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## Black Rock Forest named key haven for birds

CORNWALL – 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 goal of identifying the most important places for birds and conserving them.

"We are delighted to receive the 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," said Dr. William Schuster, executive director of Black Rock Forest Consortium.

The five species are cerulean warblers; wood thrush; and blue-winged, worm-eating, and prairie warblers, Schuster said.

"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," he said.

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 such as Bob Slechta of the Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club say they see evidence of the effects each year.

"This IBA designation can be a significant tool for community and land-use planners in the preparation of area plans, as well as the review of development proposals," said David Church, Orange County planning commissioner.

"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," he said.

Erin Crotty of Audubon New York said she sees IBAs as the connections between people, birds and their habitats.

"Where birds thrive, people prosper - our fates have long been inextricably intertwined," Crotty said. "IBAs are the most important places on Earth for birds."



Erin Crotty of Audubon New York speaks about Black Rock Forest being named a new Audubon Important Bird Area. PHOTO PROVIDED

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