

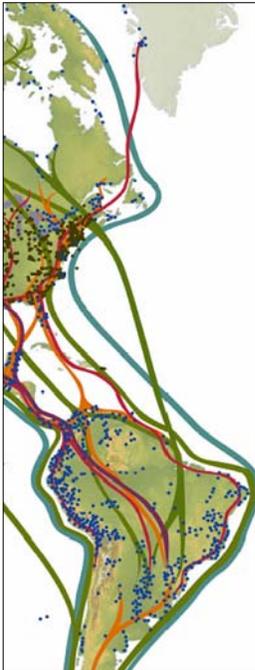
THE ATLANTIC FLYWAY INITIATIVE

Conserving Eastern Forests, Coastal and Saltmarsh Habitat for Birds, Wildlife and People

The birds of the Atlantic Flyway reflect the beauty, diversity—and the peril—of America's Eastern Seaboard. Many are declining fast. Neither the birds nor the people of the region can continue to prosper without dramatic conservation action.

Audubon is responding with a unique multi-state effort that will draw on the grassroots power of its Chapters, local Centers and integrated science, education and advocacy programs to safeguard the forest, coastal and saltmarsh habitats of the Flyway, and the nature of tomorrow.

The Challenges We Face



Stretching from the Canadian border to the tip of Florida, the Eastern Seaboard covers just over ten percent of the U.S.'s land mass, yet houses more than a third of its people. Pressures from ever-expanding development and other threats are taking their toll on the natural bounty of the Atlantic coastal region that sustained native peoples for eons and helped give birth to a new nation. The amazing spectacle of millions of migrating birds along Atlantic beaches and forested ridges continues to mark the progression of seasons, but also alerts us to ominous changes.

While Atlantic Flyway states remain rich in wildlife—with more than 500 bird species found within its forests, wetlands, and shorelines—recent declines in species' populations reflect the toll of development on the integrity and sustainability of our natural systems. Like canaries in the coal-mines, the birds are warning us of threats to our own survival and showing the way to safety.

Climate change adds an increasing threat to the delicate cycles that affect the birds of the Flyway; cycles dependent on a network of healthy environments throughout the hemisphere.

Atlantic Ocean levels have increased by almost a foot along the east coast in the last century; scientists warn that unchecked global warming will add another one to three feet over the next hundred years. The ever-changing shape of the Atlantic coastline will be dramatically altered by accelerated natural processes and by inevitable human responses. Inland, our famously diverse eastern forests will also undergo marked transformations; species will disappear unable to adapt to dramatic changes in temperature, rainfall, seasonal cycles and frequency and severity of storms. They will be replaced by more adaptable, aggressive, and often non-native plants and animals. The Flyway will be forever changed and the nature of life diminished, not just on the Eastern Seaboard, but across the hemisphere, unless we take prompt and decisive action.

The Audubon Response

Arrayed like a string of pearls across the Flyway, special places provide shelter and sustenance to birds throughout their migratory journeys. Audubon's nine state offices, 134 local Eastern Seaboard Chapters, its science, advocacy and education programs, and its critical international alliances will provide the expertise to identify and protect them. We believe success will be enhanced by focusing on the forests, salt marshes, and coastal habitats where conservation promises the best return for birds and the environment. Guided by the sophisticated mapping and planning resources of Audubon's Important Bird Area Programs, we will employ strategies that encourage and facilitate broad stewardship and protection of the Flyway's three most important habitats.

Forests

Eastern forests shelter 75% of the neo-tropical migrants using the Atlantic Flyway, along with a stunning array of biodiversity; they are critical to controlling climate change through absorption of carbon dioxide emissions; enhance air and water quality; and deliver immense economic and recreational benefits.

Audubon will identify and protect the most important forested habitats needed to establish an unbroken conservation network comprised of 10-30% of the Flyway's forest area. We will map, prioritize and implement conservation and monitoring plans for those which shelter biome-restricted species such as the Wood thrush and Blackburnian warbler. Plans will be implemented for at least one block in each Flyway state. An essential strategy for protecting them will be to expand Audubon's *Forest Stewardship Program*. This program has been launched successfully in the northern reaches of the Atlantic Flyway, with Audubon staff providing practical, hands-on advice and assistance about improving bird habitat to both private and public landholders. Another essential part of our work is to work closely with our partners from BirdLife International to identify and implement complementary conservation strategies at the highest priority international migratory sites along the Atlantic Flyway.



Coastal and Saltmarsh Habitats

The Atlantic Flyway's coastal habitats offer a spectacular array of biodiversity; they also contain 1/8th of the world's rare salt marshes. Critical to birds, these habitats provide vital stop over and nesting areas to many at-risk species. Critical to all of us, they provide a first line of defense against rising sea levels and increased storm damage. As popular with humans as with birds and wildlife, it's not surprising that our coastal and saltmarsh habitats have seen a disproportionate increase in development pressures over the past two decades.



This in turn has led to increased environmental degradation, as shown in the sharp decreases in certain indicator bird species.

But the good news is that Audubon has pioneered programs here, that by combining education with efforts to identify and protect coastal and saltmarsh habitats, have shown that conservation and recreation can co-exist successfully. More specifically, Audubon's "*Share the Beach*" program has combined public outreach efforts with expanded hands-on beach stewardship to reduce threats and improve conditions at coastal Important Bird Areas. This has included erecting symbolic fencing and predator 'exclosures' to protect nesting areas, and has included educational outreach to boaters and beach-goers alike. Improved nesting rates attest to its success. In fragile saltmarsh habitats, Audubon is concentrating on both technical strategies like restoring natural tidal flow regimes and controlling destructive invasive plants *and* increasing public awareness of the enormous importance of saltmarshes as bulwarks against floods and rising sea levels.



Expanding these programs will require hiring coastal bird stewards to reduce animal predators and disturbances by humans, and to increase public awareness of, and sensitivity to, coastal and saltmarsh habitats. Our public outreach initiatives in particular will be crucial to the program's success, so that all beach users and residents of communities near saltmarshes can understand and appreciate the need for protective areas and conservation measures. Towards these ends, Audubon has already launched social marketing and education efforts with the ambitious goal of fully engaging the support of a diverse range of residents of beach and saltmarsh communities. We view the full involvement of diverse constituencies as being *essential* to finding long-term conservation solutions in such a populous region as the Atlantic seaboard.

And following nature's migration, we envision this program's protections and outreach expanding beyond the Eastern seaboard as Audubon identifies key sites in the Caribbean, Central and South America – where we can pinpoint where priority bird species winter and stop over - all part of a truly *hemispheric* conservation program.

Urban Oases



With its 843 acres of greenery set within one of the world's densest urban populations, New York's Central Park serves as a critical stop over point for many thousands of migrating birds every year, and as such is identified as an Important Bird Area. Using places like Central Park as inspiration, Audubon's new "Urban Oases" program is working with parks like this and botanical gardens within key municipalities to increase and improve urban habitat that can support migratory birds at these crucial stop over points. These efforts not only have great conservation value, but also great educational value as they are within reach of broad and diverse audiences. The initial focus of the Urban Oases Program is the east and western coasts of the Florida Peninsula, which provide essential but gravely imperiled stopover habitat to migratory birds

whose winter destinations are both the Caribbean and Mexico and Central and South America. Audubon's work has just begun here, and we will greatly expand its scale to identify, protect and improve urban oases sites all along the string of pearls comprising the Atlantic Flyway. We have also initiated partnerships with our BirdLife International partners to conserve critical and seriously under-conserved stopover habitats outside the United States.



Hemispheric Conservation Takes Flight

The Atlantic Flyway Initiative lets nature serve as our guide. By following birds' migratory paths we are letting them help us identify the places so important not just to their survival, but to all our lives. We are then leveraging one of Audubon's strongest assets – our vast, grassroots network of people and conservation capability to power conservation on a hemispheric scale. It will succeed because it clearly focuses its conservation priorities around bird habitats within three distinct and prioritized habitats: forests, coastlines and saltmarshes. Birds, those environmental sentinels, will be the lens through which we gauge conservation threats and successes. By expanding and linking Audubon's string of Important Bird Area pearls, the program will create an architecture for hemispheric conservation. It will deploy proven, breakthrough strategies like our Forest Stewardship, Share the Beach and Urban Oases programs. It will unite and engage the grassroots Audubon network across the region, with international, state and chapter participation. And it will meet the challenges of climate change head-on, by linking human communities with these natural communities. For these reasons, we believe the Atlantic Flyway Initiative will help hemispheric conservation to take flight.

