

# MIGRATORY SPECIES

*Learn about how the Nature Conservancy of Canada is protecting habitat for migrating species across the country*

## Overview

In Canada and around the world, animal migration is a key part of the conservation picture. Mammals, fish, birds, some reptiles and amphibians migrate. Some range short distances, others migrate for tens of thousands of kilometres, in search of food and places to breed and raise their young. The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) protects natural areas that are seasonal homes for many species during their annual migration cycles, including birds.

Many of the birds familiar to Canadians spend part of the year elsewhere: the United States, Mexico, Central America and South America. More than 400 migratory bird species rely on habitat in Canada and most are protected under the *Migratory Bird Convention Act* (1994).

Canada's bird populations are changing. Shorebirds, grassland birds and birds that eat flying insects are rapidly declining. Some waterfowl and birds of prey are starting to recover. Today, 90 bird species are considered at risk. Canada has lost three migratory bird species to extinction.

Each spring, Canada's skies fill with the sights and sounds of millions of birds returning from the south along the four major North American migration routes, or flyways (Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic). It is one of nature's great spectacles. But this seasonal movement is also an endangered phenomenon. Migratory birds are vulnerable to habitat loss, climate change, illegal hunting and pollution. Those that fly longer distances face more threats.

NCC protects habitat for more than 300 species of migratory birds. This includes critical breeding habitat as well as stopover sites where migrating birds pause to rest and feed and reenergize for marathon flights. These places not only help migrating species, they also contribute to global biodiversity conservation.

## Why NCC cares

1. Migratory birds provide incredible ecological services. They eat and control insects, disperse seeds and pollinate plants. Birds are also a food source for other wildlife.
2. Migratory birds are high up in the food chain and indicators of the health of natural systems that sustain us all. If the forests and grasslands are silent and if the birds are disappearing, that tells us it's time to act, because something is wrong. Grassland bird populations have shown steeper, more geographically widespread and more consistent decline than any other category of North American species.
3. Habitat conserved for migratory birds also supports other species.
4. Migratory birds bring us joy. From birdwatching to backyard feeders, they add colour and song to our world. They enhance our quality of life and our economy through recreation.

Disturbing any part of a migratory bird's life cycle and at any location along its migration route can be fatal. As Canada's leading national land trust, NCC supports migratory connectivity by protecting key breeding habitat and critical stopover sites. This helps birds survive year in and year out, so they may continue their flights for generations to come.



Red-headed woodpecker (Photo by Tony Campbell)

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## Examples of our work and impact

- NCC conserves more than 45 natural spaces across Canada that lie within Important Bird Areas.
- There are currently 92 migratory bird sanctuaries across Canada, 21 of which are located on or within five kilometres of NCC-conserved properties.
- There are seven Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network sites in Canada. NCC is working in and around four of these, including the Bay of Fundy (New Brunswick) and Quill Lakes (Saskatchewan).
- Habitat conserved for birds may also provide stopover sites for migratory insects and bats.
- Monarch butterfly populations have declined by over 80 per cent in the past few decades. This is a result of the loss of milkweed along their migration route, threats to winter habitat and climate change. Many sites that are important stopover habitats for birds are also used by migrating butterflies, dragonflies and bats.
- NCC contributes to research and monitoring migratory birds, including migratory species at risk, such as [loggerhead shrike](#), and through the installation of Motus radiotelemetry tracking towers on several NCC properties.

### Examples of areas where we work:

- » **British Columbia:** [Douglas Lake Plateau Important Bird Area](#)
- » **Alberta:** [Ministik, Joseph and Oliver Lakes Important Bird Area](#)
- » **Saskatchewan:** [Quill Lakes Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve](#)
- » **Manitoba:** [Monarch butterfly work](#)
- » **Ontario:** [Prince Edward County South Shore Important Bird Area](#)
- » **Quebec:** [Île aux Grues Important Bird Area](#)
- » **New Brunswick:** [Johnston's Mills Shorebird Reserve and Interpretive Centre](#)
- » **Nova Scotia:** [Port Joli Migratory Bird Sanctuary](#)
- » **Prince Edward Island:** [Boughton Island Important Bird Area](#)
- » **Newfoundland & Labrador:** [Codroy Valley Estuary Important Bird Area](#)

## Facts

- The Arctic tern migrates up to 40,000 kilometres annually, from pole to pole. It is one of nature's longest migrations.
- Conserved habitat at NCC's Johnson's Mills Shorebird Reserve is used by 30 per cent of the world's semipalmated sandpipers every summer.

Around the world, the spectacle of migratory wildlife is at increasing risk. From songbirds to shorebirds, the annual journey from Canada to other countries is becoming increasingly perilous because of habitat loss and the effects of climate change.



Monarch (Photo by Cathy Shaluk)

For more information on how NCC is protecting habitat for migratory species across Canada, visit [natureconservancy.ca/migration](https://natureconservancy.ca/migration).