



nabci

North American Bird Conservation Initiative



Canada

A Diversity of Birds

Birds are an integral part of North America's rich natural heritage. They are critical to the biodiversity within the vast landscapes of Canada, Mexico and the United States. Collectively, over 1,300 species of birds inhabit the continent. Canada is home to more than 600 of these species, that include shorebirds, seabirds, colonial waterbirds, landbirds and waterfowl. Our great variety of birds range from the small ruby-throated hummingbird to the majestic whooping crane, the tallest bird in North America. Canada's bird populations occupy every single habitat on the continent, including forests, mountains, grasslands, wetlands, coastal beaches, Arctic tundra and urban areas.

Birds in Decline

While governments and wildlife organizations in Canada, the United States and Mexico are working to protect birds and their habitats, many species remain in decline. Despite conservation success stories, the loss and degradation of valuable bird habitat continues, aggravated by pollution and illegal trading practices. In Canada, many bird species are federally listed as endangered or threatened and several groups of birds are showing serious, long-term population declines, such as grassland songbirds, seaducks and many species of shorebirds.

Strengthening International Cooperation

Our continent has a history of international cooperation for bird conservation through the Migratory Bird Treaties and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. However, these have traditionally focussed on hunted species. Now we are expanding our vision to encompass all species of birds. Greater international cooperation is needed to address bird conservation needs in North America. Joint action is essential to ensure the survival of transboundary species. Many bird species occupy tremendously broad geographic ranges and require diverse habitats to complete their annual cycle. International cooperation and program integration are essential.

The NABCI Vision

The Vision of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) is that populations and habitats of North America's birds are protected, restored and enhanced through coordinated efforts at international, national, regional and local levels, guided by sound science and effective management. It is designed to increase the effectiveness of existing and new programs, enhance coordination between organizations and foster greater international cooperation. NABCI will encourage conservationists to take an approach similar to the highly successful North American Waterfowl Management Plan. As such, the initiative will promote conservation programs comprised of regional partnerships that pursue biologically based landscape conservation.

The Value of Birds

Birds are North America's most visible wildlife species. They are effective indicators of biological diversity because they respond rapidly to ecosystem changes. They also provide many critical natural services, such as insect pest control, plant pollination and seed dispersal that benefit forestry and agriculture. Birds are also culturally important. Some species are revered by aboriginal peoples, while others provide an important source of food. In North America, millions of birdwatchers, hunters and photographers foster an industry that generates billions of dollars annually for local and national economies.

The NABCI Strategy

North American conservationists are embracing this cooperative approach to conserve the continent's birds. In June of 1999, in Banff, Alberta, government leaders from Canada, the United States and Mexico signed an agreement that encourages international cooperation to conserve the continent's bird species, thereby launching NABCI. The initiative is a statement of principles and approaches shared by individuals, organizations, agencies and programs engaged in bird conservation. It intends to make programs more effective without reducing their autonomy. Government and non-government representatives from all three countries are guiding the development of NABCI through national committees.

Bird Conservation Regions

As a first step toward implementing NABCI, the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation coordinated a project involving experts from each country that defined a hierarchical set of ecoregions throughout North America. These Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) are defined by common biophysical elements, such as soil type, vegetation and associated bird species. In all, there are 67 BCRs throughout North America, including 12 regions wholly or partially within Canada. These BCRs are used as the basis for the planning and evaluation of integrated bird conservation.

NABCI Participants

Several agencies have played important leadership roles in building NABCI. Internationally, NABCI is supported and facilitated by the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation. In Canada, NABCI members include federal, territorial and provincial governments, conservation NGOs, private sector organizations, and partners from Canada's four major bird initiatives: the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners in Flight – Canada, the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan and the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan. Through cooperative planning and implementation, the partners will achieve their own goals, while helping make the vision of NABCI a reality. The success of NABCI depends entirely on the active participation, enthusiasm and energy of the individuals, organizations and government agencies that make up the partnership.

For more information, contact the NABCI Coordinator-Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service-Environment Canada, 351 Blvd. St. Joseph, Gatineau, Québec K1A 0H3, nabci@ec.gc.ca, or visit www.nabci.net