



# Woodlands for Wildlife

Volume 29 Winter 2012

## Update: Coverts Fund Drive

We are currently in the midst of our annual fund drive. To date, we have raised \$18,557 from 156 donors.

To those who have already donated, Thank You!

We still have a ways to go to reach our two goals. The first is to have contributions from 200 individuals. With over 500 Cooperators, and a growing number of friends, there is no reason we can't reach this goal.

The second is to raise \$24,000. We can do this as matching grants will kick in if we continue to receive contributions.

If you have not responded to our request for donations, before making a final decision take a minute to remember your training class experience. With your help we can reach many more Vermonters with our core message of managing woodlands for wildlife, as well as timber resources.

## ***vtinvasives.org:*** ***An essential resource***

Make sure to check out [vtinvasives.org](http://vtinvasives.org), a joint effort by University of Vermont Extension, the Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

It's among the very best invasive plant and insect web sites, and filled with the information you need to responsibly manage your land.

A good place to start is the Gallery of Invasives. Here you'll find excellent photo-

*continued on page 3*

## Creating Forest Habitat for Nesting Songbirds:

### How To Make Your Woodlot Bird Friendly

*By Steve Hagenbuch, conservation biologist, Audubon Vermont, class of spring 2006*

As a Vermont Coverts Cooperator or friend with an interest in managing your land to benefit wildlife, you may be asking yourself: What can I do if one of my goals is to improve bird habitat?

Is the use of patch cuts the best tool for enhancing wildlife habitat? Are there other silvicultural prescriptions that can balance the need for a sustainable yield of forest products and at the same time be "doing good" by the wildlife?

To help answer these questions, we'll use a particular wildlife group: forest nesting songbirds. This group, which includes wood thrush, blackburnian warbler, and white-throated sparrow, provides a great focus because they can be readily observed, utilize a variety of forest conditions, and respond relatively quickly to changes in forest structure and composition as a result of active management.

#### ***Begin with the big picture***

Before considering what to do on your own property it's important to take a broader look at the landscape. A bird's eye view of your property and surrounding land will help you think about the existing habitat in your woodlot in the overall context of the habitat features found in your neighborhood. Aerial views and topographic maps, along with hiking the land, are useful tools in gaining this information.

One commonly asked question is how much early-successional habitat "should"

exist. Audubon Vermont's Forest Bird Initiative suggests an early-successional habitat target of three to five percent in a 2,500 acre landscape — that's 75 to 125 acres in a four square-mile area. This habitat can be in the form of a one to twenty-year-old regenerating forest, shrubby old fields, margins of beaver ponds, etc. The target is based on pre-colonial estimates of New England forest conditions and is generally considered conservative. Once



*Michael Snyder, Forests, Parks and Recreation*

**A common forest condition: mixed hardwood, overstocked, small pockets of understory regeneration, generally closed canopy, minimal coarse woody debris, and evidence of past high-grading. This site can be greatly improved to provide better bird habitat.**

the landscape context has been determined it's time to turn your attention to your own property.

#### ***Warblers, thrushes, or sparrows?***

What's good for the goose isn't necessarily good for the gander. The nesting habitat requirements for blackburnian warbler — extensive areas of mature,

*continued on page 2*

## Nesting songbirds

*continued from page 1*

closed-canopy softwood or mixed forest — are quite different from those of a chestnut-sided warbler — open-canopy, regenerating hardwoods. For this reason a single-species approach to forest management is generally not recommended. Instead think about managing in terms of habitat conditions.

Fortunately there are a number of silvicultural options available to maintain, enhance, and/or create the full suite of commonly desirable forest conditions. This increases the chances that your forest management actions will benefit the greatest number of bird species.

### I. Habitat Enhancement in a Mature Forest

There's a pretty good chance that all or a significant proportion of your forestland could be considered "mature," with the majority of trees in the pole timber and greater size classes. Canopy closure will be more than 50 percent.

The forest is often overstocked and structure is simple, lacking a well-developed understory and midstory. Dead and down wood may be in low abundance, along with few large diameter snags or cavity trees.

These forest conditions provide many opportunities for habitat enhancement. From a bird perspective, we can focus on a particular suite of species to include black-throated blue warbler, wood thrush, ovenbird, and scarlet tanager.



wood  
thrush

Just

*Powdermill Avian Research Center*

imagine the great birding days you can experience when these birds visit or live in your woods.

For this exercise, let's assume that there's

a good mix of habitat conditions within the approximately 2,500 acres surrounding your land, with permanent openings, wetlands, regenerating and mature forest, and adequate early-successional habitat.

We have a green light to focus on enhancing nesting habitat for the mature forest suite of birds we just mentioned.

Management objectives will include increasing the amount of regeneration and understory shrubs one to five feet in height. Over time this will encourage a more developed midstory six to 30 feet tall. These changes will benefit not only our suite of birds, but other species, such as veery and American redstart.

Another goal is to increase the amount of down and dead woody material along with planning for the future of large di-



Following a silviculture option known as variable retention thinning, logging removed trees of low-vigor and poor quality and opened the canopy. Larger openings of mixed size are scattered throughout the

ameter snags and cavity trees.

We can integrate all these habitat considerations into an overall management plan that also provides for the sustainable production of timber.

#### "Silviculture with Birds in Mind"

A helpful tool to assist you in understanding how a forest can be made more bird friendly is a new publication, *Silviculture with Birds in Mind*. The manual is a result of the Foresters for the Birds project, a partnership involving Audubon Vermont and the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation. It can be downloaded at [vt.audubon.org/PDFs/Silviculture-Options.pdf](http://vt.audubon.org/PDFs/Silviculture-Options.pdf).

In addition to providing information on integrating timber and songbird habitat management, the manual also serves as an accepted reference for the creation of Use Value Appraisal management plans.

The silviculture options described include crop tree release with canopy gap formation, variable-retention thinning, expanding gap group shelterwood, and mixed intermediate treatments.

As our goal is to enhance habitat for nesting birds in a mature forest, we might select small-group and single-tree selection as one option. Under this procedure, openings between one-tenth acre and two acres are created to release regeneration, with single tree and crop tree release used in the matrix between openings.

Another option is to provide additional dead woody materials. One practice is to girdle large diameter snags and cavity trees in the overstory with poor stem quality. If deer browse is possible, its important to leave the lowest quality stems and tops on the ground as this will encourage successful regeneration.



*Kristen Sharpless, Audubon Vermont*

Canopy gaps range from 30 to 75 feet in diameter as a result of a crop tree release with gap formation.

Research has shown that even birds sensitive to disturbance often will tolerate this lighter approach to forest management in a primarily forested landscape.

### II. A Case for Early-Successional Habitat

Now, let's focus our attention on a scenario where creating early-successional habitat is desirable. Our definition of early-succession habitat is an area greater than one acre where the majority of trees are

*continued on page 3*

## Nesting songbirds

*continued from page 2*

seedlings and saplings. Some residual and poletimber or sawtimber can be present. Canopy closure is generally less than 30 percent.

A high density of woody-stemmed vegetation, often including raspberry or blackberry, will create the low, dense structures providing nesting cover for chestnut-sided warbler, mourning warbler, common yellowthroat, and a host of other bird species.

By retaining snags and cavities in this habitat area, we will provide important singing perches and nesting cavities for northern flicker.

Slash piles from the logging activity will



Aspen cavity tree with yellow-bellied sapsucker nest cavity.

create habitat area used by white-throated sparrows as nest site locations.

Just as there was for mature forest, there are a variety of silvicultural options available for creating early-successional conditions. These include group selections between one and two acres, patch cuts, and shelterwood with reserves.

### **Making it happen**

In many situations, habitat enhancement will provide saw timber or firewood income that will pay for part, or all, of the project. There are times however when the costs to implement habitat management projects exceeds revenue. Fortunately, programs are available through the Natural Resource Conservation Ser-

vice (NRCS) to help to cover the cost of getting good work accomplished.

The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial assistance to landowners to create early-successional habitat. In addition, there are now practices available for payment designed to enhance mature forest habitat, thanks to a partnership between NRCS, Audubon, and Forests, Parks, and Recreation.

Audubon's Forest Bird Initiative is also a source of information on forest songbird habitat management. Biologists on staff may be able to visit your property to provide technical assistance.

For more information on any of these opportunities please contact Audubon Vermont at 802-434-3068 or visit the Forest Bird Initiative website at <http://vt.audubon.org/fbi.html>.

Of special interest to birders is the *Audubon Bird Guide*, designed to be used as a quick field reference to 12 of the 40 forest "responsibility" songbirds identified as being high priorities for protection. This birder's dozen is a great starting place for novice birders, and an excellent focal point for creating forest habitat diversity.

### **Habitat assessment**

In addition to the *Audubon Bird Guide* and the *Silviculture with Birds in Mind* manuals, a third very useful publication has been created as part of the Foresters for the Birds project. It is the *Forest Bird Habitat Assessment: A Guide to Integrating Bird Habitat Data into a Vermont Forest Inventory*.

All three manuals were created over a period of two years by the staff of Audubon and Forest Parks and Recreation, in collaboration with over 100 foresters participating in the project.

To receive hard copies of the publication, mail a check for \$15 made out to Audubon Vermont to 255 Sherman Hollow Road, Huntington, VT 05462. Write "Foresters for the Birds Toolkit" in the memo line.

## **vtinvasives.org**

*continued from page 1*

graphs for plant ID, habitat, reproductive strategy and dispersal for 21 of the most common invasive plants threatening the Vermont landscape. The ecological threat for each plant is explained, giving you plenty of reasons to control the introduction or spread of these plants on your own property.

You'll also find information on practical, and field tested, control methods — not only what to do but when to do it.

The same comprehensive and easy-to-understand approach provides the information you need as a landowner about four invasive pests: Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, hemlock woolly adelgid and the sirex woodwasp.

### **Winter invasive work:**

Just because it's cold and snow covers the ground is not a good reason to stop invasive plant action. When leaves are off trees and plants, and snow cover is not too deep, the season creates an excellent opportunity to get out on your woodlot and look for invasive woody plants.

Japanese and common barberry, glossy and common buckthorn, shrub honeysuckles and Oriental bittersweet vines, among our most common invasives, stand out in stark relief against the background of a white landscape.

You can initiate control activity by getting a head start on next year's growing season. One option is to cut plant stems near the ground, using manual shears or a chain saw. Next summer, after regrowth has started, you can follow up with mechanical or chemical treatments.

Sitting by a fire or wood stove is also an opportunity to study for a pesticide applicator's license, if you have an interest in expanding your chemical control options.

If you're interested in helping Vermont to document the spread of invasives, you can become a volunteer trained to upload and access data about invasive plants by using iMap. For information see [www.vtinvasives.org/plants/imapinvasives-report-it](http://www.vtinvasives.org/plants/imapinvasives-report-it)



## Woodlands for Wildlife

Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.  
PO Box 81, Middlebury, VT 05753

Prstd Std  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Putney VT  
Permit 1

### VERMONT COVERTS: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

Executive Director: Lisa Sausville  
Lisa@vtcoverts.org 802-388-3880

### VERMONT COVERTS COUNCIL

Jay Allen, secretary, *Jeffersonville*  
Carolyn Boardman, *Brownington*  
James Bruce Engle, ex officio, *Peacham*  
Allen Calfee, vice-president, *Dorset*  
Rich Chalmers, *Williamstown*  
John Evans, ex officio, *Dummerston*  
Bob Lloyd, ex officio, *Tinnmouth*  
Ian Martin, *Newfane*  
Larry Mengedoht, *Chelsea*  
John McNerney, ex-officio, *Monkton*  
Gisela Palmer, *Cornwall*  
Fred Pond, *Tunbridge*  
Kimberly Royar, ex officio, *Wallingford*  
James Stack, treasurer, *Andover*  
Rich Turner, vice president, *Williamstown*  
Peter Upton, ex-officio, *Wallingford*  
Class Representatives:  
Suzanna Brown, *Georgia*  
Tina Barney, *Hartland*  
Newsletter Editor: John Evans  
Associate Editor: Lisa Sausville

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

For additional calendar information visit [www.vtcoverts.org](http://www.vtcoverts.org)

### **Ties to the Land Workshop — Transitioning to the Next Generation**

*Saturday, February 18, Northwoods Stewardship Center, East Charleston, 9:30am-5pm, Lisa Sausville, Executive Director of Vermont Coverts, will present this workshop offering landowners valuable guidance on passing land to the next generation. The program covers setting goals, discussions with family members, along with discussion on strategies and professionals needed to make a smooth transition. Participants should come prepared to complete sample exercises to help them move this process forward and will receive a workbook to take home. Attending with multiple generations will be helpful. Registration cost is \$10. Please bring a lunch — coffee and tea are provided. For information contact Lisa Sausville at 802-388-3880.*

### **Winter Tree Identification**

*Sunday, February 19, Montgomery Center, at property of Coverts Cooperators Bill and Joan Hildreth. For information contact Lisa Sausville at 802-388-3880.*

### **Apple Tree Release**

*Saturday, February 25, Kehoe Conservation Camp, Hydeville, 9:30am-12 noon. Workshop conducted by Eric Hanson and Jason Morin. For information contact Lisa Sausville at 802-388-3880.*

### **Vermont Coverts Three Day Cooperator Training**

**Spring:** June 1-3 at Northwoods Stewardship Center, East Charleston.

**Fall:** September 7-9 at Kehoe Conservation Camp, Hydeville.

*The spring and fall training programs are designed to provide landowners with classroom and field studies in forest and wildlife management. For additional information or to register visit the Coverts website at [www.vtcoverts.org](http://www.vtcoverts.org) or call 802-388-3880.*