

State of the Birds

Birds of the Midwest



STATE OF THE BIRDS OF THE MIDWEST

The State of the Birds report was developed in partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), state wildlife agencies, and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) as a subcommittee of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

Birds are considered indicators of the health of our environment. They keep us attuned to changes in habitat and natural resources and are undeniably linked to our quality of life in the Midwest. Approximately 450 of America's bird species occur in the wetlands, grasslands, forests and urban environments of the Midwest. The bird species that follow provide just a few examples of the ongoing successes and challenges of bird conservation and management in this region. To see the complete report, visit www.stateofbirds.org.



FOREST BIRDS OF THE MIDWEST

Cerulean Warbler

Cerulean Warbler breeds in large tracts of mature eastern deciduous forests, including river floodplain, ridge top, and cove forests. Although the center of its current distribution is in the central Appalachians, there are current breeding populations in all eight upper Midwestern states. The species flies more than 2,500 miles twice a year to and from its wintering grounds in the northern Andes of South America from Venezuela to Peru.

Survey data suggest the current population has declined by more than 70 percent since 1966. Declines are believed to be caused by habitat loss and degradation due to forest fragmentation and loss of large emergent trees on both the wintering and breeding grounds. The species has also suffered from habitat loss to mountaintop mining in the core of its breeding range. Ceruleans appear to respond well to forest management tactics including selective cutting and the creation of small openings.

Proactive conservation measures have been coordinated by the Cerulean Warbler Technical Group, a partnership between federal, state, nonprofit, and private agencies and organizations. The group has established conservation action priorities, conducted research on breeding requirements and nesting success, tested forest management practices, and surveyed populations on the breeding and wintering grounds.

An active international working group, El Grupo Cerúleo, is working to develop conservation strategies throughout the breeding, migratory and wintering stages of the Cerulean life cycle. In partnership with ProAves Colombia, El Grupo hosted a summit in Bogotá in October 2008. As a result, an international partnership is forming between the coal industry in the Central Appalachians and coffee producers in Colombia.



Canada Warbler

Canada Warbler breeds in coniferous and mixed northern hardwood forests across the southern boreal forest and Upper Great Lakes, and in mesic ravines in the Appalachian Mountains. The species winters in the mountains of northwestern South America.

Population declines noted by survey data are believed to be due to forest fragmentation and habitat degradation both on the breeding and wintering grounds. Habitat of Southern Appalachian high-elevation breeding birds is being degraded by acid rain and increasing numbers of insect pests.

Canada's Boreal Forest Conservation Framework has set a goal of protecting more than 50 percent of the boreal forest, which should lead to habitat improvements that support the long-term viability of this species.

American Woodcock

American Woodcock breeds in early-successional northern hardwood forests across the southern boreal forest of Canada, the Upper Great Lakes, and northeastern United States. The Woodcock Singing-Ground Survey shows a long-term decline that is believed to be caused by loss of early-successional forest and habitat degradation on the breeding grounds.



Bird populations can provide an indication of healthy or unhealthy changes in the nation's habitats and natural resources. The health of bird populations is linked to the quality of life for citizens of the United States.

The Wildlife Management Institute, in cooperation with the Service and numerous state agencies, has embarked on several regional woodcock initiatives. The goal is to focus habitat management efforts to benefit woodcock through maintenance of field and shrubland habitats and the creation of young forest using the best available principles of conservation biology and land-use planning.

GRASSLAND BIRDS OF THE MIDWEST

Eastern Meadowlark

Survey data show a long-term decline throughout the species' range in the eastern and midwestern U.S. and Canada. The decline is attributed to the disappearance of suitable nesting habitat due to urbanization, intensive agricultural practices, and loss of open fields.



Maintenance and increases in local meadowlark populations will depend on restoration of large blocks of grassland and prairie habitat and continuation and expansion of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Larger landscape-scale increases seem partially dependent on changing land-use behaviors of the agricultural community.

Henslow's Sparrow

Henslow's Sparrow is found in grasslands of the eastern and midwestern U.S. and southern Ontario. Large population declines from the 1960s through the mid-1980s have been halted, and the species has rebounded above the objective set by Partners in Flight.



Recent increases may be due primarily to the large number of acres set aside for the CRP in the 1990s. CRP acreages recently began a sharp decline, however, future population stability may be dependent upon reversing this trend.

Large landscape-scale prairie restorations can hold several

hundred or even thousands of breeding pairs of this bird.

This restoration work produces source populations for surrounding landscapes when CRP lands are abundant and also creates refugia when CRP lands dwindle.



WETLAND BIRDS OF THE MIDWEST

Trumpeter Swan

Trumpeter Swan breeds in freshwater marshes and along ponds and lakes from central Alaska to western South Dakota, North

Dakota, and throughout the Great Lakes states and provinces. It has been re-established farther eastward in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ontario. The species winters in lakes, streams, springs, rivers and reservoirs.

The Trumpeter Swan was hunted for its feathers throughout the 1600s - 1800s, causing a tremendous decline in its numbers. It was reduced to near extinction by the early 20th century.

The continental estimate of Trumpeter Swan abundance in 2005 was 34,803 - a record-high since comprehensive surveys were initiated in 1968. Much of the success of this species' recovery has been due to collaborative restoration and management efforts across its range.

Lesser Yellowlegs

This shorebird breeds across the boreal forest of Canada and Alaska and winters in southern U.S. and Central and South America. Numbers are thought to be declining, particularly at migration sites in the Midwest and Northeast.



Threats to the species include insecticides on wintering rice field habitat in the southern U.S., drainage of wetlands from tiling in the Midwest with resultant loss of important stopover habitat, fragmentation and degradation of its boreal forest habitat, and energy development and habitat degradation through pollution and development in the estuaries of northern South America.

Management of national and state refuges for shorebird stopover habitat during spring and fall migrations benefits this species directly and partially compensates for loss of wetlands.

King Rail

King Rail breeds inland in fresh water marshes along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and in the interior U.S. as far north as Wisconsin and west to the eastern Great Plains.

Interior migratory populations have decreased greatly in recent decades, and the King Rail has been identified as a species of greatest conservation need in 30 State Wildlife Action Plans.



Photo by J. A. Spindelov

Loss of wetland habitat due to drainage and habitat degradation from nutrient runoff, invasive plant species, and fragmentation are adversely affecting this species.

Scaup

Decline in continental populations of Greater and Lesser scaup continue to seriously concern waterfowl managers in North America. The decline in the breeding population largely has occurred in the western Canadian boreal forest - in the heart of Lesser Scaup breeding range - but breeding populations of greater scaup in traditional survey areas appear stable.



Issues of habitat quantity and quality and contaminants are applicable to both species on many key staging and wintering areas.

The next step needed for scaup conservation is the development of a comprehensive conservation action plan. The goals for

the conservation plan are to synthesize the recent, rapidly evolving information on scaup; identify important affiliations, habitats and areas; identify conservation threats; develop priorities for monitoring, research, and habitat conservation; and identify potential funding programs, resources, and partnerships.

URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

The Service entered into an Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds with Chicago, Ill., in 2000 and St. Louis, Mo., in 2004.

An important stopover location for migratory birds, the City of Chicago has since successfully reduced bird hazards through such initiatives as the Lights Out program, and has set a national and global model for "green" municipalities.

At the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, St. Louis is a major stopover point along the Mississippi Flyway. Partners involved with the St. Louis Urban Treaty have committed to the creation, protection, and restoration of bird habitat.

Both Urban Treaties offer excellent opportunities to educate both children and adults about the ecology and conservation needs of migratory birds.

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