

The first-ever State of North America's Birds report found that 432 of 1,154 North American bird species are in decline. Species at risk in Wisconsin include grassland birds like the greater prairie chicken and bobolink.

The state of North America's birds (in Wisconsin)



RICH PHALIN

2016 REPORT IS A PICTURE OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND WORK AHEAD.

Meredith Penthorn with contributions from Yoyi Steele and Ryan Brady

Each spring and summer, hundreds of bird species find ideal foraging, resting and nesting habitat across Wisconsin. Most spend the summer in Wisconsin before migrating back to the tropics ahead of the icy winters, while some are equipped to brave the cold and get a head start on raising young the following spring.

Birds provide countless days of birding and hunting recreation for the people of Wisconsin, as well as valuable ecosystem services such as seed dispersal and insect control. While decades of conservation work across North America have benefitted birds, there is still great need to expand and enhance these efforts.

Most modern-day bird conservation stems from the Migratory Bird Treaty, signed between the United States and Canada 100 years ago to protect migratory birds across international boundaries.

In 2016, to commemorate the Migratory Bird Treaty Centennial and bird conservation, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative unveiled the first-ever State of North America's Birds report. The report is a trilateral effort between partners in the United States, Canada and Mexico to evaluate the status and conservation needs of migratory birds across nine major ecosystems. Methods used to develop the report are similar to those used for the United States-specific State of the Birds

reports of previous years. However, the 2016 report demonstrates the complexity surrounding conservation of migratory birds that rely on multiple habitats across an entire continent.

"This year's continental State of the Birds report paints a picture of key accomplishments in international bird conservation, while underscoring things that still need to be done to protect our shared resource," says DNR wildlife biologist Yoyi Steele.

According to the report, 432 of 1,154 North American bird species are considered to be in decline and potentially at risk of extinction. North American habitats with the most critical conservation need include oceans and tropical ecosystems, where over half of the species evaluated are at high risk of extinction. In coastal, arid and grassland habitats, 25 to 30 percent of the bird species are in steep decline.

However, birds that prefer boreal and temperate forests, tundra and wetlands are doing fairly well continentally with some concerns. Generalist birds such as mourning doves, red-winged blackbirds and red-tailed hawks that thrive in many different habitats are faring well overall.

Four ecosystems identified in the report occur in Wisconsin: boreal forest, temperate forest, wetland and grassland. Governments, partner organizations, conservation groups, landowners and citizens have worked hard over the years to protect and manage millions of acres of Wisconsin land in these main ecosystems. Ongoing projects aim to restore and enhance tens of thousands more acres specifically for birds and other wildlife.

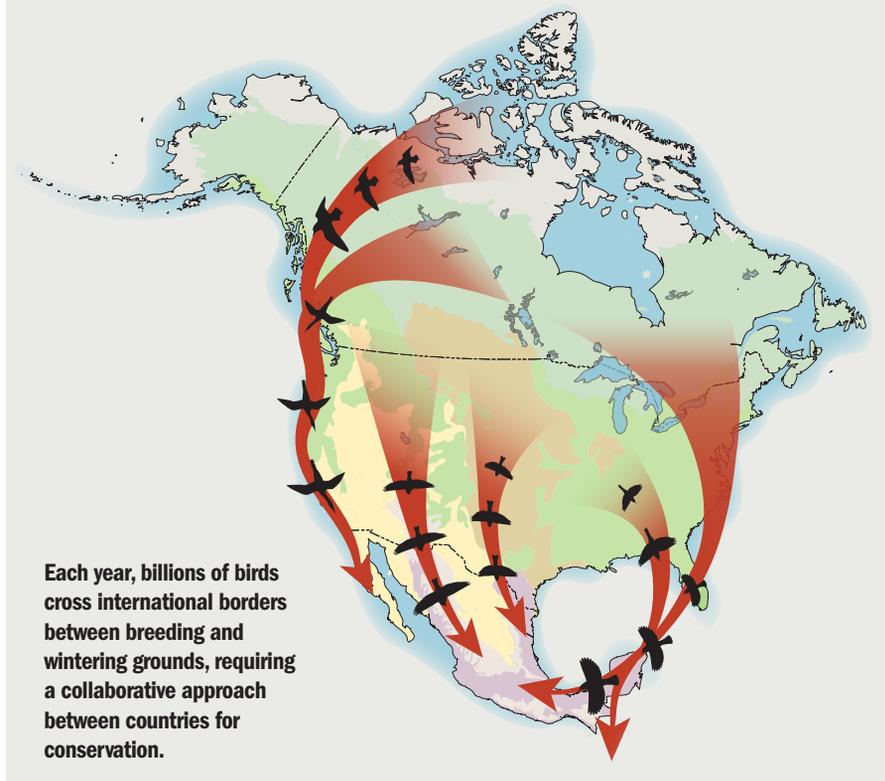
Such conservation also provides a variety of destinations for the many tourists and Wisconsin residents who enjoy nature-based recreation.

Maintaining boreal forests and their birds

This year's State of North America's Birds report categorizes the northern third of Wisconsin as mainly boreal forest. Fortunately for birds, 80 percent of boreal forest habitat in the United States and Canada is considered functional, with 3 to 5 billion birds breeding in this habitat annually.

Wisconsin's boreal forest habitat occurs amid other northern forest types in the far northern counties, and attracts species such as Canada warblers, boreal

CROSS-CONTINENTAL MIGRATION ROUTES



chickadees and evening grosbeaks. Much of the old-growth forest was cut in the 19th century, but large tracts of mature woodland, as found in Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and numerous state properties, provide good habitat for birds.

Additionally, the Young Forest Partnership helps manage forest within Wisconsin's boreal transition zone for birds like ruffed grouse that prefer young, open woodlands.

However, most birds that nest in boreal forest spend the winter in tropical habitat, which faces significant loss and degradation. Organizations that support bird conservation efforts in the tropics, such as Partners in Flight, Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative International and Southern Wings, help keep boreal nesters returning in droves year after year while also supporting diverse tropical wildlife. Such teamwork exemplifies the tradition of international cooperation for bird conservation established by the Migratory Bird Treaty 100 years ago.

Enhancing temperate forests

Roughly two-thirds of Wisconsin is classified as temperate forest in 2016's State of North America's Birds report. Temperate woodland bird species are generally doing well, but some species that require large

areas of either mature or young forest are in steep decline due to habitat loss both in temperate breeding and tropical wintering habitats.

However, forest management practices that maintain blocks of both mature and young trees help improve the quality of woodland habitat for many different birds. Because oak

trees have such high wildlife value, temperate forest habitat management often incorporates strategies to maintain a healthy oak component. In Wisconsin, prescribed fire is a common tool used to revitalize oak forests. Periodic thinning and creation of small forest openings also benefits sapling oak and some temperate forest birds, including the familiar rose-breasted grosbeak, red-headed woodpecker and American woodcock. These forms of management are common in state parks, forests and wildlife areas in central and southern Wisconsin.

Partnering for wetland and waterfowl conservation

Though not as extensive as forest, wetlands also attract unique species to Wisconsin. The state has devoted millions of dollars to wetland management, restoration and enhancement. Partnerships with other states and Canada through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and North American Wetlands Conservation Act have helped waterfowl populations increase steadily over the past 50 years.

Hunters and waterfowl conservation groups are major supporters of wetland conservation. Through the purchase of state and federal duck stamps, migratory bird hunters generate habitat funds that benefit huntable ducks and geese as well as most other wetland birds, such as the American bittern and sandhill crane. In addition, matching funds from partner groups help improve wetland habitat across a much larger area. This is important for blue-winged teal and



When they purchase state and federal duck stamps, migratory bird hunters fund habitat projects that benefit not only ducks and geese, but other wetland birds like sandhill cranes and American bitterns.

other ducks that nest in Canada, migrate across the United States and winter in Mexico and further south.

Yet despite wetland conservation accomplishments, the rate of continental wetland habitat conversion has increased 140 percent since 2004. To keep wetland bird populations in good condition, additional restoration efforts are needed to offset habitat loss.

Expanding grassland preservation and management

Similarly, grasslands currently make up a relatively small proportion of Wisconsin's total area due to widespread conversion for agriculture and development. Prior to settlement, huge expanses of oak savanna and native prairie were historically important to grassland birds.

As native grasslands were converted to other uses in both the United States and tropical wintering ranges, bird populations decreased. Currently, one-third of all North American grassland bird species are in decline. Species at risk in Wisconsin include the bobolink, greater prairie chicken and grassland birds that depend on rapidly vanishing tropical grassland habitat in the winter.

Fortunately, several programs help stem grassland habitat loss. The federal farm bill assists farmers in managing grassland habitat for livestock and wildlife, and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program pays annual rent to farmers to remove sensitive land from agriculture and enhance it for habitat value.

Wisconsin's remaining grasslands are also managed through several partnerships between the DNR and conservation organizations. The Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area aims to establish and manage three 10,000-acre blocks of grassland habitat specifically for birds. The Central Wisconsin Grassland Conservation Area has protected 22,000 permanent acres of grassland, with a goal of adding 15,000 additional new acres to aid greater prairie chicken populations. The Glacial Habitat Restoration Area and Western Prairie Habitat Restoration Area are working to conserve 38,600 and 20,000 acres of grassland, respectively.

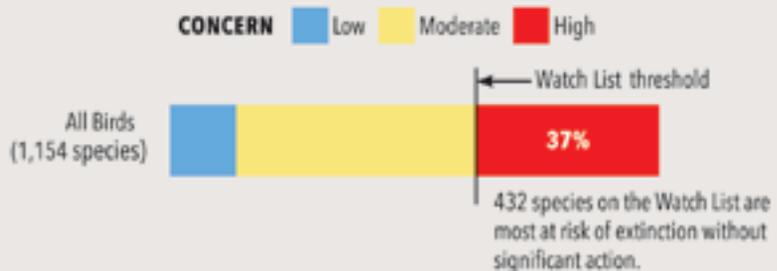
The 2016 State of North America's Birds report is an unprecedented review of the connections between the birds of Canada, the United States and Mexico and the ecosystems that support them. While conservation efforts within Wisconsin and across borders have paid



In Wisconsin, prescribed burning and periodic thinning of oak forests benefit temperate forest species like the rose-breasted grosbeak, red-headed woodpecker and American woodcock.

JERRY DAVIS

ONE-THIRD OF ALL NORTH AMERICAN BIRD SPECIES NEED URGENT CONSERVATION ACTION



NORTH AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

off in many cases, the report highlights the areas where additional actions are needed to conserve sensitive bird populations.

Such actions include supporting research and conservation through citizen science and fundraising efforts, continuing conservation initiatives in key habitats and encouraging sustainable practices. In Wisconsin, many of these strategies are currently going strong, including Bird City Wisconsin, the second Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas, the state

Duck Stamp program and the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative.

And in light of 2016's Migratory Bird Treaty Centennial, renewing and strengthening bird conservation efforts in response to emerging challenges will help sustain even declining bird populations, providing the best chance of success over the next 100 years.

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