

Note: This document is a DRAFT Summary of the Workshop. If you attended the workshop and have any corrections, please send to Cindy Staicer <cindy.staicer@dal.ca> by December 15. The final document will be posted on the new web site in early January 2009. Conference participants will receive an e-mail notification when the website is ready for viewing.

For Our Birds 2008: Summary of the Bird Conservation Workshop



This document summarizes the workshop held on November 16, 2008, Day 2 of the conference *For Our Birds 2008: Sharing Science, Conservation and Education about Birds in Nova Scotia*. The conference and workshop were held at Dalhousie University.

A. Questions and Concerns

Prior to the workshop, its organizers attempted to ensure that the interests of participants would be captured in the workshop activities by taking all of the questions and comments submitted by participants on Day 1 (November 15) and grouping themes, as summarized below:

1. Specific Issues of Concern

- Why can't we get the lights turned off in high buildings in HRM?
- How can we promote 'cats indoors' programs?
- Can we do anything about killer cats?
- How can we decrease the amount of lead used in shot and fishing gear?
- Interested particularly in forest birds.
- How can we re-establish a cliff swallow colony if building is gone?
- Decimation, or worse, of barn swallows.
- Information on roosting and nesting boxes for particular species in urban areas with minimal wild habitat remaining?

2. Research & Monitoring

- The varied climate change effects on birds/from changes in ambient temperature and its effects on reproductive success to changes in insect phenology/gray jay and rotten food.
- Effects of acid rain deposition and mercury.
- In view of climate change and increasing hurricanes, tropical storms, etc., that have increased particularly in this decade, it would be useful to examine potential for increased mortality during fall migration (particularly shorebirds or other species that migrate over water, e.g., Gulf of Mexico).
- What can NS info/data tell us about winter bird population survival, etc.?
- Do we monitor aerial insects?
- What is needed to support/increase monitoring conservation efforts; funding/resources?

3. Cross-border Conservation

- What knowledge and actions do we need to work on bird conservation across borders?
- What are the cross-border issues affecting NS birds in wintering habitat for example?

4. Habitat Prioritization & Management

- What are the priority sites in NS that need to be protected?
- I'd like to see a reduced emphasis on single species measures and more of a focus on indices of community health.
- Are species at risk in protected areas?
- Provide advice about specific areas of habitat to be conserved in our region.

5. Communication

- Communicate to general, interested public (especially landowners) how they can enhance their property using native species of plants that would fulfill the needs of local bird species. Publish suggested plants lists? Information on Acadian forest and how to bring it back, etc.?
- How can we raise awareness among the general public of threats to our native birds and conservation opportunities?
- A number of projects were outlined at this conference. How can one gain access to this info i.e. Cindy Staicer's projects?
- Have you considered extending your reach via a public relations strategy? Maybe a story on Quirks and Quarks could have valuable introductory impact on new conservationists in all of Canada and beyond.
- How do we spread the word beyond the committed and knowledgeable audience present for the talks? This could profit both action and further data mining from the 'traditional knowledge base'.
- Can we make use of Jessica Roy's website in a practical way?

6. Education, Engagement & Training in Bird Conservation

- My main concern is how to change or enhance and enlighten people's outlook on our relationship with nature (including birds). So many people seem disconnected from nature, or they consider animals as products or pets, or they're afraid of animals, etc. How can we show people that they are part of our lives, our neighbours our friends, etc.?
- How do we get the general population to care?
- I was wondering about creating engaging and interesting stewardship programs for the public.
- How can we improve field skills? We need something like the extended camps which Mass. Audubon has. Week-long camps for adults?
- Suggestions on how to regularly involve communities and local schools in bird recovery/conservation initiatives?
- How do we train young birding ears, this is a skill that is being lost.

- Idea: Monitoring program for BBS. Is it feasible to have current BBS participants work with BBS ‘wannabes’ (this is not intended to be pejorative) to help them gain confidence with birding by ear?
- Participation rate is poor on breeding bird atlas. How can we get more people excited and actively involved?
- Urban habitat for birds – can we involve the public by understanding urban habitat improvement?
- How can we get more people involved in monitoring programs? Training? Communications?

B. Impressions of the Plenary Speaker

Janis Dickinson, plenary speaker visiting from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, gave her impressions of Day 1 of the conference. Her comments are summarized below:

- The participants at this conference have a strong sense of place and affection for Nova Scotia. They can’t imagine living any place else.
- Nonetheless it is important to not become too insular. We need to build partnerships across boundaries, especially south of the Canadian border.
- It is important to find people who can help you with bird conservation—don’t assume they aren’t out there (e.g., unlikely friend of bird conservation in the Bush White House).
- The dedication and research of speakers and participants is impressive.

C. Bird Conservation Messages

In the first-break out session, participants in five randomly-selected groups were asked: **“What are the 5 key messages about bird conservation coming out of this conference?”**

These messages (which included many recommended actions) are summarized below:

1. The public needs to hear what we heard yesterday.
2. Various birds are in decline, particularly migratory species. Examples include the Piping Plover, feeder birds like the Evening Grosbeak, aerial insectivores (swallows, swifts), and other newly listed species.
3. Causes of declines include: (a) Habitat loss (e.g., mature forests, coastal salt marshes, urban habitat); (b) Climate change, and the resulting mismatch between the timing of bird life histories and their resources; (c) Pollutants; (d) Buildings and power lines; (e) Cats; (f) other complex issues for which there are no simple fixes.
4. More research is needed: (a) Better baseline data; (b) Effects of climate change; (c) Sharing and gathering data; (d) Habitat loss (e.g., winter vs. stop-over vs. summer breeding habitats); (e) Pollution and toxins; and (f) Changes in bird communities.
5. Conservation successes include raptors and waterfowl.

6. Move beyond monitoring to action and advocacy. For certain species and threats, the picture is clear – we don't need more data.
7. Protect habitat (e.g., change forest practices, conversion to lawns, development of coastlines).
8. Make the connection between the impacts resulting from economic activities and birds (e.g. climate change, other major threats).
9. Prioritize by identifying key species for recovery and protection efforts.
10. Focus on those bird species that occurred naturally in NS and where NS habitat is key to their survival.
11. NS has a high responsibility for many unique bird (and other) species and habitats.
12. Birds need to be viewed within an ecosystem context. We need to include the other organisms and connections.
13. Bird populations are changing and so are their ecosystems.
14. Volunteers are doing amazing stuff, and there are many opportunities for new people to get involved.
15. Recruitment of youth into the birding community is crucial to building the bird conservation movement.
16. A digital divide separates most of us and the younger “Facebook” generation.
17. Develop citizen science capability in NS, improve expertise, and include local knowledge.
18. Improve collaboration among interested groups. There has been a lack of coordinated action.
19. Build a network to connect groups and individuals working on bird conservation.
20. Actions must span the range of scales – from the backyard behaviour of citizens to government policy.
21. Enable volunteers at all levels, from backyard enthusiasts to conservation planners.
22. Engage the political process.
23. The birding community needs to be a stakeholder, to participate in decision-making, and to influence policy and management.
24. Engage all levels of government, local, municipal, provincial, and federal.
25. Spread awareness among the general public by effective means.

D. Actions for Bird Conservation in Nova Scotia

In the second break-out session, a different set of five breakout groups were tasked with determining “**What do we need to do now for bird conservation in NS and who is going to do it?**” Each group considered a particular question and developed lists of conservation actions that should be achievable within the time frame of about one year. The actions are listed below under each of the five questions.

1. **What can we do to improve collaboration, networking, research, and sharing information among ourselves, i.e. organizations, agencies, academics and individuals already interested and working with birds and conservation?** (*Question considered by the break-out group facilitated by Cindy Staicer and David Hughes*)
 - a) **Develop a web portal for Nova Scotia bird conservation.** The purpose would be to improve communication and collaboration of those already working on bird conservation, to invite involvement of new people, and to raise the profile of bird conservation among the public. The web portal would bring together in one place the links to existing relevant information and posting of new material where needed. We stressed the need to keep it focused on NS, make it simple enough to maintain without a lot of effort, and to avoid repeating the work of other groups. Cindy Staicer volunteered to take the lead on this project and work with Dal students to develop and maintain the site. The plan is to host the site at Dal and to work with Jessica Roy, basing the web site on the mock-up and ideas she presented on Saturday.
 - b) **Hold an annual gathering.** Make this conference an annual event to enhance collaboration and communication among volunteers, NGOs, government, and academics. Move the location of the conference around the province to reach different regions and engage different groups of people. Dave McCorquodale agreed to take the lead on organizing *For Our Birds 2009* in Cape Breton.
 - c) **Give short presentations about bird data at Bird Society and naturalist group meetings.** Arrange for people from CWS, Bird Studies Canada, NSBS, and other agencies or organizations that manage various kinds of bird data to give short (15-min) presentations at Bird Society and Naturalist group meetings, before the usual presentation. (This could be a kind of “road show” but would be different than the one mentioned later in the recruitment and education section.) The purpose would be to raise awareness about the importance of collecting, keeping, organizing and making accessible data on birds. The government and NGOs should tell the people in the NSBS what data they use and what else they need. This action will facilitate the next action.
 - d) **Improve access to data and information about bird populations.** We need to make data more accessible, data entry easier and data more reliable. We need to connect the data user and gatherer. We will use the existing network and bring in data from other groups. First, we will review what data are currently available and how they are being used. We need to know what information is being collected beyond the web-available BBS and CBC data, and to identify gaps. For example, DNR does aerial surveys, and environmental consultants do other surveys, but the data aren’t accessible to public. Another example is that government needs to be aware of things like local chimney swift populations and immediate threats to birds. The primary aim should be to make the remaining data/analyses web-available. This task will likely take more than a year to complete, but we can start building the network of connections now. People who volunteered to serve on the committee included Andrew Boyne, Dave Carmichael, James Churchill, Wayne Neily, and Becky Whittam. NSBS will appoint a contact person. Chantal Gagnon offered to assist in building the network of people working on this task.

2. What can we do to engage all levels of government in bird conservation? (*Question considered by the break-out group facilitated by Andy Horn*)

- a) Bring birds and birding interests into land use planning in the same way that, for example, tourism and salmon interest now are, through:
 - i) advocacy that establishes birds as a politically visible issue, especially provincially and municipally
 - ii) proactive involvement, from data collection to advocacy, in specific site evaluations and management
 - iii) establishment of a single, go-to source for planning issues affecting birds
 - iv) proactive engagement in existing planning processes
- b) The logical group to do so is the Nova Scotia Bird Society, which has indeed acted on each of these fronts on a case by case basis but needs to be more visible and proactive. To provide the needed scientific, administrative, and political expertise and interest, the Society needs to:
 - i) partner with existing coalitions (as they have already with, e.g., the Coastal Coalition)
 - ii) partner with groups with the needed know-how (e.g., Ecology Action Center)
 - iii) recruit individual members with the needed motivation and skills

3. What can we do now to improve recruitment and education for bird conservation? (*Question considered by the break-out group facilitated by Sue Abbott and Joan Czapalay*)

- a) Organize monthly field trips for beginner birders of all ages. Suzanne Borkowski will organize additional field trips to serve this role.
- b) Mentor new volunteers for shorebird surveys by organizing a 2-day training workshop. Suzann Myers (NSBS) and Sue Abbott will organize mentoring activities.
- c) Link bird conservation into the new natural history curriculum in the schools. Martin Willison, Laurel McIvor, Joan Czapalay, Robin Stinson, Wayne Neily, and Brian Starzomski will get together soon to plan for this action. [note: this initial meeting has already been held]
- d) Develop an outreach web site. Include there a list or database of speakers and venues for brown-bag seminars. Appropriate people to be involved are Mark Butler and Scientists in the Schools (SITS).
- e) Develop a common PowerPoint presentation (suggested title: “The Inconvenient Truth about Birds in Nova Scotia”) that can be used by all speakers for brown-bag seminars, school visits, etc. Brian Starzomski volunteered to take the lead.

4. What are the key conservation messages from this conference? (*Question considered by the break-out group facilitated by Mark Butler and Bob Bancroft*)

- a) A number of bird species are in decline. Examples include Piping Plovers, some backyard feeder birds (e.g. Evening Grosbeaks), aerial foragers (swallows, swifts). The number of listed birds is increasing.
- b) The reasons for bird declines include:
 - i) habitat loss (forest, coastal saltmarshes, urban areas)
 - ii) climate change (causing a mis-match in timing such as between birds' peak need for food and their food supply)
 - iii) pollutants
 - iv) structures (buildings and power lines)
 - v) cats
 - vi) big issues for which there is no simple fix
- c) What we need to do:
 - i) Communicate conservation successes (raptors and waterfowl).
 - ii) Protect habitat:
 - (1) Lawn conversion in urban/suburban habitats
 - (2) Forest practices
 - (3) Coastal development
 - iii) Develop effective legislation.
 - iv) Gain public support.
 - v) Have more field trips, improve outdoor education.
- d) Volunteers are doing amazing things.

5. What specific actions can we do now? (*Question considered by the break-out group facilitated by Marty Leonard and Sherman Boates*)

- a) Develop a consistent, province-wide policy on buffers. The committee, including EAC, NSBS, CPAWS and others, will write letters, produce press releases.
- b) Communicate with local citizens about how change their behaviour at home. Issues include responsible cat ownership, bird feeding, brush clearing, acid rain, pesticides, lead. Post on web sites, report on NS birds, produce newspaper articles, develop a road show. Helene would take the lead on the cat and lead issues. Suzanne Borkowski and Helene will write up a list of things that any citizen can do to help birds.
- c) Identify important areas to protect as habitat for birds. Use information from the Atlas to identify important areas. Engage landowners. Conduct research. This work could be done by Becky Stewart, Nature Conservancy, and NS Nature Trust.

- d) Increase action on shorebird conservation. This action could be carried out by a small group lead by Sue Abbot and Susann Myers. Involve the birding community in coastal management strategies by becoming a stakeholder. The NSBS, EAC, and John Kearney would take the lead on this action.
- e) Connect priorities here in NS with what is happening on the wintering grounds. Becky Whittam and CWS would take the lead to improve collaboration with working groups across the border.
- f) Within the urban landscape, conduct research and increase habitat for native birds.
- g) Create campaigns on particular issues. Tap into the expertise of organization who run campaigns. EAC would take the lead.
- h) Take specific actions and make it easy for the public to engage. (See below)
- i) Start a Piping Plover campaign, including letters and presentations, to get government to enforce legislation/regulations more fiercely, including arrests, fines, dedicated paid warden, etc. NSBS, BSC, EAC would work together on this action.
- j) Get forest companies to put up chimneys for chimney swifts. Ian McLaren and Jim Wolford will take the lead.
- k) Change cutting habits on agricultural land to improve reproductive success of grassland birds such as Bobolinks. Sherman Boates will take the lead.
- l) Advocate for and educate of local governments and citizens about best practices that affect bird habitat, such as regards to brush-clearing. NSBS will take the lead.
- m) Plan for sea level rise, possibly by building dikes. Ian McLaren will take the lead.

E. Workshop Participants*

A complete list of workshop participants is not available but they included people from:

- Applied Geomatics Research Group (AGRG)
- Bird Studies Canada (BSC)
- Blomidon Field Naturalists
- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)
- Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS)
- Cape Breton University
- Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre (CWRC)
- Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology
- Dalhousie University
- Ecology Action Centre (EAC)

- Halifax Field Naturalists
- Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute (MTRI)
- Nature NS
- Nova Scotia Bird Society (NSBS)
- Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources (NS DNR)
- Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History
- Nova Scotia Nature Trust (NSNT)
- Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society
- Parks Canada
- Pictou County Naturalists
- School for Resource and Environmental Studies (SRES)
- Two Countries – One Forest (2C1F)

** Note: The views expressed at the workshop were those of individual participants who may have been affiliated with, but were not necessarily representing, these organizations, institutions, departments or agencies, and thus the above list does not imply any kind of endorsement of the content of this document.*