

**Conservation Plan for the Mamacoke Important Bird Area in Quaker Hill,
Connecticut**

Summary

The National Audubon Society has recognized the shoreline of the Thames River between Harrison's Landing and Smith Cove in Quaker Hill (Waterford) as an Important Bird Area for Connecticut. Important Bird Areas constitute a network of sites in the United States and other countries that provide critically important habitat for bird populations. The site on the Thames River centers on Mamacoke Island, which is a designated natural area within the Connecticut College Arboretum. It includes three coves and two salt ponds that provide important habitat for a variety of ducks that spend the winter in Connecticut. Smith and Mamacoke coves are especially important as feeding areas for ducks during periods of intense cold during mid winter when freshwater lakes, reservoirs and rivers are covered with ice. The brackish water of the Thames River generally does not freeze completely and thus provides an open-water refuge for Hooded Mergansers, Black Ducks, Canvasbacks and other waterfowl species. Although large flocks of ducks only concentrate in these coves for a few weeks each year, this section of the Thames River may still be critically important for their survival through the winter. The coves also support Bald Eagles, Pied-billed Grebes and American Coots during the winter, and Ospreys and a variety of species of herons during the summer. The adjacent upland areas within the Connecticut College Arboretum are also important for birds. Several open fields are maintained with controlled burning or periodic mowing. In 2004 a 12-acre parcel

in the Arboretum was restored to open grassland with scattered trees to improve habitat for species that require open areas. This restored area should provide better habitat for Screech Owls, American Woodcocks, Blue-winged Warblers, Orchard Orioles, and other species that require meadows or park-like savannas.

As part of the Important Bird Area program, Glenn Dreyer, Robert Askins and Scott Peterson of Connecticut College have drafted a conservation plan that includes a history of the area and of the research and resource management around Mamacoke Island. The entire plan is available on-line at the Connecticut College Arboretum web site (<http://arboretum.conncoll.edu/>). Natural habitats in much of the Mamacoke Important Bird Area are already protected in the Connecticut College Arboretum. Protection of a couple of small, undeveloped parcels of land along the river shore would help protect the coves. Our main goals, however, concern better management of conservation land and public waterways that make up the bulk of the Important Bird Area. Key goals are to reduce sewage infiltration and runoff of sediments into the coves and river, and to continue active maintenance of meadows. We also plan to erect nest boxes and nest platforms at the site, and to expand our program for monitoring bird populations. Another high priority is to discuss the importance of this section of the river for conservation with local residents, and to ask for their advice and help in protecting the area