

IBA Outreach Kit

Community outreach is one way to raise awareness about IBAs and their role in conserving birds and maintaining healthy ecosystems. There are many ways to get the message out there. This short outreach kit provides useful advice on:

- How to write a letter to the editor
- Public speaking tips
- Where and how to find information on participating at outreach events
- How to write a press release
- Key messages to incorporate in your outreach activities

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor can be an effective way to reach two target audiences: the general public and key decision makers. Elected officials and heads of government agencies read letters to the editor to better understand their constituents. Letters to the editor are often the most widely read sections of the paper.

Tips

- *When submitting your letter make sure to include your name and daytime phone number* - some newspapers will not print from anonymous sources or they may require your permission to publish your letter.
- *Localize the content of your letter* - some local newspapers only publish letters touching on local issues.
- Be brief, concise and to the point - respect word limits (if applicable) or risk having your letter bumped or edited.
- Stick to a single topic. Do not dilute your message by touching on too many different issues.
- Tie your letter to recent and relevant news and when possible make references to recently published news articles or editorials. Editors like letters that make references to other articles in their newspapers as it demonstrates readership interest in their publications.
- When sending your letter by e-mail; copy the letter into the body of the e-mail. Do not send it as an attachment (many newspapers do not open attachments for risk of viruses).
- Send a copy of your letter, particularly if it is printed, to the person or agency you are writing about.
- Use catchy statements to draw in readers.
- Use simple language. Studies have shown that adults, regardless of education are most comfortable reading at an 8th grade level.
- Use facts, figures and expert testimony whenever possible to support your point of view but don't overwhelm the reader. The goal is to engage, inform and not simply reiterate a set of facts.
- Do not be rude or abusive or make personal attacks in your letter.
- Close with a short restatement of your message.

Public Speaking Tips

Effective public speaking is key to getting your message across and successfully educating and raising awareness of IBAs. Below you will find a few useful tips to enhance your public speaking skills and ensure you make a good first impression.

1. *Have a clear message:* Describe what it is you want your audience to know or do in one sentence or less and reinforce it at several points throughout your presentation.
2. *Know your audience:* Talk to two or three individuals to find out what your audience is like (what matters to them, their values, issues, level of knowledge etc.). Tailor your presentations to your audience and gear your message accordingly to increase the chance that your audience connects to the issue.
3. *Make it interesting:* Engage your audience, present like you are telling a story. Use real examples/anecdotes and structure your presentation so that it moves from point to point seamlessly. To do this, write down your thoughts, ideas and examples; then sequence them so that one builds into the next while avoiding repetition.
4. *Prepare your "Ask":* Give your audience at least 3 options of things they can do to support the IBA program or Caretaker Network. Make sure to tailor your ask to your audience.
5. *Practice and respect time limits:* Practice and make sure to stay within the allotted time frame. Typically, a 10 minute presentation consists of 1600-1800 words. If possible tape yourself, watch for proper pausing and make sure to emphasise key words.
6. *Bring handout/outreach materials:* If feasible bring outreach materials (brochure, pamphlet poster etc.) that complement your presentation and always make sure your contact information is readily available.
7. *Anticipate questions:* Make a list of questions you think your audience may ask and prepare credible, informative, 40-60 word answers. Collect questions from previous presentations to build your list.
8. *Use proper body language :* Various statistics and studies show that about 70% of communication is conveyed through body language; so it is imperative that you portray appropriate posture, gestures and eye contact
 - a. **Posture:** Stand straight and well-centred, behind the podium (if you have one to use), as it conveys confidence and that you are in control of the situation. Do not slouch or rock from side to side.
 - b. **Gestures:** Use appropriate and controlled gestures.
 - c. **Eye contact:** Speak, don't read. It is important to have eye contact with all areas of the room, ideally with every person but with larger audiences that may not be possible.
9. *Don't speak too fast:* If you're nervous be honest about it, be yourself and simply tell them you're a bit nervous. If you stumble, don't repeat sentences or phrases unless they are pivotal to your speech.

Where to find information on participating at outreach events

Finding opportunities to engage others, whether at a public speaking engagement or at an event (participation at local fair/festivals with a table) can at times seem overwhelming; here are a few helpful hints to help you discern opportunities to engage the public.

First, you will need to be aware of relevant events in your area. Search relevant online communities and boards for those promoting events in your area and subscribe to their mailing list.

Who should you contact?

Below are a few starting points. Make sure to inquire for other key contacts as every area is different. Some larger organizations may adopt a decentralized system where you will need to contact individual departments or sectors (there is not one central point of contact).

- Your local tourist information centres
- Local and regional colleges, universities and other schools
- Local community centres
- Local naturalist and historical societies etc.
- Various clubs: garden, service (rotary) and other related groups
- Your municipality
 - Elected officials
 - Environment Committee members
 - Key decision makers
- Event organizers
 - Environment related Fairs
 - Country Harvest Fairs
 - Community events
- Other environmental groups
 - May provide valuable insight and possibility of joint ventures/partnerships

When speaking with event organizers inquire whether or not the fee can be waived or discounted for non-governmental organizations (NGO).

- If it is not possible or feasible to attend the event inquire whether or not event organizers would distribute/display your outreach material at the event.

How to write a press release

Press releases are like snapshots of a news story enticing media to report on a particular person, event, service, accomplishment, award or product. They provide journalists with the basic information they need to develop a news story. But keep in mind that journalists receive many press releases and do not read the vast majority of them. Your challenge is to write a release that makes the journalist want to know about your story and ultimately report on it. Below you will find some useful tips on how to write an effective press release.

Method: Press releases are generally disseminated by e-mail but can also be sent by fax, mail, as part of a full press kit (or accompanied by a pitch letter). When submitting your press release by email take into consideration that some recipients may receive your press release in plain text format.

Tips

- **Choose an interesting and descriptive headline to grab the media's attention**

Use the active voice when writing your headline and keep it short but descriptive. One way is to extract the most important keywords from your press release and from these keywords, frame them in a logical and attention-grabbing statement.

Also, headlines are typically written in bold large letters and generally exclude "a" and "the" and utilize the sentence case format (creates a more graphically news-attractive look and feel).

The first word in the press release headline should be capitalized. Most headline words appear in lower-case letters.

- **Place the most important information at the beginning**

Organize the content so that key information is relayed to the reader in the first two paragraphs as most reporters will not read your press release in full. Editors may use your press release as is or edit it by cutting the press release from the bottom up to fit the text in the available space. Make sure to include the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How in your press release.

- **Avoid hype and unsubstantiated claims**

Do not make over-inflated statements, provide real, usable information. Avoid hyperbole, bragging, subjective claims and superlative adjectives.

- **Use clear and concise language**

Be concise and to the point and avoid using technical terms. Most reporters are not familiar with the IBA Program and the IBA Caretaker Network so use clear simple language and spell out acronyms. Also keep your release to one page or less.

- **Include a live contact**

Make sure to include a media contact and note when the press release can be used. If not specified, it will be assumed that the press release is "For Immediate Release," otherwise indicate the date for which the release can be used.

- **Proofread**

Double-check your spelling, grammar and sentence structure. Make sure your writing presents your topic in the most favorable light.

Here are some key communication messages to incorporate in your engagement activities.

The Caretaker Network: Key Communications Messages

1. Important Bird Areas (IBAs) provide essential habitat for birds.

- There are nearly 600 Important Bird Areas across Canada that provide habitat for threatened birds, large groups of birds, and birds found almost nowhere else on Earth.
- Birds face many pressures – pollution, habitat loss, climate change, and human disturbance – and conserving Important Bird Areas is an essential way of relieving pressures.
- Migratory birds depend on Important Bird Areas to rest, feed and breed. Without them, birds could not make their long and difficult journeys each year.
- Important Bird Areas unite people, communities and organizations in a common goal to conserve healthy bird populations.
- Canada's Important Bird Areas are part of a global system of more than 10,000 sites worldwide, which gives them a conservation currency that transcends borders and promotes international collaboration for protecting the world's birds.

2. Protecting and monitoring Important Bird Areas are the cornerstones of effective bird conservation in Canada.

- Many bird populations are in serious decline and more on-the-ground conservation action is needed to keep common birds common and to recover species at risk.
- Community care of local habitats in and around Important Bird Areas is essential for the health of our birds and for protecting the environment.
- The Important Bird Area Program identifies, monitors and protects the most vital places in Canada for birds – Important Bird Areas – so that conservation action can be directed in the most effective way possible.
- The IBA Program provides the scientific and conservation information decision-makers need to make better, more sustainable land and water use decisions.

3. Canada's Caretaker Network empowers volunteers to watch over and protect Important Bird Areas.

- Caretakers work within their communities to promote Important Bird Areas and to ensure that local conservation ideas are put into action. Their hands-on volunteer work puts Caretakers on the frontlines of bird monitoring and habitat protection.
- The Canadian IBA Caretaker Network is coordinated by regional partners BC Nature, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Nature Saskatchewan, Nature Quebec, and by national partners, Nature Canada and Bird Studies Canada.
- Caretakers are the eyes, ears, and hands on the ground at Important Bird Areas across Canada. They monitor birds, assess habitats, and conduct conservation activities within IBAs.
- By cooperating with local communities, scientists, governments and nature groups, Caretakers are building healthier bird communities and more sustainable environments for future generations.
- Becoming a Caretaker is a rewarding experience and an effective way to make a positive impact on this planet.