

The Ossipee Pine Barrens 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 Ossipee Pine Barrens meet categories 1 and 2 of the IBA criteria, as follows:

1) Endangered and threatened species

Common Nighthawk – Although the actual nighthawk population in the pine barrens is not known, surveys in 2004 detected at least 3 individuals. Even as a minimum estimate, this is the 1st or 2nd highest population in the state, and certainly the largest number of birds using a natural area (rather than urban rooftops).

2) Other species and habitats of conservation concern

The Ossipee Pine Barrens are the largest remaining example of their habitat type in New Hampshire. In addition to rare plants, insects, and natural communities, several birds reach high densities here. Of these, the species of highest priority is the Whip-poor-will. Although Whip-poor-wills occur in a variety of forest types, densities may be highest in pine barrens. Surveys in most of the IBA area in 2004 detected at least 30 calling males, making this the densest known population in the state. Other birds characteristic of pine barrens that reach high densities in the Ossipee area include Field Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, and Prairie Warbler. Vesper Sparrows occur in small numbers at the edges of airstrips or other open areas.



For the purposes of the NH IBA Program, the Ossipee Pine Barrens IBA is defined as approximately the area known to have been pine barrens prior to extensive human alteration of the landscape. Much of this area is obviously no longer suitable, but it has been included to reflect the ecological history of the area. Pine barrens ecosystems depend on fire for their long-term survival, and one conservation goal for the Ossipee region is to implement a program of prescribed burns to mimic natural processes. This, in combination with continued land protection by The Nature Conservancy and other conservation partners, is critical if the Ossipee Pine Barrens and their avifauna are to be maintained as a viable ecosystem.

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.