

Migratory Bird Program

FY2023 Accomplishments

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Program works with other federal agencies, states, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations to manage migratory bird species, cultivating partnerships that deliver local, regional, national, and international management plans that conserve habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Among our major roles in bird management and habitat conservation, we conduct surveys, coordinate with public-private bird-conservation partnerships, provide matching grants for partner-based conservation efforts, administer conservation laws and develop policies and regulations, issue permits that allow individuals and organizations to participate in migratory bird conservation in a variety of ways, and manage the harvest of migratory birds to provide sustainable hunting opportunities for all Americans.

Guided by our [Strategic Plan](#), every year we work with hundreds of conservation partners to conserve over one thousand different species ensuring these natural treasures will be around for future generations to admire and enjoy.

Celebrating Our National Successes in 2023

Our multi-million dollar grant programs reached new milestones as part of our collective efforts to conserve crucial bird habitat. The [North American Wetlands Conservation Act](#) funded 74 grants in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, totaling \$84 million in grant funds and \$140 million matched by partners. The [Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act](#) funded 32 projects in 30 countries, totaling \$5.1 million in grants and \$19.6 million in matching contributions, helping to protect birds throughout the western hemisphere.

We developed and have started to implement our long-term vision to create more effective regulations for the American public, including a [final rule](#) to improve the incidental take of bald and golden eagles by developing a brand new general permitting system.

And in one of the most important touchpoints we have with the American public, we continued to improve our interactions via the [ePermits](#) system, with a focus on using permits as a conservation tool.

Bring Birds Back: Conserving At-Risk Birds of Conservation Concern

In response to the [Decline of North American Avifauna](#), we identified five groups of birds and one major threat where we can amplify ongoing actions to have an immediate impact. Working with partners, we aim to support and implement high-impact, common-sense [conservation actions for birds now and into the future](#).

The Service is advancing conservation of at-risk birds by focusing on the following priorities:

- Shorebirds
- Aerial Insectivores
- Seabirds
- Grassland birds
- Forest birds
- Collisions

During 2023, we made unprecedented strides to reduce bird collisions with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service facilities. More than 85% of FWS facilities were surveyed for collision risk and the Service has prioritized retrofits at numerous buildings, including Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and Crosby National Wildlife Refuge. We also created glass and lighting [tool kits](#) to provide targeted outreach to key audiences and published numerous stories for internal and external audiences describing the glass and lighting issue, highlighting successful solutions that can be replicated.

Our staff in the Pacific Northwest Region made substantial gains in seabird conservation this past year through our partnership with the Department of Defense and other USFWS programs. We worked with a military base in Hawaii to develop a plan to reduce and replace problematic lighting and alter



operations to reduce seabird fallout, especially during the fledging season. The Base accepted and implemented our suggestions by changing their maintenance schedule to avoid using bright lights in hangars, using temporary focused lighting on maintenance ramps instead of flood lights, and by turning off bright flood lights at ball fields during the fledging season.

In our Southwest Region, we led the development of a comprehensive grassland conservation strategic plan. The plan establishes conservation goals needed to stabilize grasslands over the next 20 years and specifies the capacity needed to [accomplish grassland conservation habitat goals](#), benefitting one of the suite of bird species suffering from steep population declines across their range.

Monitoring Bird Populations

Our agency has been conducting surveys and monitoring waterfowl populations for close to 70 years. One of the most well-known surveys we conduct is the [Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey](#), conducted by airplane, helicopter, and ground crews over a 2 million square mile area that covers the principal waterfowl breeding areas in North America. The data collected each

year during the survey are reported in the annual [Waterfowl Population Status Report](#), which wildlife managers use to develop annual harvest regulations and ensure that waterfowl continue to thrive.

While some surveys cover multiple species over vast regions, others focus on a single species in small geographic areas. After a monumental effort in species monitoring and rigorous data management, the information gained from these surveys are then synthesized into annual status reports that are then posted on our website and disseminated to partners each August. This includes our online [Migratory Bird Harvest Survey](#), inviting 400,000 hunters each year to report their harvest.

In our Northeast Region, we deployed nanotags (small transmitters with a wire antenna) on cerulean warblers to gather data on seasonal and annual survival. Cerulean warblers are listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern and have experienced significant population declines in recent decades - averaging nearly 2% losses every year from 1966 to 2021, according to Breeding Bird Survey data. The data collected through these efforts will help to fill critical knowledge gaps in the demography of this species and improve our ability to build robust population models which can identify the critical factors driving population change.

In Alaska, we've been leading a collaborative partnership with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Audubon, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as we implement a statewide colony census effort for Aleutian terns, a Bird of Conservation Concern. In 2023, 43 tern colonies (est. 1202-6946 terns) were counted in southcentral Alaska through air and ground surveys, with additional surveys planned for the next two years.

In California, we launched a western yellow rail pilot survey in the San Francisco Bay area to test and compare survey methodologies, characterize wintering habitat, and link wintering rails to breeding areas for a better understanding of the species needs. Fewer than 150 breeding pairs occur at known breeding sites and this research will fill critical data gaps on habitat use that we can use to improve on-the-ground conservation efforts.



FWS staff training to install bird collision prevention products

Collaborating with Partners to Scale Up Conservation

We work with hundreds of diverse partners to support critically important bird management plans, treaties, migratory bird joint ventures, and initiatives including Partners in Flight, the U.S. Shorebird Plan, the North American Waterbird Plan and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (which we have initiated an update to in 2023).

The migratory bird joint ventures continued to strategically tackle priority habitat needs of declining birds and address broader landscape resource concerns. For example, The Upper Mississippi / Great Lakes Joint Venture partnered with the Midwest Landscape Initiative to catalyze collaboration with states, agencies, and private landowners on grasslands, including conservation of native prairies and the use of grassland habitat on working lands.

And the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture worked with partners via the Northern Grasslands Restoration Incentive Program (N-GRIP) to restore more than 10,000 acres of grasslands. Interest in the N-GRIP program continues to grow, with more than 10,000 additional acres currently in progress for conservation actions.

The Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture has worked with partners in Hawai'i and Oregon to secure funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation National to address the impacts of climate change. One project on Moloka'i will assess resiliency potential and is planning to remove invasive mangroves that will benefit the community and recovery of waterbirds. The project will engage the community, fill data gaps, and provide capacity for strategic restoration

planning at sites prioritized for climate resilience, community support, and bird habitat.

Leadership from our Southeast region conducted a "Student Blitz" at two Historically Black Colleges and Universities to build relationships with university leadership, inform students about conservation careers, and promote the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service internship programs. As a result, the Service has hired several historically marginalized students from these schools into intern positions.

In a purposeful effort to reinforce our commitment to our Tribal relationships and our respect for Tribal sovereignty, our Permits staff have been working diligently to improve relationships, collaboration, and communication with state falconry coordinators, and develop new approaches for improving Tribal Engagement.

Into 2024

As we enter a new fiscal year, we will continue to work with our partners to provide leadership in bird conservation across the country and deliver first-class customer service to the American public.

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