

WATERBIRD CONSERVATION

for the
AMERICAS

North American Waterbird Conservation Plan

Version 1

Waterbirds have been cherished by human societies for centuries. They have inspired poetry, music, and fables and are often touted as symbols of freedom, strength, and agility. This Plan provides an overarching framework and guide for conserving waterbirds. It sets forth goals and priorities for waterbirds in all habitats from the Canadian Arctic to the offshore islands of Venezuela, from Bermuda to the U.S. Pacific Islands, at nesting sites, during annual migrations and during nonbreeding periods. It advocates continent-wide monitoring; provides an impetus for regional conservation planning; proposes national, provincial, state, and other local conservation planning and action; and creates a larger context within which local habitat conservation can nest. Taken together, we hope that these activities will assure healthy populations and habitats for the waterbirds of the Americas.



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Clapper Rail

This Plan is about weaving together cultures, opinions, resources, and science to achieve sustainable waterbird populations and appropriately manage waterbird habitats throughout the entirety of their ranges. The most encouraging revelation that occurred to us during the years it took to develop this Plan was the great number of individuals, representing all factions of society, that were willing and eager to unite to accomplish waterbird conservation. This shared passion for waterbirds will continue to be the force that moves waterbird conservation ahead in the Americas.



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Brown Boobies

This Plan is in its first version, emphasizing seabirds and other colonial-nesting waterbirds. It also concentrates on the northern portions of its geographic scope. Future versions will include more guidance on conservation of solitary-nesting waterbirds, such as the grebes and rails, and more details on the needs and priorities of various regions within the overall Plan area, especially the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico. Moreover, publication of the Plan is just one step in an initiative to further waterbird conservation. Other anticipated products include national waterbird plans, regional waterbird plans, a continental conservation status assessment document, training workshops, educational materials, symposia, and a continent-wide monitoring partnership.

This Plan was developed by an independent partnership of individuals and organizations with interest and responsibility for conserving waterbirds and their habitats. Waterbird conservation in the Americas is facilitated, although not directed, by this partnership. The partnership is a means of formalizing alliances to plan and implement waterbird conservation cooperatively with other bird initiatives and other national and regional strategies for species and habitat conservation.

The planning process was possible because of the voluntary engagement of hundreds of experts on biology, conservation, and management of waterbirds (please see the Acknowledgments). It also was made possible by the firm backing of government agencies and private organizations, which provided both moral and financial support. We thank all for their dedication to waterbirds and for their good work.

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Version 1



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Top to bottom: Herring Gull, skimmers and gulls, Tricolored Heron

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*To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal
is our only legitimate hope of survival.*

Wendell Berry

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Vision and Framework

The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (the Plan) is the product of an independent partnership of individuals and institutions having interest and responsibility for conservation of waterbirds and their habitats in the Americas. This partnership—Waterbird Conservation for the Americas—was created to support a vision in which the distribution, diversity, and abundance of populations and habitats of breeding, migratory, and nonbreeding waterbirds are sustained or restored throughout the lands and waters of North America, Central America, and the Caribbean.

The Plan provides a continental-scale framework for the conservation and management of 210 species of waterbirds, including seabirds, coastal waterbirds, wading birds, and marshbirds utilizing aquatic habitats in 29 nations throughout North America, Central America, the islands and pelagic waters of the Caribbean Sea and western Atlantic, the U.S.-associated Pacific Islands and pelagic waters of the Pacific. Birds as familiar as herons, loons, pelicans, and gulls, as well as the lesser known albatrosses, petrels, auks, and rails are among the species considered in the Plan. These birds' dependence on aquatic habitats such as wooded swamps, stream corridors, salt marshes, barrier islands, continental shelf waters and open pelagic waters make them especially vulnerable to the myriad threats facing water and wetland resources globally. In addition, the congregatory behavior of

many waterbirds increases population risks by concentrating populations in limited areas.

Conservation Challenges

The conservation of waterbirds faces significant challenges. Eighty percent of the species considered in the Plan are colonial nesters—congregating at breeding sites in numbers ranging from many to hundreds of thousands of birds. Of this group, the Plan finds that one-third are considered to be at risk of serious population loss. Eleven species of pelagic seabirds are highly imperiled, and 36 species of pelagic and coastal seabirds as well as seven species of wading birds are of high conservation concern. Although non-colonial waterbirds remain to be assessed quantitatively, many of these populations are also clearly at risk. Waterbird populations are subject to numerous threats, many of which

are habitat-based and affect all aquatic birds and other aquatic resources. The threats that the Plan identifies as requiring remedial action include destruction of inland and coastal wetlands, introduced predators and invasive species, pollutants, mortality from fisheries and other human industries, disturbance, and conflicts arising from abundant species.

Additional information on population sizes and trends is needed to improve the assessment of conservation risk, as well as allow a detailed assessment of the relative importance of specific areas to the various species and the effectiveness of waterbird management prescriptions. More precise



Black-footed Albatross

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Common Moorhen

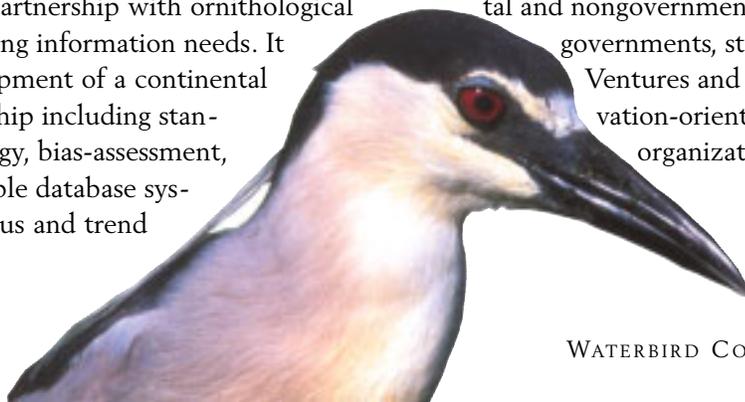
information on spatial habitat needs is also needed; presently, there is little information on habitat use outside of the breeding season for many species, particularly during migration. Critical to the effective management of waterbird populations and habitats will be increasing knowledge, through monitoring and research, broadly disseminating this information, and encouraging conservation action by policy makers, wildlife managers, and the public.

Conservation Solutions

The Plan identifies strategies and opportunities for achieving its vision. It documents a dynamic process for species status assessment to inform setting of conservation priorities at a regional scale, and has identified many of the key issues requiring conservation action. The Plan has involved the scientific community, especially through partnership with ornithological societies, in identifying information needs. It proposes the development of a continental monitoring partnership including standardized methodology, bias-assessment, and internet-accessible database systems to support status and trend evaluation.

The Plan promotes habitat and site-based conservation actions throughout the Americas, especially via the Important Bird Areas programs and similar efforts. Regional waterbird conservation working groups will step down the continental-level aspects of the Plan to the regional and local levels. At all scales, the Plan advocates integration of waterbird conservation with other bird conservation initiatives when appropriate, in order to efficiently provide the best management options for local wildlife and habitat managers.

An evolving Waterbird Conservation Council will facilitate implementation of the Plan, assess its effectiveness, and plan the future course of waterbird conservation. Finally, the Plan details resources and infrastructure needed to more fully accomplish waterbird conservation. Rather than establishing new structures, implementation of the Plan will be entrusted to governmental and nongovernmental entities, especially national governments, state governments, habitat Joint Ventures and other partnerships, and conservation-oriented nongovernmental organizations.



Black-crowned Night-Heron

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