



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Migratory Birds & Habitat Programs

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The MBTA was born in an era when people adorned their hats with egret feathers, and signed their letters with pelican-quill pens. At the same time, sport hunters were pushing for a law that would unify state hunting regulations.

Through a far seeing coalition of hunters and conservationists, this Act assures the protection of a healthy environment for people, fish and wildlife, and helps Americans conserve and enjoy our living treasures.



History

The [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#) (MBTA) of 1918 implemented the 1916 convention between the United States and Great Britain for the protection of birds migrating between the U.S. and Canada. Similar conventions between the United States and Mexico (1936), Japan (1972) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1976) further expanded the scope of international protection of migratory birds. Each new treaty has been incorporated into the MBTA as an amendment and the provisions of the new treaty are implemented

domestically. These four treaties and their enabling legislation, the MBTA, established Federal responsibilities for the protection of nearly all species of birds, their eggs and nests.

MBTA Protection

The MBTA made it illegal for people to "take" migratory birds, their eggs, feathers or nests. Take is defined in the MBTA to include by any means or in any manner, any attempt at hunting, pursuing, wounding, killing, possessing or transporting any migratory bird, nest, egg, or part thereof. The [Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act](#) affords additional protection to all bald and golden eagles.

Migratory Birds and Habitat Programs primarily operates under the auspices of the MBTA. In total, [836 bird species are protected by the MBTA](#), 58 of which are currently legally hunted as game birds. A migratory bird is any species or family of birds that live, reproduce or migrate within or across international borders at some point during their annual life cycle.

- Other [laws and regulations](#) governing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

