

# Bird Conservation as a Flagship for Global Diversity Conservation<sup>1</sup>

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It is a pleasure to be here at the Third International meeting of Partners in Flight (PIF) – and the international aspect is important. Bird conservation is a global problem. Building on the work of BirdLife International and other partners, the 2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species listed more than 12 percent of the world's known species as at risk. Bird conservation is also a national accountability. Partners in Flight has been a leader in helping countries acknowledge their share of that accountability, but it is important that the responsibility is shared.

That leads to the need – no, the imperative – for international co-operation if we are to be effective. But the need is not just government-to-government cooperation. We talk about a landscape approach to managing habitat, about considering solutions at an ecosystem level. Well, there are ecosystem-like connections in the organizational world as well. We need to make the connections between regulators and the regulated; between the scientists and the policy makers; between the grantors and the grantees, and between bird conservation projects and initiatives. The best way forward in the near term, in my opinion, is the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). Eventually, we need to see NABCI as only a step towards a true hemispheric effort and as one of a series of such efforts globally. There are organizations working at that level now: BirdLife International, Wetlands International, The Convention on Migratory Species, The European Union's Birds Directive, and so on.

I would like to spend a few minutes talking about activities in Canada. The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) has a 10-year strategic plan to guide its activities. Its mission statement is to: *Conserve wildlife and the ecosystems of which they are a part, with a particular focus on migratory birds and species at risk.* Conservation of birds is an important part of the CWS mandate. In fact, conservation of migratory bird populations is the first of three main CWS roles (the other two being leading the protection of species at risk, and the conservation of habitat for migratory birds and species at risk). These roles are strongly interrelated; we must strengthen the linkages across the conserva-

tion spectrum from maintaining the diversity in common species of birds (across their natural ranges) to recovery of species at risk (often in greatly restricted ranges by the time they are listed). Many of the underlying habitat objectives are shared by abundant and rare species alike. Integrated delivery of habitat objectives, then, is the only option. PIF and NABCI exemplify partnerships working to achieve a common goal of bird conservation, and they share a larger vision of biodiversity conservation.

Another area to which Canadians have devoted a lot of effort in the past couple of years is the development of Species at Risk legislation. Many of you here may have commented throughout this process; some of you might even have understood the issues. The proposed Species at Risk Act (SARA) to protect wildlife at risk from becoming extinct or lost from the wild recognizes shared responsibility among federal, provincial and territorial governments. This leads to mandatory partnerships to develop recovery strategies/action plans for endangered and threatened species, and management plans for species of special concern. The legislation also requires us to identify critical habitat and protect it through conservation agreements, provincial or territorial legislation, or federal prohibitions. As part of SARA, a Habitat Stewardship Program provides funding for voluntary conservation activities by individuals, organizations, communities, businesses or governments that protect species and habitats. Many such activities are already under way in Canada. We need to maximize opportunities to piggyback bird conservation onto these efforts for species at risk and critical habitat, and this will require coordination with Partners in Flight and NABCI programs.

Finally, I'd like to say a few words about an issue that is occupying an increasing amount of my personal time: We need to find better ways of managing the data that are generated from our conservation programs and of turning those data into information, the information into knowledge, and the knowledge into action. While most, if not all, of our programs and projects pay attention to data compilation, management, and retrieval, too often that attention is focused a little too narrowly, a little too locally. There is a growing realization in the biodiversity conservation community that we need to improve the integration of our data and its derivatives. Governments are certainly engaged through initiatives like NBII in the USA, CISE in Canada, leading edge efforts by CONABIO in Mexico, initiatives under the

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Commission on Environmental Cooperation (NABIN), the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, and many, many more.

Many of these initiatives focus on making what is already collected better accessible, leading to a focus on museum collections and taxonomic issues. These are important, but there are also some pressing conservation problems to be dealt with.

On the non-governmental side, the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN – which I chair just at the moment – is developing the Species Information Service. The SIS will be a web-based system that will allow field biologists and researchers around the globe to link their real-time information through a standardized database to allow the better integration of geo-referenced, peer reviewed information – quite a mouthful, but it is hard to capture the complexity of the project in a single sentence. The vision of the project is “A world in which current and universally accessible biodiversity information encourages and promotes the

achievement of effective conservation and sustainable forms of development”. We plan to bring this about through a novel approach to partnerships for conservation, where the IT industry provides the hardware and software resources, foundations and governments provide the financial resources, and the conservation community provides the expert participation and the data (i.e. the content).

We expect this will lead to concrete recommendations for site-specific conservation actions.

I have had a chance to look through the program for this meeting, and I am impressed with the range of topics that will be covered, and with the commitment to effective collaboration and integration that is reflected in so many of the presentations. I know the first two international meetings helped us along the path noted by Humberto Berlanga – taking the idea of integrated bird conservation from the novel to the obvious. I am confident this meeting will do more of the same.