

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS OF CERULEAN WARBLERS IN THE EFFIGY MOUNDS/YELLOW RIVER BIRD CONSERVATION AREA OF NORTHEAST IOWA 2010-2013

OBJECTIVES

To provide data that helps to complete baseline information and helps to build a data base on breeding bird populations within Effigy Mounds/Yellow River State Forest Bird Conservation Area (BCA), with special emphasis on Cerulean Warblers and other neo-tropical migrant birds on the list of Species of Greatest Conservation Concern.

To correlate previous and current forest management practices with current bird survey information in attempt to develop a better understanding of the best possible forest management for species on the list of Greatest Conservation Concern such as Cerulean Warblers.

IOU funding allowed us to conduct additional observations on Cerulean Warbler populations within the BCA. We conducted transect searches and specific locations searches by boat, foot, ATV, and in 4-wheel drive automobiles on trails and logging roads. Observations documented 92 active Cerulean Warbler territories within Yellow River State Forest (YRSF). 30 of the territories were newly found in 2013. Of the 92 territories identified, there is record of Cerulean activity in eleven of these sites every year for the past five breeding seasons (2009-2013). It may also be significant that 55 of the active territories were within 300 meters of Paint Creek. Similar to our findings in previous years, we found that Cerulean Warbler territories were often “clustered” together. This conspecific attraction is similar to findings in Cerulean Warblers studies in Southern Indiana (Kirk & Islam 2007; K. Islam personal communication).

Many of the 92 active territories were centered in the lower portion of fairly deep canyons where there was a stream, or an intermittent stream, or wet soil conditions during May and June. Many of the territories also included topographic diversity i.e., they were near a bluff or steep incline and also included vertical stratification with large mature trees with distinct open topography in the upper branches. Although Ceruleans are considered an interior forest species, they were found near the edge of recent timber harvests within YRSF, and at edge habitats near YRSF Headquarters and the Sawmill. More work is needed to identify these pockets of Cerulean Warblers and to understand how they use the various habitats throughout the breeding and post-breeding season. It may be significant that even though there has been consistent timber management in some sections of YRSF, there has nevertheless been no regular timber management in slopes that exceed a 30 degree slope (Bob Honeywell, YRSF forester, personal communication). Consequently, we feel there is additional opportunity to do a more sophisticated analysis of the 2009-2013 Cerulean data which may help in understanding some of the habitat requirements. There are also opportunities to investigate some of the population dynamics and perhaps try to determine nesting success in this population of Cerulean Warblers.

As a result of the findings of our Cerulean study, the Bird Conservation Area in northeast Iowa was recently designated a Globally Significant Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society and Birdlife International.