



September 2004 Newsletter

Partners In Flight Ontario



Welcome to the third Partners in Flight Ontario newsletter. This newsletter contains an update on progress on the development of landbird conservation plans for Ontario's four Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs). These conservation plans are being developed within the Partners in Flight (PIF) framework as part of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI).



Photo: Ann Cook

Second BCR 13 Workshop

A second workshop for the ON BCR 13 Technical Advisory Committee was held at the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources building in Peterborough on 14-15 April 2004. This workshop, attended by 19 bird experts and conservation partners, focused on setting objectives for the priority species identified at the first workshop held in October 2003. In addition, workshop participants developed a preliminary list of the conservation actions needed to achieve these objectives. They also identified various research and monitoring needs.

The BCR 13 Plan takes Shape

Bird Conservation Region 13, the Lower Great Lakes St. Lawrence Plain, includes all of southern Ontario to the south of the Canadian Shield. This area comprises less than 10% of the province's land area but is home to 92% of its population and 95% of its agricultural land base. The region is also home to almost 200 species of landbirds.

Forty species of landbirds have been identified as conservation priorities in the Ontario portion of BCR 13. Most of these are species that breed in forest, shrubland, grasslands or wetland habitats; few priority landbirds are found in the croplands and urban landscapes that together cover more than 50% of southern Ontario. Habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation are the primary conservation issues in this region. Other priority species, particularly aerial foraging insectivores such as Bank Swallow and Whip-poor-will, have experienced significant declines for as yet unexplained reasons.

Sixteen of the priority species in ON BCR 13 are federal or provincial Species at Risk or Species of Special Concern. The main focus of the landbird conservation plan is to establish conservation objectives for the other priority landbirds, to complement the recovery efforts underway for Species at Risk.

Setting Objectives for the Conservation of Priority Landbirds in BCR 13

The BCR 13 plan establishes the following objectives to achieve the overall conservation goal of sustaining the distribution, diversity, and abundance of native landbird populations and their habitats in Ontario's portion of BCR 13:

- Reverse declines of priority species in forest, shrubland and wetland habitats
- Stop declines of priority species in grassland habitat
- Contribute to the recovery of endangered and threatened species
- Maintain the distribution of priority species across the region

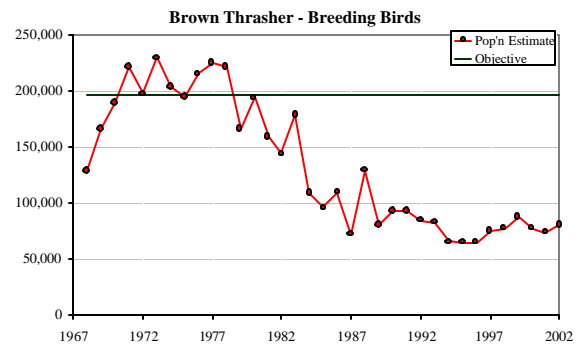
- Ensure sufficient quality habitat for priority species and guilds
- Monitor trends and distribution of all landbird species, and their habitats
- Research reasons for declines and assess success of conservation actions
- Evaluate progress towards objectives

The BCR 13 plan provides measurable objectives for the population and distribution of each priority species, as well as for their habitat needs. For listed species, the plan endorses objectives laid out in the recovery strategy or as set by the recovery team. For most other landbirds, the plan makes use of the abundance and distribution data collected by the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) program and the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (Atlas) projects to set objectives. These same monitoring programs will be used to evaluate short-term and long-term progress towards achieving the objectives.

Brown Thrasher is an example of a priority species that has undergone a severe decline in this region, as illustrated by the population trend graph (based on BBS data) shown to the right. The proposed objectives for Brown Thrasher are provided in the box below.

Preparation of the Draft Plan

A first draft of the Ontario BCR 13 Landbird Conservation Plan is close to completion. The next step will be to circulate the draft to the Technical Advisory Committee and other experts for peer review. The draft plan will also be reviewed by conservation partners and potential users to ensure that suggested actions can be integrated with other conservation initiatives. Anyone wishing to review the draft plan should contact Brigitte Collins (see contact information on page 3).



Population trend for Brown Thrasher in BCR 13

Conservation Objectives for Brown Thrasher in the Ontario portion of BCR 13

Reasons for concern: Continental Stewardship Species for which ON BCR 13 has a moderate conservation responsibility. This species has undergone a range-wide population decline, including a severe decline in BCR 13.

Status in Ontario BCR 13: BBS data indicate that the Brown Thrasher population in ON BCR 13 has declined by -3.7% per year since 1968, a 61% decrease (see graph above). The average population for 1968-77 period was about 200,000; whereas, the 2001-02 population estimate is about 80,000. During the first Atlas, this species was reported in 75% of all squares in this region. Based on the preliminary results of the second Atlas (2001-03 data), this species is now found in 10% fewer squares than in the first Atlas. Distribution losses have occurred across most of region, except the northwest section.

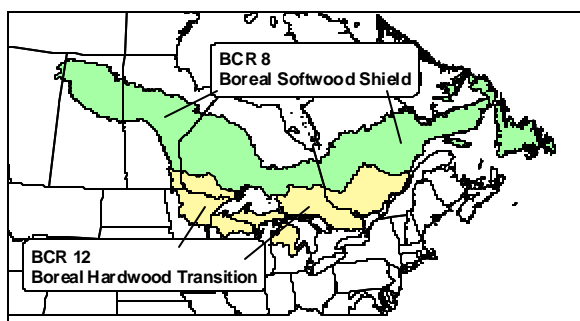
Population objective: Reverse decline and increase population to the average abundance during the 1968-77 period, about 200,000 birds.

Distribution objective: Expand the breeding distribution to a level comparable to the 1981-85 period in all parts of BCR 13, about 75% of all Atlas squares.

Habitat objective: Maintain or restore sufficient quality habitat to support a population of 200,000 birds. This is estimated to require some 1.6 million hectares (19% of ON BCR 13) of suitable upland habitat with shrubland or forest-edge conditions including thickets, hedgerows, forest edges, alvars, shrubby pastures, and shrubby clearings. This habitat could also support other priority shrubland birds including Eastern Towhee and Field Sparrow.

BCRs 8 and 12: The Planning Process Begins

Now that BCR 13 planning is well underway, the PIF Ontario Organizing Committee is turning its sights northwards. The Technical Advisory Committee has been expanded to meet the boreal challenge; its membership now includes representatives from the Canadian Forest Service, Domtar, Tembec, Abitibi-Consolidated, OMNR forest habitat and planning divisions, and other agencies and industries with an expert knowledge of the northern forests. Because of the high degree of overlap in key bird experts and conservation partners in Ontario for BCRs 8 and 12, a joint workshop is being held covering both these regions. Development of the two plans will likely proceed in tandem.



The Planning Regions

Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) form the geographic basis for the NABCI integrated all-birds conservation initiative. The full geographic extent of BCRs 8 and 12 are shown on the map above. BCR 12, the Boreal Hardwood Transition, extends east into Quebec, and west into Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and southeast Manitoba. BCR 8, the

Boreal Softwood Shield, spans six provinces, stretching some 3800 km from northeastern Alberta to Newfoundland.

BCRs 12 and 8 together are equivalent to Environment Canada's Boreal Shield Ecozone. The Ontario portion of BCR 12 encompasses the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' (OMNR) Ecoregions 4 and 5. The Ontario portion of BCR 8 corresponds closely with OMNR's Ecoregions 2 and 3.

Both BCRs are predominantly forested landscapes, but include significant amounts of shrubland, wetland and shoreline habitats. A high proportion of the landscape is Crown forest, subject to forest management plans that ensure these productive forests remain healthy and diverse while yielding both timber and wildlife benefits.

BCRs 8 & 12 Technical Workshop

A three-day technical workshop for BCRs 8 and 12 will be held from October 13th to 15th at the Canadian Ecology Centre, located in Samuel de Champlain Park between North Bay and Mattawa, Ontario.

The objectives of this initial workshop are to:

- 1) Familiarize the Technical Advisory Committee members with PIF goals and the species assessment process;
- 2) Review and revise the preliminary lists of priority species for BCRs 8 and 12 in Ontario;
- 3) Decide on priority habitat types and the level of specificity required for planning in these BCRs; and
- 4) Discuss options for setting population, distribution and habitat objectives.

Partners in Flight Ontario:

<p><i>Overall Contact / General Information</i> Brigitte D. Collins Program Development Biologist Canadian Wildlife Service, Ontario Region 49 Camelot Drive, Ottawa, ON K1A 0H3 Ph: (613) 952-2408; Fax: (613) 952-9027 Email: brigitte.collins@ec.gc.ca</p>	<p><i>Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Contact</i> Julie Simard Habitat Conservation Biologist, Wildlife Section Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources 300 Water St, Box 7000, Peterborough, ON K9J 8M5 Ph: (705)-755-1980; Fax: (705) 755-1900 Email: Julie.simard@mnr.gov.on.ca</p>
<p><i>Technical Contact</i> Peter Blancher, PIF Scientist Bird Studies Canada / Études d'Oiseaux Canada 49 Camelot Drive, Nepean, ON K1A 0H3 Ph: (613) 954-1253; Fax: (613) 952-9027 Email: peter.blancher@ec.gc.ca</p>	<p><i>Plan-writing Contact</i> Audrey Heagy, PIF Plan Writer Bird Studies Canada / Études d'Oiseaux Canada P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan ON N0E 1M0 Ph: (519) 586-3531 x 214; Fax: (519) 586-3532 Email: aheagy@bsc-eoc.org</p>

The Canadian Wildlife Service and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources are major financial supporters of this effort. Other important financial supporters include PIF Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and Wildlife Habitat Canada. For more information visit the PIF Ontario website: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/PIF/PIFOntario.html>