

Important Bird Areas

Overview

Important Bird Areas, or IBAs, are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of bird. IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. IBAs may be a few acres or thousands of acres, but usually they are discrete sites that stand out from the surrounding landscape. IBAs may include public or private lands, or both, and they may be protected or unprotected.

To qualify as an IBA, sites must satisfy at least one of the following criteria. The site must support:

1. Species of conservation concern (e.g. threatened and endangered species)
2. Restricted-range species (species vulnerable because they are not widely distributed)
3. Species that are vulnerable because their populations are concentrated in one general habitat type or biome
4. Species, or groups of similar species (such as waterfowl or shorebirds), that are vulnerable because they occur at high densities due to their congregatory behavior

Identification of a site as an IBA indicates its unique importance for birds. Nonetheless, some IBAs are of greater significance than others. A site may be important at the global, continental, or state level. The IBA identification process provides a data-driven means for cataloging the most important sites for birds throughout the country and the world. The use of a hierarchical classification system further helps to establish priorities for conservation efforts.

Background

BirdLife International is a global coalition of more than 100 country partner organizations. The IBA Program was initiated by BirdLife International in Europe in the 1980's. Since then, over 8,000 sites in 178 countries have been identified as Important Bird Areas, with many national and regional IBA inventories published in 19 languages. Hundreds of these sites and millions of acres have received better protection as a result of the IBA Program.

As the United States Partner of BirdLife International, the National Audubon Society administers the IBA Program in the U.S. Audubon launched its IBA initiative in 1995, establishing programs state by state. State-based IBA programs provide conservation leaders with the flexibility to tailor the program to their individual state needs, and they also give Audubon members and local volunteers the greatest opportunities to protect sites in their communities.

Approximately forty-eight states have initiated IBA programs and more than 2,100 state-level IBAs, encompassing over 300 million acres, have been identified.

For additional details on the IBA project, in general, visit the National Audubon site <http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/index.html>.

For a complete list of Missouri's IBA sites, visit <http://iba.audubon.org/iba/stateIndex.do?state=US-MO>

BirdLife International Homepage <http://www.birdlife.org/index.html>.