, bottom-up process,” he said. “Local engagement is a cornerstone of the IBA program’s success in the United States.”

With a goal of someday having 3,000 IBAs across the country, the IBA program is a pillar of Audubon’s bird conservation work, Cecil said. “Many of these are places everyone in the country has a chance to see. If we can engage people in conserving their local places, then we can get them to think about the bigger picture.”

The IBA program offers an important resource to conservation activists on the ground, said Jillian Liner, director of bird conservation for Audubon New York. New York’s IBA program has been up and running for over 10 years, and includes 136 IBAs with publicly and privately owned habitat from the Adirondacks to Central Park.

“IBAs may not be regulatory, but they’ve proved to

be influential in furthering land-protection efforts and helping to pass important legislative policies in New York,” said Liner, including a state bird conservation area program.

Liner said that when a large development was proposed near a Hudson River IBA, a local Audubon chapter became involved, studying the development’s impacts to short-eared owl habitat. IBA information was critical in mobilizing the members and convincing the state to protect core areas of the IBA, she said.

“In New York the program has really been successful and has a lot of support from local residents and conservation partners,” said Liner, hoping to expand the program to work with private landowners proactively to improve and ensure protection of IBAs.

## Next Steps

Similarly, Maine Audubon plans to use IBAs as a foundation to engage the public, work with landowners, and encourage responsible land management.

**Next steps for the program include:**

- Using GIS models to identify northern forest IBAs.
- Coordinating IBA monitoring programs to get birders on the ground to record observations that can be posted on a Web database.

- Expanding the IBA list to include private lands where landowners want to work closely with Maine Audubon to manage for bird conservation.
- Developing conservation plans for IBAs that prioritize management for bird habitat.
- Gathering more baseline data to identify additional IBAs.

“Identifying IBAs is an ongoing process and this is simply the first step,” said Gallo. “There’s still a lot of important work to do from here.”

## Maine and Birds

As a lifelong birder, longtime Penobscot Valley Audubon officer, and Maine House of Representatives member serving on the Natural Resources Committee, Bob Duchesne knows well how important Maine is to birds, and birds are to Maine.

When it comes to birds, what makes Maine a special place is its unique combination of boreal forests and coastal waters, Duchesne said. There aren’t many states where both boreal warblers and pelagic species find the places they need to breed. But as in other states, he said, inappropriate development puts pressure on these habitats.

The value of protecting birds in Maine is both economic and personal, Duchesne said. As the creator of the Maine Birding Trail, he points to the rise of nature-based tourism and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report that found wildlife watching is outpacing hunting and fishing for outdoor recreation in Maine.

“To protect birds you have to identify the places that need protecting,” said Duchesne.

*Maine Audubon’s IBA work is supported in part by grants from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, the William P. Wharton Trust, and the Margaret E. Burnham Charitable Trust.*

## IBA in Focus: Maine’s Scarborough Marsh, Global IBA Candidate

**Habitat:** As the state’s largest contiguous salt-marsh (about 3,000 acres), Scarborough Marsh supports a wide variety of flora and fauna. Fed by three rivers, the rich waters of the marsh are important to a number of breeding wading birds.

**Bird Species:** The marsh supports arguably the most significant breeding habitat in the state for Nelson’s and salt-marsh sharp-tailed sparrows, making it eligible as a globally Important Bird Area. Least bitterns breed in the freshwater wetlands surrounding the marsh and many species of wading birds can be seen feeding in the large salt panne complexes. Wading birds in the network of tidal creeks during breeding season include glossy ibis, American oystercatcher, great blue and little blue heron, and snowy and great egret. The marsh also provides feeding habitat for migrating shorebirds,

including whimbrels, short- and long-billed dowitchers, dunlin, least and semipalmated sandpipers, and greater yellowlegs. Several threatened or endangered species, including piping plover, roseate tern, arctic tern, least tern, and peregrine falcon, have been recorded at the marsh.

**Conservation Issues:** Human impact has long been an issue at Scarborough Marsh, which is located near some of the most heavily developed and fastest-growing communities in southern Maine. State and federal agencies and other partners are working to restore tidal flow and control the spread of invasive species. Recent research on sharp-tailed sparrows at the site revealed high levels of mercury, suggesting that human activities around the marsh are having an impact on the site’s ecology.

*Maine Audubon operates Scarborough Marsh Audubon Center May through September.*



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