

The Deer Hill Wildlife Management Area 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 Deer Hill Wildlife Management Area meets categories 1-3 of the IBA criteria, as follows:

1) Threatened and endangered species

Five pairs of the state-threatened Pied-billed Grebe bred at this IBA in each of the years 2006-2008. This is by far the largest concentration in the state, and may represent close to half of New Hampshire's total population of this species. The Deer Hill grebe population uses the seven vegetated ponds that form the core of this artificial wetland.



2) Other species and habitats of conservation concern

In addition to its wetlands (see above and below), Deer Hill contains extensive areas of early successional habitat. Many of the birds associated with such brushy areas are showing steep population declines across the Northeast, making places like this IBA potentially important in their long-term conservation. Priority species at Deer Hill include American Woodcock, Black-billed Cuckoo, Brown Thrasher, Blue-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Field Sparrow. Other common birds using this habitat in large numbers include Eastern Kingbird, Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and Song Sparrow.

3) Congregatory species

Although Deer Hill doesn't support large numbers of migrant waterfowl like nearby Powwow Pond and Great Bay, it does receive extensive use by Ring-necked Ducks (maximum of 190) in spring, and is also used by Canada Geese, Mallards, Wood Ducks, and Hooded Mergansers (all of which also breed). There is a 15-nest Great Blue Heron colony in one of the wetlands. Solitary Sandpipers and Wilson's Snipe can be fairly common when water levels are low. During spring and fall, shrubby areas can hold dozens of migrant songbirds, including the common breeders and species from farther north such as Yellow-rumped and Palm Warblers.

For the purposes of the NH IBA Program, Deer Hill Wildlife Management Area IBA is bounded by Route 101 on the north, Deer Hill Road on the southwest, and developed areas along Pine Road on the south and east. Perhaps the most pressing issue to face this IBA is the eventual succession of both the upland and wetland habitats to stages that are less suitable for priority species. Future management for shrubland is planned by the NH Fish and Game Department, but it will also be important to consider water level management to maintain suitable habitat for Pied-billed Grebes.

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

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