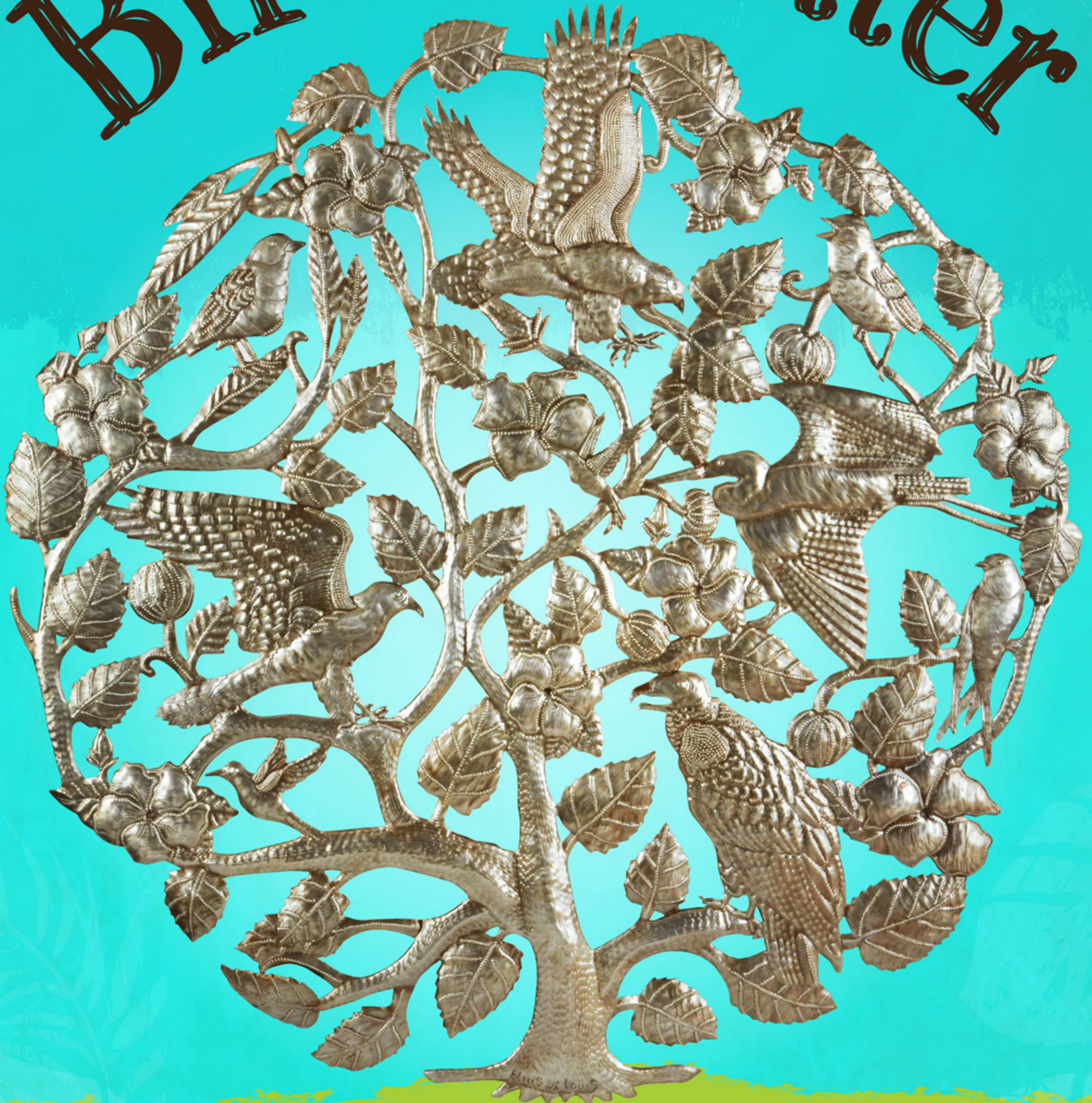


Why Birds Matter



INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY 2014



International Migratory Bird Day 2014

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The Benefits of Birds to Humans and Nature

What Is A Bird Worth?

by Jeff Wells

There was once a time in North America, not so long ago, when wild birds were seen by most people as an economic commodity. In a walk through a late 1800's city market, one might have encountered strings of dead Bobolinks (at a dollar per dozen), American Golden Plovers, and Passenger Pigeons for sale. Ironically, several of the species that were most economically important in that period — Passenger Pigeons and Eskimo Curlews in particular — became extinct, and their worth was lost to all future generations. Fortunately, today we have a broadened sense of the "value" of birds.

Bird lovers don't need any economic rationalization for why they think birds are important and valuable. They are not afraid to admit that they just gain pleasure and joy from seeing, hearing, and interacting with wild birds around their homes, neighborhoods, parks, and wild places. For some people that is enough, and no deeper thinking is required. Others feel a spiritual connection to birds as fellow inhabitants of the Earth, whose lives are enmeshed with the seasons and fates are reliant on communities of plants and animals. For these people it is refreshing to have a reminder that the health and future of we humans is equally dependent on the natural world.

It is also important, however, to let the world know about the crucial roles birds play in keeping our natural world working and our economies healthy. And it is a long list! Birds are pollinators, scavengers, small mammal predators, seed dispersers, insect controllers, environmental indicators, and an inspiration for the arts.

Pollinators

As hummingbirds probe flowers for nectar, they pollinate them in the process. Other bird species are also pollinators, including many migratory warblers, such as Cape May and Tennessee Warblers, which are avid flower probers on their wintering grounds and during migration. Globally, more than 900 bird species pollinate at least 500 genera of vascular plants, and for many plant species the loss of a bird pollinator will lead to declines in population size.



Scavengers

Cleaning up roadkills and waste at landfills is a job that no one wants — unless, that is, you're a vulture! Vultures are not the only bird species up to this task, and gulls, crows, ravens, and even eagles engage in scavenging. These birds help remove potential disease reservoirs and prevent the build-up of mammal scavengers that can decrease bird populations and carry diseases, such as rabies. For example, a collapse in vulture populations in India has led to an increase in feral dogs and a consequent increase in rabies from dog bites amounting to added human health costs of \$34 billion over 14 years.

Small Mammal Predators

Hawks and owls are important predators of small mammals, which in agricultural areas can be pests that cause significant economic damage. Predatory birds are more mobile than mammalian predators and are therefore more likely to be able to locate areas with increasing numbers of small mammals. Recent research also suggests that these predators change the behavior of their prey by forcing them to spend more time watching for predators and less time looking for food or engaging in other behaviors.



Seed Dispersers

Tens of thousands of plant species benefit from birds dispersing their seeds — in fact 30 to 50% of all plant species have fruits dispersed by vertebrates, including birds. Many bird species switch to fruit diets during migration and in winter. They may play critical, although poorly documented, roles in maintaining diversity of plant communities in the tropics. Even insect-eating species, such as Olive-sided Flycatchers and Eastern Kingbirds, consume a lot of fruit on their South American wintering ranges. Consider how the estimated 100 million fruit-eating Swainson's Thrushes wintering in northern South America may help to maintain tropical forest diversity!



Insect Controllers

It will come as no surprise that birds consume massive amounts of insects. While they don't eradicate insect pests completely, they can often control them at a level below which they will cause appreciable damage to plants.

A study in California found that adding nest boxes to vineyards to increase the number of nesting Western Bluebirds was beneficial, because the birds consumed large numbers of insects. Another study in Washington State estimated that Evening Grosbeaks and other birds provided pest-control services worth \$1,820 per square kilometer each year.



Environmental Indicators

Peregrine Falcons, Ospreys, and other predatory birds were famously responsible for raising alarm bells of the problems of widespread use of DDT through their sudden and dramatic declines. Even ancient peoples used birds as environmental indicators in many ways, such as alerting them to the return of migratory fish that were a vital resource for both birds and humans. Today, we closely track many bird populations to better and more quickly understand factors and issues that may be having broadscale impacts on the environment and humans.



Inspiration for the Arts

Birds are featured worldwide in poetry, dances, photography, music, legends, and paintings. A starling motivated Mozart's opening of the 3rd movement of his Piano Concerto in G. In Mexico and Central America, the Maya depicted a variety of birds on ceramic bowls and other forms of art. The Great Egret highlighted in the IMBD 2014 art is a striking bird that has provided artistic inspiration because of its beautiful white feathers, expansive wings, and dramatic courtship dance. Once hunted to near extinction for its long white plumes, this species is now commonly seen in the U.S., Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.



Jeff Wells is senior scientist at Boreal Songbird Initiative. He received his M.S. and Ph.D. in Ornithology from Cornell University and served as the National Bird Conservation Director for the National Audubon Society for many years. He has published extensively in both the peer-reviewed ornithological and popular birding literature and has authored or co-authored three books.

International Migratory Bird Day

Environment for the Americas (EFTA) coordinates International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD). EFTA works throughout the Western Hemisphere to increase awareness and motivate conservation of the wildlife that move across borders. IMBD is a celebration of one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird—its journey between breeding and non-breeding homes. The program was created by Partners in Flight (PIF) to focus public attention on the need for action to conserve birds and their habitats.

IMBD is celebrated at over 600 sites across the Western Hemisphere, through bird festivals, bird walks, and other activities. The official date for IMBD in the U.S. and Canada is the second Saturday in May each year (May 10, 2014). In the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America, the second Saturday in October (October 11, 2014) marks the return of birds to non-breeding grounds from their nesting sites to the north. Because migratory birds do not use calendars, IMBD events are scheduled to coincide with when birds are most likely to be present.



IMBD Information, Products & Events
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IMBD TITLE SPONSORS



U.S. Forest Service administers 193 million acres of forests and grasslands in 44 states, comprising the largest amount of breeding-bird habitat under one ownership in the U.S. Through the *Wings Across the Americas* program, the Forest Service works with a diversity of partners to conserve migratory birds and their habitats, both domestically and internationally.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is directed by Congress to ensure the perpetuation of migratory bird populations and their habitats. Migratory birds are some of nature's most magnificent resources and play a significant ecological, economic, and cultural role. The Service's Migratory Bird Program supports the critical and challenging endeavor of conserving birds through careful monitoring, effective management, and support of national and international partnerships that benefit migratory bird populations and their habitats.



Partners in Flight (PIF) was launched in 1990 in response to growing concerns about declines in populations of Neotropical migratory bird species. Since then, PIF has expanded to consider the conservation needs of all 882 species of native landbirds that regularly breed in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. Through voluntary partnerships, PIF addresses its mission of helping species at risk and also keeping common birds common. PIF partners are numerous and include federal, state, provincial and territorial agencies, First Nations, tribes, nongovernmental organizations, universities, industry, and concerned individuals.

IMBD PROGRAM SPONSORS

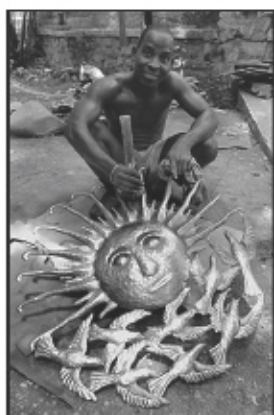


The Bureau of Land Management manages 245 million acres and focuses on sustaining the health and productivity of these lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing activities, such as outdoor recreation and grazing. BLM also protects cultural heritage and fish and wildlife by conserving natural and heritage resources.



The Department of Defense (DoD) Partners in Flight (PIF) program sustains and enhances the military testing, training, and safety mission through habitat-based management strategies that maintain healthy landscapes and training lands. DoD PIF is a network of natural resources personnel from military installations across the U.S. that improves monitoring, inventory, research, management, and education programs involving birds and their habitats. DoD PIF also works to determine the status of bird populations and prevent the listing of additional species as Threatened or Endangered. Primary funding is from the DoD Legacy Resource Management Program.

2014 IMBD ARTIST: ELIAS ST. LOUIS



Elias St. Louis is a talented metal artist with Haiti Gallery in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. To create the IMBD 2014 piece, EFTA provided a concept with images of the bird species to be highlighted. Elias and gallery owner Ted Beckett adapted the design and then drew the final piece onto a flattened, recycled 55 gallon steel drum. Using a hammer and chisel, Elias shaped the metal, detailing the art piece. The traditional art of converting oil drums into amazing wall sculptures began in the 1940's and is a mark of Haitian imagination and resourcefulness, supporting families and providing a

source of income. Thanks to Elias and Ted for their help crafting this unique piece for IMBD 2014!



- 1 - American Robin
- 2 - Red-tailed Hawk
- 3 - Yellow Warbler
- 4 - Peregrine Falcon
- 5 - Broad-tailed Hummingbird
- 6 - Great Egret
- 7 - Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- 8 - Turkey Vulture
- 9 - Barn Swallow

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