



# Celebrating Special Places for Birds

*The IMBD 2002 Theme*

*International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), held annually on the second Saturday in May, is an invitation to celebrate and support migratory bird conservation.*

## **Helping Birds by Protecting Habitat**

Birds live in places all around us. They are found in our cities and on our farms, in schoolyards and backyards, parks and roadsides, forests, beaches and fields. They live wherever they can find habitat, an area that provides for their basic needs for food, water, cover, and space.

Providing or protecting habitat is one of the most important things people can do to benefit birds. Anyone can help. Homeowners can make a place for birds in their yards and gardens, and communities can work to provide natural areas in their neighborhoods, office complexes, and schoolyards.

Lands used for agriculture, grazing, forestry or recreation can also be managed as bird habitat, as can waters used for fishing or other industries. With the right plans and practices, the needs of both people and birds can often be met in the same areas.

Public and private landholders can also set aside areas purely for the needs of wildlife. Wildlife management areas, parks, refuges, sanctuaries, and private preserves have been established to provide protections for particular species and to maintain places free from human disturbance and development.

## **Special Recognition**

Some places are especially important to protect because of the type, number, or variety of birds that use them. For example, habitats critical to rare or threatened species must be preserved if these species are to be preserved. An important place for birds might also be one that has a significant role in conservation awareness, education, or research.

These special places for birds deserve recognition, and programs have been designed to identify, designate, and safeguard them. The Important Bird Areas program, the Ramsar treaty, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and local habitat certification programs are examples. Each of these recognition programs is non-regulatory, relying on the voluntary support of interested stakeholders, public and private land owners, local citizens, communities, organizations, and agencies. The site designations or certifications provided by these programs not only help set priorities, but stimulate additional advocacy and stewardship for these special places.



IMBD Information  
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## Some Special Places for Birds

### Important Bird Areas

Important Bird Area (IBA) programs are aimed at identifying, monitoring and protecting a network of critical sites for the world's birds. In brief, IBAs are areas that support threatened and endangered species; species that are vulnerable because they are found only in limited areas or because they require one particular type of habitat; or very large congregations of birds. Hierarchical criteria determine a site's importance at a global, continental, national, and local (state, provincial, or regional) level.

The IBA program was initiated by BirdLife International in Europe in the 1980s, and with the cooperation of in-country partners, has expanded to Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. Programs exist in the Bahamas, Ecuador, Paraguay, Venezuela, and several other Latin American countries. BirdLife International's list of IBA programs in the Americas can be accessed at <http://www.birdlife.net/sites/index.cfm>.

The IBA program in Canada is jointly coordinated by Bird Studies Canada and the Canadian Nature Federation. The nearly 600 IBAs in Canada are described at <http://www.ibacanada.com/index.htm>.

In the U.S., the IBA program is rapidly expanding. The American Bird Conservancy has a nationwide program for IBAs of national or greater significance, with a focus on those of global significance. See <http://www.abcbirds.org/iba/aboutiba.htm>. The National Audubon Society has established State IBA programs (40 to date) and has taken on the responsibility of assessing every globally-, continentally-, and nationally-ranked IBA in the U.S. Visit <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/> for details.

In Mexico, 230 IBAs have been identified in the program coordinated by Consejo Internacional para la Preservacion de las Aves (CIPAMEX). For information, visit <http://www.iztacala.unam.mx/cipamex/aicas.html>.

### Ramsar Sites

Ramsar is the short term for the "Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat." Named after the town in Iran where it was signed in 1971, this intergovernmental treaty was developed to stem the loss of wetlands and ensure their conservation world-wide. Under the treaty, wetlands include all aquatic habitats from shallow marine systems to inland waterways. Sites are designated as Wetlands of International Importance based on criteria for uniqueness, value for rare or endangered plants and animals, large numbers of waterbirds, or importance for fish.

Most Ramsar sites meet the criteria for numbers of waterbirds, a term which includes loons, grebes, herons, bitterns, storks, swans, geese, ducks, shorebirds, terns, gulls and other aquatic species. To qualify, the site must host 20,000 or more birds, or one percent of the population of a species. There are now about 1,030 Ramsar sites identified in the 122-plus participating nations, with new sites added regularly.

Visit <http://www.ramsar.org> for more information on Ramsar.

### Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) was created to protect critically important areas for shorebirds of the Western Hemisphere. Shorebirds include plovers, oystercatchers, avocets, stilts and sandpipers, and inhabit open areas of grasslands, wetlands, and tundra, as well as beaches. Migratory shorebirds tend to concentrate in great numbers in their breeding and migrating and wintering habitats, and disturbances at these areas could have devastating effects on entire populations. WHSRN sites are those which host a minimum of 20,000 shorebirds a year (some host 500,000 or more).

Launched in 1986, WHSRN is administered by the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences and includes 200-plus partner organizations. The network of sites now includes 20 million acres of habitat.

For more information on the WHSRN program, including a list of sites, visit <http://www.manomet.org/WHSRN.htm>.

### Certified Habitats

Some places are most important at the local level. A site can have a tremendous effect on public interest, education, and support, even if it cannot be said to provide habitat critical to the survival of a species. A variety of conservation organizations offer certification to homeowners, schools, corporations, and communities who provide habitat on their own properties.

To earn certification, participants describe how they will provide for the basic needs of wildlife — food, water, shelter, and space — in the area under their care. Certifying organizations provide participants with needed guidance as well as validation of their efforts. By encouraging citizens and private entities to commit to sharing space with birds and other wildlife, habitat certification programs promote a public conservation ethic that is vital to all conservation programs.

The Backyard, Schoolyard, and Community Habitats programs of the National Wildlife Federation and the Canadian Wildlife Federation are described at <http://www.nwf.org> and <http://www.cwf-fcf.org>, respectively.

The Wildlife Habitat Council's certification programs for corporations and other large land owners are described at <http://www.wildlifehc.org>.

For information on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Schoolyard Habitat Program, visit <http://www.fws.gov/r5cbfo/schoolyd.htm>.

A search of the World Wide Web using the keyword "habitat" provides many links to additional information on protecting habitat at home, at work, at school, and in the community.

### Recognition is Just the First Step

The identification of an area as a special place for birds is just the first step in its protection. The success of any recognition program depends on the group of people that the program brings together to champion the site. Ideally, collaborations between agencies, private landowners, biologists, schools, and communities are formed. These groups support a site by making it the focus for management, monitoring, education and outreach.