



# Audubon NORTH CAROLINA

[FALL & WINTER 2012]



## [FROM THE DIRECTOR]

HEATHER STARCK

*Executive Director*

Audubon North Carolina



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The only certainty in life is change goes the old adage, and that adage is holding true for anyone involved in conservation work. From decisions made at the highest levels that affect national conservation policies to internal changes made to align our organization with new strategic initiatives, Audubon is changing too. We have enacted a strategic vision centered on the four major migratory flyways that birds travel in the Americas. We are letting birds tell us where we need to concentrate our vast network of members, chapters, nature centers, and state offices. Our state's great diversity of habitats and birds make it a critical link in the Atlantic Flyway for birds that winter here, breed here, or live here year round. Audubon North Carolina is leading the way for our organization both within the Atlantic Flyway and on a national level.

We are also changing the focus, format, and frequency of our newsletter. Each issue will focus on a bird conservation initiative we are spearheading in North Carolina. The publication is now printed in a smaller format to conserve paper and cut costs. In this issue you will learn how Curtis Smalling, our Director for Land Bird Conservation, is working to put 50,000 acres of western forests under best management practices for birds and people by 2016.

We hope you will join Audubon's new conversation by visiting our Facebook page, blog, and website ([www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org)). From there you can upload a photo of a backyard bird, learn about volunteer events, or help increase our impact by making a contribution. However you participate, the birds and Audubon need you now more than ever.

Change is in the air, just look up.

**In case you wondered about my new photo, I'm holding Carl the Traveling Cardinal. To learn more about Carl (and how you can get a plushy Cardinal of your very own) read on and visit our Facebook page to follow Carl on his travels.**



**B**ecause Audubon is determined to protect birds every wing beat of the way, we have aligned our conservation work with the major routes that migratory birds travel in North and South America, called flyways. Every year millions of birds travel along the Atlantic Flyway, which runs along the eastern seaboard and includes North Carolina. Human development and other activities constantly alter the landscapes throughout the flyway, impacting birds and other wildlife.

Through an initiative called Putting Working Lands to Work for Birds and People, Audubon is partnering with landowners to make working lands benefit birds, people, and communities, focusing on forests, agricultural lands, grasslands, and ranchlands. Ranches and farms comprise more than one billion acres in the United States, and forests, many of which are managed for timber, make up an additional 747 million acres. These working lands provide our food, shelter, and even homegrown energy.

Within the Atlantic Flyway, this initiative is focused on a network of forested landscapes that supports viable populations of priority birds throughout their life cycles. Audubon has mapped the blocks of forest that are most critical to birds in the flyway, using a new mapping technique where data about the density of birds is layered over data about the intactness of the forest and other measures of forest health. These blocks include large forested areas where birds breed and key stopover sites both inside and outside the United States. To protect this mosaic of public and privately owned land, Audubon is using a variety of tools, including permanent protection, improved stewardship, and bird-friendly management.

Audubon has an ambitious goal for working lands within the Atlantic Flyway. By 2016, we intend to reach out to the landowners or public land managers of 5 million acres within the most important forested areas in the eastern United States. We will inform them of the management options that will provide the best habitats for our most vulnerable forest birds and we will write or provide technical assistance for management plans for at least 500,000 of these acres.

**The Atlantic Flyway encompasses some of the hemisphere's most productive ecosystems, including forests, beaches, and coastal wetlands. Audubon is working to support this avian superhighway's 500-plus bird species and millions of individual birds. With only one-tenth of the U.S. landmass, this flyway is home to one-third of the nation's people. And dense population carries with it many challenges for birds and habitat: development and sprawl, incompatible agriculture, overfishing, and climate change.**

# What is Audubon's vision for Working Lands in North Carolina?



**A**s “the bird people” for our state, Audubon North Carolina has crafted an approach to forest management that protects and restores habitats for birds while simultaneously helping landowners enhance their property in cost-effective ways. Audubon is developing partnerships, training opportunities, management plans, and demonstration sites. We are collaborating with federal and state organizations that manage lands and provide funding to private landowners to support environmentally sound practices, especially those that benefit birds.

Working with private landowners is a critical piece of the Working Lands initiative as 61% of North Carolina's 18.4 million acres of forest lands is privately owned. Ninety percent of that acreage is contained in parcels of less than 50 acres and private lands comprise about twenty percent of the total acreage of North Carolina's Important Bird Areas. For a virtual tour of our IBAs visit [www.ncaudubonblog.org](http://www.ncaudubonblog.org).

Curtis Smalling, Director of Land Bird Conservation for Audubon North Carolina, is reaching out to private landowners to help them develop cost-effective strategies for making their properties more bird-friendly. Curtis is meeting with landowners, assessing their property and its birdlife, and writing management plans that provide strategies for maintaining or restoring bird-friendly habitats as well as suggesting sources of funding and tax incentives for management activities. Audubon plans to expand this program across North Carolina, focusing most intensively on blocks of forest where we will have the greatest impact on songbird populations now and in the future. Audubon North Carolina intends to write or influence management plans for 50,000 acres in the state by 2016.

**If you're interested in finding out if your property is located within a priority forest block and how you can help manage it for birds and wildlife please contact Curtis Smalling at [csmalling@audubon.org](mailto:csmalling@audubon.org).**





### **What is a priority species?**

A priority species is one that is particularly threatened in terms of the species' long term survival. All priority species have been selected through rigorous scientific analysis and most represent a broad array of other birds and wildlife that use the same habitat type. Conservation focused on priority species is almost always focused on priority habitats as well. Audubon has identified 32 priority bird species within the Atlantic Flyway. Species that need intact forest and that spend part of their lives in North Carolina include the Wood Thrush (on cover), Golden-winged Warbler (on left), Canada Warbler (top left), and Black-throated Blue Warbler (top right).

### **What is the difference between a mature forest and a young forest?**

For birds, a mature forest has a closed canopy with larger trees and only occasional gaps from damage (like lightning strikes or storm damage). A young forest (also called early successional habitat) does not have a closed canopy and retains some grass and weedy plant species in the ground layer. An abandoned field that is growing into forest is a good example of a young forest. If left unmanaged, a young forest will eventually become a mature forest. These forests are critical for many birds' life cycles. Wood Thrushes and Scarlet Tanagers are born in mature forests but after they leave the nest they move to denser young forests where they can find better protection from predators. Species like Golden-winged Warblers build their nests in these young shrubby forest areas. Visit the Audubon NC YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/audubonnc](http://www.youtube.com/audubonnc) to watch videos about early successional habitats and the Amphibolite Mountains where much of this habitat is located.

## Accomplishments to date

Since launching the Working Lands conservation strategy in 2011, Audubon North Carolina has made the following progress toward our goal of impacting 20,000 acres by 2014.

- We are working with a number of regional and local land trusts to provide management advice and technical assistance on properties protected by conservation easements. We have worked with the National Committee for the New River, Blue Ridge Conservancy, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, Land Trust for the Little Tennessee, The Nature Conservancy, and Conservation Trust for North Carolina to impact about 6,000 acres.
- In partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and others we are partnering with 30 landowners that manage a total of 500 acres for the benefit of Golden-winged Warblers. The landowners are already enrolled in NRCS tax incentive programs or plan to enroll this year.
- We are working with the National Forests in North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee to train staff on Golden-winged Warbler management for about 2,000 acres of habitat.
- We are partnering with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission on management of priority gameland parcels at Pond Mountain, Elk Knob, and Roaring Creek, totaling about 4,000 acres.
- We are assisting staff at Elk Knob and New River State Parks in conducting inventories, planning for active management, and possible cooperative management impacting about 800 acres.
- We are working with several local and community parks on management and restoration projects including Green Valley Park, Valle Crucis Community Park, Tate Evans Park in Banner Elk, and the Boone Greenway Wetlands. These projects represent about 200 acres and offer opportunities to connect many people to bird conservation through interpretive materials and field trips.
- In partnership with Highlands Audubon Society and other groups, we launched Treasure Highlands, a project to help residents of the Highlands Plateau create bird-friendly backyards, learn about volunteer opportunities with local conservation organizations, and explore their Important Bird Area (see [treasurehighlands.org](http://treasurehighlands.org)).
- We secured funding from TogetherGreen and the Clabough Foundation for production of bird-friendly forestry guides for North Carolina that will be available in early 2013.
- We hosted an all country meeting of Important Bird Area coordinators in Nicaragua, the first of its kind in Central America. We also helped launch eBird in Nicaragua.
- We provided tiny transmitters for UNC-Wilmington graduate students to place on Golden-winged Warblers to find out what habitats the birds use on their wintering grounds in Nicaragua. We also supported the placement of 70 geolocators on Wood Thrushes in Nicaragua to determine where these birds spend their summers. Geolocators are small photo cells that record a daily estimate of the birds' location. Biologists will try to recapture the birds the following year to download the data.



“Our partnership with Audubon enables us to do more than we could possibly do alone. SAHC has more of a land perspective while Audubon has this great science expertise and is well-connected with the research community. Their knowledge helps leverage our land management work. They provide quality work and have a great reputation. And Curtis Smalling is an outstanding resource. I would recommend that landowners work with Audubon not only because of their knowledge but also because they can help people find funding to manage their working lands to benefit priority species. Even projects that are focused on helping one priority species, like the Golden-winged Warbler, are vehicles to protect habitats for a suite of other species.”

– Chris Coxen, Field Ecologist, SAHC



## Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy – Land Trust

**A**udubon North Carolina is working with Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, one of the country's oldest land trusts, to restore early successional habitats that are home to Golden-winged Warblers as well as small mammals like weasels and the Appalachian cottontail. The groups hope to attract the colorful warbler to sites they once inhabited and are encouraged by recent field work that doubled the known Golden-winged population in the Roan Highlands.

### See this partnership in action

Hampton Creek Cove

[www.tn.gov/environment/na/natareas/hampton/](http://www.tn.gov/environment/na/natareas/hampton/)

Little Hump area

[www.ncbirdingtrail.org/TrailGuide/Guide\\_RoanMtn.pdf](http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org/TrailGuide/Guide_RoanMtn.pdf)

## Shady Grove Gardens and Nursery – Private Landowners

**S**usan Wright and Brent Cochran own 76-acre Shady Grove Gardens and Nursery, a cut flower farm located on the slopes of 'The Peak' in the Amphibolite Mountains of Ashe County. The farm's open meadows, early successional forest, streams, and mountain bogs provide diverse habitats for numerous bird species. Curtis Smalling helped the couple connect with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and Natural Resources Conservation Service and obtain guidance and funding to help manage their property to benefit Golden-winged Warblers.

“Both of us are birders so we were already familiar with the habitats and birdlife on our property but Curtis confirmed that Golden-winged Warblers were nesting here and suggested how we could manage our property to help the species. This initial contact with Audubon helped give us the energy to manage the property for Golden-winged Warblers. He also provided us with a video about the species’ habitat that gave us some ideas about what we wanted our property to look like. And he nominated our farm to be included on the N.C. Birding Trail. So now birders from all



over the state and the country visit our farm! They're usually interested in seeing Golden-wingeds, but we have a pretty extensive bird list so there are lots of other birds to see as well.”

– Susan Wright and Brent Cochran, Private Landowners

**See this partnership in action**

[www.shady-grove-gardens.com](http://www.shady-grove-gardens.com)

## Blue Ridge Parkway – Public agency

**A**udubon North Carolina has been working with the Blue Ridge Parkway for several years on a variety of projects, including a study of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and an ongoing project to manage agricultural fields to benefit birds and butterflies. The partners are planting a field with native warm-season grasses in an effort to recreate some of the grasslands historically found in the area and to provide habitat for grassland species that are declining, such as the Eastern Meadowlark.

“Working with Audubon benefits the Parkway in several ways. Curtis Smalling’s knowledge about birds and bird habitats allows him to look at our land from a bird perspective. As well, a private nonprofit has more flexibility than we do in finding different sources of funding and handling some of the logistics that would take too long for us to do, such as doing bird transects or hiring a local farmer to plant grasses. Audubon’s expertise really enhances our conservation efforts.”

– Bob Cherry, Wildlife Biologist, Blue Ridge Parkway



### See this partnership in action

The field conversion project is open to the public and is located in Price Park about 5 miles south of Blowing Rock at Milepost 296.1 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Park at the cable gate (don't block the gate) at the large red barn on the south side of the parkway. The field is about 3/4 mile down that road.



"I often think about Emily Dickinson's poem: 'Hope is the thing with feathers' when I think about the lives of birds. It's just mind-boggling to think about what some birds are capable of doing, like flying 8,000 miles from the Tropics to North Carolina and then raising their young. Some years they have chicks that survive and some years they don't. But they keep at it because giving up is not an option."

– Curtis Smalling

## Curtis Smalling – Director of Land Bird Conservation Audubon North Carolina

**W**hen we tracked down Curtis for a quick interview, we found him rambling along a chilly mountainside thinking about, you guessed it, birds. He shared his perspective on how landowners can take small steps that make a big difference for birds.

"Many migratory birds have what we call site fidelity, meaning they return to the same site every year to spend the winter or to breed. It gives you a new perspective when you talk about working on your land or your yard because all the little things we do matter to the birds that live here too. The same Scarlet Tanager has nested in my yard for the past eight or nine years. In a way, my yard is his yard too! What if he came back here one spring and I'd cut down all my trees?

Everybody makes hundreds of decisions every year about how they manage their property or their backyard, from deciding what to plant to deciding when to mow. And if a significant portion of those decisions started to be made with birds or wildlife in mind it could really make a difference. If you do a few little things like planting native plants that offer migrating birds a safe resting place and high quality food, you essentially give the birds one more day to make it to their next destination. Those days add up to higher survival and more baby birds over the course of their lives."

## How can I help put working lands to work for NC's birds and people?

Audubon North Carolina faces an enormous challenge in achieving our conservation goals for the state's working lands: We have only one staff person to connect with landowners for 50,000 acres in western North Carolina forests. That is a tall order, even for someone as talented and energetic as Curtis Smalling, our Director of Land Bird Conservation!

You can help us meet this challenge through a special fundraising opportunity that is open until the end of the year: Audubon North Carolina has submitted a grant to a federal agency to get funding to hire another person to help Curtis with our Working Lands initiative. We need to raise \$25,000 in funding to match this grant before December 31, 2012.

**You can make a contribution with the enclosed envelope or by donating online at [www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org). Please consider supporting Audubon this year, even if you have never sent a gift before. Together we can kick start Audubon North Carolina's innovative campaign to protect our working lands.**

The background of the page features a scenic landscape. In the foreground, there is a body of water reflecting the sky. Behind the water is a dense line of trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and green. A small wooden structure is visible on the left side of the tree line. The text "getting involved" is overlaid in a large, white, lowercase font at the bottom of the image.

getting involved

## How can I help forest birds?

Volunteering your time and talent is a great way to help our small staff reach our conservation goals for protecting Forests. In 2012 and 2013, thanks to a TogetherGreen Volunteer Days grant, Audubon North Carolina is working with multiple partners to organize a variety of volunteer opportunities across the state. We also have opportunities for individuals and groups to do bird and site monitoring in the spring.

To learn more about these opportunities visit our blog at [audubonncblog.org](http://audubonncblog.org) or contact Curtis Smalling at [csmalling@audubon.org](mailto:csmalling@audubon.org) or 828.265.0198.

## Join a survey in the field

We have an ongoing need for volunteers to help with surveys during the spring and summer. During a survey volunteers go out in the field to gather information about a specific bird species, such as looking for Golden-winged Warblers that are building nests, or other sorts of information, such as documenting the types of plants that grow in a certain area. Most of these surveys take place between April and October and include:

- Golden-winged Warbler surveys (April through mid-June)
- Private landowner surveys and monitoring (April to October)
- State Parks surveys (year round possibilities)
- Vegetation monitoring on selected plots (June-October)
- Spring and summer Nightjar surveys (April to June)





With a century of conservation history in North Carolina, Audubon strives to conserve and restore the habitats we share with all wildlife, focusing on the needs of birds. Audubon North Carolina achieves its mission through a blend of science-based research and conservation, education and outreach, and advocacy.

#### **Main Office**

400 Silver Cedar Court, Suite 240  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514  
919.929.3899  
919.929.4599 Fax

#### **Coastal Office & Sanctuaries**

7741 Market Street, Unit D  
Wilmington, NC 28411-9444  
910.686.7527  
910.686.7587 Fax

#### **Mountain Office**

667 George Moretz Lane  
Boone, NC 28607  
828.265.0198

#### **Donal C. O'Brien, Jr. Audubon Sanctuary and Center at Pine Island**

300 Audubon Drive  
Corolla, NC, 28607  
252.453.0603  
252.453.0603 fax

[www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org)  
[www.ncaudubonblog.org](http://www.ncaudubonblog.org)

#### **Audubon North Carolina Chapters**

##### **Audubon Society of Forsyth County**

[www.forsythaudubon.org](http://www.forsythaudubon.org)

##### **Cape Fear Audubon Society**

[www.capefearaudubon.org](http://www.capefearaudubon.org)

##### **Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society**

<http://emasnc.org/>

##### **Great Smoky Mountains Audubon Society**

<http://gsmas.com>

##### **High Country Audubon Society**

[www.highcountryaudubon.org](http://www.highcountryaudubon.org)

##### **Highlands Plateau Audubon Society**

[www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org](http://www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org)

##### **Mecklenburg Audubon Society**

[www.meckbirds.org](http://www.meckbirds.org)

##### **New Hope Audubon Society**

[www.newhopeaudubon.org](http://www.newhopeaudubon.org)

##### **T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society**

[www.tgpearsonaudubon.org](http://www.tgpearsonaudubon.org)

##### **Wake Audubon Society**

[www.wakeaudubon.org](http://www.wakeaudubon.org)



# join the club!

Audubon  
CARDINAL CLUB



This singing cardinal plushy bird can be yours! Just sign up for the Cardinal Club before December 31, 2012 and this little bird will wing your way.

Join the Cardinal Club, our monthly giving program, and put your contribution to work for birds every day of the year. Your tax-deductible monthly gift will support all of Audubon's programs in North Carolina.

Monthly giving is simple. Your credit card will be charged once per month. Each January we will send you a tax receipt – and a big thank you – for your giving over the previous year. You may change or cancel your gift or skip a month whenever you like.

To sign up, go to [www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org) and click the link under the cardinal on the home page. Remember to select North Carolina from the drop down menu to put your dollars to work in our state.

Watch for more fun incentives on our website and our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter to be the first to get the word!

Find us online today!

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[www.facebook.com/audubonnc](https://www.facebook.com/audubonnc)

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#### PHOTO CREDITS

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# Audubon NORTH CAROLINA

A STATE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

**400 Silver Cedar Court, Suite 240**

**Chapel Hill, NC 27514-1585**

**919.929.3899**

**[www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org)**

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