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## IMPROVING NATIVE BIRD HABITAT ALONG THE LAKE ONTARIO STATE PARKWAY

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### Abstract

In 1998 The Nature Conservancy (TNC) made the Rochester regional office of the New York State Department of Transportation aware of the need for improved habitat for birds along Lake Ontario. The lake shore is internationally recognized as an important migratory route, nesting and wintering area for many bird species, both songbirds and birds of prey. The Lake Ontario State Parkway, with more than 30 miles of expansive right-of-way along the shoreline, presented an ideal opportunity for the department to respond, while enhancing the aesthetics of the corridor for the traveling public and adjacent land owners.

Planning and design began in 1999 with construction in the spring of 2000. The project included restoring and enhancing native vegetation (meadow, shrub and trees) for habitat and food, and adding nest boxes for wood ducks, kestrels and other native cavity dwellers. Nest boxes are monitored through the creation of an 'adopt a nest box' volunteer program which has successfully kept European Starling activity to a minimum. Boxes have been used by six different native bird species. Seven hundred native shrubs and 236 fruit or mast bearing trees were planted. Forty-four acres of non-native scrub shrub was removed, with three acres replanted with native woody plants and the rest left open as meadow. Since 2001, the 41-acre R.O.W. area is being managed so that mowing occurs once after September 1, which has improved nesting success for Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows, Bobolink and Meadowlark. Upland Sandpiper nested there until 1999, and it is hoped they will return. The department is currently revising mowing management practices statewide, in part based on the success of this project.

The NYSDOT partnered with TNC, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Cornell University, Braddock's Bay Raptor Research Center, Braddock's Bay Bird Observatory, Genesee Ornithological Society, Town of Greece, Otetiana Boy Scout Council and DOT staff volunteers through planning and implementation phases of this ongoing project. For a relatively small investment of time and money, the department has made a noticeable improvement in the environment and won accolades from our many partners.



**Biographical Sketch:** Amy Kahn has been with NYSDOT for six years and has worked as an ecologist for 22 years. She has a master's in environmental and forest biology from SUNY CESF and has birded for most of her life.