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MEDIA ALERT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Boreal Chickadee, a State Indicator Species in Decline

The Boreal Chickadee, aptly named for its dependence on the Boreal forest, is a superb indicator species in Michigan. Simply put, if the Boreal forest is declining so is the Boreal Chickadee population.

In Michigan, Boreal habitats can be found in the Upper Peninsula and consist primarily of cold-tolerant coniferous trees, such as black and white spruce, balsam fir, jack pine and tamarack (larch). Additionally, the Boreal Chickadee favors black spruce-tamarack wetlands. This makes Michigan the southernmost range for this non-migratory resident species and easily susceptible to habitat degradation.

The Boreal Chickadee, which looks similar to the very common Black-capped Chickadee, has experienced a 73 percent population decline between 1965 to 2005 (Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas) and thus put the species on National Audubon's, "Top 20 Common Birds in Decline" list. The current population is a mere 5.2 million individuals compared to 40 years ago when the population stood at an impressive 20 million.

This decline may be attributed to changes in the amount and quality of Boreal habitats in recent decades. Excessive logging, drilling and mining has threatened mature Boreal forests throughout the bird's North American range. The Boreal forests of the Upper Peninsula are still recovering from the effects of logging during the turn of the last century. Although these Boreal forests have rebounded, they are still not at their fullest potential to attract Boreal Chickadees, which were very common in the Upper Peninsula before the logging boom of the 1800's (Barrows).

Another probable factor in the species' population decline in Michigan is climate change. As the species' southernmost range a minor one or two degrees in temperature change can, over time, reduce the amount of Boreal habitat in the Upper Peninsula. With smaller areas of Boreal forest available the Boreal Chickadee population in the state will decline further as the bird retreats to Canada in search of suitable habitat and food.

The future of the species depends heavily on better cultivation practices of Boreal forests and improving industrial methods for logging, mining, and drilling. In Michigan, encouraging public land managers to have bird-friendly management plans and to increase protected areas of Boreal forests will also help the chickadee. Conservation of this specific habitat will improve lives for an abundance of other Michigan-native Boreal species such as the Gray Jay, Black-backed Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Belted Kingfisher, Great Horned Owl, Saw-whet Owl and Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Reducing the effects of climate change will improve the Boreal Chickadee population as well. There are a few easy ways you can help such as staying informed on current legislation regarding greenhouse emissions and alternative energy, along with conserving energy where you live, work and play.

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Although the Boreal Chickadee is on National Audubon's, "Top 20 Common Birds in Decline" list it has not made it on the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List yet. This means there is still time to help this species and prevent it from joining the threatened or endangered species list. If you would like to contribute to Boreal Chickadee conservation contact Michigan Audubon at michiganaudubon.org or the Boreal Song Bird Initiative at borealbirds.org.

For additional information or photos to use with this announcement, contact Michigan Audubon's, Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Mallory King at mallory@michiganaudubon.org or 517-641-4277.

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