

Making flyways conservation a reality

Effective migratory bird conservation efforts address issues throughout a species' flyway and in Canada, flyway conservation is imperative, as about **90% of the country's birds** migrate south each year, only to return the following spring. This flyway concept is being put to the test with one initiative that links three Important Bird Areas: Great Salt Lake in Utah, the most important inland stopover for many species of shorebird, waterbird and waterfowl in continental North America, and an area of global significance for many breeding bird species; Chaplin Lake in Saskatchewan, and the Marismas nacionales along the Pacific coast of Mexico. These areas share many of the same species, including American Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, American White Pelican and Franklin's Gull among other species. The Canadian anchor in this north-south chain is centred on Chaplin Lake Important Bird Area, but includes a series of alkaline lakes in southern Saskatchewan, including Old Wives, Reed, and Quill Lakes. All sites are recognized as Important Bird Areas and Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) sites. Last week, BirdLife partner Nature Canada's manager of bird conservation, Ted Cheskey, attended meetings in Salt Lake City, Utah, on behalf of Nature Canada, the Canadian partners in the Linking Communities Initiative at Chaplin Lake and Nature Saskatchewan. The National Audubon Society and ProNatura, the BirdLife International Partners from the USA and Mexico respectively, as well as staff from BirdLife and from Rio Tinto - Kennecot, the mining company that supports some elements of this project, all attended the gathering. The focus of last week's summit was to plan where the partnership will go in the coming year. To date, the initiative has promoted teacher exchanges, common curriculum elements, standard bird monitoring protocols, research and public awareness efforts. "It is a model that could and should be replicated elsewhere to link communities across the hemisphere for bird conservation," said Cheskey. "We share the same birds with communities in other countries through the western hemisphere, and only by working to protect habitat and reduce threats throughout their flyways can there be any hope for effective conservation." Cheskey recorded a conversation with Wayne Martinson, Important Bird Area Coordinator for National Audubon for the State of Utah, about how the idea of linking these communities came to be.