

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Focal Species Strategy for Migratory Birds

Measuring success in bird conservation



Beginning in 2005, the Migratory Bird Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is initiating a new strategy to better measure its success in achieving its bird conservation priorities and mandates. The Service remains committed to landscape-scale, integrated bird conservation for the full array of species of management concern, and has developed the focal species strategy to provide the increased accountability required from all federal agencies. The focal species strategy involves campaigns for selected species to provide explicit, strategic, and adaptive sets of conservation actions required to return the species to healthy and sustainable levels.

Background

The USFWS's Migratory Bird Program Strategic Plan 2004-2014 "A Blueprint for the Future of Migratory Birds" (Strategic Plan) describes the mandates, mission, vision, and operating principles which are the foundation of the Service's bird conservation activities. In 2004, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) evaluated the Program using the Program Assessment Rating tool (PART) and recommended that the Program develop stronger performance measures to evaluate its activities. In response, the Program developed a goal of increasing the percent of species of migratory birds that are at healthy and sustainable levels.

The emphasis on performance (changing the status of bird species) requires specific accounting of Program actions. The strategy accepted by OMB was for the Service to focus on a small set of species already identified as being of management concern in order to document and demonstrate the depth and breadth of management challenges faced by the Service and its conservation partners. Although the focal species strategy targets particular species, the Service must work to ensure that the status of other species does not decline. Since the performance goal for the Service is a net increase in the

percent of migratory bird species at healthy and sustainable levels, the Service will maintain existing commitments while using the focal species strategy to more tightly link Service activities to measurable outcomes.

Selection of Focal Species

The list of Birds of Management Concern (BMC) described in the Strategic Plan is a subset of the species protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that pose special management challenges due to a variety of factors. The Service will place priority emphasis on these birds during the next ten years. The BMC list consists of 412 species, subspecies, or populations out of a total of over 900 bird species found in North America. [See <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/mbstratplan/GPRAMBSpecies.pdf>] This list reflects the results of extensive consultations with partners and processes and criteria established over many years. It is dynamic and will be revised as new information concerning species status is available.

From the Birds of Management Concern, a team of representatives from across the Program identified species that meet at least one of the following five characteristics: 1) high conservation need, 2) representative of a broader group of species sharing the same or similar conservation needs, 3) high level of current Program effort, 4) potential to stimulate partnerships, and 5) high likelihood that factors affecting status can realistically be addressed. Considering a combination of characteristics possessed by the species, status of management planning, and expert opinion, and with due consideration to external factors that might affect, either positively or negatively, the Service's ability to enhance migratory bird populations, the team identified 139 focal species to receive heightened attention over the short term, with recommendations on the order that they be addressed.

Fiscal Year 2005/2006 Focal Species

The Service has launched campaigns for the Pacific population of Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*), the Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*), Black-footed Albatross (*Diomedea nigripes*), King Rail (*Rallus elegans*), Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*; excluding the Endangered Pacific coast populations), Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*), American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*), Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*), and Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*). Focal species campaigns will entail compilation or identification of comprehensive management/conservation documents into an action plan (a species-specific mix of monitoring, research, assessment, habitat and population management, and outreach) necessary to accomplish desired status; a clear statement of the responsibilities for actions within and outside the Program; a focus of Service resources on implementing those actions; and communications to solicit support and cooperation from partners inside and outside the Service.

Partner Support

The engagement of partners and stakeholders is essential for creation and implementation of action plans and for existing work in support of maintaining or increasing the number of species of migratory birds at healthy and sustainable levels. Contact the Regional Migratory Bird Offices or the Division of Migratory Bird Management for more information on the focal species strategy and the focal species campaigns now underway.

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RECOMMENDED USFWS MIGRATORY BIRD PROGRAM FOCAL SPECIES¹ -- AUGUST 2005

Greater White-fronted Goose (Tule)	Black-capped Petrel	Marbled Godwit	Gilded Flicker
Emperor Goose	Hawaiian Petrel	Red Knot (Atlantic)	Olive-sided Flycatcher
Snow Goose (Wrangel Island)	Christmas Shearwater	Dunlin (Arctic)	Buff-breasted Flycatcher
Snow Goose (Lesser)	Townsend's Shearwater (Newell's)	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Loggerhead Shrike
Brant (Atlantic)	Audubon's Shearwater	American Woodcock	Gray Vireo
Brant (Black)	Ashy Storm-Petrel	Wilson's Phalarope	Florida Scrub-Jay
Canada Goose (Southern James Bay)	Band-rumped Storm-Petrel	Red-legged Kittiwake	Brown-headed Nuthatch
Canada Goose (N. Atlantic population)	Tristram's Storm-Petrel	Gull-billed Tern	Sedge Wren
Canada Goose (Resident populations)	Brown Pelican	Caspian Tern	Bicknell's Thrush
Cackling Goose (Cackling)	Double-crested Cormorant	Elegant Tern	Wood Thrush
Canada Goose (Dusky)	Red-faced Cormorant	Common Tern	Bendire's Thrasher
Trumpeter Swan (Interior)	Lesser Frigatebird	Arctic Tern	Sprague's Pipit
Trumpeter Swan (Rocky Mountain)	Reddish Egret	Least Tern (Interior)	Golden-winged Warbler
Wood Duck	Swallow-tailed Kite	Least Tern (California)	Blackpoll Warbler
American Wigeon	Ferruginous Hawk	Aleutian Tern	Cerulean Warbler
American Black Duck	Peregrine Falcon	Black Tern	Elfin-woods Warbler
Mallard	Yellow Rail	Blue-gray Noddy	Prothonotary Warbler
Mottled Duck	Black Rail	Marbled Murrelet	Swainson's Warbler
Northern Pintail	Clapper Rail	Kittlitz's Murrelet	Bachman's Sparrow
Greater Scaup	King Rail	Xantus's Murrelet	Grasshopper Sparrow
Lesser Scaup	Sandhill Crane	Cassin's Auklet	Baird's Sparrow
Steller's Eider	Whooping Crane	Least Auklet	Henslow's Sparrow
Spectacled Eider	American Golden-Plover	Whiskered Auklet	Le Conte's Sparrow
Common Eider (Pacific)	Snowy Plover ²	White-crowned Pigeon	Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Common Eider (Atlantic)	Wilson's Plover	Band-tailed Pigeon	Seaside Sparrow
Surf Scoter	Piping Plover	Mourning Dove	Smith's Longspur
White-winged Scoter	Mountain Plover	Black-billed Cuckoo	Chestnut-collared Longspur
Black Scoter	American Oystercatcher	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	McKay's Bunting
Long-tailed Duck	Black Oystercatcher	Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl	Painted Bunting
Red-throated Loon	Black-necked Stilt (Hawaiian)	Burrowing Owl	Bobolink
Yellow-billed Loon	Upland Sandpiper	Short-eared Owl	Tricolored Blackbird
Laysan Albatross	Bristle-thighed Curlew	Northern Saw-whet Owl	Eastern Meadowlark
Black-footed Albatross	Long-billed Curlew	Red-headed Woodpecker	Rusty Blackbird
Short-tailed Albatross	Hudsonian Godwit	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Audubon's Oriole
Herald Petrel	Bar-tailed Godwit	Red-cockaded Woodpecker	

¹ This list includes 139 species (and subspecies and managed populations) of birds that fall into one or more of the following five categories of concern: 1) Endangered or Threatened under the Endangered Species Act; 2) non-game birds that have been determined to be of conservation concern due to declining populations and other factors (as published in Birds of Conservation Concern 2002 -- see <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/reports/BCC02/BCC2002.pdf>); 3) game-birds that are below desired condition; 4) game-birds that are at or above desired condition; and 5) birds that are considered superabundant in part or all of their range and thus potentially damaging to natural ecosystems or human interests. Species in shaded cells have been selected for the initial campaigns under the strategy to satisfying PART Long-term Goal 1 (i.e., action plans in place by end of FY06).

² except Pacific Coast populations (Listed under ESA).