The grasslands in this BCA support declining nesting species such as Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Henslow's Sparrow (threatened), Field Sparrow, and Upland Sandpiper. Wooded areas provide key nesting habitat for the Red-shouldered Hawk (endangered), Wood Thrush, Acadian Flycatcher, and Worm-eating Warbler. Savanna habitat supports the Redheaded Woodpecker and Barn Owl (endangered), Northern Mockingbird, and Eastern Bluebird. Species like the Bell's Vireo, Yellow and Black-billed Cuckoos, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Loggerhead Shrike prefer shrub habitats, which are also well represented within this BCA. In addition, the diverse habitat in this area provides important stopover locations for migrating woodland species including the Golden-winged, Canada, and Bay-breasted warblers, and for wetland birds like Blue-winged Teal, American Woodcock, American Golden Plover, and Lesser Yellowlegs. This area is an important part of Iowa's history; it is in the part of the state that was settled earliest by Euro-Americans, who closely interacted with American Indians, inhabitants of this state for thousands of years prior to settlers arriving.

BIRD CONSERVATION AREAS

Within the last three decades, alarming declines in a large number of species of North American birds have led to the emergence of national and international programs dedicated to the conservation of game and non-game birds. Since 1999, bird conservation organizations and enthusiasts have worked together under an umbrella called the North American Bird Conservation Initiative to "conserve all birds in all habitats." As part of this initiative and in an effort to protect dwindling populations of many Iowa birds, the Bird Conservation Area (BCA) program was established by the Iowa DNR Wildlife Bureau in 2001. The present model BCA encompasses at least 10,000 acres of public and/or private lands with approximately 35 percent of the area established as key bird habitat. This concept is backed by research that suggests viable bird populations require conservation efforts at a landscape-oriented level. Each BCA also includes a large "core" area of protected high-quality habitat. Surrounding this core are private lands, plus additional public tracts, all managed to provide good bird habitat.

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

Audubon’s Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program is a global effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. Designated IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. All Iowa Bird Conservation Areas are also Important Bird Areas.

PLANT AND ANIMAL DIVERSITY

This BCA is located within the Southern Iowa Drift Plain which is characterized by wooded river valleys, soft rolling hills, and an abundance of green pastures. With only 14% of the land within the BCA used for row crops, the vast majority of this area is available to support a wide variety of plant diversity, including five state threatened species. In wetter areas it is possible to find the Winged Monkey Flower (threatened), Oval Ladies’ Tresses (threatened), and False Hellebore (threatened). The rich black prairie soils support Prairie Blazing Star, Downy Wood Mint (threatened), Virginia Spiderwort, and Eared False Foxglove. Slender Ladies’ Tresses (threatened), Broom Sedge, and Little Ladies’ Tresses grow in the drier soils. Several species of oak and hickory trees provide most of the woodland over-story, with Bur and White Oak trees providing the main shade for grazing animals in the savanna pastures.

ANIMALS

Many species of wildlife utilize the important existing habitat within this BCA. The Slender Glass Lizard, Smooth Earth Snake, Eastern Hognose Snake, Cricket Frog, Cope’s Gray Treefrog, and Smallmouth Salamander are reptile and amphibian SGCN that live in this BCA. A list of Iowa’s SGCN can be found at www.iowanrd.gov by entering “Wildlife Action Plan” in the search. If you encounter uncommon or rare species in this BCA, please contact the Wildlife Resources Conservation Service, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Local citizens have shown extraordinary support for this BCA, and there are promising opportunities for future collaborative efforts to improve bird habitat and bird appreciation.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Soap Creek-Stephens Forest Bird Conservation Area was made possible through partnership among the Wapello and Davis County Conservation Boards, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa Audubon, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Local citizens have shown extraordinary support for this BCA, and there are promising opportunities for future collaborative efforts to improve bird habitat and bird appreciation.