

# Canada's Boreal Forest

## Vital to North American Bird Life

One in three birds across North America owes its existence to Canada's boreal forest.

A new analysis shows that the fate of much of the continent's bird life depends on the future of this vast northern landscape – a future that is now at a crossroads. The evidence is detailed in the report, *The Importance of Canada's Boreal Forest to Landbirds* by biologist Peter Blancher of Bird Studies Canada. The study, based on an unprecedented compilation of bird census data from across Canada and the United States, was released for International Migratory Bird Day.

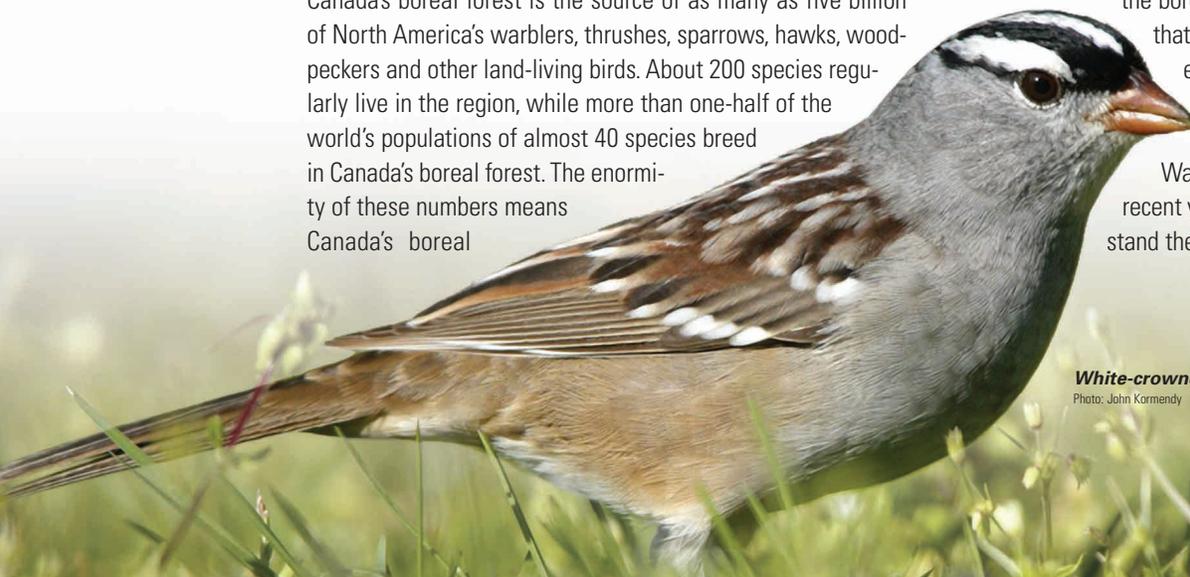
Canada's boreal forest is the source of as many as five billion of North America's warblers, thrushes, sparrows, hawks, woodpeckers and other land-living birds. About 200 species regularly live in the region, while more than one-half of the world's populations of almost 40 species breed in Canada's boreal forest. The enormity of these numbers means Canada's boreal

region is critical to North American bird abundance and biodiversity. It also means that the boreal forest management choices we make today will affect bird life well into the future from Labrador to Louisiana and right across the United States and Canada.

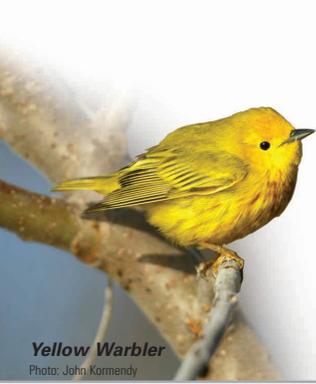
The release of *The Importance of Canada's Boreal Forest to Landbirds* marks the first time scientists have assessed the large-scale dependency of North American land-living birds on the boreal forest. Significantly, the study shows that populations of several boreal-dependent birds are suffering. Numbers of boreal-breeding Connecticut Warblers, Rusty Blackbirds and Canada Warblers, for example, have fallen sharply in recent years. More research is needed to understand the reasons for these declines.



**Yellow-rumped Warbler**  
Photo: John Kormendy



**White-crowned Sparrow**  
Photo: John Kormendy



Yellow Warbler  
Photo: John Kormendy

# Look up.



Common Goldeneye  
Photo: Ducks Unlimited



Rose-breasted Grosbeak (m)  
Photo: John Kormendy



Bufflehead  
Photo: Ducks Unlimited



Chestnut-sided Warbler  
Photo: John Kormendy

As many as three billion birds migrate to Canada's boreal forest every spring. More than 90 percent of boreal-nesting birds fly south in the fall, and those that survive winter return in the spring. Migration counts from the southern United States suggest that a third of all springtime migrants in the area are heading to the boreal forest.

Boreal bird life is species rich. Canada's boreal forest has unusually high bird diversity for its northern latitude. With almost 200 species of land-living birds from 35 families, the boreal forest generally has greater bird diversity than adjacent landscapes to the south.

The United States is a boreal bird's home away from home. Most boreal-nesting birds spend at least some of the year in the United States. The country is home in winter to more than one billion land-living boreal birds, including White-throated Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos and Hermit Thrushes.

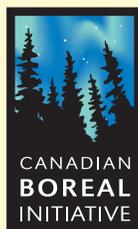
Warblers depend on the boreal forest. Of all birds, the many small, bright warblers are perhaps most cherished by bird-watchers. Almost three-quarters of warblers found in Canada hail from the country's boreal forest. Palm Warblers, Tennessee Warblers, Connecticut Warblers and several others breed almost exclusively in Canada's boreal wilderness.



Photo: Ducks Unlimited

## The Canadian Boreal Initiative and the Boreal Songbird Initiative

*The Importance of Canada's Boreal Forest to Landbirds* by biologist Peter Blancher of Bird Studies Canada was jointly commissioned by the Canadian Boreal Initiative and the U.S.-based Boreal Songbird Initiative.



CANADIAN  
BOREAL  
INITIATIVE

The Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI) is working with a wide range of conservation organizations, First Nations, industry and other interested parties to link science, policy and conservation activities in Canada's boreal forest. The CBI's long term vision is to safeguard the balance of nature for all time in Canada's boreal forest through the establishment of an interconnected network of large-scale protected areas and conservation

lands, applying state-of-the-art sustainable development practices on the remainder of the landscape, and engaging and empowering local communities and First Nations on land management decisions.



BOREAL SONGBIRD INITIATIVE

The Boreal Songbird Initiative (BSI) is a new project dedicated to educating birdwatchers and naturalists throughout the United States about the importance of the boreal forest to migratory birds. The BSI is part of an emerging network of U.S. organizations – including the American Bird Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council – working to raise awareness about the boreal forest and assist efforts in Canada and Alaska to conserve it.

Canada's boreal forest is one of the world's largest remaining intact forest ecosystems, home to some of our last great wilderness areas.



**Black and White Warbler**  
Photo: John Kormendy

### Could the languid, lonesome whistle of the White-throated Sparrow grow more lonely still?

The White-throated Sparrow is one of the most abundant summertime residents in Canada's boreal forest. These birds rely almost exclusively on the boreal forest to breed, and more than 100 million of them nest in the region each year. These Sparrows are also familiar to Americans as among the common species at U.S. bird feeders after they migrate south for the winter.

In the summer, no other songbird is more closely associated with the peaceful expanse of Canada's remote boreal woodlands. The White-throated Sparrow's slow, clear song – pure sweet *Canada, Canada, Canada*, heard across still lakes and through rugged forest – is almost an anthem for this unspoiled wilderness.

Studies reveal, however, that Canada's White-throated Sparrow population is faltering. Breeding bird survey data presented in *The Importance of Canada's Boreal Forest to Landbirds* shows the number of White-throated Sparrows is declining significantly, by almost one percent per year across its range. No single cause has been identified. But as we begin the process of choosing boreal forest management priorities, the sparrow's plight should give us pause for thought. It may be that the wistful song of the White-throated Sparrow shares strains with the cautionary melody of coal-mine Canaries.



**Canada Warbler**  
Photo: John Kormendy



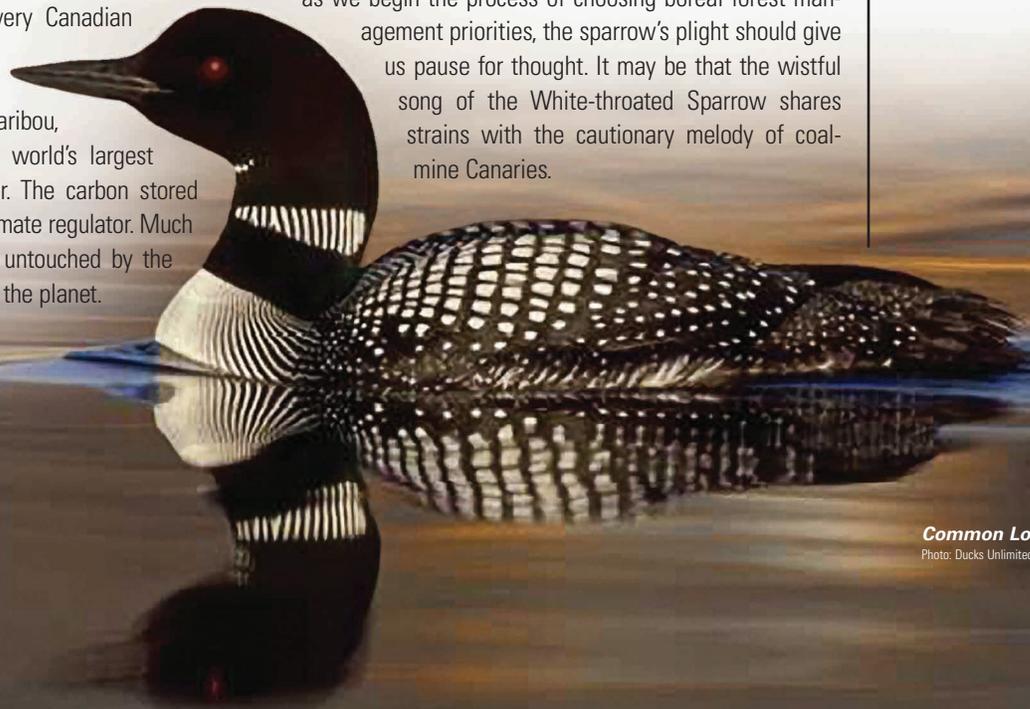
**Red-breasted Merganser**  
Photo: Ducks Unlimited



**White-throated Sparrow**  
Photo: Kevin Hannah

Many North American ducks, geese and shorebirds also nest in Canada's boreal forest. More than 40 percent of North America's waterfowl use Canada's and Alaska's boreal and for 35 species of waterbirds, the boreal region forms more than half of their breeding grounds. That means the future of much-loved birds like the Common Loon depend on the choices we make for conserving boreal lakes and woodlands.

Canada's boreal forest is one of the world's largest remaining intact forest ecosystems, home to some of our last great wilderness areas. Its tracts of remote woodlands and wetlands, thousands of clear lakes and cool rivers cover more than one billion acres across almost every Canadian province and territory. It boasts many ecological wonders, including some of the planet's largest populations of woodland caribou, wolves and bears. It holds one of the world's largest supplies of precious unfrozen fresh water. The carbon stored within its vast wetlands is an important climate regulator. Much of Canada's boreal forest is substantially untouched by the development that has transformed most of the planet.



**Common Loon**  
Photo: Ducks Unlimited



**Black-throated Green Warbler**  
Photo: John Kormendy

## What could be more Yankee than a Connecticut Warbler?

Who wouldn't feel some hometown American pride for a Tennessee Warbler, a Philadelphia Vireo, a Nashville Warbler or a Cape May Warbler? In fact, almost all of these birds with American names are born and bred in Canada's boreal forest. They only pass through or linger in these U.S. places as they migrate.

Percent of global population that nests in boreal Canada

Tennessee Warbler	97%
Connecticut Warbler	92%
Philadelphia Vireo	86%
Cape May Warbler	83%
Nashville Warbler	63%

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**Philadelphia Vireo**  
Photo: John Kormendy



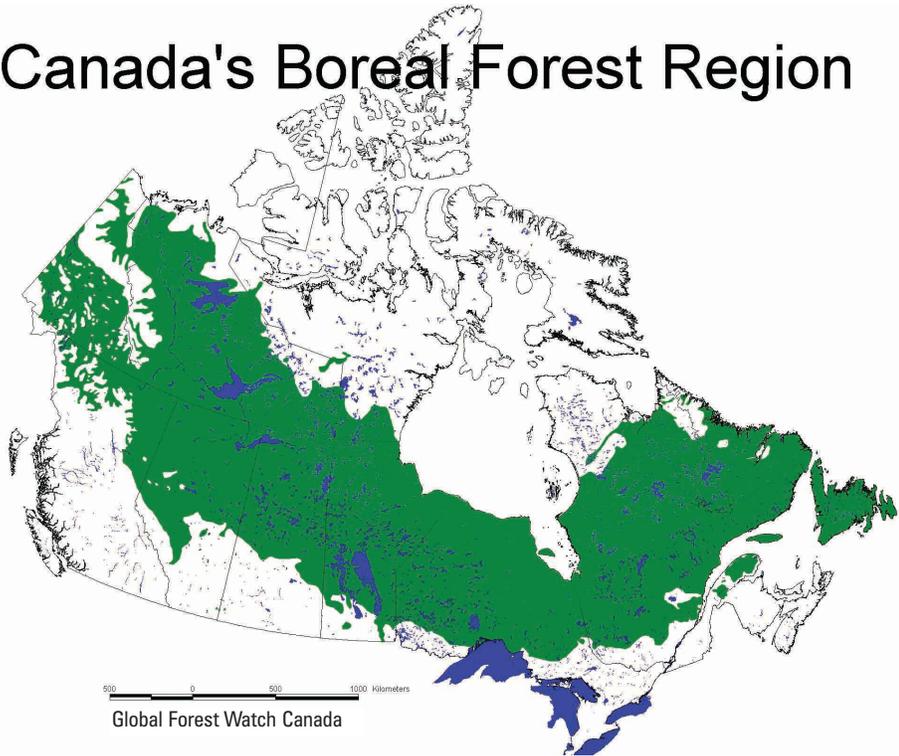
Photo: Ducks Unlimited



**Cape May Warbler**  
Photo: John Kormendy

Canada's boreal forest offers an unparalleled opportunity to conserve one of Earth's most important wilderness treasures – if we act now.

## Canada's Boreal Forest Region



Canada's boreal forest offers an unparalleled opportunity to conserve one of Earth's most important wilderness treasures – if we act now. Land-use planning for boreal regions in virtually every province and territory is underway now, and decisions within the next three to five years will determine the fate of much of the remaining intact forest. Logging, oil and gas, mining, hydro-electric power and even farming are increasing in the rugged woods of boreal Canada. Almost one-third of Canada's boreal forest has already been allocated for industrial development, most of it since 1990.

We can safeguard Canada's boreal forest if we act now to establish an interconnected network of large-scale protected areas and conservation lands, and if we apply state-of-the-art sustainable development practices on the remainder of the landscape.

Learn what the future holds for Canada's boreal forest and the birds that depend on it. Read the report, *The Importance of Canada's Boreal Forest to Landbirds*, and find out more by visiting the Canadian Boreal Initiative web site at [www.borealcanada.ca](http://www.borealcanada.ca) or the Boreal Songbird Initiative web site at [www.borealbirds.org](http://www.borealbirds.org).

### BOREAL SONGBIRD INITIATIVE



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