



Audubon Science

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS (IBAs)



USFWS



JAMES LEIPOID / USFWS



J. & K. HOLLINGSWORTH / USFWS



STEVE MASLOWSKI / USFWS

Saving birds, one place at a time

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program is the focal point for Audubon's bird conservation work. It is a global effort to identify the most important places for bird populations and to focus conservation efforts on those sites. The Important Bird Areas Program is Audubon's lead conservation initiative because the most severe threats to bird populations are habitat-based. IBAs are important for species of high conservation concern like those on Audubon's WatchList, for species with restricted ranges, species that are restricted to one habitat type or biome, and for species that congregate in large numbers during some portion of the year.

BirdLife International initiated the IBA concept in the 1980s, and now IBAs are active in nearly 200 countries, with over 10,000 sites identified. As the U.S. Partner of BirdLife, Audubon has identified more than 2,400 IBAs in the United States, covering over 350 million acres, towards a goal of 3,000 IBAs or approximately 15% of the U.S., 350 million acres. It is expected that out of these state-level IBAs, 1,500 sites, encompassing 10% or 250 million acres of the U.S., will be significant at the continental level, and 800 sites will be significant at the global level, encompassing approximately 7% of the U.S. or 160 million acres. To date, Audubon has recognized 358 IBAs as globally significant and 15 as continentally significant. Progress on the identification and conservation of IBAs has been achieved through the efforts of dozens of staff and thousands of volunteers, making it the largest and most ambitious IBA Program in the world.

IBAs have a unique power to unite people, communities, and organizations in proactive bird conservation, one place at a time.

Frank Gill, Board of Directors, National Audubon Society

PROMOTING A CULTURE OF CONSERVATION BY CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

AUDUBON SCIENCE PROGRAMS >> IBAS >> WATCHLIST >> BIRDS & AGRICULTURE >> AUDUBON AT HOME >> CITIZEN SCIENCE >> COASTAL BIRD CONSERVATION >> SEABIRD RESTORATION >> INTERNATIONAL

VISION

- The IBA program focuses conservation action by engaging individuals, organizations, agencies, and communities on the most critical sites in the Americas.

GOALS

- Identify all the Global IBAs in the Americas.
- Take conservation action at these sites.
- Measure conservation success at IBAs at local, state, national, and international levels.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- The IBA program is active in 22 countries in the Americas and in 48 states.
- IBA inventories documented for 21 countries, 14 states.
- Conservation is happening at hundreds of IBAs.

FUTURE

- Establish links among IBAs through shared species, habitats, threats, and needs.
- Digitize IBA boundaries for sharing between partners.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Nominate an IBA based on presence of WatchList, restricted-range, or congregatory species.
- Adopt an IBA. Help with conservation, advocacy, threats assessment, or monitoring bird numbers.

Audubon is also committed to foster IBA programs throughout the Americas as witnessed by the involvement of 20 Latin Americans together with 60 U.S. participants at an international IBA meeting in August of 2004. Throughout the Americas, approximately 4,000 sites are expected to be identified as globally significant IBAs. Currently, 2,300 IBAs have been identified in the Americas, encompassing approximately 250 million acres. IBA inventories have been documented in 14 states and 21 Western Hemisphere countries.

The IBA program starts with this foundation of site identification and prioritization for conservation action, and follows with community engagement in the development and implementation of conservation plans. The IBA Program engages individuals, private landowners, local communities, and government agencies, and the result is an IBA network with a community of supporters working to monitor, restore, conserve and watch over these important habitats for birds and other wildlife. Audubon chapters and volunteers constitute a team of IBA citizen scientists, studying species populations, assessing breeding success, evaluating threats to bird populations, and keeping ever-watchful eyes on the places birds depend on. These places can be National Wildlife Refuges, National Parks and other public, protected lands, but they can also be working farms, ranches, reserves, local parks, and other private lands.

Conservation achievements at IBAs have been many. In Connecticut, 144 acres were acquired adjacent to the Barn Island Wildlife Management Area, a state-owned IBA. In Missouri, IBAs have been used to secure significant funding to restore marsh and forest habitat on private lands. In New Hampshire, town residents voted overwhelmingly to buy 500 acres of an IBA within the Merrimack River corridor. In Pennsylvania, citizens created a simulated heron colony to induce some herons and egrets to move away from an overcrowded colony, but to stay within the IBA. In Illinois, grassland restoration projects have increased populations of grassland birds at several IBAs and in some cases created new grassland IBAs. In Washington, a law was passed mandating the state Natural Heritage Program to recognize IBAs, a critical step towards ensuring IBAs are considered in many land use and development decisions.

IBAs also host important education, outreach, and bird population monitoring projects that contribute to the conservation successes at these locations. In Arizona, Iowa, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, the IBA Program has trained hundreds of volunteers to monitor IBAs. Further, many states are now taking steps to adopt IBAs. Audubon chapters, bird clubs and local community groups are stepping up to monitor, provide stewardship, and advocate for the conservation of these special places.

The IBA Program continues to be successful because it identifies priority sites for birds in a global context. It includes all birds and all bird habitats, and it promotes constituency building focused on stewardship and conservation delivery. The IBA Program is poised to contribute to conservation throughout the Americas, and the world, for many years to come.