



# The All-Bird Bulletin

*Bird Conservation News and Information*

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## Interior Secretary Signs NABCI Declaration

On May 17, 2005, in commemoration of the 12th International Migratory Bird Day, Secretary Gale Norton signed the North American Bird Conservation Initiative Declaration of Intent with Canada and Mexico to strengthen bird conservation throughout the continent. Once signed by the Mexican Secretaría and the Canadian Minister, this important document will serve as a public expression of support for trilateral cooperation to advance comprehensive bird conservation in North America.

At the same time, Norton announced \$3.9 million in grants to conserve migratory birds in 18 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 25 Latin American and Caribbean countries. The partners who receive these grants will contribute nearly

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## The Ivory-billed Woodpecker: Symbol and Reality

*By Paul J. Baicich, Smarowski Birding and the National Wildlife Refuge Association*

Let's face it: the news was nothing short of spectacular. The announcement in late April of the dramatic rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in Arkansas drew remarkable interest — from all quarters. It not only became a real media event, it made conservation history.

The whole experience can be seen as conceptually iconic and realistically challenging.

What we first have is a message of hope — a second chance. The phrase “second chance” has been used to the point where it's almost trite. But, there is no other way to put it. It's as if we were able to put a chunk of Arkansas into a time capsule, retry the Ivory-bill experience once again, and, like some science fiction story, attempt to correct some horrible past mistake. Related to habitat, the good news in the words of John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology is that, biologically, we've “passed the bottleneck” and we are in a situation where the Ivory-bill habitat “can only get better.” That, alone, is encouraging.

Vital to the future of that habitat are the broad partnerships involved — federal government, state government, conservation organizations, universities, dedicated citizens — all working together to construct buffers and corridors between and among federal refuge, state park, national forest, and private properties. The ultimate survival of the

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Among the world's largest woodpeckers, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker once ranged throughout swamps in the southeast and lower Mississippi valley, requiring an estimated six square mile territory of uncut forest for breeding. /George M. Sutton, CLO



*Advancing integrated bird conservation in North America*

**Declaration**, from Page 1

\$18 million in matching funds. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 2000 established this matching grants program to fund projects that promote the conservation of these species in the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean (visit [www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Nmbca/eng\\_neo.htm](http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Nmbca/eng_neo.htm)).

A drafting team, comprised of representatives from the three governments, states and provinces, and non-governmental organizations, developed the Declaration with input from the U.S., Mexican, and Canadian committees of NABCI and other cooperators. The idea for the declaration originated from discussions at NABCI's second international conference in Querétaro, Mexico in February 2001. The national and trinational committees of NABCI, and the many partner organizations that comprise them, will be the primary entities involved in administering the Declaration.

The Declaration will apply to all the native birds of North America, including approximately 1,100 migratory and resident species. Many of these species require immediate conservation attention as their populations continue to decline, some moderately, some precipitously, and their habitats continue to be degraded or lost. Other countries of the hemisphere can join this important effort, and as signatories, can add their native birds to the list of species covered by the Declaration.

NABCI coordinators from Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. met in Zacatecas, Mexico on May 22-23, 2005 in conjunction with the meeting of the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation. The coordinators reported to the Committee on a NABCI Action Plan which will be built around six draft goals designed to implement the 12 objectives in Section II of the Declaration. The goals focus on building and sustaining regional alliances in Mexico, securing sustainable new funding for critical habitat projects, developing needed decision support tools, strategically engaging other countries, securing the commitment of other partners, and prioritizing marine ecosystem issues. Within 18 months of the signing, NABCI participants plan to host a trinational meeting of about 75 leading conservationists — 25 invited from each country — to further develop this Action Plan.

Public-private joint ventures and other partnerships are working all across the continent to protect and restore broad landscapes for birds, but they need the help of additional partners and financial resources to succeed. The main objective of NABCI is to increase resources for these partnerships and make them more effective by fostering integrated bird conservation, which is based on sound science, effective management, and efficient use of resources.

The Declaration formalizes the process for carrying out integrated bird conservation and can be used by anyone to increase the profile and recognition of partnerships helping to deliver Partners In Flight's Continental Landbird Conservation Plan, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), and state and regional plans for game species.

Visit the U.S. NABCI web site at [www.nabci-us.org](http://www.nabci-us.org) to download a copy of the Declaration or contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Division of Bird Habitat Conservation at 703-358-1784 or Division of International Conservation at 703-358-1754.



Dept. of Interior Secretary Gale Norton (center) signs the *Declaration of Intent for the Conservation of North American Birds and Their Habitat*; Carlos de la Parra, Environment Counselor, Mexican Embassy (right) and Sigi Johnson, Counselor, Environmental Affairs, Canadian Embassy (left). /USFWS

*“The Declaration will apply to all the native birds of North America, including approximately 1,100 migratory and resident species.”*

## Pushing Secretive Birds Out in the Open: Marshbird Monitoring and Assessment

By Jennifer Wheeler, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Courtney Conway, U.S. Geological Survey

For many bird populations, our knowledge base is too limited to allow us to confidently determine status and trends, effectively manage them, and conserve their habitats. The shy and secretive rail species, able to seemingly disappear into the thick marsh vegetation, are the consummate example. Unfortunately, for some rails, the disappearing act appears to be more than just illusion: anecdotal and atlas information coupled with significant loss of emergent wetlands suggest that some continental marshbird populations are in decline. Many marshbird populations are of conservation concern, threatened, or endangered on both state and federal levels. Further, for those classified as game species, managers need reliable population trend estimates to set responsible harvest limits.

Now in its fifth year, the Marshbird Monitoring Program (Program) is accumulating information needed to improve our understanding and management of rails and other marshbirds. While some focused regional monitoring programs are on-going (e.g., the Marsh Monitoring Program in the Great Lakes Ecosystem and programs for endangered subspecies) current monitoring efforts at the national and continental scale have poorly surveyed marshbirds on a range-wide basis, thus requiring the development of special population assessments. The Program, a direct outcome of a 1998 Marshbird Monitoring Workshop, has grown under the leadership of Dr. Courtney J. Conway, U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Division, Arizona Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Visit [www.ag.arizona.edu/srnr/research/coop/azfwru/cjc/](http://www.ag.arizona.edu/srnr/research/coop/azfwru/cjc/)

The Program was created specifically to evaluate and improve survey methods and increase our knowledge on detection probability, effectiveness of call-broadcast surveys, and the usefulness of distance sampling, double-observer surveys, and removal models for estimating components of detection probability. Recently, Dr. Conway reported on a preliminary finding that a multi-species survey does not appear to decrease the number of birds detected and may actually increase the number of birds detected compared to a survey focused on a single species. Further results are forthcoming in an official Program report.

The number of Program participants volunteering to field-test survey protocols far exceeded expectations. To date 180 individuals plan to participate or are already participating in 43 states (most on National Wildlife Refuges), 3 Canadian provinces, and 4 Mexican states. Because so much information is being generated, Conway initiated the development of a standardized relational database and provided the required coordination.

The volume of data is permitting additional continental-scale analyses. For example, the National Wildlife Refuge System is funding Dr. Conway to develop a simple predictive model to assess marshbird occurrence based on plant communities, as the basis of a decision model to determine individual Refuge significance for setting and attaining regional or national marshbird conservation and management goals.

While the Program may yield data about habitat preferences and population status, far more is needed for marshbirds. In the case of monitoring status and trends, scientists must address questions related to how and where permanent survey points should be located. Though investigations into sampling designs are underway, no guidance currently exists to ensure that the monitoring data can be used to draw conclusions about continental and regional population trends and responses to habitat management.



The largest of the North American rails, the King Rail, which uses a variety of habitats with shallow fresh or brackish water and dense cover, has become uncommon due to loss of habitat and farm chemical runoff. /Jim Rathert

*“Anecdotal and atlas information on marshbirds coupled with significant loss of emergent wetlands suggest that continental marsh bird populations are in decline.”*

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## Plan Committee Initiates Continental Waterfowl Assessment

By Seth Mott, Division of Bird Habitat Conservation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

In a world of tightening budgets, there is a need to assure that conservation investments made in time and money result in habitat being protected, restored, or enhanced in the right places for the right reasons in the right way. That is why the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (Plan) Committee has initiated its first continent-wide assessment of the Plan's goals and accomplishments.

This assessment will examine what has been accomplished over the past 17 years to determine the extent to which waterfowl populations in North America have benefited from efforts conducted under the Plan's guidance. Every aspect of waterfowl conservation under the Plan will be investigated, from the current knowledge of waterfowl biology to the conservation planning, implementation, and evaluation techniques used by partnerships that put waterfowl habitat on the ground. The assessment also will help to identify the Plan's top priorities for future waterfowl conservation efforts. The initiation of this effort represents the first step toward achieving the goals of the Plan's 2004 Strategic Guidance, *Strengthening the Biological Foundation*.



The Fulvous Whistling-Duck inhabits mostly tropical and subtropical freshwater or brackish coastal marshes and irrigated land./Milton Friend, USFWS

This comprehensive analysis will be conducted by a Continental Assessment Steering Committee comprised by waterfowl and habitat scientists from federal, state, and provincial fish and wildlife agencies, universities, and private sector conservation organizations from across North America.

The steering committee members will prepare a report that provides an accounting of regional and continental progress in achieving the Plan's conservation goals plus an analysis of current habitat conditions and those needed in the future to realize waterfowl population goals. The assessment will identify desired biological outcomes and habitat conditions needed to achieve those outcomes; help to strengthen the scientific underpinnings of the Plan and Plan Committee endorsed joint ventures; reevaluate the resources needed to attain the full vision of the Plan; and help to improve the effectiveness of institutional infrastructures and relationships.

*“Every aspect of waterfowl conservation under the Plan will be investigated...”*

The assessment process will involve a series of interviews with joint venture and other Plan partners, including flyway council and technical committee members, natural resources agency staffs, and nongovernmental conservation organization staffs. Interviews, which will begin early in the summer of 2005 and will be completed by the end of the year, will follow a standard framework of questions regarding desired Plan outcomes. The exchanges will occur at 8 to 10 sites yet to be determined in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. The committee will collate and synthesize information gathered during the interviews in early 2006. The continental assessment is expected to be presented to the Plan Committee in August 2006 in the form of a report.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, originally signed by the Canadian and the U.S. Governments in 1986, with the Mexican Government joining as a signatory in 1994, uses a public-private partnership approach to safeguard waterfowl populations across the continent. During the Plan's 17-year history, partnerships called joint ventures have marshaled more than US\$3 billion to conserve more than 13 million acres of the wetlands and associated-uplands habitats that these birds depend upon for survival. For more information about the Plan, and for periodic updates on the status of the continental assessment, please visit these Web sites: [birdhabitat.fws.gov](http://birdhabitat.fws.gov) and [www.nawmp.ca](http://www.nawmp.ca).

**Marshbird** from Page 4

To raise awareness of the needs of marshbirds, the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas initiative committed this year to producing a comprehensive continental-scale marshbird assessment that will cover the 43 species of solitary breeding waterbirds (i.e., marshbirds) identified in the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (Plan): 26 Rallidae species and five loons, four grebes, three bitterns, Sungrebe, Sunbittern, Limpkin and two species of cranes. The assessment process will be similar to that used for colonially-nesting species, as described in the Version 1 of the Plan. Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences has again stepped forward to coordinate this effort on behalf of the Waterbird initiative and is compiling information on population size, trend, distribution, and threats, including that already assembled in regional waterbird plans. This summer Manomet will contact species experts to review information. The entire effort will culminate in a workshop in conjunction with the October 13-16, 2005 Waterbird Society meeting on Jekyll Island, Georgia. The status assessment may further justify and guide marshbird monitoring as well as identify those species in most immediate need of attention. Contact Katharine Parsons, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, [parsonsk@manomet.org](mailto:parsonsk@manomet.org) for more information on this workshop.

Of course, financial resources are vital to expanding marshbird monitoring and carrying out recommendations of the status assessment. Fortunately, after two years of no funding, the 2005 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget saw a return of monies to the Webless Migratory Game Bird Research Program. Although the majority of this program's funds have historically gone to more popular game species (e.g., Mourning Dove, American Woodcock, Band-tailed Pigeon, and Sandhill Crane), the Webless Program is a source of support for research on harvested rail species as well. For example, funds from this program were instrumental in supporting the 1998 Marshbird Monitoring Workshop.

## Gulf Coast Joint Venture Hires Bird Conservation Specialist

On May 25, 2005, at the Gulf Coast Joint Venture (GCJV) Board meeting in Lafayette, Louisiana, Barry Wilson, GCJV Coordinator, welcomed Bill Vermillion as the new Bird Conservation Specialist for the joint venture. In this new position, Bill will have primary responsibility for guiding the biological foundation for joint venture activities that benefit landbirds, waterbirds, and shorebirds — a key step in the joint venture's efforts to implement integrated bird conservation across the region. Bill is a native of Lafayette, where he received his degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana and where he has been working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ecological Services Office for the past four years. Prior to that, Bill gained 10 years of experience as a non-game biologist for the Louisiana Dept of Wildlife and Fisheries in Baton Rouge. Bill brings a wealth of regional knowledge on birds and their habitats and will be joining the GCJV team in Lafayette in mid-June 2005.

## 20% Discount Offered for New Book on Avian Migration

For centuries biologists have tried to understand the underpinnings of avian migration: where birds go and why, why some migrate and some do not, how they adapt to a changing environment, and how migratory systems evolve. Twenty-five years ago the answers to many of these questions were addressed by a collection of migration experts in Keast and Morton's classic work *Migrant Birds in the Neotropics*. In 1992, Hagan and Johnston published a follow-up book, *Ecology and Conservation of Neotropical Migrant Landbirds*.

In *Birds of Two Worlds* Russell Greenberg and Peter Marra bring together the world's experts on avian migration to discuss its ecology and evolution. The contributors move the discussion of migration to a global stage, looking at all avian migration systems and delving deeper into the evolutionary foundations of migratory behavior. Readers interested in the biology, behavior, ecology, and evolution of birds have waited a decade to see a worthy successor to the earlier classics. *Birds of Two Worlds* is now here, and indispensable for anyone interested in bird migration.

To receive the All-Bird Bulletin discount, simply call 1-800-537-5487 and tell the operator you want to order the book using code NAF. You can also order online at [www.press.jhu.edu](http://www.press.jhu.edu). The book will be discounted from its list price of \$110 to \$88 when you use the NAF code.

*The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) is a coalition of organizations and initiatives dedicated to advancing integrated bird conservation in North America.*

*The vision of NABCI is to see populations and habitats of North America's birds protected, restored, and enhanced through coordinated efforts at international, national, regional, state, and local levels, guided by sound science and effective management.*

*The goal of NABCI is to deliver the full spectrum of bird conservation through regionally based, biologically driven, landscape-oriented partnerships.*

*The All-Bird Bulletin is a news and information-sharing publication for participants of NABCI.*

*For subscription or submission inquiries, contact the Editor, Roxanne Bogart, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 802-872-0629 ext. 25 or [Roxanne\\_Bogart@fws.gov](mailto:Roxanne_Bogart@fws.gov). To download tack issues, visit [nabci-us.org/news.html](http://nabci-us.org/news.html).*

*The All-Bird Bulletin publishes news updates and information on infrastructure, planning, science, funding, and other advancements in the field of integrated bird conservation and management. Include author's name, organization, address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. Pictures are welcome but not necessary.*

### **Ivory-bill** *from page 1*

bird and its habitat depends upon a collective effort of careful scrutiny and management by leaders of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Department of Agriculture, and many others.

As for the core role of refuges — both White River and Cache River National Wildlife Refuges are pivotal to the project — their status is both wonderful and tenuous. It is wonderful that both refuges will serve as hubs for regional work upon which buffers and corridors surely will be built. Another marvel is that the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp has, since 1986, been a major contributor to habitat acquisition at Cache River Refuge. Even the much older area-refuge, White River, has been a recipient of stamp dollars. (So much for the Stamp being ‘just for ducks.’)

So, yes, there is hope and there is habitat. (There was also some luck involved.) But questions remain: How many birds and for how long can they survive? To be sure, their survival, like many species, is still tenuous. What is also tenuous is the funding situation for refuges and beyond. Of course, both refuges will get a funding shot in the arm, but will it come at the expense of other refuge, bird, or endangered species work? Or, contrariwise, perhaps this will serve as a catalyst to further fund bird work and refuges to the degree they deserve. (Perverse aside: How many other super-rarities are yet to be found in underfunded, understaffed refuges? How many have slipped into extinction, unknown, unobserved, unmanaged, unannounced? Might Bachman's Warbler have been one?)

Insufficiently monitored and managed species also depend upon grant programs like the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), which, by the way, has supported habitat conservation work on both Cache and White River Refuges. What is the future of NAWCA and its upland complement, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, designed specifically for landbirds in serious decline or on the cusp of Ivory-bill-dom?

There will also be visitation-temptation, as the details for management and recovery are being worked out. Bird enthusiasts will need some restraint and will need to assume a burden of responsibility. As many officials at the rediscovery press conference in Washington, D.C. warned, “we must not love the bird to death.”

All these lessons have a familiar NABCI-like message running through them — coordination, creativity, funding, planning, cooperation, thoughtful management, effective monitoring — all leading to the possibility of redemption. Perhaps now, with the U.S. government signing of the NABCI Declaration of Intent, more funds and attention will be paid to regionally based, science-driven, landscape-oriented partnerships across the continent that strive to prevent the listing of threatened and endangered species in the first place. And, yes, sometimes even help save one on the brink of extinction.

Without being banal, second chances don't come often. It's up to all of us to make it work, in Arkansas and elsewhere, taking the Ivory-bill lessons and projecting them for all-bird conservation. Among the many websites on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker are these two highly informative ones: [www.ivorybill.org/](http://www.ivorybill.org/) [www.fws.gov/cacheriver/](http://www.fws.gov/cacheriver/)