

IBA Canada Caretaker Manual



Connecting Birds and People:

IBAs are an important tool for engaging people in awareness and protection of their local bird populations.



BIRD STUDIES
ÉTUDES D'OISEAUX **CANADA**

IBA
BIRDLIFE IMPORTANT BIRD
AND BIODIVERSITY AREA





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IBAs in Canada

Cover photo: IBA Caretaker Joanne Smith surveys birds at Riverton Sandy Bar © Donna Martin



Welcome to the Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas Program

Congratulations! By participating in the IBA Program, you are part of the world's largest partnership for nature and people through BirdLife International and the national IBA partners in Canada, Bird Studies Canada and Nature Canada. This manual explains the role of an IBA Caretaker, how Caretakers fit within the broader IBA Program in Canada, and provides pointers to the resources available to help you with your important work. A hearty "thank you" for joining us to conserve Canada's birds and the special places they call home.

About IBAs

The IBA Program is a global initiative to identify, monitor, and conserve the world's most important sites for birds and biodiversity. Using internationally-accepted scientific criteria, nearly 600 Canadian sites have been designated across the country. Some are extremely remote, while others are located within our largest urban centres. These sites are not only critical for birds, but also for many other species, including people. The rigorous scientific foundation of the Program gives IBAs a conservation currency that transcends international borders and promotes international collaboration for the conservation of the world's birds. It also makes IBAs an important tool for identifying conservation priorities, and fostering greater success in the conservation of bird populations.

The Caretaker Network

The Caretaker concept is now a major pillar of Canada's IBA Program. It took root in 2007, when BC Nature initiated a province-wide IBA Caretaker Network based on similar networks in Europe. The idea was to engage volunteers with an interest in birds or the conservation of a particular area to become 'caretakers' for the province's IBAs. The job description was simple – visit the site when the 'trigger' bird population(s) are present, and report back on habitat conditions, bird population observations, any signs of threats to the birds or habitat, and information on any conservation efforts taking place. This information would be used by regional and national IBA staff to update the published information on the national IBA website and to engage in various conservation actions. A concerted effort was made to adapt and expand the Caretaker concept to all provinces, a goal that was realized after many years of effort and with support from a variety of funders at all scales from local to international. A list of past and present supporters can be found at the IBA Canada website.



Hudsonian Godwits © Mike Burrell



What is a Caretaker?

IBA Caretakers are individuals or groups of people who voluntarily commit to caring for one or more IBAs in Canada. This commitment is made typically as a formal agreement between you (the Caretaker or Caretaker Group), and the Regional Partner. In general, Caretakers keep track of and report on changes to bird populations and habitats (including potential threats) within IBAs. Information gathered by Caretakers helps Regional and National IBA Canada Partners engage in effective bird conservation efforts by keeping information up-to-date and responding to threats to habitats and species. Caretakers may also choose to engage in other important conservation activities such as stewardship, outreach, site rehabilitation, conservation planning and helping to assess broader site biodiversity. Caretakers may be members of a nature club/conservation organization, be officially associated with IBAs as part of their employment (e.g., parks staff), or simply have an interest in being involved in local bird conservation. Ideally, a Caretaker will be familiar with, and be situated close to the IBA, and possess the means to visit the IBA with some frequency. For some remote IBAs, visitation might be limited to once per year or as opportunities arise. It is helpful if Caretakers are able to commit to participating in the Program for at least three years. Caretakers are usually recruited by and report to the Regional Coordinator, except where a province/territory lacks an active Partner. The exact nature of the reporting and the agreement between the Caretaker and the Regional or National Partner will likely vary. The Regional Coordinator is the link from the Caretaker to the national IBA Program in Canada.



Norfolk Forest Complex © Mike Burrell

Caretaker Activities

The activities (listed below) that you as a Caretaker choose to participate in will vary based on the IBA and on your own interests and skills. In some cases, a single person will have the capacity, interest, and ability to conduct all of these activities. A more likely scenario is that a number of people with different skill sets and interests will form a Caretaker Group, collectively covering off the full spectrum of activities required. Whatever the scenario, your efforts are valuable and appreciated. All activities assume that you are familiar with the IBA and that you visit it annually or more frequently. No matter what your involvement is, all Caretakers are expected to report to their Regional IBA Coordinator (or the National Partner where



appropriate) on at least an annual basis. See the section on reporting for guidance on how and what to report and how to keep track of your time and effort as a Caretaker.

Update IBA Information

Ongoing monitoring and assessment is central to determining if bird populations or habitat conditions are changing. Efforts to track these changes at Canadian IBAs need to be consistent with BirdLife International's protocols. BirdLife's global framework for IBA monitoring was recently adopted by the United Nations as a key indicator from which to measure global progress towards targets set by global conventions and agreements. This involves assessing site conditions and bird populations (see below), and submitting your observations to the Regional or National IBA Coordinator - normally on an annual basis. This information will be used to update site summaries published on the IBA Canada web directory, among other uses. Guidance and reporting forms are available from the IBA Canada website under the Caretaker Resources page. The Regional or National IBA Coordinator should be able to provide instructions to help you with the assessment. You are encouraged to use the form "IBA Comprehensive Review" to collect information for your site assessment. Collecting this information may require multiple visits and may not be possible to complete within one calendar year.

Conduct Bird Monitoring

At many IBAs, some form of bird monitoring is already taking place through Bird Studies Canada's [citizen science programs](#) or other local programs. The IBA Program seeks to build on these valuable efforts, and not duplicate them. However, since such monitoring is most likely being done incidental to IBA objectives (i.e., by surveys that do not cover the IBA adequately and/or are mistimed in relation to the presence of IBA trigger bird species), it is almost certain that additional, targeted bird monitoring will be required. The site summary (on the IBA Canada website) for any given IBA indicates the state and currency of the existing bird data holdings, and the gaps that need to be filled. Please work with your Regional IBA Coordinator and/or BSC to develop and implement the most appropriate bird monitoring strategy. Bird observations should always be entered into [eBird.ca](#), where they are automatically associated with IBAs and periodically transferred to the IBA Canada database. Please see the resources section of this guide for more information about eBird. Some examples of bird monitoring



Albany River Estuary © Mike Burrell



programs you may be able to contribute to at your IBA are provincial breeding bird atlases, Marsh Monitoring Program, Christmas Bird Count, Project Nestwatch, Coastal Waterbird Survey and many more. As noted, these will not necessarily match the monitoring needs of the IBA trigger species, but are useful (and fun!) nonetheless and add to our knowledge of the IBA.

Conduct Outreach

Consider building interest and support for the IBA in the local community through a variety of approaches. Regional and National Partners have engagement tools such as presentations, brochures and other materials, all of which are available through your Regional IBA Coordinator or the Caretaker Resources page of the IBA Canada website. Some outreach activities currently being conducted by Caretakers include leading guided tours and field trips; building wildlife viewing infrastructure; running summer nature camps for children; including the IBA in regional ecotourism guides; starting a blog, Facebook page or website about the IBA; organizing festivals and special celebratory events; participating in meetings, workshops and local events; and engaging local decision-makers by sharing information about IBAs and their value to birds and Canadians.



Point Pelee © Erica Barkley

Be an IBA Advocate

When a potential conservation threat arises in an IBA, we encourage you to inform your Regional IBA Coordinator and/or National Partner to discuss actions that could be undertaken. As a Caretaker, you provide a very important local perspective, and possess local knowledge that is critical to understanding an issue. Regional and National Partners are available to help and can provide advice on an appropriate course of action, or provide contact information for government agencies that may have a regulatory role. Some examples of advocacy activities that Caretakers have taken part in include participating in public hearings about development and advocating for inclusion of IBAs and bird conservation in general to local government. In



Black-bellied Plovers © Mike Burrell



some cases, it may be more appropriate for the Regional or National Partners to lead a response, in which case the Caretaker's role is more advisory in nature.

Be an IBA Steward

Stewardship activities come closest to the meaning of “caring for” something; in this case, habitats that are important for birds. In an IBA this could include undertaking habitat restoration by removing garbage or invasive species; planting vegetation to improve degraded habitat; installing signage or information panels; and managing the movement of visitors in the IBA to minimize negative effects and maximize positive experiences. Regional IBA Coordinators are on hand to assist by providing information and materials where possible, or by helping to identify funding sources for such activities. Examples of stewardship activities that Caretakers have done in the past include protection of sensitive nesting sites, invasive species removal, beach cleanups, tree planting, trail clearing, and nest box installation and monitoring.



West End of Lake Ontario © Ron Ridout

Conservation Planning

Conservation planning at IBAs is an important activity that is typically led by the Regional or National Partners, following national standards, protocols, and guidance. As a Caretaker, your local knowledge can play a key role in defining and carrying out what needs to be done at any given IBA. Setting out conservation goals and objectives is important for focusing effort, tracking progress, and for leveraging support for the IBA. The Regional and National Partners can help in determining the type of approach that is appropriate for any given site. Setting conservation priorities and actions is a rapidly evolving area and new tools are being developed for the Canadian IBA Program that will make it easier to do and easier to integrate within the existing IBA website¹.

¹ For reference, almost 100 formal conservation plans were written for priority IBAs in the early 2000s, most of which are available on the IBA Canada website.



Conduct monitoring for other plants and animals

IBAs are important sites for birds and for biodiversity in general. The more we know about these sites the better we can ensure they continue to provide healthy ecosystems supporting birds and other wildlife. Conducting monitoring programs for other groups of animals and plants is strongly encouraged. Talk to your Regional Coordinator about opportunities to survey plants, butterflies, reptiles and amphibians, or other groups of organisms. Some examples of protocols and projects are eButterfly, provincial butterfly atlases, bioblitzes, and reptile and amphibian atlases.



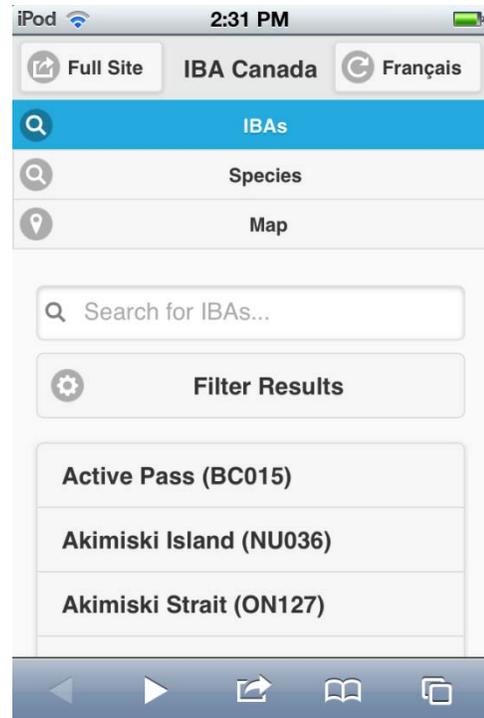
Cecropia and Io moths © Mike Burrell

Resources

The Regional and National partners have developed a suite of tools and resources to help you be an effective Caretaker. A central resource is the [IBA Canada website](#), where you will find a searchable directory of Canada’s IBAs, maps and data, conservation plans, and much more. The website is also available in a mobile-friendly 'to-go' format, allowing for convenient viewing in the field on your phone or tablet (requires an Internet connection). Like the main website, the mobile site is fully bilingual and contains all the latest information and maps about Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in Canada. Importantly, the main website houses a page dedicated to Caretaker Resources, some of which are described below. Your Regional Coordinator may also have material that is tailored to your region.

Reporting Forms and Guidance

At a very minimum, you should report your findings and your Caretaker activities to your Regional Coordinator once per year. This information is important for keeping IBA site data current. There are standardized forms to use for reporting all aspects of being a Caretaker and these can be downloaded directly from the IBA Canada webpage or by request from your Regional Coordinator. Your Regional Coordinator will let you know which forms are needed and can give you guidance on completing them.



IBA information on-the-go



Facebook Page and Group

The IBA Canada Facebook page is the central hub for news and announcements related to the IBA Program in Canada, and is maintained by the National Partners. To stay up-to-date on the Program, please “like” the page and our posts will appear in your news feed. Even if you don’t have a Facebook account, you can still read the content by visiting www.facebook.com/IBACanada.

You are encouraged to join the related [Facebook Group](#), an interactive forum that allows you to share experiences, stories, photos, videos, and any content relevant to Important Bird Areas. The Group has grown to include members from around the world, thus facilitating interaction and learning from a wide circle of like-minded individuals. Please consider posting your stories, photos and video of birds, people, landscapes, and habitats taken in an IBA so that we can share your good work with the rest of the world (please always label appropriately with the IBA name and code).



IBA Canada Facebook Page

eBird

Keeping the bird data up-to-date for each IBA is one of the most important jobs of Caretakers and is most easily done through [eBird Canada](#). eBird is an online checklist program that allows anyone to enter information about the birds they saw or heard at a specific location. Bird Studies Canada manages the eBird Canada portal, where all bird data collected should be submitted. A special [IBA Canada Protocol](#) can be used within eBird to record observations in specific circumstances. Use of eBird is described in more detail on the IBA Canada website and in a tutorial on the IBA Canada YouTube channel (see below).



Caretaker materials © Joanne Smith



YouTube Channel

IBA Canada maintains its own [YouTube Channel](#) where videos are posted. The videos range from promotional material for the Program to technical “How to” videos. You are encouraged to watch the videos that are relevant to you and to share them with others who might be interested. In particular, please help us to grow awareness of the Program by sharing our national IBA video.

Contacts

Visit the IBA Canada website for [current contact information](#). You can contact IBA Canada by email at iba@birdscanada.org.

National Partners:

Bird Studies Canada

Box 160, 115 Front Street
Port Rowan, ON NOE 1M0
Phone: 519 586 3531
www.birdscanada.org

Nature Canada

75 Albert Street, Suite 300
Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7
Phone: 613 562 3447
www.naturecanada.ca

Regional Partners:

- British Columbia – BC Nature and Bird Studies Canada (BC office)
- Alberta – Nature Alberta
- Saskatchewan – Nature Saskatchewan
- Manitoba – Nature Manitoba and Bird Studies Canada (Manitoba office)
- Ontario – Bird Studies Canada (National office)
- Québec – Nature Québec
- New Brunswick – Nature New Brunswick
- Nova Scotia – Bird Studies Canada (Atlantic office)
- Prince Edward Island – Island Nature Trust
- Newfoundland and Labrador - Nature Newfoundland & Labrador and Intervale Associates



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