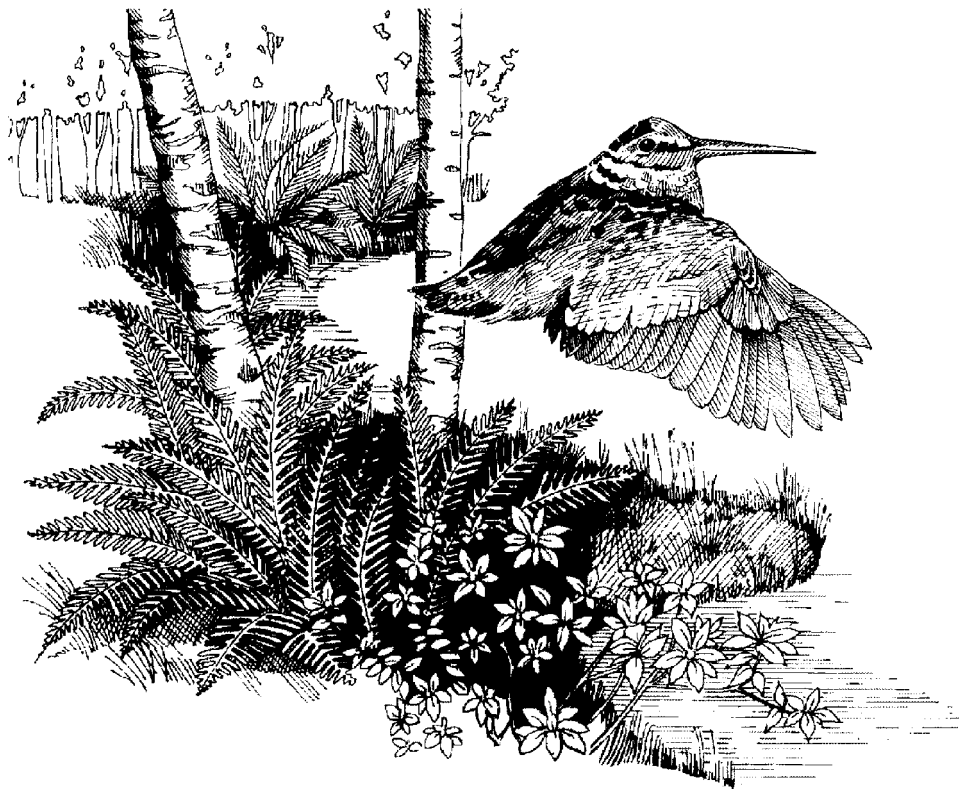


# A Guide to Critical Bird Habitat in Pennsylvania

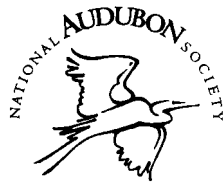


PENNSYLVANIA  
IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS  
PROGRAM



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Compiled by Gary J. Crossley



Pennsylvania Audubon Society  
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**NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY**

**IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS  
IN PENNSYLVANIA**

A Guide to Identifying and Conserving Critical Bird Habitat

**Produced by the  
Pennsylvania Audubon Society  
Important Bird Areas Program**

**Compiled by Gary J. Crossley**



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I would like to personally thank the many people who have contributed to the Pennsylvania Important Bird Areas program. This effort brought together many dedicated and skilled people from every corner of the state: Audubon's many Pennsylvania chapters, independent bird clubs, land conservancies, government agencies, and private individuals who heard about the IBA program and offered their help. This report is truly the product of a partnership of Pennsylvania's diverse environmental community.

I would especially like to thank Doug Gross and Dan Brauning for their many hours of help, encouragement, and moral support, both as members of the PA Biological Survey's Ornithological Technical Committee, and through their work with the PA Society for Ornithology. Special thanks to all the OTC members who helped review and select the sites.

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Special recognition also goes to the many individuals whose love for birds and wilderness contributed the hundreds of IBA site nominations. This network of dedicated individuals took time from their busy lives to participate in the Pennsylvania Important Bird Areas program. These people are, and will continue to be, the heart and soul of the IBA process.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wife Susan for her encouragement, patience, and support during this long and sometimes challenging project.

**Gary J. Crossley**  
**Coordinator, Pennsylvania IBA Program**  
**National Audubon Society**

Pennsylvania Audubon Society is pleased to release this report on the Important Bird Areas of Pennsylvania. Completion of this first report is the start of a process that will keep this document alive, as new sites are nominated and environmental changes occur at the sites.

Now the most important work begins — putting into place management practices that will help enhance and conserve these locations and others that are so critical to birds and other wildlife.

I wish to express my appreciation also to the many people who contributed to this program. Special thanks to Gary Crossley for his work in facilitating this effort and creating the initial draft, and to Fred Baumgarten, Ron Freed and Walt Pomeroy for their many hours of research and editing to produce the final report.

**Cindy Adams Dunn**  
**Executive Director**  
**Pennsylvania Audubon Society**

# Why Pennsylvania?



With an entire nation to choose from, why did the National Audubon Society decide to launch its Important Bird Areas (IBA) Project in the Keystone State? The reasons are compelling. Pennsylvania was the cradle of American ornithology, and John James Audubon began painting here, at Mill Grove near Philadelphia, the same city where the pioneering naturalists William Bartram and Alexander Wilson also lived.

Today, Pennsylvania still has one of the strongest traditions of birding and ornithology in the country, and a committed corps of volunteers who mapped, documented and nominated the 73 IBAs, each a location of unusual importance to nesting, migrating or wintering birds.

Even more compelling is the state itself. Pennsylvania is a huge commonwealth, encompassing more than 47,000 square miles of land that blends north and south, east and west in a biological melting pot. Boreal habitats, like spruce bogs and cool birch-maple forests, dot the northern tier highlands, home to rarities like the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, while river valleys in the south provide a temperate foothold for species such as the Yellow-throated Warbler, more at home south of the Mason-Dixon line. Tidal marshes along the lower Delaware River bring a hint of the ocean to this landlocked state, while in the west, relic prairies harbor creatures characteristic of the Great Plains. The Appalachian ridge-and-valley system sweeps across the middle of Pennsylvania, dividing the rolling Piedmont to the south from the rugged Allegheny Plateau to the north. Three major rivers – the Delaware, Susquehanna and Ohio – drain the state, providing nesting and travel corridors for multitudes of waterfowl.

All this means diverse habitats for birds. Meticulous surveys have recorded more than 230 species of breeding birds within the state, and many more migrate through each year but do not nest here. Some of the migrants depend on small, vital staging grounds on their epic journeys, like the thousands of majestic Tundra Swans, en route to the Arctic, that descend on Lancaster County each spring at places like Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area and the Conejohela Flats of the Susquehanna – sites now included under the IBA umbrella.

Among Pennsylvania's strongest features are its forests – nearly 60 percent of the state is wooded, making it a stronghold for interior-nesting species like the Wood Thrush, Ovenbird and many vireos and warblers. While much of that forest habitat has been fragmented by roads, gas- and power-line corridors, timbering and other disturbance, enormous tracts of maturing woodland still remain. Now, crucial woodland habitat like St. Anthony's Wilderness (State Game Lands

211) in Dauphin County, southern Sproul State Forest in Clinton County and the remote Hickory Creek watershed in Warren and Forest counties are recognized through the IBA program for their value to birds.

Many of the IBA sites are wetlands, a recognition of both the importance of such habitats to many birds – more than two-thirds of the state’s breeding species require them – and their increasing rarity in Pennsylvania, which has lost almost 60 percent of its wetlands since colonization. The John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum, partly within the city of Philadelphia, preserves the largest remaining freshwater tidal marsh in the state, while the bogs and beaver dams of Black Moshannon State Park in Centre County provide a home for Black Ducks and other northerly species. Bald Eagles patrol the Geneva Marsh in Crawford County and Shohola Lake in Pike County.

Another habitat in even more desperate straits – and its birds with it – are grasslands. The Freedom Township Grasslands in Adams County, a crucial IBA, shelter some of the last remaining pairs of Loggerhead Shrikes in the state, along with Grasshopper Sparrows, Bobolinks and other meadow-nesters.

The Important Bird Areas designation carries no legal protection, no force of law. But it has a powerful impact nonetheless. An IBA label shines a spotlight on the significance of that place for birds, giving landowners and governmental agencies vital information as they make land-use and management decisions. Already this process is beginning, with positive effects for the Commonwealth’s birds.

But in a different and no less crucial way, the IBAs are a celebration – of Pennsylvania’s natural heritage, and its astonishingly rich and beautiful bird life. I suspect old John James Audubon would be proud.

**Scott Weidensaul**

# Executive Summary

*“Modern man’s proudest works have devastated his most important inheritance. Almost every triumph of his civilization has been a defeat for the land – the land on which he lives; the thin, finite covering of his planet upon which he depends for life itself. For all our wondrous works and soaring dreams, the process of life is sustained by 6 inches of soil and the fact that it rains every now and then.”*

–DAN W. LUFKIN

(“THE SPOILER’S HAND; THE RAGE OF GAIN,” 1974)

## Wilderness and Habitat

Wilderness and habitat are shrinking everywhere we look. Every day, more wild land is altered or destroyed by highways, housing developments, and strip malls. Little regard is given to the wild creatures and habitat that are displaced by these actions. I hear many people comment that these displaced birds and animals “will find new habitat elsewhere.” The sad reality is that these creatures will perish because of lack of food, interrupted reproduction cycles, predation by domestic animals, or other human activities.

The great nineteenth century conservationist and founder of the Sierra Club, John Muir, said, “The battle for conservation will go on endlessly. It is part of the universal struggle between right and wrong.” Preserving habitat is truly a universal and endless struggle. Every day new assaults work to weaken the quality and quantity of wilderness. The only deterrent to this loss of habitat is vigilance, empowered by information. With information, concerned individuals and groups can make a difference in preserving habitat and wilderness.

Birds have been victims of this onslaught on wilderness and habitat. For years, bird populations have been declining. Pennsylvania alone lists thirty-two bird species that are in some degree of danger. Like the canary in the mine shaft, these struggling birds foretell the possible danger to other animal species, including humans. Noted biologist David Suzuki states that “ours is the last generation that will be able to do anything about preserving wilderness.” One thing is certain: the forces at work to alter or destroy habitat will not be curbed unless we are equally determined to save it.

## Why IBA

The Important Bird Areas Program developed from a need for a centralized source of information on important bird habitat, first in Europe, then the Middle East, and now in the United States with Pennsylvania. To help save birds, we need to know where they live and breed, and we need to get this information into the hands of activists and decision-makers who can effect a positive change for habitat preservation.

Many fine programs exist that gather research information on birds, but often it is for use by scientists or experienced ornithologists. The chief goal of the Pennsylvania IBA program was to locate habitat areas important to birds by using objective scientific criteria, highlight them as IBAs, and then distribute this information to a broad range of decision-makers, not just those with ornithological backgrounds, in a clear, straightforward manner.

The IBA Program is also meant to inspire actions that will focus attention on important bird habitat areas and hence help promote their conservation and preservation. As you read through this book, think of how you can make a difference for habitat and wilderness. You may be the director of a land conservancy that would like to target acquisitions for birds but did not know the locations. You may be an individual living in a municipality or township where you are the only contact a local government official will hear from concerning wildlife and habitat. Remember, the forces that are actively reducing habitat are well-represented; you may be the only voice that habitat will have in your community.

## The IBA Process

The IBA process began in Pennsylvania in 1995, and was the first in the United States. Although BirdLife International, a conservation group in Europe, developed the basic IBA program, the National Audubon Society was the first organization to develop it in the United States. Pennsylvania was chosen to be the first state to begin the IBA process for several important reasons. First, Pennsylvania had a strong network of birders, birding organizations and scientists concerned about habitat issues. This valuable network was instrumental in the success of the IBA program. Second, Pennsylvania has a vast amount of quality bird habitat, mainly forests. These areas are combinations of state forests lands, state parks, national forests, and state game lands. Private preserves, land conservancies, trust properties and commercial forests also contributed to the overall mass of forest habitat in Pennsylvania.

IBAs in Pennsylvania were chosen by nominations based on scientific criteria. Interested individuals or groups could nominate sites by using a standardized nomination kit. The kit contained a nomination form,

guidelines for completion, and the scientific criteria that are at the heart of the IBA selection process. These criteria were written to make the selections as scientifically valid and objective as possible. Once completed, the nomination form was mailed back to the National Audubon Society for review by the Pennsylvania Biological Survey / Ornithological Technical Committee (OTC) and National Audubon. Over two hundred seventy nominations were received for habitat sites across Pennsylvania. Of those two hundred seventy sites, seventy-three were determined to meet the criteria for IBA designation.

## Results of the IBA Process

Many sites that were nominated, but not designated, are superb habitat areas. The decision to designate seventy-three sites was made by the completeness of the data and how well they met the IBA site criteria. By no means do these seventy-three sites constitute an entire directory of important bird habitat areas. These sites represent only areas that were nominated and found to meet the scientific criteria at this time. The IBA list will evolve as new habitat areas are documented or as habitat areas change and evolve. The IBA list will be evolutionary and changing to represent the most current information.

From its inception, the Pennsylvania IBA program sought to form partnerships with many environmental organizations across the state. Independent bird clubs, Audubon chapters, land conservancies, private corporations, individuals, state, county and municipal officials all participated in the IBA effort. This combined effort advanced the IBA goals immeasurably by involving many groups and individuals who did not previously work closely together on a regular basis.

The future of the Important Bird Areas program is clear; designations will continue. The OTC and National Audubon have established a permanent review committee to evaluate future IBA nominations in Pennsylvania. This will insure that as information is reviewed on additionally nominated sites, new sites could be added to the Pennsylvania IBA inventory. Conversely, existing IBA sites will be monitored and, if necessary, removed from the IBA listing if site conditions no longer meet the established criteria.

## Uses of this Report

The IBA Report represents a “first cut” at compiling available data on the 73 sites selected by Audubon and the OTC as Important Bird Areas in Pennsylvania. Its purpose is to provide useful information to land managers, conservationists, decision-makers, and other key stakeholders in the IBA Program. With this report, we hope to guide

these constituents toward actions that will maintain and enhance crucial bird habitats. Land managers should look here for information on what species of birds regularly occur in significant numbers on their property and how to manage the habitat in accordance with those species' needs. Conservationists should seek out opportunities to work with landowners and state agencies on projects that will protect and enhance habitat, paying particular attention to the conservation section of the site descriptions. Land-use planners and other decision-makers should consider these 73 IBAs as priorities for conservation planning and resource allocation.

There is still a great deal to be learned about these areas, individually and collectively. We encourage readers of this report to go well beyond the data contained here when seeking to become knowledgeable about a particular site, and we urge Pennsylvania's birders to continue to collect data to fill in the gaps of our knowledge, by regularly monitoring Important Bird Areas wherever possible. Doug Gross's summary contains a very thorough listing of useful monitoring projects that one can choose from. There will almost certainly be errors and omissions in this preliminary report, and we take full responsibility for them. Readers are encouraged to send us any corrections or additional information on these IBAs.

Important Bird Areas in no way reflect all the habitats in Pennsylvania that are necessary to conserve the Commonwealth's rich heritage of birds and other wildlife. There are literally millions more acres and thousands more sites, large and small, scattered around the state that provide habitat — from large public forests not covered in this inventory all the way to someone's backyard, where a few plantings or a well-placed bird feeder may attract and sustain the wayward migrant. There are plenty of ethical, economic, social, and environmental reasons to preserve as much habitat as we can in Pennsylvania, not only the 73 IBAs listed here.

The IBA report contains information that will undoubtedly be of interest to birders seeking out "hotspots" for recreational birding. While we hope that this report will help promote birding and bird tourism where it is desired, we urge the reader to exercise extreme caution in using this report as a birding guide. The primary purpose of this document is to promote habitat conservation. The 73 IBAs listed here include a mix of public and private lands, some of which are not established as birding destinations and where a sudden influx of birders would not be welcome. We have provided the names and phone numbers of local contacts for each of these IBAs, and we strongly recommend that readers call these contacts before making site visits for any reason. Keep in mind also that many of these IBAs are extremely rugged and unsuited for casual birding, and that on some, birding may actually constitute a disturbance to the birds and/or the habitat. Finally, birders and outdoor enthusiasts in the field should follow the

“principles of birding ethics” established by the American Birding Association; an excerpt of which is printed below.

**Principles of Birding Ethics (excerpt)**  
**American Birding Association**

1. Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.
  - 1(a) Support the protection of important bird habitats.
  - 1(b) To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming.
  - 1(c) Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance can be minimized, and permission has been obtained from private land-owners. The sites of rare nesting birds should be divulged only to the proper conservation authorities.
  - 1(d) Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.
  
2. Respect the law and the rights of others.
  - 2(a) Do not enter private property without the owner’s explicit permission.
  - 2(b) Follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing use of roads and public areas, both at home and abroad.
  - 2(c) Practice common courtesy in contacts with other people. Your exemplary behavior will generate good-will with birders and non-birders alike.

Conservation succeeds through consensus and cooperation, not conflict and contentiousness. Accordingly, the IBA report should not be used to stigmatize or polarize perceived opponents. Rather, it should be viewed as an entry point for discussion and dialogue. Again, the best way to start using this report is to get in touch with the contacts listed and start learning about local issues. Always begin with the positive: IBAs are good habitats for birds because someone is taking good care of them. If we could just keep all 73 of these sites as they are, we will have accomplished something significant for bird conservation.

## What Needs to be Done

Go out and walk Pennsylvania’s forests, wetlands and wilderness. These last vestiges of wild habitat can never be replaced and without vigilance, they will slowly disappear. Every person who loves birds, wildlife and wilderness must take an active part in their protection. If you bird-

watch, hike, hunt, fish or saunter through Pennsylvania's public or private lands, think about your responsibility to provide the stewardship necessary to insure their future. Attend meetings, write letters, call or e-mail people who manage, acquire or determine land use for the area you're concerned about. Contribute to a land trust or conservancy, visit your Congressional or state representative and tell him or her that wilderness, habitat and biodiversity are important to you. Help private landowners to manage their land for birds and wildlife. Contact government agencies and become active in their public comment and planning processes.

Join an organization that is strong in environmental advocacy. Participate in its programs and activities. Attend a legislative boot camp or workshop. Work with land managers; many are eager for help and constructive comments from concerned individuals and groups. If a group or agency is resistant to managing for wildlife, seek out interested individuals within that group and work with them. If you are online, find The League of Conservation Voters or the Clearinghouse on Environmental Advocacy and Research (CLEAR) or similar Web sites to keep abreast of legislation that will affect habitat and biodiversity issues. Details are provided in later chapters to help you learn how to work your way through the sometimes complex maze of details for preserving habitat. Remember, the forces that would harm or destroy wilderness are motivated. We must raise awareness, and become equally motivated.

## Conclusion

Remember, the birds that we enjoy will not survive if we do not take responsibility for preserving their habitat. Martin Litton, one of twentieth century America's most passionate environmentalists, said "When you compromise with what you believe in, you've lost, because you know that you've given up something which you really care about. Don't be too quick to give away the wilderness, it will never come back".

Watch for updates of the Pennsylvania Important Bird Areas book. If you know of a site that meets the criteria outlined in the back of this book, consider nominating it. It is my sincere hope that you find this book a useful aid to locating, identifying, and preserving habitat for birds and wildlife.

**Fred Baumgarten**  
National Coordinator  
IBA Program

**Gary J. Crossley**  
Coordinator, PA IBA Program  
Pennsylvania Audubon Society

## *The IBA Program: A Global Perspective*

Pennsylvania has been the proving ground for the state-based IBA concept in the United States, but the idea originated in Europe over a decade ago. The first ancestor to this report was *Important Bird Areas in Europe*, published in 1989 by the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau. That 900-page book summarized the results of a two-year study to inventory key sites throughout the continent. The basis for Important Bird Areas was a set of criteria similar to those developed later for the Pennsylvania IBA Program.

*Important Bird Areas in Europe* lists 2,444 sites in 32 countries, with a brief description of each site, its importance to birds, and its protected status. The book's stated purpose was to provide "the first comprehensive basis for the promotion of a network of protected sites for birds throughout Europe." That goal has largely been realized in a remarkably short period of time, albeit not without the consistent, ongoing efforts of BirdLife International (as the ICBP is now known) and its constituent organizations at the national and local levels.

What began as a straightforward inventory became in 1990 the full-fledged IBA Program, with the aim of conserving individual IBAs and the network as a whole, whether through legislative or other means. Many countries took swift unilateral action to safeguard designated IBAs within their borders. The European Union's Bird Directive, which called on member nations to give Special Protection Area status to all designated IBAs, has been a critical conservation tool. By 1995, some 636 IBAs totaling more than 16 million acres had received special protection. Through the continuing work of BirdLife International and its partners, those figures have steadily increased. Monitoring IBAs for threats has been another key component of the program. Its importance was tested just recently following the spill of toxic chemicals near the Doñana in Spain, one of the region's most important wetland IBAs. Awareness of the area's vital role for migratory birds and the ability of the European community to respond quickly have been major benefits of the IBA Program in Europe.

Following on the heels of the European IBA Program, the global expansion of the IBA concept was rapid. *Important Bird Areas of the Middle East* was published in 1994. Today, IBA Programs organized by BirdLife International and its partners are taking place on nearly every continent, including Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In the Western Hemisphere, IBA Programs are underway in Canada, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Venezuela, and other countries, as well as in the United States. BirdLife International maintains a world database of IBAs and is actively promoting the review and updating of many national IBA inventories.

## IBAs in the U.S.

Recognizing the enormous potential of the IBA Program, the National Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) adopted the IBA concept in 1995. ABC has led the identification of Important Bird Areas with exceptional significance at the national, continental, and global level – sites such as Hawk Mountain/Kittatinny Ridge and Presque Isle State Park in Pennsylvania. Audubon has focused on establishment of state-based IBA Programs, with Pennsylvania as our first, pilot program. The development of state IBA Programs goes hand-in-hand with Audubon's strength as a grassroots organization, a strength that is most associated with our 518 chapters. Originally a project of Audubon's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, the Pennsylvania IBA Program is now fittingly housed in the year-old Pennsylvania State Office in Harrisburg.

The Pennsylvania IBA Program has yielded tremendous results for conservation in just three years, far exceeding expectations. Several sites have been protected against threats as a direct result of IBA designation. Politicians, including the governor, and the state's wildlife and natural resource agencies have been very supportive of the program. The IBA Program has had a demonstrable impact on public awareness of birds and their habitats, thanks to some well-timed publicity events and friendly, progressive media. Clearly, there is a great appetite in Pennsylvania for good information about birds and for sound conservation initiatives. In 1997, the National Audubon Society was honored as Conservation Organization of the Year by the Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation for the achievements of the Pennsylvania IBA Program.

Perhaps most important, the Pennsylvania IBA Program has been a model for other states to develop successful IBA Programs. Fifteen states currently have IBA Programs underway, all closely patterned after, and improving upon, the Pennsylvania model. In New York, the first state after Pennsylvania to establish an IBA Program, the governor signed a bill in 1997 that makes the identification and protection of "bird conservation areas" on state lands – using the IBA criteria developed by Audubon – a legal mandate. Just as with "Special Protection Areas" in Europe, we now have the opportunity before us to protect millions of acres of habitat in the United States.

As you read this impressive compendium of 73 of Pennsylvania's Important Bird Areas, remember that each IBA is part of a global network of sites and backed by a worldwide network of hundreds of organizations dedicated to conserving the natural environment. Together, we can all help ensure that this network of Important Bird Areas is truly a safe haven for birds in Pennsylvania, the United States, and around the world.

**Fred Baumgarten**  
**National Coordinator Important Bird Areas Program**