



July 2003 Newsletter

Partners In Flight Ontario



What is Partners In Flight?

Partners In Flight (PIF) is, at its broadest level, a coalition of countries, government agencies, conservation groups, academic institutions, industry and concerned citizens who share a common vision: *to maintain the health of landbird populations and their habitats.*



In Ontario, Partners in Flight is being led by Ontario Region Canadian Wildlife Service and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in partnership with Bird Studies Canada. Although international in its scope, Partners In Flight advocates a grassroots approach where regions develop their own goals and strategies *to keep common birds common.*

North American Bird Conservation Initiative

The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) is a tri-national initiative involving Canada, the United States, and Mexico. It was launched by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation in 1999 to address the need for coordinated bird conservation efforts that benefit "all birds in all habitats."

NABCI's approach to bird conservation is regionally-based, biologically driven, and landscape-oriented. It draws together the major bird conservation plans already in existence for waterbirds, shorebirds, waterfowl, and landbirds, fills in knowledge gaps, and builds a coalition of groups and agencies to execute the plans. For more information visit www.nabci.org.

Over the next three years Biological Plans for the conservation of landbirds in Ontario will be written.

Partners In Flight activities within Ontario fit into broader continental wide initiatives that comprise the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). As part of NABCI, Partners In Flight supports conservation of migratory landbirds throughout their yearly ranges.

PIF Mission

To sustain the distribution, diversity and abundance of landbirds in their natural numbers and natural habitats, throughout their natural geographic ranges.

- 1) **Keeping common birds common.** Native birds, both resident and migratory, must be retained in healthy numbers throughout their natural ranges.
- 2) **Helping species at risk.** Species must be conserved before they become imperiled: allowing species to become threatened or endangered results in long-term and costly recovery efforts whose success is far from guaranteed.
- 3) **Working in partnerships for birds, habitats and people.** Conservation of landbirds and their habitats cannot be undertaken alone.

In 1990, Partners In Flight was launched in the U.S. in response to growing concerns about declines in the populations of neotropical migrants. This led to the completion of PIF Bird Conservation Plans for several areas adjacent to Ontario, including the St. Lawrence Plain, and the Upper Great Lakes Plain. Copies of these plans can be obtained from <http://www.blm.gov/wildlife/pifplans.htm>

In 1995, a partnership of government and non-governmental agencies produced a bird conservation plan for Ontario that was published in 1997 as the Ontario "Flight Plan." Priority species lists were

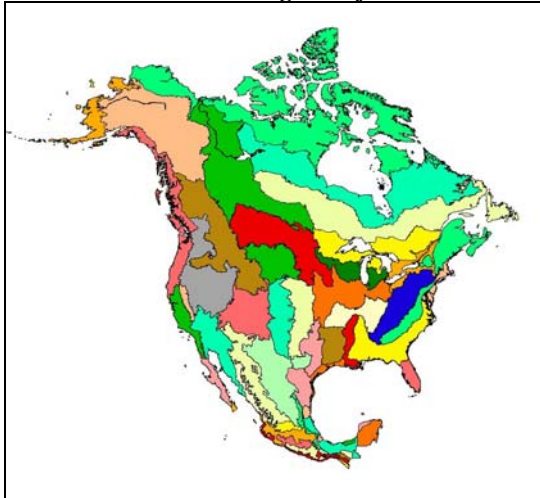
subsequently produced in 1999. Since the late 1990s, numerous other NABCI based activities have been completed that are influencing bird conservation planning in Ontario. These include the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, U.S. and Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plans, the Continental Partners In Flight Plan and the development of Bird Conservation Regions covering all of North America.

North American Bird Conservation Regions

A shared concept of geography and landscapes is critical to effective planning. To that end, participants in NABCI have adopted a map of North America that delineates geographic areas called Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs). A BCR encompasses landscapes having similar bird communities, habitats, and resource issues.

Using the BCR framework, North America has been divided into 66 regions with 12 of these being located in Canada. Most importantly, like the birds, these planning regions cross borders: conservation success will depend on cooperation among jurisdictions.

Bird Conservation Regions of North America



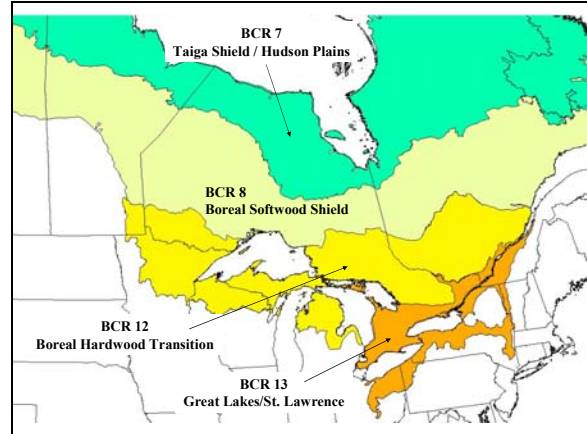
Ontario Planning Regions

There are four Bird Conservation Regions in Ontario:

- Taiga Shield / Hudson Plains
- Boreal Softwood Shield
- Boreal Hardwood Transition
- Great Lakes / St. Lawrence

These four regions are shared by 5 other provinces, 2 territories, and 7 U.S. States.

Bird Conservation Regions of Ontario



Next Step: Ontario Landbird Conservation Plans

Over the next three years, biological plans for the conservation of landbirds in Ontario will be written by Bird Studies Canada under the supervision of the Ontario Region Canadian Wildlife Service and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. These plans will likely be developed as a series of 4 plans staged by Bird Conservation Region, working from south to north.

Each of these Landbird Conservation Plans will contain the following information:

- 1) Descriptions of priority landbird species and habitats within each planning region;
- 2) Priority species accounts, including information specific to Ontario (status, threats, knowledge gaps, etc.);
- 3) Priority habitat accounts that describe how much of the habitat exists, where, of what quality, which priority birds use it, and what threats are imminent;
- 4) Descriptions of population and habitat objectives;
- 5) Recommended actions to achieve objectives;
- 6) Identification of specific parts of Ontario where actions should take place and when actions need to be site specific (as opposed to landscape-wide);
- 7) Descriptions of best management practices for landscape wide actions; and

- 8) Development of research and monitoring needs and recommendations.

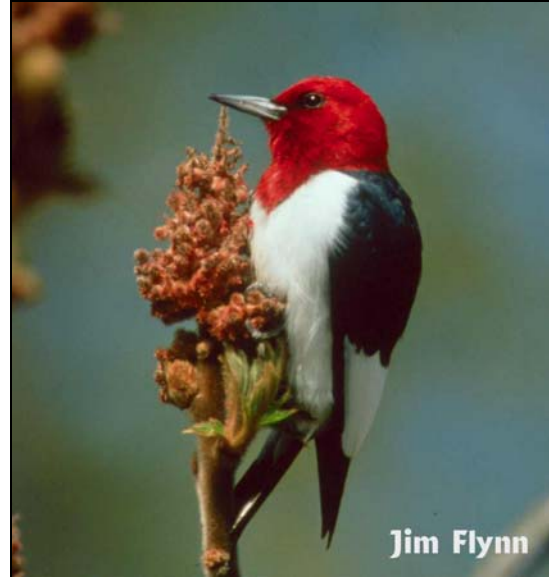
These plans will identify options/strategies for enhancing landbird conservation that will help guide voluntary conservation efforts. As such, landowners need not fear that the plans will place new restrictions on their lands.

PIF Priority Setting Approach

Using the PIF planning approach, the first step is a biological status assessment of each species in each area where it occurs. Species assessment is based on data in the PIF North American Species Assessment Database, which contains standardized status data for North American birds at the continental scale.

Complete descriptions of the status data, justifications, scoring criteria etc. can be found at the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory web site (<http://www.rmbo.org/pif/pifdb.html>).

Data at the continental level are then augmented with region specific information to generate priority species lists that are inline with the regional goals and strategies necessary to keep common birds common. Species of planning interest fall within one of the following two categories:



“Watch List Species”: those with significant population concerns or vulnerability at the continental and/or BCR scale; and

“Stewardship Species”: those that are important by virtue of their concentration in one part of North America; in this case those breeding almost entirely in northern forests

Once priority species for a BCR have been identified, their distribution can be assessed, priority habitats identified and population and habitat objectives set.

Species of Conservation Planning Interest in Ontario (examples)

The following table provides examples of the type of species that are likely to be considered for priority status in Ontario, judging by progress at the Continental scale, and preliminary work in Ontario. They illustrate the need to work in a variety of habitats and landscapes. These species will likely qualify as priorities in Ontario because of population concerns (some combination of declining trends, high threats, small range, or small global population) and/or high Ontario responsibility for the global welfare of these birds.

Eastern Deciduous Forest

- Wood Thrush
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Prothonotary Warbler

Mixed Forest

- Canada Warbler
- Black-throated Green Warbler
- Black-billed Cuckoo

Boreal Coniferous Forest

- Bay-breasted Warbler
- Black-backed Woodpecker
- Purple Finch

Wetlands

- Rusty Blackbird
- Northern Harrier
- Great Gray Owl

Early Successional / Shrub Habitats

- Brown Thrasher
- Golden-winged Warbler
- Willow Flycatcher

Open Grasslands / Agricultural

- Bobolink
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Short-eared Owl

Linkages to Other Conservation Initiatives

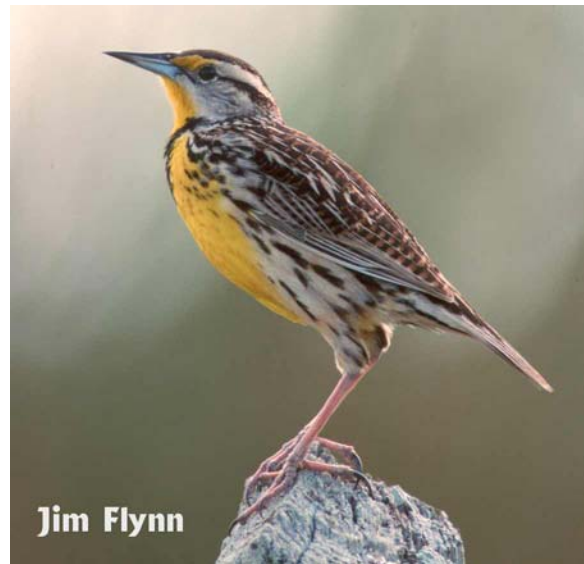
A key component of the PIF Ontario work plan is the development of links to other conservation initiatives within each BCR. Examples of these initiatives include:

- other NABCI-based bird group planning efforts (shorebirds, waterfowl and waterbirds).
- Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC) and the Natural Heritage Information Centre's (NHIC) Big Picture initiatives
- NCC Regional Blueprint projects
- NHIC syntheses
- Endangered Species Programs
- BirdLife's Important Bird Areas Program and in adjacent jurisdictions:
- PIF Canada
- PIF Prairies
- PIF Quebec
- PIF Northeast Working Group
- PIF Midwest Working Group
- Other all-bird planning initiatives

Some landbirds have been officially designated as endangered or otherwise at risk according to federal or provincial endangered species legislation. Efforts are increasingly underway to recover these populations through species at risk programs. PIF Ontario will not duplicate those efforts, instead using a complementary approach to extend conservation measures to other species.

Partners Make it Happen

Achieving the PIF vision for landbird conservation in Ontario will involve activities over large geographical areas, multiple scales of planning and implementation, and involvement of numerous partners from government and nongovernmental organizations, from the scientific community, and from local communities.



The key to the success of this effort will be communications among the various stakeholders in an effort to agree to common definitions, foundations, tenets, priorities, strategies and structures to the extent possible.

To assist with communications, a PIF Ontario Advisory Committee is being established to provide technical advice and guidance on conservation planning for landbirds in Ontario. The Committee will include representatives of the Ontario Region Canadian Wildlife Service, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Bird Studies Canada and other agencies / groups that support the PIF Ontario purpose and wish to be actively involved.

In addition to active participants, PIF Ontario is also working to develop a network of extended partners that may be interested in the PIF Ontario initiative. This extended group will be kept informed of landbird plan objectives and progress, and may be asked for input at various times.

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