



Monitoring Landbirds in the Great Lakes Network Parks

Importance

- The nine Great Lakes Network national parks provide important breeding habitat for migratory and resident birds.
- Birds are of high interest to the public, and several species are threatened, endangered, or of special concern, particularly species of wetlands and open sand beaches, neotropical migrants, and grassland birds.
- Eight of the nine parks have monitored landbirds since the 1990s, and one (St. Croix National Scenic Riverway) began in 1982. The Network now has a standardized data collection protocol, and beginning in 2011, all nine Network parks will have a landbird monitoring program in place.

Status and Trends

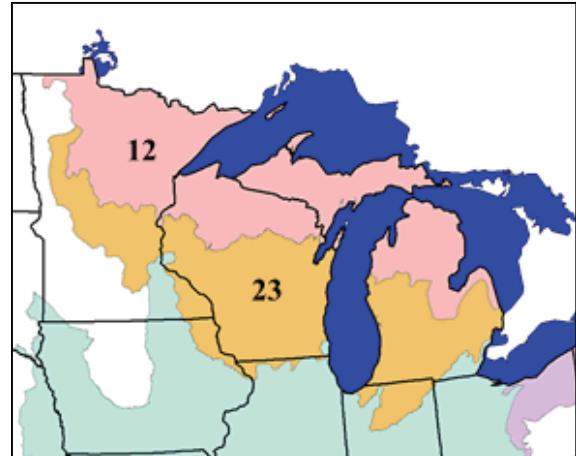
The Great Lakes Network national parks are spread across two Bird Conservation Regions (BCR), as identified by the international bird conservation organization, Partners in Flight (PIF) (see map). BCR 12 is the Boreal Hardwood Transition—approximately 150 million acres (61 million hectares) of mostly forested lands along the southern edge of the Canadian Shield. Thirty-six percent of BCR 12 lies within the United States, and 6½ of the Network parks represent this community. BCR 23, the Prairie Hardwood Transition, covers 45 million acres (19.2 million hectares) including southeastern Minnesota, southern Wisconsin and Michigan, and northern Indiana. Two-and-a-half Network parks lie within this region. (St. Croix National Scenic Riverway flows between BCRs, with the northern half in BCR 12 and the southern half in BCR 23.)

There are 39 priority species (those considered regionally or continentally important) in BCR 12, and 54 priority species in BCR 23. Thirty of the PIF priority species are also considered Species of Greatest Conservation Need by one or more of the states within the Great Lakes Network. Combining these two lists, we have identified 22 priority species for the Great Lakes Network parks (Table 1). Populations of 18 of these species are experiencing “apparent” or “significant” declines in one or both BCRs.

Management Implications

According to Partners in Flight, the northern forests of the Great Lakes region contain the highest overall breeding bird species richness in the U.S. and Canada. Approximately 98% of the land in BCR 12 is considered “protected” (national parks comprise 1.2% of that amount), while just 6% of the land in BCR 23 is in public ownership (the national parks comprising approximately 0.09% of the total). Still, PIF specifically identified Pictured Rocks, Sleeping Bear Dunes and Apostle Islands national lakeshores; St. Croix National Scenic Riverway; and Isle Royale and Voyageurs national parks as presenting “outstanding opportunities for implementing conservation measures.” Similarly, the Indiana shoreline of Lake Michigan in BCR 23 is identified as a globally important migration stopover site, and the two river parks (Mississippi and St. Croix), though not specifically mentioned, are part of a network of protected areas that includes the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge and forms an important flyway for migratory birds.

The challenges are big, but the opportunities are equally so. Even in the face of climate change and the potential effects it could have on plant communities, the parks can still provide important refuge for migratory and breeding birds, especially in the urban parks where large tracts of habitat are rare. Point count surveys are conducted in the Network parks each year, and these data are used to identify trends in species populations early enough to implement management actions.



Bird Conservation Regions (BCR) 12 and 23. From Birder Certification Online, www.birdercertification.org/.

Table 1. Great Lakes Network priority bird species.

Acadian Flycatcher	Golden-winged Warbler ¹
Black-billed Cuckoo ¹	Grasshopper Sparrow ¹
Black-throated Blue Warbler	Henslow's Sparrow ¹
Blue-winged Warbler ¹	Kirtland's Warbler
Bobolink ²	Least Flycatcher
Brown Thrasher ²	Olive-sided Flycatcher ¹
Canada Warbler ²	Red-headed Woodpecker ²
Cerulean Warbler ¹	Rusty Blackbird ¹
Connecticut Warbler ¹	Veery ¹
Dickcissel ¹	Willow Flycatcher ¹
Field Sparrow ²	Wood Thrush ¹

¹species declining in one Bird Conservation Region

²species declining in both BCRs.

Photo (Black-throated Blue Warbler) by Steve Maslowski/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service