



The State of the Birds *United States of America 2009*

Many of our nation's birds are sending us an important and troubling message about the state of our environment, according to an unprecedented report based on 40 years of data analyzed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, state government wildlife agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. The report also shows that investment in conservation works, exemplified by the remarkable recoveries of waterfowl after more than 30 million acres of wetlands were restored and managed. Birds are beautiful, economically important, and a priceless part of America's natural heritage--and they are critical indicators of the health of the environment upon which we all depend.

The U.S. State of the Birds report offers heartening evidence that strategic land management and conservation action can reverse declines of birds.

--**Wetlands:** Although many wetland birds show troubling declines, conservation programs have protected millions of acres and contributed to thriving populations of hunted waterfowl, herons, egrets, and other birds. Lesser Scaup, Northern Pintail, and several sea ducks are showing troubling declines, but most geese are increasing dramatically and many ducks have held steady.

--**Waterfowl:** On the whole, 39 species of hunted waterfowl have increased by more than 100% during the past 40 years. Successful waterfowl conservation is a model for widespread habitat protection.

The report also reveals sobering declines of bird populations during the past 40 years--a warning signal of the failing health of our ecosystems. For example;

--**Hawaiian Islands:** Threatened by habitat destruction, invasive species, and disease, nearly all native Hawaiian bird species are in danger of extinction if urgent conservation measures are not implemented immediately. Since humans colonized the islands in 300 AD, 71 Hawaiian bird species have gone extinct; 10 others have not been seen in as long as 40 years.

--**Oceans:** At least 39% of U.S. bird species restricted to ocean habitats are declining and almost half are of conservation concern, indicating deteriorating ocean conditions. Management policies and sustainable fishing regulations are essential to ensure the health of our oceans.

--**Coasts:** Half of all coastally migrating shorebirds have declined, indicating stress in coastal habitats besieged by development, disturbance, and dwindling food supplies.

--**Aridlands:** The aridland birds indicator shows a 30% decline over the past 40 years. Unplanned urban sprawl is by far the greatest threat to aridland birds. A regional system of protected areas can enhance quality of life for people and enable birds to survive.

--**Grasslands:** The grassland bird indicator shows nearly a 40% decline in the past 40 years, based on birds that breed exclusively in grasslands. Farm conservation programs provide millions of acres of protected grasslands that are essential for the birds in a landscape where little native prairie remains.

Additional Findings

--**Forests:** Representing eastern, western, boreal, and subtropical forests, the forest birds indicator dropped by roughly 10% from 1968 through 1980, then increased slightly. In eastern forests, the indicator dropped by nearly 25%. Sustainable forestry, landowner incentives for forest preservation, and urban greenspace initiatives can protect natural resources and help ensure the long-term viability of many forest birds.

--**Arctic:** Because the Arctic is so remote, we lack quantitative information for most species. Arctic-nesting geese are increasing dramatically, but 38% of species that breed in arctic and alpine regions are of conservation concern. The future of arctic habitats and birds depends on our ability to curb global climate change and to explore energy resources with minimal impact to wildlife.

--**Game Birds:** Of 19 resident game bird species, 47% of species of conservation concern. Cooperative partnerships have implemented landscape-level management benefiting both game and non-game bird species.

--**Marsh Birds:** Secretive marsh birds are not well covered by current surveys, but the data we do have suggest relatively stable populations that fluctuate with wet and dry conditions. Marsh birds respond quickly to management and restoration efforts, and even small marshes can support large numbers of birds.

--**Urban Birds:** More than 100 species of native birds inhabit urban or suburban environments. The indicator for these birds shows an increase of 20% over the past 40 years, driven primarily by a small number of very successful species such as gulls and doves. Creating greenspace for birds in cities can help adaptable urban birds as well as migrants stopping over during their long journeys.

--**Endangered Species:** Four American bird species have gone extinct since the birth of our nation, including the Passenger Pigeon, once the world's most abundant bird. The possibility of extinction is still a cold reality for many birds: 13 species may no longer exist in the wild (10 birds from Hawaii, plus Bachman's Warbler, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and Eskimo Curlew). Several species face unprecedented conflict with humans from development, for example, in peninsular Florida, mid-continental prairies, coastal California, Texas hill country, and the Pacific Northwest.

- The United States is home to a tremendous diversity of native birds, with more than 800 species inhabiting terrestrial, coastal, and ocean habitats, including Hawaii. Among these species, 67 are federally listed as endangered or threatened. Additionally, more than 184 are species of conservation concern because of their small distribution, high threats, or declining populations.
- Habitat availability and quality is the key to healthy, thriving bird populations. That is why the report explores different habitat types and the threats they and the birds that depend on them face--and offers recommendations to protect and restore them.
- The U.S. State of the Birds report is the result of an unprecedented partnership among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), state wildlife agencies, American Bird Conservancy, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, and other conservation organizations.
- Using new statistical techniques developed by U.S. Geological Survey and Audubon scientists, the report integrates long-term trend data from three bird population surveys: the North American Breeding Bird Survey administered by the USGS and the Canadian Wildlife Service, National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count, and the USFWS and Canadian Wildlife Service Spring Waterfowl Survey.
- Each year, thousands of citizen-science participants from across the United States contribute data to these important surveys. However, little is known about the population trends of birds in many habitats, hampering our ability to help them. Greater monitoring efforts are needed to ensure that we can identify where birds need help--while we still have time to make a difference.