

Bird Mountain Wildlife Management Area

General Description

Bird Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 640-acre parcel of land owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. The WMA is located approximately six miles west of the city of Rutland. It lies within three towns including 175 acres in Ira, 115 acres in Castleton, and 350 acres in Poultney.

History

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department purchased this land from H. Tyler Benner, Jr. in 1976. The WMA's name is derived from the prominent 2,216-foot rock outcrop known as "Birdseye Mountain." A portion of this mountain is publicly owned and occupies the northeast corner of the WMA.

Habitat Features

Bird Mountain WMA is situated within the Western Foothills physiographic region, which has one of the mildest climates in the state. The topography of the parcel ranges from fairly level former pasture and farmland to the steep talus slopes of Birdseye Mountain. The mountain overlooks a mix of hardwoods that include red and sugar maple, yellow and paper birch, beech and aspen that covers about 70% of the WMA. The remainder is comprised of white pines and remnant fields. One major watercourse, Gulley Brook, drains the WMA with several smaller feeder streams traversing the parcel. The brook has great aesthetic value and is worth the short hike to see it.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals White-tailed deer is an important game species, and Bird Mountain WMA provides critical deer wintering habitat. The WMA is excellent habitat for gray squirrels and supports a large population. Cottontail rabbits are likely to be found in the more open areas where the brush provides more cover and browse. Coyotes, fishers, red fox and raccoons can be found throughout the WMA. Mink are more likely to be found along Gulley Brook or the smaller feeder streams.

Birds The peregrine falcon, which is featured on the State's conservation license plate, is the fastest bird in the world and is capable of diving in excess of 200 miles per hour. These amazing birds were known to have nested previously on the steep rocky ledges of Birdseye Mountain. The historic nesting was one reason for the Department's purchase of this parcel. The peregrine falcon population crashed in the 1960's and the last known sighting of a wild adult peregrine at a northeastern nesting site occurred in Vermont in 1970. The peregrine population was entirely wiped out in Vermont and throughout the Northeast. Their demise was due to the effects of the pesticide DDT, which thinned eggshells to the point of breaking under the weight

of the parents. The peregrine falcon is a State endangered species and was Federally listed as endangered in 1970.

DDT was banned in 1972. With that and the help of an intense captive breeding program, peregrine falcons have made a dramatic recovery. The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, in cooperation with the Peregrine Fund and the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, released 93 young birds between 1982-87. By 1989, Bird Mountain once again had peregrine falcons nesting on its rocky ledges. The State's population has steadily increased, and in 2002 reached a high of 30 breeding pairs. They were removed from the Federal, but not the State, endangered species list in 1999.

The relatively diverse habitats on the parcel provide opportunities to encounter numerous other species of birds. The abundance of early successional habitat preferred by ruffed grouse and woodcock accounts for their relatively high numbers. Turkeys are often found on Bird Mountain WMA, which is in the heart of prime turkey range. Hiking through the various habitats provides opportunities for the bird watcher to encounter numerous songbird species.

Reptiles and Amphibians Gulley Brook and the other moist areas are host to a number of amphibians including the vocal green frog, and the less conspicuous spring and northern dusky salamanders. Redback and two-lined salamanders are likely to be found under logs in damp areas of the forest. Elusive gartersnakes might also be found in this WMA.

Fish Gulley Brook eventually flows into the Castleton River and shares many of its fish species. Most notably are the brown and brook trout that can be found in the good spawning grounds of Gulley Brook.



Bird Mountain is once again home to nesting peregrine falcons. Doug Blodgett, VFWD photo.

