

The Connecticut Lakes Headwaters Important Bird Area

The New Hampshire Important Bird Area Program is part of a national and international effort to identify areas that provide critical habitat to birds during some stage of their annual cycle. In New Hampshire the program is a partnership of the Audubon Society of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, and the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. IBAs are identified based on strict scientific criteria, including 1) the presence of threatened or endangered species, 2) other species and habitats of conservation concern, and 3) areas where birds congregate during breeding, migration, or winter. It is hoped that recognition of IBAs can help guide future conservation and research efforts at areas that meet these criteria.

The Connecticut Lakes Headwaters meet categories 1 and 2 of the IBA criteria, as follows:

1) Endangered and threatened species

Although no species on the state threatened and endangered list is widespread in the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters area, several are known to breed there. These include Pied-billed Grebe (see below), Osprey, Northern Harrier (irregular), and American Three-toed Woodpecker (see below). Common Loons nest on the Connecticut Lakes themselves, which with the exception of Third Lake are not currently part of the IBA.

2) Other species and habitats of conservation concern

Two broadly defined habitats provide much of the justification for calling the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters an IBA: wetlands and lowland conifer forest. Wetlands in the region range from bogs and emergent marshes to shrub-lined streams and beaver flowages, and provide habitat for many sensitive marsh birds. East Inlet and Scotts Bog in the northeastern corner of the IBA are historically one of the more reliable locations for Pied-billed Grebes in the state, and each wetland may have supported a pair in 2005.

American Black Ducks, American Bitterns, and Wilson's Snipe are more widespread wetland species found in the IBA. Where wetlands start to grade into forest, one finds habitat for some of the species for which the Connecticut Lakes area is famous among birders. Rusty Blackbirds are fairly common in shrubby wetlands and along streams throughout the IBA, and perhaps reach their highest densities in the state here. Spruce Grouse, American Three-toed Woodpeckers, and Olive-sided Flycatchers will variously use bogs and old beaver wetlands, as well as more upland forests.

It is these uplands that define the IBA away from water. While much of the Connecticut Lakes region was historically spruce-fir forest, heavy logging has resulted in a higher proportion of hardwoods in recent decades.

Lowland conifer forest still persists, however, along the streams and in the northern and eastern parts of the IBA. It is in these forests that birders come for such boreal species as Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers, in addition to some of the species mentioned previously. Although they didn't strongly influence the IBA nomination, it should be noted that Pittsburg in general is one of the more reliable spots in New Hampshire for winter finches, particularly Pine Grosbeaks and White-winged Crossbills, even when these birds don't venture into more southerly areas of the state.



For the purposes of the NH IBA Program, the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters IBA occurs entirely within the town of Pittsburg. It includes the extensive forested areas along the Canadian border and to the east of First and Second Lakes, and extends south in two narrow fingers along Indian and Perry Streams in the west. Roughly half of it is

within the Connecticut Lakes Natural Area, which is protected by the NH Fish and Game Department. Most of the rest is protected by easement, although active timber operations will continue. Because of this mix of protected area and well-managed working forest, the IBA faces relatively few threats beyond those that originate outside its boundaries such as mercury or acid deposition.

For more information on the New Hampshire Important Bird Area Program, contact:

Pam Hunt
Audubon Society of New Hampshire
3 Silk Farm Road
Concord, NH 03301

(603) 224-9909 extension 328

email: phunt@nhaudubon.org



More details on the IBA Program are also available on the N.H. Audubon web site.

