

# Bird Research and Conservation



*Initiatives in Pennsylvania and on a national level promote the study of bird populations and the protection of their habitat.*

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This guide offers an overview of initiatives related to bird research and habitat protection, as well as the role conservation plays in supporting healthy bird populations. Some of the initiatives are specific to Pennsylvania, while others are part of national or global efforts. Links to websites offer more comprehensive information about each program.

## **The Role of Conservation**

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Organizations and governments involved in conservation efforts can make important contributions to protecting birds, especially threatened and endangered species. The development of farmland and open space often destroys critical habitat for bird migration, breeding, and wintering. Preserving these natural areas ensures healthy bird populations and intact ecosystems.

Land trusts, in particular, can be key partners in bird conservation. The [2013 State of the Birds report](#), submitted to the U.S Department of Interior by 15 bird conservation groups and government agencies, found that more than 100 bird species have at least half of their populations on private land. Many of those species are in decline and in desperate need of habitat conservation. Considering that a majority of land in the United States is privately owned, the ability of land trusts to work directly with landowners means

that they can play a major role in the effort to secure, restore, and protect habitat for birds.

## **Audubon Society Programs**

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The [National Audubon Society](#) is a prominent bird-focused conservation organization. It coordinates a number of bird conservation programs, many of which are implemented by local chapters and state offices, including [Audubon Pennsylvania](#).

### **Important Bird Areas**

The Important Bird Area (IBA) program is an initiative by [BirdLife International](#) designed to help organizations and governments prioritize conservation efforts in the most important places for birds. In the United States, the National Audubon Society and local partners administer the IBA program. To date, Audubon has identified nearly 3,000 IBAs covering over 400 million acres.

IBAs are areas that provide essential habitat for birds, including sites for breeding, wintering, and migration. An IBA can consist of a few acres, or thousands of acres. Land in an IBA can be public or private, protected or unprotected. To be designated an IBA, an area must meet at least one of several objective criteria.

After designating land as an IBA, the Audubon Society works with partner organizations and local chapters to develop and implement an IBA conservation plan. Plan activities vary from IBA to IBA and can include bird monitoring, habitat restoration, land protection, and proposing changes to municipal land use policies.

IBA designation does not offer legal protection to the identified area; it simply recognizes the area as having outstanding value to bird conservation.

See the National [National Audubon Society website](#) for additional information, including a map of IBAs,

local contacts, and instructions for protecting an IBA in your area.

### Forestry for the Birds

Audubon Pennsylvania works with foresters and land managers to incorporate consideration of bird habitat into forest and natural resource planning through habitat assessments, bird monitoring, education and training, and other services.

See the [Forestry for the Birds website](#) for more information.

### Audubon at Home

Audubon Pennsylvania coordinates programs to help people make their homes, gardens, and lifestyles more bird-friendly through sustainable landscaping and other methods.

See the [Audubon at Home](#) website for more information.

### Bird Town

Bird Town is a working partnership between Audubon and municipalities in Pennsylvania to encourage the creation of sustainable environments for birds and people. Audubon provides tools to designated Bird Towns that help the municipalities engage residents, businesses, and schools in more ecologically sound practices. Municipalities unready to become fully designated Bird Towns can make the Bird Town Pledge, which connects them with some of the same communications and tools.

See the [Bird Town website](#) for more information.

## Pennsylvania Farmland Raptor Project

[Hawk Mountain Sanctuary](#) coordinates the Pennsylvania Farmland Raptor Project with the goal of studying four species that have experienced population decline in recent years and are commonly found on farmland: the barn owl, American kestrel, short-eared owl, and northern harrier. The project encourages landowners to report sightings, enhance bird habitat on their property, and ask other landowners to join the effort.

See the [Pennsylvania Farmland Raptor Project website](#) for more information, including sighting forms, nest box cameras, and yearly reports.

## Willistown Trust Bird Conservation Program

[Willistown Conservation Trust](#), a land trust in southeastern Pennsylvania, operates a Bird Conservation Program. The program focuses primarily on bird banding, bird monitoring, and habitat restoration. Since banding activities began in 2009, staff and volunteers have documented thousands of birds that use the Trust's preserved land during migration or as a permanent home.

See the [Bird Conservation Program website](#) for more information.

## Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative

In 2016, the Lab of Ornithology at Cornell University began a partnership with the [Land Trust Alliance](#) designed to maximize the mutual benefits birds and land trusts can offer each other. The Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative consists of three main components:

- A [website](#) with a library of resources including conservation plans, presentations and publications, management guides for various habitats, and a directory of funding sources. It also features tutorials for [eBird](#), a popular program for reporting and accessing bird observations.
- [Collaboratives](#), which are partnership-based conservation efforts that help land trusts work together in the areas where protection and management are most necessary.
- The [Small Grants Program](#), launched in 2017 to support land trusts in their bird conservation work.

See the [Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative website](#) for more information.

## Citizen Science

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Organizations large and small facilitate bird counts, which provide valuable data for scientists studying bird populations. Notable examples include the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) and the [Christmas Bird Count](#), coordinated by National Audubon Society and its partners. Groups like [Allegheny Land Trust](#) and the [Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania](#) participate in these events on a local level, engaging their members in this popular form of citizen science.

Find more citizen science projects and resources at [Citizen Science Central](#), a project of The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

## Resources at ConservationTools.org

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To find experts and other information on the topics covered by this guide, see the right column of the on-line edition at

<http://conservationtools.org/guides/32>

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## Submit Comments

Help improve the next edition of this guide. Email your suggestions to the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association at [aloza@conserveland.org](mailto:aloza@conserveland.org). Thank you.

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