



Controlled, prescribed burning is part of the team's ecological fire management plans./Michelle Zweede, USDA Forest Service.

iven the high percentage of migratory bird species that are important to the United States yet spend the majority of their lives outside its borders, U.S. bird conservation efforts need to reach beyond these borders as well. Driven by this awareness, we at The Nature Conservancy and the USDA Forest Service's Office of International Programs recently formed a new international partnership to help conserve the migratory birds that winter in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our goal is two-fold: to conserve species of high concern while abroad and to protect the large investments already made in conserving their breeding grounds. Our work outside the United States emphasizes protecting bird species and their most at-risk habitats, building capable conser-

vation partnerships, and putting technical and financial resources on the ground.

Species of high concern are identified on the U.S. Endangered Species List, Canada's Species At Risk List, and by the various North American bird conservation plans. Upon comparing these species' migration destinations in Latin America and the Caribbean with the ecoregional priority areas developed by The Nature Conservancy and others, the most important areas for migratory bird conservation actions south of the United States become clear.

To immediately focus our efforts, we identified bird groups and sites that share common threats and contain high numbers

TEAMING FOR BIRD CONSERVATION

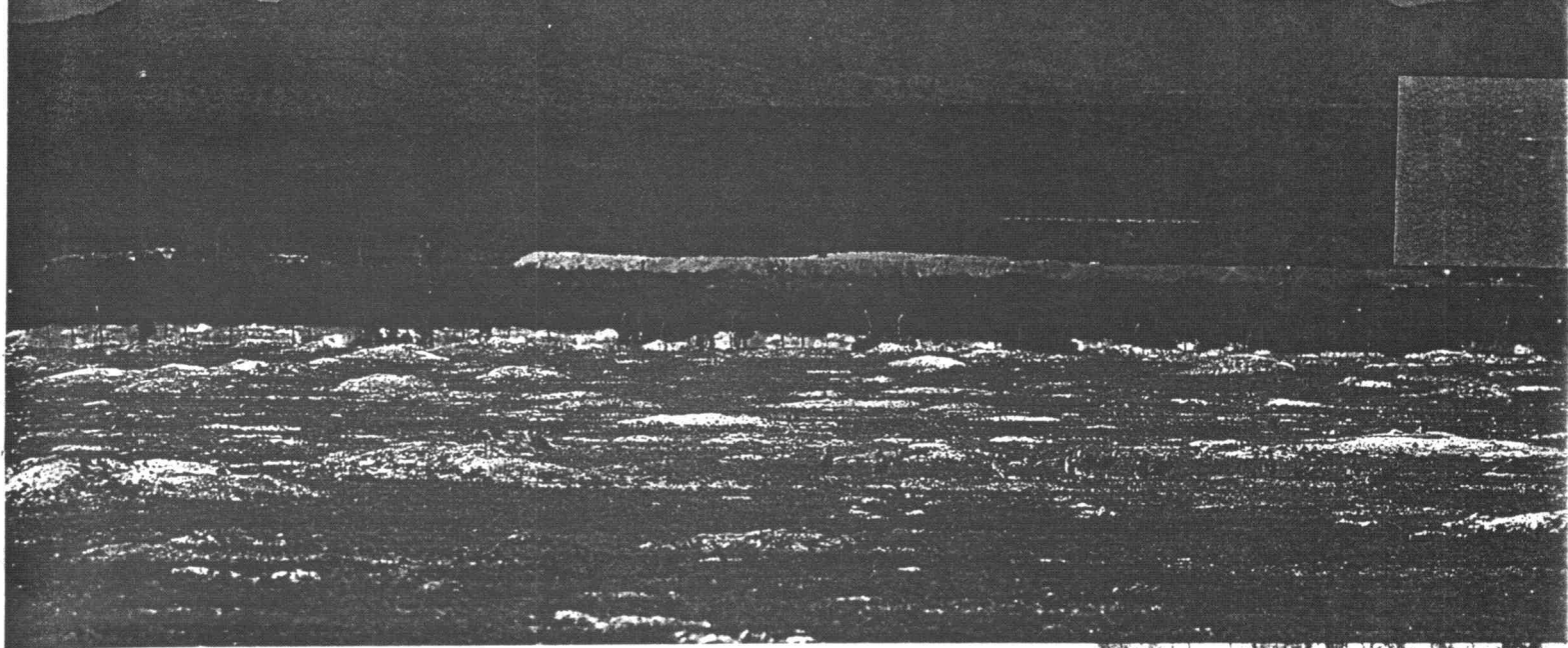


Team members from The Nature Conservancy and USDA Forest Service gather with partners in northeast Mexico to coordinate shortgrass prairie-bird conservation actions./John Sidle, USDA Forest Service.

of birds of concern. What emerged from this exercise were restricted-range neotropical migrants, shortgrass prairie birds, and high-priority migration corridors. We then devised three conservation strategies for the next 3 years.

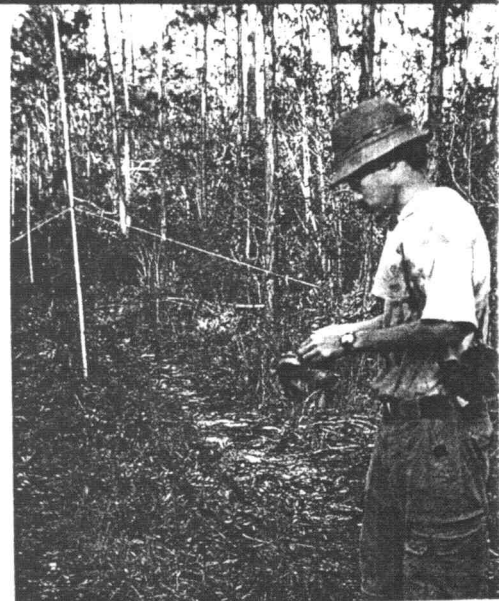
One strategy is ecoregional planning, which identifies landscapes that support the greatest biodiversity in an ecologically defined area. In 2002, we began developing ecoregional conservation plans in Mexico and Central America.

Recognizing that fire is a major and natural determinant of bird habitats, the second strategy is ecological fire management.



Long-billed curlews/John Sidle, USDA Forest Service

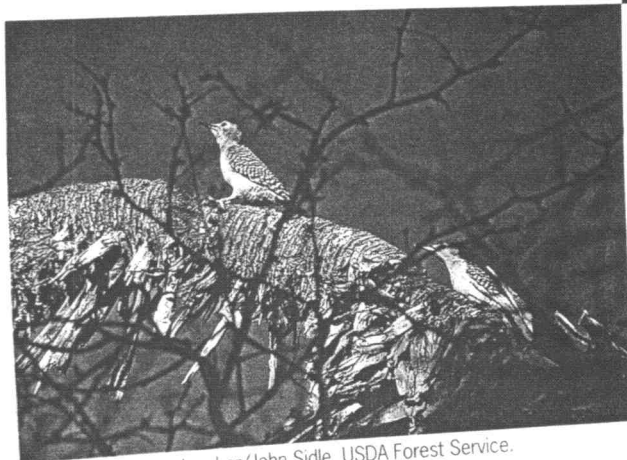
CONSERVATION IN THE AMERICAS



The Kirtland's warbler that Ancellino Davis carefully removes from the mist net is one of the six that were banded in the Bahamas this winter./Joe Wunderle, USDA Forest Service.

In Mexico, we are working with partners to form an ecological fire management plan in several protected areas to help sustain vital bird habitats.

Monitoring of bird populations and their habitats is critical for focusing priorities and gauging accomplishments, and is, therefore, an important third strategy. With our Mexican partners, we are monitoring shortgrass prairie birds on the Janos Grasslands and establishing a management plan for the Saltillo Grasslands Protected Area. These grasslands are also crucial wintering areas for Sprague's pipit, long-billed curlew, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, and other prairie birds. Likewise, we are monitoring Bicknell's thrush with our partners in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere and the



Golden-fronted woodpecker/John Sidle, USDA Forest Service.

endangered Kirtland's warbler with our partners in the Bahamas. This winter, eight Kirtland's warblers were sighted and six banded at a single site in the Bahamas, exceeding all previous winter sightings and bandings combined.

Millions of dollars have been spent in the United States on conservation and recovery efforts for these and other bird species in decline, yet without comprehensive information on their wintering grounds, we will not be able to recover nor sustain the more than 350 species that spend most of their lives outside the United States.

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