

Bid for bird conservation

Co-operation with wildlife agencies in Latin America and the Caribbean, where many Canadian birds spend the winter is being stepped up by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). This is being done through the CWS Latin American Program (LAP), launched in 1980. The CWS previously concentrated its conservation efforts on waterfowl, most of which winter in the United States. However, of some 500 other species breeding in Canada, about 225 migrate to Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean islands and South America.

The migrants include 33 species of shorebird which breed in Canada and winter as far south as the southern tip of South America. They also include the peregrine falcon, the common tern and various warblers, flycatchers and native Canadian sparrows.

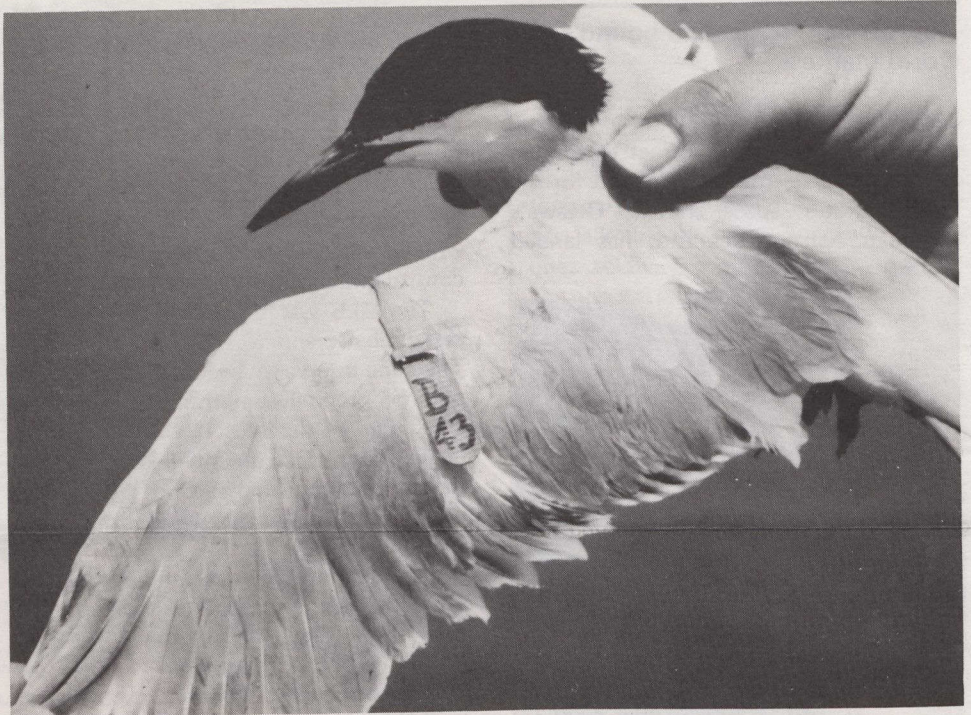
In Canada the shorebirds are widely dispersed, but during migration and on their wintering grounds they congregate in large numbers. This makes them especially vulnerable to any disruption or disturbance of their habitat. The first major LAP project in South America was a survey of the continent's northern and eastern coastline to identify shorebird concentration areas and make a preliminary assessment of the habitat.

Countries involved

The governments of Argentina, Brazil, Guyana, French Guiana, Surinam, Trinidad and Venezuela co-operated in this survey, providing military aircraft in some places. About 95 per cent of the Atlantic and Caribbean coast believed to contain suitable habitats have now been surveyed, important wintering areas have been located, and more than a million shorebirds counted and identified.

CWS and local scientists are also trying to measure the harvest of shorebirds killed for food and recreation. Other studies are focused on chemical contamination from agricultural, industrial and mining wastes ingested by the birds. Such studies may help to explain the high levels of organochlorines still found in peregrine falcons and their eggs, despite restrictions on the use of the chemical DDT in Canada and the United States. Peregrines prey heavily on shorebirds and often travel with them.

Another major concern is the loss of habitat, which may be Latin America's most serious bird conservation problem.



A common tern caught on its nest at Lake Ontario is banded and tagged to provide information on migratory routes to South America.

Tropical forests are shrinking at an alarming rate, especially in Central America and parts of Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil. This will almost certainly imperil the 100 or so species of forest-dwelling bird — warblers, flycatchers, sparrows and others — that breed in Canada and migrate to the tropics.

Other threatened habitats are wetlands. About 100 birds that breed in Canada and winter in Latin America depend on freshwater or brackish lakes



Canadian biologists on the south coast of Trinidad colour-mark birds which were banded in Canada.

and wetlands, or on coastal and inland beaches. Industrial societies everywhere tend to use wetlands as waste disposal sites, or drain them for agriculture, housing, plant construction or other purposes.

An international effort is being made to preserve these valuable habitats, through a program of wetland mapping organized by the International Waterfowl Research Bureau and the International Council for Bird Preservation. Meanwhile scientists from the Organization of American States are trying to revitalize the 1940 Convention on Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere.

Training in Canada

Besides supporting far-ranging programs of this sort, the Canadian Wildlife Service is giving specialized training to biologists from Latin American and Caribbean countries. Biologists from Trinidad, Surinam and Venezuela spent a month in Canada learning the theory and practice of bird banding, which they returned to apply in their own countries. The CWS is also sponsoring, along with several other government and private conservation groups, production of a Spanish version of *Wildlife Management Techniques*. This Wildlife Society manual is the most widely used wildlife management reference book in North America.

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