



Canada's Minister of the Environment recognises the remarkable BirdLife Partnership

Title

At the Opening Ceremony of BirdLife International's World Congress the Honourable Peter Kent, PC, MP Canada's Minister of the Environment and Minister Responsible for Parks Canada spoke about Conservation in Canada. Here is the transcript of his speech. "Thank you, and welcome, everyone, to this evening's Canada Night gathering. I'd also like to welcome you to Canada's Capital and to thank BirdLife International for choosing to hold its first North American World Congress here in Ottawa. BirdLife International is a remarkable organization that demonstrates the considerable value of cooperation. Partner agencies in more than 100 countries contribute to scientific knowledge and to the conservation and preservation of bird species, habitats and flyways. And BirdLife outreach activities—particularly with youth—inspire people to recognize the importance of preserving not only individual bird species, but also humankind's connection with the natural world. As we all recognize, the environment and the habitat of birds is increasingly at risk.

Like BirdLife International, Canada also follows a cooperative, multi-faceted approach to preserving the environment, including: conserving natural spaces; protecting species at risk; and supporting the science and outreach activities that ensure the success of long-term preservation efforts. This country is blessed with large, undeveloped landscapes. Canadians believe we have a duty to protect these spaces for future generations to enjoy. And we continue to do exactly that. Recognized as the world leader in wilderness conservation, Parks Canada's network of national parks includes more than 300,000 square kilometres of protected lands—an area bigger than Sweden. A few years ago, we expanded the Nahanni National Park Reserve—pristine Northern wilderness—to six times its original size. And more recently, further steps have been taken towards the creation of special places such as Sable Island national park, off the coast of Nova Scotia; Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories; and Canada's first national urban park in the Rouge valley, near Toronto. Much can be done with hard work and determination, but at the same time, we are aware that the key to successful conservation are successful partnerships. This is why the Government of Canada works with a range of partners to preserve species at risk, such as Piping Plovers, Whooping Cranes, Ancient

Murrelets and the Red Knot rufa, and the habitats of countless other species. Some 36 of Canada's Important Bird Areas lie either completely or partially inside our National Parks and, of course, birds are legally protected in all of them. The Government of Canada is committed to maintaining healthy ecosystems for wildlife and migratory birds, and preserving Canada's natural heritage. We are investing over 1 million dollars this year to support monitoring activities and implementation of conservation actions at Important Bird Areas, working in partnership with Bird Studies Canada and Nature Canada. We also continue to fund universities, museums and non-governmental organizations to help us better understand migratory birds and implement conservation for their benefit.

In a more global context, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, and the BirdLife International Global Partnership, allow us to work in concert with our international partners in the conservation and protection of migratory birds. A great example of this cooperation is our work with international BirdLife partners in the grassland regions of North and South America, where we are working hand in hand with ranchers on conserving and enhancing bird habitats. In Budget 2013, we committed \$20M to the Natural Areas Conservation Program, a 5-year partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, which has to date secured 356,000 hectares of protected habitat for 148 species at risk since 2007. We are also protecting species at risk through the Habitat Stewardship Program, funding over 2,000 projects for more than \$117 million, and leveraging an additional \$287 million in investment. And we continue to partner directly with Canadians through the Ecological Gifts Program, which has just celebrated its 1000th EcoGift in Manitoba this month.

Creating a deep personal connection with nature is a key goal for all of us. I'm sure that many of us have been inspired by a personal experience in nature: a backcountry canoe trip, perhaps, or a hike through the wilderness, or maybe some quiet time at a favourite nature site with a family member. This is precisely why Parks Canada has created programs with partners such as My Parks Pass, Coolest School Trip and "learn to" events that welcome new and young Canadians to discover nature. We know that by investing in Canada's youth, we bequeath to them the importance of a healthy environment. Canada also develops and implements solutions tailored to specific challenges. For instance, populations of plains bison and black-footed ferret have been re-introduced to the prairies. Through an innovative network of overpasses, underpasses and a 77-kilometre stretch of fencing along the Trans-Canada highway in the Rocky Mountains, the number collisions with these animals has dramatically reduced. This is but an example of concrete action we are taking to protect and co-exist with nature, to ensure the long-term sustainability of our environment. Despite these successes, however, we are cognizant of the fact that we must pursue our conservation work and protect even more habitats and species from disappearing from our collective environment each year. Our generation is holding the key to reversing this trend. We must continue our positive actions. Fortunately, the number of people who are willing to take on the challenge continues to grow. The concept of seventh-generation sustainability—rooted in the Great Law of the Iroquois, one of North America's first peoples—is increasingly popular. We must all act in ways that consider that the actions we take today, will affect future generations. That is why, in the past six years, we have increased

by more than 50% the size of the protected areas in Canada. Ultimately, we must ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to be inspired by the natural world and to live those experiences that first motivated each and every one of us to become involved. We must pass on to them the ecological, social and spiritual benefits of iconic wildlife, clean water and magnificent landscapes. The theme of this year's World Congress: Partnerships for nature and people, reflects this idea. Clearly, multi-national cooperation is absolutely essential to protecting species of migrating birds and to preserving biodiversity. During the next few days, I encourage all delegates to forge new partnerships and expand their networks. Learn from one another and find new ways to cooperate. Let us increase the effectiveness of our conservation efforts so that future generations can also have opportunities to experience and be inspired by the wonders of nature. Thank you."