

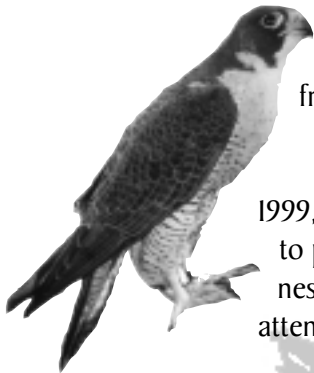
Birds

Since Yellowstone was established, 303 species of birds have been documented in the park. The list includes 148 species that nest in the park, one of which was until recently classified under the Endangered Species Act as endangered (the peregrine falcon), and one as threatened (the bald eagle). The whooping crane is also listed as an endangered species, but although these birds are found in the park, it is unclear whether they ever nested in Yellowstone. Intensive monitoring is also conducted for other birds of special interest, such as trumpeter swans, ospreys, common loons, harlequin ducks, great blue herons, great gray owls, and colonial nesting birds. The discovery of non-native lake trout in Yellowstone Lake has made bird monitoring especially important as we watch for effects from the possible decline of native cutthroat trout, an important food for many bird species.

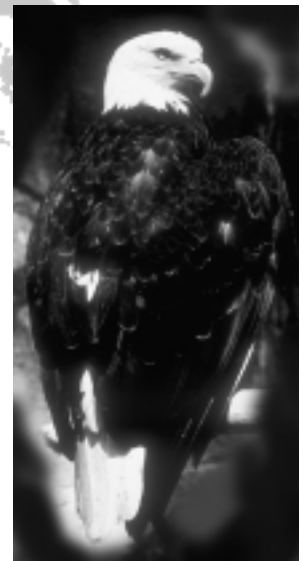
The park staff includes one full-time ornithologist. Other park employees and volunteers assist with specific monitoring projects as needed.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED

Peregrine falcons. As part of a program sponsored by the Peregrine Fund, captive-bred peregrine falcons were released in Yellowstone from 1983 to 1987, and the number of known eyries in the park increased from 1 in 1984 to 13 in 1998. Peregrine falcons reside in Yellowstone from April through October and migrate to Central or South America in winter. In July 1999, the Secretary of the Interior announced that the species recovered sufficiently to permit removal from the endangered species list. Monitoring and protection of nest sites will continue, as these birds will always merit special attention for their majesty and as an indicator of environmental quality.



Bald eagles. A Bald Eagle Working Group, formed in 1982 to coordinate efforts among the eight federal and state agencies in greater Yellowstone, has monitored the eagle population, assessed habitat conditions, and implemented conservation measures. Despite some isolated problems in the Great Lakes and the Southwest, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service downlisted the bald eagle from endangered to threatened in 1995 because of significant gains in places like greater Yellowstone, where the birds are now thriving. The number of active nests almost tripled between 1982 and 1998, when 21 of the ecosystem's 91 bald eagle pairs nested in the park.



Trumpeter swans. Early in this century, habitat destruction and commercial hunting led to the near extinction of North America's largest wild fowl in the lower 48 states. Protected areas have been essential to the trumpeter swan's survival; Red Rocks Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Montana was specifically established for this purpose. Yet the greater Yellowstone population has declined in recent years. The summer nesting population in the park, which numbered 45 swans at times during the 1980s, rarely exceeds 25 now. The winter population, boosted by migrant birds from elsewhere in greater Yellowstone and from Canada, has varied from 60 to several hundred swans.



Human activities have sometimes affected swan reproduction, although signs are posted and patrol rangers enforce regulations that prohibit people from approaching within 25 yards. The highly visible trumpeter pairs attract visitors who may create a disturbance, often taking photos and sometimes offering food. When swans become habituated to people, they lose their fear of predators and are more likely to die from predation. In certain areas, biologists have attempted to improve trumpeter swan nesting success by providing floating platforms.

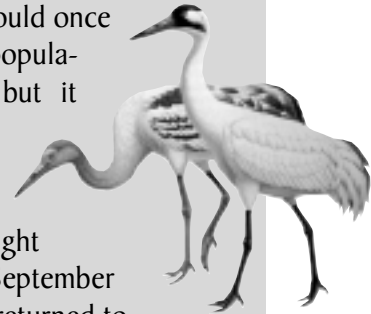
Through private donations, Yellowstone established a Trumpeter Swan Recovery Fund in 1989. This program has replaced exotic mute swans, which may be detrimental to trumpeter recovery, with captive-raised trumpeter swans on cooperating ranches north of the park. These cross-boundary efforts have resulted in growing public support for swan conservation and nesting sites on lands outside the park. The park ornithologist also participates in a trumpeter swan working group to coordinate recovery efforts across the entire greater Yellowstone.

Colonial nesting birds. The Molly Islands in the southeast arm of Yellowstone Lake provide an important nesting area for colonial bird colonies. On Rocky Island and Sandy Island, American white pelicans, double-breasted cormorants, Caspian terns, and California gulls are censused four times a year from May through October. Boat surveys and aerial photography are used to monitor nest attempts, egg production, hatching, and fledging. To protect the nesting birds, park regulations prohibit visitors from approaching within 1/4 mile of the islands.

Neotropical migrants. More than 100 of the bird species that can be found in Yellowstone during the summer, including the osprey and the peregrine falcon, spend the winter in Mexico and Central America where they are threatened by loss of habitat, pesticide use, hunting, and an increase in human development. Yellowstone is an active participant in the Western Working Group of Partners in Flight, an international effort to protect migrant landbirds in the Americas. The park has also provided technical assistance to Latin American ornithologists and established partnerships with the Sierra Manatlan and the Mariposa Monarca biosphere reserves, two important wintering areas for neotropical migrant landbirds. Similar cooperative efforts to monitor and manage bird populations are needed within the United States, as some species that summer in Yellowstone may winter along the Pacific or Gulf coasts.

THE WHOOPING CRANE: HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW?

Although historically rare in Yellowstone, the whooping crane could once be seen from the Arctic coast to central Mexico. Today only three wild populations remain in North America and one of them is in greater Yellowstone, but it could easily vanish. At the end of 1998, a total of 364 whooping cranes were recorded on the continent, but that included 104 birds in captivity; 4 of the wild birds were in greater Yellowstone. In May of 1998, as part of an experiment to train the birds to migrate by imprinting on an ultralight aircraft, two whooping cranes were released in the park. The following September the whoopers flew south to wintering grounds in New Mexico, and one returned to Yellowstone in the spring of 1999. However, the national effort to recover whooping cranes was focussed on other projects in the midwest and Florida.



Program Needs

- **INVENTORY AND MONITORING.** It is crucial to obtain long-term funding to inventory a broad spectrum of bird habitats, complete nesting and production surveys, and carry out cooperative recovery efforts aimed at trumpeter swans and other rare birds, especially those that winter in insecure habitat outside Yellowstone.
- **EDUCATION.** As birding grows in popularity as a recreational pastime, the park hopes to increase its interpretive and research programs, add bird specimens to the park collection, and computerize bird records. Also needed are additional references, such as an annotated checklist of the birds of Yellowstone, and audio and video tapes on rare birds and on conserving neotropical migrants and their habitats.
- **PARTNERSHIPS.** Cooperative partnerships for birds must be expanded to provide greater protection for bird habitat and populations, especially those that migrate across park and national boundaries.



BIRDS

STEWARDSHIP GOALS



Working together with neighbors and partners, Yellowstone preserves and protects bird populations and their habitat, and recovers species that are rare or endangered.



Visitors' enjoyment of park birdlife is enhanced through educational programs, exhibits, and viewing opportunities in a natural setting.



Professionally trained staff inventory and monitor the full spectrum of bird populations and habitats on a cyclic basis, and oversee necessary research.



Through partnerships with states, other management agencies, and international cooperators, Yellowstone's migratory and neotropical bird species and their habitats are protected.

CURRENT STATE OF RESOURCES/PROGRAMS



Peregrine falcons and bald eagles are recovering and several other rare species have growing populations, but whooping cranes and trumpeter swans are declining in Greater Yellowstone.



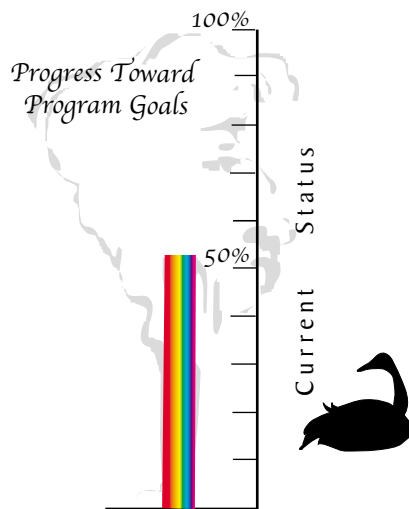
Extensive undisturbed habitat exists for bird-watching, but interpretation and educational efforts related to migrant and resident bird species are limited.



One staff ornithologist monitors birds and their habitat; additional studies are sometimes conducted by visiting researchers.



Growing concern exists about birds that migrate from greater Yellowstone to Latin America; more research and cooperation are needed to maintain these species and their habitats in the face of numerous threats in summering and wintering grounds and along their flyways.



1998 FUNDING AND STAFF

Recurring Funds	
Yellowstone N.P. Base Budget	\$ 57,500
Cost Recovery/Special Use Fees	
Non-Recurring Funds	
One-time Projects	\$ 13,800
Staff	0.8 FTE

The human resources and funding necessary to professionally and effectively manage the park to stewardship levels will be identified in the park business plan.