

The State of the Birds United States of America 2009

What is the *State of the Birds United States of America 2009*?

The *State of the Birds United States of America 2009* demonstrates and provides data-driven support in a comprehensive, collaborative effort to assess the health of all birds and their habitats within the United States. This report also provides support for the concept that the health of bird populations is linked to the quality of life for citizens of the United States, and that bird populations are an indication of changes in this nation's valuable natural resources.

The *State of the Birds United States of America 2009* will give us a glimpse of what is happening in the United States through a bird's eye view. In other words, it will show us that birds can be effective indicators of the health of habitats and our environment as a whole. It will point to habitat areas where we have problems as indicated by the state of bird populations there. These are problems not only for birds but also the environment itself and its human inhabitants.

Who created the *State of the Birds United States of America 2009*?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service along with bird conservation partners created the *State of the Birds United States of America 2009*. The *State of the Birds* team is a subcommittee of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). This report reflects the first product of what will become a long-term collaboration among partner organizations to chart the state of United States' birds over time and, thereby, the state of our environment.

What data was used in the *State of the Birds United States of America 2009*?

The report presents a new synthesis of major North American databases, highlighting the contributions of thousands of citizen scientists and professional biologists. Results from the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Christmas Bird Count, and Spring Waterfowl Population Survey, including information from each of the bird conservation initiatives*, state and federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations, and a variety of surveys for shorebirds, seabirds, and other groups of birds, will be integrated to provide for the first-ever comprehensive summary of population status for North American birds found in the United States for some part of their life cycle.

Why is the report based on habitats?

Bird species rely on specific types of habitats to provide the food, shelter, water, and space they need to survive and reproduce young. To understand how bird populations are changing over time, we analyzed trends in bird populations by groups of birds that live in the same habitat, such as wetlands or grasslands. The trends in bird populations in a given habitat can provide important insight into the ever changing quality of these habitats. If the bird populations that depend on a given habitat show an increase, then we might expect that habitat has healthy characteristics. In contrast, if bird populations in a given habitat are declining, it might suggest a habitat in trouble.

Birds as indicators of the health of our environment, what does that mean?

Trends in bird populations can give us the first insights into the health of the environment as well as a serve as a measure of sustainability. Birds respond quickly to changes in their environment and reflect the health of other wildlife populations. Research and monitoring of bird populations is an easy and cost-effective means to track ecosystem health. By focusing

on bird populations in specific habitats, we hope we can use birds as indicators of the health of those habitats and relay that healthy habitats are good for people too.

Why is there a need for such a report? Why now?

Enormous changes are occurring in our environment. Birds reflect these changes occurring and are increasingly being used as an indicator of the health of our environment. This report will provide the findings of the first-ever comprehensive analysis to understand the relationship between changing bird populations and habitat. Datasets and monitoring results are now in place to allow us to conduct this analysis we could not have done previously. Because bird watching is one of the most popular recreational activities, citizen scientists and bird watchers represent great potential for gathering comprehensive and rapid information about birds and their habitats.

Who is the target audience?

The target audience is primarily policy decision makers and bird conservation organizations as well as the general public. The objective is to inform these audiences about the status and trends of bird populations in relation to the health of habitats, ecosystems, and many environmental issues of importance to Americans.

How will this report be used?

This report will present information to policy makers and the American public about birds and the need for action concerning bird conservation. The United Kingdom, Australia, and other countries in Europe have produced their own national “State of the Birds” reports at regular intervals. In 2004 and 2008 Birdlife International published the “State of the World’s Birds.” In 2004 the National Audubon Society published a “State of the Birds” report that addressed the health of all bird populations, and in 2007 reported on the decline in common birds. Connecticut and Washington have published their own state reports.

These reports have been helpful in illustrating the need for conservation action of birds and their habitats. As a result of these reports, the UK government has adopted the “State of the Birds” as one of the quality of life indicators for the country, along with such indicators as gross national product and air pollution. In response to the results, the government has made a commitment to return bird populations to historic levels. For example, in their farm conservation programs they have chosen ten conservation practices that are good for farmland bird species and require farmers interested in receiving subsidies to implement some of these practices.

With the *State of the Birds United States of America 2009*, we will be able to highlight where we have had successes and where energy must be focused to aid bird conservation and overall ecosystem health and the overall well being of the American people.

Many birds travel over international boundaries. How does the *State of the Birds United States of America 2009* relate to other countries?

Birds do not recognize international boundaries. This report will present the population trends of some species of birds that exist both in the United States as well as other countries. Sometimes these birds may only spend a few weeks of every year in the United States, such as some of the seabirds. Further, we will address threats to bird populations experienced in

the United States and in other countries—during breeding and wintering seasons or on the course of migration. The report will be shared with scientists and conservationists in other countries and with organizations that work on bird population status worldwide.

State of the Birds United States of America 2009 follow up.

The report is expected to be updated every three to five years in conjunction with updates of the Service's Birds of Conservation Concern. The continent of North America offers unique challenges and opportunities for bird conservation. Mexico and Canada are interested in developing their own State of the Birds report. There is also interest in the publication of a North American State of the Birds report in cooperation with Canada and Mexico.

* North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Joint Ventures, Partners In Flight Conservation Plans, Shorebird Conservation Plan, North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, North American Bird Conservation Initiative, Resident Game Bird Initiatives, and the Pacific Flyway Council

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