

For the Future

BY M. CARTER, G. FENWICK, C. HUNTER,
D. PASHLEY, D. PETIT, J. PRICE, J. TRAPP

With the publication of this WatchList, bird conservation has a powerful new tool that is built on a solid foundation of defensible citizen science, and the consensus of many knowledgeable people. The WatchList will help all member organizations of Partners In Flight develop and implement wise land management practices for the habitats of all high priority birds of North America. It is the culmination of years of citizen-science cooperative efforts and holds great promise for the future of avian conservation. The List brings a diverse assemblage of interests together behind a simple but powerful concept. Non-governmental organizations, federal, and state agencies across the country will consistently use this single WatchList for a wide variety of conservation purposes. There is every hope that it will substantially increase the breadth and depth of attention to bird conservation on this continent.

This group of 90 bird species is ranked by Partners In Flight in the highest tiers of conservation concern. It excludes those species already designated as federally endangered. It includes only full species as recognized by the American Ornithologists' Union. It does not currently include the birds of Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, or Guam. Their omission is based on a decision to focus on mainland species for now rather than lack of recognition of their importance.

Partners In Flight has developed a Species Prioritization Scheme to evaluate the status of all birds in all of the places they occur.

Each species was evaluated on the basis of parameters that collectively establish its likelihood of extinction in the relatively near future. The abundance of a species where it occurs relative to the abundance of other species is one of these factors. A common species is less prone to extinction than one that is rare. The size of the range of a bird, both in breeding season and winter is also considered. Range and relative abundance together make up a rough index of the number of individuals of a species. Population trend, as measured by the Breeding Bird Survey, Christmas Bird Counts, or other data, is another important parameter. The last measures considered are threats, defined as the loss of conditions necessary for survival and reproductive success, notably loss of habitat but also including such factors as pressure from cowbird parasitism. Threats include losses in the recent past as well as those anticipated in the future in both the breeding and non-breeding season.

Inclusion on the WatchList does not foreshadow listing under the Endangered Species Act, nor does it imply any other sort of government regulatory action. The hope of Partners In Flight is that focusing conservation attention on birds on the WatchList, at a time when they are common, will prevent further deterioration that could lead to listing.

Partners In Flight is not an independent organization, but rather a vehicle for bird conservation that is used by federal agencies, state wildlife agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations (including the National Audubon Society, American Birding Association, American Bird Conservancy, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and many others), academicians, and private industry. It is dedicated to the long-term well being of the birds of this continent and hemisphere, and the WatchList is an important tool developed to help achieve that goal.

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Photographs, Top to Bottom: Short-tailed Hawk (B. K. Wheeler/VIREO); Brown-headed Nuthatch (A. Murphy/VIREO); Le Conte's Thrasher (H. Clarke/VIREO); Rufous-winged Sparrow (Rob Curtis/VIREO); Red-headed Woodpecker (R. Day/VIREO).



Highest Priority Species

1. Black-capped Petrel
Pterodroma hasitata
2. Steller's Eider
Polysticta stelleri
3. Swallow-tailed Kite
Elanoides forficatus
4. Short-tailed Hawk
Buteo brachyurus
5. Black Rail
Laterallus jamaicensis
6. Limpkin
Aramus guarauna
7. Mountain Plover
Charadrius montanus
8. Island Scrub-Jay
Aphelocoma insularis
9. Bicknell's Thrush
Catharus bicknelli
10. Golden-winged Warbler
Vermivora chrysoptera
11. Colima Warbler
Vermivora crissalis
12. Cerulean Warbler
Dendroica cerulea
13. Swainson's Warbler
Limnothlypis swainsonii

High Priority Species

19. Black-vented Shearwater
Puffinus opisthomelas
20. Ashy Storm-Petrel
Oceanodroma homochroa
21. Black Storm-Petrel
Oceanodroma melania
22. Reddish Egret
Egretta rufescens
23. Black Oystercatcher
Haematopus bachmani
24. Long-billed Curlew
Numenius americanus
25. Hudsonian Godwit
Limosa haemastica
26. Red Knot
Calidris canutus
27. Buff-breasted Sandpiper
Tryngites subruficollis
28. Franklin's Gull
Larus pipixcan
29. Xantus' Murrelet
Synthliboramphus hypoleucus
30. White-crowned Pigeon
Columba leucocephala
31. Black-billed Cuckoo
Coccyzus erythrophthalmus
32. Black Swift
Cypseloides niger
33. Lucifer Hummingbird
Calothorax lucifer
34. Allen's Hummingbird
Selasphorus sasin
35. Lewis' Woodpecker
Melanerpes lewis
36. Brown-headed Nuthatch
Sitta pusilla
37. Bendire's Thrasher
Toxostoma bendirei
38. Le Conte's Thrasher
Toxostoma lecontei
39. Sprague's Pipit
Anthus spragueii
40. Bell's Vireo
Vireo bellii
41. Gray Vireo
Vireo vicinior
42. Lucy's Warbler
Vermivora luciae
43. Hermit Warbler
Dendroica occidentalis
44. Prairie Warbler
Dendroica discolor
45. Prothonotary Warbler
Protonotaria citrea
46. Canada Warbler
Wilsonia canadensis
47. Abert's Towhee
Pipilo aberti
48. Baird's Sparrow
Ammodramus bairdii
49. Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Ammodramus nelsoni
50. McCown's Longspur
Calcarius mccownii
51. Smith's Longspur
Calcarius pictus
52. McKay's Bunting
Plectrophenax hyperboreus
53. Audubon's Oriole
Icterus graduacauda

Moderate Priority Species

54. American Bittern
Botaurus lentiginosus
55. Emperor Goose
Chen canagica
56. Black Tern
Chlidonias niger
57. Band-tailed Pigeon
Columba fasciata
58. Common Ground-Dove
Columbina passerina
59. Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Coccyzus americanus
60. Short-eared Owl
Asio flammeus
61. Chuck-will's-widow
Caprimulgus carolinensis
62. Chimney Swift
Chaetura pelagica
63. Rufous Hummingbird
Selasphorus rufus
64. Red-headed Woodpecker
Melanerpes erythrocephalus
65. Olive-sided Flycatcher
Contopus borealis
66. Western Wood-Pewee
Contopus sordidulus
67. Eastern Wood-Pewee
Contopus virens
68. Veery
Catharus fuscescens
69. Wood Thrush
Hylocichla mustelina
70. Gray Catbird
Dumetella carolinensis
71. Curve-billed Thrasher
Toxostoma curvirostre
72. Loggerhead Shrike
Lanius ludovicianus
73. Palm Warbler
Dendroica palmarum
74. Kentucky Warbler
Oporornis formosus
75. Painted Bunting
Passerina ciris
76. Dickcissel
Spiza americana
77. Cassin's Sparrow
Aimophila cassinii
78. Clay-colored Sparrow
Spizella pallida
79. Brewer's Sparrow
Spizella breweri
80. Field Sparrow
Spizella pusilla
81. Black-chinned Sparrow
Spizella atrogularis
82. Lark Sparrow
Chondestes grammacus
83. Sage Sparrow
Amphispiza belli
84. Lark Bunting
Calamospiza melanocorys
85. Grasshopper Sparrow
Ammodramus savannarum
86. Harris' Sparrow
Zonotrichia querula
87. Bobolink
Dolichonyx oryzivorus
88. Yellow-headed Blackbird
Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus
89. Rusty Blackbird
Euphagus carolinus
90. Orchard Oriole
Icterus spurius

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is the culmination of years of citizen-science cooperative efforts and holds great promise for the future of avian conservation. It brings a diverse assemblage of interests together behind a simple but powerful concept. There is every hope that it will substantially increase the breadth and depth of attention to bird conservation on this continent.



The WatchList is not an endorsement of single species management. One of the main premises of Partners in Flight is that high priority species should be grouped on the basis of shared habitats, and that conservation planning should thereafter focus on those habitats. Assigning priorities for species is a tool for completion of one step in setting conservation objectives. With the exception of the most threatened of species, the birds of this continent cannot possibly be managed one species at a time. The WatchList is intended to increase the focus on well-planned bird and habitat conservation, *not* on just these few listed species.

There is no single conservation action that is appropriate for all of the species on the WatchList. Most have declined in recent decades, but causes for population declines vary. The relative impact of loss or degradation of breeding habitat, often attended by increases in cowbird parasitism and nest predation, loss of stopover habitat, changes in land-use on wintering grounds, pesticides, and other causes of decline are difficult to untangle. For some species, prompt response to some combination of these factors is needed. Other species are doing reasonably well throughout their small ranges and currently require no more than careful long-term monitoring.

A species is included on the WatchList because of the sum of reasons for concern over the entirety of its range. The long-term well-being of these birds depends on an accumulation of reasoned actions in appropriate places in their breeding, wintering, and migratory ranges. Although WatchList species ought to be watched, they will not always be the highest conservation priorities everywhere that they occur. This is particularly true where occurrences are accidental or irregular, but also applies where a species is currently doing well. Conversely, many birds that should be of local conservation concern are not on the WatchList. Local bird conservation priorities should be defined locally, assisted by but not limited to a national list.

Although there are subspecies that may be high conservation priorities in many physiographic areas, there are no subspecies included in the WatchList. Taxonomy can have a significant impact on conservation priorities, as evidenced by the elevation of Bicknell's Thrush and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow to the WatchList on the basis of recent species splits. Other taxa or distinct populations that may be of equal importance from the perspective of global avian genetic diversity should be foci of local and national conservation attention.

Publication of the WatchList may result in increased efforts and funding for the conservation of birds. When decisions must be made between funding high quality work on a high priority species or funding work of similar quality on a lower priority species, conservation would be better advanced by the work on the higher priority species. However, funding entities should not limit grants to projects dealing with species on this list. Many species not on the list badly need research and management attention, and basic work on low priority species could provide critical models for broader application.

Although Partners in Flight currently concerns itself with landbirds exclusive of game species, a wide variety of other birds is included in the WatchList. This makes biological sense and is appealing to most birders. More importantly, it points up the fact that habitat-based conservation plans should consider all high priority birds in that habitat, regardless of their taxonomic affiliation. The assistance of organizations and individuals devoted to the well-being of waterfowl, shorebirds, colonially nesting birds, seabirds, upland games birds, and raptors has been important in shaping this list.

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—Authors: Colorado Bird Observatory (Carter), American Bird Conservancy (Fenwick, Pashley, and Price), Partners in Flight (Hunter), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Petit and Trapp) ♣

Photographs, Top to Bottom: Rufous Hummingbird (H. P. Smith, Jr./VIREO); Limpkin (A. & E. Morris/VIREO); Prothonotary Warbler (C. R. Sams II & J.F. Stoick/VIREO); Canada Warbler (B. Schorre/VIREO); Short-eared Owl (W. Greene/VIREO).