

# Atlantic Coast Joint Venture News

*Partners working together for the conservation of native bird species in the Atlantic Flyway region of the United States.*

Winter 2006/2007

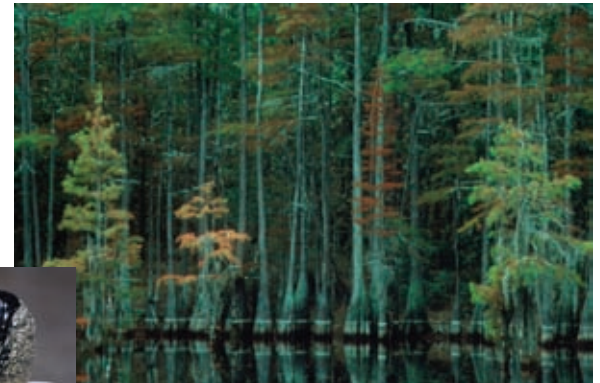
Volume 4, Number 1

## Coastal Wetlands Grants Awarded

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in December awarded more than \$5.6 million in National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants to six states in the Atlantic Flyway for projects in Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia to conserve, restore, and protect coastal wetlands. State resource agencies and other project partners contributed over \$20 million in matching funds for the federal grants, conserving over 35,000 acres of coastal habitats.

[View Coastal Grant summaries.](#)

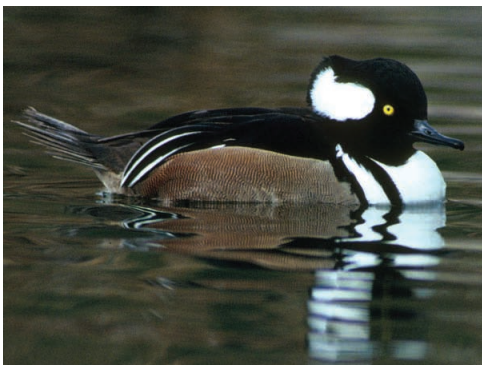
[Link to USFWS press release.](#)



The purchase of the Woodbury Tract along the Pee Dee River in South Carolina will protect over 25,000 acres; including important Wood Stork habitat.

## North American Wetland Conservation Act Grant Recommended for Approval in Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

The North American Wetlands Conservation Council, in December 2006, recommended funding an additional ACJV project in New Hampshire. Along with the [eleven projects approved in September, 2006](#) the most recent approved project would result in the conservation of thousands of acres of significant wetland, riverine and upland habitat for priority migratory birds.



Hooded Merganser roost on the Great Bay Estuary and feed in adjacent freshwater wetlands. *USFWS photo*

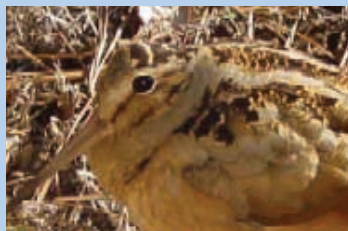
The Great Bay Estuary: Piscassic River Watershed proposal is an integral part of the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership's landscape scale conservation plan for protecting significant wetland and associated uplands in the Great Bay Focus Area. The Great Bay Estuary is the most important site for wintering waterfowl in New Hampshire and the watershed provides a good mix of habitat for other priority migratory birds. To date 7,470 acres have been protected through Partnership efforts, including 5,007 acres protected through North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) projects. This proposal builds upon the cumulative successes of five previous NAWCA grants (1995, 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2003) and will protect an additional 664 acres. A relatively small percentage of the proposal is wetlands, but virtually all of the project is within wetland buffer areas. The small tracts tie together existing

conservation lands based on an analysis of the highest priority habitats. The protection of these tracts has both direct benefits to wetland and wetland buffer areas in the watershed and indirect benefits to the estuary and the species that depend upon them.

[View previous Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership article.](#)



*Learn more about the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture program.*



### Upcoming meetings of the Joint Venture:

#### Winter 2007

ACJV Integrated Bird Conservation Committee  
February 12, 2007  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

ACJV Management Board  
February 12-14, 2007  
San Juan, Puerto Rico

ACJV Waterfowl Technical Committee  
March 4, 2007  
Saratoga, New York

#### Summer 2007

ACJV Waterfowl Technical Committee  
July 22, 2007  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

ACJV Integrated Bird Conservation Committee  
July 24, 2007 (tentative)  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

ACJV Management Board  
July 25, 2007  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

**Grant proposal deadlines:**  
North American Wetlands Conservation Act Standard Grants  
March 2, 2007 and July 27, 2007

National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Act Grants  
First week of June, 2007

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Private Stewardship Grant Program  
January 2007

## Florida All-Bird Initiatives Biologist Hired

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is pleased to introduce Heather Tipton as its new All-Bird Initiatives Biologist. This new position was created to develop and help implement a statewide avian conservation plan, and to increase Florida's participation in national and regional avian conservation initiatives. Heather started in the position in mid-November, returning to Florida after finishing her M.S. in Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University where she specialized in grassland bird ecology and monitoring. While in Colorado, she also worked with Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and the Colorado Division of Wildlife as a Wetlands Biologist. Prior to her work in Colorado, Heather was employed as a Wildlife Biologist with FWC at Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area where she worked with threatened and endangered species, such as Florida Scrub-Jays and Florida Grasshopper Sparrows, and helped develop and implement habitat management and restoration plans.



*Florida's Bird Conservation Regions.*

Development of Florida's All-Bird Conservation Plan is underway and will seek to incorporate stepped-down priorities of existing regional bird plans while providing additional direction to identify and prioritize avian monitoring, research, and conservation activities within the state as well as those crossing geopolitical boundaries. As Florida's all-bird conservation representative, Heather is off to a quick start, with plans to participate in the upcoming Southeast Partners in Flight and ACJV Management Board and Integrated Bird Conservation Committee meetings in early February.

Heather Tipton  
All-Bird Initiatives Biologist  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Species Conservation Planning  
1239 SW 10 St.  
Ocala, FL 34474  
Phone: 352-732-1225 x155  
Heather.Tipton@MyFWC.com

## Appalachian Mountains BCR Coordinator Hired

The Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Region Steering Committee is pleased to announce the selection of Brian Smith as the new coordinator for the partnership. Brian is planning on starting in early February and the office location is now being finalized. Brian is originally from Kentucky where he has worked for the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) since 2002, serving as their Small Game/Farm Bill Program Coordinator and most recently as their Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator. Brian has represented KDFWR on numerous committees including NRCS State Technical Committee, Mississippi Flyway Council Nongame Migratory Bird Technical Committee, technical and steering committees for 3 BCRs/JVs, and the Southeast Quail Study Group's Forestry Committee. Prior to working for Kentucky, he earned a B.S. in Wildlife Management from Eastern Kentucky University, an M.S. in Raptor Biology from Boise State University (Burrowing Owl research), and a Ph.D. in Forest Resource Science from West Virginia University (Ruffed Grouse research for the Appalachian Cooperative Grouse Research Project). He also is a Certified Wildlife Biologist through The Wildlife Society. Brian is married to Rebecca, his lovely wife of 7 years, has a 2.5 year

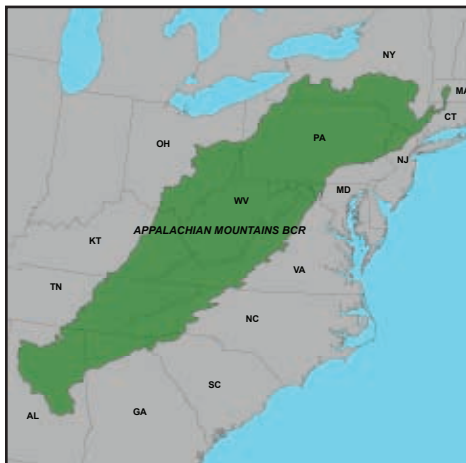


The 4th International  
Partners In Flight Conference  
February 13-16, 2008  
McAllen Convention Center  
McAllen, Texas

The conference theme will be *Tundra to Tropics: Connecting Birds, Habitats and People*, which will be shared with International Migratory Bird Day for 2008. The focus of the conference will be international connections of all sorts that further bird and habitat conservation throughout the Western Hemisphere. Concurrent paper sessions will focus on issues in bird conservation and will be of two types, 1) standard sessions typical of scientific society meetings, and 2) sessions followed by a facilitated discussion session. The goal of each of the latter sessions will be to produce a strategic action plan to be distributed to all partners within weeks of the conference. There will also be keynote speakers, vendors, social events, a poster session, a variety of single- and multi-day birding field trips, and a proceedings that will include papers developed from posters. Details will be posted on the [PIF web site](#) and distributed through various bird conservation listservs as they develop. Contact [Terry Rich](#) with inquiries.



Merlins are an example of a tundra to tropics species.. *Photo courtesy of Kent Nickel.*



*The Appalachian Bird Conservation Region is comprised of fifteen states.*

## South Carolina Partnership Launches Into Second Year of Searching for Ivory-Billed Woodpecker

Tantalized by signature sounds and fleeting glimpses, the South Carolina Ivory-billed Woodpecker Working Group has launched into its second season of searching for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (IBWO), hoping to capture that clear picture or video of the “Ghost Bird” that will prove the bird has survived in the swamps of the southeast since it was thought to have gone extinct in the early 1940’s.

Evidence collected in the 27,000 acre Congaree National Park has resulted in the South Carolina Partnership securing increased funding to launch into a new phase of searches in the Park and throughout South Carolina. Partners, including The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and the South Carolina Forestry Commission, have contributed almost \$180,000 to continue search efforts and implement new



Aerial photography of Congaree National Park.  
*NPS photo*

old daughter, Ani, and pursues various upland gamebirds with his German Shorthaired Pointer, Belle.

The Appalachian Mountains Bird Conservation Coordinator position is being funded through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and several state agencies and will be coordinated and supervised through the American Bird Conservancy. David Whitehurst of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is the present chair of the Steering Committee.

*Contact information will be posted on ACJV website when available.*



TNC crew members and Cornell search team (Pictured from left to right, John Cely, long-time volunteer, Nathan Banfield, Martjan Lammertink, Chris McCafferty, Amy Leist, Brett Hubbard, Zach Nelson, Peter Gordon, Katie Martin, Utami Setiorini and Matthew Moskwik.) *NPS photo*

strategies to find the rare woodpecker. Most recently, The Nature Conservancy has stepped forward to take a leadership role in current and future IBWO efforts in South Carolina.

A first task was to hire a full time coordinator to direct the many activities of the partnership. Matthew Moskwik, a field researcher and





Utami Setiorini above and Nathan Banfield, members of the IBWO search team, comb the Congaree Region for signs of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. *NPS photos.*



Pineland Creek. *Photo courtesy of Buddy Baker, SCDNR.*



Scaled bark may be evidence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. *USFWS photo*

avid birder, was hired by The Nature Conservancy to direct all facets of Ivory-billed Woodpecker work in South Carolina. Matthew holds a M.S. in biology from Eastern Washington University, and has extensive field experience in the United States, Costa Rica, and Sierra Leone. Additionally, a full time field crew of four was hired by TNC to continue searches in the Park and to scout and search others prime areas in the state.

Searchers are implementing a new search strategy to assist IBWO Recovery Team goals, led by University of Georgia scientists. This effort will assist in developing a habitat occupancy model across the species historic range. Other strategies include deploying Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) and Reconyx surveillance cameras at strategic points within the park to assist in detecting the bird, and utilizing spring and summer aerial reconnaissance photography to identify large patches of dead and dying stands of timber in which to concentrate intensive scouting for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker.

Partner funds were also used to hire a Mobile Search Team out of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology, led by world renowned large woodpecker expert, Martjan Lammertink. The Mobile Search Team has already spent four weeks in the Congaree region searching for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. The team is now in Florida and will soon be joining Dr. Geoff Hill's effort on the Choctawhatchee River in the panhandle of Florida. Daily activities of the Mobile Search Team, including their first four weeks at the Congaree National Park, can be found in their [travel log](#). The Mobile Search Team will be returning to South Carolina later in the season, continuing the effort to document the presence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker in South Carolina.

Search efforts to determine the presence of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker have begun in all southern states and search efforts to determine the presence of this species have also started in other southern states. Perhaps the most exciting news is coming from Florida, where a group of researchers from Auburn University and the University of Windsor, now in their second season, claim to have found a small population of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers on public protected lands in the panhandle. These exciting updates of observations of birds, vocalizations, and "double-knocks" from the Choctawhatchee can be found at the [Auburn](#) webpage. As the search season progresses, many will anxiously await the results of these region-wide searches in an effort to accurately assess the true status of this magnificent bird.

## The Congaree-Wateree-Santee Basin Initiative: A Commitment to Conserve the Critical South Carolina Midlands Area

One of the largest delta-forming rivers on the east coast begins in the mountains of North Carolina, merging many rivers that eventually flow into the Congaree and Wateree Rivers that join to form the Santee River, eventually reaching the Atlantic Ocean. This huge river system has carved the landscape over thousands of years to create vast flood plain forests, high bluffs, fertile soils, forests, rare or endangered species, and beauty beyond description. This basin covers over 300,000 acres and is a Focus Area of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, the Congaree-Wateree-Upper Santee Rivers Focus Area. The heart of the basin includes the 24,000-acre Congaree National Park, home to the largest old-growth bottomland hardwood forest remaining in the eastern United States. The area is rich in wildlife and cultural resources. Seasonally flooded bottomland hardwoods, numerous oxbow lakes, and beaver ponds once supported huge wintering mallard populations and is a priority



**ACJV Staff:**

Andrew Milliken, USFWS  
Joint Venture Coordinator  
300 Westgate Center Dr.  
Hadley, MA 01035  
Phone: 413/253-8269  
Fax: 413/253-8487  
Andrew\_Milliken@fws.gov

Mitch Hartley, USFWS  
North Atlantic Coordinator  
103 E. Plum Tree Rd.  
Sunderland, MA 01375  
Phone: 413/548-8002 X116  
Fax: 413/863-3070  
Mitch\_Hartley@fws.gov

Melanie Steinkamp, USFWS  
Mid-Atlantic Coordinator  
Nelson Lab, Room 203  
11410 American Holly Dr  
Laurel, MD 20708-4017  
tel: (301)497-5678  
fax: (301)497-5706  
Melanie\_Steinkamp@fws.gov

Craig Watson, USFWS  
South Atlantic Coordinator  
176 Croghan Spur Rd.  
Suite 200  
Charleston, SC 29407  
Phone: 843/727-4707 ext. 304  
Fax: 843/727-4092  
Craig\_Watson@fws.gov

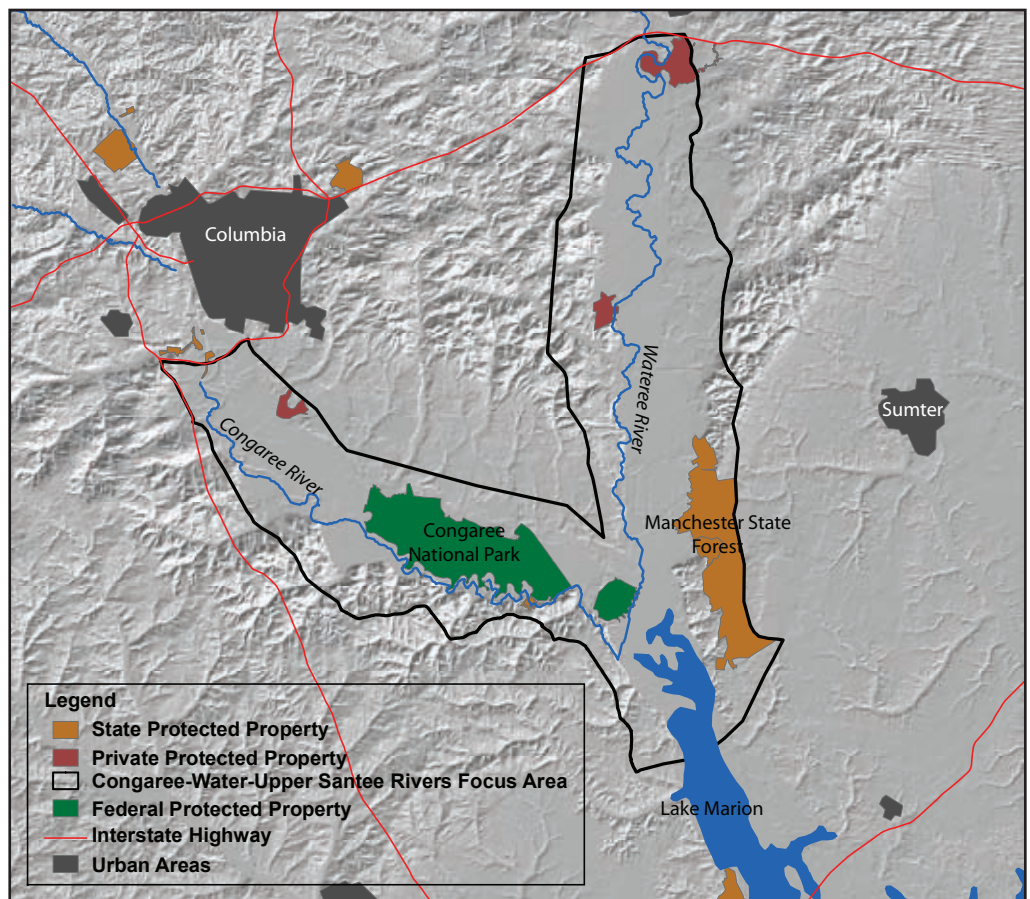
Tim Jones, USFWS  
Science Coordinator  
Nelson Lab, Room 209  
11410 American Holly Dr  
Laurel, MD 20708-4017  
tel: (301)497-5674  
fax: (301)497-5706  
tim\_jones@fws.gov

Debra Reynolds, USFWS  
Outreach Coordinator  
300 Westgate Center Dr.  
Hadley, MA 01035  
Phone: 413/253-8674  
Fax: 413/253-8487  
Debra\_Reynolds@fws.gov

Kirsten E. Luke  
GIS Analyst  
U.S. Geological Survey  
Patuxent Wildlife Research Center  
Nelson Lab, Room 207  
11410 American Holly Dr  
Laurel, MD 20708  
Phone: 301-497-5903  
Fax: 301-497-5706  
Kluke@usgs.gov

waterfowl restoration area. The National Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy recognize the bottomlands at the confluence of these rivers, referred to as the “Fork Swamp”, as a “Globally Important Bird Area”. Some of the highest winter songbird densities ever recorded has been observed in this basin.

In 2005, a partnership and task force of private landowners, conservation organizations, land trusts, and government agencies created the Congaree-Wateree-Santee Basin Initiative to promote conservation. The Task Force has targeted over 200,000 acres to preserve in this initiative, similar to the Lowcountry’s ACE Basin Initiative. This partnership works with willing private landowners to promote stewardship using a variety of tools ranging from technical and financial assistance to conservation easements. The success of this project rests on the willingness of current landowners to protect these river basins. Most (68%) of the land within this focus area is privately owned. These landowners have a long history of being good stewards of their resources; effectively managing their property for agriculture, forestry and wildlife purposes. The key for this initiative is to encourage the continuation of private ownership while insuring long-term protection and enhancement of resource stewardship. Support for the protection of this unique area is broad. In 2006, Governor Mark Sanford recognized the importance of this project and said: *“The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has recently established a Congaree/ Wateree/ Upper Santee River Focus Area initiative with a goal of protecting critical habitats and traditional land uses in these midlands river basin habitats. This project involves public and private conservation organizations working cooperatively with private landowners to promote and practice good resource stewardship.”*



*Protected Lands of the Congaree-Wateree-Santee Basin.*



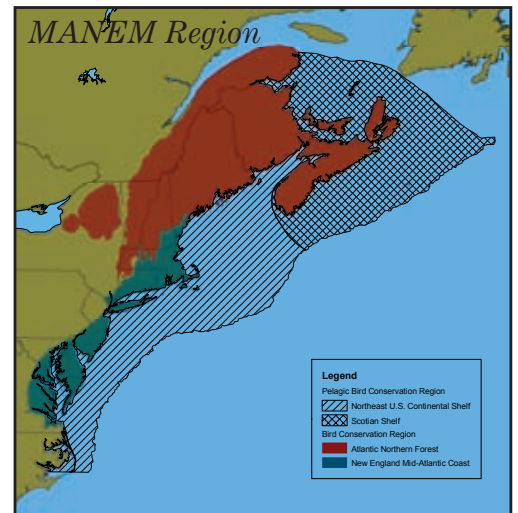


These areas are not only rich in wildlife habitat and cultural resources, their timber and agriculture have contributed to employment and a way of life unique to the area. Outdoor recreation opportunities for hunters, fishermen, hikers, birders, and boaters provide critical revenue for local businesses. To insure these recreational and financial opportunities for the future, conservation actions must be taken now by working together to promote habitat protection. The primary partners in this initiative are private landowners, the Congaree Land Trust, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., The Nature Conservancy, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture.

Part of the Task Force's job is identifying areas in danger of immediate development and protecting those areas, particularly on private lands. Again, from Mark Sanford, the Governor of South Carolina, *"I support the Congaree/ Wateree/ Upper Santee River Focus Area's efforts to encourage private landowners to voluntarily practice resource conservation to enhance the quality of life in the Midlands area and create a legacy of stewardship for future South Carolinians."*

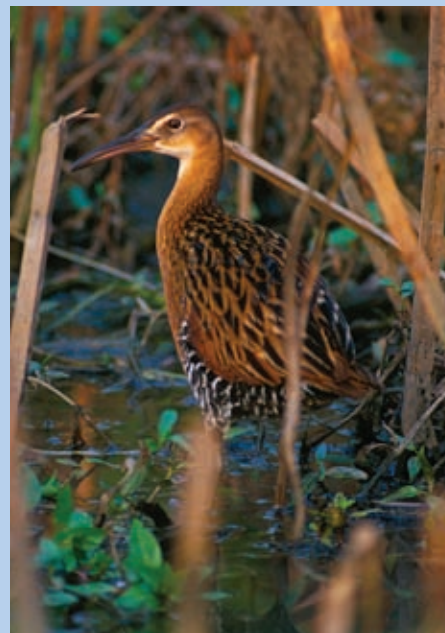
## Draft Mid-Atlantic/New England/Maritimes Waterbird Conservation Plan Available

A partnership of organizations and individuals working to facilitate waterbird conservation in the Mid-Atlantic/New England/Maritimes (MANEM) region of the US and Canada has developed a regional waterbird conservation plan to be implemented during 2006-2010. Over 200 partners comprising the MANEM Waterbird Working Group have compiled and interpreted technical information on the region's waterbird populations and habitats, assessed conservation status of these natural resources, developed strategies to ensure the persistence of sustainable waterbird populations in the region, and identified near-term priorities. MANEM partners include wildlife managers, scientists, policy makers, educators and funders.



The MANEM region consists of Bird Conservation Regions 14 (Atlantic Northern Forest) and 30 (New England/Mid-Atlantic Coast), and Pelagic Bird Conservation Regions 78 (Northeast US Continental Shelf) and 79 (Scotian Shelf). Seventy-four waterbird species utilize habitats in MANEM for breeding, migrating and wintering. Avian families include Gaviidae (loons), Podicipedidae (grebes), Procellariidae (shearwaters), Hydrobatidae (storm-petrels), Sulidae (boobies), Pelecanidae (pelicans), Phalacrocoracidae (cormorants), Ardeidae (herons), Threskiornithidae (ibises), Rallidae (rails), Laridae (gulls, terns), Stercoraridae (skuas, jaegers) and Alcidae (alcids). Partners in four subregions of MANEM selected 43 Focal Species for immediate conservation action.

The plan consists of technical appendices on 1) waterbird populations including occurrence, status, and conservation needs, 2) waterbird habitats and locations within the region that are critical to waterbird sustainability, 3) MANEM partners and regional expertise for waterbird conservation, and



Information on species like the Little Blue Heron (Photo courtesy of the South Florida Water Management District), the Common Loon (photo courtesy of Nathan Bacheler), and the King Rail (USFWS photo) can be found at the MANEM website.

4) conservation project descriptions that present current and proposed research, management, habitat acquisition, and education activities. Summarized information on waterbirds and their habitats provide a regional perspective for local conservation action. An Executive Summary and Abstract provide concise information in a popular format on near-term waterbird conservation priorities for the Mid-Atlantic/New England/Maritimes region of North America.

[View the draft plan.](#)

## New Analysis of Shorebird Surveys Shows Declining Trends in Northeast

A newly released study in the *Journal of Avian Biology* describes a broad decline in the average number of shorebirds recorded on surveys in the northeastern United States (International Shorebird Survey) and southeastern Canada (Maritimes Shorebird Survey) during the period 1980-2000. The average decline among the 30 species studied was 2.17 percent per year, equivalent to a 36 percent decline during 20 years. Survey results declined by more than 50 percent for 13 species and by more than 60 percent for 7 species. Some of the species showing the largest and statistically significant declines were Black-bellied Plover (65 percent), American Golden-plover (78 percent), Killdeer (63 percent), Upland Sandpiper (73 percent), Pectoral Sandpiper (61 percent), and Stilt Sandpiper (74 percent). The researchers concluded that the most likely explanation for their results is a decline in shorebird populations that migrate through the study area. They could not eliminate the possibility that a change in movements, for example shorebirds moving through the region more quickly during recent years of the study, caused the decline in survey results. Many other reports have appeared in the past decade suggesting that shorebird populations are declining in many parts of the world. Shorebird data from the Midwest also were studied. No clear pattern of change was detected in this region. This analysis confirms the need to support and expand continued surveys of shorebirds on the breeding migration and wintering regions to determine the limiting factors of these shorebird populations including surveys coordinated through the [Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring](#) (PRISM).

Contributing scientists were Jonathan Bart, U.S. Geological Survey; Stephen Brown and Brian Harrington, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, and Guy Morrison, Canadian Wildlife Service. The article is published in the January edition of the “[Journal of Avian Biology](#)”.



ACJV staff attended a “Joint Venture Conference” in Austin, Texas, December, 2006. From left to right: Kirsten Luke, Tim Jones, Melanie Steinkamp, Mitch Hartley, Debra Reynolds, Andrew Milliken, and Craig Watson.



The Black-bellied Plover (*above-USFWS photo*) and the Upland Sandpiper (*photo courtesy of Kent Nickel*) are two species showing significant declines in new shorebird survey.