NEW - Comprehensive 1966 - 2012 Results!

North American Breeding Bird Survey

The Challenge: Like the canary in the coal mine, wild birds have long been recognized as bellwethers for environmental health. By monitoring populations of wild birds we gain an understanding of the state of the natural world and this, in turn, allows us to identify pressing environmental challenges, to set conservation priorities, and to measure the success of conservation action. But the task of trying to count wild birds in a way that will lead to reliable population estimates is no easy task -- especially when hundreds of species are involved and when the area of concern is at the scale of an entire continent. The need for such credible information is a vital one for government agencies and other decision-makers because conservation actions informed by sound scientific evidence are the ones that are most likely to succeed.

Loggerhead Shrike 1966-2012 Trend Map

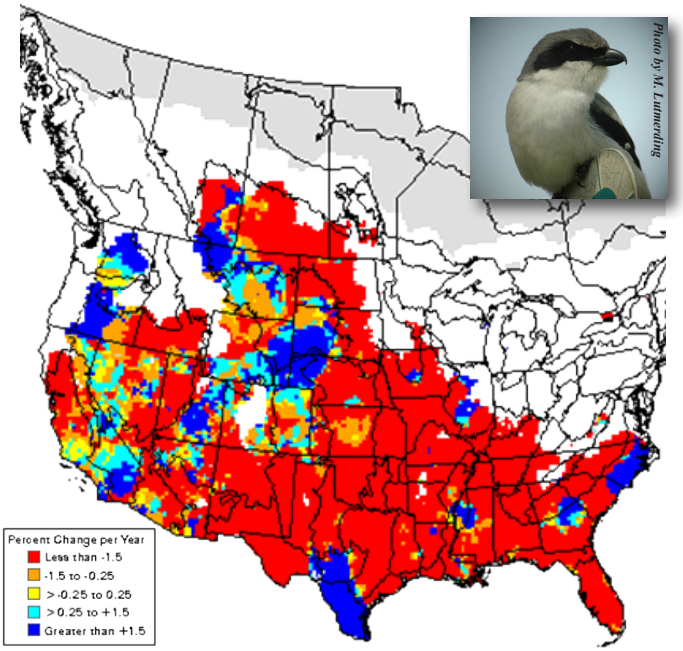


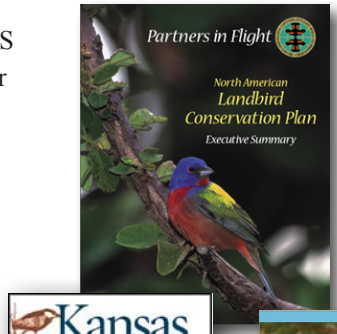
Photo by M. Lumsden

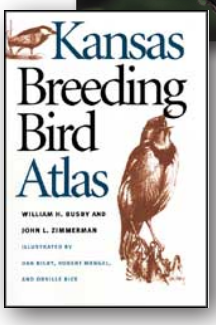
The Science: Our work in addressing this challenge began in 1966 with the creation of an innovative bird monitoring program called the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). The Survey is a multinational partnership jointly coordinated by the US Geological Survey, Canadian Wildlife Service and Mexican National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity. For nearly five decades now the BBS has been the primary source of long-term, large-scale population information for more than 400 species of North American birds. Several US federal agencies, the Canadian Wildlife Service, state wildlife agencies, and non-governmental organizations depend on the survey's annual results for tackling some of the biggest problems facing birds and the environment. But that's not the only intended audience -- arguably one of the best aspects of the BBS is that its data and results are freely available to all for viewing and use, and they're easily accessed via our website <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>.

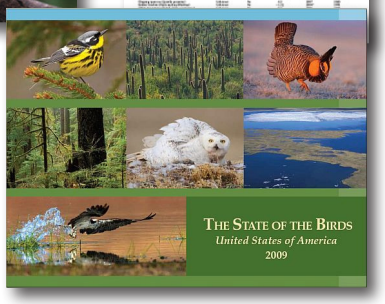
It gives us great pleasure to announce here the latest installment to the Survey's rich legacy of results, the release of the cumulative 1966 - 2012 population trend estimates. We cordially invite you to visit our site and to explore the ample array of graphs and maps that document the recent history of bird life changes across our vast continent.

The Future. A simple visual summary on the reverse of this page illustrates how some bird species have fared better than others since the BBS began. Overall though, it's a sobering reminder of the challenges facing our modern environment to learn that twice as many species have experienced significant drops in numbers relative to those with increases. Scientists don't yet fully understand all the reasons for the changes that the BBS results bare out, and this just underscores the critical role that the survey plays in stimulating both scientific discovery and our understanding of the natural world. The BBS program continues to grow, building capacity in conservation science as it does so.

More than 550 peer-reviewed publications have utilized BBS data to focus on myriad topics -- many of these in line with what the Survey was created for, and many others making use of BBS information in novel ways that would have been unimaginable to the Survey's progenitors. We look forward to learning how you will use this invaluable set of information to expand our collective understanding of North American bird populations!







North American Breeding Bird Survey
Bird Population Changes, 1966 - 2012

Bird Numbers

- Way up!
- Up
- Down
- Way down!