FFN Bird Nesting Season Operational Protocol

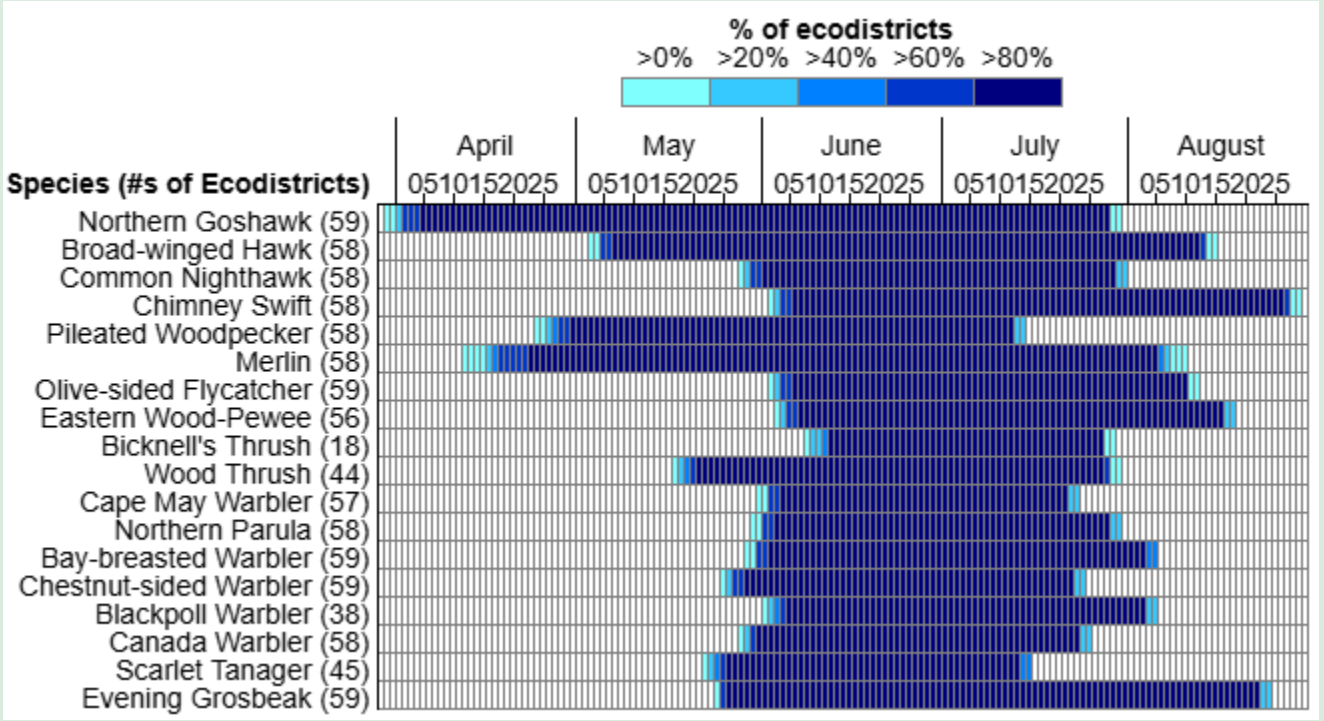
Ryan Dickie
Forestry Operation Coordinator
dickie.ffn@gmail.com
www.familyforestnetwork.ca

Why This Matters

- Ecological forestry considers all parts of the forested ecosystem, including birds.
- Regulations (Wildlife Act, MBCA, SARA)
- Forest harvesting responsible for destruction of between 18,709 and 159,138 bird nests per year in NS forests (Hobson et al. 2013)
- We can, and must, do better!

Typical Nesting Season Window

- Peak nesting activity: May–July
- Species vary in timing, important to know when specific species are most likely to be nesting
- Harvest timing and site selection are critical



FFN Protocol – 5 Steps

Step 1 - Site is identified and a desktop biodiversity assessment is carried out by MTRI. Data from ACCDC is used to inform possible presence of at-risk flora and fauna.

Step 2 – If possible, PTA carried out close to harvest and during nesting season. At all times of the year our PTA plots have a requirement to document bird species observed at that plot.

Step 3 – If harvest activities are planned during nesting season ARU's will be deployed for a minimum of 2 weeks (ideally) to record at interval during dawn and dusk. Data from the ARU's is then processed through BirdNET and species are then confirmed by field staff.

Step 4 – Birds confirmed to be using the area as a nesting site are then sorted by their S-Rank, if birds ranked S1-3 are present harvesting is deferred to a time outside of the breeding season (current protocol). All species are documented and field staff will have information on likely nesting location by species.

Step 5 – Landowner, harvest contractor and supervisors are made aware of protocol and related mitigation measures. Extra time is taken by staff doing layout and supervision to observe for possible nesting behaviour prior to and during harvest operations.

Other Considerations

- Harvest type can also have a large influence.
- Thinning, continuous cover shelterwood and partial overstory removal harvests will cover the entire site and greatly increase the risk of disturbing nests
- Gap based harvests are preferred during nesting season. Gaps have a high impact on a small area
- Gaps are also easier to observe for nesting behaviour

Technology

BirdNET

TheCornellLab Merlin®

Bird ID Help for 5,000+ Species

Start Bird ID

ArcGIS Survey123

RAVEN Lite

TheCornellLab

K. Lisa Yang Center for Conservation Bioacoustics

Field Practices – ARU Deployment

- ARU have a listening radius of approximately 100m, planning locations digitally helps
- Place in areas that are relatively free of obstruction and above understory vegetation if possible
- Orient ARU towards the middle of the block
- Mark the location with a GPS!!!

Field Practices – PTA/Layout/Bird Survey

- Use combination of visual and audible ID of bird species present.
- Use Merling or PUC as often as possible during field work
- Document bird species present, try to be aware of their likely nesting sites
- Watch for old nests
- Carry field cards and know your regulations

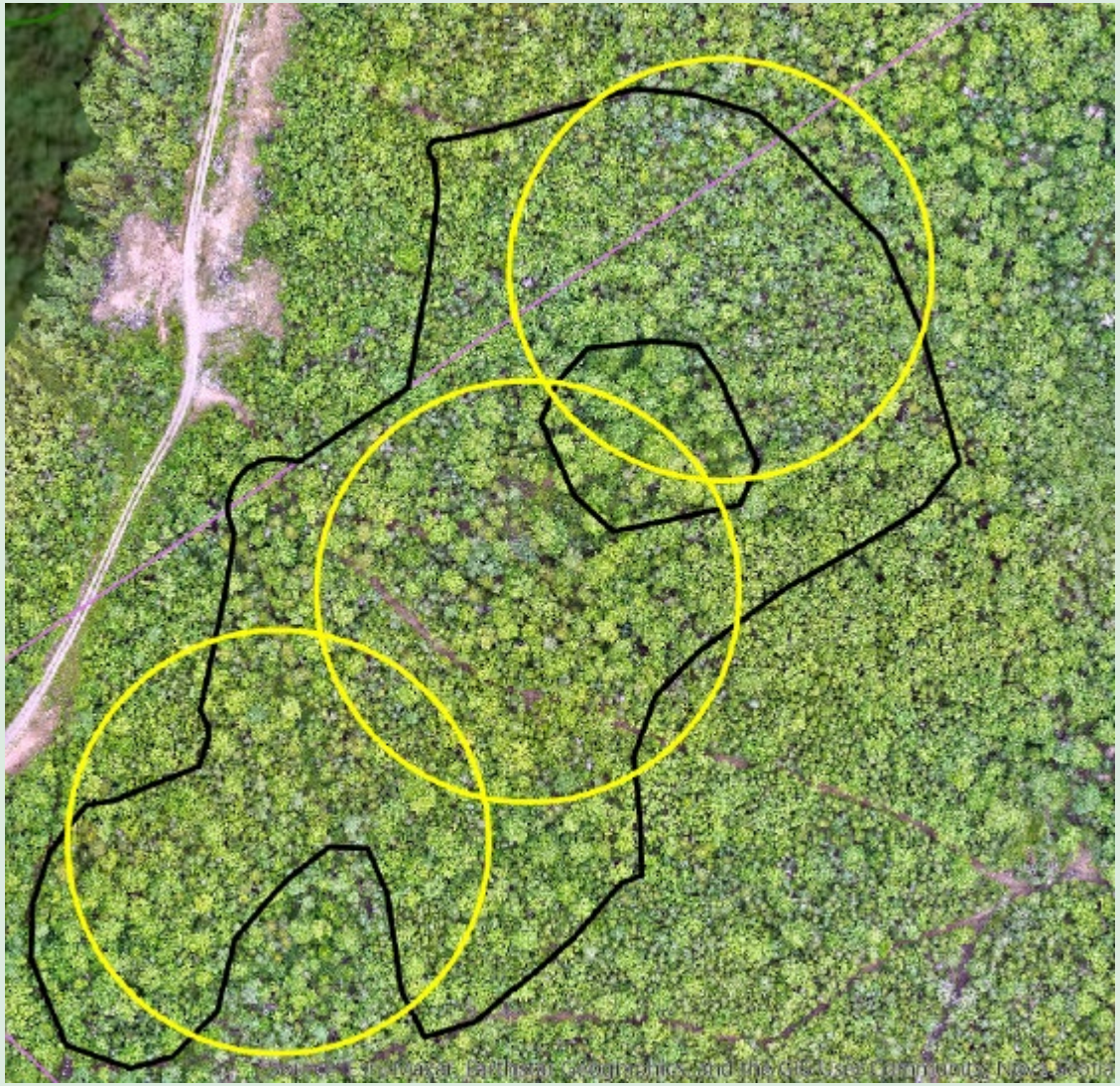
Results So Far

- We started with very strict ideas for our protocol
- S3 birds are everywhere!!!
- 13 out of 14 sites planned for last summer had S1-3 birds present
- We are now working to try and find ways to adapt protocol to allow for summer harvests while still protecting nesting birds

Examples of S3 Birds

Likely Adaptations

- Plan to operate larger sites during nesting season
- S1 & S2 birds still result in harvest deferral
- S3 we will work to try and adapt the harvest site to allow for some of it to be operated while still buffering for the S3 nesting area.
- Better assessments of suitable habitat and nesting periods for birds that have been detected



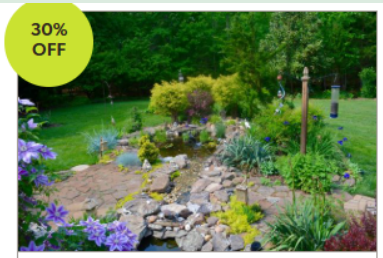
Training

The Hidden World of Nests and Eggs

Discover how birds come to life—learn all about nest building, egg laying, incubation, parenting, and so much more.

Sale $47.99 ~~$59.99~~

Sale ends 04/28/2026



Growing Wild: Gardening for Birds and Nature

Transform your outdoor space into a garden sanctuary to support birds. Learn expert tips and hands-on practices to create beautiful bird-friendly spaces.

Sale $41.99 ~~$59.99~~

Sale ends 04/21/2026

3+ hours to complete

Be a Better Birder: Hawk and Raptor Identification

The most comprehensive online course on raptors. Covers all 34 species found in the continental U.S. and Canada. Practice for the field with SnapID.

Sale $87.49 ~~$124.99~~

Sale ends 04/28/2026

9+ hours to complete

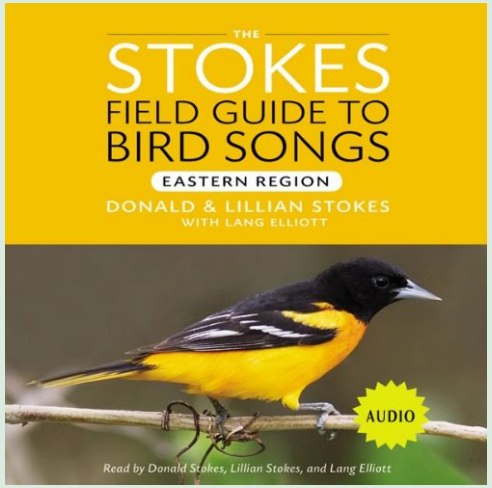
Avian Nest Sweeps and Monitoring Methods – Online – May 21st – 22nd, 2026

05/21/2026 - 05/22/2026

8:30 am - 4:00 pm Pacific Time

Location: Fully online

This two-day, fully online Avian Nest Sweeps and Monitoring Methods training provides participants with foundational knowledge to support effective, efficient, and ecologically responsible nest sweeps for breeding birds. After completing this course participants will understand the regulatory and environmental drivers behind nest sweeps and gain tools to plan and conduct these specialize surveys. Being able to perform nest sweeps thoroughly and efficiently is a valuable and applicable skill for environmental professionals.

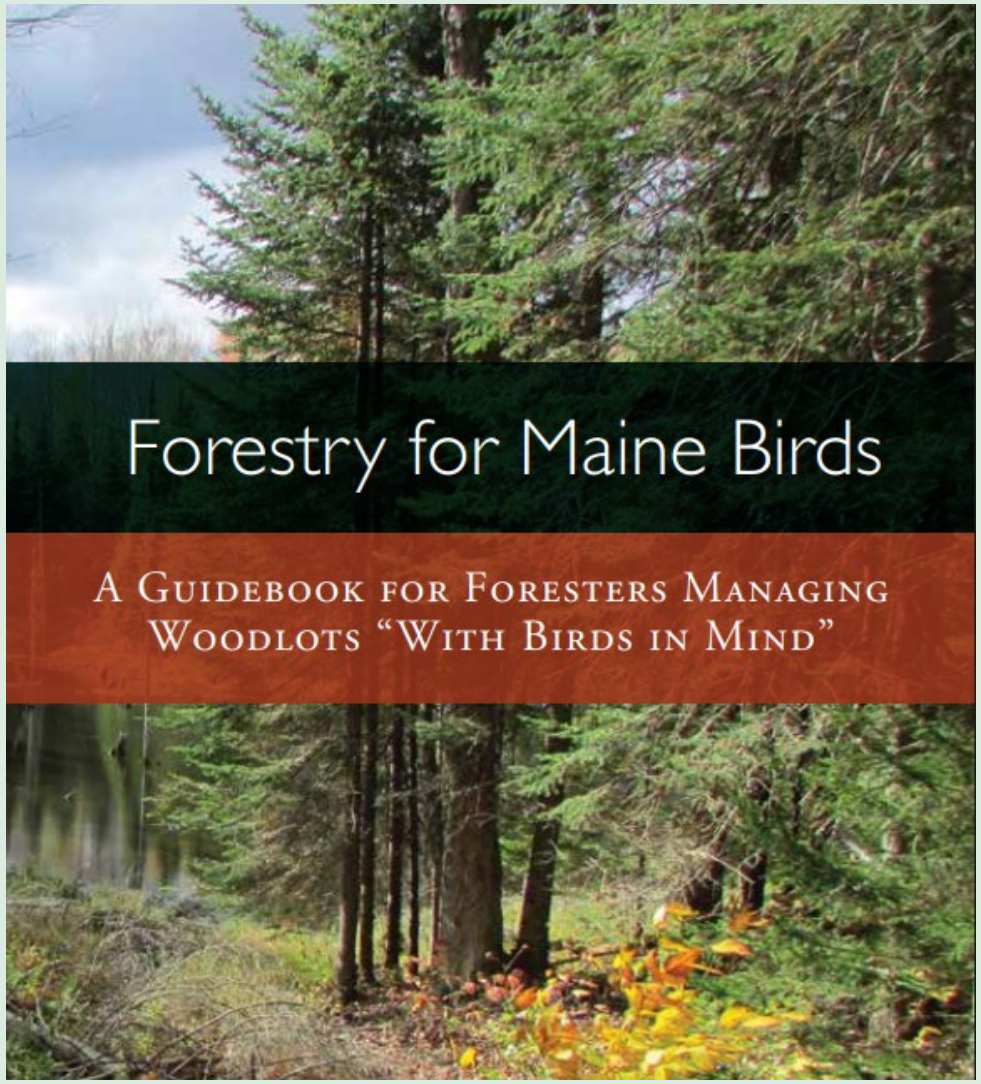


Costs

- Audiomoth ARU devices approx. $175 each
- Deployment of audiomoths can take up to half a day on larger sites, sometimes possible to deploy during other field work ($225)
- Another half day for removal of ARU's ($225)
- Processing data and confirming bird song can be very time consuming. Possible it could take all day to complete a larger site ($450)
- Mileage also needs to be considered

Possible Future Projects

- Development of field cards for forest professionals
- Silviculture for NS Birds Manual
- FEC interpretations for bird habitat
- Use of LiDAR for identifying and assessing habitat potential
- Training events for forest professionals and land stewards



Questions?