






WATCHLIST 2007 Chicago Region

A State of the Birds Report
Fall 2007

A place on WatchList 2007 is a dubious distinction for 34 of the Chicago Region's birds. Using the latest research, including more than a century of data from the Christmas Bird Count and forty years of the Breeding Bird Survey, Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy analyzed population size and trends, distribution, and threats to identify the most critically imperiled birds in the U.S. "Red" list species are those at greatest risk of extinction. Birds on the yellow list need effective conservation action to avoid slipping closer to "red" list status. We must act to save them before time runs out.

The following are some of the species that depend on Chicago Region's habitats and our conservation commitment. For more information, visit www.habitatproject.org

CHICAGO REGION'S PRIORITIES

	WatchList Status
<p>BELL'S VIREO (<i>Charadrius Melodus</i>)</p> <p>An energetic bird of shrubby thickets in grasslands, unusual in that it sings while sitting on its nest. The best numbers are found at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie near Joliet, but a few nest most years in the forest preserve grasslands of Will, Cook, DuPage and Kane Counties. Planning for more healthy shrubland habitat in our preserves will help this bird.</p>	
<p>HENSLow'S SPARROW (<i>Charadrius Melodus</i>)</p> <p>The Henslow's Sparrow is one of the few prairie birds that does not also make its home in the mixed- or shortgrass prairie regions farther west, but relies entirely on the rich grasslands of Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio – the tallgrass prairie region - for habitat. These same grasslands have been almost completely converted to farmland, and were it not for preserved land and agricultural set-asides, this bird would have no habitat at all. The necklace of preserves surrounding Chicago contains many grasslands where these birds nest.</p>	
<p>RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (<i>Charadrius Melodus</i>)</p> <p>This woodpecker's entire head is bright red. Once this was the common woodpecker of the Illinois landscape. It is the classic bird of our open oak woodland and savanna (a grassland habitat with scattered trees, once widespread, now almost gone from the state). Along with habitat loss, competition with the introduced starling has contributed to this bird's decline.</p>	
<p>BLUE-WINGED WARBLER (<i>Charadrius Melodus</i>)</p> <p>Lives in shrubby grassland or open shrubby woodland. Both habitats suffer from invasive trees and shrubs and quickly become too shady for this and many other species without management. Originally a bird of areas that burned rarely, but intensely. In the modern landscape it requires conservation management to maintain habitat for this species and its associates.</p>	
<p>KING RAIL (<i>Charadrius Melodus</i>)</p> <p>This chicken-like marsh bird lives in large grassy marshes. Destruction of these habitats has led to lowered water tables, downstream flooding and water pollution. Efforts to reverse those problems by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the US Fish and Wildlife Service working with Forest Preserve Districts and other large landowners should be helpful to the King Rail.</p>	



CHICAGO REGION HABITATS AT RISK

Habitat losses have caused sharp declines in many of our grassland, woodland and wetland bird populations. Our grasslands are home to the fastest declining birds on the continent including two red Watchlist species, the Henslow's Sparrow and the Short-eared Owl. Grassland birds need expansive acreages of unbroken grassland – some need 50 acres; others need thousands. Our grasslands, once kept free of woody invasives by fire, now need our help to keep them open.

A closely associated habitat is shrubland – grasslands with woody growth that historically came and went in the prairie region, controlled by fire, flood and wind. Three red Watchlist species – the Bell's Vireo, the Blue-winged Warbler and the Willow Flycatcher – can be found in shrubby forest preserves and fields in the Chicago region. Our savannas – grasslands with trees – have almost vanished and such classic savanna birds as the Swainson's Hawk and Red-headed Woodpecker find themselves on the Watchlist. Our region holds some of the best wetland habitats in the state, breeding grounds for the King Rail and others.

During the enormous twice-yearly migration, all these habitats are also host to many other Watchlist species, and all face daunting threats.



WHAT AUDUBON CHICAGO REGION IS DOING

The Chicago region is home to a thriving community of active bird conservationists, citizen scientists and restoration volunteers. Audubon-Chicago Region works with local Audubon chapters and hundreds of individuals throughout the region to monitor bird populations and restore habitat. Our large restoration projects are model partnerships between public agencies and volunteers. These partnerships use best practices for ecosystem restoration and dramatically increase rare bird numbers in grasslands, woodlands and wetlands. We work within Chicago Wilderness to map and survey key habitats through our Grassland Blitz and Shrubland Blitz. We also work with forest preserve districts to support scientifically sound management practices for those birds.

Examples of effective conservation partnerships also include our work with Com Ed to improve shrubland bird habitat under power lines and our Lights Out program (which dims skyscraper lights) to protect birds migrating through the Loop. Our Important Bird Areas program identifies critical bird habitat throughout Illinois; we then work with local groups to promote the conservation of these areas.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can help bring back these Watchlist species in a variety of ways.

Homeowners:

- * Keep cats indoors, especially during migration
- * Fix problem windows that birds crash into
- * Maintain bird-friendly yards with layered, diverse landscaping and reduced insecticides.
- * Don't feed nest predators such as raccoons and opossums - cover garbage cans securely and don't spread more than a few tablespoons of bird seed on the ground.

Individuals:

- * Volunteer for habitat restoration projects
- * Volunteer for bird monitoring projects, such as the BCN Census and the Christmas Bird Count
- * Learn about local habitats and support sound management practices such as controlled burning and deer population control
- * Help to reduce the pressure on boreal forests (nesting grounds for many migrants) by using recycled paper and wood products
- * Learn about and support the many Farm Bill provisions that help grassland birds
- * Support organizations that work to increase bird populations

Public landowners:

- * Reduce fragmentation
- * Restore woodlands and grasslands to good ecological health.
- * Delay mowing large fields until after August 1st
- * Enroll farm acreages in conservation set-aside programs.
- * Install bird-friendly windows in buildings, and install layered, diverse vegetation in landscaped areas.