

Date: Sat, 15 Feb 2003 11:39:11 -0400
From: Sue Thompson <sthomp@andrew.cmu.edu>
To: PA Biodiversity Listserve <PABIODIV@webmail.upb.pitt.edu>
Subject: PABIODIV: BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN REPORT

From the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE IDENTIFIES BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN IN NEW REPORT

Emphasizing the need to conserve declining species long before they require the protection of the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released its Birds of Conservation Concern 2002 report. The report identifies more than 100 bird species that deserve prompt conservation attention to stabilize or increase populations or to secure threatened habitats.

The report will assist efforts by Federal and State agencies, conservation organizations, private companies, and landowners to protect and restore bird habitat and reduce the impact of their activities on species of concern. In addition, species included in this report can be given priority consideration for funding for research, monitoring, and management.

"We need to do more to protect declining species before they become threatened or endangered," said Interior Secretary Gale A. Norton. "This list will help the Fish and Wildlife Service work in partnership with states, conservation groups, and others with an interest in bird conservation to take action now to keep species from declining to the point of requiring listing under the Endangered Species Act. It provides a road map for conserving hundreds of bird species across the country that have suffered habitat and population losses."

Developed in consultation with the leaders of ongoing bird conservation initiatives and partnerships such as Partners in Flight, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, the list prioritizes species based on the threats they face and the declines they have suffered. Species that are currently declining or uncommon, have small ranges, and/or face significant threats to their future survival were included on the list. The list will be used by a broad array of agencies and organizations to shape spending and research priorities, habitat acquisition and restoration needs and to minimize the impacts of their activities on identified species.

"The Federal government needs to take the lead in efforts to conserve migratory birds. Release of this report will guide ongoing efforts to avoid impacts to migratory birds, and enhance migratory bird conservation," said Service Director Steve Williams.

Release of the 2002 report takes on special significance for Federal agencies. Executive Order 13186 directs all Federal agencies taking actions having or likely to have a negative impact on migratory bird populations to work with the Service to develop an agreement to conserve those birds, focusing on species identified in the Birds of Conservation Concern 2002 report. As a result, the Service is currently developing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with dozens of Federal agencies that will help guide future agency actions and policy decisions; renewal of permits, contracts or other agreements; and the creation of or revisions to land management plans.

In addition to avoiding or minimizing impacts to bird populations of conservation concern, agencies will be expected to take reasonable steps to restore and enhance habitats, prevent or abate pollution affecting birds, and incorporate migratory bird conservation into agency planning processes whenever possible and to the extent that these actions are compatible with their primary missions.

The development of an "early warning" list of bird species in potential trouble is mandated by a 1988 amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980. The number of such species has grown from 30 in 1987, to 122 in 1995, to 131 in 2002. This growth partly reflects the addition of eligible species in Hawaii and other U.S. Pacific Islands. Scientists also know more about the status of some

bird species and that knowledge has increased the pool of eligible species. Publication of the 2002 report is expected to prompt heightened efforts to improve habitat conditions, conduct monitoring, and initiate status assessments for some of the highest priority species.

The newly revised report is actually a series of 45 individual lists that identifies bird species of concern at national, regional and landscape scales. The lists include a principal national list, seven regional lists corresponding to the Service's regional administrative units, and species lists for each of 37 Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) in the U.S. designated and endorsed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. The BCR lists will help focus on-the-ground conservation actions on the highest priority species. The 1987 and 1995 reports did not identify species at the BCR level, thus limiting their effectiveness for identifying species that may be relatively abundant nationally or regionally but in steep decline in smaller but still ecologically significant areas such as BCRs.

Copies of the Birds of Conservation Concern 2002 may be obtained by writing to the Chief, Division of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop 4107, Arlington, VA 22203-1610, ATTN: BCC 2002. It is also available for downloading on the Division of Migratory Bird Management's web page at <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov>.

The Pennsylvania Biodiversity Listserve encourages open discussion about biodiversity issues in the state. It is hosted by the Allegheny Institute of Natural History, University of Pittsburgh-Bradford and is moderated by the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership. The opinions expressed in messages are those of the authors and NOT the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership.