

Teaming Up for Birds

Student Reading

People care about birds for many different reasons. Some people think they are beautiful or interesting to observe. Some people consider birds an important part of their culture. Other people see the economic value of wild birds. Still others care about birds because of how they interact with other animals and plants. To these people, birds have an “ecological” value. Can you think of some reasons that you or people you know care about birds?

One way to measure the value placed on wild birds is to look at the amount of money people spend related to birds. The 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation reports that hunters spent \$20.6 billion that year on game hunting (not including fishing), while wildlife watchers spent \$32 billion directly related to bird watching activities.

Another way to see the value of birds is to look at how people work together to protect them. Many different types of groups are involved in bird conservation, including the federal government, state wildlife agencies, businesses, universities, and nongovernmental organizations (called NGO’s, for short). NGO’s often include local birding groups, bird rehabilitation groups, wildlife protection groups, and many other organizations.

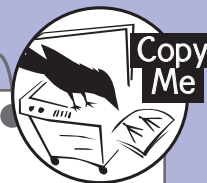
In 1929, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission was established by the passage of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act. Representatives from various government organizations that make up the Commission work together to obtain land for bird habitat. In recent years, several public and private sector organizations dedicated to bird conservation have also created partnerships, with the knowledge that they can accomplish more by working together. Some of these cooperative efforts include Partners in Flight, International Migratory Bird Day, and Joint Ventures.

A variety of groups have supported bird conservation for a long time. Some people are surprised to hear that hunters started many of the first conservation programs. Hunting groups focus on protecting species of birds that are valued for hunting. For over a century, hunters and other sportspeople have paid a large share of the costs of conserving wildlife and its habitat, including billions of dollars for license fees and taxes on sports equipment, as well as for travel, fees to hunt on private land, guides, and other services.



This tax money supports the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program, which was set up in a 1937 U.S. law called the Pittman-Robertson Act. It ensures that a tax on guns, ammunition, and archery equipment helps fund state agencies that protect wildlife. In many cases, the taxes have protected tens of millions of acres of wildlife habitat. Later, the Dingell-Johnson Act set up a similar program to tax fishing gear.

This Pittman-Robertson Act came in the 1930s when the Dust Bowl era, a drought that lasted for years, dried up countless acres of wetland habitat in North America.



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Waterfowl, such as ducks and geese, that had used those wetlands for breeding, nesting, feeding, and migratory resting spots, were seriously threatened. To ensure the survival of future generations of waterfowl, hunters came together for conservation.

Conservation groups such as Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Ruffed Grouse Society, Quail Unlimited, and Pheasants Forever have many members who are hunters. They continue to support conservation legislation, protect and improve habitat, educate people about wild birds, and sponsor research that helps conserve birds. In some cases, these groups purchase and manage land that provides habitat for wild birds.



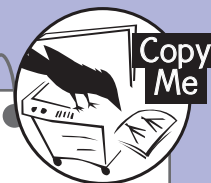
Many people who are non-hunters also contribute to conservation. Those who enjoy recreation related to birds and other wildlife—bird watchers, photographers, artists, hikers, and campers—pay fees for using public and private lands. This is just one way these people contribute. A total of \$38 billion is spent annually on wildlife-watching alone. Bird watching is by far the most popular wildlife-watching activity (in fact, 96% of wildlife watchers are birders). In addition, 54.1 million people feed birds and other wildlife every year.

Many people who care about birds have created bird conservation groups, such as the National Audubon Society, America Birding Association, American Bird Conservancy, Peregrine Fund, and the International Crane Foundation. They give money and offer support for bird conservation through research, education, wild bird rehabilitation, reintroduction programs for imperiled species, protecting and improving bird habitat, and supporting conservation legislation.

In certain ways, the goals of these bird conservation organizations and those of groups that are based on hunting are similar. Both types of groups support wildlife conservation.

For example, the National Audubon Society began out of concern for declining numbers of birds. The first state Audubon Society chapter was founded in 1896 by women who were encouraging ladies in Boston to stop wearing fashionable hats that featured feathers because millions of egrets and other wading birds were being killed to provide the feathers. A few years later, Audubon members helped pass the Lacey Act, an important conservation law that made selling illegally killed birds and wildlife a crime. That same year, Audubon members helped pass strong legislation to protect wild birds in many states.

Today, hunting and non-hunting groups continue the practice of influencing legislation to protect wild birds. While bird conservation groups may work in different ways and vary in the bird species and geographic areas they focus on, they all share a concern with protecting wild birds and their habitat now and in the future.



Design Your Own Bird Conservation Organization

Create a new idea for a bird conservation group!

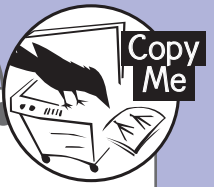
First, work with others to come up with ideas about kinds of bird conservation organizations you would like to see at work in your local area, nationally, or internationally. Here are some questions to get your discussion started:

1. What species or types of birds (for example, raptors, songbirds, waterfowl, game birds) do you or your family members find interesting?
2. What kinds of hobbies or recreational activities that involve birds (such as wildlife viewing, bird feeding, camping, hunting, hiking) do you or your family members enjoy?
3. Which bird species are endangered or in trouble locally?
4. Are there any bird-related issues in your local news recently? (Try checking your state wildlife agency web pages to get more information.)
5. What can you, other students, or community members do to help conserve wild birds?

Now, answer these questions about the group you would like to form.

1. What do you want to accomplish?
2. What roles will your group fill that perhaps no other group is currently addressing?
3. What is the name of your group?
4. In one or two sentences that everyone can understand, what is the mission of your group?
5. What is your group's logo? (A logo is a simple graphic that a group uses to identify itself. It often includes a symbol that helps people understand the group's work, while also suggesting the name of the organization.)
6. What is your plan of action?
 - Who will your members be? (Will you appeal to the general public or a specific group, such as hunters, gardeners, birders, or students?)
 - Where will you work? (Will you work in a specific area, such as your school and the schoolyard? ...your local community? ...your state or country? ...internationally?)
 - What are the most important kinds of projects your group will take on?
 - How will you fund your efforts? (Will you sell products, memberships, services, or all?)
7. Why would people want to join your organization? How will you reach out to them?

Using the answers to these questions as a guide, create a promotional piece that represents your group and helps others learn about what you do. This may be a brochure, newsletter, poster, website, or other promotional item that helps people learn about your group and its cause.



Bird Conservation Organization Profile

Ducks Unlimited

FOUNDING: Ducks Unlimited began in 1937, after severe droughts dried up countless acres of wetlands on the U.S. and Canadian prairies. Ducks and other waterfowl rely on wetlands for breeding, nesting, and feeding. Losing this habitat meant that populations of these birds would decline for many generations.

In 1937, hunters successfully lobbied for a tax on hunting gear that went toward purchasing waterfowl habitat in the United States. That same year, a small group of hunters and other conservationists started Ducks Unlimited. The group began by raising money in the United States to protect habitat in Canada, where most of North America's waterfowl breed.

MEMBERSHIP: 444,000 members

MISSION: Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.

HOW DUCKS UNLIMITED WORKS:

- Buying land to protect habitat
- Doing habitat improvement projects
- Researching waterfowl, migration, and habitat needs
- Educating through magazines for adults and students, radio and television shows, and websites
- Supporting conservation legislation

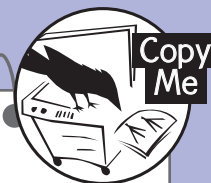
A SUCCESS STORY: In 1989, President George Bush, Sr., signed a bill authorizing the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), which was reauthorized in 2003. The act provides challenge grants for wetlands conservation. Groups like Ducks Unlimited match each dollar of this grant money with at least \$1 from non-federal sources. Since 1989, NAWCA has helped protect and restore 9 million acres of wildlife habitat.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

One Waterfowl Way, Memphis, TN 38120
(800) 45DUCKS www.ducks.org

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Look in the telephone book or on the Internet for a Ducks Unlimited chapter near you and talk with a member.
- Research species of ducks or geese that are found in your area, especially where they breed, nest, and winter. The Ducks Unlimited website includes information about waterfowl species found in North America.
- Find out about waterfowl habitat in your area.
- Look up how ducks and geese use wetlands such as Playa Lakes and prairie potholes.
- Learn more about duck and goose hunting, and its impact on the economy, culture, and ecology.



Bird Conservation Organization Profiles

Partners in Flight

FOUNDING: A cooperative effort of public and private sectors in bird conservation, launched in 1990 to emphasize the conservation of birds not covered by existing initiatives.

MEMBERSHIP: Over 150 organizations of federal and state agencies, industry, non-governmental organizations, and many others

MISSION: To focus resources on the improvement of monitoring and inventory, research, management, and education programs involving birds and their habitats.

HOW PARTNERS IN FLIGHT WORKS:

- Assessing the conservation needs of each bird species in North America
- Identifying areas where conservation efforts for those species would be most effective
- Establishing population and habitat conservation objectives
- Developing a Flight Plan as a blueprint for Bird Conservation for the continental U.S.
- Promoting education of audiences about Western Hemisphere birds and their habitats

A SUCCESS STORY: Due to PIF efforts, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) formed to unite several bird initiatives to collaborate in bird conservation.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
1387 S. Vinnell Way, Boise, ID 83709
www.partnersinflight.org

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Discover priority bird populations and habitats in your area by visiting www.blm.gov/wildlife/pifplans.htm.
- Learn about Partners in Flight's conservation recommendations and needs in your area.
- Explore the four steps of PIF's Flight Plan (on its web site), and understand why each step is necessary for success.

Nature Conservancy

FOUNDING: Founded in 1950 by scientists intent on preserving natural areas, the Nature Conservancy has acquired 1,400 nature preserves and grown to protect both U.S. and world-wide natural regions.

MEMBERSHIP: Approximately 1 million

MISSION: The Conservancy preserves the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

HOW THE NATURE CONSERVANCY WORKS:

- Identifying the highest priority places that, if conserved, promise to ensure biodiversity over the long term
- Acquiring land and managing it
- Working with local communities and national governments to encourage the protection of ecologically sensitive land
- Reselling land to those who promise to protect it for the long-term
- Creating funding for conservation worldwide by using a variety of creative methods

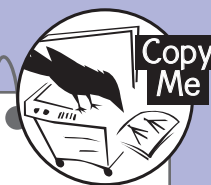
A SUCCESS STORY: The Conservancy has protected more than 92 million acres of valuable lands and waters worldwide. In 2003, the Conservancy purchased 87,760 acres to protect the Devil's River, the most pristine river in Texas. The deal is believed to be the largest private conservation effort ever undertaken in Texas.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203-1606
(703) 841-5300 www.nature.org

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Learn more about the five conservation initiatives that the Nature Conservancy addresses at each acquired site.
- Find out what places the Conservancy has helped to protect in your area.
- Research one or two conservation public policy initiatives.



Bird Conservation Organization Profiles

National Audubon Society

FOUNDING: The first state Audubon Society chapter was founded in 1896 after Harriet Hemenway urged Boston socialites to stop wearing feathered hats that resulted in the slaughter of millions of wild birds. In 1901, 35 state groups banded together to form what became the National Audubon Society.

MEMBERSHIP: 400,000 members

MISSION: The Audubon Society conserves and restores natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

HOW THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY WORKS:

- Providing bird habitat and education for visitors through a network of chapters in each state, as well as community-based nature centers
- Studying birds and habitat
- Involving people around the world in bird counts at Christmas and through the year
- Educating people about what they can do to protect birds and their habitats through websites, magazines, and other publications
- Educating people about important issues and helping them submit letters to the editor and give feedback to lawmakers

A SUCCESS STORY: In November 2003, a new environmentally friendly Audubon Center opened at Debs Park in the heart of East Los Angeles. It helps 50,000 urban schoolchildren learn about nature.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003
(212) 979-3000 www.audubon.org/nas

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Call the National Audubon Society or look on the website to find a chapter or Audubon nature center in your area.
- Research rare or endangered bird species in your area.
- Find out about artist John James Audubon (1785-1851), whom the NAS is named after.
- Learn more about bird watching.

Last Chance Forever

FOUNDING: Founded in 1978, when its founder saw that government groups, universities, and bird conservation groups in Texas were not doing anything to help individual raptors that were found sick, injured, or orphaned.

MEMBERSHIP: 4,200 members

MISSION: Last Chance Forever is dedicated to the rehabilitation and release of injured and orphaned raptors (birds of prey such as hawks, owls, eagles, vultures, and falcons).

HOW LAST CHANCE FOREVER WORKS:

- Providing veterinary treatment, physical therapy, and facilities where injured birds can learn to fly again
- Releasing most birds back to the wild
- Providing public demonstrations to teach people about the importance of raptors and how people can help protect birds of prey
- Educating people about what to do if they find an injured bird of prey
- Helping people "Adopt a Raptor" to pay for rehabilitation of injured birds of prey

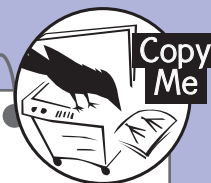
A SUCCESS STORY: About 80% of the injured raptors treated by Last Chance Forever are successfully released back to the wild. For example, members recently helped a Bald Eagle with a fractured wing to recover his breathing ability and muscle strength, and then released him.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

P.O. Box 460993, San Antonio, TX 78246
(210) 499-4080 www.lastchanceforever.org

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Take a virtual tour of Last Chance Forever's facilities and meet some of the birds at www.lastchanceforever.org/kidshome.
- Research one or more raptor species.
- Find out more about how injured birds are treated and released back into the wild.
- Research falconry, the sport of training birds to hunt with humans.
- Contact your local fish and game office to obtain a list of people in your area who are licensed to keep birds of prey in captivity.



Bird Conservation Organization Profile

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

FOUNDING: Cornell Lab of Ornithology was founded in 1915 by Dr. Arthur A. Allen, the country's first professor of ornithology.

MEMBERSHIP: 30,000 members

MISSION: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology interprets and conserves the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.

HOW THE CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM AT THE CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY WORKS:

- Researching the causes of and consequences related to the distribution and population of North American birds
- Educating students by utilizing science-based bird education programs, such as BirdSleuth, to encourage scientific inquiry and literacy
- Promoting scientific understanding and hands-on research for the public through a variety of citizen-science projects, such as Urban Bird Studies, Project PigeonWatch, and The Birdhouse Network
- Creating and maintaining extensive bird population databases, using bird count data from their education and citizen-outreach programs, including the Great Backyard Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird.
- Producing guidelines and manuals to help professional land managers and private landowners make informed, conservation-minded management decisions through projects such as Birds in Forested Landscapes

A SUCCESS STORY: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has created the world's largest research team through its numerous citizen-science research projects. Every year, nearly 100,000 citizens collect data about birds and share their valuable observations with scientists at the Lab. Ornithologists use the data for the continued study and conservation of North American birds.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Attn: Communications,
159 Sapsucker Woods Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850
1-800-843-BIRD (1-800-843-2473) www.birds.cornell.edu/

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Participate in Project FeederWatch by putting up a bird feeder, counting the birds that visit, and sending your data to scientists.
- Provide valuable nesting sites for cavity-nesting birds by placing nest boxes in appropriate habitat and participating in The Birdhouse Network.
- Explore eBird, www.ebird.org, to create maps and graphs of bird activity in your area from the past several months. Compare your results and discover reasons for any patterns and trends that you find.
- Learn how the Cornell Lab of Ornithology works towards the conservation of wild birds and their habitats and find out how you can help, at www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds/Conservation/CLOPrograms/CLOPrograms.html.
- Research the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website to learn about the numerous other research projects that Cornell scientists are conducting.



Bird Conservation Organization Profile

International Crane Foundation

FOUNDING: The International Crane Foundation was founded in 1973 to help save cranes from extinction. Cranes live on five of the seven continents, but many populations are in trouble because of habitat loss and unregulated hunting. Seven crane species are currently listed as endangered and four others have been proposed for listing as endangered.

MEMBERSHIP: 9,500 members

MISSION: The International Crane Foundation works worldwide to conserve cranes and the wetland and grassland communities on which they depend.

HOW THE INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION WORKS:

- Keeping captive cranes for breeding and reintroducing cranes into the wild
- Educating scientists, government officials, and the public about the destruction of wetlands and grasslands and possible solutions
- Supporting research about cranes and their habitat
- Hosting school groups, families, and international delegations at its crane conservation center
- Training scientists in other countries about habitat management, restoration, and breeding cranes in captivity

A SUCCESS STORY: Cranes are the most endangered family of birds. Eleven of the world's 15 species are threatened with extinction. After great successes in increasing populations of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes in the United States, the International Crane Foundation is now working on other continents. The International Crane Foundation's headquarters is the only place in the world where you can see all 15 species of crane.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

P.O. Box 447, Baraboo, WI 53913
(608) 356-9462 www.savingcranes.org

IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Research what cranes symbolize in different cultures and countries such as Japan, Viet Nam, and native traditions in North America, Africa, and Australia.
- Research one or more of the 15 crane species found throughout the world.
- Find out more about how researchers use leg bands to study wild birds and birds that are introduced into the wild from captivity.
- Learn more about how endangered Whooping Cranes that were bred in captivity are taught migration routes using an ultralight airplane! Contact the Foundation or look at www.operationmigration.org.