



Bird Notes

From Northeast Kingdom Audubon
1302 Main Street, Saint Johnsbury, Vermont 05819

For Immediate Release

Top Ten Birds

What could this mean? Most often seen, most colorful, most abundant, most interesting? When I first saw “Top Ten Common Birds in Decline”, I was quite surprised and saddened. When I referenced the eastern meadowlark in Bird Notes in June, I failed to mention the seriousness of their decline. The native prairie grasslands that they depend on are in danger of becoming agricultural lands yielding corn for ethanol, and row crops for food. Trying to be upbeat about this topic is a challenge. However, this summer’s article by Greg Butcher, Audubon’s Director of Bird Conservation, entitled, “Wake Up Call”, got my attention. The hopeful conclusion points the way to activities that can make a difference for these birds. Read on.

First, let’s look at the cast of characters. Only birds that are showing somewhere in the order of a 65-82% decline in their populations made the top ten. Remember the bird counts I have mentioned throughout the year? The data from the Christmas Bird Count and the Breeding Bird Survey of USGS are now showing some unfortunate trends. (Next month, I promise to write about the positive trends!) Other parts of the country are witnessing the declines of the loggerhead shrike, northern bobwhite, and greater scaup. In addition to the eastern meadowlark, birds in decline that spend some time in Vermont include evening grosbeak, northern pintail, boreal chickadee, common tern, field sparrow and grasshopper sparrow. The studies show that since 1967 the average population of these ten common birds has fallen 70 percent.

But what are the problems? What is threatening our birds? It’s simple. Their preferred habitats have been changed. Examples? Warming trends are melting the permafrost earlier each year, and new southern species are invading new areas. Agricultural practices are changing for more corn production. Invasives species are spreading. And even forests growing up in new places are changing the birds’ habitats.

Feeling helpless, even though you have bird feeders out all year long? There are many activities for individuals and groups. If you are part of a group that can help to conserve farmlands, grasslands or wetlands, you know what to do. If you work to support sustainable forests, you know what to do. If you are helping to stop the spread of invasive species, you know what to do. Even individuals like you who monitor feeders, count birds when the time is right, and support the groups that are keeping track of our birds, you also know what to do. We need more time to tell if these efforts are paying off. I believe they will.

Happy Late Summer Birding!

Carolyn E. Boardman is a board member of NEK Audubon living in Brownington, Vermont. NEK Audubon is one of 8 chapters of Audubon Vermont and part of the National Audubon Society. NEK Audubon is a non -profit organization that encourages people to enjoy birds, wildlife and natural habitats through field trips, programs and publications. For more information about meetings, field trips and special events visit www.nekaudubon.org. Art work by Robin Rothman.