

## The Blue List for 1979

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Marsh Hawk. Photo/ Ken W. Gardiner

**P**articipation by observers in this year's polling for the Blue List was disappointing. Although more individual observers reported than in any previous year, the response was far below expectations, leaving some regions with less than adequate representation.

This year, for the first time, a "cooperators form," with instructions, was published in *American Birds* (32: 405 - 6, May 1978), and it was anticipated that the response from the more than 12,000 copies distributed might result in such widespread cooperation than we would truly have, for the first time, a significant cross-section of observer opinion from all parts of the continent. Unfortunately and regretfully, something went wrong; forms did not pour into the Regional Editors, and the response in some regions was so thin as to be of questionable validity. Several reasons for this failure have been suggested: the form sheet was buried in the back of the issue; it asked for opinions restricted to persons with 10-year experience in their areas; subscribers

were loath to deface their issues; perhaps even that few observers keep records accurate enough to form valid judgments on the changing status of most species in their areas. And finally, of course, there is natural human inertia.

Whatever the reasons, only those regions in which the Regional Editors themselves pursued the project diligently responded to the degree we hoped for. Hugh Kingery in the Mountain West Region led the way splendidly with 52 cooperators responding; Vernon Kleen, with 23 ballots, and P. William Smith, with 19, both provided us with ample input for meaningful analysis. On the other end of the scale, the Québec Region and the Northern Great Plains submitted one ballot each, hardly representative and impossible to weigh. For this reason, the percentages of overall sentiment for some species are noted below merely for passing interest, and should not be considered as unquestionable statistics. Similarly, the noting of regions for and against retention, in some cases, will equate highly valid high-

response regions with very shaky low-response regions.

With those reservations in mind, we still believe that the Blue List as presented affords valuable insights into population trends for many troubled species, and still serves well as an "early warning list", often for species whose ebbing fortunes may not always be otherwise apparent.

This year five species are added to the list, of the 70 recommended by one or more regions. We consider this a most conservative approach; actually there seems little doubt that far more species of North American birds are evidencing slow, steady declines of which we are presently only dimly aware. As wetlands continue to disappear, marsh birds can only become scarcer; as tropical forests fall to ax and fire, our wood warblers and other winterers in that habitat must continue to diminish, as beach and dune areas suffer increasing human encroachment, some terns and plovers must suffer.

This year no previously-listed species has been removed from the list. Surprisingly, several species that seemed strong candidates for deletion gained substantial support for retention, among them species whose previous inclusion has aroused so much strong opposition. Among them are Sharp-shinned Hawk, Marsh Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Hairy Woodpecker, Purple Martin, Yellow Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat. For some species, of course, there will never be agreement, because they may be thriving and even increasing in one part of their range, and declining rapidly elsewhere. No one this year could convince anyone in the Central Southern Region, or Southern Great Plains, for example, that the Yellow-billed Cuckoo should be Blue-listed, but in the Pacific Coast regions it is a disaster species.

There are also a number of species of fairly local distribution that should be listed, some of them still abundant, but steadily losing ground. The Gannet and the Common Loon in the Northeast are among these; probably the Purple Gallinule in Florida fits this description. We could probably add another twenty species in this category. Finally, this year, we have resisted the temptation to add those species that have recently

crashed as a result of severe winters, such as Bobwhite and Ring-necked Pheasant, both kinglets, Winter and Carolina wrens. Hermit and Swainson's thrushes; it is too soon to determine how serious and how permanent their declines may be.

## THE BLUE LIST

- 1. Red-necked Grebe.** Returns are almost identical to last year, when the East Coast, with the single exception of the Northeastern Maritime Region, favored retention, a viewpoint agreed upon by observers in the Great Lakes and Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain Regions. The present survey, however, adds the Middle Pacific Region to the ranks of those favoring retention, a change from last year. Percentage in favor is now much larger than 1978: 81% now, 64% last year.
- 2. Western Grebe.** Sentiment seems to be slightly more positive this year in favor of keeping this grebe on the list. Of the eight Regions reporting, six favor retention, although by rather inconclusive margins. In the Mountain West Region, for example, the score was 14:12 for retention. Last year the overall sentiment slightly favored deletion; this year it is 55% for retention.
- 3. White Pelican.** Ten out of the 14 regions reporting on the pelican favor retention, and the overall percentage of observers in favor now stands at 71%. Two regions are evenly divided, with only the Central Southern and Northern Great Plains favoring deletion.
- 4. Double-crested Cormorant.** This species would appear to be teetering on the brink of de-listing, at least for populations in the Northeast and the Pacific Coast. Of 21 regions reporting, 10 favor retention, 7 deletion, and four are evenly divided. But Nesting Season reports this year seemed to suggest an improvement in the fortunes of this species, which would seem to contradict the 58% of observers now favoring retention. Strongest for retention are Ontario, Niagara-Champlain, Middle-western Prairies, and Northern Rocky

Mountain regions. West of the Great Plains, no region favors retention.

5. **Reddish Egret.** Retained on the list on the basis that it is a rare species worthy of continued surveillance, although it is not at present giving evidence of a population decline. All four regions reporting favored retention except Florida, which was evenly divided.
6. **Black-crowned Night Heron.** Sentiment seems to be growing stronger this year for retention of this species, up from 57% in favor of 1976 to almost 68% this year. Of the 21 regions reporting, no less than 12 see problems with this heron, and only five, Québec, Florida, South Texas, Mountain West and Southern Pacific Coast, dissent. Four others are evenly divided. Opinions have changed most drastically in the Northeast, where deletion was favored last year. This year, retention polls 73% of the observers reporting from eight eastern regions. It is even stronger in mid-continent.
7. **Least Bittern.** Added to the list on the basis of recommendations from five eastern regions, including Northeastern Maritime, Niagara-Champlain, Southern Atlantic Coast, Appalachian, and Western Great Lakes. Habitat destruction may be the primary cause; lack of comment from other regions may merely mean that data are lacking for this elusive species.
8. **American Bittern.** In only two reporting regions, Québec and the Southern Pacific Coast, does opinion favor deletion. In every other region but one (Middle Atlantic Coast) retention is strongly supported, even East Coast Regions formerly untroubled. In fact, 87% of all respondents now see the bittern as a declining species, deserving careful and continuous monitoring.
9. **Wood Stork.** Only one dissenting opinion this year: all except for one opinion in South Texas favor inclusion of the stork on the Blue List. A failure of nesting in some Florida colonies may not have a long-term effect, but no one is suggesting that the species is doing well anywhere.
10. **White-faced Ibis.** Eight of nine regions reporting on this species favor retention, with South Texas disagreeing. The overall percentage of observers in favor reaches a convincing 85%. "Disaster in w. Nevada Failed in the Colorado San Luis Valley O.K. in Utah and e. Nevada" (Hugh Kingery, Colorado).
11. **Fulvous Whistling Duck.** This year, all but two lonely reporters in all nine reporting regions favor retention. Apparently declining throughout its range in the United States. Both dissenters were from Florida.
12. **Canvasback.** This is one of the species which has gained substantial support for continued Blue-listing in the past year. While viewpoints were decidedly mixed in 1978, this year shows no less than 18 of 21 regions favoring retention, two for deletion, and one evenly divided. The two regions in opposition are: Northeastern Maritime and Québec. Overall, 81% of all respondents favor listing.
13. **Sharp-shinned Hawk.** In spite of reports of large numbers of migrating Sharp-shinneds along eastern flyways and in the Florida Keys in autumn 1978, 15 of 21 regions vote to keep this raptor on the Blue List for one more year at least. The only strong dissent comes from Québec, Southwest and the Southern Pacific Coast regions; three other regions are undecided. The overall percentage in behalf of retention is 67%.
14. **Cooper's Hawk.** Opinions on the appropriateness of Blue-listing this species were almost unanimous, with deletion garnering majority votes in only two of 21 regions Southwest and Southern Pacific Coast. In all 85% of the reporting observers concurred — down from 87% last year.
15. **Red-shouldered Hawk.** Although support for retention of this raptor dropped from 80% in 1976 to 76% in 1977 to 60% in 1978, this year optimism fled, and a record 87% of all respondents consider the Red-shouldered to be a prime candidate for Blue-listing. By a slight margin South

Texas and Central Southern Regions favored deletion, while that sentiment was unanimous in Québec and the Southern Pacific Coast Region. In the Middlewestern Prairies, however, the vote for retention was 20 - 1, and in the Hudson-Delaware Region it was 17 - 1.

16. **Swainson's Hawk.** Only in the South Texas Region was there strong sentiment for deletion of this species. Elsewhere, in eleven reporting regions, respondents were of the opposite opinion. The overall retention majority was 73%.
17. **Ferruginous Hawk.** With nine regions reporting, the preponderance of opinions in favor of keeping this increasingly rare hawk this year reaches 92%. Actually, there are only four dissenting opinions, two (out of 31) in the Mountain West, and one each in Southwest and the Southern Pacific Coast Region. "Intolerant of disturbances during breeding season . . . reduced habitat" (Kingery).
18. **Harris' Hawk.** No dissenting votes in the three areas reporting: Southern Great Plains, Southwest and South Texas. In all three, the Harris' Hawk is a Blue List species, or worse.
19. **Marsh Hawk.** A rather drastic turnaround in viewpoints across the continent strongly upholds Blue-listing of the habitat-sensitive Marsh Hawk. This year only two regions favor de-listing, and one, Mountain West, has a sizable minority deletion support. Overall, the ratio for listing is 117: 34; eliminating the Mountain West it becomes 98:19. "Wintering numbers on the Upper Texas Coast down 50-75%" (David Dauphin).
20. **Osprey.** Although in a few areas the Osprey shows tentative signs of an arduous comeback, it remains the classic Blue List example. All but three of 20 regions vote to retain the Osprey, by an overall majority of 88%. In one region alone, the Mountain West, the vote for retention was 34:0. Three regions: Middle Atlantic Coast, Northern Rockies, and Northern Pacific Coast, are evenly divided.

21. **Caracara.** Retained on the Blue List, with very little supporting evidence from the regions where it is found. There were, however, no dissenting regions.
22. **Prairie Falcon.** In the nine regions reporting, seven were unanimous in favor of retention for this species; only in the Mountain West and Southwest regions was there dissent, and here those in favor outnumbered those against listing two to one. Overall, the sentiment was almost a duplicate of last year's response, a 76% retention vote. "In 9700 miles of travelling through the Northern Great Plains (8200 in Prairie Falcon habitat) we saw only one Prairie Falcon. They hurt!" (Gerry Craig)
23. **American Kestrel.** The little falcon seems to gain some Blue List support this year, with nine of 21 regions favoring listing. In the northeast, north central, prairie and mountain regions, no problems are seen, but from the Middle Atlantic Coast south and around the Gulf, breeding pairs are increasingly rare, a condition echoed in Appalachia and Ontario. Overall sentiment in favor of listing is only 42%, but we retain the race *F. s. paulus* on the list.
24. **Merlin.** The continent-wide concern for the Merlin continues this year, if anything stronger and more positive than ever. Only nine dissenting opinions are tallied, all but one representing minority positions on their regions: only the single reporter in Québec swings his Region perilously for deletion. When better than 92% of the observers support Blue-listing for the Merlin, it would appear that the Merlin must be closely watched.
25. **Sharp-tailed Grouse.** Only four regions report on this species; all strongly support Blue-listing. There are only three scattered dissents.
26. **Sage Grouse.** Of the five regions concerned, only the Mountain West, where the vote is almost evenly divided, does not unanimously endorse Blue-listing for this species. The change in the Mountain West Region must represent a real change in status, since the 1978 vote there was 13 2 in favor of listing.

27. **King Rail.** With 13 regions expressing opinions on this rail, only one, South Texas, with one negative vote, favors deletion. The other 12 report almost unanimous opinions (there is a single other negative vote among 17 in the Middlewestern Prairie Region and one in Florida). While impressions are less than authoritative for this elusive species, there must be something amiss with such overwhelming and widespread support. "The local situation is futile." (Richard Forster, Mass.).
28. **American Oystercatcher.** The situation is similar to 1978, when the East Coast observers strongly urged de-listing, and the Gulf Coast reporters favored retention. Blue-listed for Gulf Coast only.
29. **Piping Plover.** In every region reporting, save only South Texas, the vote is unanimous in favor of retaining the Piping Plover, a disheartening response indeed. Percentage-wise, the retention sentiment was 98% of the total, up from 90% a year ago.
30. **Snowy Plover.** Both races are continued on the list, with support in every region involved. Except for the Southwest, the Mountain West and the Southern Pacific Coast, retention sentiment is unanimous.
31. **Upland Sandpiper.** The situation this year, if our observers are correct, is increasingly serious. A 70% retention vote in 1978 has now increased to 92%, and of the regions (Ontario, Northern and Southern Great Plains, and Northwestern Canada) then seeking deletion, only the Northern Great Plains remains shakily in the "delete" ranks. Sixteen regions now favor Blue-listing.
32. **Gull-billed Tern.** Of the eight regions with opinions about the status of this tern, seven favor retention on the Blue List, and the Southern Atlantic Coast Region is evenly divided. It continues to be subject to habitat disturbance and diminution.
33. **Common Tern.** Added last year on the recommendation of three regions, supported for inclusion this year by 14 regions, with two (Middle and Southern Atlantic Coast) evenly divided, and three (Northern and Southern Pacific Coast and the Southwest) favoring deletion. A very real decline in the fortunes of the North American population seems evident. "Very serious decline continues." (Clive Goodwin, Ont.).
34. **Roseate Tern.** Added to the list on the basis of reports of serious declines at nesting colonies from New England southward, some of them drastic. This is another species of restricted habitat that can suffer from a variety of ills: colony disturbance, bird and mammal predation, colony site destruction — even possibly pesticide contamination.
35. **Least Tern.** This beleaguered species is continued on the Blue List on the strength of an all but unanimous roll call in the 14 regions reporting on it. Only in the Hudson-Delaware (2 votes) and the Southern Atlantic Coast Region (one vote) and Florida (one vote) was there any dissent whatsoever. The same habitat problems faced by the Piping Plover and other beach and spoilbank—nesting species face the Least Tern. Increasing reports of roof-nesting may presage a minor turnaround in its fortunes.
36. **Black Tern.** Added to the list on the recommendation of three regions last year. Emphatic endorsement this year comes from no less than 15 regions, with three others on the fence, and two in favor of deletion. Has there been a sudden decline in the numbers of the Black Tern, or did last year's nomination spur more intensive interest in this species? Roughly 78% of all reporters now concur in its Blue-listing.
37. **Common Puffin.** The only observers involved, in the Northeast, are unanimous in Blue-listing the puffin.
38. **Yellow-billed Cuckoo.** The wide diversity of opinion on this species probably reflects a lack of solid data. Last year only the western race *occidentalis* was Blue-listed, and this year the same western regions unanimously endorse this listing. However, of 20 regions reporting, no less

than nine favor listing, and the overall "keep" vote is actually 54%. But many reporters are vehemently opposed: in the Middlewestern Prairie Region it is 18:4 for deletion.

39. **Black-billed Cuckoo.** An unlikely candidate for inclusion, since like the Yellow-billed, it is a known cyclical species. But apparently the cycles are slowly spiralling downhill, and six regions, from the Hudson-Delaware to the Southern Great Plains, recommend addition to the list.
40. **Barn Owl.** Of all the regions reporting, only three, the Northern and Southern Pacific Coasts and the Southwest favor deletion. Fifteen other regions, many of them unanimous, favor retention, and the percentage of observers sharing this view has risen this year from 67% to 80%.
41. **Burrowing Owl.** No change in status: every reporting region but one favors continuance on the list, and the one — the Southwest — is divided. The percentage of individual endorsements for listing, however, has risen from 75% last year to 81%.
42. **Short-eared Owl.** A truly declining species, with only two of 20 regions feeling otherwise. Overall, the percentage of reporters this year agreeing with the listing of the Short-eared Owl has gone up from 71% to 89%, a substantial and alarming one-year change. The species must be monitored carefully to determine whether or not this is a short-term phenomenon.
43. **Common Nighthawk.** The reasons for its decline are not immediately apparent, but no less than six regions, from the Northeast to the Mountain West, nominate the nighthawk this year. It was not nominated by a single respondent last year, which evokes a certain contemplative consideration: could the decline have been manifest in this year only?
44. **Ruby-throated Hummingbird.** The mere act of Blue-listing has apparently incited much more definite opinions on the status of this little-studied species. Last year, on the strong views of three regions, it was tentatively continued on the list. This year seven regions concur, three dissent, and five poll evenly. The Hudson-Delaware Region shows the most positive reaction, with a 16-2 ratio in favor of retention. Overall, 61% of observers favor retention.
45. **Red-headed Woodpecker.** In 1975, four regions supported listing, in 1976 ten, and in 1977 eight. This year, 12 out of 15 regions reporting consider this a candidate for Blue-listing, with only the Western Great Lakes and the Middlewestern Prairie Region strongly opposed, and Middle Atlantic Coast divided. With so much of the continent feeling concern for this handsome bird, we must continue it on the list this year.
46. **Lewis' Woodpecker.** With seven regions reporting this year, the regions are split 4:3 for continuance, with the Southwest, Middle and Southern Pacific regions in the minority. In the Mountain West the "keep" faction outnumbered the "delete" by 20:5.
47. **Hairy Woodpecker.** This species this year is subject to a rather puzzling swing in sentiment. With only 27% of the reporters and three regions supporting listing last year, the sentiment now favors retention by a 53 - 47% popular vote, and support from eight regions, with three more evenly split, and nine opposed. There seems to be no act continental pattern to the results, most regions east of the Mississippi favor retention, with the exception of the Northeastern Maritime Region, in the other dissenting regions, the balloting is probably too close to be valid.
48. **Purple Martin.** One of those species abundant in some areas and declining in others. On both sides of the continent, the Purple Martin is causing concern; in mid-continent the feeling is one of confidence. In the two former areas, support for retention is 82% of the "electorate", while in mid-continent, it is 67% in favor of deletion. This pattern, except for the western regions, differs considerably from last year's, and suggests that far more intensive study is needed.
49. **Bewick's Wren.** Status unchanged from the previous two years. All regions east of

the Rockies, except for South Texas, strongly endorse listing; western regions are almost evenly divided. In the East, the "keep" vote reaches 92%; in the West it drops to 43%. In the Middlewestern Prairie Region, hardest hit, there is a 19:1 ratio in favor of retention.

**50. Short-billed Marsh Wren.** Nominated this year by no less than five regions, including Northeastern Maritime, Hudson-Delaware, Niagara-Champlain, Ontario, and Western Great Lakes, or much of the breeding range, and totalling the most number of individual nominations of any previously unlisted species. Last year three regions, including the Central Southern, suggested Blue-listing. A possible victim of recent hard winters.

**51. Florida Scrub Jay.** Unchanged.

**52. Eastern Bluebird.** Listed last year in spite of considerable protest, on the strength of reports from four regions. This year, no less than 16 regions favor Blue-listing this bluebird, and the other three reporting are split between yeas and nays. (Middle and Southern Atlantic Coasts). In the Hudson-Delaware Region the keep vote is 18:0, in the Middlewestern Prairie Region it is 23:0. Overall, 87% of our reporters view the status of the bluebird with alarm, in spite of some encouraging localized successes with nest-box trails. "At the lowest ebb ever." (Kimball Elkins, NH).

**53. Western Bluebird.** Tentatively listed last year on the basis of recommendations from three regions. This year, six of eight reporting regions favor listing, with the Southwest and the Southern Pacific Coast the only dissenting voices. In the Mountain West, "retain" sentiment is 13:3.

**54. Loggerhead Shrike.** Throughout the entire East, not a single voice is raised against retention of the Loggerhead; not until one reaches the Middlewestern Prairie Region are the first dissents registered, and these are four of 22 votes. Of 21 reporting regions, only two, South Texas and Southern Pacific Coast, are solidly in favor of deletion, the Southern Great Plains and the Southwest are evenly split, and the rest consider the Loggerhead a

true Blue List species. Overall, 81% of our reporters agree. It may be that the race *L.l. gambeli* should be added to *migrans* and *ludovicianus* on the list.

**55. Bell's Vireo.** Only in the South Texas Region and the Southwest, where respondents split on the question, is there doubt that Bell's Vireo is declining. Elsewhere, in seven regions, "keep" sentiment prevails by a 4:1 margin.

**56. Warbling Vireo.** Blue-listed last year on the basis of three region support; this year six regions of 20 favor retention. Support comes from mid-continent and three eastern Regions (Ontario, Hudson-Delaware, and Southern Atlantic Coast) West of the Great Plains there is little support for listing, but the overall continental consensus is evenly divided. Perhaps only *V.g. gilvus* should be listed

**57. Yellow Warbler.** A most difficult species, because it is still common in many parts of its range, and obviously declining in others. Our reporting regions favor deletion 12-9, a trend in favor of retention, and the overall continental retention cause has increased its support from 28% last year to 41% today. The major support is still the West and the Central South; in the Northeast only one in four reporters see problems with the Yellow Warbler.

**58. Yellow-breasted Chat.** A questionable species last year, the chat increases its listing support this year with no less than 13 regions endorsing this position. Strong negatives, however, are registered by the Middle and Southern Atlantic Coast regions, the Central Southern Region, South Texas, and the Mountain West. In three years overall support for Blue-listing has gone from 31% to 45% to 62%.

**59. Dickcissel.** This species picks up slightly more support than last year, with seven regions favoring listing, two split, and two opposed. If we add the voices of reporters in eastern regions, where the Dickcissel is only a sporadic visitor, four more regions favor listing.

**60. Grasshopper Sparrow.** Sixteen of 19 regions favor retention of this species, South Texas dissents and the Western

Great Lakes and Southwest regions are split. Support this year increased from 72% of all respondents to 85%.

- 61. Henslow's Sparrow.** The number of *individual* dissenting opinions drops from five to two this year, one each in Ontario and Appalachia. Otherwise, we are as close to a unanimous Blue-listing nomination as we have ever had, with all thirteen regions agreeing, eleven of them without a single dissent.
- 62. Vesper Sparrow.** This species seems to be gaining support for inclusion on the Blue List. Last year overall support was only 37% and only seven regions favored retention. This year 13 regions move into the "keep" column, with the six regions — Québec, Northern Great Plains, Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain, Mountain West, Southwest and Northern Pacific Coast — in disagreement. In an astonishing reversal, 70% of all respondents now favor Blue-listing.
- 63. Bachman's Sparrow.** Not quite unanimous this year, with three individual dissenting votes, but this sparrow is otherwise strongly supported, once again, for inclusion.

Following is the key to regional initials. Q Québec; NEM. Northeastern Maritime; H-D. Hudson-Delaware; MAC. Middle Atlantic Coast; SAC. Southern Atlantic Coast; F Florida; ONT. Ontario; N-C. Niagara-Champlain; APP. Appalachian; WGL. Western Great Lakes; MPR. Middlewestern Prairie Region; CSR. Central Southern Region; NGP. Northern Great Plains; SGP. Southern Great Plains; ST. South Texas

Region; NRM. Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain; MW. Mountain West; SW Southwest; NPC. Northern Pacific Coast, MPC. Middle Pacific Coast; SPC. Southern Pacific Coast.

The following species, not yet added to the Blue List, but considered leading candidates, were nominated by respondents in *four* regions: Great Blue Heron (H-D,APP, WGL, NGP), Whip-poor-will (NEM, N-C, APP, WGL), Eastern Phoebe (H-D,N-C,APP, WGL) and Carolina Wren (H-D,ONT,APP, WGL), the latter a major winter-kill victim. The following species were nominated by observers in *three* regions, some of them recent winter-kill victims: Yellow-crowned Night Heron (H-D, APP, NEM), Black Vulture (SAC, CSR, ST), Golden Eagle (NEM, APP, NPC), Mountain Plover (SGP, NRM, SW), Least Flycatcher (NEM, H-D, ONT), Cliff Swallow (deleted in 1977) (NEM, APP, WGL), White-breasted Nuthatch (H-D, F, SGP), Brown Creeper (MAC, NEM, WGL), Winter Wren (NEM, N-C, WGL), Long-billed Marsh Wren (NEM, N-C, WGL), Hermit Thrush (NEM, N-C, SGP), Swainson's Thrush (SGP, MPC, SPC), Mountain Bluebird (NRM, NPC, MPC), Yellow-throated Vireo (NEM, N-C, H-D), Bobolink (NEM, N-C, WGL).

CONTRIBUTORS — Space does not permit listing this year all those who have returned forms to their Regional Editors. Their contributions, and those of all 21 of the Regional Editors who supplied forms are gratefully acknowledged. Hawaii, Alaska, and North-western Canada regions are not included in the analysis this year.□