Catch The Migration Sensation!
International Migratory Bird Day
1999 Educator’s Supplement

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Migratory Bird Conservation: An Introduction

A migratory bird travels from one place to another in search of food. Some species migrate long distances, while others migrate shorter distances.

Long-distance migratory birds breed in the United States and Canada and winter in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. In spring and fall they travel between these locations.

The Cliff Swallow, a long-distance migrant, leaves northern breeding grounds in fall as prey become scarce. In spring, it travels north from southern wintering grounds, following once again abundant food.

Storms, tall buildings, windows, predators, and pollutants impact migratory birds during their flight and at their destinations. The greatest threat, however, is loss of habitat.

This topic reviewed by: Mary Deinlein, Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

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Conservation Issue: CHEMICAL POLLUTANTS

**Pesticides in the environment**

Swainson’s Hawks eat insects and small mammals. One hawk may capture as many as 100 grasshoppers in a day.

Insects eat plants, and can destroy many acres of crops.

Pesticides are used on crops to control insects. Some of these pesticides are harmful to birds and other wildlife.

Without insects, Swainson’s Hawks lose an important food source. Hawks that eat poisoned insects may die.

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**Swainson’s Hawk**
* *Buteo swainsoni*

**Range Map**
- **Breeding**
- **Winter**
- **Year-round**

**BBS Population Trend**
+ **0.8%** per year
Conservation Issue: STOPOVER SITES

Red Knots breed in the Arctic and winter in South America. Each year they migrate 20,000 miles round trip! They often fly more than 1,000 miles between rest stops.

In the spring, over 50% of adult Red Knots stop on the Delaware Bay in the eastern United States to eat the eggs of horseshoe crabs. This gives them the energy they need to continue their journey north.

Horseshoe crabs are harvested for use as bait to capture eels and whelk, which people like to eat. Unfortunately, harvesters usually catch females that are carrying the eggs Red Knots need.

Red Knot
Calidris canutus

Range Map
- Yellow: Breeding
- Blue: Winter
- Green: Year-round

BBS Population Trend
No BBS data available.

This topic reviewed by: Janis Burton and Brian Harrington, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences
In the western United States, Burrowing Owls nest in Black-tailed and White-tailed prairie dog burrows. The owls do not excavate their own tunnels, but depend on the prairie dogs to do so.

Prairie dog towns are lost because:

We clear the land to grow crops.

We build houses and shopping centers over them.

Prairie dog towns are poisoned.

Burrowing Owl
Athene cunicularia

Range Map
- Breeding
- Winter
- Year-round

BBS Population Trend
+ 0.7% per year
Conservation Issue: COLLISON COURSE

LIGHTS: Many bird species, especially small insect-eaters, migrate at night. They navigate using the stars and are attracted to lights shining from skyscrapers, lighthouses, and other tall structures.

Birds either flutter about the light until they drop from exhaustion or actually hit the object. Fog, rain or low clouds may cause birds to fly lower and collide with structures.

GLASS WINDOWS: A major threat to birds is the plate glass used on homes and buildings. Birds do not see glass and fly into it, resulting in the death of millions of birds each year.

Scientists estimate that between 1 and 10 birds are killed each year for every building containing plate glass in the United States.
Conservation Issue: LOSS OF HABITAT: RIPARIAN

Yellow-billed Cuckoos breed in riparian woodlands, that is, woodlands found near water.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo
*Coccyzus americanus*

Because the human population is growing so quickly, riparian woodlands are being lost to development and overuse by livestock.

Yellow-billed Cuckoos are threatened by loss of habitat on their breeding and wintering range and along their migration route.

Range Map
- Breeding
- Winter
- Year-round

BBS Population Trend
- 1.6% per year

This topic reviewed by: Stephanie Jones, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Many species of birds, including the Lark Bunting, breed in grasslands. Their nests are built of grasses and located on the ground.

Grazing by too many cows for too long reduces the grass cover and shade Lark Buntings need while nesting.

One cause of habitat loss is agriculture. Grasslands are widely used for planting crops. While some crops are grasses, they are grown in rows with bare ground at the base. As a result, birds that depend on grasslands cannot find the food and nest sites they need.
Conservation Issue: BROOD PARASITISM

Bison once roamed the grasslands of the western United States in large numbers.

Brown-headed Cowbirds followed herds of bison in search of the insects flushed by these grazing mammals.

Cowbirds are brood parasites. They lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species. This behavior allowed them to follow the constantly-moving bison.

The cowbirds’ young are raised by host species. Cowbirds hatch and develop more quickly than most songbirds. They are often bigger, and outcompete host chicks for food, causing them to die.

As cattle have been introduced, cowbirds have expanded their range. They now parasitize many bird species which have little defense against this behavior.
As human populations grow, large areas of habitat are divided into smaller and smaller sections to make room for development. This is called habitat fragmentation.

Many habitats once found in large blocks, including grassland, forest, and desert, are now fragmented.

On both breeding and wintering grounds, Cerulean Warblers prefer large, continuous blocks of forest.

In the Andes of Peru, these birds winter at elevations between 2,034 and 4,265 feet. This entire zone has been fragmented, as has habitat on their breeding grounds in the United States.
Conservation Issue: ON THE HOME FRONT

There may be many hazards for birds near our homes.

**Windows:** Birds do not see glass and fly into windows. One out of every two window strikes results in the death of a bird.

**Cats:** Hundreds of millions of birds are killed by free-roaming domestic cats each year.

**Disease:** Birds congregate at feeders, and dirty feeders spread germs.

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Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Archilochus colubris

Range Map
- Breeding
- Winter
- Year-round

BBS Population Trend
+ 1.5% per year

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This topic reviewed by: Bill Hilton, Jr., David Stowe Botanic Garden and Bob Sargent, The Hummer/Bird Study Group