2019
World Migratory Bird Day
Focal Species Fun Facts

PROTECT BIRDS:
BE THE SOLUTION
TO PLASTIC POLLUTION

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

- The Belted Kingfisher breeds locally in suitable habitat in the United States and Canada. They require earthen banks so that they can dig out a burrow to nest in.
- During winter many of the northern breeding Belted Kingfishers migrate south as far as northern South America.
- The diet of the Belted Kingfisher consists mainly of fish, although these birds are also known to eat a variety of other small vertebrates and invertebrates. Starting as fledglings, they regurgitate pellets that hold their prey’s bones and scales, which they cannot digest.
- Because they live along the banks of waterways, Belted Kingfishers may become entangled in plastic pollutants such as discarded fishing gear.

BLACK SKIMMER (*Rynchops niger*)

- Black Skimmers are mostly found along the coasts of the United States, Mexico, and Central and South America. They nest on the ground in open areas with loose substrate and sparse vegetation.
- Black Skimmers are colonial seabirds that nest in groups that can include other species of seabirds.
- They have a distinct bill shape where the lower mandible is longer than the upper. Although Black Skimmers hatch with symmetrical bill lengths, by the time they are ready to fledge the birds’ lower mandibles are longer than their upper ones.
- They use their lower mandibles to skim water in search of fish, snapping their mouths shut when they make contact with their prey. This method of feeding makes Black Skimmers vulnerable to ingesting plastics that they mistake for fish.
CHILEAN FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*)

- This species can be found in South America, from Peru south, living in shallow alkaline or brackish lakes.
- They gather in large flocks that can sometimes include other species and tend to migrate in these large flocks in a V-shaped formation.
- The Chilean Flamingo is a wading bird that filter-feeds in brackish or saltwater environments. These birds get their pink coloration from the beta-carotene found in their prey.
- Chilean Flamingos are particularly susceptible to ingesting microplastics while filter-feeding, and their long legs and necks can easily become entangled in plastic debris and discarded fishing gear.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo* )

- Common Terns overwinter along the coasts of Central and South America. Many non-breeding individuals remain in these locations, whereas their breeding counterparts migrate to breeding grounds in Canada and the northeastern United States.
- They nest in large breeding colonies along shorelines of waterways in areas that have loose substrate.
- As they incubate their eggs, Common Terns build up their nests with materials found nearby. If suitable materials are not available, the Common Tern is known to use plastic debris as nesting materials. This poses an entanglement and ingestion risk for both adults and chicks.
- Common Terns collect food by plunge-diving, diving-to-surface, or contact-dipping, which makes them highly susceptible to mistaking plastic for food and unintentionally ingesting it.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferous* )

- Killdeer breed in Canada and the northern United States and overwinter in Central and South America. They also live year-round in the central and southern United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean.
- This species live in open areas and wetlands and can also be found in manmade habitats such as athletic fields, parking lots, and grazed pastures. They nest on the ground on slight rises.
- Killdeer will act like their wings are broken to lure potential predators away from their nests or chicks.
- Because Killdeer spend much of their time walking and running along shorelines, they are prone to entanglement by plastic and fishing line that has washed up on the beach. Well-meaning cleanups that use beach-grooming machinery can injure these birds, destroy their nests, and remove many Killdeer food sources which can cause them to go hungry.
LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

- The Lesser Scaup is one of the most abundant and widespread diving ducks in North America.
- They breed in the boreal forest, arctic tundra, and prairies of Alaska and Canada as well as into the northern United States.
- One of the latest waterfowl species to migrate south in fall, the Lesser Scaup can be found wintering in and around the Gulf of Mexico and the west coast of the United States. Some travel as far south as Central America and the Caribbean.
- Lesser Scaup mainly eat insects, crustaceans, and mollusks as well as occasional aquatic plants and seeds. Because their prey, particularly mollusks, can accidentally ingest microplastics, these are often passed on to the Lesser Scaup through the food chain. In addition, the habit of occasionally feeding at night may lead the Lesser Scaup to mistake plastic for food.

MAGELLANIC PENGUIN (*Spheniscus magellanicus*)

- Named after the maritime explorer Ferdinand Magellan, the Magellanic Penguin is a medium-sized penguin identified by the white bands that go from over the eye down the neck and meet at the throat.
- The Magellanic Penguin nests in burrows or scraps under foliage in colonies found along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, as well as on southern South American islands as far north as central Argentina and Chile.
- During the non-breeding season Magellanic penguins swim north to Peru and southern Brazil.
- During a recent study surveying the gastrointestinal content of Magellanic Penguins, plastic was found to be the most common debris present in their stomachs.

MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRD (*Fregata magnificens*)

- This species nests in low trees or shrubs in dense colonies along the coast of Mexico, Central and South America as well as on islands throughout the Caribbean.
- During non-breeding periods Magnificent Frigatebirds can be found as far north as the United States and as far south as Argentina.
- Magnificent Frigatebirds are excellent flyers but clumsy walkers due to having very short legs. Because they lack waterproofing on their feathers, these seabirds are rarely if ever found swimming.
- Magnificent Frigatebirds occasional go after baited hooks, which can lead to entanglement with plastic fishing line in branches when they roost.
NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

- Northern Fulmars, which spend most of their time at sea, can be found in large breeding colonies in the Alaskan and Canadian Arctic.
- Their migration south depends on the availability of food sources in the north. They are not recorded as leaving the northern hemisphere.
- The Northern Fulmar is known to follow fishing and other boats and feed off the scraps that are left behind.
- Due to their feeding habits, Northern Fulmars frequently consume or incidentally ingest plastic when they mistake it for prey. During studies Northern Fulmars are often used as markers of plastic ingestion due to their high frequency of consumption.

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

- Ospreys plunge-dive to capture fish, which is their main diet. From mangrove inlets to Alaskan lakes, they live in a variety of habitats where the water is shallow or surface-schooling fish are abundant.
- This species has seen an expansion in its breeding range, which stretches throughout Alaska and Canada and along the coast of the United States.
- Northern nesting Ospreys generally overwinter in Mexico, the Caribbean, and as far south as Central and South America.
- Ospreys utilize a wide variety of nesting materials. As plastic pollution becomes increasingly common, they are more frequently mixing it in with their natural nesting materials, potentially posing dangers to them and their young.

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER (*Protonotaria citrea*)

- The Prothonotary Warbler breeds in the wet forests of the southeastern United States, and winters in mangrove forests in Central and South America.
- This migratory species nests in holes in standing dead trees, which limit its breeding range.
- The Prothonotary Warbler's diet consists primarily of insects and occasionally mollusks and fruit.
- Because microplastics consumed by mosquito larvae stay with them into adulthood, microplastics in water sources can move through the food web into the aerial environment and the Prothonotary Warblers which consume these insects.
TRICOLORED HERON (Egretta tricolor)

- Tricolored Herons typically nest along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of the United States as well as the Pacific coast from Mexico into Central America.
- This species is a colonial nester and can be found nesting in wetland areas with other species of herons and egrets.
- Tricolored Herons overwinter in a variety of locations, including along the Gulf of Mexico, and in Central and South America, where wetland habitats exist.
- Due to their frequent wading, Tricolored Herons are common victims of entanglement from plastic pollution. The Tricolored Heron diet also consists almost entirely of small estuarine and marsh fishes that inadvertently consume microplastics.

The accumulation of plastic and plastic pollution has become a worldwide epidemic and a primary threat to birds across the globe. An estimated 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been produced since its introduction in the 1950s. Only 9% of plastic waste has been recycled, and an estimated 79% of plastic waste accumulates in landfills or the natural environment (Geyer et al. 2017). Most of these plastics exist indefinitely, fragmenting into smaller and smaller pieces over time. As exposure to plastics grows, birds and their environments are facing increasingly detrimental consequences.

The 12 focal bird species selected for World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) 2019 represent diverse groups of birds, the habitats they use, and their foraging behaviors. Despite their differences, each of these birds and their habitats have been impacted by plastic pollution. Reducing the use of plastic and cleaning up the waste that is currently contaminating our natural environments is essential to migratory bird conservation.

By making changes individually and within our communities, we can make a difference in the fight against plastic pollution! WMBD invites you to participate as a host site by using the theme to introduce your communities to the impacts of plastic on bird populations and the importance of adopting an eco-friendly lifestyle. We encourage involvement in habitat restoration activities, such as trash cleanups, to improve the local environment and motivate participants to continue efforts that contribute to a plastic-free world.