

The Pawtuckaway Highlands 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 Pawtuckaway Highlands meet category 2 of the IBA criteria, as follows:

2) Other species and habitats of conservation concern

Pawtuckaway is one of the largest unfragmented forest blocks in southeastern New Hampshire, and might qualify as an IBA for this reason alone. However, it is perhaps better known for the unique assemblage of bird species that regularly breed there. Topping the list is Cerulean Warbler, a species of special concern in NH. Pawtuckaway is the only place in the state where this species breeds regularly, and an atlas project in 2002 detected 5 singing males. Other common birds in the area's hardwood, pine/oak, and hemlock forests include Red-shouldered Hawk, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Least Flycatcher (abundant), Red-eyed Vireo, Veery, Wood Thrush, Blackburnian Warbler, American Redstart (abundant), Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Scarlet Tanager, and Purple Finch.



Pawtuckaway is also well-known for its mix of species with both northern and southern affinities. From the south are birds like Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Acadian Flycatcher (rare but regular), while northern species include Evening Grosbeak, Northern Parula, Common Raven, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The area's wetlands, while not exceptionally diverse, support small numbers of Wood Ducks, American Black Ducks, and Hooded Mergansers, and there is at least one small Great Blue Heron colony in one of the numerous beaver wetlands.

For the purposes of the NH IBA Program, the Pawtuckaway Highlands IBA is tentatively defined as the high areas within a half mile buffer of the 500 foot contour around the Pawtuckaway Mountains. This boundary includes Adams Hill and other highlands to the northwest that currently lack supporting bird data. It also includes wetlands associated with Mountain Brook, Dead Pond, and Round Pond, and the scrubland habitat under the powerlines west of Pawtuckaway State Park. The core of the IBA remains the State Park, and as such there is a reasonable degree of protection for its unique avifauna. In addition, Pawtuckaway is host to several rare plants and natural communities.

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.