

## MASSACHUSETTS PARTNERS IN FLIGHT WORKING GROUP

by Bradford G. Blodget

While Peter Stangel discusses the national and international scope of the Partners in Flight program, this article focuses on the Massachusetts Partners in Flight Working Group, which is a subset of the thirteen-state Northeast Regional Working Group comprising the six New England states, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. Most of these states have also established their own state-level working groups.

Partners in Flight is a panhemispheric umbrella organization that was launched by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in 1990. It is literally built on partnerships and networking to address the conservation and management issues involving the neotropical migratory bird resource. The Massachusetts Working Group started meeting in February 1993. Chaired by the state ornithologist, the group includes foresters, ornithologists, researchers, managers, and representatives from some of the large landholding organizations in the state such as the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, the Metropolitan District Commission, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Harvard Forest, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Participation in the group is open to anyone interested in neotropical migrants.

It is estimated that 106 species of neotropical migratory birds are regular breeders in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Working Group has identified numerous monitoring activities that are already being conducted by various partner organizations here in Massachusetts to determine population abundance and distribution and trends. For example, twenty-seven U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey routes are currently operated in Massachusetts. Many of these have now been run for thirty years. Another particularly long-running monitoring project is the Forbush Bird Club's Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary Breeding Season Census that began in 1964.

The Massachusetts Audubon Society initiated point-count monitoring programs at several of its properties in 1988 and established a Grassland Bird Program that conducted thorough inventories of grassland birds in Massachusetts from 1993 through 1995. Expansion of the latter program regionally in 1996 promises to yield a better understanding of the relative importance of Massachusetts populations of grassland birds. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, in hopes of developing trend data of forest passerines in unfragmented forest, established a long-term point-count study at its Hiram Fox Wildlife Management Area on the heavily-forested Berkshire escarpment in Chester in 1986. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management and the Metropolitan District Commission are

initiating point counts on several of their properties. Manomet Observatory for Conservation Sciences has expanded its southeastern Massachusetts pine barrens study, which began in 1973. Such point counts complement BBS route data.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contributes strongly at the regional, interstate level through its new Connecticut River/Long Island Sound Ecosystem Team. Within this watershed, the new interstate Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge has very high on its agenda programs to address neotropical migrants. In the spring of 1996 a monitoring program will begin to identify habitat in the Connecticut River Valley important to migrating passerines. Work is currently underway to identify priority Connecticut River Valley habitat for breeding neotropical migratory birds. We are indeed fortunate that our state is included in these sweeping efforts that should help us to secure our population of neotropical migrants in the Connecticut River Valley.

The Massachusetts Working Group's broadest goal is to hold together our diverse populations of neotropical migrants in Massachusetts by encouraging and facilitating sound research and monitoring programs to better understand conservation needs and to identify priority areas and habitats for conservation.

As one can imagine, crafting management activities to benefit neotropical migrants is an extremely challenging task, given the highly fragmented ownership patterns of habitat in Massachusetts. The fine mosaic of ownership patterns in the northeastern states contrasts sharply with western states where land ownership of many significant habitats is highly concentrated in the hands of a small number of large land-holding agencies of the federal government. To a large extent, in the absence of any type of coordinated plan, this highly fragmented ownership pattern has precluded any one landowner, acting alone, from having much overall effect on any one species or species group. The most specific management actions implemented to date have been directed toward conservation and stabilization of the grassland species at the large air bases in Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts Working Group has developed point-count standards for technical guidance for those interested in long-term monitoring of forest bird populations in Massachusetts. The group is working along with the Northeast Working Group to develop criteria for generating lists of priority species for management purposes; studying ways to interact and manage priority species at an interstate or physiographic regional level; and preparing a draft state action plan. A strong Massachusetts delegation was present at the international Partners in Flight workshop in Cape May, New Jersey, on October 1-5, 1995. The theme of this meeting was "Building consensus for action—developing a strategy for a national conservation plan."

As a result of this meeting and after further discussions at a subsequent meeting of the Steering Committee of the Northeast Working Group in Newark,

New Jersey, on January 24-25, 1996, ten broad objectives were outlined to work toward. These included increasing public awareness of Partners in Flight; ensuring stakeholder representation in the development of conservation initiatives; expansion of the program to encompass all landbirds (except game species); partnering with neighboring Canadian provinces; promoting research on the demographics of common species; developing standard monitoring techniques for priority species not adequately sampled by BBS routes; ensuring the continuation of existing long-term monitoring programs; further developing interstate initiatives directed at grassland birds, boreal/mountaintop forest bird communities, and important migrant stopover sites; and encouraging new interstate cooperation among states where this will meet regional needs or objectives.

The Massachusetts Partners in Flight Working Group feels strongly that public input into the state's action plan will be very valuable and is looking forward to eventual informational meetings to solicit comments and suggestions. In the interim, questions or inquiries may be directed to the chair, Brad Blodget, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Route 135, Westborough, MA 01581-3337, telephone 508-792-7270, extension 152.

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### **ABA YOUTH TEAM AT THE 1996 WORLD SERIES OF BIRDING**

Please join *Bird Observer* in pledging your support for the American Birding Association's youth team in the 1996 World Series of Birding. The Pentax-sponsored ABA Tropicbirds, all eighteen years of age or younger, return for the fourth time to the twenty-four-hour New Jersey birdathon on May 11. The team expects to tally between 170 and 200 species.

Flat-rate or per-species pledges will boost the flourishing ABA youth program, which supports birding camps and courses, offers birding scholarships, and publishes *A Bird's-Eye View*, a quarterly newsletter by and for young birders.

The Massachusetts birding community has always had strong ties to the ABA, but we have special links to this year's ABA team. Mashpee's talented Jeremiah Trimble will be one of the Tropicbirds' five members, and Arlington resident Matt Pelikan (*Bird Observer's* subscription manager) is organizing the team and will serve as one of the drivers.

To register your pledge or for information about the ABA youth program, call the American Birding Association at 800-850-2473.

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