

Ceruleans find a safe home at Black Rock Forest

Way up in an enormous tree in Cornwall's Black Rock Forest, a small bird famous for its beauty and guts is singing full blast. Meet the male cerulean warbler. It's an at-risk species whose population numbers are falling.



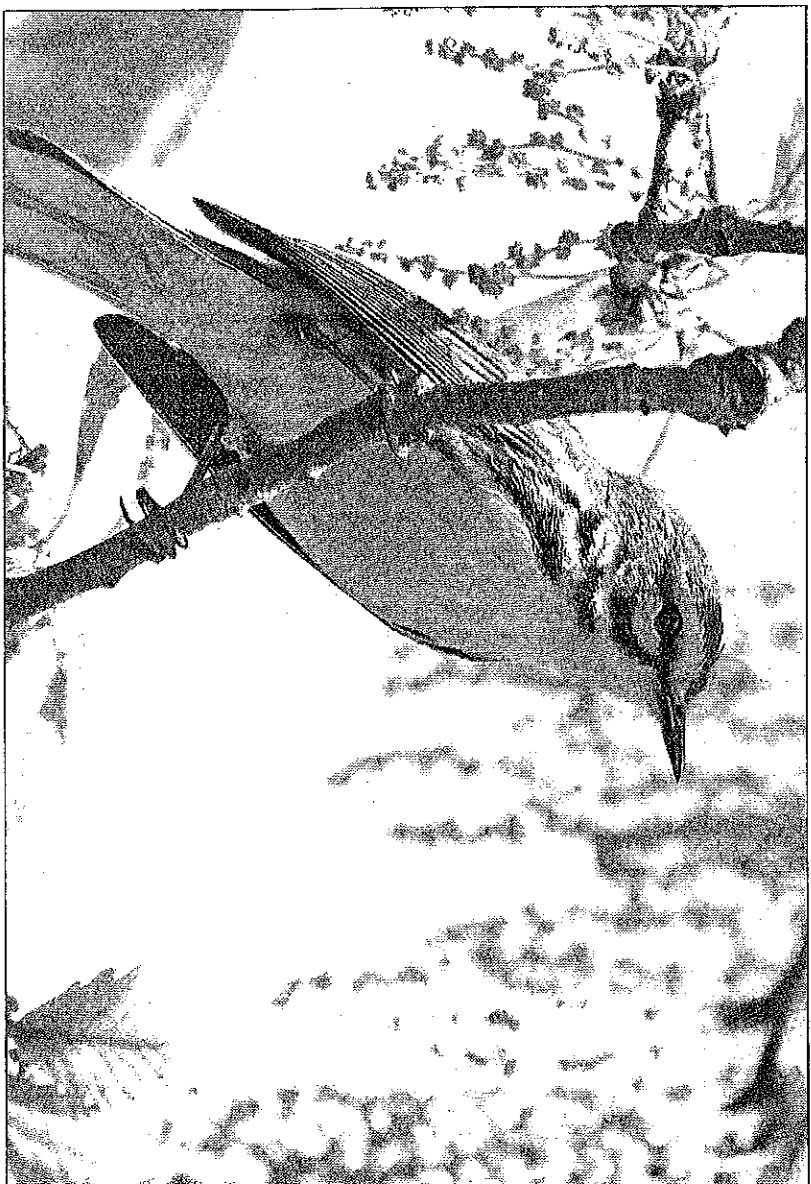
WAYNE HALL

In sunlight, this small bird glows in gorgeous markings of blue and white.

"Ceruleans are spectacular," says Terryanne Maenza-Gmelch, a Barnard College forest ecology researcher working with the 3,830-acre Black Rock Forest Consortium's treasure trove of birds. "The male cerulean is gorgeous, sort of navy blue and a little bit of turquoise and powder blue. It's a must-see bird."

"If you go out early, and also in late afternoon, on the trails you can see them and they are striking," Maenza-Gmelch says. Not only is the cerulean a looker, it's one tough songster. It flies to South America every fall from here, about 3,000-plus miles - then back to Black Rock in spring. That's an exhausting 6,000-mile round trip by a small bird that weighs about as much as a nickel piled on a quarter.

This lovely bird is just one reason why Black Rock Forest, in conjunction with Schunemunk Forest, was recently named an expanded Audubon Society Important Bird Area (IBA), a



The prairie warbler is among the five species of birds on the Audubon Watch List that are flourishing at Black Rock Forest. PHOTO PROVIDED

designation "that will help us safeguard threatened bird species," says Black Rock Forest Consortium Executive Director William Schuster.

"Cerulean numbers are down and they face threats on both ends of their migrations, but they keep coming back here year after year. It's a great thing," Schuster says.

Federal officials say cerulean warbler numbers declined at the steepest rate of any North American warbler monitored

recently.

"But these birds are holding their own around here," Schuster says. "So it's fortunate that we're able to maintain this great forest for them."

In return, this gorgeous bird and other birds help by gobbling Gypsy moth caterpillars, who deforest trees big time.

Many bird species inhabiting the Black Rock research gem also "have threats at both ends of migration, so fortunately we're able to maintain this large,

great habitat suitable for them, too," Schuster says. "And they keep coming back year after year. It's a great thing."

People get really excited about bird preservation. After all, birds have deep emotional connections with us.

Birds take us out of ourselves, cheer us up, make us wonder and put the world in perspective.

As Audubon-New York Executive Director Erin Crotty says, today's "IBA's are the most



Bob Slechta, an Edgar A. Means Bird Club member, took part in a census of Black Rock's bird life for the Important Bird Area designation. WAYNE HALL/ FOR THE TIMES HERALD-RECORD

important places on earth." Yes, they are. So go down any wooded Black Rock trail and you never know which great creature you'll find.

"Yes," says Teresa Loomis, 13, of Goshen. "That happens to me all the time."

Recently, she says, "I saw a male and female scarlet tanager together!"

—scribewayne@aol.com

More information

To learn more about Important Bird Areas, go to my.audubon.org/conservation/adopt-iba