



Saving Our Shared Birds: Partners in Flight Tri-National Vision for Landbird Conservation

Overview



Landbirds depend on terrestrial habitats throughout their life cycles. The landbirds of Canada, Mexico, and the United States encompass 58 taxonomic families; 17 are primarily Neotropical families that reach their northern limit of distribution in Mexico. Left to right: Maroon-fronted Parrot, Golden-winged Warbler, Ocellated Turkey, Tufted Jay, Tody Motmot, Harpy Eagle.

A Continent of Birds and People

Canada, Mexico, and the continental United States are home to 882 native landbird species, more than one-third of which depend substantially on habitats in more than one country. Our abundant and diverse birdlife enriches the cultures of all three countries, provides immeasurable ecosystem services that benefit our economies, and serves as a sensitive barometer of changes to our environments. We now face unprecedented loss of bird populations and the imminent threat of extinction of many species. Conserving our shared North American birds will require a continental, and ultimately hemispheric, perspective and a commitment to international cooperation.

Loss of Bird Diversity

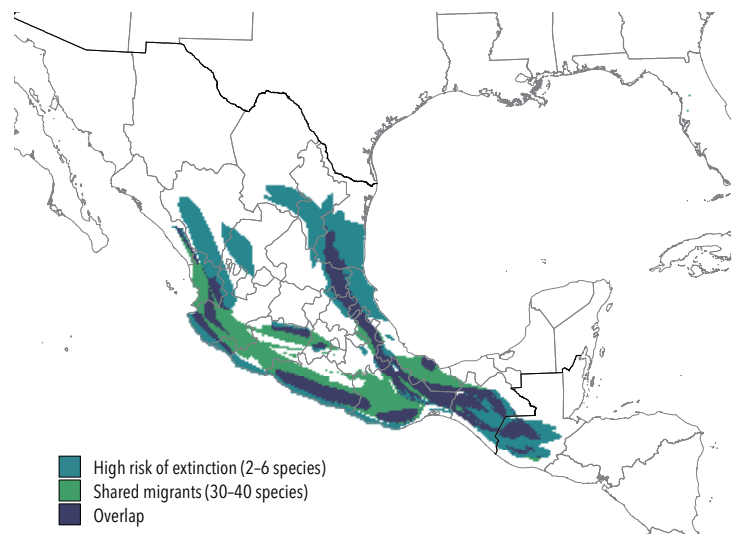
Partners in Flight's first tri-national assessment identified 148 bird species in need of immediate conservation attention because of their highly threatened and declining populations. The most imperiled species include:

- 44 species with very limited distributions, mostly in Mexico, that are at greatest risk of extinction;
- 80 tropical residents dependent on deciduous, highland, and evergreen forests in Mexico;
- 24 species that breed in temperate-zone forests, grasslands, and aridland habitats.

Action is needed in each country, but the most urgent needs are in Mexico, where tropical forests important to many high-concern landbirds are threatened by continued clearing for agriculture, livestock production, timber, and urban development. Many species are also threatened by unsustainable hunting or trapping for the cage-bird trade. Urban sprawl, intensified agriculture and grazing, and energy development threaten high-concern species in temperate forests, grasslands, and aridlands.

Loss of Bird Abundance

Steep declines in 42 common bird species over the past 40 years have resulted in the loss of 800 million birds from nearly all terrestrial habitats, with resulting effects on ecosystem services. The majority of steeply declining species breed in the northern United States and southern Canada; in winter these species are concentrated in the southern United States and Mexico. Because we lack long-term monitoring data to fully assess many tropical-forest, boreal-forest and arctic-tundra birds, the number of steeply declining species is probably much higher. Declining birds face a diversity of threats on their breeding grounds from land-use policies and practices relating to agriculture, livestock grazing, urbanization, energy development, and logging. Migratory species also are highly threatened on their wintering grounds by loss of grasslands in northern Mexico and tropical forests in southern Mexico.



The winter ranges of shared migrants show a striking geographic overlap with the ranges of species at greatest risk of extinction. More than 100 of the migrants shared substantially among our three countries depend on the same tropical and pine-oak forests that support highly threatened tropical residents.

Shared Birds, Shared Responsibility

More than 200 species comprising 83% of individual landbirds rely on habitats in all three countries. Tropical forests in Mexico provide critical nonbreeding habitat for close to 100 substantially shared migratory species. These same forests provide year-round habitats for 70% of species that are of high tri-national concern. Migrating birds depend on high quality habitat for safe travel and refuelling stopovers between distant breeding and wintering homes. The clear linkages among birds and habitats compel us to work internationally, to reinforce partnerships, and to develop new mechanisms for conserving both migrants and residents.

A Call to Tri-National Action

We can achieve our goals to protect, restore, and enhance populations and habitats of North America's birds, but the window of opportunity is rapidly closing. We recommend six primary actions.

1. Protect and Recover Species at Greatest Risk

A strong network of protected areas, especially in tropical and pine-oak forests in Mexico (see map), is necessary to support landbirds of high tri-national concern. Full implementation of national endangered species laws must ensure sufficient critical habitat for recovery of listed species.

2. Conserve Habitats and Ecosystem Functions

Relatively small policy changes can have dramatic cumulative benefits to birds in many habitats. Sustainable agriculture, forestry, and urban planning can protect core areas of habitat in working landscapes. Innovative incentives to communities and businesses are essential to support the transition to more sustainable economies.

3. Reduce Bird Mortality

Providing alternative livelihoods can reduce unsustainable hunting and trapping for the cage-bird trade. Simple measures can effectively reduce other sources of mortality, such as collisions with windows and tall structures, pesticide poisoning, and predation by domestic cats.

4. Expand Our Knowledge Base for Conservation

Effective conservation programs require an increased understanding of distribution patterns, seasonal connectivity between locations, factors limiting bird survival and productivity throughout the year, and the human dimensions of bird conservation. We also need to better understand the response of populations to management practices and the cumulative effects of human-caused mortality.

5. Engage People in Conservation Action

A more engaged human society will be necessary to conserve habitats and reverse bird population declines. Shared products and programs can increase participation by bird enthusiasts in citizen science and promote economic gain for people who rely on birds or bird habitats for their livelihoods.

6. Increase the Power of International Partnerships

Regional Alliances, international Joint Ventures, and community-based partnerships represent successful models for communication, international collaboration, and expanded funding for conservation of shared species. New mechanisms for engaging business, industry, and nongovernmental sectors will be necessary to find economically viable conservation solutions.

PHOTOS: MAROON-FRONTED PARROT BY RENÉ VALDÉZ, GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER AND OCELLATED TURKEY BY GERRY DEWAGHE TUFTED JAY BY EDUARDO IÑIGO-ELIAS, TODY MOTMOT BY GERRY DEWAGHE, HARPY EAGLE BY KENNETH V. ROSENBERG, PINK-HEADED WARBLER BY FRANCE DEWAGHE, HERMIT WARBLER AND TOWNSEND'S WARBLER BY BRIAN SULLIVAN, GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER BY DAVID CREE, HORNED GUAN BY FULVIO ECCARDI

Conserving Migrants While Conserving Residents



Many migrants from Canada and the United States depend on the same tropical highland forests in southern Mexico as highly threatened residents. Left to right: Pink-headed Warbler, Hermit Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Golden-cheeked Warbler, Horned Guan.

See the full document now at www.savingoursharedbirds.org



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