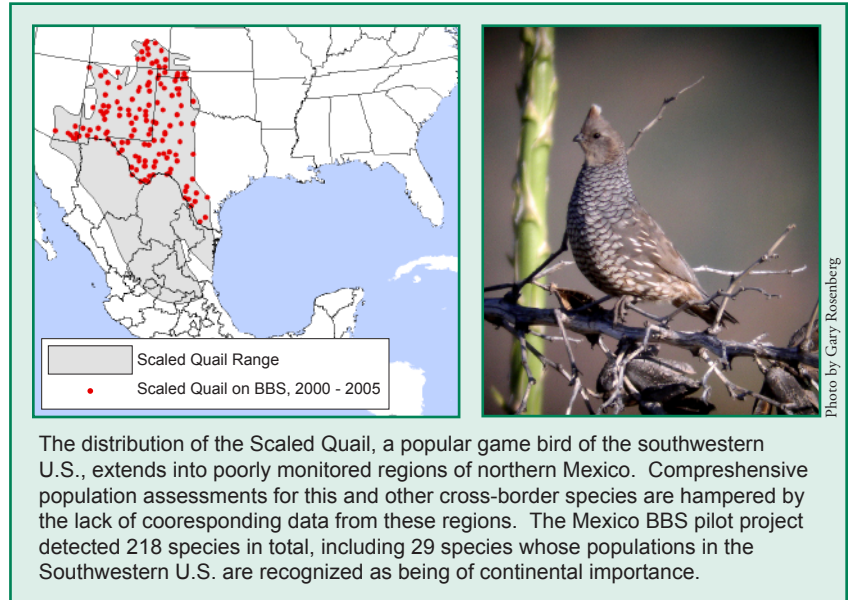


USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

Expanding the North American Breeding Bird Survey into Mexico

As the primary source of large-scale, long-term population data for over 400 of North America's breeding bird species, the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is the Federal government's flagship non-game wildlife surveillance program. This collaborative effort between the USGS and the Canadian Wildlife Service has been identifying species at risk and informing bird conservation planning efforts of resource management agencies for over 40 years. To date, however, the ability of the BBS to document the status of North American species whose breeding ranges extend into northern Mexico has been limited by a lack of information from poorly surveyed regions there. Included are more than 100 species, many of which are long distance neotropical migrants. Considering population trends for these species could differ markedly where they breed in Mexico, this represents a significant impediment to developing the full population picture that's important to making biologically sound avian conservation and management decisions. To fill this void and provide a framework for the Mexican government to track their own populations of endemic species, Mexico's National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO) partnered with the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and the Canadian Wildlife Service to expand the BBS into Mexico. In 2007 this multinational partnership embarked on a course aimed at implementing a Mexican BBS program by 2010 – a significant step toward making the BBS a truly North American program.



The distribution of the Scaled Quail, a popular game bird of the southwestern U.S., extends into poorly monitored regions of northern Mexico. Comprehensive population assessments for this and other cross-border species are hampered by the lack of corresponding data from these regions. The Mexico BBS pilot project detected 218 species in total, including 29 species whose populations in the Southwestern U.S. are recognized as being of continental importance.

Photo by Gary Rosenberg

Mexico adopts the BBS bird monitoring model

The success of the BBS stems from a relatively simple but scientifically rigorous roadside sampling methodology, an integrated network of national and local coordinators, and a participant base of highly skilled volunteer observers. Augmenting the approach of a three-year pilot project, hundreds of new routes have been established across the northern tier of Mexican states. Further capacity building efforts have involved the sort of local recruiting events needed to generate a robust BBS infrastructure. The October 2007 'Mexico BBS Expansion' workshop in Veracruz, Mexico, presented by staff from the USGS, Canadian Wildlife Service, and CONABIO, marked the first of such events. The workshop was well attended and presented BBS methodology, U.S. and Canadian examples of partner responsibility, and highlights of the usefulness of BBS data to avian conservation in Mexico. The results of this and a similar February 2008 workshop at the Partner's in Flight meeting in McAllen, TX led up to 2008 as the official year of Mexico's inauguration into the multinational BBS program. Additional training and recruitment events are planned to support continued expansion of the program into other regions of Mexico.

Newly established BBS routes in northern Mexico extend throughout 13 bird conservation regions recognized by the tri-national North American Bird Conservation Initiative. These encompass diverse and critical habitats including Baja shrublands, desert grass and brushlands, high elevation deciduous and coniferous forests, and coastal savannas and thornscrub.

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