



# May 2005 Newsletter

## Partners In Flight Ontario



### Draft BCR 13 Plan Released!

The landbird conservation plan for the Ontario portion of Bird Conservation Region 13 (BCR 13), the Lower Great Lakes/ St. Lawrence Plain, is now out for review! The draft plan can be downloaded from the Ontario Partners in Flight (PIF) website at [www.bsc-eoc.org/pif/PIFOntario.html](http://www.bsc-eoc.org/pif/PIFOntario.html). Highlights of the plan are presented in this newsletter. The Ontario BCR 13 plan is the **first** of four regional plans being developed by Ontario PIF as part of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI).

### The Ontario BCR 13 Planning Area

Ontario BCR 13 encompasses all of Ontario to the south of the Canadian Shield. The landscape of this region is among the most intensively developed areas of Canada. Agriculture is the dominant land use. Deciduous and mixed forests currently cover about 30% of the landscape, up from an all-time low of just 10% forest cover in 1910 but still well below the 90% forest cover that existed just 200 years ago.

Habitat loss and degradation has affected all native habitats in this region including, for example, wetlands (68% loss), and tallgrass prairie and savannah (97% loss). In addition to direct loss due to conversion to agriculture or development, native grasslands and shrubland communities face an additional threat—encroachment by woody vegetation due to suppression of natural disturbance processes such as fire and flooding. As well, all ecosystems have been affected by the insidious spread of exotic species.

Fortunately, most of the avifauna of this region is resilient. However, one formerly abundant landbird (Passenger Pigeon) has become extinct and another (Greater Prairie-Chicken) is extirpated and considered unrecoverable due to habitat loss. The goal of the conservation plan is to sustain the distribution, diversity and abundance of the 180 landbird species that regularly breed or winter in the Ontario portion of BCR 13 by *helping species at risk* and *keeping common birds common*.

### Landbird Conservation Priorities

Forty-two landbird species are identified as conservation priorities in this BCR 13 Plan. Three priority habitats are identified: forest, shrubland/

early successional, and grassland/ agricultural habitats. These three broad categories encompass the breeding habitats of most of the priority species. A few priority landbirds are found predominantly in other habitats, such as riparian areas (e.g. Belted Kingfisher) and urban settings (e.g. Chimney Swift).

Another conservation priority identified in the plan is the aerial-foraging insectivore guild. Three priority species are in this foraging guild: Bank Swallow, Chimney Swift and Whip-poor-will. Moreover, the abundance and distribution of the entire guild has experienced significant declines over the past two decades.

Some facts about priority species in ON BCR 13:

- Most are of high regional concern due to population declines and high threats;
- 11 species are of high continental concern;
- 16 are Species At Risk (SAR), 10 of which have recovery strategies already developed;
- Many are widely distributed continentally but five are of high regional stewardship responsibility, with a significant proportion of their North American population in this BCR (Baltimore Oriole, Bank Swallow, Black-billed Cuckoo, Bobolink and Rose-breasted Grosbeak).



**Table 1: Number of Priority Landbird Species in Ontario BCR 13 by Overall Conservation Objective for each Priority Guild**

Conservation Objective	Forest	Grassland/ Agriculture	Shrub/ Successional	Other Habitats	Total	Aerial Foragers
Recovery	3	4	1	2	10	
Assess Status	3	1	1		5	
Reverse Decline	5		5	4	14	3
Halt Decline		7			7	
Maintain Current	2	1	3		6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>3</b>

### Conservation Objectives

The BCR 13 plan sets specific, measurable conservation objectives for each priority species and priority guild. The overall objective for each species varies depending on whether the species is already the subject of a SAR recovery strategy (**recovery**), is poorly monitored (**assess status**), has declined to a less desirable level (**reverse decline**), had declined but is still at an acceptable level (**halt decline**), or appears to be stable or increasing (**maintain current**). Reverse decline is the objective for all 3 priority aerial insectivores but various objectives are set for priority species in each habitat guild (Table 1).

### Conservation Actions

The plan proposes a wide range of actions for the conservation of landbirds in southern Ontario including actions related to monitoring, research and evaluation, planning and policy, outreach and education and applied conservation.

Among the most immediate needs are actions to achieve the objective of reversing declines in 14 priority species and the aerial insectivore guild. For several species the proposed actions involve conducting demographic research in concert with

applied conservation measures to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions and identify population-limiting factors. Implementation of the proposed actions will be done by a range of conservation partners, in coordination with other bird conservation initiatives under the NABCI umbrella. Conservation actions outside of southern Ontario may also be necessary, as all but one priority species (Northern Bobwhite) is migratory.

### Your Comments are Welcome!

The Ontario BCR 13 draft plan is currently being reviewed by the Technical Advisory Committee, other bird experts and conservation partners. Your comments are also welcome. The full draft plan is available on the PIF Ontario website (see bottom of page). Comments should be directed to Brigitte Collins, by 6 June 2005 (see contact information below).

### Future Plans

Over the next year, similar plans will be prepared for the other three BCRs in Ontario. We'll keep you posted on these through the PIF Ontario website and in future newsletters.

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