

Wisconsin birds and birding

Why is Wisconsin important for birds?

The first Atlas survey underscored Wisconsin's amazing diversity of native bird species: 226 species were confirmed as nesting in Wisconsin. This diversity stems from Wisconsin's location at the junction of three major ecological zones: deciduous forests of the east; coniferous forests of the north and grasslands of the south and west. The Mississippi River, Lake Michigan, and Lake Superior add to habitat and bird diversity.



Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II

Because Wisconsin sits astride a major migration pathway, dozens more bird species stop over in Wisconsin in the spring to fuel up on their way to nesting grounds farther north, and then again in the fall as they return to wintering grounds. Altogether, more than 400 species have been recorded in the state.

Why are birds so important for Wisconsin?

Birds are an essential part of Wisconsin and we respect, enjoy and celebrate our birds and other wildlife: fully 1 in 3 Wisconsin adults watch and identify birds at home and away – the second highest rate in the nation.¹ Nearly 1.7 million Wisconsin residents 16 and older reported bird-watching in 2011.

Birds are vital components of the natural world and in agriculture, helping control pests that damage the foods and natural resources that people use every day.

And birds are biological indicators -- bellwethers of changes in habitats and ecosystems – our “canaries in the coal mine.” Studying them creates a better understanding of the interconnections between living creatures and the features that support them, like soil, water, plants and insects.

What is the state of birds in 2014?

U.S. and Canadian agencies and organizations involved in the North American Bird Conservation Initiative conclude that “where conservation investments have been made in healthy habitats and cleaner water, birds are doing well.” Many wetland birds are showing strong population gains, and grassland bird populations are showing signs of improvement, according to the group’s [State of the Birds 2014](#). But bird populations in eastern and western forests and deserts are declining and reflect an urgent need for conservation in these habitats. The report identifies a Watchlist of 230 species that are likely headed for extinction unless they receive immediate attention.²

In Wisconsin, about 30 percent of our birds are listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need, meaning they have low and/or declining populations. That includes 11 birds formally listed as endangered species, and 13 as threatened species.

Bird Conservation in Action in Wisconsin

With its heritage of conservation giants such as Aldo Leopold and John Muir, Wisconsin has long been recognized as a conservation leader. Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, Audubon Society, Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory, the Department of Natural Resources and dozens of other agencies and organizations partnering through the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI) advance the full spectrum of bird conservation. The initiative’s [Wisconsin State of the Birds 2014](#), highlights the challenges birds face today in our state and also contains many examples of conservation efforts making a difference for birds on the ground and in the air.

¹ [Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis \[PDF\]](#), is an addendum to the 2011 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation.