

Update on the New Hampshire Important Bird Area Program

by Pamela Hunt

New Hampshire's Important Bird Area (IBA) Program began in 2002 as a partnership among New Hampshire Audubon, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, and the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. It is part of a national and international effort to identify those areas that provide critical habitat to birds at any stage of their annual cycle. The program is coordinated in the United States by the National Audubon Society.

Since its inception, the New Hampshire IBA program has identified 15 IBAs (see map) ranging from the Seacoast to the northern tip of the state. These IBAs recognize three broad categories of sites:

- 1) Locations used by threatened and endangered species (e.g., tern colonies, loon lakes)
- 2) Important habitats for species of conservation concern (e.g., grasslands, salt marshes)
- 3) Places where large numbers of birds congregate during the non-breeding season (e.g., coastal mudflats, river corridors)

The following is a list of all currently identified IBAs in New Hampshire and the predominant reasons that each site has been accepted into the IBA program.

- 1) Connecticut Lakes Headwaters (boreal and wetland birds)
- 2) Lake Umbagog (boreal and wetland birds, Bald Eagle, Common Loon, Osprey)
- 3) Pontook Reservoir (wetland birds, Osprey, Bald Eagle)
- 4) Pondicherry Basin (breeding waterfowl, forest and wetland birds)
- 5) High-elevation Spruce-Fir of the White Mountain National Forest (Bicknell's Thrush and other high-elevation conifer species)
- 6) Squam Lake (Common Loon, migrating waterfowl, Bald Eagle)
- 7) Ossipee Pine Barrens (Whip-poor-will, Eastern Towhee, and other pine barrens species)
- 8) Merrimack River Floodplain (migrating waterfowl, wintering eagles and waterfowl, floodplain forest species)
- 9) Concord Airport Grasslands (Grasshopper Sparrow and other grassland species)
- 10) Pawtuckaway Highlands (Cerulean Warbler and a rich assemblage of other forest species)
- 11) Powwow Pond (migrating waterfowl and other wetland birds)
- 12) Great Bay (wintering/migrating eagles and waterfowl, Osprey, saltmarsh sparrows)

- 13) Pease Grasslands (Upland Sandpiper and other grassland species)
- 14) Hampton-Seabrook Marsh and Dunes (breeding saltmarsh species, migrating shorebirds, Piping Plover)
- 15) Isles of Shoals (terns and other breeding seabirds, wintering waterfowl, Purple Sandpipers)

As the New Hampshire IBA program moves forward, there are still areas to evaluate. To help in this endeavor, we need data from the state's active birders. Much of that data is submitted to *New Hampshire Bird Records*, and as such it has been put to great use in justifying the recognition of our current IBAs. But there are plenty of places in the state that are visited significantly less often, and for which data are sorely needed. High on this list are most of the state's freshwater wetlands. Historical data indicate the presence of Pied-billed Grebes, Soras, and other scarce marsh birds at several sites in the central and southwestern parts of the state, but there are few current data with which to evaluate these areas for potential inclusion in the IBA program. For example, Cascade Marsh in Sutton may very well be the best site in the state for Pied-billed Grebe, but in recent years it has not been consistently visited during the breeding season. As such we are currently unsure how many grebes still nest there or how successful they have been. Without such information it is hard to justify including Cascade Marsh as an IBA.

Other habitats with similar data needs include waterfowl stopover sites along the Connecticut River, large forest blocks south of the White Mountains (e.g., Pisgah State Park in the southwest, or Bear Brook State Park in Allenstown), and locations of historic Cliff Swallow colonies. Members of the New Hampshire birding community can be of great assistance in collecting such data, simply by submitting data they already have or by making the effort to visit new places. Bird conservation has a long history of being supported from the "grassroots," and in New Hampshire those roots are the active birders and the birds they enjoy, seek out, and—most importantly—report. Forms for reporting are available on the *New Hampshire Bird Records* web site at www.nhbirdrecords.org, or from the Managing Editor.

Additional details on any of the sites identified so far are available from the author, who coordinates the IBA program for New Hampshire Audubon. Contact Pam Hunt at 603-224-9909 X328, or phunt@nhaudubon.org.

**Map of New Hampshire's
Important Bird Areas (April 2006).**

