



BLACK ROCK
FOREST
CONSORTIUM

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**Black Rock Forest Given Audubon Conservation Distinction:
Important Bird Area (IBA)
*PRESS CONFERENCE ON JUNE 4TH AT BLACK ROCK FOREST***

Cornwall, NY – June 4, 2016 – Black Rock Forest Consortium and Audubon New York announced the designation of Black Rock and Schunnemunk forests as part of an expanded, existing Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA). The region will be known as Hudson Highlands West IBA: Harriman and Sterling to Black Rock and Storm King. Audubon’s Important Bird Area program is an international bird conservation initiative with the significant goal of identifying the most important places for birds and conserving them. IBAs are identified according to standardized, scientific criteria through a collaborative effort among state, national, and international non-governmental conservation organizations, state and federal government agencies, local conservation groups, academics, grassroots environmentalists, and birders.

“We are delighted to receive the Important Bird Area designation because it will help us safeguard threatened bird species, including five that are on Audubon’s Watch List, but which studies show are thriving in Black Rock Forest : cerulean warblers, wood thrush, and blue-winged, worm-eating, and prairie warblers,” said Dr. William Schuster, the Executive Director of Black Rock Forest Consortium. “We particularly want to thank Dr. Terryanne Maenza-Gmelch of Barnard College for her leadership in preparing the successful IBA application, and the Orange County Land Trust and members of the Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club for completing bird surveys in support of this effort.”

Increased habitat fragmentation, especially from land development, puts threatened Black Rock Forest birds like the cerulean warbler and the wood thrush at increased risk. Local birding experts like Bob Slechta of the Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club see evidence of the effects each year. Cowbirds, large birds that thrive in disturbed areas, scan newly exposed forest edges, looking for other birds to parasitize by laying eggs in their nests. Cerulean warblers and wood thrush are smaller species, whose eggs hatch later than those of cowbirds. They have no natural defense against parasitism, and will raise cowbird nestlings at the expense of their own offspring.

Consortium scientist, Dr. Terryanne Maenza-Gmelch of Barnard College noted that, "The cerulean warbler and wood thrush thrive in large, mature forests like Black Rock, where they can be shielded

from nest parasites like the brown-headed cowbird. Ceruleans like to nest in the canopy, while wood thrush prefer the understory. Black Rock Forest Consortium's exemplary forest management has kept intact a mosaic of different-aged forest patches and habitat structural complexity that bird populations need, while the Consortium's successful deer management allows the understory to grow."

"This designation can be a significant tool for community and land use planners in both the preparation of area plans as well as the review of development proposals," said Orange County Planning Commissioner, David E. Church, AICP. "By knowing in advance where important habitat is, we can be smarter about our activities and investments, and we can proactively avoid or lessen impacts from public and private land development decisions."

In sum, Erin Crotty sees IBAs as the connections between people, birds and their habitats, "Where birds thrive, people prosper -- our fates have long been inextricably intertwined." Crotty continued, "Audubon is honored to recognize Black Rock Forest as part of the Important Bird Area. IBAs are the most important places on Earth for birds. Congratulations to the Black Rock Consortium and its many partners. Large contiguous forests, like this IBA, are crucial to the survival of breeding forest song birds. Audubon New York is grateful for the Consortium's vision, hard work, and model stewardship practices."