

Alberta Conservation Association
2019/20 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Alberta Wildlife Status Reports

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Key Findings

- We are in the final stages of completing reports on McCown's longspur, western wood-pewee, and an update of Canada warbler.
- We have published 87 status reports (17 updates) on species in Alberta since 1997, including reports on mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and plants.
- Status reports include current information on each species' conservation biology, habitat, population, distribution, limiting factors, and management in Alberta.

Abstract

ACA and Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) have produced Alberta Wildlife Status Reports for wild species that are believed to be declining in Alberta. These reports are the essential first step for a species to have its status assessed, and they play a key role in identifying *Endangered* and *Threatened* species that need legal protection and recovery actions to keep them from becoming extinct in Alberta. Each status report summarizes the information needed for assessing

a species' status—where it lives, the specific habitat it requires, its population size and whether it is stable/increasing/declining, factors preventing the species from thriving in Alberta, and what work has been done or is ongoing to manage the species in Alberta. A committee of Alberta-based scientists compares the information in each status report to internationally set thresholds (e.g., for population size) and recommends a status for the species. Using international criteria and thresholds ensures the status assessment process is as unbiased as possible. The status recommended by the scientists is subsequently scrutinized by an Alberta-based multi-stakeholder committee (the Endangered Species Conservation Committee). Composed of land managers, academic institutions, conservation groups, and industry, the committee provides its recommendation on a species' status to the Minister of AEP. The ultimate decision on status designation (e.g., *Endangered*, *Threatened*) is made by the Minister. In 2019/20, we continued our work on three reports: McCown's longspur, western wood-pewee, and an update of Canada warbler. ACA has played a key role in assessing the status of Alberta's species at risk through our involvement with the Alberta Wildlife Status Report series. The 2019/20 fiscal year was the final year that ACA jointly produced the Alberta Wildlife Status Report series with AEP.

Introduction

Every five years, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) reviews the general status of wildlife species in Alberta. These overviews assign "ranks" to individual species that reflect the perceived level of risk to populations. Such designations are determined from extensive consultations with professional and amateur biologists, and from a variety of readily available sources of population data. A key objective of these reviews is to identify species that may be considered for more detailed status assessments.

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) has coordinated the production of the Alberta Wildlife Status Report Series and published the reports together with AEP. This series is an extension of the general status exercise and provides comprehensive current summaries of the biological status of selected wildlife species in Alberta. Priority is given to species that are considered *At Risk* or *May Be At Risk* in *The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2015* (AEP 2017), or that are considered to be at risk at a national level by the Committee on the Status of Endangered

Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC; www.cosewic.gc.ca). The 2019/20 fiscal year was the final year that ACA jointly produced the Alberta Wildlife Status Report series with AEP.

Status reports are the primary source of information on species at risk used by the Scientific Subcommittee (SSC) (of Alberta's Endangered Species Conservation Committee; ESCC), an independent body of scientists that completes a formal status assessment for the target species using criteria developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The SSC then provides the ESCC (comprised of members from groups representing resource-based land users, corporate and government land managers, conservation organizations, and university scientists) with both the formal status evaluation and conservation recommendations. The ESCC then either concurs or withholds concurrence with the recommended status, which is then provided to the Minister of AEP for determining the legal designation (e.g., *Endangered* or *Threatened* under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*) (see Figure 1; also refer to Fish and Wildlife Division (2008) for more information on Alberta's species at risk process). ACA is a voting member of the ESCC.

Methods

Each spring, ACA and AEP staff have met to prioritize the species that are most in need of a detailed status assessment. We prioritized species based on the general status rank, COSEWIC priorities, the availability of new Alberta data (that will likely change the existing status of a species at risk), and new threats to a species at risk in Alberta.

Once a suite of new species was decided, ACA contracted species experts (individuals with unique local expertise in the biology and management of the species) to write the status reports. ACA staff managed these contracts, received and edited the report drafts, developed the current range maps, supervised the external review process, and formatted the reports for online publishing (www.ab-conservation.com).

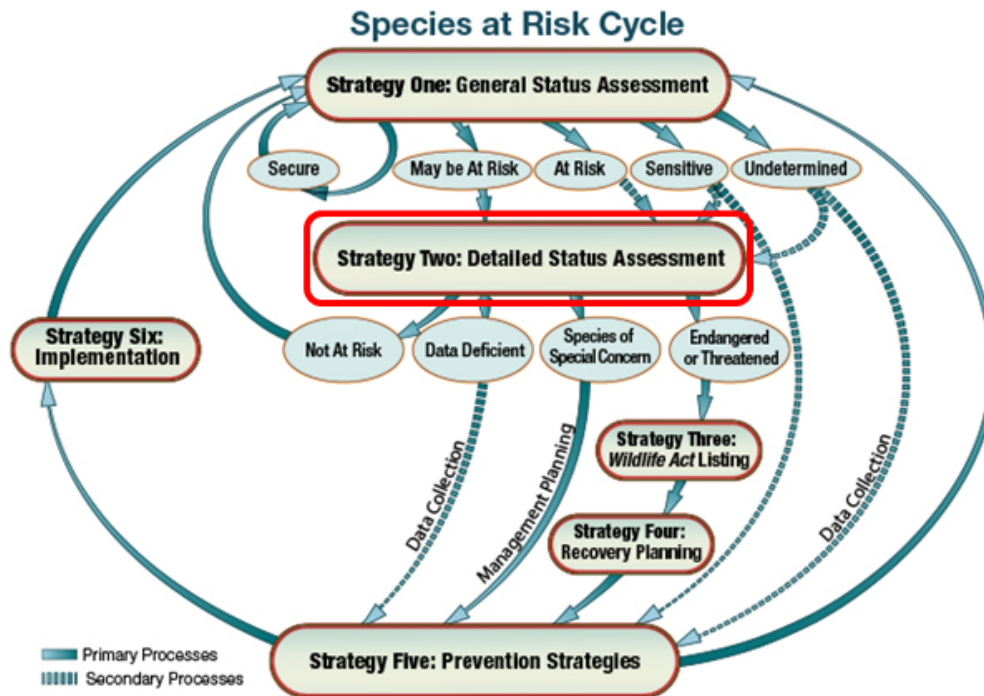


Figure 1. This flowchart, taken from AEP (2016), shows the species at risk process; the box outlined in red is where the Alberta Wildlife Status Report Series (and hence, ACA) plays a key role.

Results

In 2019/20, we continued our work on three reports (McCown’s longspur, western wood-pewee, Canada warbler update). In total, we have published 87 reports on species at risk in Alberta in this series since 1997, including reports on mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and plants (Figure 2). This includes updates to 17 older reports, revised with new information.

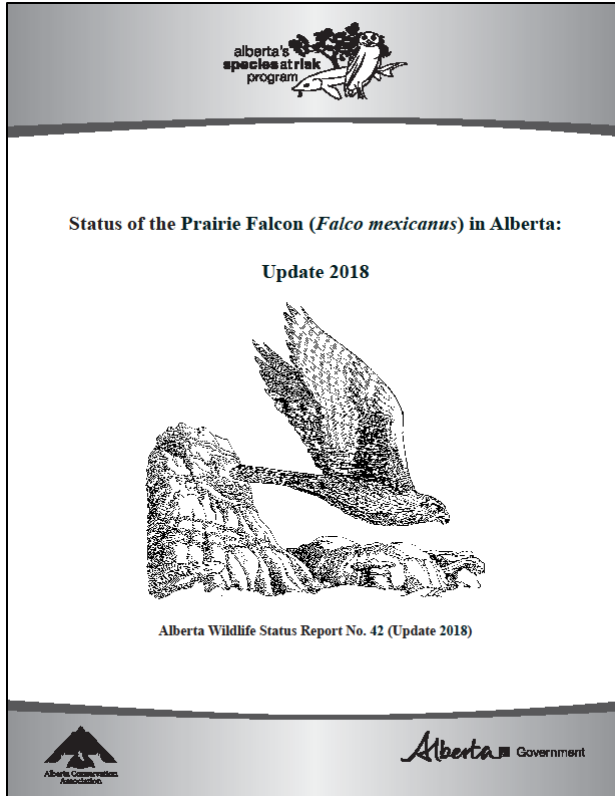


Figure 2. Example of a status report cover.

Conclusions

The Alberta Wildlife Status Report Series plays a key role in identifying *Endangered* and *Threatened* species in Alberta that need legal protection to keep them from becoming extinct or extirpated. As well, *Species of Special Concern* and those that are *Data Deficient* are identified using status reports, instigating the necessary actions to either prevent their decline or to obtain the information needed to further clarify their status in the province.

Communications

- All status reports are available online (ACA and AEP websites); reports published until 2011 are also available as hard copies.

- ACA's involvement with status reports and species at risk in Alberta have been promoted through formal and informal venues (e.g., ACA is a voting member at ESCC meetings; presentation at high school environmental studies class).

Literature Cited

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP). 2016. Alberta's species at risk strategies. Available online: <https://www.alberta.ca/albertas-species-at-risk-strategies.aspx>.

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP). 2018. Wild Species Status Search. Available online: <https://extranet.gov.ab.ca/env/wild-species-status/default.aspx> (Updated August 2018)

Fish and Wildlife Division. 2008. Alberta's strategy for the management of species at risk (2009 – 2014). Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. 30 pp. Available at: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/9780778577188>