



United States Shorebird Conservation Plan

MANOMET CENTER FOR CONSERVATION SCIENCES
MANOMET, MASSACHUSETTS 02345

MAY 2001
SECOND EDITION

United States Shorebird Conservation Plan Council Organizations



MANOMET
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WESTERN
HEMISPHERE
SHOREBIRD
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NETWORK



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BY STEPHEN BROWN, CATHERINE HICKEY,
BRIAN HARRINGTON, AND ROBERT GILL, EDITORS

The United States Shorebird Conservation Plan is a partnership effort of state and federal agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, academic institutions, and individuals from across the country committed to restoring and maintaining stable and self-sustaining populations of shorebirds in the U.S. and throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Cover: Short-billed Dowitchers congregate before fall migration at Cook Inlet, Alaska. Photo by Robert Gill.



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Preface

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan presents the major conclusions and recommendations of the technical and regional working groups that contributed to the development of a coordinated national initiative for shorebird conservation. Many of the details pertaining to the development of specific goals and objectives are presented in the accompanying technical reports, which are part of the Plan and are listed at the end of this document. These additional reports should be consulted whenever greater detail is required. This document is intended to provide an overview of the current status of shorebirds, the conservation challenges facing them, current opportunities for integrated conservation, broad goals for the conservation of shorebird species and subspecies, and specific programs necessary to meet the overall vision of restoring stable and self-sustaining populations of all shorebirds.

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*American Avocets in the United States nest principally in wetlands in the Great Basin region of the intermountain western states; during winter most of the population lives in saline lakes, lagoons, and estuaries of western Mexico.
Photo by David Twitchell.*

Executive Summary

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan is a partnership involving organizations throughout the United States committed to the conservation of shorebirds. This document summarizes all of the major technical reports and recommendations produced by the various working groups that participated in developing the Plan. The organizations and individuals working on the Plan have developed conservation goals for each region of the country, identified critical habitat conservation needs and key research needs, and proposed education and outreach programs to increase awareness of shorebirds and the threats they face. The shorebird partnership created during the development of the Plan will remain active and will work to improve and implement the Plan's recommendations.

Natural landscapes in the United States have been altered significantly, and the wetlands, shoreline habitats, and grasslands used by shorebirds have been particularly disturbed. For many shorebird species, existing information is insufficient to determine how these alterations have affected populations. Many shorebird species face significant threats from habitat loss, human disturbance, and from different forms of habitat degradation such as pollution, prey resource depletion, and increasing threats from predators. Despite ongoing conservation efforts, many shorebird populations are declining, in some cases at alarming rates. Because development pressure will continue, critical conservation actions must be identified, integrated management practices must be developed, and ongoing changes in habitat configuration, quality, and availability must be controlled. Focused conservation action is needed now to protect and restore necessary habitats and address other threats to prevent additional shorebird species from becoming threatened or endangered.

The Plan has three major goals at different scales. At a regional scale, the goal of the Plan is to ensure that adequate quantity and quality of habitat is identified and maintained to support the different shorebirds that breed in, winter in, and migrate through each region. At a national scale, the goal is to stabilize populations of all shorebird species known or suspected of being in decline due to limiting factors occurring within the U.S., while ensuring that common species are also protected from future threats. At a hemispheric scale, the goal is to restore and maintain the populations of all shorebird species in the Western Hemisphere through cooperative international efforts.

The Plan was developed by a wide array of state and federal agencies, non-governmental conservation organizations, and individual researchers throughout the country. Major partners include all 50 States, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the North American Waterfowl and Wetlands Office, most of the Joint Ventures established through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Geological Survey, the USDA Forest Service, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited, the Canadian Wildlife Service, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, and many other regional organizations. Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences initiated the project, obtained the funding to develop the Plan, and hired the coordinators who oversaw all aspects of the project to date as well as publication of these reports.

Three major working groups were formed at a national level. The research and monitoring group developed scientifically sound approaches for tracking populations of shorebirds, identified the critical research questions that must be answered to guide conservation efforts, and determined funding requirements to meet these needs. The habitat management group worked with the regional groups to assemble specific regional habitat management goals into a national program. The education and outreach group focused on development of materials for schools and public education programs to help build awareness of shorebirds and the risks facing them throughout the country, and identified areas where increased funding for education and outreach are needed.



Eleven regional groups were formed during the development of the Plan. The major focus of these groups was to determine what habitats need to be protected and managed to meet the requirements of the shorebirds in each region. Each group set its own regional goals and objectives, and collected information about ongoing management efforts and how they can be improved. In addition, the regional groups provided input to the development of the research and monitoring programs, and helped identify education and outreach needs.

The loss of wetland habitat in the U.S. has motivated federal, state, and private agencies to increase conservation and management of wetlands to preserve the public values of these critical habitats. Wetland management and restoration have developed rapidly in recent years, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan has stimulated significant increases in funding for wetland conservation activities. There is growing recognition among land managers of the opportunity to integrate management practices beneficial to shorebirds and other waterbirds into current management practices focused predominantly on game species. This changing orientation reflects the rapidly growing number of people who engage in bird watching, wildlife photography, and eco-tourism in addition to traditional activities such as fishing and hunting. This growing constituency brings substantial economic benefits to wetlands and waterfowl areas, and has broadened public support for wetland conservation. We need management practices to focus on entire landscapes, but this requires an unprecedented level of coordination among multiple partners. No single conservation initiative can be effective alone. Wetland conservation for wildlife across entire landscapes requires the coordination of multiple efforts. The Shorebird Conservation Plan represents a significant contribution to the development of landscape-level wildlife conservation, and can contribute significantly to these larger goals as part of a broad partnership for wetland conservation.

The Shorebird Plan is designed to complement the existing landscape-scale conservation efforts of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners in Flight, and the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan. Each of these initiatives addresses different groups of birds, but all share many common conservation challenges. One major task is to integrate these efforts to ensure coordinated delivery of bird conservation on the ground in the form of specific habitat management, restoration, and protection programs. The newly developing North American Bird Conservation Initiative addresses conservation needs for all birds in North America, and the Shorebird Plan partnership will work closely with this initiative toward common goals.

Each partner organization involved in the Shorebird Plan will take on implementation roles suited to its focus and skills. The U.S. Shorebird Plan Council, which includes representatives of all partners in the Plan, will coordinate implementation. Major implementation partnerships are being set up with interested Joint Ventures organized under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and with Partners in Flight. International coordination is also underway between the U.S. Shorebird Plan and the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan, which share responsibility for many of the same species at different points in their annual cycles. These partnerships will work to ensure that all of the recommendations provided in this document and the accompanying technical reports are addressed, and to ensure that stable and self-sustaining shorebird populations are maintained into the distant future.

