

I. Introduction

Migratory Birds: A Federal Trust Resource

The seasonal ebb and flow of migratory birds is one of the most complex and compelling dramas in the natural world. Driven by a genetic memory millions of years in the making, these animals embark twice each year on long-distance journeys between their breeding areas and wintering grounds. Their travels traverse states, landscapes, and oceans throughout the hemispheres linking the countries, peoples, and ecosystems they visit. The conservation and management of animals capable of such impressive mobility requires strong federal leadership to foster effective partnerships among the many nations, states, provinces, tribes and organizations that are woven together by the flight paths of these remarkable species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the principal federal agency charged with protecting and enhancing the populations and habitats of more than 800 species of migratory birds that spend all or part of their lives in the United States. The Service is committed to undertaking an unprecedented level of cooperation and coordination to protect and conserve these international treasures.

Birds and People

Because of their ubiquitous and conspicuous presence, migratory birds symbolize America's wildlife experience. Birds enrich human lives in innumerable ways and the loss of bird populations would immeasurably diminish the quality of life for a large segment of the American public. Birds have intrinsic value to people as threads in the earth's ecological tapestry, as pollinators, predators, and prey. Birds are also actively appreciated and enjoyed by millions of people throughout the country.

Nearly 82 million residents of the United States - 39 percent of the adult population - participate in wildlife-related activities, and 64 million of them pursue bird-related recreation, such as birdwatching, backyard bird feeding, hunting, and photography. These citizens substantially contribute to local economies throughout the country by spending nearly \$40 billion annually on these pursuits. Experiences range from an annual

Migratory birds are indeed a source of wonder and inspiration. They weave the nations of the globe together as neighbors.

John Turner



The Arctic tern flies over 20,000 miles (35,000 km) every year – roughly the circumference of the Earth – from its arctic tundra breeding grounds via the coast of Africa to Antarctica and back again. It is declining at the southern edge of its breeding range on the Atlantic Coast. /Dave Menke

The human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery, not over nature but of ourselves.

Rachel Carson



The Golden-winged Warbler breeds in Ontario and the northern United States and overwinters in Central America and northern South America. It is among a suite of early successional forest species that have shown some of the greatest declines of any landbird habitat group. /Steve Maslowski

duck-hunting trip to enjoying a chickadee at a backyard feeder to watching a pair of red-tailed hawks from a tractor seat. In addition, more than 13,000 subsistence hunters have a long and rich cultural tradition of harvesting birds in rural Alaska. These citizens have every expectation that their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will be able to experience the same wonder and enjoyment of birds in their natural habitats. The Service recognizes that migratory bird conservation and management is ultimately for the benefit of future generations of birds and people, too.

The Challenges of Today

Compared to a century ago, society today faces a more complex set of environmental problems that occur over the entire ranges of migratory birds. Habitat loss and degradation from a burgeoning human population and direct bird mortality attributable to a host of human-caused factors are redefining the challenges of migratory bird conservation in the twenty-first century. Declines in abundance of many landbird, shorebird, and waterbird populations, coupled with exponential growth of some goose populations, are indicative of ecosystems that have been highly altered.

Reductions in habitat quantity and quality, the primary causes of negative population trends in many species, are exacerbated by the direct loss of bird life from an array of external environmental hazards. Despite the banning of DDT, which resulted from Rachel Carson's far-sighted warning of a "silent spring," pesticides and other contaminants continue to poison birds. Numerous other factors such as high predator populations in human-altered ecosystems, invasive species, collisions with human-made structures, and disease outbreaks collectively cause significant migratory bird mortality. Global warming and the demand for water, particularly in the West, are of considerable concern; however their specific effects on bird populations and habitats are as yet unknown.

Birds are the ultimate indicator of environmental quality. Clean air, clean water, and abundant, diverse habitats are essential for birds to continue to survive and flourish. Without a healthy environment, bird populations will diminish and species will disappear, along with the quality of life for people on this planet.

Meeting the Challenges

For more than a century, the Service and its predecessors have endeavored to achieve lasting conservation of migratory birds. The Service's efforts have resulted, for example, in the creation of more than 540 national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts as havens for waterfowl, colonial waterbirds, seabirds, shorebirds and landbirds. The Service developed and continues to carry out the longest operating and most comprehensive survey of animal abundance, the Aerial Waterfowl Breeding Ground Population and Habitat Survey. The Service also guided the recovery of endangered species such as the peregrine falcon and brown pelican. In addition, the Service administers two premier continental partnership-based conservation efforts, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Through these accomplishments the Service has left a legacy of leadership in twentieth century migratory bird conservation. However, despite these and other successes, the Service now faces a host of challenges to meet the expectations of growing constituencies that often have conflicting priorities for the conservation and management of migratory birds and their habitats.

To surmount the escalating challenges of this century and meet public expectations for migratory bird conservation and management, the Service needs a clear, well-defined blueprint to guide its actions over the next decade. This strategic plan is designed to meet that need over the ten-year period from 2004-2014. Its purpose is to direct the efforts of those Service offices that administer the Migratory Bird Program, including the Office of Migratory Birds and State Programs through the Washington Office Divisions of Migratory Bird Management and Bird Habitat Conservation, seven Regional Migratory Bird and Joint Venture Program Offices, and associated field stations (see Appendix 1).

To develop this strategic plan, the Migratory Bird Program sought the counsel and wisdom of its partners during a two-month consultation in the fall of 2003 and a Migratory Bird Conservation Forum in January 2004 (see Appendix 2). This plan sets a course for the Service to engage existing and new partners in a comprehensive approach that coordinates and integrates partners' efforts across

*The future belongs to those who believe
in the beauty of their dreams.*

Eleanor Roosevelt



Experiencing long-term population declines, the Northern Pintail breeds throughout most of Alaska and Canada southward into the mid-western United States. It over-winters throughout most of the United States south through Mexico to northern South America. /Dave Menke