



# International Migratory Bird Day

## What is a Stopover Site ?

Between the high altitude forests and willow thickets of the Rocky Mountains and the tropical forests and shade coffee farms of Nicaragua, the Wilson's Warbler must fly across a vast geography to find the resources it needs to complete its life cycle.

Long-distance migrants like this species evolved to take advantage of seasonal food resources, but they face many challenges and perils during their biannual travels between breeding grounds in the United States and Canada and wintering grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some 350 bird species make this daunting trip and need to find places to rest and refuel along the way, just as people do on a long road trip.

These important locations where birds pause between migratory flights are called stopover sites, as well as refueling, staging and *en route* areas. Many of these sites are well known, such as along the coasts of Louisiana, New Jersey and California, the Copper River Delta in Alaska, and the Upper Bay of Panama. There are also important inland sites, including riparian habitat along the San Pedro River in Arizona, wetlands at Cheyenne Bottoms in Kansas, and grasslands in Venezuela. Even sites in urban areas, like Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C., are important to migrants. Thanks to evolving technology, using tracking devices such as geolocators and satellite transmitters, we are learning about other key places where migratory birds stop to sustain themselves along their journey.

### Stopover Habitats



San Pedro River, AZ

By The Old Pueblo



Rock Creek Park, DC

By Moreau1



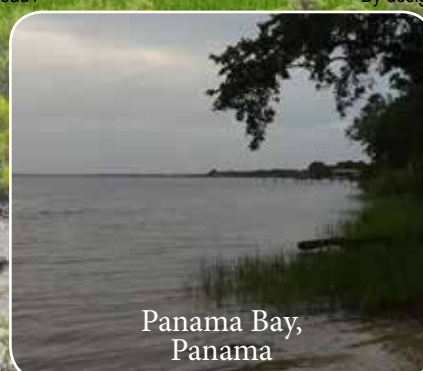
Cheyenne Bottoms, KS

By designatednaphour



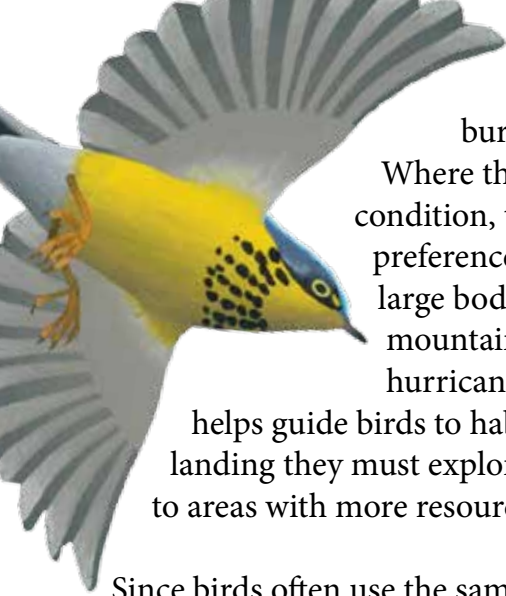
Parque Nacional  
Aguaro-Guariquito,  
Venezuela

By Veronidae



Panama Bay,  
Panama

By Stephen Hansley



Birds expend considerable energy during the process of migrating, and may burn most of the fat stored in their body which accumulated at their last stop. Where these long-distance travelers decide to land and rest can depend on the bird's condition, their normal range of daily flight, weather systems, and the availability and preferences for habitat and food. They may become exhausted after flying across a large body of water, like the Gulf of Mexico, or through the harsh terrain of deserts or mountains. They may also run into difficult flying conditions, pushed off course by hurricanes or caught in early or late winter storms. From the air, the landscape below

helps guide birds to habitats which appear to have the food, water and shelter they need, but after landing they must explore the area to determine if it is adequate or if they need to move further along to areas with more resources.

Since birds often use the same stopover sites year after year, it is vitally important that these habitats are protected to provide what migrating birds need, whether their stops last for a few hours, a few days, or a few weeks. The continued existence of these sites is critical to both their short-term and long-term survival. They must find a place with shelter and enough food to allow them to make the next flight along their route.

Thus if we want to conserve migratory birds, we need to know and protect not only where they breed and winter, but also the important places they use in between. Migrants may stop at a national park, national forest, or wildlife refuge, but they may also stop in your backyard habitat...so it's up to us to make sure they have somewhere safe to land, feed, and recover!

WATER



FOOD



SHELTER

