Re-invigorating BC’s IBA Program

The B.C. IBA Program is re-invigorating with a proactive partnership of birders and naturalists around the province. The purpose is to establish a network of knowledgeable volunteers who are prepared to be Caretakers for each of our IBAs. They will be the “eyes and the ears” on the ground, watching for any changes in bird population levels or conservation threats. It will be the first such Caretaker Network in Canada, although networks of volunteers and site support groups have been established elsewhere in the world, from Denmark to Cambodia, and Tanzania to Mexico.

British Columbia is a large and very biodiverse province with a small population, concentrated in the southwest region. IBAs vary in size and accessibility, and many are remote from communities. Some have severe conservation threats. The challenge is to find Caretakers for every one of the 84 designated B.C. IBA sites.

The Program will unfold over the next few years with several elements: creating the network of volunteer Caretakers, outreach and awareness-raising, and renewal of the database and web-resources. Project coordination is being led by BC Nature with strong support from Bird Studies Canada BC Regional Office, and from the national IBA partners, Nature Canada and Bird Studies Canada.
BC Nature and partners will undertake the following steps in the coming year:

**Creating the Caretaker Network**

- Recruit volunteer birders and naturalists in communities around B.C. to take responsibility for reporting on each of the 84 sites. Caretakers may be individuals or groups; if a group takes on the role, an individual must be identified as the contact point. (see FAQs “Who can be Caretaker”)

Additional activities such as more frequent visits or collection of data is optional at this time, but will guide progression to later phases of the project as a standard IBA monitoring protocol is developed.

**Outreach and Awareness-Raising**

- Create an educational IBA powerpoint presentation with template slides that you can customise for your local IBA, and use in your community/municipality and beyond.
- Create an information brochure on IBAs to help Caretakers raise the profile of this international program with decision-makers and within communities.
- Outreach to other organizations to bring the IBA network to as many outdoor recreation and stewardship groups as possible, and encourage their partnership in and support for this program.

**Data Management and Web Resources**

- With the help of Caretakers, review site summaries on existing IBAs on the web-database www.ibacanada.com
- Complete Site Summaries for existing IBAs
- Upload new information to the web-database www.ibacanada.com
Becoming an IBA Caretaker

Caretaker’s Role
Caretakers will have four primary duties:

- Review their designated Site Summary on the website www.Ibacanada.com (in some cases this will entail writing the summary from scratch), and submit revisions/new summaries to project coordinator.
- Commit to at least one annual, seasonally appropriate visit to your site, with a brief report back to the project coordinator at BC Nature.
- Take opportunities to raise awareness of the IBA in your community.
- Advise BC Nature of any conservation threats to the site requiring actions, such as letter writing campaigns, meeting with environment agencies, etc.

Instructions for Caretakers

1. Updating site summaries
When creating new, or updating existing site summaries please consider the following:

- **Site Description** - unlikely to require alteration unless major changes have occurred to habitats, or new developments (e.g. construction) have significantly altered the site
- **Birds** – we are not looking for a detailed review of this section, rather we require any recent information that suggests substantial change to what is currently presented, e.g. McFadden Great Blue Heronry population decline.
- **Conservation Issues** –
  1. Provide details of ongoing and planned stewardship and monitoring activities within IBAs (e.g. Coastal Waterbird and Beached Bird Surveys, Ecological Reserve Wardens, WiTS), including web-links where appropriate.

2. Site Visits
Please visit the site at least once a year at a seasonally appropriate time and write a brief report on any observations, particularly noting presence or absence of birds, changes in land use or status, and any conservation threats. If you visit the site more often, please try and summarize your observations in a brief annual report. Reports should be sent to the Program Coordinator (see contact details below). We do not want to give you an onerous amount of reporting to do, but we do need you to check in with us. Even a verbal report over the phone is better than nothing.

3. Outreach
BC Nature is working on an IBA powerpoint presentation that will explain the international, national and provincial aspects of this global bird conservation program. There will be template slides so that Caretakers or local groups can customise the presentation for their local IBA and community. We hope that Caretakers and partner groups will take advantage of this presentation and accompanying pamphlet to do some outreach in their local community. The IBA Program is not well known in British Columbia and it is vital that regional planners and municipalities become aware of the ecological importance of IBA sites.

Once the powerpoint presentation is prepared, copies will be sent to all Caretakers and others who request it.
Future Plans

IBAs will be selected in which to pilot a system for monitoring bird populations, habitats, land- and human-use following a standard protocol that feeds into the global IBA monitoring plan being developed by BirdLife International.

Progress to-date

Thanks to all the Caretakers who have already volunteered. Nearly half the IBAs have now been matched with a Caretaker. Many individuals and groups are supporting the program, including:

- BC Field Ornithologists
- Bird Studies Canada
- Canadian Wildlife Service
- Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival Committee
- Laskeek Bay Conservation Society
- Mayne Island Conservancy
- Nature Canada

If you notice that your group is not on this list, please let us know!

Outreach presentations have been given to the following organisations: Nature Trust of BC, Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), Living Oceans Society, Georgia Strait Alliance, Partners in Flight, BC Field Ornithologists, & BC Nature.

Funding news

The BC IBA Caretaker Network Project has received a grant of $4,000 from Nature Canada’s Community Action Fund for 2007-2008. Bird Studies Canada is providing in-kind support including staff time to help with project planning and management, preparation of communications materials and data management.

BC Nature is providing $2,200 in financial support and many hours of volunteer support from Caretakers in member clubs, as well as the volunteer project coordinator. We also received $2,500 from the Gaming Commission fund for 2008. BC Nature has applied to the BC Ministry of Environment for additional project support.

Expenses

We greatly appreciate the time and energy volunteers are contributing to the Program. As yet, we do not have enough money to fund expenses incurred by Caretakers visiting their local site. We hope that volunteers will check on sites as part of routine visits that they would have made anyway. However, limited funds are available to reimburse pre-approved out-of-pocket expenses for Caretakers who need to reach remote IBAs. Please contact the project coordinator to assess your eligibility, prior to incurring the expense.

For more information, contact:
BC Nature fbcn@telus.net 604 737 3057
Anne Murray sanderling@uniserve.com 604 943 4460
FAQ

• Who can be a Caretaker?

A Caretaker can be an individual, a group of individuals, a club or an organisation with an interest in promoting the conservation of an IBA. Ideally, the Caretaker will be familiar with, and situated close to the IBA, with the means to visit the IBA with some frequency (e.g., at least a couple of times a year). For some IBAs this is not possible, e.g., IBAs in remote areas and on offshore islands; in these instances the Caretaker should be able to visit the IBA at least once a year at a seasonally appropriate time (e.g. when that IBA is hosting the bird species for which it is important).

• Can we propose new IBA sites?

We do not currently have the capacity to evaluate and designate new IBAs, but this is something that we are working towards. The priority at this stage is to consolidate the existing IBA network, with a view to building on it when the capacity has been developed to do so.

• Why didn’t your site make it from the candidate list to designation?

During the first round of IBA evaluation, 84 of the 300 sites nominated as potential IBAs in B.C. were granted IBA status. This was done as part of a nation-wide review process, using standardized criteria across all provinces. Some sites that were nominated came close to, but did not meet the IBA criteria. Other sites may have met some IBA criteria, but were not designated because at least three other sites fulfilled these criteria more effectively (e.g., supported larger total numbers of the species, higher congregations of waterfowl, etc). A general premise of the IBA program is to select sites throughout each species’ biogeographic range, based on bird numbers, that when taken together forms a minimum network to ensure the species survival. The IBA network is not a rigid one, however. There will be sites that lose their conservation importance for whatever reason, and no longer meet thresholds for designation, and sites that become more important. Plus of course there will be newly discovered sites from time to time, particularly in the vast landscapes that Canada supports.
BC IBA Caretaker Network (Sept 2007)

Caretakers are needed for the following sites: (contact Anne Murray for a complete list: sanderling@uniserve.com)

- Amphritite and Swiftsure Banks
- Big Bay south to Delusion Bay
- Carmanah Walbran Forest
- Cecil Lake
- Checleset Bay
- Chilcotin Junction
- Clecleset Island and Southeast Clayoquot Sound
- Cowichan Estuary
- Cumshewa Inlet north to Sheldens Bay
- Desolation Sound
- Duke of Edinburgh Ecological Reserve
- Fraser Lake
- Greater Vancouver Watershed
- Hesquiat Lake area
- Holden Lake
- Jervis Inlet/McRae Islet
- Kitkatla Channel, Goschen Island north to Porcher Island
- Klaskish River and East Creek Watersheds
- Kotcho Lake
- Lawn Point
- Megin, Moyeha, Watta and Pretty Girl watersheds
- Mitlenatch Island
- Mount Arrowsmith Area Mountains
- Mussel and Kynoch Inlet and Sheep Passage
- Nootka Island banks
- Pacific Spirit Park
- Skidegate Inlet
- Snake Island
- South Thompson River
- Strathcona Provincial Park
- Stuart, Tachie and Middle Rivers
- Sumallo River/Skagit Valley
- Tachick and Nulki Lakes
- Barkley Sound
- Baynes Sound
- Boundary Bay – Roberts Bank – Sturgeon Bank (Fraser River estuary)
- Chehalis River Estuary
- Chopaka Customs
- Comox Valley
- Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area
- Dodge Point and Gogit Passage Island Chain
- Douglas Lake Plateau
- Englefield Bay Islands
- English Bay and Burrard Inlet
- Frederick Island
- Gillam Island
- Goose Island Group and Banks
- Grey and Green Islets
- Hippa Island
- Kerouard and St James Islands
- Kipool Lake Area
- Kunghit Island and Luxana Bay
- Kyuoquot Channel Islets
- Lambert Channel/Homby Island Waters
- Langara Island
- Laskeek Bay
- Lapas Bay Islet
- Little Qualicum Estuary to Nanoose Bay
- Lucy Islands
- Major Brown Rock
- McFadden Creek Heronry
- McIntyre Beach and Rose Spit
- Moore and Byers Islands and Banks
- Osoyoos Oxbows
- Porlier Pass
- Ramsay and Northern Juan Perez Sound
- Scott Island Group
- Sidney Channel
- Skincuttle Inlet Islands
- Skookumchuk Prairie
- Smith Sound Islets
- Solander Island and Brooks Bay
- Somenos Marsh Wildlife Refuge
- Squamish River Area
- Tian Bay/Port Louis Area
- Tofino Mudflats
- Vaseux Lake Area
- White Islets and Wilson Creek
- White Lake Area

Caretakers have already volunteered for the following sites:

- Active Pass
- Alder Island
- Anthony Island