

Highstead

Summer 2017





“EE-OH-LAY”

The flute-like “ee-oh-lay,” which echoes through the forest at dawn and dusk is that of the **Wood Thrush**, one of the more noteworthy birds found on Highstead’s 100+ acres. This cinnamon-colored, spotted-breasted bird is known for its unique and hauntingly beautiful song.

“At last count, there were three Wood Thrushes singing on the property,” according to Ed Faison, senior ecologist at Highstead. “After declining sharply from seven birds in 2006 to zero in 2010, Wood Thrush numbers unexpectedly rose to as many as nine in 2013, before falling again in recent years.”

The male Wood Thrush appears in early spring and begins singing to establish his territory and attract a mate. The female will build the nest, and incubate four or five greenish-blue eggs for about two weeks. Together the pair will feed the young. The Wood Thrush is a thorough hunter, hopping across the forest floor turning over leaves with their thin beak in search of insects. The rapidly growing chicks will leave the nest in as little as 10 days.



Evan Barbour, Bartels Science Illustration Intern, birds.cornell.edu/artinterns (c) Cornell University

In September, they fly south to winter mostly in the broad-leaved forests from southeastern Mexico to Panama.

Birds are
charismatic hallmarks
for collaborative large
landscape conservation



According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature “Red List,” the Wood Thrush is classified as “Near Threatened.” The primary reason is the fragmentation of forests in both its breeding and overwintering habitats.

Fortunately, when the day’s light fades and most other birds are quiet for the night, the bell-like tones of the Wood Thrush can still be heard from the darkening woods here at Highstead.





“The Wood Thrush is the only bird whose note affects me like music. It lifts and exhilarates me. It is inspiring. It changes all hours to an eternal morning.”

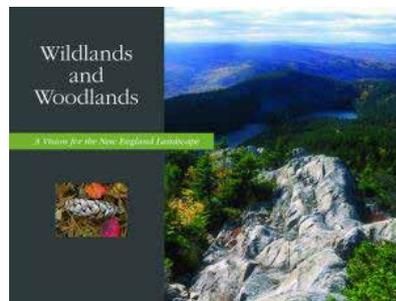
Henry David Thoreau



Wildlands and Woodlands 3.0

Henry David Thoreau spent most of his years roaming the nineteenth-century countryside of Concord, Massachusetts. His journals provide us with broad insights into many of the pervasive factors that control the patterns and variation in the natural world. A major theme in Thoreau’s landscape was change. A modest amount of this change was the consequence of natural processes. The major force was clearly human.

About 150 years later, the human impact on the New England forest would astound Thoreau. New England is still the most forested region of the United States, yet also one of the most densely populated. That juxtaposition creates unique challenges for land conservation and was the genesis for the Wildlands and Woodlands Initiative: to keep 70% of New England free from development.



The Wildlands and Woodlands vision began in 2005 as *A Vision for the Forests of Massachusetts*. In 2010, the second W&W report was released: *A Vision for the New England Landscape*.

The recently completed third update—*Wildlands and Woodlands, Farmlands and Communities: Broadening the Vision for New England*—will be released in September. It builds on the substantial work we have accomplished to date and incorporates the conservation community’s need for innovative financing strategies, as well as the vital role that farmland and cities play in the health of New England.

Thoreau’s timeless observations, including that of the melodious **Wood Thrush**, still stir our wonderment of, and fear for, New England’s natural world. This is the basis of Wildlands and Woodlands, and of all of the work at Highstead.



David Foster, President, Board of Highstead Foundation, Inc.; Director of the Harvard Forest at Harvard University; and author of *Thoreau’s Country – Journey through a Transformed Landscape* (1999).

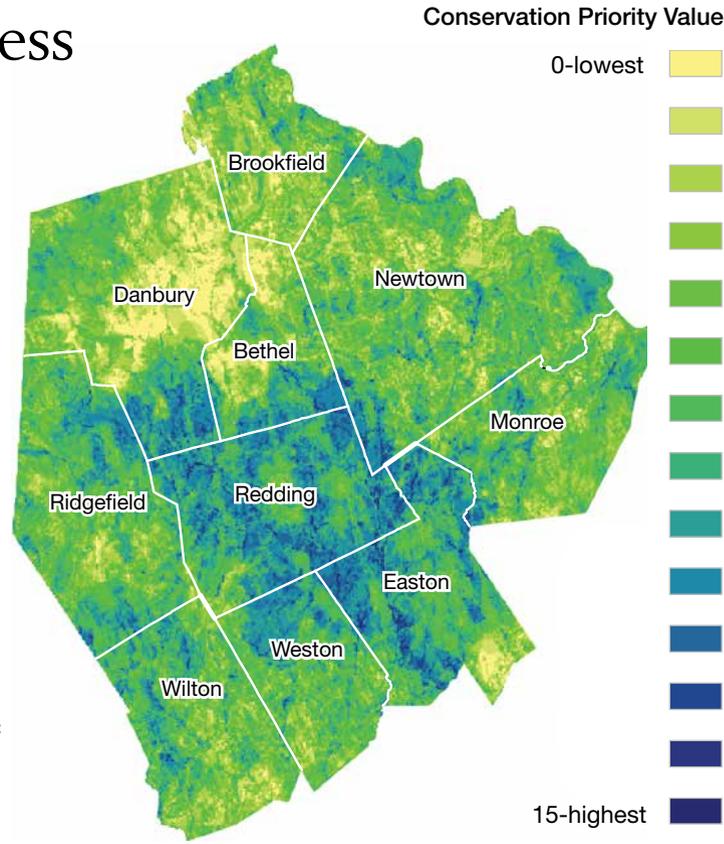


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Mapping Our Progress

From the coastal shores to the upland forests, the suburban landscape of southwestern Connecticut holds both unique conservation challenges and valuable natural resources. Thankfully, organizations in Fairfield County have banded together to protect and restore the area for generations to come, and with Highstead's help, these groups have mapped out a conservation plan.

The Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership (FCRCP) includes 25 land trusts, commissions, and other groups, each with its own land and/or wildlife preservation goals. In order to guide their joint action, Highstead facilitated the creation of a Strategic Conservation Map.



The map represents five priority focuses: Long-Term Ecological Values, Water Resources, Community Values, Connectivity (land near protected open space), and Wildlife Habitat. Combined, the resulting map identifies the most sensitive land of highest conservation priority and offers opportunities for local groups to join forces in working together to protect it. This invaluable tool helps guide the partnership's activities.



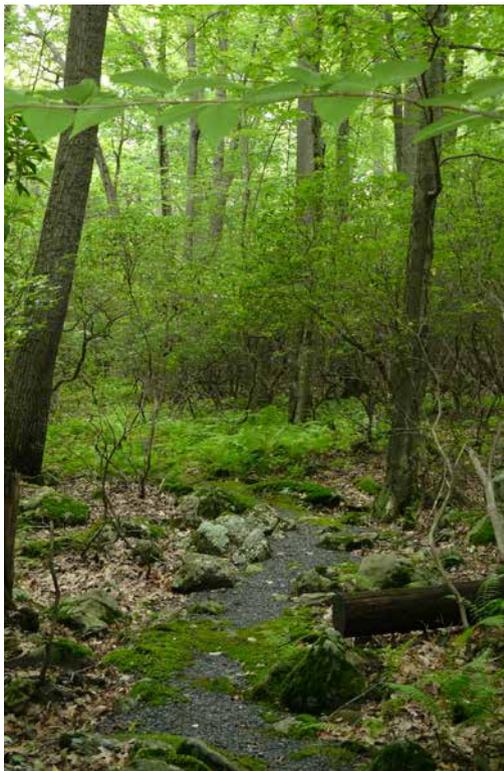
Interestingly, **Wood Thrush Habitat Capability** was one of the Wildlife Habitats mapped.

“We included three specific forest habitats in our map-building process, including Wood Thrush Habitat Capability,” according to Bill Labich, Highstead's senior conservationist. “The Wood Thrush is a representative species for hardwood forest ecosystems. Their presence in a landscape hints at the health of the larger ecosystem for a whole suite of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians.”

Take a tour of Fairfield County with a conservationist's eye by visiting bit.ly/FCRCP_Map



“Happy Trails!”



Here at Highstead, our microcosm of meadows, woods, and water is both a sanctuary for indigenous species and a laboratory for their stewardship. There are five distinct natural communities on the property: the Oak-Mountain Laurel Forest, the Mesic Hardwood Forest, the Red Maple-White Ash Forest, the Meadow, and the Red Maple Swamp (where many of the **Wood Thrushes** have been heard).

Connecting them is a series of interpretive trails, designed to reveal a model for forest conservation consistent with the Wildlands and Woodlands vision, as well as an educational arboretum with native plant collections.

We welcome Highstead members and friends to walk and witness first-hand the important ecological research and conservation projects being conducted. Our trails also provide an ideal place of quiet reflection.

Highstead is open from 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Visitors are welcome by appointment by calling 203-938-8809. Guests should sign in at the Barn on arrival, where they may pick up a trail map.



End Notes:



- The male Wood Thrush can sing a duet by itself using two separate voices: one a continuous series of complex elements, the other - a steady trill at a lower frequency. The female Wood Thrush does not sing.

- In 1938, the Wood Thrush was adopted as the official state bird of Washington, DC, but scientists fear there is a 75% chance that it will no longer inhabit the District by 2100.

Four interesting facts - four more reasons to care - about the Wood Thrush

- The Wood Thrush uniquely places something white (a blanched leaf) on the exterior edge of the nest to break the recognizable shape of the nest to deter predators.



- Before migration, the Wood Thrush switches from eating insects to eating berries with high lipid levels to ready themselves for the long journey.



Highstead

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