ATLANTIC FLYWAY SHOREBIRD INITIATIVE

A LOOK BACK AT THE ATLANTIC FLYWAY SHOREBIRD INITIATIVE & NEXT STEPS

March 2015
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) adopts the Strategy as a Keystone Initiative.

April 2014
Meeting held at NFWF headquarters to prioritize projects and develop results chains.

September 2013
A workshop was held for South American partners at the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group meeting in Colombia.

June 2013 - July 2013
A workshop was held for Caribbean partners at the Birds Caribbean meeting in Grenada.

June 2013
The Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Conservation Business Strategy (Strategy) was published.

February 2013
Second full workshop. Participants broke into threat groups and began developing potential projects.

February 2012
First full workshop included Canadian, US, and Caribbean partners. Participants discussed threat groups, identified projects, etc.

October 2010
Participants at the Northeast Bird Conference in Plymouth, MA hatch the idea of a coordinated, ACTION-ORIENTED, FLYWAY-SCALE effort for shorebird conservation.

2008 - 2009
NFWF and partners, fund the American Oystercatcher (AMOY) Business Plan which shows an immediate turnaround in population status.

September 2008
NFWF publishes the AMOY Business Plan; the first-ever business plan for species conservation.

2007 - 2008
The Northeast Region begins discussions with NFWF on shared objectives on focusing resources.

June 2007
The USFWS Northeast Region of Migratory Birds develops American Oystercatcher Conservation Plan in response to the Office of Management and Budget asking for focused objectives.

March 2015
Increase direct engagement of South American and Caribbean partners to ensure Initiative planning aligns with the countries' goals and priorities.
Highlights include engagement at Ramsar Convention, Birds Caribbean, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group meeting, and individual meetings in Brazil, Argentina, and others.

Actively collaborate with the Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative to assist with implementation of the strategy.
The Shorebird Initiative will assist at their planning meetings and help implementation goals.

Find new funding partners.
A working group dedicated to finding new partners will be established. Targets include the InterAmerican Development Bank, World Bank, Global Agency for International Development and Global Environment Facility.

Develop fully functioning Working Groups.
Working Groups continue to work on prioritizing actions, writing proposals for funding opportunities, and revising results chains.

Develop Executive Committee to guide the overall Initiative.
Provide oversight and guidance, particularly to the Working Groups by supporting identified needs and objectives.

Develop a website dedicated to showcasing accomplishments of the Initiative.
This outreach tool will track accomplishments, show priorities, and leverage funding.

Host ceremony or reception to kick off the Initiative.
Provide opportunities in multiple countries to generate interest and visibility of Initiative.

Create a sustainable shorebird hunting program in the Caribbean and northern South America.
Increase stakeholder engagement to move shorebird hunting towards sustainability.

Purple Sandpiper. Jim Fenton

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative is the culmination of a three-year effort involving multiple partners along the entire Atlantic Flyway. Spearheaded by the USFWS to address declines in shorebirds, the initiative grew to embrace full-life cycle conservation and represents the full suite of strategies and actions needed to conserve fifteen Atlantic Flyway shorebirds and other species occupying the same habitats.

American Oystercatcher. William Majoros

Red Knot. Jim Fenton

The overall goal of the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative is to increase focal shorebird populations 10% by 2025.

SHOREBIRD DECLINE

Shorebirds cross thousands of miles each year from the tundra of the arctic to the wind swept beaches of Tierra del Fuego in the southern hemisphere. The majority of shorebirds breeding in Alaska and Canada spend their non-breeding period in South American or Caribbean countries. Round-trip migration requires a series of flights between two or more stopover sites that connect breeding and non-breeding habitats. Protecting all links along migratory pathways is a critical component of shorebird conservation. The degradation of just one site can have a profound and catastrophic impact on a species, as observed by the dramatic decline in horseshoe crabs in Delaware Bay – the major food source for staging Red Knots.

Shorebirds are vulnerable to many threats throughout the flyway. These threats are magnified by their combination of nesting habitat preference (variable arctic and coastal environments), life history strategies (low reproductive output, long distance migration) and demography (small populations).

FLYWAY APPROACH TO CONSERVATION

Effective conservation of migratory birds requires action beyond any one set of political borders; it requires a wide-ranging approach to identify and reduce threats that shorebirds face throughout the flyway.

A flyway approach coordinates research, conservation, and management efforts across political boundaries and consolidates resources to undertake efficient conservation activities. Implementing full life-cycle conservation across large geographic and cultural landscapes requires a long-term vision and a sustained effort. This approach is our best chance to reverse the serious declines we are witnessing in many of our shorebird populations.

FOCAL SPECIES

Fifteen focal shorebird species were selected to represent a wide array of regional ecologies and habitats. They also serve as representatives for other species that have similar conservation needs, making conservation planning more efficient and simplifying implementation.

The focal species are:
American Golden-Plover
American Oystercatcher
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Marbled Godwit
Piping Plover
Purple Sandpiper
Red Knot
Red-necked Phalarope
Ruddy Turnstone
Sanderling
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Snowy Plover
Whimbrel
Wilson's Plover

THREATS

During migration, shorebirds face a multitude of challenges ranging from finding sufficient food sources to fuel their long distant migrations, avoiding predators, competing for limited habitat, adapting to a changing climate, and succumbing to sport and subsistence hunting.

Among the many threats, four primary anthropogenic threats were identified as key mortality sources for Atlantic flyway shorebirds: habitat loss and change, human disturbance, hunting, and predation. Threats to shorebird habitats have been further refined to address specific problems with residential and commercial development, coastal engineering, incompatible management and invasive plants and invertebrates. Because of shorebirds' affinity to coastlines, the potential impacts of climate change ranked very high as a stressor.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN: STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THREATS

Five strategies were identified to address the four major threats, and lack of knowledge identified above, these include:

- Protect habitat,
- Minimize predation,
- Reduce human disturbance,
- Reduce hunting; and
- Fill knowledge gaps.

For each strategy, one or more actions are outlined with corresponding SMART objectives. Together, the implementation of the strategies, actions and objectives will lead to achieving the goal of increasing shorebird populations by 10% by 2025.

Piping Plover. Jim Fenton

FOCAL GEOGRAPHY

An effective conservation strategy requires the identification of key areas where work should be focused. Focal geographies listed in this strategy were identified by overlaying all available distribution data for individual Focal Species with sites in the Atlantic Flyway previously identified as important to these species ("Focal Sites"). Focal Sites were aggregated into larger regions ("Focal Geographies"), covering the entire flyway, that shares broad habitat features and conservation issues.

- Eastern Arctic & Subarctic
- Boreal
- Maritime Canada and Northeast US
- Mid Atlantic and Southeast US
- Caribbean
- Northern South America
- Southern South America

Arctic monitoring. Manomet

RISKS TO SUCCESS

Seven principle risks to the Atlantic Flyway shorebird plan were assessed, and, where applicable, strategies to avoid or mitigate these risks are identified and incorporated into the plan.

- *Regulatory Risks*
- *Financial Risks*
- *Environmental Risks*
- *Economic Risks*
- *Scientific Risks*
- *Social Risks*
- *Institutional Risks*

EVALUATING SUCCESS

The ultimate measure of success of the plan is an increase in focal species populations. However, the same globe-spanning ranges that leave shorebirds vulnerable also make them difficult to monitor. Recognizing this challenge, monitoring will occur at multiple levels to ensure success.

Red-necked Phalarope. Lynn Schmid

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Enactment of several recent policy changes which will reduce the hunting pressure on shorebirds in the Caribbean and northern South America.
- Continued to maintain the Woodbourne Shorebird Refuge, a no-shooting reserve on Barbados, which supports thousands of passage shorebirds.
- Mapped the distribution and abundance of high priority shorebirds across the Bahamas which led to the dedication of new protected areas.
- Completed first systematic survey of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge-one of the largest and high density arctic nesting areas.
- Held five workshops to engage partners throughout the Caribbean and South America.
- Coordinated management of American Oystercatcher (AMOY) has led to range wide reproductive success and has exceeded the goal of recovery effort. Partner efforts are now extending beyond AMOY and will use approach to manage associated beach nesting shorebirds.

FUNDING NEEDS

The initiative is built on an assumption that adequate funds can be raised over a 10-year period. It is expected that funds invested in projects prudently will result in a 10-15% increase in 15 Atlantic Flyway shorebird species'.

The successful implementation of the business plan will require a collaborative effort to secure funding from the following sources:

- Federal and state governments
- Multilateral and bilateral agencies
- Foundations
- Individuals

Ten-Year Budget

Action	US Dollars (in Millions)
Manage and protect critical habitat	
(a) Commercial and Residential Development	21.4
(b) Incompatible Coastal Engineering	4.7
(c) Incompatible Natural Resource Management	8.06
(d) Invasive species management	3.3
Minimize predation impacts	10.94
Reduce human disturbance	30.56
Reduce hunting pressure	3.45
Fill knowledge gaps	7.93
TOTAL	90.38