

# Site Nomination Criteria for the Audubon

## Important Bird Areas Program in Utah

**Note: The Criteria were first established in May 2002. The following is an update that primarily reflects additional information since that time.**

**April, 2008**

### **Definitions**

An Important Bird Area (IBA) is a site providing essential habitat to one or more species of breeding or non-breeding birds. Sites are usually discrete and distinguishable in character, habitat, or ornithological importance from surrounding areas. Boundaries may be natural, such as watersheds, or man-made, such as roads and property boundaries. There is no pre-determined size for an IBA, but wherever possible an IBA should be large enough to encompass the resources that are significant to the birds throughout the season for which they are important. Not all IBAs can or will meet this last definition--bottlenecks or migration corridors for raptors being one example.

### **Criteria**

A site meeting any one of the criteria in the following four categories may qualify as an IBA. Many sites will meet several criteria. These criteria should not be considered absolutely binding, and other factors, such as relative importance to other sites, may be weighed in making final site selections.

Category UT-1: Sites important to endangered, threatened or state listed sensitive species in Utah.

*Description:* Sites that regularly support breeding or non-breeding densities (wintering and migratory sites) of one or more of the following species on the Utah Sensitive Species List, dated December 14, 2007. (Note: The Utah Sensitive Species list also includes federally listed species.) Sites should be those where the species occurs or potentially occurs with some regularity, not areas of infrequent or accidental occurrence. Thresholds (i.e., percent of state population) will vary due to the lack of population data for many species in Utah. In other cases the species naturally occurs in low density due to its position on the food chain or foraging guild.

#### Federal Candidate Species

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

#### Federally Threatened Species

Mexican Spotted Owl

#### Federally Endangered Species

California Condor

Whooping Crane

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

#### Conservation Agreement Species

Northern Goshawk

Gunnison Sage-Grouse

#### Wildlife Species of Concern

Bald Eagle

Grasshopper Sparrow

Short-eared Owl

Burrowing Owl

Ferruginous Hawk

Greater Sage-Grouse

Black Swift

Bobolink

Lewis's Woodpecker  
Long-billed Curlew  
American White Pelican

Three-toed Woodpecker  
Sharp-tailed Grouse  
Mountain Plover

Category UT-2: Utah Partners in Flight Priority Species and additional species from the Utah Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

*Description:* Sites that regularly support breeding or non-breeding densities of the following species identified as priority species in the Utah Partners in Flight Utah Avian Conservation Strategy (UTACS), 2002. This category also includes Tier III species listed in the Utah Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, Sept. 9, 2005 that are not listed in Category 1 above or as priority Partners in Flight species below. Thresholds will vary, but preferably include sites with 25 or more breeding pairs. Thresholds may also include sites with a significant complement of species totaling 50 or more breeding pairs of up to three listed species or 100 breeding pairs for all listed species.

Utah Partners in Flight Priority Species

Lewis's Woodpecker  
American Avocet  
Lucy's Warbler  
American White Pelican  
Virginia's Warbler  
Bell's Vireo  
Long-billed Curlew  
Brewer's Sparrow  
Black-necked Stilt  
Ferruginous Hawk  
Black-throated Gray Warbler  
Three-toed Woodpecker  
Gamble's Quail

Abert's Towhee  
Mountain Plover  
Sage Grouse  
Bobolink  
Gray Vireo  
Black Rosy-Finch  
Sharp-tailed Grouse  
Black Swift  
Broad-tailed Hummingbird  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Sage Sparrow

Additional Species included in Utah Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Band-tailed Pigeon  
Bendire's Thrasher  
Black-billed Cuckoo  
Boreal Owl  
Caspian Tern  
Crissal Thrasher  
Osprey  
Peregrine Falcon  
Sage Thrasher  
Snowy Plover  
Williamson's Sapsucker

Category UT-3: Habitat Supporting Important Bird Species

*Description:* Sites that contain rare or unique habitat within the state/region or exceptional representatives of natural habitats, and that hold important species or species assemblages largely restricted to a distinctive habitat type.

This category is intended to cover relatively large areas capable of supporting substantial bird populations, especially of species with particular habitat requirements. Examples of such habitats are saline environments in close association with emergent marshes harboring populations of American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts or a complex of sagebrush habitats that includes productive sage grouse leks. Small remnants of exceptional and important habitat types may be included. Selection of sites will be based on avian assemblages within the habitat community type, not on the habitat community type alone. Characteristic species of birds and other wildlife indicative of the habitat type should be identified and, if possible, quantified.

Below is a prioritized list of 24 major bird habitats in Utah. This prioritized list is from the Coordinated Implementation Plan for Bird Conservation in Utah, Prepared by the Utah Steering Committee of the Intermountain West Joint Venture, 2005. (The Plan is available at [www.iwjv.org](http://www.iwjv.org), then go to plans and then to Utah.) The original source of information for the specific habitats comes from the Utah Partners in Flight Utah Avian Conservation Strategy (UTACS), 2002.

**Priority A Habitats:**

High overall rating: high to medium value to birds, high to medium threat, high to medium opportunity for protection, restoration, and or enhancement of habitat.

Lowland Riparian, Mountain Riparian, Wetlands and Associated Uplands, Shrub-Steppe, Wet Meadow, and Playa.

**Priority B Habitats:**

Medium overall rating: one criterion may be high (habitat value, threat, opportunity) but generally of medium importance to birds statewide.

Low Desert Scrub, High Desert Scrub, Mixed Conifer, Pinyon-Juniper, Sub-Alpine Conifer, Aspen, Mountain Shrub, Water, and Agriculture.

**Priority C Habitats:**

Low overall rating: low to medium relative habitat value, threat, and/or opportunity statewide.

Alpine, Ponderosa Pine, Grassland, Northern Oak, Desert Oak, Lodgepole Pine, Rock, Cliff, and Urban

Below is a table that lists Utah Partners in Flight broad habitat categories, the total number of bird species found in each habitat category and the number of Partners in Flight priority species that utilize these habitats. (Note: The following information does not include waterfowl.) Additional information can be found in the Utah Partners in Flight Utah Avian Conservation Strategy. If you have questions or would like additional information about this strategy please contact Russell Norvell, Utah Partners in Flight Coordinator, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, (801) 537-3436, or [russellnorvell@utah.gov](mailto:russellnorvell@utah.gov).

UT PIF HABITAT CATEGORY	TOTAL SPECIES	UT PIF PRIORITY SPECIES
Lowland Riparian	98	9
Mountain Riparian	46	1
Wetlands	33	3
Wet Meadow	12	1
Shrubsteppe	8	3
Mountain Shrub	16	5

High Desert Scrub	29	5
Low Desert Scrub	25	1
Northern Oak (Gambel's)	4	1
Desert Oak (Gambel hybrids)	1	0
Grassland	11	2
Alpine	5	1
Sub_Alpine Conifer	21	1
Mixed Conifer	21	0
Ponderosa Pine	13	1
Lodgepole Pine	2	1
Pinyon_Juniper	21	3
Aspen	19	0
Water	19	1
Rock	3	0
Playa	7	2
Agriculture	26	5
Urban	9	0
Cliff	13	2

Category UT -4: Avian Concentrations

*Description:* Sites where significant numbers of birds concentrate for breeding, migration, or over-wintering.

Sites that regularly hold substantial numbers of one or more species, breeding or non-breeding, including migration, and including sites supporting a high diversity of bird species. Significant numbers are subjectively defined, but could include one percent or more of the state's population. The guidelines indicated below provide some logical thresholds for site selection. Except where indicated, numerical estimates should be based on a short identifiable period of time, such as one-time counts on daily surveys, not on cumulative totals.

4(a) Concentrations of waterfowl: The site regularly supports at least 2,000 breeding/wintering waterfowl or 5,000 migrating waterfowl. "Waterfowl" includes such birds as loons, grebes, ducks, coots, and moorhens.

4(b) Concentrations of gulls or terns: The site supports at least 5,000 or more gulls at sites around the Great Salt Lake or 500 gulls at other sites in Utah or 50 terns over a short period of time during any season. For breeding pairs, the site regularly supports at least 200 pairs of California gulls or 50 pairs of Franklin or other gulls or 25 pairs of terns.

4(c) Concentrations of shorebirds: The site regularly supports 2,000 or more shorebirds at sites around the Great Salt Lake or 500 shorebirds at other sites in Utah. For breeding pairs, the site regularly supports 50 pairs of shorebirds.

4(d) Concentrations of raptors: The site is a migratory corridor for at least 1,000 raptors (seasonal total) during spring or fall migration, or is a winter concentration area used by at least 100 raptors. The area may include topographic features that funnel birds through a particular site.

4(e) Concentrations of wading birds: The site regularly supports 100 or more pairs of wading birds (herons, egrets, and ibises).

4(f) Concentrations of migratory land birds: The site is an important migratory stopover, bottleneck, or migratory corridor. Sites should contain exceptional numbers and/or diversity. No threshold in numbers is set.

4(g) Single species concentrations: The site regularly supports significant concentrations of a species but may not meet the thresholds for specific groups of birds listed in criteria 4a-4f above. Such sites should support a higher proportion of a species counted on a statewide basis than other comparable areas. Examples of this condition are: waterfowl in molt migration, post-breeding concentrations of pinyon jays, and significant concentrations of wintering land birds i.e., rosy-finch.

#### Supportive Criteria

The following two criteria may be used to supplement or support a site nomination. By themselves, they are insufficient to warrant the designation of a site in Utah as an IBA. In addition to the two criteria described below, you are encouraged to list other outstanding resources that characterize the site you are nominating (see nomination form).

Supportive Category A: Sites supporting long-term avian research efforts.

Sites protected under this criterion should be natural areas where a long-term avian research project is based. Past or on-going research at the site should have contributed substantially to ornithology, avian ecology, or bird conservation. Publication of relevant findings in a widely recognized, peer-reviewed journal (e.g., Utah Birds, Great Basin Naturalist, Western Birds, Journal of Field Ornithology, Condor, and Southwestern Naturalist) is one of the primary considerations. Breeding Bird Survey blocks and Christmas Bird Count routes, while important within the context of their own programs, will not qualify an area as an IBA.

Supportive Category B: Sites providing important, bird-specific educational opportunities.

Sites supporting educational programs in which a significant component of the program content focuses on avian ecology, bird identification, biodiversity, or the value of high-quality habitat for birds. Sites may be in a natural, urban, suburban, or rural setting, but should retain significant natural habitat. Sites where educational programs are being developed will also be considered, as will sites where habitat restoration is a significant management goal.

## **Further Information**

If you require further assistance or need to obtain the nomination form that should accompany these criteria, please contact the IBA Program at the addresses below or check the Utah IBA website at [www.audubon.org/bird/iba/utah](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/utah). You may also wish to check the Audubon website for general information about the IBA program at [www.audubon.org/bird/iba](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba).

For general information about the Utah IBA program, nominating a site, nomination forms, criteria, etc., please contact:

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