

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS PROGRAM

Background and Status

Important Bird Areas are sites that are important to the survival of bird species. The identification of Important Bird Areas and the conservation of these sites was initiated by BirdLife International in the mid-1980's in Europe. BirdLife International is a global partnership of conservation organizations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources (BirdLife International 2006). The National Audubon Society is the BirdLife Partner in the U.S. with its mission to conserve and restore natural ecosystems for the benefit of humanity and biological diversity being very similar to the mission of BirdLife and that of its partners (National Audubon Society 2005).

Over the last twenty years more than 4,000 Important Bird Areas have been identified throughout Europe. Since the program's initiation the identification and conservation of IBAs has expanded to all continents with initial inventories completed in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Inventories are in the process of being completed in the Americas, Antarctica, and Australia. As of March 2006, over 8,000 Global IBAs have been identified in 178 countries by BirdLife International partners.

As the U.S. Partner for BirdLife International, Audubon has the responsibility for identifying and working to conserve a network of Important Bird Areas throughout the U.S. In the U.S., this network of sites is comprised of state-level IBAs that are prioritized as continentally or globally significant. This identification and prioritization process focuses the IBA program on achieving the greatest conservation results at the sites most in need of conservation attention.

The National Audubon Society initiated the Important Bird Areas Program beginning approximately in 1995 with its first state IBA Program in Pennsylvania. After starting in Pennsylvania, a state IBA Program was established in New York in 1996. Both Pennsylvania and New York were the first to publish IBA inventories in 1999 and 1998 respectively (Crossley 1999, and Wells 1998). From those initial state programs the Important Bird Areas Program expanded throughout the east and western states and has also expanded through the central part of the country and also to Alaska and Hawaii. Important Bird Areas inventories have been published or presented online in most states of the United States (Audubon of Florida 2007, Audubon Minnesota 2007, Idaho Department of Fish and Game 2007, Massachusetts Audubon Society 2007, Wilson 2007, Hunter 2006, Marks 2006, Poague 2006, Wisconsin Important Bird Areas 2006, Audubon New Mexico 2005, Burger 2005, McIvor 2005, Audubon Alaska 2004, Cooper 2004, Golder 2004, Iowa Audubon 2004, Martinson 2004, LaBarr 2003, Reid 2003, Lyon Date 2002, Wilbor 2002, Audubon Colorado 2001, Cullinan 2001). Several states are still identifying Important Bird Areas and their information appears on National Audubon's website as it becomes available (National Audubon Society 2004). Audubon has identified approximately 2,000 state-level Important Bird Areas covering more than 200 million acres of habitat in 41 states (Figure 1). The identification process is underway or beginning in 48 states, leaving only Kansas and Rhode Island to initiate an IBA Program (Figure 2).

Identifying IBAs is only the first step in the site conservation process. Beyond the identification of sites, the IBA program is focused on monitoring and evaluating the status of those sites in order to track increases and decreases in bird populations, track changes in the quality and extent of the habitats, as well as understand the most significant threats to Important Bird Areas. With a greater understanding of these IBA characteristics, conservation strategies can be tailored to the needs of the site. As an example, a site surrounded by rapidly occurring land development might need to be purchased in order to be protected. Other sites might need some sort of habitat management technique applied (*i.e.*, burning of grasslands, thinning of forests, removal of invasive and exotic plants) in order to improve conditions for certain bird species. Conservation strategies can take many forms, and habitat acquisition and management are only two. Other strategies can include advocacy, education and outreach, and lobbying local, state or national governments. A particular conservation strategy that Audubon is focused on is engaging landowners, land managers and local communities in the monitoring, stewardship of, and general advocacy on behalf of Important Bird Areas that they own, are responsible for, or live near. In order for conservation to be successful, the support of those most directly associated with the site is needed. In many ways, all conservation is local and often includes a grassroots element. The Important Bird Areas Program strives to identify a network of sites and prioritize those places into a hierarchy, focusing on conservation need. With this information in hand a principle goal is engaging those closest to the IBA in that site's conservation.

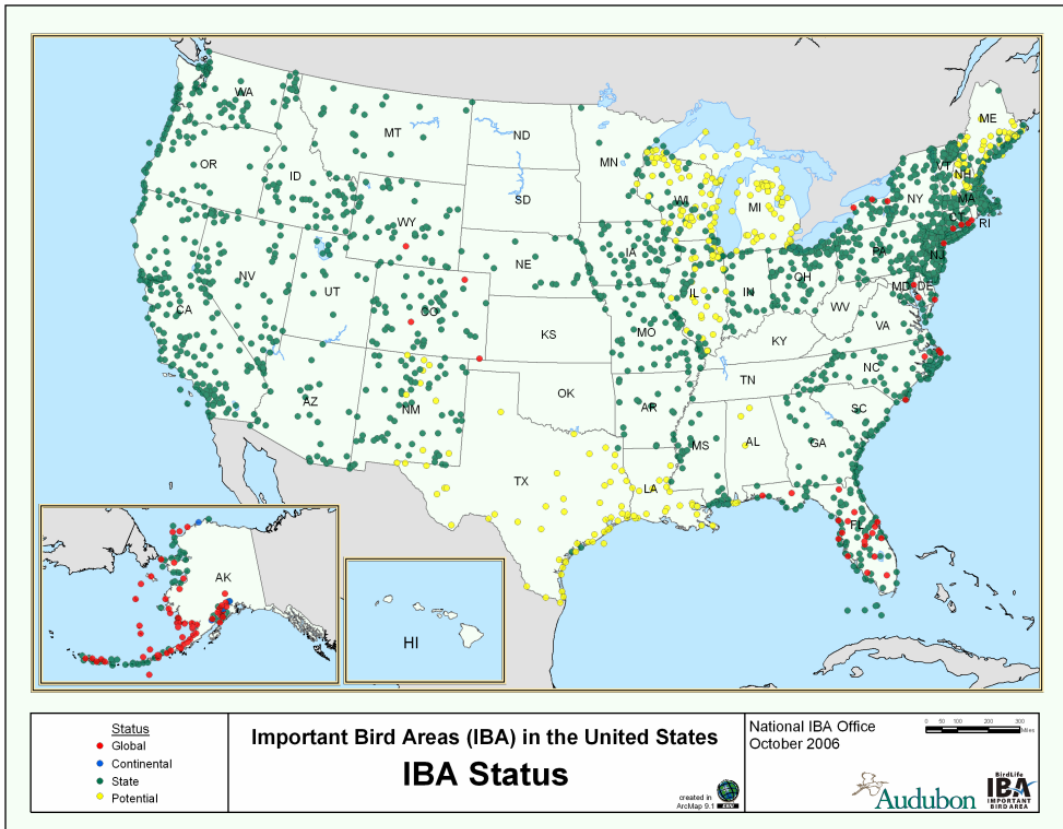


Figure 1. Important Bird Areas in the United States

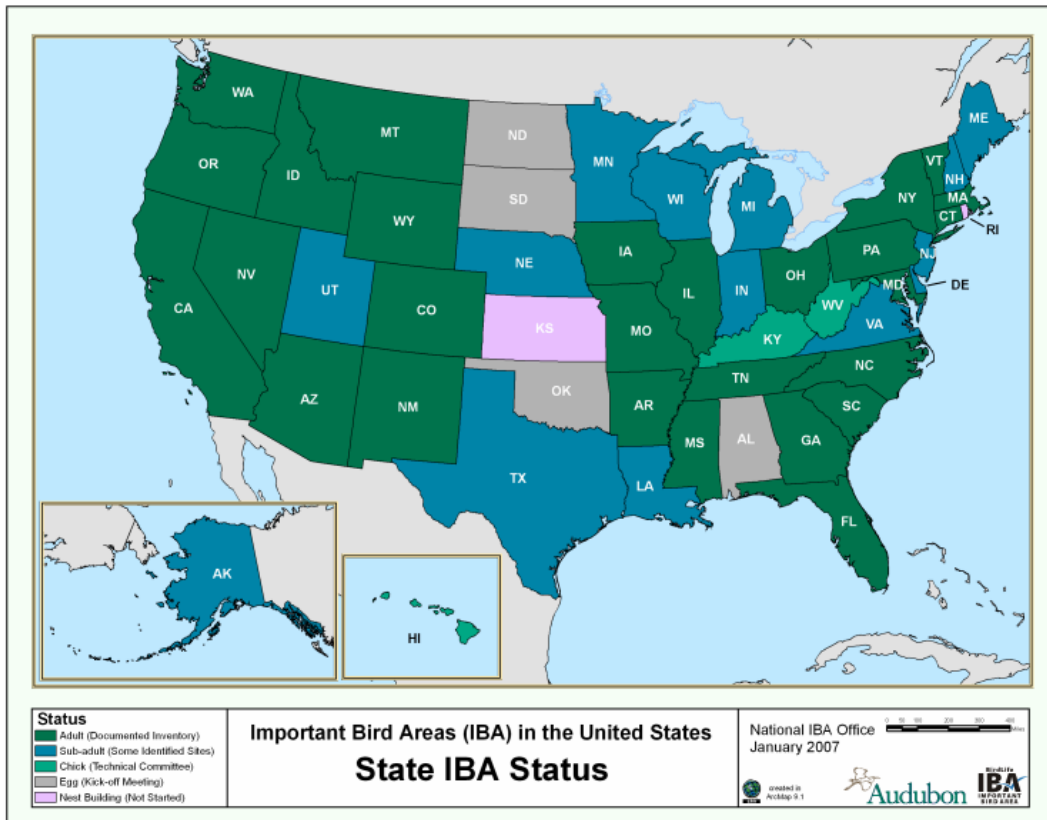


Figure 2. Status of Important Bird Area State Programs in the United States

This local conservation focus has assumed several names throughout the globe. In Africa the recruitment of landowners, individuals and community groups around an Important Bird Area create what are known as Site Support Groups. In Europe these IBA groups are often referred to as local conservation groups. In the United States these groups are often known as Important Bird Areas adoption groups.

Site Identification and Prioritization Process

The United States is unique among BirdLife partners in that the IBA Program is first implemented on a state-by-state basis with coordination of state-based efforts at the national level via Audubon’s national IBA office. In many, if not most, countries throughout the world the BirdLife International Partner implements and manages the IBA Program at the national scale. Audubon has taken this state-based approach in order to maximize the effectiveness of IBA conservation. A state-based IBA program helps to assure that the process is grassroots-driven.

The IBA process begins at the state level, with the hiring of an IBA coordinator and the establishment of a state IBA Technical Committee. State IBA technical committee members are experts in bird conservation, ecology, bird distributions, and natural history and also have expertise in ecological communities and broader conservation issues. Working with the state IBA Coordinator, the IBA Technical Committee then develops state specific IBA criteria and reviews nominated sites using these criteria. This results in the technical committee identifying (see Appendix A for a list of IBA status terms) a network of Important Bird Areas throughout the state based on available bird data contained in the nomination forms. This network of state-level IBAs are intended to be the primary focus of state bird conservation efforts, conservation planning, and conservation action.

For local site-based conservation to be effective, it is critical that those local efforts are tied to broader regional, national and international conservation planning, implementation, and evaluation efforts. In the U.S., the network of state-level IBAs and the professional and volunteer IBA conservationists working to conserve them are supported, in part, through a national IBA office. Some of the principal responsibilities of the national IBA office include the development of standards and practices as they relate to the identification, prioritization, and conservation of Important Bird Areas in the U.S.

State-level IBA criteria are unique to each state and are not standardized across states. While the IBAs identified using the state-level criteria can have tremendous importance locally, they can be limited in their value to larger regional, national, or international conservation planning efforts since comparisons among these sites are not always appropriate. To facilitate comparisons and more efficient and effective conservation planning and implementation at regional, national and international scales, Audubon has developed an IBA criteria hierarchy for the prioritization of state-level IBAs. Through the establishment of a U.S. IBA Technical Committee (similarly structured as the state technical committee), Audubon has adapted BirdLife's global IBA criteria for the U.S and then similarly developed a middle tier of continental IBA criteria, referred to by BirdLife International as regional criteria. The U.S. IBA Technical Committee, with assistance from the national IBA office, is responsible for prioritizing state-level IBAs into the global, continental and state hierarchy.

The following outlines the specific steps that a state IBA Coordinator takes in order to have state-level IBAs prioritized using this global and continental hierarchy:

1. The state IBA coordinator develops a list of Potential IBAs, often with the assistance of the state technical committee members. The details for those sites are entered into Audubon's IBA Database, and the status is set to Potential.
2. Nomination forms for the Potential sites are completed by volunteers, the IBA Coordinator, members of the IBA technical committee or the landowner of the site. The status should be changed to Nominated in Audubon's IBA Database, and information for species data and criteria, site criteria, ownership, habitats, landuse, and threats should be entered as compiled and available. The state technical committee reviews Nominated sites and identifies IBAs according to state-specific criteria. The status in the IBA database should then be changed to Identified.
3. Identified sites are termed as Recognized once the site information has been made available to the public, either through formal recognition events or publication of site information online or in hardcopy. A goal is to get all the IBAs that have been identified to be available to the public and Audubon's conservation partners.
4. State IBA Coordinators screen state-level IBAs using the global and continental IBA criteria thresholds. Sites potentially meeting these thresholds are proposed as globally or continentally significant using the IBA criteria codes for species criteria in Audubon's IBA Database. The national IBA coordinating office will provide assistance and training to support this process.
5. The state IBA coordinator communicates to national IBA staff their state's recommendation about proposed global- and continental-level IBAs.
6. Using the data within Audubon's IBA database, national IBA staff verify that the proposed state-level IBAs have sufficient information associated with them for U.S. IBA Technical Committee review and that the global- and continental-level IBA criteria have been proposed correctly.
7. If sufficient data are provided and criteria are proposed correctly, site reports for each IBA are prepared by national staff and submitted to the U.S. IBA Technical Committee for review.
8. The U.S. IBA Technical Committee, with support from the national IBA office, determines if there is sufficient information and justification for prioritizing the IBA at the global- or continental-level and either accepts, rejects, or returns the site for more information. Sites accepted by the U.S. IBA Technical Committee as meeting global or continental criteria will have those criteria confirmed in the database by the national IBA office.

Site Criteria

Important Bird Area criteria fall into four categories based on a species' vulnerability and/or responsibility. By definition, Important Bird Areas are sites that support: (1) species of conservation concern, (2) range-restricted species, (3) species vulnerable because they often occur in one general habitat type, and (4) species vulnerable due to a tendency to occur in large numbers. With these four criteria as general guides, more specific rules and thresholds have been established at a variety of scales to select specific sites.

As previously mentioned, Important Bird Areas Programs in the U.S. are implemented and managed at the state level with integration and coordination of those programs via a national IBA office. Generally, all criteria require a basic level of data to support the nomination of an IBA at the continental or global level, which includes a reliable estimate of the number of birds of a particular species at a site, in a season, in a year. State-level IBA criteria threshold requirements may be more flexible than the continental or global criteria and to a degree vary from state to state. For the continental and global criteria, it is important to have species-specific count data in all cases. Moreover, for conservation planning purposes, the IBA Program needs to understand the seasonal importance of a site and the species occurring there, rather than just the count of birds in a given year.

The conservation value of a site may change significantly over time due to changes in land use, threats, and/or ownership, among other factors. An intention of the IBA Program is to monitor the number of birds, the threats, and the habitat condition of IBAs on a regular basis to track the status of the IBA. For this reason it is important to report the counts of birds in a particular year rather than as an average over a number of years. Moreover, it is important that the identification of an IBA be based on relatively current data. The U.S. IBA Technical Committee, the group of ornithological experts responsible for reviewing all state-level IBAs for approval as continentally or globally significant, has established that data for site must be no more than 10 years old, or 15 years old in the case of Alaska (where site access is often particularly difficult and/or expensive).

IBA criteria for the U.S. fall into three priority tiers. At the highest level, those sites of greatest significance are global IBAs, followed by sites significant at a continental level and then sites significant at the state-level (Table 1).

Sites are initially identified as significant at the state-level using the state-level IBA criteria, with review by the state IBA technical committee. After the state identification process, the IBA is then evaluated to determine if it may meet the continental or global criteria. Sites proposed as global or continental IBAs are reviewed by Audubon's national IBA staff and then, if all of the necessary information is available, forwarded to Audubon's U.S. IBA Technical Committee for approval. The U.S. IBA technical committee is similar to the state technical committee in that it is comprised of experts on bird distribution, abundance, natural history and conservation at the national level.

Table 1 IBA Criteria Codes and Brief Descriptions.

| Criteria Level | Code | IBA Criteria Descriptions |
|----------------|-------|---|
| Global | A1 | A1-Global: Global Species of Conservation Concern |
| Global | A2 | A2-Global: Assemblage of Restricted-range species |
| Global | A3 | A3-Global: Assemblage of Biome-restricted species |
| Global | A4i | A4i-Global: >1% N.A. waterbird pop. simultaneously; 5% over season |
| Global | A4ii | A4ii-Global: >1% global pop. seabirds/terrestrial sp. simultaneously; 5% over season |
| Global | A4iii | A4iii-Global: > 20,000 waterbirds/ >10,000 seabirds |
| Global | A4iv | A4iv-Global: > 5% N.A. pop. migratory waterbirds; >5% global pop. migratory seabirds/terrestrial sp. during season |
| Continental | B1 | B1-North America: Continental Species of Conservation Concern |
| Continental | B3 | B3-North America: Assemblage of Bird Conservation Region-restricted Species |
| Continental | B4i | B4i-North America: >1% flyway/subsp. waterbird pop. simultaneously; 5% over season |
| Continental | B4ii | B4ii-North America: > 1% N.A. pop. seabirds/terrestrial sp. simultaneously; 5% over season |
| Continental | B4iv | B4iv-North America: >5% flyway/subsp. pop. migratory waterbirds; >5% N.A. pop. migratory seabirds/terrestrial sp. during season |
| State | D1 | D1-US State: State Species of Conservation Concern |
| State | D3 | D3-US State: Species in rare/unique habitat |
| State | D4i | D4i-US State: > 1% State population |
| State | D4ii | D4ii-US State: waterfowl (State defined) |
| State | D4iii | D4iii-US State: wading birds (State defined) |
| State | D4iv | D4iv-US State: seabirds/other colonial waterbirds (State defined) |

| | | |
|-------|-------|--|
| State | D4v | D4v-US State: shorebirds (State defined) |
| State | D4vi | D4vi-US State: raptors/season (State defined) |
| State | D4vii | D4vii- US State: outstanding landbird stopover |
| State | D5 | D5-US State: Research site |

Following is a detailed description of the IBA criteria at the global and continental level that are used to prioritize state-level IBAs.

Global A1 criteria for species of global conservation concern is used to prioritize sites that regularly holds significant numbers of a globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern. Under this criterion sites are identified for those species most threatened with extinction at the global level. This includes species classified as “Critical”, “Endangered”, “Vulnerable”, and “Near-Threatened”, according to universally recognized definitions of global threat status (BirdLife International 2004, BirdLife International 2000, IUCN/SSC 1994).

The thresholds used for criterion A1 are determined by threat status, dispersion pattern, and population size. For species listed as ‘Critical’ or ‘Endangered’, their regular presence at a site should be sufficient to merit IBA status, irrespective of their abundance at the site. Species listed as ‘Vulnerable’ or ‘Near-Threatened’ must regularly be present in ‘significant numbers’ for a site to qualify as an IBA. In the U.S., significant numbers are defined based on the global threat category and dispersion pattern of each species. However, thresholds have been further modified based on consideration of the global population size of each species and population scores established by bird conservation authorities. Population thresholds that must be regularly met at a site for it to qualify as an IBA at the A1 level are detailed in table two. It is expected that threshold numbers be supported simultaneously.

Table 2. Global A1 IBA criteria threshold guide.

| Conservation Status | Distribution | Pop. size score (PS)=5 | PS=4 | PS=3 | PS=2 |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|------|------|------|
| Critical or Endangered | | 1 pair / 1 individual | | | |
| Vulnerable | Dispersed | 5 pairs / 15 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | |
| Vulnerable | Aggregated | 10 pairs / 30 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | |
| Near-Threatened | Dispersed | 10 pairs / 30 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | x 4 |
| Near-Threatened | Aggregated | 20 pairs / 60 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | x 4 |

Global A2 range-restricted species criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to hold a significant component of the group of species whose breeding distributions define an Endemic Bird Area or a Secondary Area. Under this criterion, the most important sites within “Endemic Bird Areas” and “Secondary Areas” are identified. BirdLife International defines an Endemic Bird Area as a region to which two or more restricted-range species are confined, with “restricted-range” defined as a world distribution of less than 50,000 km² (Stattersfield et al. 1998). A “Secondary Area” is defined as the location where one range-restricted species occurs. Seabirds are excluded from these lists because their distributions are thought to be influenced by different factors than those affecting terrestrial species, and their conservation is covered through the application of other criteria.

Global A3 biome-restricted species criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to hold a significant component of the group of species whose distributions are largely or wholly confined to one avifaunal biome (Figure 3) (Rich 2004). This criterion applies to groups of bird species with largely shared distributions, often greater than 50,000 km², which occur mostly or wholly within all or part of a particular biome. Many of these assemblages are found in large areas of relatively intact and continuous habitat where delimiting IBAs may be particularly difficult. Biome-restricted species are those whose entire (global) *breeding* distribution lies entirely or mostly within the defined boundaries of the biome (Fishpool and Evans 2001). Seabirds are excluded from these lists because their distributions are thought to be influenced by different factors than those affecting terrestrial species, and their conservation is covered through the application of other criteria.

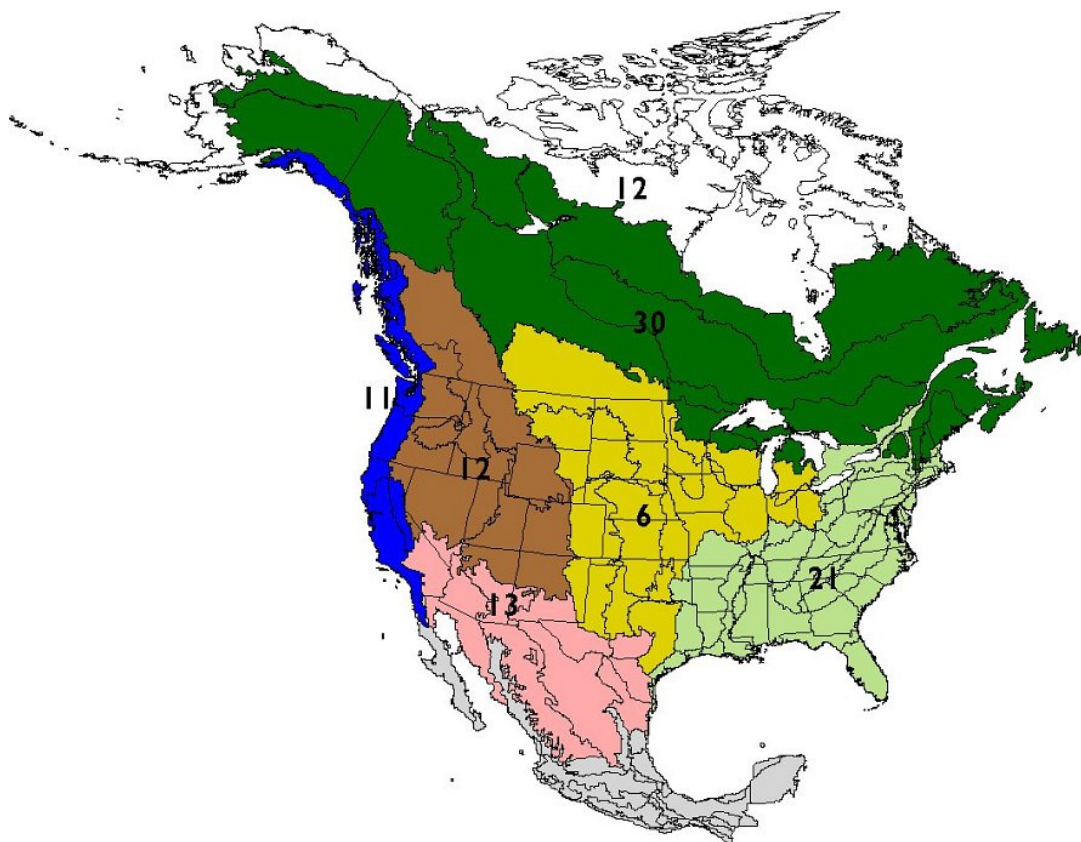


Figure 3. Avifaunal Biomes of North America. Numbers in bold indicate the number of bird species that have 90% or more of their range occurring within the biome.

Global A4 criteria applies to those species that are vulnerable due to their tendency to occur in large numbers (congregate) at regularly used sites, either at breeding colonies or during the non-breeding season, including at foraging, roosting and migratory stopover sites. Such stopover sites may not hold spectacular numbers at any one time, but nevertheless, do so over a relatively short period due to the rapid turnover of birds on passage. For the purpose of the US IBA Program, a relatively short period is defined as one season – spring, summer, fall, or winter – the dates of which should be determined based on the biology of the species in question. The A4 criterion is sub-divided into four subcategories to further delineate the significance of the sites.

Global A4i criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to support, on a regular basis, 1% or more of the North American population of a congregatory waterbird species simultaneously, or 5% over a season. Waterbirds are defined according to Table 3. The A4i criterion can be met if either of the following conditions applies. The number of individuals of a species in roosts, breeding colonies, feeding flocks or at a migratory stopover site regularly meets or exceeds 1% of the North American population ‘simultaneously’. The U.S. IBA Committee will use reason to further define ‘simultaneously’. The number of individuals of a species at a migratory stopover site regularly meets or exceeds 5% of the North American population over the course of the season.

Table 3. Waterbird Families

| Family | Commonly Referred to As |
|------------------|---|
| Gaviiformes | Loons |
| Podicipediformes | Grebes |
| Anseriformes | Geese, Swans, Ducks |
| Pelicaniformes | Pelicans, Cormorants, Anhingas |
| Ciconiiformes | Bitterns, Herons, Egrets, Ibis, Spoonbills, Storks |
| Gruiformes | Rails, Gallinules, Moorhen, Coots, Limpkins, Cranes |
| Charadriiformes | All ‘Shorebirds,’ Gulls, Terns, Skimmers |

Global A4ii criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to support, on a regular basis, 1% or more of the global population of a congregatory seabird or terrestrial species simultaneously, or 5% over a season. Seabirds are defined according to Table 4, and terrestrial species include all families not considered waterbirds or seabirds. As in A4i, this criteria is met when the number of species roosts, breeding colonies, feeding flocks or at a migratory stopover site regularly meets or exceeds 1% of the global population 'simultaneously' or 5% of the global population over the course of the season.

Table 4. Seabird Families

| Family | Commonly Referred to As |
|-------------------|---|
| Procellariiformes | All 'Tubenoses' |
| Pelicaniformes | Tropicbirds, Boobies, Gannets, Frigatebirds |
| Charadriiformes | Skuas, Jaegers, Alcids |

Global A4iii criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to support, on a regular basis, at least 20,000 waterbirds (Table 3), or at least 10,000 pairs of seabirds (Table 4), of one or more species. This criterion is rarely if ever used in the U.S. and was established by BirdLife International to further align with the Ramsar convention for recognizing wetlands of international significance (Ramsar 2006). This criterion is unique in that mixed species aggregations that exceed these thresholds can be used to apply this criterion. Further, criteria A4iii is intended to be used primarily in two cases: (1) where sufficient population data are not available to estimate 1% thresholds with any degree of accuracy and (2) to identify wetlands of international importance under Ramsar criterion 5 (Ramsar 2006). The relevance of criterion A4iii is limited in the U.S. Therefore, the U.S. IBA Committee, following BirdLife Europe's example, has agreed that it will not currently apply criterion A4iii, and only revisit it at a later date if sufficient justification can be made for its use.

Global A4iv criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to be a 'bottleneck site' where 5% or more of the North American population of a migratory waterbird species (Table 3), or 5% or more of the global population of a migratory seabird (Table 4) or terrestrial bird species, regularly passes during the spring and/or autumn migration season. As previously, terrestrial species include all families not considered waterbirds or seabirds.

This criterion applies to narrow migratory corridors such as narrow sea crossings, mountain ranges and passes, and other local areas where physiographic features concentrate migrants (*i.e.* not large areas like the entire coast of Texas). The A4iv criterion can be met if either of the following conditions applies: (1) The number of individuals of a waterbird species passing over a site during the course of spring or fall migration regularly meets or exceeds 5% of the North American population or (2) The number of individuals of a seabird or terrestrial species passing over a site during the course of spring or fall migration regularly meets or exceeds 5% of the global population. This criterion applies to the aerial space the birds fly through and the land/water below it. If threshold numbers of birds regularly stopover at the site then criteria A4i or A4ii applies.

Continental B1 criteria for selecting sites significant for species of continental conservation concern are defined as sites that regularly hold significant numbers of a regionally threatened species, or other species, subspecies, or flyway populations of regional conservation concern. Under this criterion, sites are identified for those species that are not globally threatened, but for which there is ample reason to believe that conservation actions are necessary to sustain them. This criterion is also used to identify sites for threatened flyway populations or populations of subspecies that would not otherwise be included in criterion A1.

The thresholds used for criterion B1 are determined by threat status, dispersion pattern, and population size. The B1 species have been classified into two threat categories Tier 1 and Tier 2 using several readily available bird conservation prioritization schemes. Tier 1 is defined by using Audubon's WatchListed red category (National Audubon Society 2002) and the species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as federally threatened or endangered species (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2003). Tier 2 is defined by using Audubon's WatchListed yellow category (National Audubon Society 2002) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Birds of Conservation Concern species (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002).

Population thresholds for the B1 continental IBA criteria have been modified to take into consideration the season-dependent dispersion patterns of each species. Thresholds for dispersed species are further modified based on taxonomy (passerine versus non-passerine), following procedures used by BirdLife International in Africa (Fishpool and Evans 2001). Population scores are used to further refine the population thresholds for identifying IBAs under criterion B1. For each lower population size score (higher abundance) the thresholds are raised.

Population thresholds that must be regularly met at a site for it to qualify as an IBA at the B1 level are outlined in Table 5. It is expected that threshold numbers be supported simultaneously.

Table 5 Continental (B1) IBA criteria threshold guide.

| Conservation Status | Distribution | Pop. size score (PS)=5 | PS=4 | PS=3 | PS=2 |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------|------|------|
| Tier 1 | Dispersed non-passerine | 10 pairs/30 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | |
| Tier 1 | Dispersed passerine | 20 pairs/60 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | |
| Tier 1 | Aggregated | 40 pairs/120 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | |
| Tier 2 | Dispersed non-passerine | 20 pairs/60 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | x 4 |
| Tier 2 | Dispersed passerine | 40 pairs/120 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | x 4 |
| Tier 2 | Aggregated | 80 pairs/240 individuals | x 2 | x 3 | x 4 |

Continental B3 criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to hold a significant component of the group of species whose distributions are concentrated in a sub-biome (Figure 4). This criterion is meant to assure that species are protected in the core of their range, regardless of their current threat. This criterion applies to groups of bird species with largely shared distributions. Many of these assemblages are found in large areas of relatively intact and continuous habitat where delimiting IBAs may be particularly difficult. Seabirds are excluded from these lists because their distributions are thought to be influenced by different factors than those affecting terrestrial species, and their conservation is covered through the application of other criteria.

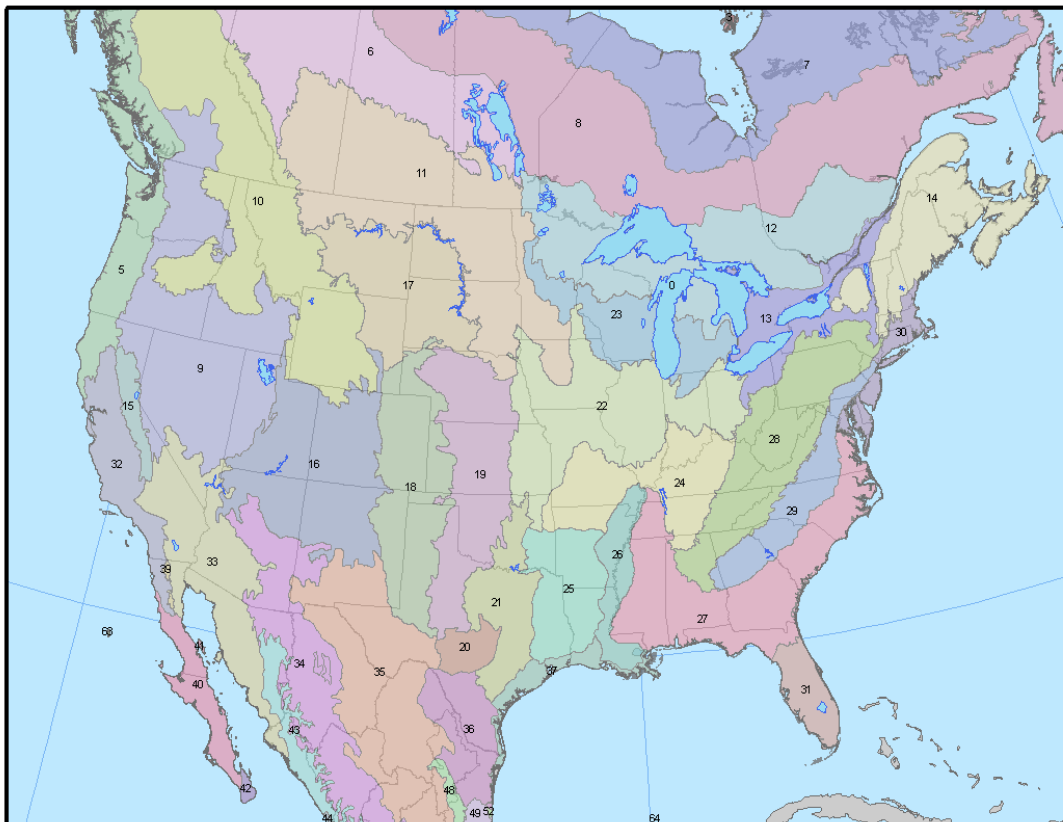


Figure 4. Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) of North America. Species with 30% or more of their range within a particular BCR are candidate for inclusion in sites selected using the continental B3 criteria. Numbers on this map refer to the numeric identified of the individual BCRs.

Continental B4 criteria is used to select sites important for regional (continentally) important congregations. This criteria applies to those sites that are known or thought to provide habitat for those species that are vulnerable due to their tendency to occur in large numbers (congregate) at regularly used sites, either at breeding colonies or during the non-breeding season, including at foraging, roosting and migratory stopover sites. Such stopover sites may not hold spectacular numbers at any one time, but nevertheless, do so over a relatively short period due to the rapid turnover of birds on passage. For the purpose of the US IBA Program, we define a “relatively short period” as one season – spring, summer, fall, or winter – the dates of which should be determined based on the biology of the species in question. The B4 criterion is sub-divided into four subcategories to further delineate the significance of the sites.

Continental B4i criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to support, on a regular basis, 1% or more of a subspecies or flyway population of a congregatory waterbird species (Table 3) simultaneously, or 5% over a season. The B4i criterion can be met if either of the following conditions applies. The number of individuals of a species in roosts, breeding colonies, feeding flocks or at a migratory stopover site regularly meets or exceeds 1% of the flyway or subspecies population simultaneously. The number of individuals of a species at a migratory stopover site regularly meets or exceeds 5% of the flyway or subspecies population over the course of the season.

Continental B4ii criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to support, on a regular basis, 1% or more of the North American population of a congregatory seabird (Table 4) or terrestrial species simultaneously, or 5% over a season. The B4ii criterion can be met if either of the following conditions applies. The number of individuals of a species in roosts, breeding colonies, feeding flocks or at migratory stopover sites regularly meets or exceeds 1% of the North American population ‘simultaneously’. The number of individuals of a species at a migratory stopover site must regularly meet or exceed 5% of the North American population over the course of the season.

Continental B4iv criteria is used to select sites that are known or thought to be a ‘bottleneck site’ where 5% or more of a subspecies or flyway population of a migratory waterbird species (Table 3), or 5% or more of the North American population of a migratory seabird (Table 4) or terrestrial bird species, regularly passes during a spring and/or autumn migration season. Terrestrial species include all families not considered waterbirds or seabirds.

As with the A4iv criterion, The B4iv criterion applies to narrow migratory corridors such as sea crossings, mountain ranges and passes, and other local areas where physiographic features concentrate migrants (i.e. not large areas like the entire coast of Texas). The B4iv criterion can be met if either of the following conditions applies. The number of individuals of a waterbird species passing over a site during the course of spring or fall migration regularly meets or exceeds 5% of the flyway or subspecies population. The number of individuals of a seabird or terrestrial species passing over a site during the course of spring or fall migration regularly meets or exceeds 5% of the North American population. This criterion applies to the aerial space the birds fly through and the land/water below it. If threshold numbers of birds regularly stopover at the site then criteria B4i or B4ii applies.

IBA criteria are only as good as the data used to apply them and the experts available to evaluate whether the information about the sites meets the IBA standards that have been set. The basic data needed to support the nomination of an IBA at the continental or global level is a reliable estimate of the number of birds of a particular species at a site, in a season, in a year. It is important to have species-specific count data in virtually all cases. For conservation planning purposes we need to know the seasonal importance of a site rather than just the count of birds in a given year. With this level of detail about a species occurrence at a site, specific recommendations can be made on how best to manage the habitats or what conservation actions may need to be undertaken to improve the site for the birds. Further, the conservation value of a site may change significantly over time due to changes in land use, the threats to a site, or landscape-level changes for example, those that occur as a consequence of urban sprawl.

In order to collect IBA data and prioritize sites at a national or even a state scale, specific data management tools are necessary. Audubon has developed its own data management system that allows for the processes of IBA identification and prioritization as described above to take place.