

West Amwell welcomes the migratory birds from Mexico, Central and South America!

Have you noticed recently that the birds have been singing more intensely with a variety of melodies not heard since last spring? And that different birds have appeared at your feeders or in the woods nearby? That's because our "shared" migratory birds have returned to nest in the Sourland Mountain region's forests and grasslands. They have traveled more than 4,000 miles from Mexico and Central and South America to their summer home, traveling what is known as the Atlantic Migratory Flyway.

So welcome back the orioles, scarlet tanagers, eastern phoebes and ruby throated hummingbirds and listen to their amazing story.

Known as "neotropicals," these birds require deep forest and large grassland areas. The Maya forest in the heart of the Yucatan peninsula and the Sourland Mountain and its foothills both have similar forest and grassland habitat. In fact, the Sourland Mountain region is a magnet for these migratory birds because the mountain is the first ridge that the rose-breasted grosbeaks, indigo buntings and others reach as they fly up the piedmont. Each bird species requires specific vegetation and terrain for food, cover and nesting materials. They feed on the same food sources in the rainforests of Central and South America and build nests of the same materials in the same type of habitat as they have done for thousands of generations here in the Sourlands.

Those nesting in the deep forests are the American redstart, blue-gray gnatcatcher, common yellowthroat, eastern wood pewee, acadian flycatcher, broadwinged hawk, ovenbird, scarlet tanager, veery and wood thrush. Selecting the forest edge are the oriole, cedar waxwing, black-billed cuckoo, indigo bunting and rose-breasted grosbeak.

Grassland nesters include the bobolink, eastern meadowlark, American kestrel and the savannah sparrow. It is interesting to note that, in New Jersey, these grassland species compose the largest percentage of threatened and endangered species—41% in all. These grassland species will prosper if haying or mowing is postponed until after July 15th, allowing the nestlings to reach maturity.

The Atlantic Migratory Flyway connects the Sourlands with our birds' winter home in Mexico and Central and South America. Both "ends" of the Flyway offer habitats favored by more than 100 species of migratory birds. This trans-continental connection has sparked the interest of several conservation groups on either "end" who are dedicated to preserving the linked habitat. If we protect the winter and breeding habitats of our neotropical migratory birds we will help to maintain global populations in key regions, including West Amwell. To that end, organizations such as the D&R Greenway Land Trust in New Jersey and Amigos

de Calakmul in Mexico have formed international partnerships with shared objectives—land preservation, education and stewardship.

So, the next time you hear a wood thrush or watch the orioles making their nests or refill your hummingbird feeder, realize that West Amwell is environmentally linked with our neighbors thousands of miles to the south and that we together share the beauty and delight of our neotropicals.