



NONGAME WILDLIFE FUND PROJECT REPORT—INDIANA Southern Wings



Cerulean warblers are difficult to see because they nest and forage high in the canopy of deciduous forests. The more vibrant sky-blue male (shown here) helps raise the young each year in a nest of bark and grass bound by spider webs and caterpillar silk. When its young fledge from the nest, the male must feed them until they become completely independent. (photo by Kamal Islam)

CURRENT STATUS

Third of a three-year project

FUNDING SOURCES AND PARTNERS

DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW)
American Bird Conservancy

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 neotropical migrants. Even though we consider them to be Indiana birds, they spend more time elsewhere during the course of the year. Many long-distance migrants have suffered greater declines 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 illuminated 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 scarce.

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 in which to nest and feed. However, 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 on which North American birds depend. Funds spent to conserve breeding habitats may be severely compromised 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 Species of Greatest Conservation Need. More than half of all states have participated, including Indiana, which joined in 2013. The DFW 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 (*Setophaga 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 and build a wildlife corridor within the major wintering areas of the cerulean warbler, which is one of the most threatened neotropical migrants in South America. With more than 90% of the cerulean warbler's wintering habitat lost, funds will primarily support the conservation of what remains. This includes supporting activities such as reforesting degraded land within and around the preserves; partnering with local farmers to promote bird-friendly, shade-grown coffee; and capacity building to help monitor bird populations and protect the reserves.

To date, reforestation efforts within the Cerulean Warbler Conservation Corridor have resulted in a contiguous corridor that spans 7 miles. More than 503,500 saplings of 26 native tree species have been produced and planted on the reserve and on private farms within the corridor by our partners, the American Bird Conservancy and Fundación ProAves. This has contributed to the reforestation of 2,828 acres. Eighteen conservation easements (1,139 acres) have also been created and managed to prevent further deforestation.

A bird-friendly, shade-grown coffee business within the corridor was developed and certified as sustainable by the Rainforest Alliance this year. Further efforts are being made to certify this business as an organic, bird-friendly (Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center certified) coffee farm.

Community outreach activities are also taking place

to educate stakeholders on local bird conservation. These include a migratory bird festival that involves hundreds of participants each year and has reached thousands of school-age children. Finally, our partners are pursuing a new cacao project on one of the reserves. They hope to produce sustainable chocolate to support the conservation activities of the corridor over the long term.

COST: \$30,000 FOR THE COMPLETE THREE-YEAR PROJECT