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AUDUBON OHIO DESIGNATES KELLEYS ISLAND AS ‘IMPORTANT BIRD AREA’

Columbus, OH, Saturday, September 28, 2002 – Audubon Ohio announced today the designation of Kelleys Island in Lake Erie as an Important Bird Area (IBA) during the Kelleys Island Feathers and Foliage Festival. The IBA program is Audubon Ohio’s lead conservation initiative with the goal of identifying key areas throughout the state that are critical to the survival of birds, and promoting the conservation of these areas in order to maintain healthy bird populations.

Kelleys Island is one of 96 IBAs that have been identified so far in Ohio. The site is important to birds because as a glacial island in Ohio it contains unique habitat within the state, and its protected coves provide important refuge to a variety of birds. Throughout the year Kelleys Island also hosts significant numbers of birds that gather there to breed and raise young, stopover during migration, and spend the winter. Through a monthly bird census project ongoing since 1996, Kelleys Island has been found to harbor large numbers of the state’s priority conservation species, particularly waterfowl such as Buffleheads and land birds like Hermit Thrushes.

“Kelleys Island is a perfect example of the important role Ohio’s landscape plays in the survival of birds,” said John C. Ritzenthaler, director of habitat conservation for Audubon Ohio. “We are located right in the middle of a major flyway, which means that birds pass through every part of the state as they travel to their winter and summer destinations. They rely on our land to survive their journeys. Through Audubon’s Important Bird Areas program, we are working to ensure places like Kelleys Island continue to be managed for the benefit of these birds, as well as the enjoyment of local communities.”

Under the direction of biology professor Dr. Edward H. Burt of Ohio Wesleyan University, the Ohio Important Bird Areas Technical Committee designates the state’s IBAs according to strict standardized scientific criteria. IBA sites must meet at least one of the following criteria in order to qualify: **a high concentration of birds; birds associated with a unique habitat; one or more species of high conservation priority; or a long history of bird research.**

The committee prepares information on IBAs that includes location, type of habitat, significance to bird populations, and additional information obtained through the scientific evaluation process. This information will be distributed to state, county and municipal planning commissions, local land trusts, Audubon chapters and other habitat conservation groups, enabling them to add these sites to their local conservation agendas.

While the IBA program confers no regulatory status, the information gathered about each site can help create model ordinances for local governments, and serve as the basis for educational materials and programs designed to increase public awareness. Other opportunities may include direct conservation measures, such as public acquisition, conservation easements, and management guides.

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Kelleys Island is the largest U.S. island (2800 acres) in the western basin of Lake Erie, with 25% of its land mass dedicated to nature preserves and state park lands. Its location is significant, serving as a stepping stone for birds crossing Lake Erie during the spring and fall migration periods. The island features many different kinds of habitat, including forest, ponds, wetlands, and glacial deposits.

As a critical flyway used by migrating North American and Neotropical birds, the Ohio region is abundant in birdlife and plays a vital role in the breeding, feeding, and migration cycles of hundreds of bird species. Audubon Ohio's IBA program seeks public involvement in the conservation of a network of about 100 sites throughout the state that will be protected or managed with the conservation of these birds in mind.

Started in Europe in the late 1980s by BirdLife International, the IBA program has been a powerful conservation tool, protecting millions of acres of habitats. In the U.S., the National Audubon Society pioneered the first statewide IBA project in Pennsylvania in 1995. The IBA program is currently underway in nearly all 50 states, and more than 1,000 IBAs have been designated in the United States alone.

The Kelleys Island **"Feathers and Foliage Festival"** is an all day no charge annual event featuring an 8:00 a.m. bird walk at the North Pond State Nature Preserve guided by Jim McCormac, Botanist with ODNR Natural Areas and Preserves; a Hawk Watch at the Glacial Grooves State Memorial manned by Kevin Metcalf, Naturalist with the Cleveland Metroparks; Bird Banding at Long Point with Tom Bartlett, Master Bander; and a Tree Identification Walk led by Crag Morton, Manager of the Kelleys Island State Park. The IBA Dedication will be held at the State Park Sandy Beach at 2:30 p.m. and will include a short, guided Bird Walk at 3:30 p.m.

Established in September 1998, Audubon Ohio is the state office of the National Audubon Society, which was founded in 1905 with over 600,000 members and supporters in more chapters throughout the Americas. Audubon Ohio's mission is to promote the conservation and restoration of ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife through advocacy, education, stewardship and chapter support, for the benefit of Ohio citizens of today and tomorrow.

Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our growing network of community-based Audubon Centers, grass roots science programs for bird enthusiasts, and advocacy on behalf of ecosystems sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in positive conservation experiences.

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