



Memorandum to Senior Arctic Officials 30/09/2013

DEVELOPMENT FOR PEOPLE OF THE NORTH: SUSTAINABLE CIRCUMPOLAR COMMUNITIES

Project status

Initiative:	Protecting Arctic lifestyles and people through migratory bird conservation		
Country Leads	Canada, Norway, Russia		
Start Date:	2013	Completion Date:	Interim results 2015; ongoing

Project Goal:

To improve the status and secure the long-term sustainability of ‘at risk’ Arctic breeding bird populations.

Project Summary:

The project will have three stages, or steps (as depicted in Figure 1).

During the first step, species or groups of species will be prioritized. The species most at risk will be the focus of conservation efforts from 2013 to 2015, while over the longer term conservation efforts will focus on species lower on the priority list.

During the second step the state of knowledge for priority species in three main areas will be assessed:

- i) Population status and trends
- ii) Identification of the most important life stage areas or hotspots
- iii) Main threats or stressors which are leading to a high extinction risk

During the third step direct actions to improve the conservation status of priority species will be developed. Where the state of knowledge in all three areas is high, the project will identify the most effective combination of actions, such as protected areas, hunting regulations or reduced development and broker agreements to implement actions. Where the state of knowledge is poorer, the project will first fill important knowledge gaps and then develop appropriate, evidence based management actions and agreements for implementation of those actions. All stages of this project will require enhanced cooperation among Arctic countries, as well as cooperation between Arctic countries and countries outside the Arctic, along migration routes.

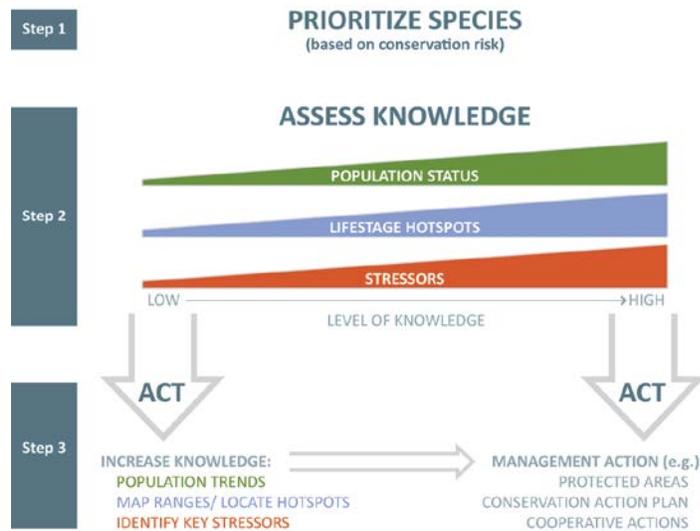


Figure 1: Summary of project steps. Step 1 will prioritize species based on conservation risk; Step 2 will assess the status of knowledge; Step 3 will result in direct actions where the state of knowledge is high, and fill important gaps in knowledge where the state of knowledge is poor. Implementation of effective management actions for priority species is the goal.

Deliverables	Target Completion
1. Project plan revised and completed	October 2013
2. Priority list of Arctic breeding birds at risk	December 2014
3. Assessment of state of knowledge for top 3 priority species or groups of species	June 2014
4. Actions secured for priority species or species groups where knowledge is highest	Feb. 2015
5. State of knowledge improved for species or species groups where knowledge is poor	Feb. 2015
6. Necessary actions identified for species where initial knowledge was lower	May 2015
7. Status Report to Ministers	June 2015

The Approach

I. Prioritization

To ensure early successes the first two years of the project (2013-2015) will focus efforts on species most at risk. Criteria will be established, based on the greatest likelihood of extinction and the rate at which declines have been observed. Early efforts will concentrate only on the species at top of the priority list.

II. Assessing the State of Knowledge

Knowledge of population status, hot spots along migration routes and stressors is high for some species. For example, the rapid decline of Arctic breeding shorebirds using the East-Asian Australasian flyway is well

known and threats are understood. For these species meaningful action is urgent and an assessment of the state of knowledge will not take long. For other species, rapid declines are known but overwintering hot spots are not (e.g. some seabirds that overwinter in the North) or declines are suspected but not well documented. For these species critical knowledge gaps will have to be filled before appropriate actions can be identified. New technologies, such as geo-locators, will be used to track birds along migratory routes and identify hot spots. On-the-ground observations and surveys, using partner organizations, will allow the documentation of threats.

III. Acting

Where knowledge is high early actions can be developed. For species with long migrations routes outside the Arctic, international cooperation will be important. Binding conservation agreements will be brokered among countries throughout the entire range for priority species. This will likely involve Arctic countries, observer countries and organizations, old and new partnerships and existing and new mechanisms. Actions will be varied and likely multi-pronged. For example, the creation of protected areas, new hunting regulations and restrictions on development could all play a role, depending on the species and the threat.

For species where knowledge is poor, filling the knowledge gaps will be an important step before actions can be taken. In the first two years, filling the knowledge gaps and the identification of necessary actions may be all that is possible.

Background

Arctic-breeding birds use as many as eight different flyways to move from Arctic breeding grounds to overwintering or stopover sites at lower latitudes. Many of these bird populations are declining at an unprecedented rate for variety of reasons: destruction of coastal wetlands for land reclamation and drainage, habitat degradation, trapping/poaching, unsustainable harvesting and climate change. A memorandum to the Chair of Senior Arctic Officials, October 6, 2012, highlights the plight of migratory Arctic breeding birds, especially those along the East-Asian Australasian flyway.

Migratory birds are an important indicator of ecosystem health. In the Arctic, seabirds can indicate much about the health of the oceans, where the majority of marine life is out-of-sight, dispersed, hard to access and costly to monitor. Shorebirds – despite the name – occur throughout Arctic habitats and are also an important indicator of change.

Birds are harvested by many people on Arctic breeding grounds, along migratory routes, and on overwintering grounds. Seabirds, for example, are harvested for their meat, eggs and down in all Arctic countries. In Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia, more extensive harvest rights are given to indigenous people, in recognition that subsistence harvest of seabirds is essential to maintaining a traditional lifestyle. The annual take of seabirds is significant, ranging from about 4,000 in Norway to about 260,000 in Canada. Traditional harvest of seabird eggs is known to be in the tens of thousands in Canada and unknown quantities in other countries.

Shorebirds and seabirds contribute to economic diversification in Arctic communities through small scale ecotourism activities which are low impact, independent of development cycles, and more compatible with

land-based pursuits. For example, each May, the Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival draws visitors and economic stimulation to the community of Homer, Alaska.

SAO Actions Required

- SAOs may wish to comment on progress and provide input and guidance.