

Migratory Bird Training Advisory Group Report to ARDs



American avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*)

MBTAG Team

Michael Kreger (Chair)	Region 9
Doug Alcorn	Region 7
Barbara Pardo	Region 3
Karene Motivans	NCTC
Kendra Bond	NCTC

Survey Developer and Analyst
Steve Gillespie USGS

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Migratory Bird Program (MBP) provides direction for training staff members consistent with its mission and objectives. As new staff members are recruited and annual objectives shift, there is a need to provide both broad programmatic as well as specialized training to meet program needs. In July 2008, the Assistant Regional Directors (ARDs) formed the Migratory Bird Training Advisory Group (MBTAG), which, in partnership with the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) Branch of Conservation Science and Policy Training, would identify the programs' training needs and advise future course development. The membership of the MBTAG includes three members from the MBP (one from the Washington Office (Region 9) and two from different Region offices) and representatives from NCTC.

The MBTAG is charged with the following objectives:

1. Review and prioritize skill sets needed within the program.
2. Assess how staff maintains their level of proficiency.
3. Describe training options available at NCTC and other venues.
4. Identify future training needs including course content and delivery.

The purpose of this report is to describe the results of a MBP training needs survey and introduce a new online tool that provides recommended training activities for all the jobs undertaken in the program.

BACKGROUND

The primary source documents we used to identify and prioritize skills needed to satisfy the MBP mission included *A Blueprint for the Future of Migratory Birds: Migratory Bird Program Strategic Plan 2004-2014* (2004), the 2008 draft program evaluation report by the Wildlife Management Institute entitled *Independent Program Evaluation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Program: Preliminary Report*, and the 2007 *Shaping Our Future: Workforce Planning* documents.

We developed a survey, described below in more detail, to determine how staff maintains proficiency and to identify training needs. We also reviewed training opportunities currently available to fulfill training needs that could be included in staff Individual Development Plans (IDP).

Based on discussions with ARDs and staff in the MBP, we added *applying strategic habitat conservation (SHC)*, *assessing the impacts of climate change*, and *providing leadership* to our list of performance elements. In total, we identified 21 performance elements needed to achieve the core goals of the MBP and which could be addressed through training (Table 1).

The 21 Performance Elements (job aspects):

1. Coordinate with other federal/state/NGO bird conservation organizations
2. Engage the public in policy and program improvements, including asking our customers how we can improve service
3. Prioritize your projects in order of conservation importance
4. Coordinate within the Service (other regions or other programs) for national consistency in policies and procedures
5. Collaborate with partners on projects of mutual interest (for example, State wildlife action plans, wind towers, seabird by catch, etc.)
6. Increase public awareness of the value of bird conservation through outreach efforts
7. Communicate in languages other than English to serve your customers or partners
8. Serve as a facilitator to assist diverse groups toward better communication and problem solving
9. Communicate effectively through listening, speaking, and writing skills
10. Engage in collaborative problem solving with those that disagree with you
11. Use GIS technologies
12. Answer biological questions in a broad, landscape context
13. Assess impacts of climate change to species and habitat
14. Apply population ecology principles to your problem solving and decisions
15. Adapt work to use latest information management systems (IT)
16. Develop and implement bird conservation plans
17. Recognize, plan for, and respond to bird disease
18. Use models in conservation design and planning
19. Apply statistical techniques to support the assessment of wildlife populations or habitat management activities
20. Apply any element of Strategic Habitat Conservation in your work
21. Provide leadership

Table 1. 21 performance elements derived from MBTAG analysis.

SURVEY

In order to collect information directly from MBP staff, we developed a survey tool to identify performance gaps, as well as current and future training needs. A preliminary survey was beta-tested by eight staff members from the MBP. Their comments were considered in the final version of the survey, which was designed, administered, and analyzed by Steven Gillespie from U.S. Geological Survey. To ensure that all program staff received the survey, the team collected organizational charts and staff lists from each region. Contact information, region, job series, grade, and job title

were included in this staff data. This information was used to categorize survey respondents for analysis. The Migratory Bird Program Training Survey launched on-line on April 1, 2009 and data collection concluded on May 1, 2009.

Respondents were asked about the importance of 21 different aspects of their job, their effectiveness in the performance of each aspect, what types of training they had received in that aspect, and if they felt they needed more training.

In addition, respondents were asked if they use an IDP to plan for acquiring new skills and development opportunities, how satisfied they were with the training opportunities they have, and if there were any other aspects of their job for which they could use training.

For a more robust analysis, we grouped employees with similar jobs into eight functional classes, which we refer to as “job classes” with the assumption that they will have similar training needs. For example, the permits function was composed of employees who described their job using terms such as “permits”, “wildlife compliance specialist”, and “lead permit examiner & budget.” The eight job classes identified were: biologists, managers, permit specialists, outreach specialists, administrative staff (i.e., budget, clerical support), coordinators (i.e., working with partners), information technology specialists (i.e., information technology, database management), and biostatisticians (i.e., data analysis, population modeling).

For each job class we identified the top priorities from the list of 21 performance elements on the survey. This data represented a manageable set of performance elements for our team to conduct further analysis. We based the selection of the top-performance elements for each job class on these criteria:

1. Percent of respondents who had an element as part of their job (higher being more valued).
2. Percent who thought they were effective (lower being more valued).
3. Percent that had training (lower being more valued).
4. Percent who said they needed more training (higher being more valued).

Survey Results

We surveyed 260 members of the MBP, obtaining 191 useful responses. Seventy percent of the respondents use an IDP for acquiring new skills and development activities. Those who do not are concentrated in Region 9 and clustered in three job classes: outreach specialists, information technology specialists, and biostatisticians. For the entire MBP, employees at higher grade levels and with more years of experience tend to use IDPs less than those at lower grade levels or with fewer years in the program. However, there was no difference in satisfaction with training between those who use an IDP and those who do not.

Overall, 66% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with their current training. Training satisfaction is significantly lower for employees with responsibility in the areas of permits, outreach, and biologists involved in climate change study. Training satisfaction is significantly higher for employees with management or supervision responsibilities. It is also significantly higher for GS 14-15 employees. Among the regions, satisfaction is somewhat lower in Regions 2 and 5.

The important performance elements identified for each job class are listed in Table 2. We found that each job class has their unique list of training need areas. However, when taken together, the overall program training priorities are

- *Effective communication,*
- *assessing climate change impacts,*
- *coordinating with other bird conservation organizations,*
- *applying statistical techniques, and*
- *using the latest information management systems.*

The top ranked performance elements are training priorities for greater than 60% of all respondents. The eight job classes intersected in their need for the elements *effective communication, using the latest information management systems, assessing the impacts of climate change, and providing leadership.*

The performance element, *effective communication* was the most prevalent need by a majority who took the survey. Both *effective communication* and *coordinating with other conservation groups* ranked highly because these are regarded as important to the work of the program and survey respondents would like additional training regardless if they already feel effective.

Over half of the respondents thought *assessing the impacts of climate change* and *biostatistics* are part of their job, most thought it would be more important in the future, feel that they are currently not doing a good job, and are in great need of training. Because climate change is of relatively new emphasis in the FWS, it is not surprising that most of the respondents identified a need for climate change training. The FWS is starting to provide all staff with basic climate change training, but particular job classes may need more targeted training in this area.

After analyzing the survey results, we identified the performance gap-- the difference between performance targets as expressed through program goals and current performance as described by staff. We identified the top priority performance elements by job class using specific criteria (described on page four). The next step was to conduct a task analysis.

Job Class	Top Training Needs by Job Class (Numbers refer to Performance Elements -See Table 1)				
Biologist	12	13	14	19	1,5,9,21
Manager	10	13	3	12, 14	21
Permit Specialist	10	15	1	4	9
Outreach Specialist	1	6	9	2	11,15
Administrative staff	9	7	15	10	21
Coordinator	13	18	15	21	3,7,12
Information Technical specialist	15	21	13	9	8
Biostatistician	13	14	3	9	15, 19

Table 2. Top training needs per job class. The numbers correspond to the performance elements (see Table 1). Equally ranked performance elements are listed together.

TASK ANALYSIS

The purpose of the task analysis is to identify and describe the knowledge and skills necessary to complete the performance element. This information can be used to meet targeted training objectives, improve position descriptions, use in recruiting efforts and contribute to knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) during the hiring process.

The most effective way to identify skills important for a particular job class is to gather this information directly from those doing the work. Between November 2009 and March 2010, MBTAG members convened focus groups consisting of volunteer staff members from each job class. These focus groups consisted of between five and nine participants representing each job class. They were interviewed to obtain more details on each of their top performance elements from the survey. They helped us identify knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish the performance element in the context of their job functions. We used this information to develop a matrix of performance elements by job type with suggested training options for each. The matrix was adapted for use as a tool for anyone in the program to access.

Throughout the survey and the focus group sessions we received open comments pertaining to training delivery methods and training needs outside of the performance elements. These comments were shared with the appropriate branches at NCTC for future course development.

Migratory Bird Program Training Matrix

The MBTAG has developed a practical, interactive Training Matrix that puts the results of our analysis at managers' fingertips. The matrix can be found at: http://training.fws.gov/CSP/Resources/mig_birds/mig_homepage.htm. It is designed with each performance element and associated tasks listed in the left hand column and job class along the top row. An "x" identifies the intersection of the job class and the particular skill as described by our focus groups (individuals representing that particular job class in interviews). For example, the biologist job class indicated that *knowledge of cultures and traditions* was an important factor in being proficient at accomplishing the Performance Element #1: *Coordinate with Federal/State/NGO Conservation Organizations*.

To determine the developmental needs of their respective staff for accomplishing the 21 performance elements, managers and supervisors can get a general idea by reading the "x" intersections by job class. In most instances, the knowledge and skill can be attained through existing training. Training is available through NCTC or other vendors. If training is available, it is described in the dropdown line on the right-hand column of the matrix. For general training recommendations by job class, see Appendix A.

MBTAG training matrix revision 10-28.pdf - Adobe Acrobat Pro

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Migratory Bird Program Training Matrix									
Performance Element/Skills	Job Classes								Available Training
	Admin. staff	Biologists	Bio-statistician	Coordinator	Information Technical specialist	Managers	Outreach specialist	Permit specialist	
#1: Coordinate w/ Fed/state/NGO Cons. Orgs.									
Cultural/traditional awareness		x					x	x	
Conflict resolution		x							
Group facilitation		x					x		
Partnership building		x					x	x	
Ability to organize/present information		x							
Interpersonal skills							x		
Knowledge of how outside org's work							x	x	
Information sharing							x		
Knowledge of Service procurement rules							x		
Negotiation skills							x		
Knowledge of laws and regs - Feds and States									Applying Collaboration to Environmental Issues OUT8122 Interest-Based Negotiations LED6102
Basic bird ecology									
#2: Engage public in program and policy improvements									
Evaluate effectiveness of outreach products							x		
Knowledge of current policies & programs							x		
Working w/ the media							x		

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Not all of the 21 Performance Elements are listed in the matrix. Specifically, Performance Elements 8, 16, 17, and 20 are omitted because they were not identified by MB program staff as being highly important to fulfill their job responsibilities. The online Training Matrix will be maintained and updated by NCTC as new training solutions are identified.

Needed skills may also be attained through management-sponsored development opportunities, such as work details, special assignments, or other skill-building events. Those opportunities are negotiated between the supervisor and the individual through the IDP. The IDP should be designed and reviewed semiannually during mid and end-of-year performance evaluations.

Individual Development Plans

The survey revealed that a significant number of MB program staff do not use IDPs. It is not known whether supervisors have not made it a requirement or if staff does not find them useful. The Service's Fish and Wildlife Manual (231 FW 2) states that employees should have an IDP in place, and that supervisors have 60 days from the start

of a performance year or from a new appointment, to establish an IDP for a subordinate employee. The matrix can be a useful tool for supervisors to facilitate their IDP discussions and select targeted training opportunities. Managers can obtain IDP training through NCTC at: <http://training.fws.gov/led/idp/index.html>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX A: JOB CLASS TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrative Staff

Administrative staff identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Communicate effectively through listening, speaking, and writing skills.
2. Communicate in languages other than English to serve your customers or partners.
3. Adapt work to use latest information management systems (IT).
4. Engage in collaborative problem solving with those that disagree with you.
5. Provide Leadership.

*Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- Increasing Your Personal Effectiveness LED5128
- Crucial Conversations LED5153
- Computer Systems Management in FWS (IT Workshop) TEC7148

Biologists

Biologists identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Assess the impacts of climate change to species and habitat.
2. Apply population ecology principles to your problem solving and decisions.
3. Apply statistical techniques to support the assessment of wildlife populations or habitat management activities.
4. Answer biological questions in a broad, landscape context.
5. Coordinate with other federal/state/NGO bird conservation organizations.
6. Collaborate with partners on projects of mutual interest.
7. Communicate effectively through listening, speaking and writing skills.
8. Provide leadership.

*Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- Introduction to Structured Decision Making CSP3171
- Adaptive Management: Structured Decision Making for Recurrent Decisions ECS3159
- Applying Collaboration to Environmental Issues OUT8122
- Critical Writing/Critical Thinking ECS3167

Biostatisticians

Biostatisticians identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Apply statistical techniques to support the assessment of wildlife populations or habitat management activities.
2. Apply population ecology principles to your problem solving and decisions.
3. Assess impacts of climate change to species and habitat.
4. Prioritize your projects in order of conservation importance.
5. Communicate effectively through listening, speaking, and writing skills.
6. Adapt work to use latest information management systems (IT).

*Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- Data Analysis I: Statistical Concepts & Procedures CSP4200
- Population Viability Analysis I: Concepts & Procedures CSP4110
- Computer Systems Management in FWS (IT Workshop) TEC7148

Coordinators

Coordinators identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Provide leadership.
2. Prioritize your projects in order of conservation importance.
3. Adapt work to use latest information management systems (IT).
4. Communicate in languages other than English to serve your customers or partners.
5. Answer biological questions in a broad, landscape context.
6. Use models in conservation design and planning.
7. Assess impacts of climate change to species and habitat.

*Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- Interest-based Negotiations OUT8121
- GIS Use for Wildlife Habitat Management TEC7113
- Project Leader Academy LED6201
- Rosetta Stone online language training

Information Technology Specialists

Information technology specialists identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Adapt work to use latest information management systems (IT).
2. Communicate effectively through listening, speaking, and writing skills.
3. Provide leadership.

4. Serve as a facilitator to assist diverse groups toward better communication and problem solving.
5. Assess impacts of climate change to species and habitat.

Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- Effective Presentation & Briefing Skills LED5156
- Project Leader Academy LED6201
- Social Media & Digital Content Development TEC7157
- Computer Systems Management in FWS (IT Workshop) TEC7148

Managers

Managers identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Provide leadership.
2. Engage in collaborative problem solving with those that disagree with you.
3. Prioritize your projects in order of conservation importance.
4. Assess impacts of climate change to species and habitat.
5. Answer biological questions in a broad, landscape context.
6. Apply population ecology principles to your problem solving and decisions.

Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- The Leadership Challenge Workshop LED6109
- Structured Decision Making: An Overview CSP3183
- Advanced Leadership Development Program LED6078

Outreach Specialists

Outreach specialists identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Increase public awareness of the value of bird conservation through outreach efforts.
2. Engage the public in policy and program improvements, including asking our customers how we can improve service.
3. Coordinate with other federal/state/NGO bird conservation organizations.
4. Communicate effectively through listening, speaking, and writing skills.
5. Use GIS technologies.
6. Adapt work to use latest information management systems (IT).

Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- National Communications & Outreach Workshop (coming soon to NCTC, 2012)
- Education Program Evaluation OUT8102
- Powerful Presentation Tools & Techniques OUT8106

Permits Specialists

Permits specialists identified the following performance elements as their highest priority training needs:

1. Engage in collaborative problem solving with those that disagree with you.
2. Adapt work to use latest information management systems (IT).
3. Coordinate with other Federal/State/NGO bird conservation organizations.
4. Coordinate with the Service (or other Regions or Programs) for national consistency in policies and procedures.
5. Communicate effectively through listening, speaking, and writing skills.

Example courses of current training available through NCTC:

- Basic Bird Ecology (coming soon to NCTC, 2012)
- Interest-based Negotiations OUT8121
- Conservation Partnerships in Practice OUT8118