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Avian Project Guidance

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Introduction

Avian species, commonly known as birds, are found on every continent and play important roles in the world's ecosystems and cultures. Globally, birds face a myriad of threats, including habitat destruction, fragmentation and degradation, invasive species, migration mortality, environmental pollutants, and climate change.

Avian projects are applicable in many corporate settings and do not often require specialized engineering or design skills. They provide a wide array of educational opportunities, and can engage employees and community members, such as schools, scouts and clubs, in monitoring and management. Depending on the scope of the project, avian projects can vary widely in terms of reach, cost and difficulty, as well as level of implementation, maintenance and monitoring.

When developing avian education programs, the focus should be on bird conservation and improved stewardship of bird habitat. Projects can range in size and scope and include; on-the-ground projects; bird-friendly practices implementable at homes, schools, offices and elsewhere; education that will inspire an appreciation and conservation of birds; or contribution to research or conservation efforts.

Building Your Program

Projects are divided into four categories: **Habitat**, **Species Management**, **Education and Awareness** and **Other Options**. You can build a program with more than one of each category but you must associate your program with at least one habitat. This Avian Project Guidance is in the **Species Management** category. You must associate your avian project with your habitat, such as grasslands, forests or wetlands.



Habitat – Projects that focus on conservation actions to protect, restore and manage different habitats.



Species Management – Projects addressing the conservation needs of targeted wildlife species or groups of species.



Education and Awareness – Projects to improve awareness, understanding and skills relating to conservation and the environment.



Other Options – Specialized projects that add value to your conservation efforts.

Browse the Project Guidance library at wildlifehc.org/pg.

What Do Avian Projects Look Like?

Avian projects create, enhance or restore habitat that benefits birds, or use avian habitat as a focus for conservation education. Avian projects may also be designed to reduce a threat to produce a meaningful, measurable conservation impact. Avian projects may vary in both size and scope, and can be designed to target either a specific species, such as a high priority bird species, or a suite of species, such as migratory songbirds or shorebirds.

Avian projects can provide habitat for resident birds that occur on-site year-round, as well as for migratory birds that occur on-site during certain times of year:

- **Provide migratory stopover habitat** for birds en route to their breeding or non-breeding habitat
- **Provide breeding habitat** for migratory birds that breed in the region and year-round resident birds
- **Provide non-breeding habitat** for migratory birds in the region and year-round resident birds

Avian projects do not include projects that are unsustainable, such as bird feeders, which require a dependency on humans to refill as a food source.

Considerations for Corporate Lands

Projects implemented on corporate-owned lands have different circumstances and challenges to those on public lands, protected lands or wild lands.

Which types of corporate lands are best suited for avian projects?

Avian projects are suitable for most types of corporate lands: urban, suburban and rural. Smaller urban sites are more likely to provide small-scale foraging or nesting opportunities such as bird-friendly landscaping and nest boxes for resident birds. Larger rural sites will have opportunities to provide large tracts of habitat. Linear habitats such as rights-of-way can also be managed to benefit birds by providing movement corridors. All avian projects should be designed within a conservation context of what is locally appropriate and suitable for the site.

Educational efforts are suitable to sites of all types, sizes, and locations, and may be easily tailored to fit the habitat and species complement of the site and surrounding landscape.

Addressing challenges

The corporate context presents certain challenges for implementing avian projects. Understanding these concerns and potential ways to overcome them can help your avian project succeed in the long term.

Concern	Response
Inexperienced volunteers often find bird species identification to be difficult.	<p><i>Develop partnerships with avian-focused organizations or local birders who can provide assistance with, and training in, bird identification.</i></p> <p><i>Educate volunteers to identify 10-20 of the most common birds at their project location, and provide them with simple identification guides or training for those species.</i></p> <p><i>Provide volunteers with easy-to-use bird identification resources such as apps and websites.</i></p>
Some project locations may be too large, or perceived as too large, to effectively monitor as a whole.	<p><i>Monitoring efforts can occur in patches and increased as resources allow.</i></p>
It can be difficult to detect changes and bird species responses on small sites.	<p><i>While a site may be too small to show species' response to conservation actions, the collection of data and contribution of it, to national or international databases, make the data and conservation effort relevant within a larger framework.</i></p>

Getting Started with Avian Projects

For a project to qualify toward Conservation Certification, you must be able to answer “yes” to five questions.

1. Is the project locally appropriate?
2. Does it have a stated conservation or education objective?
3. Does it provide value or benefit to the natural community?
4. Have outcomes been measured and is there supporting documentation?
5. Does it exceed any pertinent regulatory requirements?

Conservation and education objectives

It is a requirement of Conservation Certification that avian projects be designed to meet one or more conservation objectives. Objectives can guide the direction of the project, help motivate others to participate and provide a basis for evaluation.

The following are suggested objectives for avian projects. Your team may choose one or more of these objectives, or develop your own relevant objectives.

- Creating positive conservation outcomes that benefit birds and their habitats, with defined conservation targets, goals, and metrics evaluated.
- Creating or enhancing habitat:
 - for a specific or rare avian species
 - for a suite of avian species, such as songbirds, migratory birds, grassland birds, etc.
 - to address a local conservation or social need
 - to connect to other avian habitats inside or outside the property boundaries, along migratory corridors, and across international borders
- Managing or protecting birds and their habitat to mitigate threats/disturbances
- Improving educators' capacity to effectively teach about avian conservation
- Providing bird conservation education to employees, community members, etc.
- Addressing one or more scientific and research question related to avian species
- Contributing to an avian-focused citizen science project

The following strategies are recommended to strengthen the conservation impact of your project:

- Be in place for at least one year, with a documented commitment of at least three to five years
- Engage in site-wide or company-wide operational or behavioral changes that result in meaningful, measurable impacts to bird conservation
- Incorporate a management plan to control invasive species or subsidized predators that pose a direct threat to avian species
- Improve quality of nesting habitat through clean-ups
- Take action to minimize disturbance at nesting, roosting and foraging habitats
- Educate employees or community members about birds and bird conservation, resulting in behavioral changes that support bird conservation
- Include artificial or manufactured structures that meet a conservation or education outcome
- Establish a baseline of bird species in the habitat, upon which desired outcomes can be based and evaluated
- Include credible monitoring that informs the project, contributes to a citizen science project or, is part of a multi-site/company-wide monitoring effort
- Connect to larger local, regional and landscape-scale initiatives for bird conservation
- Change operations and maintenance to reduce impacts on birds, including efforts to reduce bird strike on windows, buildings and other structures
- Provide opportunities for credible, scientifically rigorous research and monitoring of avian species by college students, professors and other scientific professionals
- Utilize technical advice from local experts in avian conservation
- Provide native plant species that supply food, nesting and other avian habitat needs year-round
- Provide educational demonstrations of birds, such as live animal demonstrations or nestcams, to increase understanding of these species and promote their conservation

- Provide employees or community members with training or other opportunities for hands-on learning about birds and their habitats, bird identification and monitoring, habitat restoration/enhancement for birds
- Communicate or demonstrate the purpose and the outcomes of the avian project to the community
- Participate in a cross-site or cross-company mentoring program that furthers avian conservation and education objectives
- Extend the positive footprint of the avian project beyond site borders by partnering with neighboring landowners to connect bird conservation efforts across multiple locations
- Be implemented as part of a corporate-wide initiative for bird conservation
- Communicate with regional conservation organizations by engaging those groups for technical advice or help with baseline surveys, implementation, etc.
- Be located adjacent to or near an existing protected avian habitat or high-priority bird conservation area, such as an Important Bird Area, and managed in alignment with that avian habitat or high-priority bird conservation area
- Actively manage a large, contiguous tract of bird habitat
- Manage habitat to benefit one or more imperiled bird species

Partnerships

Avian projects implemented on corporate lands will benefit from partnerships with groups that have established conservation or education objectives. A team may use such a partnership to help design, create or monitor its avian project and provide educational opportunities for employees and community members. Partners may also be able to assist the team with obtaining funding for the project, and identify learning links to other conservation priorities in the region.

Resources

Your project may benefit from online or printed resources available for your region to support the design, delivery, maintenance and monitoring of avian projects.

A search for “birds” in the Conservation Registry returns nearly 400 projects implemented through WHC’s certification program. This is a great place to find inspiration for your project and see what others are doing in and around your location.

The following terms, in any combination, may be useful when searching online for items related to this theme:

avian	perching birds
bird	waterbirds
migratory birds	nesting
songbirds	nest box
grassland birds	bird box
shorebirds	stopover habitat
wading birds	Important Bird Areas
waterfowl	nest monitoring
raptors	native plants
birds-of-prey	bird watching

Understanding the Application Process

Documentation

When applying for Conservation Certification, you will provide documentation of the planning, implementation, maintenance and monitoring of your avian project. The following is required documentation for avian projects; however, you may also submit additional supporting materials.

Photographs and videos that depict the progress of the project implementation and management.

Activity logs that demonstrate appropriate activities that meet the needs of the habitat to fully support the target species and support the conservation and education objectives.

Baseline data that provides a biological baseline upon which post-implementation monitoring can be based and used to evaluate the progress of the project and determine next steps.

Monitoring logs that show the frequency, type, and results of monitoring of the project, whether in an informal manner or a scientifically rigorous manner.

Map, design plans, instructions, etc. for new project features showing design considerations to maximize their benefit for the target species.

Management plan such as a game management plan or relocation plan for projects that involve direct population management activities like hunting or relocation.

Application questions

As you complete the application online, you will be asked the following questions about your avian project. These questions will help us understand and evaluate your project.

	Question	Why this question is important
Overview	Does the project target a specific species or a group of species?	<i>This provides us with a description of your project to allow us to assess it.</i>
	Name the group of species being targeted and list several of the species in this group (common or scientific names).	
	Name the species being targeted (both common and scientific names).	
	What plants or structures have been added or maintained to benefit the species?	
	Briefly describe activities are taking place to address the targeted species?	
	Which of the major habitat and/or life cycle needs does your project address for the targeted species?	
	Upload photos showing the avian project.	
	When did on the ground work for the project begin?	
	Is the project targeting native bird species found at the project location or in the area?	

	Question	Why this question is important
Overview (cont.)	Does a significant percentage or a significantly large number of one or more targeted bird species use the project location?	<i>This provides us with a description of your project to allow us to assess it.</i>
	If so, please list the species, estimate of the population size, and the significance of the population.	
Objective	What are the project's conservation objectives?	<i>Having a conservation objective is a requirement for certification.</i>
Habitat and Life Cycle Needs	Which of the major habitat and/or life cycle needs does your project address for the targeted species?	<i>Certain conservation actions are very valuable to the target species.</i>
	What plants or structures have been added or maintained to benefit the species?	
	Describe how the plants or structures address the habitat and/or life cycle needs.	
	How important is this type of feature to maintaining populations of the targeted species?	
	Upload documentation of the plants or structures that benefit the species.	

	Question	Why this question is important
Design of New Features	Have you added new plants or structures since your last certification application?	<i>Additions and expansions of your project since previous applications for recognition signify increased habitat value.</i>
	Did specific design or placement considerations maximize the benefit of the new plants and structures for the targeted species?	
	Upload documentation of the specific considerations.	
Species Management	Briefly describe what activities are taking place to address the targeted species.	<i>Appropriate management policies and practices are also important to the target species.</i>
	Provide a timeline of the completed activities such as implementation, maintenance, population management, etc.	
	Upload documentation of these activities.	
	Does the project address a specific threat to birds? (e.g. window strikes, brood parasitism etc.)	
	List the specific threat.	
	What specific actions are being taken to address the threat?	
	Select the types of population management you are doing for the targeted species.	
	Describe the measures being taken.	
	Upload a management plan if applicable.	

	Question	Why this question is important
Monitoring	Was baseline data collected for this project?	<i>Monitoring is essential to understand the impact of the project and to be able to adapt the project develops.</i>
	Explain the types of baseline data collected.	
	Upload the baseline data.	
	Select each type of monitoring that is being carried out.	
	List each type of monitoring, including the frequency and list any plans or protocols used.	
	Upload the monitoring protocols, if applicable.	
	Upload the monitoring data and any analysis, if applicable.	
	Provide a brief summary of results from monitoring.	
	Evaluate the success of the project. If there were any concerns, what are the plans to address them in the future?	
Employee Participation	Do employees actively contribute to the avian project?	<i>Employee participation can strengthen a project and secure its future.</i>
	How many employees actively contribute to the project on a regular basis?	
	Describe how employees are involved in this project.	
	How many employee hours were spent on the following activities each year?	

	Question	Why this question is important
Other Participants	Do any groups or individuals outside of your company actively contribute to the project on a regular basis?	<i>It is not always possible to recruit outside groups to a project. Conservation and education partners can strengthen a project and provide different audiences to use it for lessons or recreation, thus broadening its reach.</i>
	Select the types of groups.	
	List the names of the groups you work with.	
	Describe their involvement in this project.	
	How many hours were spent by the groups on the following activities each year? Planning and Implementation	
	If you work with an avian specialist and have a current letter of support from them, upload it here.	
	List additional sources of technical advice (e.g. website, guidebook, etc.) and describe how they were used.	
Regulatory Requirements	Are any aspects of the project done in relation to regulatory requirements?	<i>Going beyond compliance is a requirement for certification.</i>
	Explain how the project exceeds requirements.	
Connectivity	Does the project connect with other avian projects on neighboring land?	<i>Connectivity on-site and across fence lines helps to decrease fragmentation, one of the leading causes of habitat loss.</i>
	Describe how the project connects with the other avian projects.	

	Question	Why this question is important
Alignments	Does the project align with any larger scale initiatives? (e.g. corporate strategy, regional conservation plan, migratory pathway, watershed plan, etc.)	<i>Aligning conservation efforts with large-scale conservation plans and other regional conservation initiatives allows a site-based activity to support a landscape-scale objective.</i>
	Is the project part of a corporate level commitment to bird conservation?	
	Upload documentation of your corporate commitment to bird conservation.	
	Is the project located within or adjacent to a designated high priority bird conservation area (e.g. Important Bird Area).	
	List the name of the conservation area and describe how your project is managed in alignment with its conservation priorities	
	Does the project have local, regional, or global significance for bird conservation?	
	Explain how the project is locally, regionally, or globally significant.	
	Does your project have local, regional, or global significance for bird conservation? Please explain.	
	Does the project align with any other existing conservation plan or other large-scale initiative?	
	List any other conservation plans or large-scale initiatives the project aligns with and provide website links, if available.	
How does your project align with these large-scale initiatives?		

	Question	Why this question is important
Existing Certifications	Does this project have third party avian certification?	<i>Other certifications or recognitions illustrate strong efforts and commitment.</i>
	List the certifications and provide a website link if available.	

Content development for Conservation Certification

To inform the development of Conservation Certification, WHC analyzed the projects it was recognizing through its certification program to assess whether they were aligned with contemporary conservation and education priorities.

Following this assessment and using information from it, WHC convened Advisory Committees around conservation and education themes to develop the content that would guide practitioners and applicants in the future. This content is the basis for the Project Guidance and the online application process.

The following provided feedback on the initial draft of the Avian Project Guidance:

Susan Bonfield, Environment for the Americas

Greg Butcher, Forest Service International Programs, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Charlie Butt, BirdLife International

Mitch Hartley, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

Matthew Jeffrey, National Audubon Society

Cyndi Perry, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior

Chuck Remington, National Audubon Society

Amanda D. Rodewald, PhD, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

More information can be found about this process in the “Our Impact” section of wildlifehc.org under “Commitment to Transparency.”



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The WHC Strategy and Planning team can help you build a successful project by identifying needs, making connections with partners and resources, and providing strategies that meet business and conservation goals. Contact us today.

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Every act of conservation matters.

