



Afoot in the Field

RESOURCE FOR CONSERVATION LANDOWNERS



CHICKADEE; MARIE READ

I'VE ALWAYS ENVIED the advanced knowledge of birds (particularly identifying songbirds by their calls) that some of my friends, and many people connected to the Land Trust, have. I'm no great birder but, as someone who spends a lot of time outdoors, I've had my fair share of enjoyable bird encounters. My favorites are being startled by the whirring wings of a flushing ruffed grouse or woodcock; the tremolo of a screech owl at dawn; the bold night-time calls of barred owls that seem to be within earshot of almost every forested campsite; the eerie call of loons over calm lakes in the Adirondacks; watching the white rump of a harrier dart around over fields; watching pileated woodpeckers excavating huge holes in dead trees and even eating poison ivy berries; making "pishing" noises to call black-capped chickadees in close to me when sitting still in a tree-stand; and experiencing with my kids the great swirling and cacophony of hundreds of snow geese landing in farm fields near the lakes. It's no wonder that birds have captivated people throughout the ages!

The Finger Lakes region of NY is a great place to see, hear, and enjoy a large variety of birds. Some species are full-time residents of our temperate zone, while others migrate seasonally. The diversity of habitat on any given property and across our region translates into bird diversity. We hope that the joy of seeing and hearing birds is another way that landowners benefit from the properties that they live on and care for.

Chris Olney
Director of Stewardship



Birdwatching Benefits

BIRDWATCHING has always been a popular pastime, and in 2022 there were 96 million birders in the US according to *2022 Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis*. Birdwatching is popular for numerous reasons including its accessibility: you can birdwatch from your backyard or a



park, and birding requires minimal equipment beyond a pair of binoculars. People also enjoy the beautiful colors, unique songs, and the challenge of finding different bird species. Birdwatching can also be a great activity no matter your age. Birdwatching promotes spending time outside and can help create community groups.



From top: Savannah Sparrow in a grassland; Lang Elliott. FLLT birding event at Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve during the 2022 Latino Conservation Week; Julia de Aragon.

Birdwatching can help propel conservation efforts as it fosters a connection to nature and motivates people to protect bird habitats. Data collected through birdwatching helps conservation groups and scientists determine where key species are located, where species are not, and where birds are traveling. It can help determine what birds are in more need of protection and can show what areas are most likely to provide the best bird habitat.

WHERE TO START?

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has numerous resources, including online webinars and courses. The Merlin Bird ID app is a great tool to help identify birds through their songs and physical appearance.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust offers birding events throughout the year. In the spring, check our events website page for public outings www.fllt.org/events.

PARTICIPATORY SCIENCE

Recording your birding observations create data that is used to protect birds. You can record your bird sightings year-round with ebird, an app and website. To learn more go to www.ebird.org.

You can also be a part of global bird observation events like the Great Backyard Bird Count running February 14-17, 2025. Watch and record the birds you see for at least 15 minutes. For more information go to www.birdcount.org.

If you miss the Great Backyard Bird Count in February, do not fret, there are more bird counts throughout the year! For more information, go to www.birds.cornell.edu.



HAILEY NASE

ANNUAL MONITORING

Margaret Royall, FLLT Conservation Easement Steward, and I have had the pleasure of meeting a lot of our conservation easement landowners on monitoring visits over the last couple of years. I want to thank all those landowners who took the time to join Margaret or me for a walk around their property. These walks and meetings help strengthen the relationship between FLLT and our landowners. Plus it is so fun to get to know you all!

As we continue to schedule monitoring visits, please let us know if you want to join us for the property visit.

If you have any questions, concerns, or if you have plans for the property, email me at haileynase@fllt.org.

I'd love to chat!

Hailey Nase
Conservation
Easement
Stewardship
Manager



Bird Habitat Improvements

BIRDS RELY ON A PLETHORA of different landscapes. In the Finger Lakes Region, of grasslands, lakes, ponds, and wetlands. Below are some ideas on how to increase the environment to thrive. You can use the Merlin App or the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to determine what your property could best support.



BOBOLINK; SCOTT LEVINE



CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER; MONIKA WOOD

MOWING TIMING

Mowing fields at the right time and the right interval can help protect bird nests and provide quality habitat.

Delay Mowing

Avoid mowing and management between *May 1 and August 15* to protect nests and from *November 1 to March 31* for wintering raptors.

Block Mowing

Mow different sections each year on a two to five-year cycle to create habitats with different ages and diverse vegetation while still deterring tree and shrub growth in the fields.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

- Manage non-native invasive plant species, as native vegetation provides the most habitat value.
- Leave dead standing trees as they provide great locations for nesting and foraging.
- Consider sustainable forest management to create stand diversity. (**Make sure to discuss with FLLT beforehand**)
- Promote understory growth through deer management.

SHRUB & YOUNG FORESTS

- Plant native shrubs to provide cover and food.

Resources: "Managing Forest for Birds" & "Managing Habitat for Shrubland and Young Forest" by Audubon

Quality bird habitat primarily consists of forests, shrub/young forests, and wetlands. The quality of your land for bird habitat. Each bird species requires a different habitat. Visit our website to help determine what bird species are on your property and what species



BLUEBIRD; BILL BANASZEWSKI



LITTLE-BLUE HERON; BILL BANASZEWSKI

NESTING STRUCTURES

Build a Quality Nesting Box

- Determine the best nest box for your area at www.nestwatch.org.
- Use untreated wood at least 3/4" thick, add ventilation holes and a grooved interior wall, and provide a sloped roof and drainage holes.
- Choose a location that is beneficial for the bird, but also accessible for monitoring and maintenance.

Keep out predators

- Keep your cat indoors.
- Don't install a perch as it can allow access for predators.
- Install guards such as baffles to keep predators out.

WATER RESOURCES

Lakes

Avoid using chemical fertilizers and pesticides on lawns/fields/gardens as they contribute to harmful algal blooms and affect the water quality.

Ponds

Avoid mowing the edges of your pond, and don't use herbicides, dyes, or algacides. Leave down trees and material for habitat. Consider adding a nesting box.

Wetlands

If you have a wetland on your property, take care to give nests and birds space and try not to disturb.

Landowner Profile

SCOTT SUTCLIFFE

TRUMANSBURG, NY · 55 ACRES conserved · 20+ ACRES to be conserved

Scott grew up in eastern Massachusetts where he developed a love for birds and the natural world that was fostered by his mother, grandmother, and great-aunt. He also spent many summers learning about birds and the environment at a Massachusetts Audubon summer camp. Early on, Scott knew he wanted to go to Cornell as he spent hours listening to Arthur Allen's *Songbirds of America* and *Evening at Sapsucker Woods*.

Scott attended Cornell as an undergrad and then obtained an MS at the University of New Hampshire. He's spent the majority of his career working in bird and natural areas protection. He even met his spouse, Sally, at a birding event. Scott was the first full-time director of NH Audubon's Loon Preservation Committee, he worked as the director of the Long Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and spent 31 years working for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in leadership roles. When Scott and Sally moved to Trumansburg, a longtime friend purchased and placed a conservation easement on 55 acres contiguous to their farm. Over time, they purchased the conservation easement property and added other woodlands and fields to their farm property.

What makes your conservation easement and land special to you?

It is a diverse property, bordered by two creeks (Taughannock and Bolter), featuring expansive grasslands and mature woodlands along Taughannock Creek. At one time it featured a Great Blue Heron rookery that has since moved off the property. The land provides habitat for nesting Wood Ducks and



Scott Sutcliffe on a kayaking birding trip; provided by Scott Sutcliffe.

Common Mergansers, a field for woodcocks, three species of owls (Barred, Great-horned, and Eastern Screech), a diverse array of migratory songbirds, a healthy colony of bats in the barn, and much more.

What activities do you take part in to help protect bird habitat?

My routine includes mowing and managing the fields, maintaining the mature woodlands, cleaning bird boxes, and building more boxes. I'm always scheming about what to do next to enhance my property for better bird and wildlife habitat.

Additionally, I routinely organize breakfasts with bird walks, exposing innumerable friends to the beauty of birds. I try to share my conservation ethic with them.

What suggestions do you have for other landowners looking to increase bird habitat on their properties?

Design creative ways to expand the natural diversity of your properties, including gardens, management routines/schedules to benefit birds, creating bird gardens, and planting a diversity of trees and other bird-friendly vegetation. Most importantly, enjoy your natural areas, share them with friends, and make them ever-better for wildlife.



From top: Wood Ducks; David Phelps. American Woodcock; Marie Read.

“In wildness is the preservation of the world” -Henry David Thoreau 1862

When Should I Call FLLT?



Contact us anytime with questions about your conservation easement property. Some activities will require the FLLT's input or approval. It is always better to ask before starting your project! Specifically, please contact us...



Before selling your property



Before building on your property



Before cutting trees or harvesting timber



Anytime you have a question or are unsure what your conservation easement allows

You can call the FLLT office at (607) 275-9487, or email us:

Chris Olney, Director of Stewardship, chrisolney@fllt.org

Hailey Nase, Conservation Easement Stewardship Manager, haileynase@fllt.org

Margaret Royall, Conservation Easement Steward, margaretroyall@fllt.org

Afoot in the Field is provided for landowners in the Finger Lakes region who own conservation easement properties or who are otherwise committed to land conservation and wildlife habitat protection.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a member supported non-profit conservation organization that works cooperatively with landowners and local communities to "conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone."



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