

 Audubon | MID-ATLANTIC

Impact Report

FALL 2023



Saltmarsh Sparrow

Meeting the Moment for Birds and the Planet

Audubon's efforts to protect birds and the places they need require cutting-edge science, innovative conservation methods, and bird-lovers of all stripes who care and who act—so thank you! Our vast network of 16 state and regional offices, 55 centers and sanctuaries, 525 local and campus chapters, and 1.6 million members makes us a powerful force for conservation, with the ability to catalyze actions at the scale of the challenges we face.

In response to the loss of three billion birds over the last 50 years and the compounding threats of climate change, Audubon is embarking on a new strategic direction to maximize our impact. Touching down in every office, center, and community we work in, we are shaping a future where birds and people thrive. In the Mid-Atlantic region—and across the western hemisphere—we will protect more habitat, accelerate renewable energy, advance bird-friendly policies,

engage broader constituencies, and build upon our conservation achievements from last year.

Because of your support, we were able to make important strides this year in the Mid-Atlantic to start to “bend the bird curve” for some of our region's most threatened species, including the Saltmarsh Sparrow and Cerulean Warbler. Some of Audubon's top accomplishments in the Mid-Atlantic and beyond this year include:

- CEO Elizabeth Gray attended the U.S. Climate Action Summit and shared Audubon's efforts to tackle climate change through maintaining and restoring natural climate solutions and supporting responsibly sited renewable energy.
- Audubon Mid-Atlantic's new Marshes for Tomorrow initiative is creating a plan for saltmarsh restoration at a landscape scale in Maryland to maintain 25,000 acres critical for at-risk species like the

Saltmarsh Sparrow.

- The Audubon Conservation Ranching Program certified its 100th ranch as bird-friendly, and we are ending the year with a total 111 certified ranches covering 2.8 million acres.
- Audubon Mid-Atlantic's Pollinator Corridor project partnered with more than 25 community organizations in flood-prone southwest Philadelphia to create public biodiverse green spaces that provide safe refuge for birds and people.
- Audubon's Conserva Aves team completed its first request for proposals in Colombia, selecting 12 initial projects covering more than 30,000 hectares.
- Audubon Mid-Atlantic's Healthy Forest program is supporting Cerulean Warbler populations on the Kittatinny Ridge.

We are ready to meet this critical moment for birds and the planet and are grateful for partners like you who help support and advance Audubon's conservation efforts—from the marshes of the Eastern Shore of Maryland to Canada's Boreal Forest to the coastline of Chile. **Thank you for supporting this important work.**



Cerulean Warbler

Habitat Conservation

Healthy Forests

This year Audubon launched a Forester Endorsement Program, the first of its kind in Pennsylvania. The program trains and endorses foresters who then use their expertise to implement healthy forest habitat projects across the state. The program teaches techniques that encourage healthy bird and wildlife habitat, and also creates young forests that can sequester carbon at faster rates. These managed forests provide critical ecosystem services to neighboring communities while making these habitats more resilient to a changing climate.



Foresters participating in our endorsement program.

Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape

Over the last two years, Audubon Mid-Atlantic, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, has worked to improve migratory bird habitat at Cove Mountain in the Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape. Now in its second year, these efforts are showing promise. Spring migratory bird monitoring revealed that the improved area was used by over 52 bird species, six of which breed outside of the state, which suggests the value of the improved stopover habitat. These efforts are aimed at increasing and stabilizing the regional populations of priority species such as the Golden-winged Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Cerulean Warbler.

Shorebird Nesting

Audubon Mid-Atlantic celebrated a banner year for chicks on the



Common Terns



Golden-winged Warbler

artificial nesting rafts in Maryland's Coastal Bays. 322 Common Tern nests were built on the raft, up from 155 nests in 2022 and 23 nests in 2021. The artificial nesting rafts for Common Terns are an interim measure to safeguard tern populations until natural sand island habitat can be restored.

The continued success of these artificial rafts has helped to restore populations of Common Tern in Maryland, which have declined by a staggering 90 to 95 percent since the mid-1980s due to sea level rise and the coastal erosion of their natural barren sand nesting islands. While the rebound of this species is promising, we see more opportunities to assist these shorebirds. Audubon continues to work with partners to create policy through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to preserve and protect the natural barren sand nesting islands in Maryland's Coastal Bays.

Saltmarsh Restoration

Years of planning and partnerships have resulted in significant public funding—\$1.6 million total from US Fish & Wildlife Service and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation—to support Audubon Mid-Atlantic-led saltmarsh restoration planning and initial restoration projects in Maryland. Our Marshes for Tomorrow initiative is creating a plan to maintain and restore 25,000 acres of saltmarsh habitat at a landscape scale. These projects fill a critical need, as we continue to see climate-driven sea level

rise affect saltmarsh habitat in Maryland. This work will help ensure the long-term resilience of birds such as the Saltmarsh Sparrow, Black Rail, Royal Tern, and Back Skimmer and will also safeguard the region's concentrations of migratory shorebirds that utilize these saltmarshes during their annual lifecycle.

Delaware River Watershed

This year, the Delaware River Watershed program continued to connect conservation from the headwaters to the capes of the Delaware River, focusing on the places and issues most important to birds. Our work addresses habitat loss and degradation, water pollution and the spread of invasive

species through on-the-ground restoration efforts, policy initiatives, and education and engagement with a robust network of chapters, members and partners.

In Philadelphia, staff and volunteers led riparian buffer improvements at Whitby Meadows, Cobbs Creek Park, and in 23 pocket parks in environmental justice communities in southwest Philadelphia. These projects create access to biodiverse green space and support a variety of bird species.

Throughout southeastern Pennsylvania, 4,000 native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants were planted in urban, suburban, and forests throughout the watershed to

improve bird habitat.

At the Discovery Center and John James Audubon Center, we created new and expanded existing native plant demonstration projects that highlight the importance of rain gardens, riparian buffers, and productive meadows. This fall, 60 volunteers helped plant 300 trees along the Perkiomen Creek riparian buffer at the John James Audubon Center to replace trees that were destroyed during Hurricane Ida in 2021.



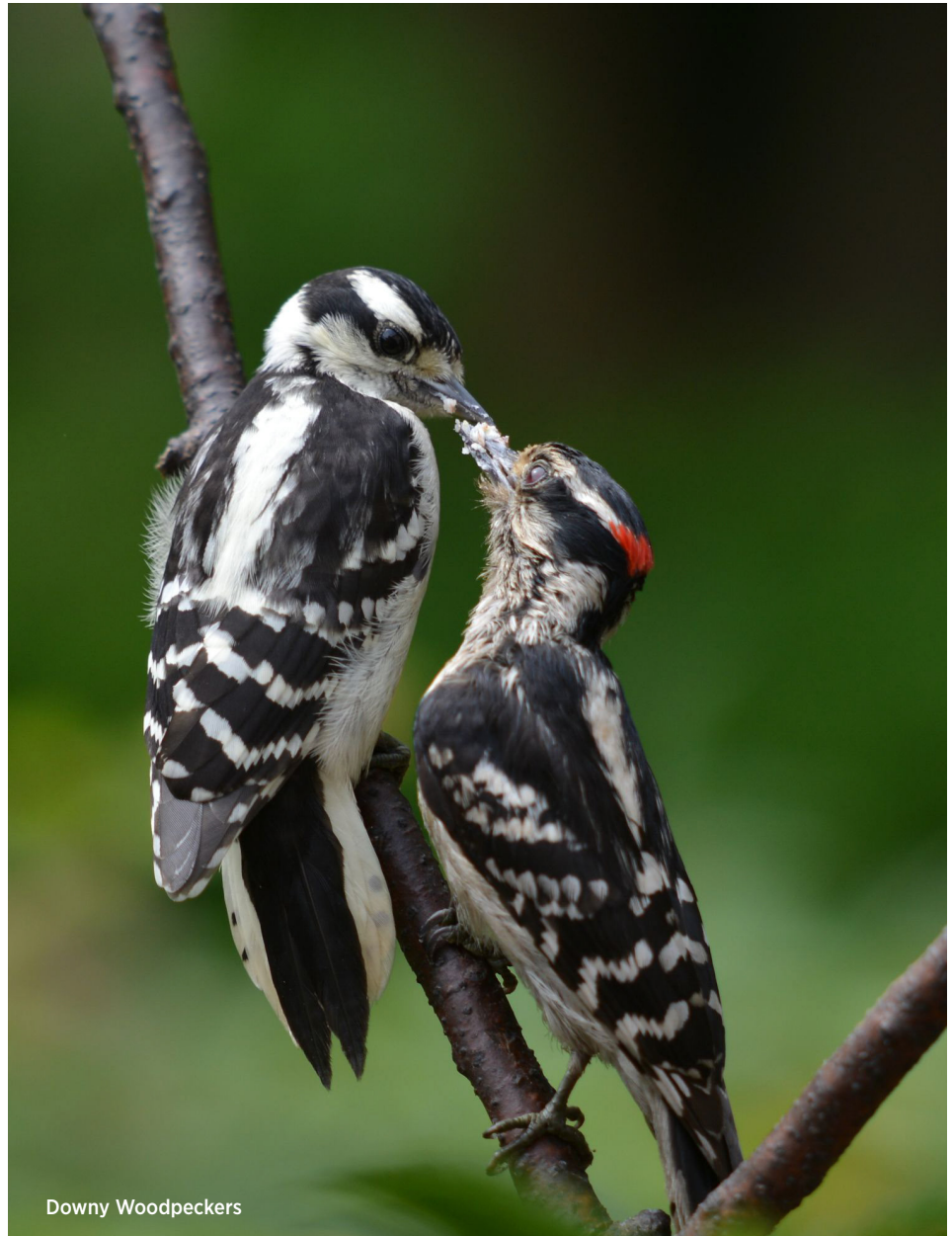
The Cecil Street Garden at sunset.

Climate Action

Audubon Mid-Atlantic utilizes the “natural climate solutions” of conservation, restoration, and land management to increase carbon storage and decrease emissions in the places where we work. We use nature itself to help the world reach its greenhouse gas emissions goals and help places, people, and animals withstand the impact of climate change.

This year, Audubon Mid-Atlantic’s programs prioritized climate action in the following ways:

- Our **Healthy Forests program** provides foresters with bird- and climate-friendly techniques to manage biodiverse forests that will sequester more carbon over time.
- Through our **Delaware River Watershed initiative**, we are planting trees, restoring riparian buffers, and creating new public green infrastructure in neighborhoods prone to flooding. This work reduces air temperatures and also filters rainwater before it reaches local streams and rivers.
- Our **Coastal program** seeks to restore thousands of acres of saltmarsh through green infrastructure. Rather than using sea walls and bulkheads to block coastal storm surge in Maryland’s Coastal Bays, we propose the use of nature-based solutions that will store carbon while acting as a natural sponge to let water ebb



- and flow with less severity.
- Through our **policy and advocacy effort**, Audubon Mid-Atlantic and our members are raising awareness of the benefits of green infrastructure investments that provide important ecosystem services for neighboring communities while increasing habitat and greenspaces for birds and people.

- **The John James Audubon Center and Discovery Center** are community spaces that encourage exploration, where visitors discover themselves in nature, practice leadership, and work toward greener, more climate resilient communities for birds and people.

Policy & Network Engagement



Over 90 people joined I Bird I Vote outside Annapolis, MD for a discussion on state and national policy priorities and action items. Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary Josh Kurtz and U.S. Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen addressed the group.

In Annapolis and Harrisburg, Audubon Mid-Atlantic and its more than 90,000 regional supporters promoted policies that address the growing challenges of climate change and its effect on the birds and people that call the Mid-Atlantic region home. Audubon Mid-Atlantic members took action more than 3,600 times this year by providing testimony, meeting with lawmakers, and contacting their legislators. Some of our top legislative wins for Pennsylvania and Maryland include:

Pennsylvania

- The state budget included a \$112 million increase for the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to address infrastructure improvements in Pennsylvania's parks and forests and to invest in natural climate solutions in the state's landscapes.

This is the largest increase in decades. The budget also included \$6 million in additional funding for the Department of Environmental Protection.

- Audubon Mid-Atlantic continues to support legislation that improves the state's renewable energy portfolio standards and keeps Pennsylvania involved in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

Maryland

- The Forest Conservation Act will update forest conservation goals and definitions to reflect new data, protect and conserve more forest land, and give local governments flexibility to pursue solutions that advance equity.
- The POWER Act sets the goal of Maryland producing 8.5 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2031. This is a significant step forward in climate

action as increasing renewable energy production will work to mitigate climate-change-induced habitat loss throughout the region.

- Maryland Sustainable Buildings requires all buildings that receive 50% public funding to meet the LEED standards that prevent bird collisions and conserve building energy usage.
- Make Community Solar Permanent makes permanent a community solar pilot project, to incentivize access to renewable energy by low- and moderate-income residents.
- Pollinator-Friendly Powerlines Bill prohibits the enforcement of "weed" height ordinances in some powerline corridors and allows electric utilities to create pollinator-friendly habitats in those corridors.

Community Building



Rodney Stotts, one of the country's leading African American master falconers, *Bird Brother* author, and the subject of *The Falconer* documentary, captivated The Discovery Center audience as he shared his worldview that nature heals while addressing issues of social and environmental injustice.

Baltimore Program

Over the last year, Audubon reimagined its work in Baltimore to respond to the urgency of making the city more climate resilient. It is clear that many communities are already suffering from extreme heat, flooding, and environmental injustices. We believe that Audubon Mid-Atlantic has an important role to play in community-wide efforts to address these climate-related issues. With our new Baltimore Implementation Plan, we will utilize the strong community partnerships we have forged over

the last two decades to directly impact Baltimore's need for more public, biodiverse green spaces, lower ambient temperatures, and cleaner water that supports birds and communities. In the coming year, we will share more about our new Baltimore program and hope that you will be inspired to join us in these efforts.

Discovery Center

This year, Audubon Mid-Atlantic welcomed 9,000 visitors to The Discovery Center, in addition to the 1,500 students who participated

in environmental programming. In partnership with Philadelphia Outward Bound School, we hosted 7 free Discovery Days and Discovery Nights that 224 people attended. Audubon offered an additional 43 community programs attended by 911 people over the year. Programming ranged from birding outings to watercolor art lessons and poetry readings to butterfly counts.

John James Audubon Center

In the last year, more than 3,000 people attended 100 community and student programs at the John James Audubon Center. Programs included birding by canoe, tours of the visitor center and historic property, bird walks, advocacy opportunities, and monthly free admission to the visitor center. April's Earth Day Native Plant sale attracted 400 plant lovers!



Older teens enter a pathway for workforce readiness in the green sector through an after-school paid Environmental Youth Leadership program at The Discovery Center and the John James Audubon Center. In addition to foundational STEM learning, the program includes career presentations, civic engagement, and hands-on conservation action.



Blue Jay and Red-headed Woodpecker

With Gratitude

Audubon Mid-Atlantic made significant strides toward our mission to protect birds and the places they need over the last year—successes that would not have been possible without your continued support. Building upon this year’s progress, we are primed for an even greater impact in 2024. We are deeply grateful for your continued commitment to protecting birds and the places they need—in the Mid-Atlantic region and beyond. If you’d like more information about how the work that you support in the Mid-Atlantic contributes to our ambitious strategic plan, Flight Plan, please don’t hesitate to contact Chelsea Heck.

Thank you.

Regional Offices

Pennsylvania

1201 Pawlings Road
Audubon, PA 19403
pa.audubon.org

Maryland

2901 E. Baltimore Avenue
Box 2
Baltimore, MD 21224
md.audubon.org

Contact

Suzanne Biemiller

Vice President and Executive Director
suzanne.biemiller@audubon.org

Chelsea Heck

Development Manager
chelsea.heck@audubon.org

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