

# Massachusetts Foresters for the Birds Focal Birds



**Massachusetts  
Woodlands  
Institute**  
A SUBSIDIARY OF FRANKLIN LAND TRUST



The Focal Birds represent 17 of the 40 priority forest birds that Mass Audubon's Foresters for the Birds Project is particularly working to protect. These 17 species were chosen because they are a conservation priority in the region or statewide, are relatively simple to identify by sight and/or sound, collectively use a wide range of forest types and conditions, and are likely to respond to some common silviculture practices. Many of these birds are showing a decline in their populations, but through proper management of our forests we hope to facilitate an increase in their populations. For those species that are stable we intend to maintain or even increase their population size by applying the same management practices. We encourage you to get to know these Focal Birds and explore your woodlands to find out if any of them are residing there!

## Ecoregion Key — where is each Focal Bird common?

- SE** (Southeast) Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens
- C** (Central) Northeastern Coastal Zone
- W** (West) Northeastern Highlands



### American Woodcock **SE C W**

**Habitat:** Hardwood or mixedwood forest with a mix of openings and young forest. Uses different habitat types depending on activity.

**Trend:** Stable and likely increasing in MA.

**ID Tips:** A plump bird with a long bill, no neck, and short legs; mottled cryptic coloration.

**Song:** A nasal beeping *peent* heard mostly at dusk; also twittering wing sound when in flight.

**Management:** Maintain or create hardwood or mixedwood forest with openings and young forests, preferably near wet areas such as alder swales.



### Black-and-white Warbler **SE C W**

**Habitat:** Partially open mature or second-growth deciduous or mixed deciduous-coniferous woodlands. Uses early-successional habitats for foraging after fledging.

**Trend:** Declining in New England.

**ID Tips:** Boldly streaked with black & white stripes; forages like a nuthatch along trunks & limbs of trees.

**Song:** High repetitive song of *weesa weesa weesa weesa weesa*. Typically lasts 3 seconds.

**Management:** Maintain or create deciduous forest with high density of large trees and a dense understory.



### Black-throated Blue Warbler **C W**

**Habitat:** Interior deciduous and mixed deciduous-coniferous woodlands with dense understory.

**Trend:** Stable

**ID Tips:** Deep blue on top with black mask & throat, white “handkerchief-like” wing -patch.

**Song:** A thick & buzzy *I’m-so-la-zeee* with last note rising.

**Management:** Minimize linear openings (i.e., straight roads) and maximize forest interior; needs dense understory for nesting – hobblebush, mountain laurel, and saplings of sugar or striped maple.



### Black-throated Green Warbler **C W**

**Habitat:** Prefers uninterrupted coniferous forests.

**Trend:** Stable; likely increasing in MA

**ID Tips:** Bright yellow face, olive head & back, black throat drips down sides onto white belly, two white wingbars.

**Song:** To attract females, males sing *zee-zee-zee-zoo-zee* (a.k.a. *I’m a black-throated-green*); to defend territory, *zoo-zee-zoo-zoo-zee* (a.k.a. *trees-trees-murmuring-trees*).

**Management:** Maximize interior area of coniferous or mixed conifer-hardwood forests. These forests include a large component of eastern hemlock, pines, spruces, and balsam fir.



### Brown Thrasher **SE**

**Habitat:** Dense thickets, hedgerows, overgrown clearings within large areas of mixedwood forest. Dry scrub understory as found in the pine forests in the southeast of the state.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, and Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Approximately robin-sized, but more slender with a long tail and short bill. Rufous brown above, and thick dark streaks below. Note the two white wing-bars.

**Song:** In the same family as mockingbirds and catbirds, the song is similar. The large repertoire of short phrases are sung back-to-back and repeated twice. *Plant a seed, plant a seed, bury it, bury it, cover it up, cover it up.*

**Management:** Maintain or create forests with an open canopy and a dense understory of woody shrubs and saplings.



### Canada Warbler **SE C W**

**Habitat:** Mixed forests, cedar swamps, riparian forests. Favors dense shrubby growth.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, and Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Necklace of black stripes on bright yellow throat & belly, complete white eye-ring

**Song:** Often has soft introductory chips, then *I’m-IN-here, but-you-CAN’T-SEE-ME*

**Management:** Improve riparian buffers, protect cedar swamps and red-maple/ conifer swamps.



### Chestnut-sided Warbler SE C W

**Habitat:** Second growth deciduous woods, early successional forest or overgrown fields.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, and Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Yellow crown, black moustache stripe & chestnut sides following contour of wings; tail often held cocked above wingtips.

**Song:** Fast *Please-please-pleased-to-meet-cha* with emphatic ending.

**Management:** Retain areas with early successional habitat; use management practices that closely mimic natural disturbances.



### Eastern Towhee SE C W

**Habitat:** Early successional open or edge habitats with a dense understory and well-developed litter layer.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, & Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Male is bold sooty black above and on throat and chest (female is brown); warm rufous sides and white belly.

**Song:** A loud *drink-your-teeee!* lasting about 1 second. Call is a bold *che-wink*.

**Management:** Maintain young forest habitat with few standing trees and dense brushy understory. Species will benefit from large (>5 acres), more complete cuts.



### Eastern Wood-pewee SE C W

**Habitat:** Deciduous and mixed forests and woodland edges.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, & Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Slender, small headed, and grayish-olive above with dull, white wingbars; “sallies” for insects (i.e., flies out from perch and then back again).

**Song:** Plaintive *pee-ahh-weee*.

**Management:** Enhance vertical structure/understory by controlling deer browsing; use single tree or small group cut to improve understory.



### Mourning Warbler W

**Habitat:** Recently disturbed forest with a dense undergrowth of saplings, ferns, and briars. Typically higher elevations (>1000 ft.) on a slight slope.

**Trend:** Increasing in MA, declining in Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Olive green on the back and wings, rich yellow below. Both sexes have a gray hood covering the head, and the males have a black breast.

**Song:** A rhythmic and rolling *chirry chirry chirry, chorry chorry*. A series of *chirry* phrases always come before the *chorry* phrases, and are higher pitched.

**Management:** Maintain or create areas of disturbance to moderately open the canopy and allow the understory to thicken.



### Northern Bobwhite SE

**Habitat:** A patchwork of young forest areas including small fields with brushy edges and hedgerows, and open pine oak forest with shrubs and grasses.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, & Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** A small (10 inches), ground-dwelling, round chicken-like bird with short legs and a short tail. Body intricately marked with browns and rusty reds, and a striking, bold pattern on the head.

**Song:** An emphatically whistled *bob white*, with the second phrase often ascending in pitch.

**Management:** Create open conditions with a moderately reduced canopy cover in upland pine and mixedwood forests near fields and brushy areas.



### Northern Flicker SE C

**Habitat:** Forest edge and open woodlands, including flooded or burned areas, with many snags to create nest cavities in.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, & Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** A large woodpecker with a gray-brown head. Body has attractive black spots, bars, and scallops over an olive-yellow background. Shows a flashy white rump in flight.

**Song:** Primary vocalizations are a loud, emphatic *peah*, and a rapid *kikikikikikiki* (similar to Pileated Woodpecker, but sustained for longer and not descending at end).

**Management:** Maintain or create large snags in open woodlands and forest edges.



### Ruffed Grouse SE C W

**Habitat:** Closely associated with quaking aspen; brushy, mixed-age woodlands.

Males require “drumming” sites (typically downed trees or logs) in dense deciduous sapling stands.

**Trend:** Likely decreasing in MA.

**ID Tips:** Chicken-sized game bird; intricately patterned with dark bars and spots on either a reddish-brown or grayish background; crested head.

**Song:** In spring, the male produces a low, rhythmic “drumming” sound while perched on a downed tree trunk or log.

**Management:** Maintain or create deciduous and mixed forest matrix with a mix of openings and young forest in early stages of regeneration. Retain downed trunks or logs for drumming.



### Veery SE C W

**Habitat:** Damp deciduous woods with dense understory.

**Trend:** Declining in MA and Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Tawny-brown above, weakly spotted on breast; least spotted of all the thrushes.

**Song:** Flute-like & ethereal; ball spiraling down a tube; call an emphatic *vreer!*.

**Management:** Enhance vertical structure/understory by controlling deer browsing; use single tree or small group cut to improve understory.



### White-throated Sparrow **C W**

**Habitat:** Coniferous & mixed deciduous-coniferous forests with openings and shrubby, dense undergrowth.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, & Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** White throat with yellow in front of eyes; white and black or tan and brown stripes on head; gray chest.

**Song:** Clear whistled, *Poor Sam Peabody Peabody Peabody*

**Management:** Soften edges between habitats creating brushy growth especially near conifer stands for cover, foraging and nesting; create brush piles on habitat edges.



### Wood Thrush **SE C W**

**Habitat:** Mature, moist deciduous woods with dense understory and heavy layer of leaf litter.

**Trend:** Declining in MA, New England, and Eastern U.S. region.

**ID Tips:** Brown back, heavily spotted on white breast; chunky thrush a little smaller than a Robin.

**Song:** A flute-like *ee-oh-layyy*, ending in a vibrant sound like shattering glass.

**Management:** Improve vertical structure/understory with small canopy gaps.



### Yellow-bellied Sapsucker **W**

**Habitat:** Mixed deciduous-coniferous woodlands.

**Trend:** Increasing in MA, likely declining in region.

**ID Tips:** Messy barring on back, yellowish wash across belly. Vertical white stripe on side distinguishes it from other woodpeckers.

**Song:** Drum burst of 5 rapid taps followed by gradually slowing double taps; call a *QUEEah*.

**Management:** Retain deadwood, leaving birch and aspen trees for cavity nesting habitat.

To learn more about these and other bird species, check out the Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2 ([www.massaudubon.org/birdatlas/bba2](http://www.massaudubon.org/birdatlas/bba2)) and Mass Audubon's State of the Birds Reports ([www.massaudubon.org/sotb](http://www.massaudubon.org/sotb)).

Learn more about the Foresters for the Birds program:

- [www.massaudubon.org/forestbirds](http://www.massaudubon.org/forestbirds)
- <http://www.masswoodlands.org/programs/foresters-for-the-birds/>

**Photo credits:** American Woodcock, Canada Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, White-throated Sparrow © David Larson; Black-and-white Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker © John Harrison; Brown Thrasher © Patricia Pierce; Eastern Wood-pewee © Fyn Kynd Photography; Mourning Warbler © Gerard Dewaghe; Northern Bobwhite © Paul McCarthy; Northern Flicker, Ruffed Grouse © Richard Johnson; Veery © Mark Thorne; Wood Thrush © Sheila Carroll.

This document was adapted for Massachusetts from Audubon Vermont's "Birder's Dozen Fact Sheet" with permission.