



Forest Birds

Resource Brief

Importance

Forest birds are a primary indicator of forest health. Forest birds are selective in choosing nesting sites, preferring to build nests only in large unfragmented forest tracts with mature trees and a healthy understory.

Forest bird populations are currently threatened by loss and degradation of habitat, including overbrowsing by deer, forest tree diseases, invasion of exotic plants, changes in fire regimes, development, and forest fragmentation. Forest bird behavior and survival is also affected by climate change, as birds shift their range with warming temperatures. According to the Audubon Society Breeding Bird Survey data from 1966 to 2003, 76 of 164 woodland species nationally are declining.

As urbanization in the National Capital Region (NCR) increases, the woodland parks of the region are becoming increasingly important as habitat reservoirs for forest birds. Our monitoring is helping us understand these changes.



The abundant red-eyed vireo. Public domain photo.

Monitoring Program & Results

During 2007 and 2008, the NCR Inventory & Monitoring Network, monitored forest bird populations at more than 380 plots within the region's parks. Results show that these parks support many bird species of conservation priority in high abundance and that some of the parks maintain populations of species that are declining rapidly across their ranges.

Cerulean warblers, which are being considered for federal listing as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, were recorded in Catocin Mountain Park and along the C&O Canal near Green Ridge State Park. The C&O Canal is also home to a high number of prothonotary warblers, a regionally declining species. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that the National Capital Region hosts abundant populations of the wood thrush, another declining species and the state bird of D.C.

The same I&M monitoring also showed the most abundant species in the parks, were the red-eyed vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*), northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), Acadian flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*), tufted titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*), wood thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*), and blue-gray gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila caerulea*).

The high numbers of forest birds whose overall populations are in decline, occupying the region's forests, is a sign that the quality of park habitats is good. It also highlights the importance of preserving habitats within the parks to ensure the future survival of these species.

Forest Bird Species in NCR Parks

