

Land Manager's Corner

Bird Diversity in the Parkers Creek IBA

Much of the land surrounding Parkers Creek was designated an Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society in 2006. Often referred to as an IBA, Important Bird Areas are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of bird, including breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. IBAs can vary greatly in size but are usually discrete sites that stand out from the surrounding landscape (Audubon Society). To qualify as an IBA, sites must support species that are of conservation concern, species that are vulnerable because they are restricted to a certain area or habitat type, or species that gather in high densities at a certain location (Audubon Society).

The Parkers Creek IBA covers 6,324 acres and, like many IBAs, includes public and privately-owned land. The area is made up of a variety of ecosystems including tidal freshwater streams, saltmarsh wetlands, upland forests, beaches, open fields, and cliffs. The large amount of forested land in the Parkers Creek IBA makes it very important for Forest Interior Dwelling Species (FIDS). Surveys conducted from 1999 through 2004 by long-standing ACLT member Leslie Starr supplied the data that lead to the designation of the land around Parkers Creek as an Important Bird Area. Leslie found that of the 24 FIDS that could potentially be found in the coastal plain region, 18 were found here. The Wood Thrush and the Kentucky Warbler are two declining at-risk species on the Audubon/American Bird Conservancy Watchlist and both breed in the Parkers Creek IBA in significant numbers (Audubon MD-D.C. Important Bird Areas).

One other factor that makes this land such great bird habitat is the unusually dense under-story vegetation layer. A thick and diverse under-story can provide food and nesting habitat for many FID birds and mammals.



Prothonotary Warbler.
Photo by Jason Avery.

The shrubs and herbaceous plants thrive at ACLT due to the success of our white-tailed deer herd management program. Members of the Parkers Creek Conservation Society have kept the

deer population in check which has allowed for a flourishing understory to support an array of FIDS.

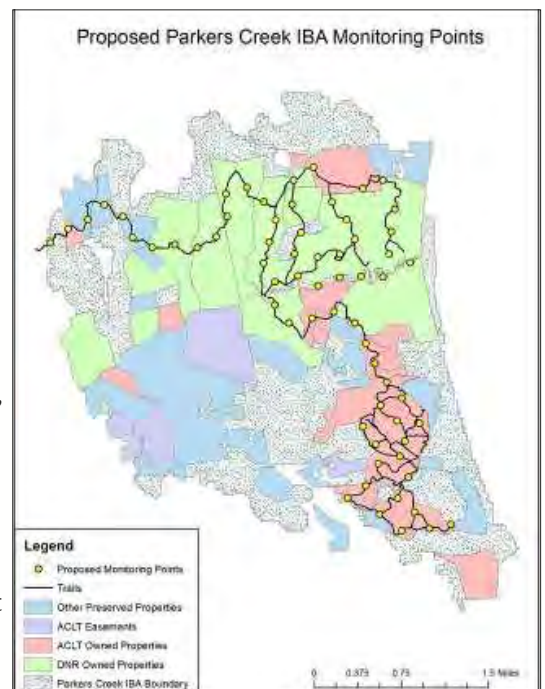
Monitoring Bird Populations

This spring, ACLT will be working with Audubon Maryland-D.C. to implement their monitoring program which was influenced heavily by Leslie Starr's surveying methods in 1999–2004. Audubon Maryland-D.C. started monitoring bird populations in a few IBAs throughout Maryland in 2015 and has been adding more IBAs each year since. This year, ACLT will be using their protocol to collect data on our bird populations as part of our on-going goal of establishing a baseline of diversity within the Parkers Creek watershed.

Over 60 survey points were selected within the Parkers Creek IBA. These sites were placed along trails so that they could be accessed easily and located so that none of the points were within 300m of each other. Volunteers will be assigned multiple points along a trail to survey between 5:45 a.m.

(sunrise) to 9:30 a.m. Upon arriving at each point, they will note the weather conditions, record any birds that they see or hear for exactly 5 minutes, then move on to the next point. This type of surveying is called a "point count" and it is the most common type of bird count method used in forest-like habitats where you hear many more birds than you see.

Each point will be surveyed by volunteers twice per year—once from May 25th and June 10th and the second time between June 11th and June 30th. This is to ensure that we only count birds that are breeding in the Parkers Creek IBA. If the point count survey was conducted before May 25th, we may see and hear birds that were just migrating through the area. If conducted after June 30th, birds would be singing much less because their breeding season would be over and it would result in a less accurate count of the bird populations. Surveys will only be conducted when wind is less than 12 mph and it is not raining as both of these conditions greatly reduce bird activity and would not give accurate data on the number of birds present.





Double-crested Cormorant in Parkers Creek. Photo by Harry Early.

By collecting data on the location and number of bird species within the Parkers Creek IBA we can see how the species and their population numbers change overtime. We can also use this information to influence our land management strategies. If rare species are found, we can take measures to improve the habitat for them on ACLT-managed land. If you are a skilled birder and would like to volunteer to help conduct bird point count surveys in the Parkers Creek IBA, please let us know at landmanager@acltweb.org.

[Editor's Note: On our ACLT Web site (<http://acltweb.org>) under "Natural Resources" you can find a printable "Checklist of Birds Found on ACLT Lands", a copy of Leslie Starr's "Study of Summer Birds of the Parker's Creek Watershed", and illustrated lists of birds found in ACLT's woods, field and water habitats.]

References

Audubon MD-D.C. Important Bird Areas. "Parkers Creek IBA". <http://md.audubon.org/sites/g/files/amh621/f/parkers_creek_iba-july_2016.pdf>

Audubon Society. "Important Bird Areas Program". <http://web4.audubon.org/bird/iba/?_ga=1.20419384.165451434.1462545593>

Autumn Phillips-Lewis
Land Manager, ACLT

Cultivating a Future

Before joining the Chesapeake Conservation Corps and thus the American Chestnut Land Trust, I spent my days working on a small farm located on the lower eastern shore of Maryland. After taking the farmer's class through Salisbury University, I became intrigued with the inner workings of this environment. Every action performed was intentional and rewarding, whilst the efficiency of a low-acreage farm stood out to me as extraordinary. Even though this farm was diminutive in size it produced food crops to feed hundreds of local families through markets and shares. This particular farmer I worked for was in fact a pioneer of organic production on the eastern shore and through this work I gained valuable skills and experiences that I will cherish for life. Work on this farm taught me various techniques including crop planning, seed starting, greenhouse production/maintenance, livestock management, and mushroom production. Most importantly, however, were the lessons learned about knowing precisely where your food is coming from and the methods by which it is produced. It is this face value that cannot be replaced by any organic certification.

According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture¹, the average age of the American farmer is 58 years old and growing. One could argue that food production is a dying trade; however, it is not just to succumb to the feelings of doom and gloom. In the past few years, Maine and other states in the northeast have seen an increase of 40 percent in farmers under the age of 35 (Mitchell, 2015). There has undoubtedly been a forceful push from consumers for an increased consciousness in food production in order to improve environmental and human health. This paradigm shift in our modern society is a crucial aspect of sustainable farming and the necessary support of it. It is my personal belief, and others may feel the same, that farmers such as the one I previously worked for, or ACLT's very own R.T. West, are a vital function in the propagation of sustainable agriculture for future generations. What comes to mind is the old adage of giving a person a fish versus teaching that same person how to fish. It is through the love of the trade and desire to teach it to a younger generation that a nation's food security can become established.

Mike Molina
Chesapeake Conservation Corps Member

References

¹US Census of Agriculture 2012

Mitchell, Jennifer. "A Young Generation Sees Greener Pastures in Agriculture." <<http://www.npr.org>>. 3 January 2015. Web. 24 February 2017.