



NONGAME WILDLIFE FUND PROJECT REPORT—INDIANA Southern Wings



*A male black-and-white warbler. The genus name *Mniotilta* means “moss-plucking” and refers to the bird’s habit of probing bark and moss for insects. (Photo by John K. Cassady)*

Many land birds that nest in Indiana migrate long distances and winter in tropical areas of the Caribbean, other parts of Central America and even in South America. These include some hawks, cuckoos, nightjars (nighthawks, whip-poor-wills), swifts, hummingbirds and many songbirds. The songbird or passerine bird group is the largest order of birds. Among this group that migrates long distances are flycatchers, swallows, thrushes, vireos, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, sparrows, buntings and orioles.

These birds are often referred to as neo-tropical migrants. Even though we consider them to be our birds, they spend more time elsewhere during the course of the year than in Indiana. Many long-distance migrants have suffered greater declines in number compared to year-round residents or birds that only migrate short distances.

The risks of migration are great. Birds travel thousands of miles, braving ill-suited winds and inclement weather in search of hospitable stopover sites where they can

rest and refuel before continuing their journey. Other perils are tall towers, utility wires, buildings, vehicles and predators. In spite of these dangers, over evolutionary time, the risk has been worth the reward. The warm tropical areas are rich in insects, other invertebrates, fruit and other foods at a time when their breeding grounds are frozen and snow-covered, and food is in short supply.

Conservation efforts in the United States, Canada and other developed countries have been relatively well funded over the years and have benefitted birds with secure habitats to nest and feed. Economic pressures in less-developed countries have placed enormous strain on native habitats. Exploitation of natural resources for food, energy and shelter is occurring at a costly pace. Deforestation, habitat fragmentation and conversion of forests, grasslands and shrub lands to crops and grazing areas are threatening resident birds and wintering areas that birds from North America depend on. Funds spent to conserve breeding habitats may be severely compro-

mised if these birds cannot survive in their wintering areas.

In 2009, the Southern Wings program was developed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to provide an efficient means for states to support conservation projects in tropical areas that benefit their species of greatest conservation need. More than half of all states have participated. Indiana joined in 2013. The Division of Fish & Wildlife is partnering with the American Bird Conservancy to provide \$30,000 over a three-year period to support the creation and management of a conservation corridor in Colombia. This corridor will benefit cerulean warblers (*Dendroica cerulea*), golden-winged warblers (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) and black-and-white warblers (*Mniotilta varia*), all of which are state-endangered or special-concern species in Indiana. Specifically, Indiana will contribute funds to manage two reserves that are major wintering areas for the cerulean warbler, reforest degraded land within the preserves, partner with local farmers to develop a bird-friendly, shade-grown coffee business within the corridor and assess the project's effectiveness. To date, reforestation efforts within the Cerulean Warbler Conservation Corridor have resulted in a contiguous corridor that spans 7 miles. The American Bird Conservancy has helped produce and plant more than 24,000 seedlings on the reserve and on private farms within the corridor.