

## Audubon's Important Bird Areas in Ohio

The National Audubon Society has taken the initiative to identify Important Bird Areas in states throughout the nation. The goal of the Important Bird Areas (IBA) program is to identify and establish a network of sites to be protected or managed for the conservation of birds. IBAs are identified using standardized criteria in accordance with BirdLife International-sponsored programs in the U.S. and other parts of the world, primarily Africa and Europe. Audubon Ohio is coordinating the program in Ohio.

IBAs are irreplaceable sources of avian abundance and diversity. Sites designated as IBAs hold large concentrations or exceptional diversity of birds, harbor rare and/or endangered species, contain unique or threatened habitat supporting a representative suite of birds, or have a history of avian research supported by published data. IBAs include sites on both private and public lands and vary in size from a few to thousands of acres, but are usually distinguishable from the surrounding landscape. The conservation of these sites must be a high priority if we are to maintain healthy avian resources and reverse the decline of many bird species.

The IBA effort in Ohio is well underway. Dr. Edward Burtt, Jr. of Ohio Wesleyan University chairs an Ohio IBA Technical Committee composed of members among those most knowledgeable about birds in the state. Representatives from ODNR's Division of Natural Areas and Preserves and Division of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, park districts, natural history museums, several universities, and nature centers all have contributed to the IBA program. This committee has determined Ohio criteria for establishing IBAs based on scientific data concerning endangered species and bird population parameters. It has formulated the nomination process that will result in the designation of a suite of 80-100 IBA's throughout Ohio.

In the fall of 2000, the IBA Technical Committee will reach determinations on the first nominations submitted this past summer. Some sites will undoubtedly have been left out. IBA nomination forms are available for anyone interested in nominating an area based on the criteria outlined in the IBA selection guidelines. At the end of the identification process, we will prepare a detailed list of IBAs. This list will include location, type of habitat, significance to bird populations, and additional information obtained through the scientific evaluation process. We will distribute this information to state, county, and municipal planning commissions, local land trusts, Audubon chapters, and other habitat conservation groups, enabling them to add these sites to their local conservation agendas. Audubon Ohio will work with partner groups and volunteers to identify and implement conservation strategies according to the size, location, ownership, and type of areas listed. For information, contact John Ritzenhaler, Director of Habitat Conservation at Audubon Ohio, at 614-224-3303 or <jritzenhaler@audubon.org>.

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This eerie turkey vulture picture was taken at Cowan Lake, Clinton Co., on 16 July 2000. Photo by Larry Gara.