

CHAPTER 6

MIGRATORY BIRDS

6.1 Introduction

Camp Lejeune provides habitats and open space for a wide variety of migratory birds that migrate annually within and beyond North America (Appendix N). Regardless of how these migratory birds use Camp Lejeune, their presence provides important ecological services and an important indicator of ecosystem health. Primary considerations with regard to migratory bird management are compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA); implementation of migratory bird management actions in accordance with Executive Order 13186, Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds; and support, contribution and compatibility with the goals and efforts of numerous regional migratory and game bird conservation programs.

Virtually all birds that occupy Camp Lejeune throughout the year are protected under the MBTA. The MBTA controls many actions that may negatively affect migratory birds, particularly collection and transportation of birds. Special purpose permits may be requested and issued that allow for the relocation or transport of migratory birds for management purposes. Camp Lejeune requests a depredation control permit for various gull species and Canada geese on an annual basis. This permit allows the base to take management actions regarding Bird/Animal Strike Hazards (BASH) around airfields.

Executive Order 13186, issued on 10 January 2001, requires all federal agencies taking actions that have, or are likely to have, a measurable negative effect on migratory bird populations to develop and implement, within 2 years, a MOU with the USFWS. The Department of Defense (DoD) is in process of developing a MOU that addresses management actions and conservation of migratory birds on installations.

Comprehensive bird conservation plans for migratory birds have recently been developed for landbirds, shorebirds and waterbirds. These conservation plans identify species and habitat conservation priorities at the national and more detailed regional scales.

Plans that encompass North Carolina and are applicable to Camp Lejeune include:

- Partners in Flight, North American Land Bird Conservation Plan
- Partners in Flight, Bird Conservation Plan for The South Atlantic Coastal Plain
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP)
- U. S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (USSCP)
- North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (NAWCP)
- South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative (SAMBI)
- North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI)

These plans provide the framework, conservation priorities, goals, and objectives comparable to INRMP goals and objectives for various migratory bird species and their habitats within the manageable area of Camp Lejeune.

Consistent with these plans, and within the framework of mission-focused conservation, Camp Lejeune's conservation management will continue to support migratory bird conservation efforts. Camp Lejeune's conservation of forested wetlands, maritime forest and restoration of longleaf pine/wire grass communities all contribute valuable habitat benefits to migratory birds. Camp Lejeune also takes proactive measures to minimize recreation pressures for the benefit of nesting or resting migratory shorebirds and waterbirds.

6.2 Population Monitoring

Migratory bird surveys and breeding bird counts provide a strong, statistically valid framework for detecting trends in migratory bird populations and assist managers in meeting their bird conservation goals. The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is held each year from mid December through January. Camp Lejeune, and local volunteers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of the survey are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, which represents over a century of data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Camp Lejeune also supports a summer bird count conducted each year on International Migratory Bird Day, the second Saturday in May each year, Camp Lejeune coordinates the use of restricted airspace for aerial surveys of wintering waterfowl on New River and performs coordinated waterfowl and shorebird surveys as part of the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative. See Chapter 5, Section 5.1.3 Shorebirds and Colonial Nesting Waterbirds for information on targeted bird species at risk.

6.3 Habitat

6.3.1 Long Leaf Pine and Wire Grass Savanna Habitat

The long leaf pine and wiregrass savannas on Camp Lejeune provide the primary habitat for several migratory bird species of high concern including some non-migratory federally-listed protected species. The high level of biodiversity found in natural longleaf pine forests is primarily based upon the condition of the ground layer. It is this ground layer composition that supports many of the plant and animal species unique to longleaf pine ecosystems. Frequent growing-season fires are essential for maintaining native warm season grasses, forbs, and vines, while keeping the shrub layer to a minimum over a burning cycle of a few years. Camp Lejeune's management emphasizes late successional stands, and prescribed fire regimes that promote high quality ground cover/understory habitat in long leaf pine forests.

6.3.2 Maritime Forest Scrub/Shrub Communities

Maritime forest communities, the scrub-shrub woodlands, found along coastal areas and on barrier islands have long been recognized as important bird habitat. The live oaks, and numerous understory shrubs that dominate maritime forest scrub/shrub communities on Camp Lejeune are indicative of the most advanced successional stage among maritime woodlands. Camp Lejeune recognizes that maritime forest scrub-shrub habitat is important for all migratory birds moving to and from their wintering grounds as well as other wildlife found in this unique system. Existing high quality maritime woodland and shrub-scrub habitats found on Camp Lejeune's barrier island ranges and training areas will continue to provide benefits to painted buntings and many other migrating birds.

Fig 6-1. A painted bunting (*Passerina ciris*) in maritime shrub scrub on Onslow Beach (photo courtesy of Marianne Killacky).



6.3.3 Forested Wetlands: Pocosins, Carolina Bays, and Other Wetlands

Forested wetlands are among some of the most important bird habitat in the Southeast. Forested wetlands on Camp Lejeune are diverse and include high and low pocosins, Carolina Bays, and riparian wetlands. Wetlands management and protection is addressed in Chapter 10. Management and silvicultural activities on Camp Lejeune consider the ecological value of forested wetlands and are consistent with the overall goal of maintaining and restoring predominantly mature forested wetlands. Camp Lejeune does not actively timber bottomland hardwood drains.

OBJECTIVE MIG1: Support the conservation and management of migratory birds and their habitat.

- **Action 6-01:** *Participate in/conduct annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count.*
- **Action 6-02:** *Participate in/conduct annual International Migratory Bird Day summer bird count.*
- **Action 6-03:** *Conduct coordinated waterfowl and shorebird surveys in support of South Atlantic Migratory Bird initiative.*

- **Action 6-04:** *Promote the restoration of native warm season grass habitats with as much associated long leaf pine forest habitat as feasible.*
- **Action 6-05:** *Exclude timber harvesting in bottomland hardwood drains.*
- **Action 4-07:** *Use prescribed fire and mechanical control for midstory vegetation control and maintenance.*
- **Action 4-30:** *Protect sensitive habitat at South Onslow beach.*
- **Action 5-01:** *Designate Conservation Areas.*