

WISCONSIN BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

2018-2022

*Celebrating 15 years of gains for
Wisconsin birds and charting a course
for the next five years*



Fox Sparrow. Photo by Ryan Brady.



WISCONSINBIRDS.ORG

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Maximizing public awareness of and connection with birds is one of WBCI's goals. Photo by William Mueller.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its creation 15 years ago, the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative has made remarkable gains for bird conservation, not the least bringing together 180 organizations to work collaboratively toward common goals. Our power is in our partnerships.

Our achievements include identifying [92 essential bird habitat areas](#) known as Important Bird Areas, or IBAs, to focus conservation work; creating a comprehensive plan recommending habitat protection, restoration and management measures for 116 priority bird species; creating a Bird City program that has engaged more than 100 communities in taking hundreds of actions to maintain healthy bird populations; and helping develop the Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail, a set of online and printed birding guides for five regions of Wisconsin.

WBCI is refocusing the partnership to ensure its continued success and respond to changing needs and challenges facing bird conservation in Wisconsin. As part of that effort, we've revised our strategic plan to guide the next five years.

Our strategic plan will help accelerate bird conservation by completing high priority actions including:

- Secure third-party funding for a WBCI coordinator and identify the position's organizational home. The coordinator was critical in driving the partnership's past success and filling that vacancy will allow more on-the-ground conservation work and public outreach.
- Identify and promote opportunities to enhance the 92 Important Bird Areas and reduce threats to these important areas and the birds using them.
- Finish the Breeding Bird Atlas II, a 5-year effort to survey bird abundance and distribution. Results will help guide land management and other conservation actions for the next generation.
- Continue citizen-based surveys for nocturnal birds and marsh birds.
- Identify gaps in monitoring and research and provide coordinated research and monitoring to aid in developing strategies for stemming declines in select species.
- Continue hosting annual conferences to build capacity and commitment to WBCI goals and continue developing white papers to increase public understanding of risks to birds and how to reduce them.

By working together to carry out these high priority actions and secondary actions, we believe WBCI will significantly advance conservation of all native bird species, including the 21 percent with low or declining populations.

BIRD BASICS IN WISCONSIN*

- 311 regularly occurring bird species
- 21% species low or declining
- 92 Important Bird Areas
- #2 ranked state in birdwatching participation
- 33 percent, or 1.68 million, Wisconsin residents 16 and older report birdwatching
- Wisconsin's Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi River flyway integral to U.S. bird populations

**Bird Basics in Wisconsin sources: WBCI; "Birding in the United States: a demographic and economic analysis addendum to the 2011 national survey of fishing, hunting, and wildlife-associated recreation," U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*

OVERVIEW

The Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, WBCI for short, is a voluntary partnership of more than 180 organizations working together to maintain and enhance native bird populations. WBCI partners include bird clubs, hunting and fishing groups, government agencies, land trusts, nature centers, environmental groups, universities, and businesses.

WBCI partners have accomplished remarkable gains for Wisconsin bird conservation over the initiative's first 15 years. Achievements include identifying 92 essential bird habitat areas, known as Important Bird Areas, or IBAs; creating a comprehensive plan recommending habitat protection, restoration and management measures for 116 priority bird species; and creating a Bird City program that has engaged more than 100 communities in taking hundreds of actions to maintain healthy bird populations.

TWENTY-ONE PERCENT, OR 66 OF WISCONSIN'S 311 REGULARLY OCCURRING SPECIES, ARE OF CONSERVATION CONCERN DUE TO DECLINING POPULATIONS.



More than 100 communities are now Bird Cities.

These and other achievements have provided a solid foundation to advance more on-the-ground conservation work for Wisconsin birds. This revision of WBCI's strategic plan focuses on the next five years, 2018-2022. It envisions ramping up conservation actions benefitting Important Bird Areas and successfully completing the comprehensive Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas survey documenting the distribution and abundance of Wisconsin birds.

This revised strategic plan also responds to evolving bird conservation needs and priorities and a reduction in state staff and funding. The plan seeks to maximize the partnership's ongoing contributions to bird conservation in Wisconsin.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative's goals include conserving and restoring endangered, threatened, and rare bird species and their habitats, educating Wisconsin citizens about birds and bird conservation issues, and promoting bird-based recreation and the enjoyment of birds.

WBCI was modeled after the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies began to develop starting in 1998 with non-governmental organizations and federal, state,

and provincial agencies. A main objective was to link bird conservation efforts in the United States with similar efforts in Canada and Mexico through existing initiatives. The U.S. NABCI Committee brings together partners that work across state and country boundaries, and across taxonomic groups to ensure that North American bird conservation is coordinated at a scale most relevant for the birds in the U.S. and beyond.

WBCI was hatched in May 2001 when 65 initial organizations signed on as partners. We mark the formal start of WBCI, however, as the date of its first Coordinating Council meeting in March 2002. From the start, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) funded a dedicated WBCI coordinator position, a major asset to the partnership until 2013. The DNR also supported two half-time staff positions dedicated to WBCI work: one focused on Important Bird Areas and the other leading research and monitoring efforts. For several years, the IBA coordinator was a full-time position.

In 2008 the Coordinating Council voted to reconfigure itself into a Steering Committee, a mixture of permanent and at-large representatives that continues today. The permanent representatives are the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, Wisconsin DNR, USDA Natural

Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Wisconsin Audubon Council. There are currently four ad hoc members: Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation & Culture, Raptor Education Group, Inc., Western Great Lakes Bird & Bat Observatory, and Wisconsin County Forests Association.



WBCI partners including REGI provide important bird rehabilitation and public education opportunities.

WBCI'S OVERALL "MISSION" IS TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE NATIVE BIRD POPULATIONS THROUGH A COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIP.

Partners made significant progress from 2002–2017 in meeting that mission. Some of WBCI's significant accomplishments are highlighted in the attached appendix.

TRANSITION CHALLENGES

In July 2013, the DNR-hosted WBCI coordinator left that position and replacement was put on hold while DNR conducted a multi-year internal restructuring review. In early 2017 the DNR informed WBCI that, due to resource limitations, it would no longer fund the coordinator position but would continue funding for one half-time staff position.

The loss of the coordinator significantly reduced WBCI's capacity and spurred the Steering Committee to launch its strategic planning effort. This also gave the committee a chance to reflect on changing needs and challenges facing bird conservation in today's political and social environment.

PLANNING PROCESS

The WBCI Steering Committee held Strategic Plan revision sessions in March and September 2017. An outside facilitator experienced in strategic planning assisted the effort.

The planning effort began with formulating major “Objectives” for the partnership over the next five-year period, which all fell under the overarching goal of maintaining and restoring native Wisconsin bird species. The Objectives are:

- Optimize Organizational Capacity
- Promote an Active, Engaged Partnership
- Maximize Habitat Quantity and Quality for Birds
- Maximize Public Awareness of and Connection with Birds
- Minimize or Mitigate Threats: Direct or Indirect
- Support Research and Monitoring

Steering committee members considered a wide range of “Projects” that WBCI might pursue in the coming years. Some were continuations of past efforts while some were new initiatives. The possible projects were looked at to see how they would contribute to the six Objectives. Possible projects were grouped into Alternate Plans, ranked by steering committee members. The revised strategic plan contains the selected projects.

The selected projects are discussed in the remainder of this strategic plan. They are grouped under the overall Objectives used in the selection process. Each Project:

- Identifies its priority level over the next five years;
- Summarizes how it was addressed by WBCI during the initial 15-year period;
- Summarizes the desired outcomes during the next five years;
- Identifies whether the project can be accomplished with existing WBCI resources (DNR positions and partner efforts), whether it requires additional resources (e.g. a replacement coordinator), or whether it is scalable, meaning that some level of achievement is possible under current resources, while an expanded level could be accomplished with additional resources.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Once the strategic plan is finalized, the WBCI Steering Committee will further identify priorities based on the existing level of resources. These first projects will be those steering committee members believe will best balance a good chance of success, their overall priority identified in this plan, and the capacity of WBCI to take them on. Work plans will be developed for each of these priorities.

Over the plan’s 5-year period, these focus projects are expected to change as WBCI’s resources, partner capacity and bird conservation needs evolve.

OBJECTIVE 1

OPTIMIZE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: SECURE THIRD-PARTY FUNDING FOR A WBCI COORDINATOR AND IDENTIFY THE POSITION'S ORGANIZATIONAL HOME

From 2002 through 2013, WBCI had a full-time coordinator with key responsibilities including partner recruitment and coordination, public outreach, and project facilitation. The coordinator played a critical role in WBCI's success and the accomplishments detailed in the appendix.

Securing funds to hire a new coordinator is a high priority for WBCI's continued success, because most partner organizations do not have the capacity to provide coordination services for WBCI.

Previously, the coordinator position was supported by the DNR primarily through the use of federal funds including State Wildlife Grants and Pittman-Robertson funds; those funds and the project position are no longer available from DNR.

Since the new coordinator will not be a DNR employee, WBCI must identify and establish a new organizational home for the coordinator position. Until then, in-kind provision of partner resources will continue to play an integral role in WBCI operations and WBCI's existing organizational structure will remain in place until a coordinator is hired. Organizational structure review will occur after the coordinator position is filled and operational.

For much of its history, the majority of WBCI funding for specific projects was provided as in-kind partners contributions. Outside fundraising was a minor source of resources for the partnership. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing level of support for WBCI-related projects from the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin's Bird Protection Fund. Acquiring additional third-party funding for WBCI projects is an important task going forward. A coordinator would help expand these ongoing efforts and seek additional project-related third-party funding.

OBJECTIVE 2

PROMOTE AN ACTIVE, ENGAGED PARTNERSHIP

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: IDENTIFY PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS

WBCI will re-engage partners through consistent, strategic communication.

At its core, WBCI is a partnership and cannot exist without its member partners. Partners played important roles during WBCI's genesis, including mission and plan development, committee and subcommittee work, and planning and hosting conferences and workshops.

Partners continue to be critical to WBCI's success and have indicated through surveys their desire for more regular communication about WBCI priorities and specific projects. Providing that ongoing, periodic, strategic communication is key to engaging partners and must be a two-way street.

WBCI needs to learn about our partners: their primary missions, strengths, and how they can best contribute to the partnership. In turn, partners need to know what WBCI (collectively, our partners) is doing, and what WBCI can provide to them. How can WBCI add value to partners and vice versa?

Past partnership engagement tools included electronic newsletters, annual meetings and workshops, invitations to Coordinating Council meetings, and surveys. As WBCI is capable, we will re-engage with partners through better, more consistent and strategic communication using these tools and new tools, including social media. By providing a platform for partners to feature their work and stories, we hope that partners will be able to connect and leverage their efforts. The more resources WBCI has, the more partners will be engaged.

Annual conferences and workshops, like those WBCI has held almost every year from 2002-2016, will be one of the key avenues for engaging partners, connecting with more external partners on topics of mutual importance, and reaching out to local residents who can be advocates for WBCI projects.

OBJECTIVE 3

MAXIMIZE HABITAT QUANTITY AND QUALITY FOR BIRDS

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: USE WISCONSIN'S IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS (IBA) PROGRAM TO ADVANCE STATEWIDE BIRD CONSERVATION

In its first 15 years, WBCI identified and designated 92 IBAs that provide essential habitat for one or more species of breeding or non-breeding birds. Recognition of a site as an IBA does not confer any legal status or regulatory requirements. Our strategic plan places a major new emphasis on putting these IBA designations to work for bird conservation, however.

Activities could range from widely sharing IBA success stories to encourage other management successes like that unfolding on the Leopold-Pine Island Important Bird Area, to developing tools to further assess the existing condition of sites, to insuring IBA information is collated and accessible. The designations also can help foster efforts to identify and seek partner funding to enhance sites. And they can spur developing strategies for identifying threats to IBAs and helping coalesce and catalyze partner efforts to reduce or eliminate those threats.

Some simple steps can be accomplished with existing WBCI resources, but additional resources are necessary for this effort to maximize the benefits of IBA designations.

The Leopold-Pine Island Important Bird Area (IBA) straddling the Wisconsin River in Sauk and Columbia counties is a model for bird conservation and for WBCI's new strategic emphasis on using IBA designations to spur other conservation actions. A 16,000-acre mosaic of marsh, grassland, floodplain and upland forest and farmland, this IBA includes five large tracts managed by federal and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private individuals and families.

Landowners are working together to intensively manage the area to provide and improve habitat for many declining grassland birds such as the red-headed woodpecker, bobolink, and meadowlark and to address other threats, including power lines. Their collective planning has driven where, when and how to use management activities to benefit birds and other wildlife. Timber harvests, prescribed burning, prairie plantings, mowing, invasive species control, and wetland and stream restorations are among the conservation actions reflecting that planning.

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: UPDATE WBCI ALL-BIRD PLAN

With state, regional and national conservation plans updated since WBCI produced the Wisconsin All-Bird Conservation Plan in 2013, it is time to update WBCI's All-Bird Plan and assure its priority ranking of birds is consistent with those other plans.

WBCI's All-Bird Plan synthesizes conservation issues for 116 priority bird species and provides recommendations for habitat protection, restoration and management actions that will have the greatest impact on those species. WBCI developed a priority species list by synthesizing the targeted species from the national bird conservation plans for waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds and landbirds, regional planning documents, and Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan into one comprehensive list.

The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan, first published by DNR in 2005 as a comprehensive resource for the conservation of all rare and declining species, including birds, was updated in 2015 and its priority listing of birds changed at that time. It should be noted that the 15 bird species added to the SGCN list in the 2015 plan revision do not have species conservation accounts in the All-Bird Plan, nor has DNR issued Species Guidance documents related to them. Adding additional species accounts in the All-Bird Plan would ensure all SGCN have consistent treatment.

In order to establish compatible statewide conservation objectives, it is desirable to have a consistent priority ranking of bird species, so WBCI should update its All-Bird Plan and its bird priority rankings. Because the All-Bird Plan and the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan are used by different audiences in different ways, the two should remain separate, but their bird priority rankings should be consistent with one another and with other national and regional planning efforts. Updates to the All-Bird Plan species list can be completed with existing resources. Additional resources would be required for any other significant updates.

MEDIUM PRIORITY ACTION: CONTINUE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STOPOVER INITIATIVE

Protection and management of important stopover sites is a fundamental component of full life cycle conservation for migratory birds. The DNR will continue to house and support the Wisconsin Stopover Initiative and ensure stopover efforts are complementary to WBCI's bird conservation efforts. WBCI partners can provide additional resources to help protect key stopover areas.

MEDIUM PRIORITY ACTION: INTERNATIONAL

Conservation of wintering grounds is an important component of full life cycle conservation for migratory birds. Recognition of numerous species as "winter limited," meaning the availability of quality wintering habitat is the most important factor limiting survival and by extension, populations, underscores the importance of accelerating wintering ground conservation efforts.

WBCI international has historically supported numerous habitat conservation projects in Latin America. Due to capacity limitations, WBCI does not have the resources to actively re-engage in international conservation efforts short-term. WBCI's interest in and ability to address this need can be revisited contingent on availability of resources.

OBJECTIVE 4

MAXIMIZE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF AND CONNECTION WITH BIRDS

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN INCLUDING KEY CONSERVATION MESSAGES

WBCI has developed tools, materials, and key messages for partner bird conservation efforts. Those materials will form the basis for a new communication plan and include a strong marketing component. The following strategies will be used.

- Establish a WBCI marketing team to facilitate development and dissemination of key conservation messages contained within an updated communication plan.
- Encourage multiple partners to work together to raise public awareness of bird conservation.
- Encourage multiple partners to work together on disseminating common conservation messages to influence decisions on specific projects, policies, or actions that have bird conservation implications.
- Develop conservation story lines to raise awareness of bird conservation among broad audiences.

The project is scalable if WBCI focuses efforts on priority partners. Reaching out to all partners will require additional resources.

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: INITIATE PUBLIC OUTREACH

Given existing capacity, WBCI identified the following outreach activities:

- Continue sharing information among WBCI's partners about current projects, accomplishments, and future initiatives, and provide tools and messages to facilitate partner outreach on WBCI's behalf.
- Enhance communication with the "bird" public about WBCI accomplishments through various media tools (website, Facebook, news releases, etc.).
- Provide technical resources for resource managers, researchers, educators and others to use in project or policy decision-making to positively influence bird conservation.

MEDIUM PRIORITY ACTION: MAINTAIN A CURRENT WEBSITE

The WBCI website will be regularly updated with current bird conservation news.

WBCI has historically used various media (website, newsletter, social media etc.) to disseminate current information about bird-related news, events, opportunities, and resources for WBCI partners and the public. Additional resources will be needed to significantly scale-up other outreach.

MEDIUM PRIORITY ACTION: DEVELOP THE WEBSITE AS A ONE-STOP SHOP FOR BIRD INFORMATION

Expanding the WBCI website to include information about all bird-related projects in Wisconsin would provide a valuable resource for the statewide conservation community and the public.

This action can be accomplished with available resources.

OBJECTIVE 5

MINIMIZE OR MITIGATE THREATS TO BIRDS

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: HOST ANNUAL CONFERENCES AND CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF WHITE PAPERS

WBCI has held annual conferences and/or workshops almost every year from 2002–2016, each focusing on a significant bird conservation issue or project. These conferences have assisted in building an active, engaged partnership, with partner involvement a key to conference success.

WBCI also has produced eight white papers, each providing detailed information on specific risks to birds and how they can be reduced. The issue papers on cats, climate change, deer herbivory, window collisions, wind power, birding ethics, pesticides, and lead poisoning are all available for download on the WBCI website. These need to be kept up-to-date.

Organization of annual conferences and development of new white papers will be driven by current and emerging bird conservation needs, along with practical ways to address these. These actions can be accomplished with existing resources.

OBJECTIVE 6

SUPPORT RESEARCH AND MONITORING

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: FINISH BREEDING BIRD ATLAS II

WBCI is one of four entities implementing Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II, a statewide, citizen-based survey documenting the abundance and distribution of Wisconsin's nesting birds. Although field data collection occurs from 2015–2019, initial planning commenced in earnest around 2012 and publication of results is likely as late as 2022.

Over the next five years, WBCI's participation in the Atlas is expected to continue. The partnership's primary role is to communicate project news, needs, and results, in the short term mobilizing volunteers to collect data in priority blocks over the project's final years, and in the long term getting results into partners' hands for better management and conservation of Wisconsin's breeding species.

This project can be accomplished with existing resources. Additional resources could expand communications that catalyze partners and lead to greater likelihood of project success.

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: CONTINUE CITIZEN-BASED SURVEYS FOR NOCTURNAL BIRDS AND MARSH BIRDS

For nearly a decade, WBCI has coordinated and implemented citizen-based monitoring programs for owls, nightjars, secretive marsh birds, and, for three years, Red-shouldered Hawks. These bird groups had been previously identified as poorly monitored, which led to the establishment of surveys designed to fill those gaps.

In recent years, less time has been devoted to these surveys beyond basic implementation. Over the next five years, WBCI seeks to reinvest in these efforts in hopes of improving the timeliness of data synthesis, analysis, and annual reporting, as well as modifying survey design and protocols to provide the highest priority information needed. For example, this could include expansion of the marsh bird survey to additional counties, incorporating playback for some owl species, and/or amending the nightjar survey to yield adequate data on Common Nighthawks.

This project is scalable. As is, progress is possible but only to a limited extent. Upon completion of the current Atlas project, additional time could be refocused back to citizen-based monitoring. A new WBCI coordinator may also assist in moving this project further along.

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: IDENTIFY PRIORITIES AND GAPS (NEEDS ASSESSMENT)

WBCI should aim in the next five years to conduct a Wisconsin-based “State of the Birds” analysis that assesses current population status and trends of Wisconsin’s birds, identifies and prioritizes persisting gaps in monitoring, and potentially outlines strategies for stemming declines in select species. In addition, given WBCI’s increased focus on Important Bird Areas, the need for monitoring on all or select IBAs should be assessed. Lastly, beyond monitoring, WBCI should identify priorities for research related to birds, their habitats, and management/conservation, and strengthen relations with academic and other WBCI partners to help address them.

In 2003, the WBCI Research & Monitoring committee completed a “Survey of Surveys,” which summarized existing bird monitoring efforts in Wisconsin and helped determine how well species or species groups were being monitored. This set the stage for several statewide meetings in 2006–2007 that identified long-term bird monitoring gaps, prioritized gaps by bird groups, and started the process of identifying short-term management issues with monitoring needs in Wisconsin. Ultimately emerging were the citizen-based surveys described below, although no action was taken on the latter management issues.

This project is scalable. A State of the Birds assessment should be possible with existing resources, whereas developing and implementing monitoring schemes on IBAs will likely require additional resources. Moreover, additional resources would allow WBCI to promote and facilitate monitoring as a tool for evaluating success of habitat management projects and other conservation efforts.

HIGH PRIORITY ACTION: PROVIDE COORDINATED RESEARCH AND MONITORING

To date WBCI has provided monitoring standards and advice to its partners and others conducting surveys for birds in Wisconsin when requested. Protocols for the nocturnal and marsh bird surveys have been available online and have been accessed by a variety of users in the past decade.

WBCI’s Research & Monitoring Committee was active through the mid-2000s in conducting the Survey of Surveys and conceptualizing a Coordinated Bird Monitoring Plan. WBCI partners have also actively participated in regional working groups of the Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership since its inception. The result has been greater collaboration and standardization with neighboring states, the Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Region Joint Venture, and other regional partners.

The Joint Venture Science Team will soon absorb activities of the Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership. WBCI should remain deeply involved in regional bird monitoring and conservation efforts via the JV’s bird group committees. In addition, WBCI’s Research & Monitoring Committee should be reformed to identify gaps, set priorities, and encourage standardized protocols and data management systems. A revitalized and well-maintained WBCI monitoring website is important to communicating these to partners and others seeking to scale up the value of their efforts.

This project is also scalable, contingent on availability of resources. Completion of the Atlas, and/or recruitment of a replacement WBCI coordinator, would allow the WBCI Bird Monitoring Coordinator to spend more time on these activities.

APPENDIX

AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR WBCI ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM 2002 TO 2017

Evaluating and Increasing Awareness of Risk to Birds: WBCI has helped the public understand risks to birds and how they can be reduced, including publication of [issue papers](#) on cats, climate change, deer herbivory, window collisions, wind power, birding ethics, pesticides, and lead poisoning. WBCI also organized evaluations of special topics, such as urban gull management for communities on Lake Michigan.

Important Bird Areas: WBCI launched the Wisconsin Important Bird Areas (IBA) program, that led to establishment of 92 IBAs. Information about the specific sites can be found on the [WBCI website](#) and in a 240-page book, "Important Bird Areas of Wisconsin," published in 2007.

All-Bird Plan: The [Wisconsin All-Bird Conservation Plan](#), a major undertaking, synthesizes the conservation needs and issues for 116 priority bird species and provides recommendations for habitat protection, restoration, and management that will have the greatest impact on state bird populations. The Plan gives WBCI partners, private landowners, and others information on how their local actions can best address regional bird conservation needs.

Bird City: [Bird City Wisconsin](#), which is modeled on The Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA, was created by a coalition of Wisconsin conservation and birding organizations, including WBCI, to ensure all of Wisconsin's communities and residents maintain healthy populations of birds and grow an appreciation for them. More than 100 communities in Wisconsin have achieved "Bird City" recognition.

Bird Research: WBCI partners helped develop a comprehensive statewide plan to address bird research and monitoring needs. The initial step was a "Survey of Surveys" to summarize the state of knowledge when WBCI formed, followed by a series of statewide monitoring meetings to identify information gaps and set priorities to address those gaps. WBCI launched (and continues to coordinate) citizen-science surveys for owls, nightjars, secretive marsh birds, and earlier, Red-shouldered Hawks. WBCI also assisted creation of a Birder Certification Program for Wisconsin, aided in establishing a Wisconsin eBird portal, helped create the Forest Bird Habitat Matrix, and helped establish the Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring Network.

Bird-based Recreation: WBCI was instrumental in developing the [Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail](#), a set of birding guides for five regions of the state, and an accompanying bird checklist booklet. The trail guides direct users to the state's best wildlife-watching sites and nearby attractions. Hard copy and online versions of the guides are available.

Outreach: WBCI developed a comprehensive communication plan to work with media and the public and hosted annual statewide meetings to highlight bird conservation issues. Meeting topics included "Wisconsin Urban Bird Workshop", "Neotropical Migrants: Insuring Their Return", "Power of Partnerships", "Wisconsin Bird Education Summit", and "Making Our Private Lands Count for Birds."

Education: WBCI surveyed educators to identify how to best deliver bird education and identified key bird education materials and programs. In addition, a [Bird Monitoring Kit](#), including binoculars, field guides, and related materials, was developed and provided to schools and nature centers. WBCI has also played a vital role facilitating provision of the Council on Environmental Education's Flying Wild Program to hundreds of educators.

Wisconsin Stopover Initiative: Protection and management of important stopover sites is a fundamental component of full life cycle conservation for migratory birds. The [Wisconsin Stopover Initiative](#) originated with WBCI support and is now a DNR-housed program that provides technical and educational information to advance stopover site conservation in our state.

International: Conservation of wintering grounds is an important component of full life cycle conservation for migratory birds. WBCI has supported habitat conservation projects in Latin America and facilitated citizen-involvement in international bird conservation efforts.