

Bird Society and Nature Trust Team up for Bird Conservation

HALIFAX, NS (May 9)--The Nova Scotia Nature Trust announced a generous donation by the Nova Scotia Bird Society of seven islands and one coastal property, supporting almost 300 acres of important habitat for birds. The two organizations are combining forces to ensure that these critical sanctuaries for birds are protected, forever. The announcement is welcome news for bird conservation, at a time of increasing crisis for birds in Canada and beyond.

The conservation lands include Hertford Island in Cape Breton, Indian Island near Bridgewater, the four “Bald Islands” in the Tusket area, and Peter’s Island near Digby. Together the sites support 20% of Nova Scotia’s bird species including Atlantic Puffins. They provide critical habitat for migratory and nesting birds, including several species of conservation concern.



Atlantic Puffin, Photo: Scott Leslie

The Bird Society is primarily a birdwatching organization but over the years they had also acquired several properties. While some had volunteer property guardians who visit and report periodically on the birds, most are difficult to access. The group recognized that truly managing these properties effectively, ensuring that the birds and their habitat were safeguarded, now and into the future, was beyond the group’s capacity and resources. Dr. Bob McDonald, the Chair of the Bird Society’s Sanctuary Trust, led an initiative to donate the Society’s lands to the Nature Trust, to ensure that the islands will be actively stewarded and legally protected in perpetuity.

“We have experience with the Nature Trust and know that they will enhance the stewardship of the properties for bird protection and conservation” said Dr. McDonald. “We are confident that they will take good care of the land for breeding and migrating birds.”



Hertford Island, Photo: John Paterson

Nature Trust Executive Director Bonnie Sutherland is delighted to partner with the Bird Society. “The Nature Trust’s expertise in land conservation and stewardship is a perfect complement to the Bird Society’s passion and energy for birds and birdwatching,” said Sutherland. “The Nature Trust will ensure the permanent, legal protection and stewardship for the lands allowing the Bird Society members to focus their tremendous talents and expertise on doing what they love, which is getting out and watching the birds!”

Many Bird Society members are already active volunteers with the Nature Trust helping to provide critical information about birds and bird habitats to help the Nature Trust identify priority lands for protection and to better manage their conservation lands to benefit birds.

“We look forward to joining Bird Society members, the Province, our conservation partners, and many community volunteers who have been so passionately monitoring the birds on these properties for many years,” Sutherland added.

Hertford Island is of great significance for biodiversity conservation. The rocky shoreline, cliffs, and vegetated plateau provide important breeding and roosting habitat for a number of different seabird and other bird species. Hertford Island and nearby Ciboux Island, known as the “Bird Islands,” are recognized globally as an Important Bird Area (IBA), valued for the largest breeding colony of Great Cormorants in North America. The islands also provide one of only three refuges for the iconic Atlantic Puffins in Nova Scotia. It also provides habitat for Kittiwakes, Razorbills, Black Guillemots, Common Murres, Herring Gulls, Bald Eagles, and Bank Swallows. The islands are also designated as a provincial Wildlife Management Area and staff from the Department of Natural Resources have been monitoring birds on the islands for many years, along with Bird Society members, Cape Breton University (CBU) faculty and students, and community volunteers.

The Bald Islands are home to Common Eider, Herring, Great Black-backed Gulls, Black Guillemot, Double Crested Cormorants, and Leach’s Storm Petrels. Roseate Terns historically nested on the island. Now on Canada’s endangered species list, their numbers have been dramatically declining in Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern United States. The only known breeding colony in Nova Scotia is on the Brothers Islands, also in Yarmouth County.

Beyond their ecological value, the islands have an interesting cultural story. In 1945 Russel Arundel, a U.S. lobbyist for Pepsi Co. and sport fisherman, bought the Outer Bald Island, renamed it the Principality of Outer Baldonia and created a micronation that even had its own currency and citizenship. The story received international attention and even became a play, “The Whimsy State of the Principality of Outer Baldonia”, which toured the country.

Peter’s Island, between Brier and Long Island near Digby, features a grassy plateau and basalt columns and large populations of Common and Arctic terns as well as breeding colonies of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants, and Black Guillemots.



Outer Bald Island with stone structure created by Arundel still visible. Photo: Glen Parsons

Indian Island, a low-lying coastal barren, is located a kilometer offshore from the Lahave Islands. Beyond providing an important stopover for migrating birds, it supports a large colony of Cormorants, as well as Herring and Black-backed Gulls, Great Blue Herons, Black Guillemots, Common Eiders, Spotted Sandpipers, Chickadees, Song Sparrows, Sanderlings, Black Guillemot, Cormorants, and Oldsquaw. It also harboured over 100 pairs of Roseate Terns in the past. Indian Island and the Bald Islands offer an excellent opportunity for tern population restoration.

The Port Joli property adds to a growing network of protected habitat in this region, adjacent to Kejimikujik Seaside National Park and near the federally managed and protected Port Joli Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Important for migratory birds, the property is also home to the Endangered Vole Ears Lichen and Southern Twayblade, a rare bog orchid.

This partnership between the Nature Trust and the Bird Society, and the formal protection of these important bird habitats by the Nature Trust and the Province, is a welcome good news story for bird conservation. Alarming statistics related to bird populations abound; from the listing of 66 birds on Canada's endangered species list, an average 12% decrease in bird populations and over 50% decrease for shorebirds and songbirds in recent years. Protecting critical habitat is a key strategy in preserving bird populations. For some species, such as seabirds which are declining more rapidly than any other group of birds globally, habitat conservation focused on restoring historic breeding sites may also be critical to long-term recovery and survival of the world's birds. The islands donated by the Bird Society provide exciting opportunities for both conservation and potential restoration of bird populations.

The Nature Trust's Executive Director, Bonnie Sutherland, applauded the foresight of the Bird Society. "The Bird Society has not only inspired generations of people to love and cherish Nova Scotia's birds, but they have taken action to protect habitats for birds, long before there were land trusts and concern about protecting bird habitats."

This bird conservation initiative was generously funded by the Government of Canada, the Province of Nova Scotia and the R Howard Webster Foundation, as well as the Nature Trust's generous members and supporters. The Bird Society generously donated \$10,000 to start an endowment fund for the long-term stewardship of the islands. Donations to the fund, or other bird conservation efforts of the Nature Trust, can be made at www.nsnt.ca or by calling the Nature Trust at 425-LAND.

The Nature Trust and Bird Society will celebrate this conservation achievement along with other exciting conservation successes at the Nature Trust's 2016 Conservation Showcase on June 13 at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic. All are welcome to attend this evening of exciting announcements, stories, photographs, music, and more.

