

Continentially Important Proposals An Introduction



*Advancing
Integrated Bird Conservation
in North America*

THE NORTH AMERICAN BIRD
CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

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Cerulean Warbler/ Robert Royse



BIRD POPULATIONS ARE IN JEOPARDY

Birds are invaluable to our society. They are essential economic and ecological components of biodiversity and are of cultural significance in many countries. With their relative freedom to move among suitable habitats, the relative ease of monitoring them, and their important ecosystem roles, birds are also extraordinarily useful for evaluating the effects of human and environmental impacts on ecosystems and actions taken to protect or recover them.

However, the future of many of the continent's more than 1,100 bird species is in jeopardy. Many populations are in decline, some moderately, some precipitously, as habitats continue to be degraded or lost throughout their ranges which can span countries, continents — even hemispheres.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINENTAL COOPERATION

To ensure their survival, conservationists must address the threats to bird populations throughout their lifecycles. As early as 1916, the United States and Canada recognized the need to collaborate to conserve shared bird spe-

cies and established the Migratory Birds Convention. Two years later, the U.S. Congress enacted the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) to give effect to this convention. In 1936, the United States entered into similar a agreement with Mexico. By then, wildlife management agencies and conservation groups were actively cooperating to monitor migratory waterfowl on a continental basis. The creation of the Flyway Councils formalized the consultation processes for the major flyways.

In 1986, the governments of Canada and the United States initiated the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), a tri-national collaboration to conserve dwindling wetland habitat and restore diminishing populations of ducks and geese. Mexico joined the partnership in 1994 to make it a truly continental effort.



Western Sandpiper/ Karen Hollingsworth

In the 1990's, increasing concern for biodiversity conservation led to the development of international conservation initiatives for other bird species. The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, for example, established criteria for identifying critical shorebird habitat throughout the Americas. Partners in Flight developed science-based conservation plans for landbird populations, while representatives of the U.S. and Canadian Shorebird Plans and Waterbird Conservation for the Americas undertook similar tasks for shorebirds, seabirds, waders, and other waterbirds. Regional partnerships for resident bird species in the United States also evolved.

THE NORTH AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Public and private organizations alike recognized the advantages of working together at the national and international levels to coordinate and strengthen the growing number of partnerships on the continent for birds. So, in 1999, with assistance from the Commission on Environmental Cooperation, representatives from government and non-government organizations in Canada, the United States, and Mexico created the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). Its infrastructure includes a tri-national committee and three national committees and subcommittees that work to advance conservation for the long-term health of the continent's native bird species and the habitats on which they depend.

NABCI partners have made important progress in building a science foundation for integrated bird conservation, including establishing North American Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) for planning and evaluation, advancing coordinated bird monitoring and conservation design, and identifying priority birds and habitats. NABCI partners are also focused on improving bird conservation on private lands and developing continental partnerships for all birds in all habitats.

In 2005, the Minister and Secretaries of the Environment in the three countries formally recognized the ambitious vision and goals of NABCI by signing the *Declaration of Intent for the Conservation of North American Birds and their Habitat*. The Declaration is a formal, non-binding international memorandum of understanding among the three countries to cooperate in conserving the continent's birds and the landscapes they need to survive. It was one of the early deliverables under the Security, Prosperity and Partnership agreement signed by the Presidents of the United States and Mexico and the Prime Minister of Canada in 2005.

The NABCI Tri-national Committee developed an action plan to carry out the Declaration with specific outcome-based goals for conserving shared species across their ranges. The action plan focuses on strengthening and expanding existing regional partnerships for birds by garnering significant and secure funding sources. To meet this need, NABCI partners in the three countries worked together to develop Continentally Important Proposals for shared priority species on the continent. **The proposals aim to conserve over one million acres of key habitats -- habitats that span the range of priority species and are critical to mitigate the impacts of threats such as illegal harvesting, pollution, and climate change on birds and other migratory wildlife.**



King Rail/ Jim Rathert

CONTINENTALLY IMPORTANT PROPOSALS

The NABCI Declaration acknowledges that to safeguard migratory birds and their habitats for future generations, conservation must take place in every stage of a species' lifecycle — throughout the geographic range of nesting, migration, and wintering habitats — the full spectrum of bird conservation.

To this end, NABCI partners developed ambitious proposals to conserve habitat for some of the most vulnerable species on the continent. The Continentally Important Proposals cover a wide range of activities to address the conservation needs of these species. The proposals demonstrate the dire need to increase regional conservation capacity and the vital importance of tri-national collaboration to achieve successes that will strengthen integrated bird conservation across North America and attract more funding.

The proposals originate from continentally important areas in Mexico (see Figure 1). A diverse group of Mexican experts selected these regions with the input of partners from Canada and the United States. Their selection process was based on a thorough analysis of the highest priority Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and specific criteria developed by all three countries. The five sites include: Laguna Madre, Marismas Nacionales, Chiapas (El Triunfo), Yucatan, and Chihuahuan Desert grasslands (Janos and Saltillo). Partners used information from long-term migration monitoring studies to identify and map key linkages

between sites in Mexico, the United States, and Canada (see Figure 2 – Figure 6). Developed by Environment Canada, the maps show breeding areas for birds wintering or passing through the continentally important NABCI sites in Mexico and are based on the priority species lists from each site, including species of continental priority that migrate from Canada and/or the United States.

Using the maps, NABCI partners then connected regional partnerships in the United States and Canada, called Bird Habitat Joint Ventures, with Regional Alliances or other partnerships in Mexico with the goal of developing regionally based proposals that span the three countries. In April 2006, partners from the three countries participated in a workshop where they developed the Mexican portions of the Continentially Important Proposals and identified additional site linkages and shared species and habitat priorities.

The proposals outline actions that will benefit shared migratory species and their habitats, as well as many other species in need of conservation. Every effort will be made to link conservation actions to existing efforts, including the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative, the Security Prosperity and Partnership agreement, the Mexico Meso-American Biological Corridor initiative, and other relevant programs and projects.

Some of the Mexican sites have formal working partnerships in place (e.g., Regional Alliance in Marismas Nacionales) or are places where partners have established protected areas or undertaken some other form of conservation action. Whatever the status, all of the partnerships in these priority areas require the additional resources outlined in the proposals to be successful on-the-ground (see Table 1).

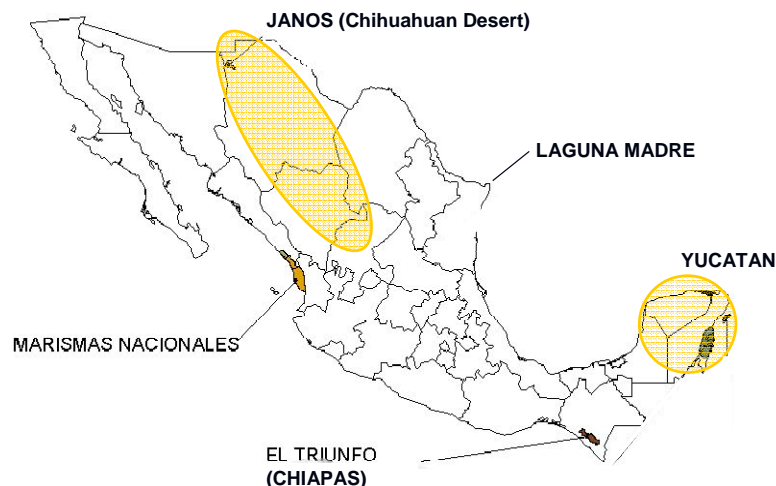


Figure 1: Priority Sites for Birds in Mexico

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSALS

The proposals seek to create a long-term program to conserve migratory birds and their habitats through existing organizations and tri-national linkages. In this way, the proposals maximize collaboration among partners and help address tri-national concerns and priorities. They also address biodiversity conservation needs in the three countries by focusing on critical habitats of importance to birds and other wildlife.

The proposals aim to conserve and restore over one million acres of key habitat, including:

- The hypersaline ecosystems of Laguna Madre, one of only five such ecosystems in the world;
- North American grasslands, one of continent’s most threatened habitats; and
- Wetlands that provide critical habitat for many species and vital ecosystem services.
- The cloud forests of Chiapas that provide critical migratory and wintering bird habitat.



Common Eider/ Glen Smart

The proposals will benefit more than 300 species, including priority species such as the Mountain Plover, Whooping Crane, Burrowing Owl, Painted Bunting, and the Golden-cheeked Warbler. Actions will not only benefit birds, but other species of concern such as the American Crocodile and the Jaguar. The proposals represent over \$150 million worth of conservation actions and at least \$50 million in matching funds from more than 70 key partners, thus fostering continental cooperation among diverse public and private groups.

Table 1: Summary of the Status of Partnership Efforts in Mexico

Alliance	Coordinator	Management Board	Ecoregional Plan	Priority Birds Identified
Marismas Nacionales	Yes	Yes	In progress	Yes
Laguna Madre	In progress	In progress	In progress	Yes
Chiapas	Yes	Yes	In progress	Yes
Yucatan	In progress	In progress	In progress	Yes
Chihuahuan Desert	In progress	In progress	In progress	Yes

PROPOSAL SITES

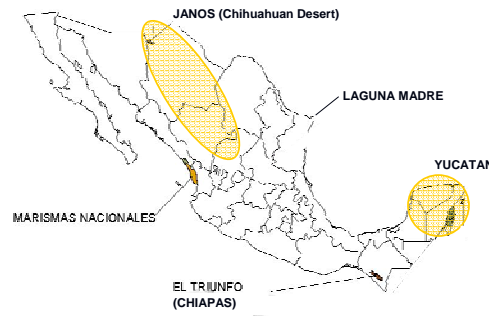


Figure 1. Continentally important areas in Mexico.

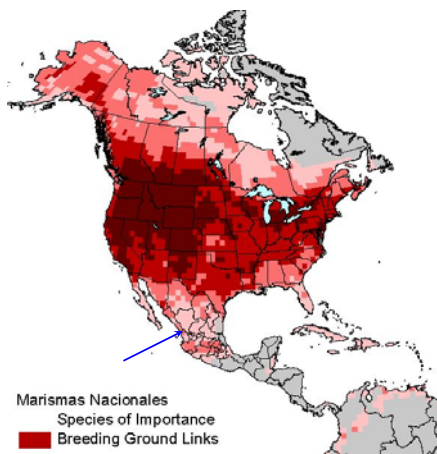


Figure 2. Breeding ground links for priority birds of the Marismas Nacionales

MARISMAS NACIONALES, MEXICO - UTAH, UNITED STATES - SASKATCHEWAN, CANADA

This proposal presents projects that will strengthen range-wide conservation of birds along a migratory path that extends from the Chaplin and Quill Lakes of Saskatchewan, through the Great Salt Lake in Utah, and ends in the Marismas Nacionales of Sinaloa and Nayarit, Mexico. The coastal wetlands of Marismas Nacionales support one of the largest wintering concentrations of U.S. breeding wetland birds on earth. Objectives include development of population and habitat objectives, technical assistance with surveys and adaptive monitoring, environmental education, and ecotourism.

Proposal Budget - \$22,400,000

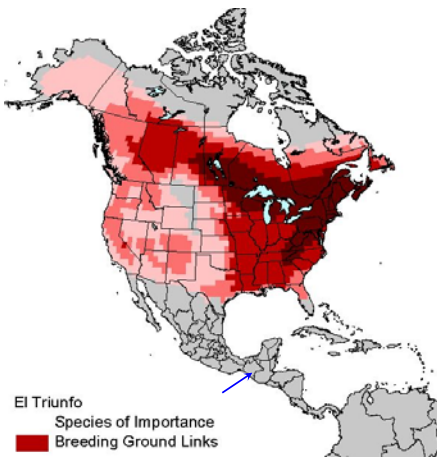


Figure 3. Breeding ground links for priority birds of Chiapas

CHIAPAS, MEXICO - PACIFIC COAST JOINT VENTURE, UNITED STATES AND CANADA

This proposal will ensure the health of the 390 bird species of Chiapas, where a diversity of habitats supports high concentrations of many of these migratory and endemic birds. Although the species abundance for breeding birds that winter in Chiapas is concentrated in the east, the proposal supports an international collaboration for the conservation of high concern Gary Oak habitats and associated bird species in the U.S. and Canadian Pacific Northwest. Objectives include habitat management and acquisition, monitoring and GIS capacity building, and consolidation of a critical regional alliance in Chiapas.

Proposal Budget - \$25,000,000

**YUCATÁN PENINSULA, MEXICO –
CENTRAL HARDWOODS JOINT VENTURE, UNITED STATES**

The Yucatan provides critical stop-over and wintering habitat for high concentrations of more than 200 Neotropical migrants as well as year-round habitat for 340 resident bird species. This proposal includes targeted land acquisition and restoration on the Yucatán Peninsula and Central Hardwoods BCR, support for the Yucatán regional alliance, bird conservation planning, and building partnerships among organizations in the Yucatán and the Central Hardwoods. Other objectives include monitoring network and database development and environmental education.

Proposal Budget - \$52,900,000

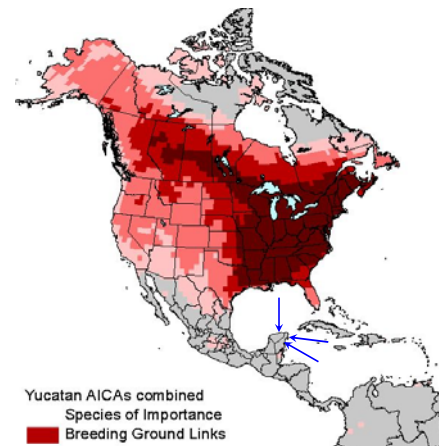


Figure 4. Breeding ground links for priority birds of the Yucatan

**CHIHUAHUAN DESERT GRASSLANDS, MEXICO –
PRAIRIE POTHOLE JOINT VENTURE, UNITED STATES –
PRAIRIE HABITAT JOINT VENTURE, CANADA**

The Chihuahuan Desert grasslands are the most important wintering area in the U.S. for grassland species, the fastest declining group of birds in the country. Conservation activities include protection of the last remaining tracts of intact grassland on the continent’s Great Plains; habitat management on privately, publicly, and communally owned areas; and increasing local interest and respect for this important ecosystem. Other objectives include regional alliance coordination and monitoring and inventory.

Proposal Budget - \$17,381,000

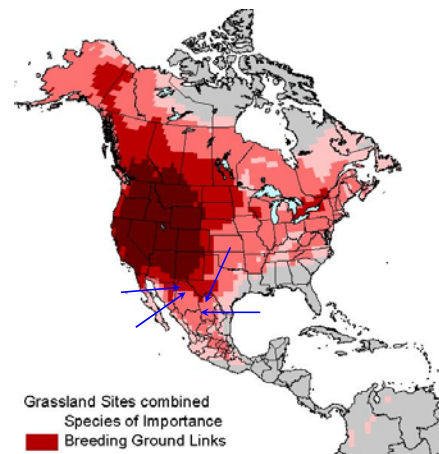


Figure 5. Breeding ground links for priority birds of the Chihuahuan Desert Grasslands

**LAGUNA MADRE, MEXICO –
RIO GRANDE JOINT VENTURE, UNITED STATES**

Laguna Madre’s diverse wetland and upland habitats support 306 species of migratory and 144 resident birds. Key components of this proposal include barrier island habitat protection for wintering Piping Plovers and other shorebirds; protection of seagrass beds and adjacent freshwater ponds for Redheads and other waterfowl; and acquisition and management of the most pristine remnant of Tamaulipan thorn-scrub habitat in existence. Other objectives include long-term monitoring, regional alliance support, and capacity building for GIS and other technical tools.

Proposal Budget - \$37,500,000

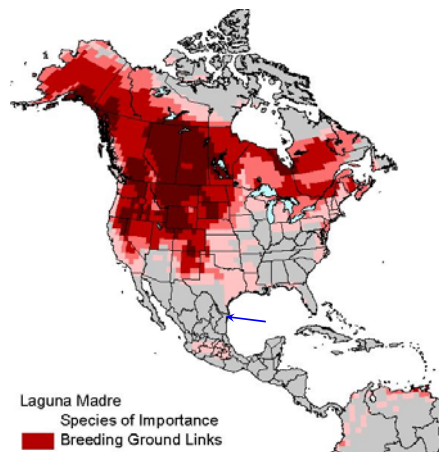


Figure 6. Breeding ground links for priority birds of the Laguna Madre