

Audubon Onward!

AUDUBON'S IMPACT IN
CONNECTICUT AND NEW YORK
2024



Audubon Onward!



DEAR FRIENDS,

This report invites you to look more closely at our collective impact over the past year to protect birds and the places they need in Connecticut and New York. *Audubon, Onward!* provides important updates and conservation gains through our forward-looking plan to address the mounting threats of climate change and biodiversity loss—threats that not only impact birds, but people and the planet, too. The following pages underscore an urgency of now, and Audubon's bold response.

Over the past half-century, we have lost 3 billion birds in North America—an alarming trend skewed heavily toward migratory species. This precipitous loss is a powerful statement about the condition of our planet and a harbinger of things to come if we don't act strategically and decisively.

Here in Connecticut and New York, birds like the Saltmarsh Sparrow, which is suffering from the rapid loss of our marshlands, face a dire future if the current pace of climate change continues. This iconic species is among many that are likely to disappear from our region in most of our lifetimes if we do not scale our work to meet the size and severity of these threats.

It is this urgency that led us to launch our *Flight Plan*, Audubon's bold five-year strategic plan, which codifies our evolution into a truly hemispheric organization.

***Flight Plan* is about protecting birds, and at the same time, protecting people and our planet by advancing a generation-shaping agenda to the forefront of conservation.**

Beyond boundaries and across vast distances, most migratory birds only spend a fraction of their annual cycle in our state. To protect them, we need to literally meet them where they are. By studying their vast migrations and extensive breeding ranges, we can zero in with precision to address the dizzying array of conservation challenges they face.

It is your investment and our shared impact in Connecticut and New York that will allow us to achieve hemispheric outcomes—this is how we will bend the bird curve.

Thank you and onward!

Mike Burger

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CONNECTICUT AND NEW YORK
VICE PRESIDENT, NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

BIRDS TELL US. THIS IS HOW WE LISTEN.

Thanks to game-changing science and new digital technologies, we are narrowing knowledge gaps that have long plagued the world of bird conservation. The Lesser Yellowlegs, for example, makes an annual migratory journey from the Boreal Forest in Canada to Chile—a round trip of nearly 20,000 miles. Last year,

four Lesser Yellowlegs originally tagged in Colombia's Cauca Valley with transmitters—four single birds spread against the mammoth skies of the Western Hemisphere—flew past Audubon-installed Motus towers located in Michigan and Pennsylvania, similar to towers located across our two states, including at the Bent of the River

Audubon Center in Connecticut and Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center in New York. These towers captured critical data revealing secrets of the birds' migratory adventures, giving new revelations and insight into where, when, and how long they sought habitats needed to provide safe rest and food.



This summer, scientists completed nest surveys, banding, and attached radio transmitters to **Saltmarsh Sparrows** at Great Meadows salt marsh in Connecticut to gather data about where the birds are feeding and nesting. Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

Audubon's *Flight Plan*:

A Powerful and Dynamic Story of Migratory Science, Climate Action, and Community Building

THE SCIENCE IS CLEAR. We have a unique opportunity to make a positive impact for birds, people, and the planet. While challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss are significant, we can bend the bird curve together. The window of opportunity remains open—if we seize this moment and act now.

The most ambitious strategic effort in our history, Audubon's *Flight Plan* establishes our vision for shaping a world where birds and people thrive, elevating Audubon as a global conservation leader. *Flight Plan* sets five-year milestones in key areas to track progress towards our long-term vision to 'bend the bird curve,' in other words, to halt and reverse the alarming decline of birds. Our recognition of the interconnectedness of people, place, and climate led to the development of four milestones we intend to reach over the next five years: Habitat Conservation, Climate, Policy, and Community Building.

MILESTONES:

Flight Plan harnesses the full power of Audubon—including on-the-ground staff across the Western Hemisphere, centers and sanctuaries, and local chapter partners—by focusing on a set of shared outcomes for greater collective impact towards our vision.



HABITAT CONSERVATION

Using science to identify, protect, and conserve 300 million acres of bird habitat across the Americas



CLIMATE ACTION

Deploying 100 gigawatts of renewable energy and storing 30 billion tons of carbon through natural climate solutions



POLICY LEADERSHIP

Pairing diplomacy with advocacy to develop and implement bird-friendly solutions



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Creating a diverse network of bird lovers working together to advance our shared vision

AUDUBON'S HEMISPHERIC APPROACH to conservation directs our efforts to the places where birds need us most and to all the places they call home; their seasonal migration across the Western Hemisphere means Audubon also works from boreal Canada to Connecticut and New York to Chile and beyond.

We have made tangible progress towards all our milestones and developed detailed operational plans that drive where we work, what we do, and how we do it. In the past year, Audubon has demonstrated its readiness for *Flight Plan*, achieving significant progress towards each of the milestones—many of which touched down in Connecticut and New York.

Guided by our *Flight Plan*, we are engaging in conservation activities on 116,650,000 acres across the Americas and influencing 50 renewable energy generation and transmission projects totaling 34 gigawatts—enough energy to power roughly 25 million homes.

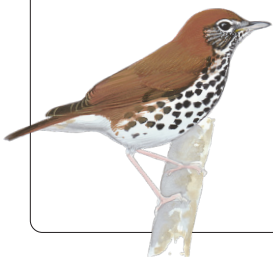
HIGHLIGHTS OVER THE PAST YEAR INCLUDE EFFORTS TO:

- **Launch Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program in Wisconsin**, building on our success in fourteen other states where more than 100 ranches covering nearly 3 million acres have earned status as Audubon Certified bird-friendly land.
- **Begin new engagement on a \$10 billion transmission project** spanning seven Midwestern states representing up to 20 gigawatts.
- **Deliver 10,000 acre-feet of water to benefit Great Salt Lake and Jordan River** through local partnerships and co-management of the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust.
- **Convene 11 Indigenous Guardians and leaders from five First Nations**, key partners on our work in Canada, at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine for knowledge exchange and training opportunities.
- **Fund seven new projects for protected areas in Perú and six in Bolivia** through *Conserva Aves*, totaling over 1.9 million acres.
- **Break ground on the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion, the single-largest ecosystem restoration project in U.S. history**; this project will restore and strengthen up to 28,000 acres of wetlands in Louisiana, providing climate resiliency benefits to local communities.



Wood Thrush Migratory Journey

- Winter Range
- Summer
- Year-Round
- Journey of a Tracked Bird



Audubon's Bird Migration Explorer provides a clearer-than-ever look at bird migration and the incredible journey of individual species. Here we see how the iconic Wood Thrush requires us to work beyond our borders to ensure it remains safe and healthy throughout its annual cycle.

ILLUSTRATOR: DAVID ALLEN SIBLEY

Advancing innovative forest and marsh land conservation and bird-friendly policies and engaging the next generation of conservation leaders, Audubon Connecticut and New York is ahead of the game and leading Audubon's *Flight Plan* by amplifying our voice and implementing innovative conservation efforts aligned with our hemispheric vision to identify connected, climate-resilient places across the hemisphere where we are focusing our efforts for the greatest impact.

Audubon's Work in Connecticut and New York. Unified by the Power of Birds.

Through our *Flight Plan*, we commit to achieving significant milestones that will demonstrate measurable impact on the climate and biodiversity crises. We are pleased to report back to you that your investments supported the following achievements over the past year:



Left: Teacher training at Hammonasset Beach State Park. Photo: Mindy Gosselin/ Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

Right: Bird-friendly maple syrup sold at BK3 Farm. Photo: Ben Knight



→ Hammonasset Beach,

Connecticut's most visited state park, is threatened by erosion and flooding associated with climate change. We received \$618,110 from the EPA Long Island Sound Study and the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Land and Water Resource Division to complete assessment and preliminary designs for a living shoreline and culvert replacement that will protect park marshes and provide habitat for birds. Simultaneously, staff have been working with CT DEEP educators to provide teacher trainings and field trips for their students to the park.

→ Audubon Connecticut and New York, along with Citizens Campaign for the Environment, the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy in Connecticut, and other partners announced the formation of a "**Coastal Restoration Coalition**" that will advance coastal resiliency projects that preserve the ecological integrity of Long Island Sound's coastlines.



HABITAT CONSERVATION

Conserving quality, connected, and climate-resilient bird habitat

→ Through our **Bird-Friendly Maple program**, we recognize family, forest-owning maple producers who are managing their sugarbush in support of bird habitat and forest resilience by offering unique product labeling and marketing opportunities. This year, we received \$2 million in USDA Forest Service Funding to expand the program across Connecticut, New York, and other states.

→ We secured \$274,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to grow our collaborative forest management work in the **Delaware River Watershed** areas of New York and Pennsylvania, and \$75,355 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to begin coastal restoration work at **Crab Meadow Salt Marsh** in Huntington, New York.



CLIMATE ACTION

Accelerating renewable energy and restoring forests, grasslands, and wetlands

→ In Connecticut, we are working on the deployment of **2,000 megawatts of offshore wind**. This is part of a three-state procurement among Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Audubon sat on the Commission of Environmental Standards that influenced the standards for the state's portion of the project.

→ In New York, we are working with partners to make the **100-megawatt Fort Edward solar project** more compatible with grassland bird needs. As proposed, this project will impact 600 acres of one of New York's grassland bird conservation centers, which is also an Important Bird Area. We are advocating for moving the project and/or mitigating the impacts adequately.

Junior Forest Technicians visit a Bird-Friendly sugarbush. Photo: Sharon Bruce/Audubon



POLICY LEADERSHIP

Advancing our *Healthy Birds, Healthy Planet* policy agenda



Hammonasset Beach State Park event with Senator Blumenthal, WildLife Guards, and Audubon staff. Photo: Robyn Shepherd/Audubon

→ Senator Richard Blumenthal joined Audubon, CT DEEP, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association at **Hammonasset Beach State Park** in Connecticut to announce \$2.696 million in federal spending for a project that will improve the sustainability and resiliency of the park's coastline. Funding was provided through the 2024 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, as requested by Senator Blumenthal and Senator Chris Murphy.

→ **More than 1,400 Audubon advocates in New York emailed the State Legislature over 24 hours** during our effort to ensure passage of a bill to prohibit the taking of horseshoe crabs for commercial and biomedical purposes. We are now working to ensure that this important legislation is signed by the governor.

→ We enacted the **Birds and Bees Protection Act** in New York. This law prohibits the use of corn, wheat, or soy seeds that have been coated or treated with dangerous neonicotinoid pesticides, bans the use of neonics on outdoor ornamental plants and turf, and requires the Department of Environmental Conservation to continue to study neonics and identify potential alternative products.

→ **Providing workforce development programming through Serve, Learn, and Earn:** Securing state funding for the Serve, Learn, and Earn program is another significant achievement. This workforce development initiative provides people with meaningful opportunities to engage in community service, gain valuable work experience, and develop leadership skills. Connecticut and New York's \$2 million investment in the program delivers a clear message about the importance of workforce development and empowering youth and young adults to be the leaders of tomorrow.



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Working together across the hemisphere to advance our shared vision



→ We launched the new **Habitat and Ecosystems Land Professionals education program** on Long Island at the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center, training 32

landscape professionals in healthy ecosystem and bird-friendly practices. The program is expanding to our Greenwich Audubon Center this fall.

As New York State's co-lead for the **Healing Our Waters Coalition**, Audubon joined with Citizen's Campaign for the Environment to recruit advocates for the Great Lakes Fly-In in Washington, DC. We were thrilled to bring in two new voices to speak with members of Congress—schoolmates from State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry—Savannah Kuhr and Aubrianna DeLario-Brown. Photo: Aubrianna DeLario-Brown

→ We prioritized the development of the “**Next Generation of Conservationists**” through 22 different Youth Leadership Programs, engaging 261 young people of high school and college ages, many from underrepresented communities. An additional 398 young people were engaged in briefer-duration habitat projects as well as others. Some examples of our Youth Leadership Programs include:

- As New York State's co-lead for the **Healing Our Waters Coalition**, and part of our Audubon in the Parks partnership, Audubon recruited five young advocates from State Parks' FORCES program for the Great Lakes Fly-Ins in Washington, DC., to help educate lawmakers about their work stewarding plovers on Lake Ontario and about Great Lakes ecosystem health.
- The Sharon Audubon Center's new **Conservation Intern program** launched with a diverse cohort of six interns from across the country who worked together on conservation, community outreach, and policy projects.

We are deeply grateful for your continued commitment to Audubon and our mission to protect birds and the places they need—in Connecticut, New York, and beyond. In the first year of *Flight Plan*, we have made significant progress towards our habitat and climate milestones. We could not have gained such momentum without you. The challenge before us is clear. Act now or risk a future with skies silenced with loss. With your help, we will bend the bird curve and make a sustainable impact for birds across the hemisphere. **This is our moment.**

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Black-and-white Warbler.

Photo: Christy Frank/Audubon
Photography Awards

Cover: **Wood Thrush.** Photo:
Lance Leonhardt/Audubon
Photography Awards



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