

Adding a Landscape Ecology Perspective to Conservation and Management Planning

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Abstract — We briefly review concepts in landscape ecology and discuss their relevance to the conservation and management of neotropical migrant landbirds. We then integrate a landscape perspective into a spatially-hierarchical framework for conservation and management planning for neotropical migrant landbirds (and other biota). The framework outlines a comprehensive approach by which managers can develop plans based on (1) assessing the composition and interspersions of habitats important to species of current or future concern at a variety of spatial and temporal scales by generating and using data with different levels of resolution, and (2) assessing and modeling population dynamics and related ecological processes. We reference our paper throughout with selected studies of birds on temperate breeding areas, and to a more limited extent, on migration and neotropical wintering areas.

INTRODUCTION

Landscape ecology is the study of spatial patterns: what they are, how they develop through natural or anthropogenic influences, how they change over time, how they affect biological systems and ecological processes, and how spatial heterogeneity can be managed for societal benefits and survival (see Risser et al. 1984, Turner 1989, Turner and Gardner 1991, Barrett 1992, Hansen and diCasti 1992, Karr 1993, and the journal *Landscape Ecology*). It is a synthetic intersection of many disciplines including ecology, geography, sociology, and economics. The explicit consideration of spatial heterogeneity and human influences, and the emphasis on spatial and temporal dynamics distinguishes landscape ecology from traditional

ecological studies which, until recently, have focused on pristine environments and have assumed that systems are spatially homogeneous or at equilibrium.

In this paper, we briefly review concepts in landscape ecology and discuss their relevance to the conservation and management of neotropical migrant landbirds. We then outline a framework which integrates a landscape perspective into a spatially-hierarchical approach to conservation and management planning for neotropical migrant landbirds (and other biota). We illustrate our paper throughout by reference to the most pertinent scientific literature. At present, our knowledge of landscape-level relationships for neotropical migrant landbirds is limited by the lack of research in more extensively forested temperate landscapes (especially northern conifer, southeastern and western forests), in nonforested temperate habitats (e.g. cropland), and during the nonbreeding season.

Landscape Defined

A landscape is comprised of a mosaic of habitat elements (e.g. patches, corridors and the intervening matrix) and resources generated at various scales (Kotliar and Wiens 1990, Barrett 1992, Dunning et al. 1992). The spatial extent of a landscape and the way it is perceived varies among organisms and ecological processes (Turner 1989, Wiens 1989, Karr 1993,

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Pearson et al. in press). For neotropical migrant landbird species, a landscape occupies the spatial scales intermediate between an individual's territory or home range and a species' regional distribution (e.g. 1-100 km²). By focussing on intermediate spatial scales, the study of landscape-level patterns and processes may form a bridge between local habitat studies that have been commonly done, and larger scale regional and biogeographical studies.

Landscape Structure

Landscape structure can be characterized by the composition and relative availability of habitat elements, and their spatial arrangement or geometry. When particular or combinations of habitat elements are rare or absent from a landscape, bird species that depend on them are also rare or absent (Dunning and Watts 1990, Thomas et al. 1990, Herkert 1991, Probst and Weinrich in press). The richness, composition and abundance of species within a given habitat element are also affected by patch size, amount of edge, the quantity and quality of resources, and how individuals and their resources are affected by natural and anthropogenic disturbances (Stauffer and Best 1980; Karr and Freemark 1983, 1985; Brown and Dinsmore 1986; Freemark and Merriam 1986; Gotfryd and Hansell 1986; Robbins et al. 1989; Askins et al. 1990; Best et al. 1990; Johnson and Temple 1990; Gibbs et al. 1991; Hejl and Woods 1991; Bollinger and Gavin 1992).

Neotropical migrant landbirds are also significantly affected by the spatial arrangement or geometry of habitat elements in the landscape. For example, less isolated habitat patches support more area-sensitive species than more isolated patches (Askins et al. 1987, Robbins et al. 1989, Gibbs et al. 1991, Freemark and Collins 1992). The orientation of habitat patches within the landscape may also influence their relative importance to neotropical migrant landbirds during migration and the subsequent breeding season (Gutzwiller and Anderson 1992). The nature and extent of the intervening habitat matrix, the nature of boundaries created by the juxtaposition of different habitats, and the presence of corridors that facilitate the movement of individuals across the habitat matrix or boundaries can also significantly affect the species richness, composition and abundance of neotropical migrant landbirds (Wegner and Merriam 1979, Szaro and Jakle 1985, Temple and Cary 1988, Wilcove and Robinson 1990, Hansen and diCatri 1992).

Metapopulations

Populations within individual habitat patches can decline, go extinct, and become re-established by the dispersal of individuals from other patches. Sets of local populations which interact through the dispersal of individuals have been termed metapopulations (Merriam 1988, Opdam 1991). Because of spatial and temporal dynamics in local populations, the

distribution pattern of a metapopulation shifts over time (Opdam 1991, Villard et al. 1992). Landscape structure coupled with a species' life-history characteristics (e.g. dispersal capability, productivity, adult/juvenile survival), affects the number of patch populations that can interact, the size of those patch populations, their temporal variability, and ultimately, the survival of the metapopulation (Merriam 1988, Opdam 1991).

There is some evidence that forest bird populations function as metapopulations within landscapes (Freemark 1989, Stacey and Taper 1992, Villard et al. 1992, Probst and Weinrich in press) and regions (Temple and Cary 1988, Robinson 1992). Within a landscape, the probability of local extinction within a habitat patch is inversely related to the size of the patch population which in turn is proportional to patch size and quality. The probability of recolonisation is proportional to proximity and connectedness to similar habitat patches and the permeability of the intervening matrix.

Some authors have suggested that metapopulations exist in a "source-sink" fashion (Pulliam 1988, Howe et al. 1991). Offspring disperse from populations in source areas where productivity exceeds mortality to populations in sink areas which, in the absence of immigration, would go locally extinct. A given area may oscillate between acting as a source or a sink with environmental variation. Computer-simulation models show that sink areas can be occupied by a large fraction of the metapopulation and can make a significant contribution to the size and longevity of the metapopulation (Pulliam 1988, Howe et al. 1991 but see McKelvey et al. 1993). Field data in support of "source-sink" metapopulation structure for neotropical migrant landbirds are currently limited to temperate forests in the east (Villard et al. 1992, Villard et al. in press) and midwest (Temple and Cary 1988, Gibbs and Faaborg 1990, Robinson 1992, Probst and Weinrich in press).

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

It is becoming increasingly clear that the species richness, composition, abundance and population dynamics of neotropical migrant landbirds cannot be understood solely from processes occurring within individual habitat patches. Effects from the surrounding landscape also have to be considered. Understanding the relationship between landscape structure, management practices, species' distributions and probabilities of local extinction is an important prerequisite for developing and implementing effective conservation and management plans for neotropical migrant landbirds. The need for a landscape-level perspective in land management has been recognized in the "New Forestry" being developed and evaluated in the Pacific Northwest (Franklin 1989, Hansen et al. 1991) and in the "New Perspectives" (now Ecosystem Management) initiatives of the USDA Forest Service (Kessler et al. 1992 and related papers in the same issue).

Metapopulation theory provides an important context for developing conservation and management strategies based on nodes and networks of breeding habitat within and among landscapes (Dyer and Holland 1991, Hudson 1991, Murphy and Noon 1992). For at least some neotropical migrant landbird species, understanding metapopulation dynamics may be essential if viable regional populations are to be maintained (Temple and Cary 1988, Robinson 1992, Probst and Weinrich in press). Without considering metapopulation dynamics, land managers may misinterpret immigration to and local extinction in sink areas as a population response to management actions. Cumulative impacts of habitat alterations may be underestimated, particularly for productive, source areas. For example, actions that reduce the abundance and size of suitable habitat below extinction thresholds for the metapopulation may lead to the regional extirpation of a species even if some habitat of suitable quality remains (Lamberson et al. 1992). The failure of existing bird-habitat models to adequately predict population density among different locations and times is related, at least in part, to such landscape-level effects (Van Horne and Wiens 1991).

Effective conservation of neotropical migrant landbirds may require the preservation of suitable but intermittently unoccupied habitat. Efforts to identify critical habitat areas and landscapes need to consider differences in population demography and variability, and species-specific dispersal characteristics as well as population density (Van Horne 1983, Pulliam 1988, Murphy and Noon 1992, Probst and Weinrich in press). In the absence of such information, management plans should protect the diversity of habitats and landscapes used by a species, not just where the species is most common. In some situations, a diversity of habitats and landscapes may be maintained by attempting to mimic the composition and geometry of presettlement landscapes (Thomas et al. 1990, Hejl in press).

A Comprehensive Framework for Conservation and Management Planning

In the remainder of this paper, we outline a framework for conservation and management planning for neotropical migrant landbirds (and other taxa) which incorporates a landscape perspective. Our objective is to provide managers with a more comprehensive approach to planning based on (1) assessing the composition and interspersed of habitats important to species of current or future concern at a variety of spatial and temporal scales by generating and using data with different levels of resolution, and (2) assessing and modeling population dynamics and related ecological processes.

The framework (Figure 1) evolved from guidelines in Probst and Crow (1991). It includes assessments of spatial relationships and population demographics of neotropical migrant landbirds measured by extensive and intensive methods at continental to local spatial scales within and between breeding seasons. Initial activities (Figure 1: Activity 1-3) assess species

distributions and population trends relative to different geographic areas, physiographic regions, landforms (sensu Swanson et al. 1988), habitats and land ownerships, in order to target species or their habitats because of concerns about limited distribution, insufficient protection of important areas, sensitivity to habitat fragmentation or other landscape alteration, or recent or long-term declines. Existing breeding bird inventory and monitoring data can be used if available and, if necessary, supplemented by specific field surveys. Otherwise, targeted field surveys are required to generate input data. This approach is similar but more comprehensive than that being used in gap analysis to assess the adequacy of habitat protection for maintaining biodiversity (Scott et al. 1987), and by the Partners in Flight program to prioritize species and habitats of concern.

Activities to examine aspects of landscape structure (Figure 1: Activity 4-6) are used to understand spatial distributions of neotropical migrant landbirds in terms of population demographics and metapopulation dynamics. Field studies contrasting existing landscapes need to be done (cf. Freemark and Collins 1992, Pearson et al. in press), and in some circumstances, may be conducted by altering landscape structure experimentally (cf. Franklin 1989, Rodenhouse et al. 1992).

Differences in bird species patterns among landscapes should be measured by population density, productivity and survivorship. Indirect measures of productivity such as population variability within and between years (Villard et al. 1992, Probst and Weinrich in press), mating status of males (Probst and Hayes 1987, Gibbs and Faaborg 1990, Villard et al. in press), and adult:young ratios are most easily used for more extensive surveys, but need to be supplemented with direct measures of nesting success. Juvenile survival rates, while important, are notoriously difficult to measure because juveniles disperse from their natal areas and birds that disappear from a study area may survive elsewhere (Pulliam et al. 1992). Estimating adult survival is easy because most (but not all) adults which nest successfully usually return year after year to the same breeding site. Better field data are needed on dispersal, especially for juveniles (Pulliam et al. 1992, Villard et al. 1992). By understanding the mechanisms underlying population distribution and dynamics, problems associated with nonbreeding habitats (resulting in poor survival) can begin to be separated from problems associated with alteration of breeding habitats (resulting in poor productivity). The information can be used to evaluate, modify or design sampling schemes for population or demographic monitoring of specific neotropical migrant landbird species, habitats, geographical areas or latitudes.

The use of spatially explicit computer models is recommended (Figure 1: Activity 5-7) to simulate metapopulation dynamics (e.g. Howe et al. 1991, Lamberson et al. 1992, Pulliam et al. 1992, McKelvey et al. 1993, Thompson in press, also see review by Merriam et al. 1991). Models can be used to help focus research, monitoring, and conservation and management efforts, and to simulate short- and long-term impacts on neotropical migrant landbird populations of current

FRAMEWORK FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT PLANNING

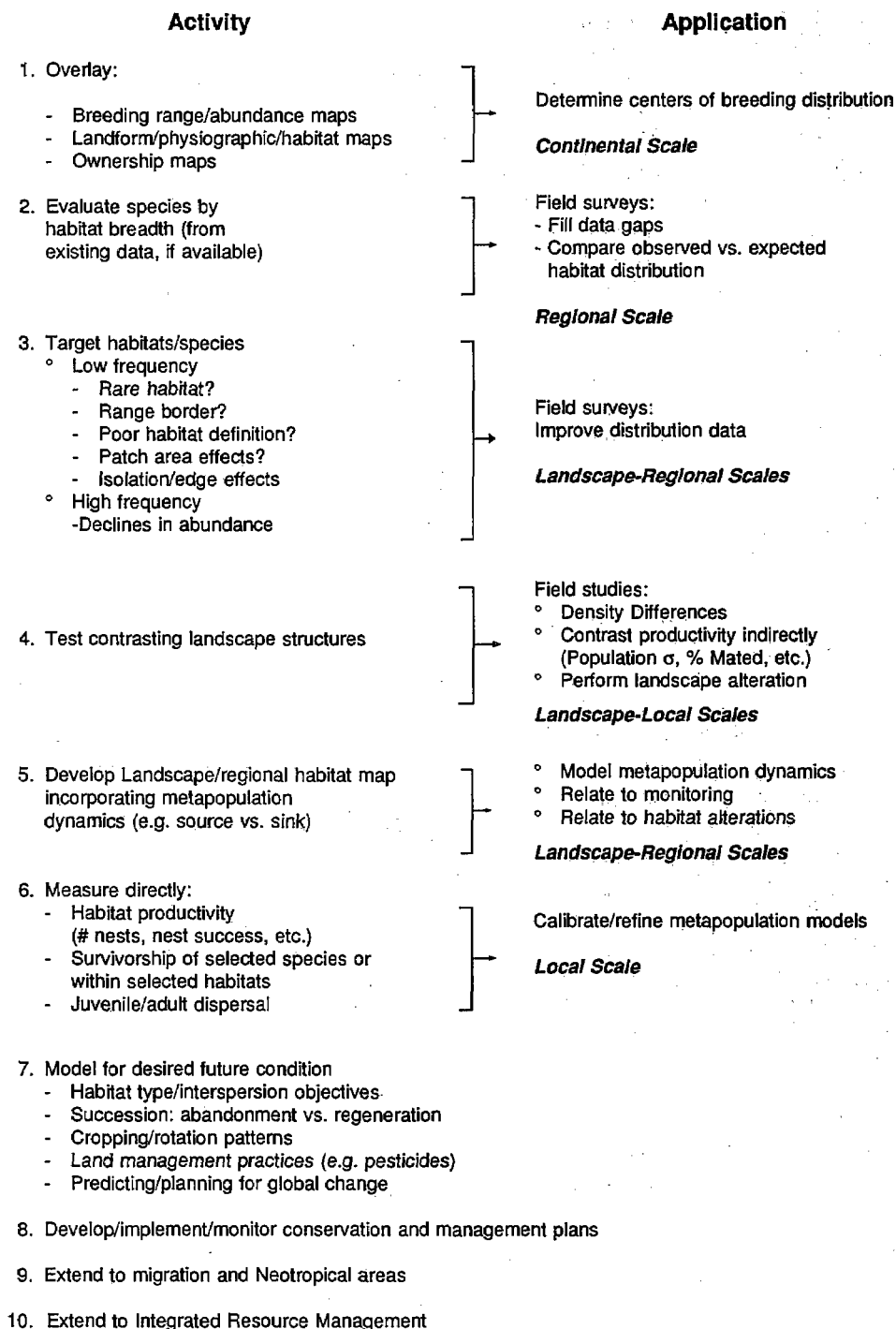


Figure 1. — A comprehensive, spatially-hierarchical framework for developing conservation and management plans for neotropical migrant landbird species (and other biota). Relevant spatial scales are indicated in bold.

and alternative management strategies for a landscape (Pulliam et al. 1992, Murphy and Noon 1992). For the greatest accuracy in developing conservation and management strategies, models should reflect local landscape structure(s) and if possible, use local, habitat-specific information about population demography and bird dispersal behavior (Hansen et al. 1992, Pulliam et al. 1992).

Toward this end, a major innovation is the linkage of computer simulation models with geographic information systems (GIS). Management agencies are increasingly turning to GIS technology to map their holdings. These databases are ideal for generating current and future landscape maps. By linking these maps to a population simulation model, the impact of a change in management strategy (e.g. habitat

type/interpersation objectives, cropping/rotation patterns, pesticide use) can be observed for the actual landscapes where the changes have been proposed (Pulliam et al. 1992, McKelvey et al. 1993). If demographic and habitat variation can be linked, then spatially explicit models could also be used to simulate impacts of global change on neotropical migrant landbirds, and to help focus related research, monitoring and conservation activities.

The development, implementation and monitoring of such comprehensive conservation and management plans (Figure 1: Activity 8) will require cooperative efforts among many researchers and land managers from many different organizations. Initially, plans will be superficial because of insufficient data but they will become increasingly more detailed and complex as additional information is generated. Use of landscape-level experiments, demonstration areas and adaptive management strategies should facilitate implementation and refinement of conservation and management plans.

At present, our approach is best developed for temperate breeding areas. However, we recognize that it needs to be extended to stopover areas and neotropical areas (Figure 1: Activity 9) if conservation planning for neotropical migrant landbirds is to be truly effective. Eventually, conservation and management plans for neotropical migrant landbirds need to be incorporated into integrated resource management strategies (Wilcove 1989, Probst and Crow 1991; Figure 1: Activity 10). Mechanisms for doing need to be developed.

Efforts to conserve neotropical migrant landbirds (and other biota) must occur on lands having a variety of uses and ownerships. Consequently, approaches for regional decision-making and cross-boundary management (both administratively and on the ground) need to be developed (Headley 1980, Schonewald-Cox et al. 1992). To be effective, approaches will have to include ecological, socio-economic, legal, cultural, ethical and aesthetic considerations (Nassauer and Westmacott 1987, Dearden 1988, Hansen et al. 1991, Kessler et al. 1992, Schonewald-Cox et al. 1992). The resolution of conflicts will require effective education and communication, and carefully designed mechanisms for planning, co-operation and co-ordination (Grumbine 1992, Schonewald-Cox et al. 1992). In this regard, the Partners in Flight program and this workshop have been important first steps.

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