BOOK REVIEWS

United States Shorebird Conservation Plan, by S. Brown, C. Hickey, B. Harrington, and R. Gill (eds.). Second edition. May 2001. Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Manomet, Massachusetts. Available on request from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 634, Arlington, VA 22203, or through the World Wide Web (with accompanying technical documents and regional plans) at http://www.manomet.org/USSCP/files.htm.

Shorebirds may not be as commercially valuable as waterfowl, or as widely appreciated by the general public as songbirds, yet they have long held a special fascination for birders and ornithologists. The spectacular migrations undertaken by some species, and the wild regions they often inhabit, stir both the soul and the mind. Until recently, however, most shorebirds have tended to slip through the cracks in conservation consciousness. Yet their highly migratory habits, their need to concentrate at a few food-rich sites, and their use of habitats prone to human disturbance and development combine to make shorebirds vulnerable at many levels.

The need to conserve these remarkable birds has taken on a new dimension with the publication of the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (hereafter the plan). The plan is a partnership of state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and individuals committed to restoring and maintaining shorebird populations in the U.S. and across the Western Hemisphere. The plan summarizes technical reports and recommendations produced by working groups that developed the plan and offers a wealth of information concerning what is needed for practical shorebird conservation in the United States.

The plan has been designed to complement, and be integrated with, the continent-wide conservation initiatives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners in Flight, and the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan, all of which share much common ground. International coordination is also underway with the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan, which shares responsibility for many of the same species. The need for information to be updated constantly and for goals to be reassessed means that the plan will be revised every five years over the next 15 years, thereafter as necessary.

Seven parts constitute the plan: an introduction to shorebirds' general biology and conservation needs, a vision for shorebird conservation, population sizes and conservation status, national conservation strategies, regional goals and strategies, how the plan should be implemented, and a listing of associated technical reports (which should be consulted for greater detail and references). Five appendices give population estimates for shorebirds breeding in North America, map the 12 planning regions in the U.S., rank the relative importance of each species in each region, classify the level of risk for each species, and list species recorded rarely in North America and not treated by the plan. The five planning regions most relevant to the western U.S. are Alaska, Hawaii/Pacific Islands, Northern Pacific, Southern Pacific, and Intermountain West. Each is based on bird-conservation regions identified by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

The plan has three major goals at different scales: at a regional scale, to identify, protect, and manage important shorebird habitats; at the national level, to stabilize population levels of species suspected to be in decline, while keeping common species common; and at the hemispheric scale, to restore and maintain populations of all shorebird species in the Western Hemisphere through cooperative international efforts.

The plan recognizes that effective shorebird conservation strategies should be based on sound science and that baseline population estimates of all species are a prerequisite to this. Estimates presented in the plan address geographically disjunct

populations (e.g., Pacific coast and interior Snowy Plovers) as well as formally recognized subspecies separately and, while crude in most cases, are a starting point for broad policy goals. The plan also sets population targets and estimates a level of risk (from "highly imperiled" to "not at risk") for each population from variables such as population trend, relative abundance, and specific threats on the breeding and nonbreeding grounds.

How the worthy aims of the plan should be accomplished is discussed in parts 4 through 6. Part 4 advocates that the conservation strategies of greatest priority at the national level should be population and habitat monitoring (at an estimated cost of $1.5 million per year), the establishment of a national shorebird-research program to address shorebird biology (with annual funding of $2 million for national and $1.75 million for regional research priorities), and concerted public education and outreach programs (no cost estimate). Part 5 summarizes regional goals and strategies, e.g., protecting important stopover sites along the Pacific coast. For the southern Pacific region, "regional priorities must include increasing populations of breeding species such as Snowy Plover, Killdeer,...Black-necked Stilt, and American Avocet." Although many birders and field ornithologists may question this statement for three of these species, can we prove otherwise? If nothing else, this should force us to recognize the need for reliable baseline data and make us question how much we take for granted. Part 6 proposes a model for the plan's implementation, to be coordinated by the U.S. Shorebird Plan Council. Membership of the council is open to any organization, and current members include the American Bird Conservancy, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, the Nature Conservancy, and several branches of the U.S. government.

A phenomenal amount of work went into coordinating and publishing this ambitious plan, which appears to have included all interested parties. Two observations might be addressed in future editions. I appreciate that agendas as broad as nationwide shorebird conservation are difficult to communicate succinctly. With judicial editing and reorganization, however, the plan's length could be cut significantly—with no loss of content. In this edition, anyone wishing to identify a focused strategy of action is likely to be lost in a maze of circumlocution. Second, I found no mention of the plan's intended audience, although I assume there is one. Identifying an audience could help focus the plan's content. The general public, unless fluent in jargon (e.g., "to enhance funding capabilities and delivery of habitat protection and restoration activities governed by provisions of...") will likely "tune out" quickly. Those with a more scientific background also may be troubled by the nebulous content and lack of direct citations—but note that these are included in the technical documents accompanying the electronic version. Even if jargon-literate land managers and politicians are the intended audience, frequent repetition in the plan is inefficient of the reader's time.

The plan represents an overview of shorebird conservation issues, which now need to be addressed. The technical committees and regional working groups formed during the plan's conception are working actively toward its fulfillment, and the best way for interested parties to become involved is to consult their regional plan and make contacts from there. Shorebirds need all the help they can get, and I am very glad that a growing constituency is dedicated to conserving what have long been among my favorite birds.

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