



## UPPER RARITAN WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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### **URWA's 17th Annual Birdathon Set for May 17th Bedminster, New Jersey; April 25, 2008**

Once each year, URWA sends a group of dedicated and enthusiastic bird watchers on a one-day, statewide tour to discover what bird species are active in the varied habitats across New Jersey. These birders, as they are known, note every species they see and hear on this annual junket, and their records provide an interesting snapshot into the health and viability of our state's ecosystems. Results from last year's birdathon gave us all reason to smile – the team recorded a record-breaking count of 168 bird species, including a Mourning Warbler and a Bicknell's Thrush. The Mourning Warbler is a skulker, and is very difficult to see since it stays low to the ground. The Bicknell's Thrush is a bird that breeds only at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher, and New Jersey residents usually have to go to the Adirondacks, White Mountains or a similar area to see or hear one!

URWA's birders do more than simply provide a list of birds they find across our state. They raise funds for URWA's efforts to protect the critical habitat that is so important to the survival of our fine-feathered friends. They accept pledges from people who then make a donation to URWA based upon the number of species they document during the birdathon. Last year, URWA's birders and their supporters raised over \$10,000!

The date for URWA's seventeenth annual birdathon is Saturday, May 17th. Veteran birders Bob Lewis of Gladstone, Gordon Cameron of Mendham, Evan Obercian of Tewksbury and Alan Willemsen of Mendham are gearing up for their excursion. With the recent media focus on the habitat needs of migrating birds, they hope to raise more money than ever before. To demonstrate your interest and support for the preservation of birding habitats, URWA invites you to make a pledge -- pledges typically range from 20 cents to \$5.00 per bird species identified, although URWA welcomes any amount that contributors choose to offer!

To learn more about URWA, its birdathon or to make a pledge or a donation, please visit [www.urwa.org](http://www.urwa.org) or call URWA at (908) 234-1852. Please feel free to enlist your friends, relatives and co-workers. All donations to the Birdathon are fully tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

#### **About the Upper Raritan Watershed Association**

The Upper Raritan Watershed Association is a not-for-profit, membership supported organization working to ensure the protection of the Upper Raritan Watershed through education, advocacy, land preservation, and stewardship. Since 1959, the Association has been preserving and protecting natural resources throughout the watershed, a 194 square mile natural geographic region defined by the drainage basin of the North Branch of the Raritan River and its tributaries. The watershed, which includes 23 municipalities in parts of Somerset, Hunterdon and Morris Counties, is a vital link in New Jersey's water supply system and contains large areas of undeveloped, environmentally significant land.

#### **For More Information, please contact:**

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Photo: Prairie Warbler, Courtesy of [USFWS](#)

URWA Birdathon Leader Alan Willemsen reports that one of the most interesting migrating birds nesting at various sites across the region, including URWA's Fairview Farm in Bedminster, is the Prairie Warbler. The suggestion of its name notwithstanding, this species barely reaches the American prairies. It breeds in all states east of the Mississippi River except Minnesota and Wisconsin. Its preferred breeding habitat includes overgrown fields pocked with shrubs, second-growth woodlands and pine barrens. Populations are declining throughout much of its range largely due to a loss of breeding habitat through development and the natural change of shrubby habitat to forest. The Prairie Warbler is a tail-wagging warbler with a yellow throat and belly and black streaks down its sides. Its hallmark characteristic is its distinctive "spectacled" facial pattern. The Prairie Warbler forages deep in the interior of bushes and likes to stay low, often feeding just above the ground. It moves quickly, making short hops from branch to branch, using its wings sparingly. Singing males like to sit at or near the tops of shrubs and young trees, with a stance that is slightly angled, more horizontal than erect. Female Prairie Warblers commonly eat the eggshells after their young hatch, consuming the shells in 15 to 90 seconds. These birds spend most of their time less than 15 feet off the ground, and some Prairie Warblers may go through their entire lives without ever seeing the canopy of a tree.