



Audubon Science

STATE OF THE BIRDS



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State of the Birds, based on the WatchList and Christmas Bird Count Analysis

Audubon's bird conservation work uses science-based information as a prioritization tool, informed by detailed analysis of information collected by Citizen Scientists and publicized through our State of the Birds report. Our goals are to focus valuable resources on the most vulnerable bird species and to communicate the state of the birds to citizens throughout the Americas.

Christmas Bird Count Data Analysis

Since 1900, Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) has grown to include more than 50,000 people volunteering more than 300,000 hours each year to count birds at more than 2,000 locations throughout the Americas.

A fun and educational activity, the program produces valuable information on early-winter bird distribution and abundance. In 2003 an independent review of the CBC reaffirmed its scientific value and asserted the need for better analysis.

With statisticians at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Audubon is using the same methods used to evaluate Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data — the U.S. Geological Survey's breeding season counterpart to the CBC. For the first time, we will have comparable assessments of bird population trends in both winter and summer.

Our first study determined population trends (1966-2003) of 13 species that breed in the boreal forests of Canada and winter in the United States and southern Canada. We confirmed BBS reports that Rusty Blackbird is declining rapidly in North America and Merlin is increasing rapidly. We documented for the first time significant declines of Harris's Sparrow, a bird that winters in central USA.

Currently, we base the Audubon WatchList and State of the Birds report on analysis of BBS data, but in the future, they will incorporate CBC data also. We will put Audubon's leading citizen science program to use to help develop Audubon's top conservation priorities.

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF CONSERVATION BY CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

AUDUBON SCIENCE PROGRAMS >> IBAS >> WATCHLIST >> BIRDS & AGRICULTURE >> AUDUBON AT HOME >> CITIZEN SCIENCE
>> COASTAL BIRD CONSERVATION >> SEABIRD RESTORATION >> INTERNATIONAL

VISION & GOALS

- Audubon's State of the Birds report allows us to prioritize our conservation actions, and communicate bird conservation needs to a wide audience.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- New analysis of Christmas Bird Count data reveals new trends for boreal-breeding birds.
- State of the Birds USA 2004 published in Audubon magazine.
- Audubon WatchList updated November 2002.

FUTURE

- Incorporate CBC data in preparing the Audubon WatchList and State of the Birds report.
- Make Audubon's leading Citizen Science program an important tool in helping to develop Audubon's top conservation priorities.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Participate in the Christmas Bird Count.
- Learn about the needs of WatchList birds in your area.
- Help WatchList birds at Important Bird Areas near you.
- Become an Audubon grass-roots activist and support Audubon's policy agenda.

WatchList

Audubon's WatchList identifies bird species in the US that need our help. A centerpiece of conservation at Audubon, the WatchList is a science-based system that focuses attention on bird species at risk so that we spend our limited resources on those species most in need. Audubon uses independent assessments published by BirdLife International, Wetlands International, Partners in Flight, the U.S. Shorebird Council, and Waterbirds for the Americas to place US species in one of three categories: red, yellow, or green. Audubon's WatchList 2002 includes those species in the red (67 species or 10%) and yellow (93 species or 13%) categories. Red species are of highest conservation concern because they are declining rapidly, have very small populations or limited ranges, and face major conservation threats. Yellow species are of high conservation concern because they face similar threats, but not as severe as those in the red category. Green species may face some of the same problems that WatchList species do, but are common or widespread enough that they are not currently at risk so are not on the WatchList.

State of the Birds

State of the Birds USA 2004, published in the October 2004 Audubon magazine, looks at WatchList birds and species with declining populations over five habitat types: grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, water/wetlands, and urban. We found that there are significant numbers of WatchList and declining species in all five habitats, but grasslands and shrublands host the highest proportion of species of conservation concern. A full 70% of grassland species are declining significantly, including Eastern and Western Meadowlarks and Bobolinks.

Because of the influence of agriculture on bird populations, Audubon aims to improve conservation provisions in the next Farm Bill. Conservation, Wetlands, and Grasslands Reserve Programs all contribute greatly to the conservation of grassland and wetland birds. Invasive plant species threaten the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers, and they threaten populations of grass-, shrub-, and wetland-loving birds. So, Audubon supports legislation that would fund the fight against non-native invasive species. The State of the Birds informs these and many other of Audubon's conservation priorities.

Audubon's bird conservation work uses science-based information to prioritize conservation action.

Greg Butcher, National Audubon Society