

Birds Draw Supporters to Preserves



BILL MOSES

The 2014 “Birds of Natural Lands Trust” calendar features lovely photos by Bill Moses, including this scarlet tanager.

2014 is the Year of the Bird for Natural Lands Trust, operating in eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey. It decided to use bird photographs by long-time member and volunteer Bill Moses to make a “Birds of Natural Lands Trust” calendar for members. “Once we landed on the calendar idea, a workshop program grew out of it with the help of our preserve staff,” says Director of Communications Kirsten Werner. “We hoped to engage new members by starting with ‘Birding 101’ and then encourage current members to try new ways of enjoying the preserves if they were not already bird enthusiasts.”

The launch of the birding workshops corresponded with the 60th anniversary of Natural Lands Trust, founded by a group of birders working to prevent an oil company from dumping dredge waste into marshland that is now a National Wildlife Refuge.

The land trust began the workshop series in November 2013, priming participants for spring birding field trips and an informal competition to spot the most bird species in 2014. •

Private Lands Provide Essential Bird Habitat

The 2013 edition of the “State of the Birds” report, an annual assessment of the status of U.S. bird populations submitted by 15 bird conservation organizations and government agencies to the U.S. Department of Interior, focuses on the crucial role of private land protection in sustaining bird populations.

It lauds government programs that support private land conservation and land trusts for their vital role in working with landowners to secure, restore and conserve habitat for American birds.

According to the report, more than 100 U.S. bird species have 50% or more of their populations on private lands, and many of those species are in decline and in desperate need of habitat conservation. Land trusts are particularly important players in conserving private lands for bird habitat in the eastern forest, grasslands and western forest regions.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, one of the report’s authors, launched an initiative in 2013 to collaborate with land trusts on conserving bird habitat on private lands.

“We are using interviews and surveys to thoroughly understand how we can best work with land trusts so birds, land trusts and communities benefit,” says Ashley Dayer, conservation social scientist for the lab. “We expect to roll out our collaborative initiative and resources beginning in fall 2014.”

To read the report, visit www.stateofthebirds.org. •

Birding Trail Creates Regional Attraction

The coastal wetlands along Lake Huron’s Saginaw Bay are not universally appreciated, even by locals, says Zachary Branigan, Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy’s executive director. Not everyone understands the critical role wetlands play for a cleaner lake by acting as a natural filter, or that they offer opportunities for recreational uses, such as kayaking and birding.

That is the primary reason the conservancy planned and created the Saginaw Bay Birding Trail, which links 50 existing parks and preserves along Lake Huron’s Saginaw Bay into a regional tourist attraction. The extensive coastal wetland system around the bay includes land trust preserves and local, state and federal parks and natural lands. The area is a critical migration stopover and nesting site for a diverse array of birds.

The 142-mile trail, which debuted in 2013, is marked by “hotspot” signs to highlight the birds and coastal habitat (including a QR code for smartphones to link to a website), a field guide and a physical hub for the trail in downtown Bay City.

“We’re trying to draw people in to understand and appreciate the unique natural qualities of our region,” Branigan says. “When you say ‘wetland,’ many people think ‘regulatory obstruction.’ But then you take them out on a 200-acre site and they see 75 different species of birds—then they get it.” •