

Report to the Blake-Nuttall Fund: Massachusetts Important Bird Area Program

Mass Audubon
September, 2015

Title Page: Massachusetts Important Bird Area Program Signage Project

Abstract: The Important Bird Area (IBA) Program – The IBA concept was developed in 1985 in England by BirdLife International as a model for prioritizing bird conservation areas around the world. In 1995 BirdLife partnered with the American Bird Conservancy and the National Audubon Society to launch the IBA Program in the United States. Mass Audubon initiated the IBA Program in Massachusetts in 2001.

By 2002, 79 sites were identified and designated as IBAs throughout the Commonwealth. Since then Mass Audubon has made extensive significant efforts to promote bird conservation activities at existing IBAs, including the initiation of monitoring and support groups using volunteers and related alliances that will together increase protection and appropriate stewardship of IBAs in the future. The primary objective is to facilitate whatever strategy works best for each site as well as to ensure the future protection of the site as an IBA.

Among the tools needed to effectively publicize and educate the public about the existence and significance of the IBA Program are high quality, colorful, and informative signs, and high-quality informational brochures that can be prominently displayed or distributed to a wide variety of audiences at appropriate IBA venues throughout Massachusetts.

Submitted by: Wayne R. Petersen, Director, Massachusetts Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program

Original Projected Completion Date: August 31, 2014

Revised Project Completion Date: December 31, 2015

Total Requested from the Blake-Nuttall Fund: \$4,640

Total Received from the Blake-Nuttall Fund: \$4,640

Accomplishment of proposal objectives to date:

Since receiving this grant in October 2013, Mass Audubon has:

- Identified the most prominent and visible IBA sites around the state as targets for IBA signage.
- Created 7 IBA posters to be placed at corresponding MA IBAs as kiosk posters or mounted signs.
- Prepared for the production of additional IBA signs to be displayed at selected prominent IBA locations, each sign designed to fit the location in which it will be placed.
- Prepared for the re-printing of 500 IBA Brochures, including making edits and updates to the original 2007 IBA brochure.

Expenditures to date:

Activity	Budget	Amount Spent	Amount Remaining
Custom design of 16 IBA signs	\$940	\$470	\$470
Production of 2 indoor-outdoor IBA signs	\$2,600	Zero dollars	\$2,600
Production of 14 IBA kiosk posters	\$700	Zero dollars	\$700
Re-printing of 500 IBA Brochures	\$400	Zero dollars	\$400
Totals:	\$4,640	\$470	\$4,170

Project Objectives:

1. **Informational Signs:** Create informational signs describing specific IBAs that will raise awareness and inform visitors to these sites of their important value to avian species.
2. **Brochures:** Revise and reprint 500 of the highly effective and previously Blake-Nuttall Fund-supported IBA brochures. These brochures will be made available to visitors at selected prominent IBA sites: either at the front desk of the site's visitor center, or in acrylic brochure holders affixed directly adjacent to the signs at the site's kiosk.

The ultimate use of the signage and brochures is to continue raising the public's awareness of the IBA program and to encourage individuals to become stewards of designated IBAs to manage their landscapes in the best way possible for bird conservation.

Methods:

1. **Informational Signage:** Each IBA sign or poster will be specifically designed to fit the specifications and aesthetics of the location. The information on each sign will be site-specific, although appropriate logos and overall layout will have a standardized appearance. Each sign, whether it is a long-lasting outdoor sign, or a poster placed inside a kiosk will include:
 - color photographs of bird species characteristic of the IBA site being represented
 - bulleted information about the site itself (e.g., size of site and primary habitats, presence of listed species, rationale for IBA nomination)
 - topographic map view of the site- its boundaries and existing trails
 - information about how the IBA Program helps birds
 - information on how people can assist the IBA Program

The template for these signs is already in place.

2. **Brochures:** In 2006, Mass Audubon developed and produced a Blake-Nuttall Fund-supported brochure as one of the ways to promote the IBA Program in Massachusetts. The brochure included:

- map showing the locations of IBAs throughout Massachusetts
- history and background information about the IBA Program
- descriptions of the criteria used for identifying IBAs
- selection of colorful images of birds characteristic of several IBAs in Massachusetts
- examples of bird conservation successes already accomplished in Massachusetts

The target audience for this brochure included Mass Audubon members and donors, local bird clubs, conservation commissions, land trusts and private land owners, elected public officials, attendees at appropriate meetings and conferences, visitors to designated public IBA locations (e.g., National Wildlife Refuges, Department of Conservation and Recreation lands, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife Management Areas, National Park Service venues, etc.), and other relevant groups within the Commonwealth. We will update and produce 500 additional brochures for distribution to similar audiences. In addition to the channels described above, the brochures will be prominently displayed and made available in acrylic brochure holders affixed adjacent to informational signs wherever possible.

Value of the IBA Program to Ornithology and Bird Conservation in Massachusetts:

When Mass Audubon released its *2013 State of the Birds* report one consequence was the reality that one of the most critical threats facing many bird populations today is the continued progression of development and sprawl throughout the Commonwealth. Mass Audubon's response to this challenge has been a significant reinforcement of bird-centered conservation initiatives and resources. Because the decline of bird species in Massachusetts that were once common is a reliable indicator of environmental damage and habitat deterioration, the significance of the IBA Program assumes added importance. The *2013 State of the Birds* report revealed that despite significant conservation efforts, many Massachusetts and New England bird populations continue to exhibit alarming declines. Juxtaposed with these habitat losses and species declines is a growing public interest in birds, and birding as a hobby. The IBA Program is a way of continuing to strengthen Mass Audubon's ability to protect remaining critical bird habitat in the Commonwealth by taking advantage of the popularity of birding. It has been shown in other states, as well as abroad, that the process of identifying and protecting IBAs creates increased public awareness about birds and the need for habitat protection. IBAs become the currency for building partnerships and cooperation among ornithologists, birdwatchers, government agencies, industry, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations.

Evaluation: The effectiveness of IBA activities will include:

- Increasing requests from the public for programs and speaking engagements that will highlight the IBA Program
- Increasing questions from private landowners requesting assistance in managing their land for birds
- Increasing reference to IBAs on the Massachusetts birding listserv (i.e., Massbird), and on Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society's eBird website
- Increasing education and outreach of IBA programs at Mass Audubon sanctuaries
- Increasing and regular reference to the IBA Program in Mass Audubon and other external publications

The Massachusetts IBA program can also be used to guide land-use planning and resource management decisions throughout the state by specifically taking birds and their habitat needs into account. Birds are widely used as environmental indicators for guiding conservation efforts that protect biological diversity. Evaluation of the long-term effect of the IBA initiative will include how data gathered will be used for statewide conservation planning, education, stewardship, and advocacy, and how it serves to enhance and inform the national IBA initiative.

Investigator Qualifications:

Wayne Petersen is Mass Audubon's director of the Massachusetts Important Bird Areas (IBA) program. He has led trips and tours, lectured, and conducted birding workshops across North America for over 40 years. His tour leading experiences have taken him from arctic Canada to South America, Antarctica, Iceland, Svalbard, Africa, Madagascar, Australia, and New Zealand. Wayne was a founding member of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee, is a New England Regional Editor for *North American Birds*, serves on the advisory committees of the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program and the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, and he is on the board of the Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts, and serves as president of *Bird Observer* magazine. In addition to regularly contributing to numerous publications his writing projects include co-authoring *Birds of Massachusetts* (with Richard Veit) and *Birds of New England* (with Roger Burrows), co-editing the *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 1* (with Roger Meservey) and the *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2* (with Joan Walsh), contributing to *The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding*, and *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior*, and writing the National Audubon Society's *Pocket Guide to Songbirds and Familiar Backyard Birds (East)*. In 2005 he received the American Birding Association's Ludlow Griscom Award for Outstanding Contributions in Regional Ornithology.