

**Third International Partners in Flight Conference:  
A Workshop on Bird Conservation Implementation and Integration  
March 2002**

**The State of the Art and the State of the Science:  
Partners in Flight in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**C. John Ralph<sup>1</sup> and Terrell D. Rich<sup>2</sup>**

In March 2002 some 700 people gathered at the Asilomar Conference Grounds near Monterey, a site long-renowned for innovative conferences, to celebrate, calibrate, and confabulate on the bird initiative called Partners in Flight (PIF). This conference had some background, an understanding of which may help readers put this volume into perspective.

### **Brief Historical Perspective of PIF**

The first bird ‘Initiative’ was for waterfowl - the North American Waterfowl Plan (1986). It was well-structured through its implementation arms, called “Joint Ventures,” and it was relatively well-funded through legislative earmarks to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian Wildlife Service, and state programs. Its success encouraged several far-seeing entities and individuals, most notably the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, to start a landbird initiative in 1990—four short years later—changing the landscape of landbird conservation.

From almost the start, Partners in Flight (Compañeros en Vuelo and Partenaires d’Envol) was a different ‘organization’ than any before it. It was, first of all, a support group for landbirds, and it concentrated on a broad spectrum of birds. “Landbirds” were defined as all those species of birds other than waterfowl, shorebirds, waterbirds, and seabirds. “Landbirds” is not an exclusive designation, however, and many of these other taxa found a home in PIF’s deliberations and products. They also found a home in many of the papers of this volume, at the least to provide exemplary or cautionary tales.

PIF is also a highly-interactive and non-hierarchical group of people and organizations. One point as a field

guide to people unaccustomed to PIF is that it has a unique organizational hierarchy – that is, a relative lack thereof. It is multifaceted and interacting, with country groups, state groups, regional groups, specialist and technical groups, habitat groups, and Bird Conservation Regions. Anyone can have a seat at any of the multitude of tables and can, if he or she is able, contribute markedly to bird conservation. It is also a visionary and flexible coalition, with various organizational units adapting as necessary to meet new needs and opportunities. And finally, it is an international group, with parallel, joint, and overlapping groups, as appropriate, in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. This coalescence of diversity is represented in this volume.

To paraphrase from our web site (<http://www.partnersinflight.org>), Partners in Flight is a cooperative partnership among federal, state and local government agencies, philanthropic foundations, professional organizations, conservation groups, industry, the academic community, and private individuals. PIF focuses resources on the improvement of monitoring and inventory, research, management, and education programs involving birds and their habitats. Its central premise is that the resources of public and private organizations in the Western Hemisphere must be combined, coordinated, and increased in order to achieve the greatest success in conserving bird populations in this hemisphere. The power of PIF lies in the synergy that builds when diverse, committed groups who care about birds work together for a common goal. Indeed, this conference aimed to foster progress toward this lofty goal.

### **History of the Conference**

By the late 1990s, the landscapes of bird conservation had irreversibly changed, we think for the better: (1) following on the success of PIF, other bird initiatives had come into being; (2) PIF had regional coordinators who encouraged and oversaw the concept of Bird Conservation Plans, more than 70 documents in all tied into major biomes, regions, and states; (3) the North American Bird Conservation Initiative had been cre-

---

<sup>1</sup>USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station, Redwood Sciences Laboratory, 1700 Bayview Drive, Arcata, CA 95521 USA

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Boise, ID 83709. E-mail: [terry\\_rich@fws.gov](mailto:terry_rich@fws.gov).

ated (an umbrella organization to help garner support for the various bird initiatives); and (4) various regional and national monitoring programs had been rapidly implemented. Now, it seemed time to move ahead.

Thus, early in 2000, several of us found ourselves at a clear juncture in the history of PIF. Implementation of objectives laid out in Bird Conservation Plans seemed to be developing into more of a North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) activity tied to Bird Conservation Regions. There were questions as to the appropriate role of PIF into the future. We thought that this evolving role could center on continuing to expand the conceptual boundaries of bird conservation.

We had learned an extraordinary amount since PIF began in 1990 covering: (1) advances in monitoring; (2) our understanding of what limits bird populations; (3) the relationships between population phenomena, landscapes, and management practices; and (4) the nature of bird conservation planning. Additionally, it was abundantly clear that there was a great deal that we either didn't understand or had yet to reach consensus on. We felt that the future of bird populations on this continent and elsewhere depended to a large extent on efforts to dramatically improve our knowledge base.

At such junctions in the past, PIF held a national meeting to conduct a status assessment and set objectives for the future. Conferences were held at Estes Park, Colorado in 1992 (Finch and Stangel 1993, Martin and Finch 1995), and at Cape May, New Jersey in 1995 (Bonney et al. 2000). These gatherings greatly increased the level of enthusiasm and provided opportunities to exchange new information regarding many aspects of bird science and conservation. Monterey was a forum for presentation of all that we have learned since Cape May, and like Cape May and Estes Park, we felt it would provide fertile ground from which our direction for the next several years could spring.

PIF has always been poised between science and management. As both the conservation community and management agencies were really taking PIF products seriously, the urgency of strengthening the conceptual ground on which we stand had greatly increased. The Monterey Workshop was a celebration of this realization, a reaffirmation of the linkage between science and management, and a statement of the relevance of PIF for the future.

## Venue and Organization of the Meeting

We held the meeting at the Asilomar Conference Center, just south of historic and beautiful Monterey.

This was a great venue with abundant landbirds, and for an ecumenical touch, sea otters, shorebirds, sea ducks, and rocky shorebirds a very short walk from the center.

Monterey was a PIF workshop, focused primarily on landbirds. Relevant perspectives regarding other groups of birds were welcomed and necessary.

## Program

We faced the problem of integrating a multidimensional hyperspace of programs, species, and objectives into seven parallel, concurrent sessions that were linear in time and content. The resulting program attracted some 350 oral papers and 75 poster presentations.

Our general guidelines were:

- (1) As a Partners in Flight conference we wanted to feature the significance of upland habitat projects that primarily benefit landbirds. We also desired some content that was decidedly “all-bird” in scope. While many examples of projects, education, outreach and research presented in sessions inevitably concerned only a subset of species, we tried to balance sessions to provide examples from a broad array of taxa.
- (2) We wanted to focus all sessions on putting conservation action on the ground. What has worked? What has not worked? How did you do it? Who helped? What did you learn? Although we obviously also were interested in what is possible or what might be done, we wanted speakers to focus on what has worked and the experience of our partners.
- (3) We designed the sessions to be as interdisciplinary and international as possible. We wanted researchers, educators, tree planters, monitoring specialists, planners, and land managers to participate together. We made ample opportunities, especially in the evenings, for groups to meet with colleagues within their own disciplines.
- (4) Although papers were largely invited by the organizing committee, acknowledged below, we also put out a call for papers and posters. Many came forward to reveal partners and project examples that we were not aware of. All presenters of papers or posters were given an opportunity to submit papers to these proceedings. That so many accepted was a bit of a challenge in processing them. All papers

were put through peer review and then reviewed by the chairs of various sessions, as well as by us. A few papers were contributed after the conference as authors, chairs, and we found relevant work that had not been part of the program. This has helped to round out the proceedings.

### The People

From the inception, David Pashley of the American Bird Conservancy, Geoff Geupel of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, and Art Martell of Ducks Unlimited, Canada provided us with inspiration and a plethora of great ideas. All three, in many and sundry ways, provided inspiration and energy for the conference and for PIF from their own unique perspectives. The entire bird conservation community owes them deeply. Our Steering Committee was quickly formed with folks from across North America, and with frequent conference calls and occasional meetings, this committee made the conference, and subsequently this volume, a reality. Committee members included the three above, along with Carol Beardmore, Humberto Berlanga, Greg Butcher, Dean Demarest, Naomi Edelson, Judith Kennedy, Mila Plavsic, Ken Rosenberg, Sandy Scoggin, and Steve Wendt. We are all in their debt.

We thank Martha Shibata and Joan Cravens for the great job from the Research Information Services of the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Research Station in Albany, California in finalizing this volume.

Finally, Linda L. Long spent much of the past four years helping us put together the conference, working with Point Reyes Bird Observatory, planning and

compiling the program, contacting and cajoling the authors, helping coordinate logistics, and most of all, tracking, editing, and formatting these papers. We would be nowhere without Linda.

### Outlook

We trust you will find much in the volumes to interest you and to move Partners in Flight onto greater efforts and bird conservation onto greater successes in the coming years. There are many unique opportunities for personal and institutional involvement in our joint efforts.

### Literature Cited

- Bonney, R., D. N. Pashley, R. J. Cooper, and L. Niles, eds. 2000. **Strategies for bird conservation: The Partners in Flight planning process.** Proceedings of the 3rd Partners in Flight Workshop; October 1-5, 1995; Cape May, NJ. Proceedings RMRS-P-16. Ogden, UT: Rocky Mountain Research Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. 281 p.
- Finch, D. M., and P. W. Stangel, eds. 1993. **Status and management of Neotropical migratory birds.** 1992 September 21-25; Estes Park, CO. Gen. Tech. Rep. RM-GTR-229. Fort Collins, CO: Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Research Station, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. 422 p.
- Martin, T. E., and D. M. Finch, eds. 1995. **Ecology and management of Neotropical migratory birds: A synthesis and review of critical issues.** New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 512 p.