

# BIRDCALLS

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## Additional Property Protected for Endangered Santa Marta Parakeet

Colombia's endangered Santa Marta Parakeet will now be better protected thanks to the purchase of a key property by Fundación ProAves, with support from ABC.

The 148-acre tract, known as the La Cumbre property, is situated in Colombia's Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, an area that is ranked as the second-most important site for threatened birds and amphibians in the world. The land purchase expands the 2,250-acre El Dorado Reserve, created in 2006 by ProAves, ABC, and Conservation International.

The La Cumbre property links two forested areas. It will allow ProAves to create additional breeding and foraging habitat for the parakeet along a ridge that contains the largest known population of parakeets. Although the new property is only partially forested, it supports an important concentration of wax palms needed by nesting Santa Marta Parakeets. With continued

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Santa Marta Parakeet by Fundación ProAves

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Colombia has the greatest number of bird species of any country in the world, and this particular spot is among the richest.

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Dear *Bird Calls* Reader:

After much consideration, we have decided to conserve paper and other resources by retiring the print version of *Bird Calls* after this issue. In its place, we're providing several ways for you to receive bird conservation news:

- **E-mail.** Our new Bird Calls Monthly eNewsletter will deliver the latest information directly to your inbox. Sign up for ABC e-mail: [abcbirds.org/subscribe](http://abcbirds.org/subscribe)
- **Online.** Visit our new Bird Calls blog to read the latest stories: [www.abcbirds.org/birdcalls](http://www.abcbirds.org/birdcalls)
- **Bird Conservation.** Several pages of news will be added to our magazine, which we will publish four times a year starting in 2016.
- **Social Media.** Our Facebook and Twitter (@abcbirds1) feeds deliver daily news from inside and outside of ABC.

As our communications efforts evolve, we remain committed to providing you with the best possible tools and information. Please feel free to share your feedback with us via e-mail: [info@abcbirds.org](mailto:info@abcbirds.org).

### Additional Property Protected for Santa Marta Parakeet, *from page 1*

support from ABC, ProAves will hire a forest guard to monitor parakeets and to restore habitat by planting palms where the parakeets feed and roost.

“This property is a conservation jewel,” said George Fenwick, President of ABC. The rare parakeet isn’t the only species that will benefit from the newly expanded property, he noted. The reserve also provides critical habitat for more than 40 neotropical migratory birds and boasts an exceptionally diverse array of native birds, plants, amphibians, and butterflies. Many are found only in this isolated corner of the country.

Colombia has the greatest number of bird species of any country in the world, and this particular spot

is among the richest. The northern slope of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta alone has more than 635 recorded bird species. At least 19 bird species — and more than 52 subspecies — live only in this one area. Meanwhile, the mountains also serve as a vital stopover point for declining migratory birds such as the Cerulean and Golden-winged Warblers that breed in the United States and Canada. The presence of multiple threatened species found only at this site has been recognized by the Alliance for Zero Extinction, a global initiative aimed at halting species loss.

Decades of colonization and agricultural expansion have taken a toll. Only 15 percent of the Sierra Nevada’s original vegetation

remains unaltered. Despite the fact that much of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is designated as a national park, encroachment and deforestation continue to harm the sensitive forests at the mountains’ highest elevations. This is bad news for many of the birds that live only in this area and depend on habitat between 4,300 and 9,500 feet, where their range comprises fewer than 200 square miles.

Still, ProAves has made great strides in bolstering the parakeets’ population. Artificial nest boxes have helped, and the presence of the forest guard will aid in protecting an area under pressure from developers.

Santa Marta vista by Fundación ProAves



## White House Strategy Plays Down Pesticide Threat to Birds and Other Pollinators

by Cynthia Palmer, Director, Pesticides Science and Regulation

The White House Pollinator Health Task Force, charged with developing a coordinated response to protect bees, birds, bats, and other pollinators, has just released its long-awaited federal strategy.

We applaud the Obama administration for this Herculean effort to protect the nation’s pollinators. The first sentence of the Executive Summary raised our hopes: “Wherever flowering plants flourish, pollinating bees, birds, butterflies, bats, and other animals are hard at work, providing vital but often unnoticed services.”

Unfortunately, the rest of the document takes a more myopic view. While there are positive aspects — who could be against planting more wildflowers? — the plan tiptoes around the role of neonicotinoid insecticides, an insidious class of chemicals that has the potential to derail U.S. efforts on behalf of pollinators.

Hundreds of recent studies detail the worrisome effects of neonicotinoid pesticides, not just on honeybees but on birds, butterflies, earthworms, and a wide range of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates — effects that occur when the chemicals are applied as directed. These chemicals are a primary driver in the bee declines of the past decade. And as little as a single seed coated with a neonicotinoid insecticide is enough to kill a songbird.

Just one-tenth of a coated seed per day during the egg-laying season can impair reproduction.

The federal strategy downplays this enormous body of research and the need for a comprehensive plan to address the neonicotinoid coatings used on agricultural seeds. The pesticides coat nearly all corn seeds and many other seeds as well, leaving many farmers no choice but to use neonic-treated seeds even if there are no pests.

By killing off pollinators and native pest control agents like birds and butterflies, neonicotinoids are sabotaging entire ecosystems.



Although these coated seeds represent the vast majority of neonicotinoid use, their planting remains unregulated due to a “treated seed exemption” loophole. The coatings are contaminating the resulting food crops and the surrounding soils on a massive scale.

In an ironic twist, EPA scientists concluded last fall in their assessment of treated soybean seeds that neonicotinoids are not increasing agricultural yields.

In addition to direct harm to wildlife, the elevated levels of these chemicals in many waterways may already be high enough to kill the aquatic invertebrate life on which aerial insectivore birds and bats depend. The chemicals can persist for many years and are extremely toxic to aquatic invertebrates.

By killing off pollinators and native pest control agents like birds and butterflies, neonicotinoids are sabotaging entire ecosystems. Instead of wrestling with these problems head-on, the White House strategy suggests such fixes as revised pesticide application schedules to avoid directly spraying the bees when plants are in bloom and the development of better glues to stick the pesticides to the seeds.

These steps are important, but they do little for managed bees and nothing for birds, bats, and other wild pollinators — essential providers of the “vital but often unnoticed services” that support production of food for people everywhere.

*Cynthia Palmer directs ABC’s efforts to address toxic impacts and pollution threats to birds. She coordinates the National Pesticide Reform Coalition and participates on the EPA Pesticide Program Dialogue Committee.*

## As Northern Spotted Owl Continues to Decline, Agency Considers Endangered Status

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is reviewing a petition that could lead to reclassifying the Northern Spotted Owl from threatened to endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. The Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC), a California conservation group and ABC partner, submitted the petition to FWS in 2012.

“The owl’s rapid population decline and reduction in breeding success warrants endangered status,” said Steve Holmer, ABC’s Senior Policy Advisor. “Research indicates that habitat loss and the Barred Owl’s incursion into Northwest forests are harming the Northern Spotted Owl. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service needs to take decisive action to reverse this spiral toward extinction.”

Long-term demography studies show that populations in all eight study areas are in decline and well below historic averages for both total numbers and breeding success. In the Tyee demographic study area near Roseburg, Ore., for instance, the population has seen a severe drop in the last five years: Only 29 owl pairs were found in 2013, compared to 66 pairs ten years ago. The number of females nesting has decreased, as has the average number of offspring. The Tyee researchers concluded that “the last three years of reproduction have been the lowest on record and resulted



Spotted Owl pair by USFWS

in the fewest number of young produced.”

Monitoring in northwestern California, meanwhile, found that over the past five years, owl detections have decreased 30 percent. In Oregon’s Coast Range study area, the percentage of sites with spotted owl detection has declined from a high of 88 percent in 1991 to a low of 23 percent in 2013. For three consecutive years, no young owls were seen.

Crucial to the successful restoration of the Northern Spotted Owl’s habitat is the Northwest Forest Plan. Established by President Bill Clinton in 1994, the plan shifted the management of federal lands within the owl’s range from an emphasis on timber production to ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation. The plan has greatly reduced owl habitat loss (from 1.5 percent per year to less than 0.5 percent over the past 15 years). It has also slowed the

declines of birds that depend on old-growth forest.

The plan seems to be working, but scientists caution that it will take at least a century to restore the old-growth forest ecosystem that the Spotted Owl requires. Two decades of monitoring and scientific studies have shown that, so far, the Northwest Forest Plan is meeting its ecosystem management objectives across nearly 25 million acres of federally managed forests, from the Coast Redwoods to the Olympic rainforest.

The USDA Forest Service now is considering revisions to the Northwest Forest Plan and has held a series of public meetings to gather citizens’ input. The Bureau of Land Management, which manages a portion of federal forests in Oregon, has released for public comment a draft plan that removes protections for hundreds of rare species. ABC is reviewing the draft plan and working to ensure it maintains adequate protections for the threatened Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet.

“It is premature to judge the effectiveness of a 100-year plan in just two decades,” said Holmer. “But scientific assessments have shown that Northwest Forest Plan has already achieved many of its goals to restore the old-growth forest ecosystem, protect wildlife habitat, and improve water quality.”

 Make your voice heard: [support.abcbirds.org/spottedowl](http://support.abcbirds.org/spottedowl)

## Ten-Year Effort Aims to Reverse Declines for Cerulean Warbler

*Conservation Corridor in Colombia Provides Key Habitat*

A conservation corridor in Colombia ten years in the making is providing critical winter habitat for the Cerulean Warbler, which has been reduced in population by 70 percent since 1966.

Six miles long and a half-mile wide, the corridor is the result of a collaboration between ABC and two Colombian partners: Fundación ProAves, one of the country’s leading conservation groups, and Fondo para la Acción Ambiental y la Niñez, an organization that focuses on community, youth, and environmental projects.

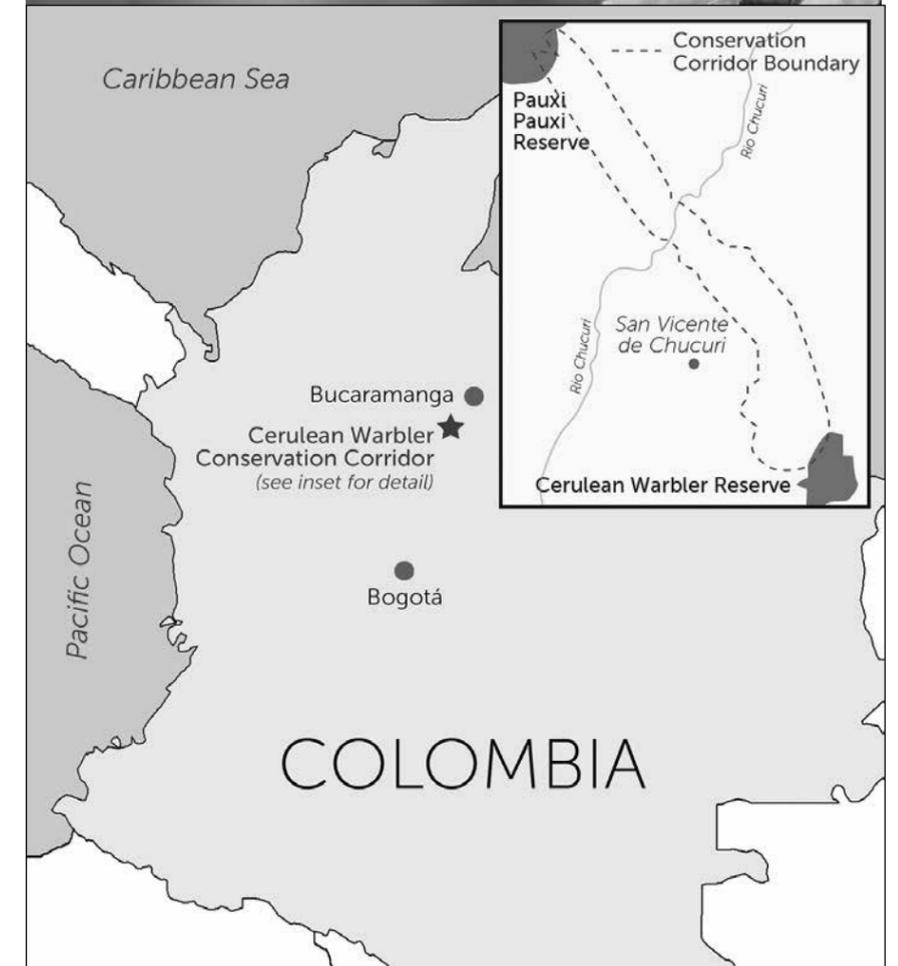
To create the corridor, 500,000 seedlings of 26 native trees – grown in nurseries at the nearby Cerulean Warbler and Pauxi Pauxi bird reserves – were used to reforest nearly 3,000 acres of land and connect existing habitat. More than 220 private landowners also participated in the project by planting shade trees on their coffee and cocoa farms and cattle ranches.

Colombia is home to more than 1,900 species of birds, so communities recognize and value migratory birds that arrive from North America, said Alonso Quevedo, Executive Director of Fundación ProAves. “People in Colombia celebrate being the nation with the highest bird diversity in the

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Cerulean Warbler by Tessa Nichols



Map by American Bird Conservancy

### Ten-Year Effort Aims to Reverse Declines for Cerulean Warbler, *from page 5*

world,” he said. “We are proud of our role in fostering this knowledge and pride for birds.”

The new native trees promote canopy cover and create a “habitat bridge” between the two protected areas and targeted coffee and cocoa farms. Area communities have played a key role: Ecological easements will conserve remnant patches of native forest, while good agricultural practices — shade coffee, and the planting of trees in open cattle pastures — benefit local residents’ livelihoods while providing important tree cover for birds.

Once among the most abundant breeding warblers in the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys, the Cerulean Warbler is now one of the most imperiled migrant songbirds in the Western Hemisphere. Conservation work on the warbler’s breeding grounds in the Midwest and Appalachia have helped, but as the bird loses its winter habitat in Latin America, its decline continues.

This conservation corridor protects and preserves critical habitat for more than 150 species of birds, including migrants like the Golden-winged Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Swainson’s Warbler, and Rose-Breasted Grosbeak, among



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TOP: Golden-winged Warbler by Laura Erickson; ABOVE: Rose-breasted Grosbeak by Jayne Gulbrand, Shutterstock

many others. It also provides habitat for the Gorgeted Wood-quail and Mountain Grackle — two species found only in Colombia and considered globally endangered — and many other threatened species found nowhere else on earth.

The project also includes a component to measure biodiversity success, such as changes in the population of Cerulean Warbler and Gorgeted Wood-quail, as well as overall bird monitoring. Current protocols are in place to monitor trees planted in reforestation plots by measuring them each month to gauge progress. The data will inform the project’s next phase of nurturing the growth of planted trees and planning for the tripling of the corridor in the years to come.

This overall effort has occurred thanks to many partner organizations and donors, including Amos W. Butler Audubon, Elisha Mitchell Audubon, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Missouri Department of Conservation, Southern Wings, Fondo para la Acción Ambiental y la Niñez, and others.

## ABC Travels ‘North with the Spring’

Bruce Beehler, a naturalist and former ABC Board member, is nearing the end of a 100-day cross-country road trip to celebrate one of the greatest wildlife events on earth: the annual migration of billions of American songbirds.

Inspired by the author Edwin Way Teale’s similar adventure from Florida to Maine more than 50 years ago, Beehler has charted a different course. Starting on the Gulf Coast in Texas, he is traversing the country from south to north, finishing in Ontario in early July. Along the way, he is visiting some of the country’s most beautiful and important places for migratory birds. In more than 30 stops during the three-month journey, he is meeting people who work to protect birds and the awe-inspiring phenomenon that brings them north each spring.

Beehler arrived on the Texas coast in early April, coinciding

with the arrival of thousands of songbirds that had just flown 600 miles across the Gulf of Mexico. Subsequent stops have taken him to swampy cypress forests; tiny woodlots where exhausted migrants refuel; and even the Louisiana forests that inspired several of John James Audubon’s plates for his famous *Birds of America*.

Teale, who famously traveled with the spring and chronicled its transformation nearly 70 years ago, was an American naturalist, photographer, author, and friend to Rachel Carson and Roger Tory Peterson. In 1947, he set out on a 17,000-mile road trip that led to the classic book, *North with the Spring*. He ultimately wrote three more books chronicling the seasons; the last, *Wandering Through Winter*, won the Pulitzer Prize.

*North with the Spring* and other books by Teale were favored reading for Beehler’s mother, an

amateur naturalist. “These Teale nature books became a part of my DNA as a budding naturalist back in the 1960s,” Beehler wrote in his first blog post for ABC. “So it is something of a tribute to my mother, who died a bit more than a year ago, to make this spring pilgrimage with the songbirds.”

In making this journey, Beehler, who also received financial support from Georgia-Pacific, hopes to draw attention to conservation issues and the importance of protecting wild places. At Texas’s Caddo Lake, where Beehler kayaked at dawn, he reflected on the lasting value of wilderness.

“We can never let down our guard on behalf of these special places,” Beehler wrote. “They are invaluable resources that make living worthwhile, and help us recharge our souls.”



Follow the journey: [north-withthespring.org](http://north-withthespring.org)



Bruce Beehler at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, one stop on his northward journey. Photo courtesy of Bruce Beehler

## Five Years After Gulf Oil Spill, Protection of Beach-Nesting Birds Still Critical

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill was an environmental disaster that affected people and wildlife all along the Gulf of Mexico. The spill had a major impact on beach-nesting birds of the Gulf, including the Least Tern and other species of special concern such as Black Skimmer and Snowy and Wilson's Plovers.

The spill itself was devastating for birds, but cleanup efforts caused problems too. Some bird colonies suffered significant damage from beach cleanup crews and their vehicles. In some cases, heavy earth-moving machinery destroyed nests.

However, recent data gathered by ABC's Gulf Beach-nesting Birds Program suggest significant success in protecting these birds through a multi-partner regional conservation effort. Since its inception in 2011, this regional program has reached thousands of people through on-the-ground stewardship, community engagement, and social media.

The collaborative effort has brought big results for shorebirds affected by the spill and its aftermath. In 2014 alone, ABC worked with 21 partners at 58 sites, where volunteers provided some combination of protection, monitoring, and outreach on more than 2,400 acres of coastal habitat.



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TOP: Least Tern by Michael Stubblefield; ABOVE: Wilson's Plover (left) and Snowy Plover (right) by Chuck Tague

That acreage supported 950 nests and 1,400 breeding pairs of target species, primarily Least Terns and Wilson's and Snowy Plovers.

Kacy Ray, ABC's Gulf Conservation Program Manager, said the project will reduce impacts on key beach-nesting bird colonies, many of which are vulnerable to disturbance by people, dogs, and all-terrain vehicles, which can crush eggs, injure or kill chicks, or cause adult birds to abandon a nest.

"Nesting birds occupy a tiny portion of the region's beaches, usually well back from the shoreline, so there doesn't need to be a conflict with beachgoers," Ray said. "But the areas they do use are absolutely vital to their breeding success."

Particularly in the spring and summer months, beachgoers should avoid getting close to areas where larger congregations of birds are gathered, and respect areas that are roped off or marked with signs indicating that an area that is used by nesting birds, Ray said.

"The habitat for these birds is diminishing every year due to beach development, erosion, and ever-increasing recreational use, so the birds can really use any break we can give them," she said. "They have no other place to go."

## Feral Cats Threaten Endangered Birds at Popular N.Y. Beach

*New York State Officials Allow Environmental Hazard*

ABC is urging New York State officials to remove a large colony of feral cats from a popular Long Island park where federally threatened Piping Plovers nest.

"Piping Plovers are scarce and are federally protected," said Grant Sizemore, Director of ABC's Invasive Species Programs. "Keeping predatory cats out of the park is an obvious conservation priority, and spring is a particularly critical season. Baby birds on the beach stand zero chance against these cats."

ABC learned earlier this year of the cats' presence at Jones Beach State Park, just outside New York City. In March, Sizemore sent a letter to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation's Rose Harvey, pressing state officials to rectify the situation.

Particularly troubling, Sizemore noted, are structures local residents have erected to provide shelter for the feral cats. Residents also routinely provide them with food and water.

Piping Plovers nest in shallow depressions in the sand and are vulnerable to a variety of threats, including free-roaming cats. As a result, New York and several other states have listed the tiny, sand-colored shorebird as endangered. The plovers are also listed as

threatened under the Endangered Species Act, which bars any modification to a protected species' habitat that would impair its "essential behavioral patterns," including breeding.

Although indoor cats are popular, much-loved pets, feral cats are an invasive species that often prove fatal for birds and other wildlife. Recent peer-reviewed research has found that outdoor cats are a leading source of predation on young birds and that even brief appearances of cats near nest sites can lead to increased nest failure.

In a reply to ABC's letter, Harvey said the Jones Beach cat colony was an "extremely difficult issue" for New York State Parks. Individuals who feed and care for the cats strongly object to removal of the animals, she wrote, and instead favor a "trap, neuter, and release" approach. State officials will analyze the park's cat population this summer, she added, and remove feral cats "where appropriate."

Seeking a firmer commitment, ABC launched a petition in early April asking supporters to write to Harvey and call for immediate removal of the feral cats at Jones Beach. As of late May, the petition had generated more than 2,400 letters. Our efforts also garnered coverage by a local CBS affiliate and *The New York Times*.



Feral cat shelter at Jones Beach by Kathy Baca

"Keeping predatory cats out of the park is an obvious conservation priority, and spring is a particularly critical season. Baby birds on the beach stand zero chance against these cats."

*Grant Sizemore, Director of Invasive Species Programs, ABC*

ABC will continue to monitor the situation at Jones Beach and elsewhere. We welcome your input: Please let us know if you encounter any beach sites where feral cats are in close proximity to nesting birds.



Let the state of New York know that you want Piping Plovers protected from the threat of feral cats: [support.abcbirds.org/jonesbeachcats](http://support.abcbirds.org/jonesbeachcats)

## ABC Pushes for Big Changes in Wind Industry

**ABC** has called on the Department of the Interior (DOI) to take two major actions that could dramatically reduce the escalating number of birds that die from collisions with wind turbines. Meanwhile, DOI has acknowledged that improved regulation of the wind industry may be possible.

In February, ABC filed a formal petition asking the agency to establish new regulations governing the impact of wind energy projects on migratory birds. The petition contains substantial revisions to an earlier petition ABC filed in 2011 that also called for regulatory action to reduce the projected 1.4 to 2 million bird deaths expected to be caused by current and proposed wind turbines by 2030.

The petition includes new information that makes an even stronger case for wind industry regulation, providing added examples of new science and prototype mechanisms that would set limits on bird deaths and make it possible to enforce the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

A key provision of the petition would have DOI establish a permitting process for proposed wind energy projects. Doing so would significantly improve the protection of birds covered by the MBTA, and would also afford the wind industry a degree of regulatory and legal certainty that cannot otherwise be provided.

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Meanwhile, in March, ABC called on DOI to create a new system that would assess risks to birds before wind turbines are constructed, and collect data on bird and bat mortality for those turbines already in place. These studies are now conducted by paid industry consultants, which ABC considers a direct conflict of interest.

The ABC proposal for independent, third-party assessment and data collection came just a few months after an Oregon-based wind energy company, PacifiCorp, entered a guilty plea with federal prosecutors for violating the MBTA and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The company will pay \$2.5 million in fines for the deaths of 38 Golden Eagles and 336 other protected birds at two wind farms in Wyoming.

ABC is asking DOI to include the following provisions in its new system for risk assessment and data collection:

- Studies will be conducted by independent, qualified experts selected by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) or a trusted consulting company hired by that agency;
- Wind energy companies will cover all costs;
- Reports will be sent directly to the FWS — not through wind energy companies — and will be available to the public for an additional layer of scrutiny;
- Independent Environmental Assessments (EA) will be mandatory, and wind energy companies will be required to obtain incidental take permits under the Endangered Species Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act when protected species are present.

The ABC letter commended the FWS for formally recognizing that there may be serious problems with the agency's current voluntary permitting system of siting and determining operational guidelines for the wind industry, which is based largely on self-reporting.

## ABC Analysis Shows Wind Turbines Going Into Sensitive Bird Habitat on Massive Scale

**M**ore than 30,000 wind turbines have been installed in areas critical to the survival of federally-protected birds in the United States, with more than 50,000 additional turbines planned for construction in similar areas, according to a recent analysis of federal data by ABC.

Many of these turbines exist in or are planned for federally identified or designated areas. They include 24,000 turbines in the migration corridor of the Whooping Crane, one of the nation's rarest and most spectacular birds, and almost 3,000 turbines in breeding strongholds for Greater Sage-Grouse, a rapidly declining species recently considered for Endangered Species Act protection.



Whooping Cranes by Al Perry

“Wind turbines are among the fastest-growing threats to our nation’s birds.”

*Michael Hutchins, Director of ABC's Bird Smart Wind Energy Campaign*

“Wind turbines are among the fastest-growing threats to our nation’s birds,” said Michael Hutchins, Director of ABC’s Bird Smart Wind Energy Campaign. “Attempts to manage the wind industry with voluntary, as opposed to mandatory, permitting guidelines are clearly not working. Wind developers are siting turbines in areas of vital importance to birds and other wildlife, and this new data shows that the current voluntary system needs to be replaced with a mandatory permitting system.”

The Associated Press published an in-depth article on ABC’s analysis, which was then picked up by nearly 200 news organizations, including CBS News, the Miami Herald, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and the Houston Chronicle.

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Wind turbines and birds by J. Marjits, Shutterstock

### Mich. County Places Moratorium on New Turbines

In March, the Board of Commissioners for Huron County, Mich., which has 328 wind turbines — more than all other Michigan counties combined — enacted a moratorium on any additional turbines.

The moratorium will be in effect for 90 days, or until the wind energy zoning committee completes a new county zoning ordinance which reportedly will increase the distance between the turbines and residences and create tighter noise restrictions.

Based on a recommendation by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service following extensive radar studies of migratory bird and bat movements in the region, the county ordinance would also ban wind development within three miles of the Lake Huron shoreline.

## ABC Analysis Shows Wind Turbines Going Into Sensitive Areas, *from page 11*

ABC's report included an interactive Wind Development Bird Risk Map that identifies specific areas across the United States where birds are likely to be particularly vulnerable to impacts from wind energy development. These include major migratory routes, breeding areas, and other sensitive bird habitats. Locations of wind turbines analyzed in the study were derived from data supplied publicly by the Federal Aviation Administration for proposed turbines, and the U.S. Geological Survey for existing turbines.

ABC supports renewable energy development to address the growing threat of global climate change, but has serious concerns about widespread bird deaths caused by poorly sited wind turbines, including impacts on protected species. By 2030, it is estimated that more than 1.4 million birds could be killed annually by wind turbines, not including losses at associated transmission lines and towers.

There is currently an opportunity to minimize this mortality through mandatory permitting, leading to proper siting and mitigation for bird fatalities before thousands more turbines are built.

### 'Bird Smart' Approach Would Minimize Fatalities

The ABC-developed concept of Bird Smart wind energy ensures that turbine projects are located away from high collision risk areas, and that the wind industry takes steps to minimize bird fatalities. It also calls for independent, transparent post-construction monitoring to inform mitigation and calculate compensation for the loss of ecologically important, federally protected birds.

ABC also recognizes and promotes the immediate need for innovative, scientifically valid research aimed at developing effective methods for pre-construction risk assessment and post-construction monitoring.

"We can and must do better if future generations of Americans are going to have a chance to see some of our nation's most iconic bird species," said Hutchins. "Our nation's wildlife should not be collateral damage in the battle against climate change, especially when much of the conflict could be easily addressed through better siting of wind projects and improved regulation."

Wind turbines and birds by Tilo G. Shutterstock



## San Jose Enacts Bird-friendly Building Guidelines

San Jose, the capital of Silicon Valley, has become the fourth and largest California city to enact bird-friendly building guidelines. San Francisco adopted a similar ordinance in 2011, followed by Oakland in 2013. Sunnyvale adopted its standards in 2014.

The implementation of San Jose's Bird-Safe Building Design Standards this spring concludes several months of research led by the San Jose Environmental Services Department, as well as collaborative work with the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society and the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club. San Jose's guidelines are based on ABC's *Bird Friendly*

*Building Design* and will be applied citywide on a voluntary basis.

"Without question, bird collisions are one of the most significant causes of bird mortality worldwide. It's a problem that is probably escalating every year," said Christine Sheppard, Bird Collisions Campaign Manager for ABC.

Birds strike glass because they cannot see it as an obstacle. They fly into reflections of trees and sky, or attempt to fly through transparent glass walls. Many migratory species in the United States are now declining because of collisions with glass and other human-caused threats.

Some species seem disproportionately vulnerable to collision with buildings. In San Jose, these include Anna's Hummingbird and Varied Thrush.

"Cues such as window frames and even dirt tell people where to expect glass," Sheppard said. "Birds don't learn these cues. They try to fly through transparent glass to reach something beyond it."

ABC's efforts to reduce fatal bird collisions in the United States are made possible in part by the generous support of the Leon Levy Foundation.

## HELP ABC MAP A FUTURE FOR HAWAIIAN BIRDS

In the race to prevent any further bird extinctions in the Americas, there is simply no greater priority than the native birds in our nation's 50th state, Hawai'i. For some species, such as the Millerbird on Laysan Island, we are winning, but for others, such as the forest birds of Kaua'i, we must pick up the pace. ABC needs your help to keep these and other threatened Hawaiian birds on the map.

Your extra support will make a real difference, helping ABC bring back the stunning golden māmane trees of Mauna Kea for Palila; prepare habitat for the translocation of Maui Parrotbills to expand their range; and remove predators from the Alaka'i Plateau of Kaua'i for the 'Akikiki, 'Akeke'e, and Puaiohi.

We still have the opportunity to save Hawaiian birds, but their

future is not assured without action!

Please donate today using the enclosed envelope, or give online at [ABCbirds.org](http://ABCbirds.org).



Palila by Robby Kohley

Will you join ABC and our partners in mapping a future for Hawaiian birds?

## As North Pacific Warms, Alaskan Seabirds Decline

The number of seabirds, including gulls, puffins and auklets, has dropped significantly in the Gulf of Alaska and southeast Bering Sea in recent decades, according to preliminary analyses of 40 years of data from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). In their study, USGS scientists Gary Drew and John Piatt found the declines to be a possible consequence of a warm-water phase in the North Pacific from the 1980s to the mid-2000s.

Seabird density at sea declined 2 percent each year during this warm phase of climate variability, which is known formally as the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO). Since 2007, however, as the North Pacific transitions to a cool phase, the

researchers documented an uptick in the numbers of seabirds at sea.

But climate and ocean conditions are complex and always changing. When the PDO waxes and wanes every 20 to 30 years, intense fluctuations — such as El Niño events every five to seven years — may cause a one-year spike of warm water during an otherwise cold phase. Moreover, these decadal cycles, which are relatively predictable, could ultimately be superseded by an overall steady rise in warming sea temperatures across the globe.

So what does this mean for seabirds? Understanding how seabird populations respond to changing ocean conditions is critical to determining how climate change will affect their productivity and,

ultimately, their populations. As sea temperatures rise, for instance, there will be winners and losers: Auklets and other species that eat plankton and are closely linked to cold, highly productive waters are likely to fare worse. What, exactly, causes these changes in seabird populations is still largely unknown. But the fluctuations are probably related to a reduction in prey such as copepods, which generally thrive during cold phases.

Long-term studies like this one help to explain climate-driven changes in bird abundance and distribution, and in predicting climate impacts. For Alaskan seabirds, this study suggests that ocean conditions can be an important overall driver of population trends.



Tufted Puffin by Greg R. Homel, Natural Elements Productions

## Corps Proceeds with Plan to Kill Cormorants

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proceeding with a plan to kill nearly 11,000 adult Double-crested Cormorants and destroy more than 26,000 of the birds' nests at East Sand Island, near the mouth of the Columbia River. The Corps argues that the cull is needed to protect salmon and steelhead trout, which are listed under the Endangered Species Act, from predation by the cormorants.

The Corps announced its intentions in a draft Environmental Impact Statement released for public comment last year. The initial plan called for culling nearly 16,000 cormorants — roughly 25 percent of the entire western population — and was met with more than 152,000 public comments, nearly all objecting to the plan.

ABC opposed this plan on several grounds. Only a weak correlation exists between the number of Double-crested Cormorants in the East Sand Island colony and predation of salmon and steelhead smolts. Furthermore, given the promising results of research supported by the Corps on non-lethal methods to control cormorants, use of lethal control should not be the first choice.

Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), permits for lethal control cannot be issued until non-lethal methods have been demonstrated to be ineffective. Even then, lethal control cannot be the sole method — it must be



Double-crested Cormorant by Dawn Wilson Photo, Shutterstock

used along with non-lethal methods. ABC and others believe that any benefits to salmon hinge not on slaughtering cormorants but on modifying East Sand Island to reduce the amount of nesting habitat available to the birds to maintain the breeding population at the target of 5,600 breeding pairs.

In its final environmental impact statement, the Corps lowered the number of cormorants that would be culled through lethal methods. Still, even the revised plan will reduce the entire western cormorant population by approximately 15 percent. It is unclear whether the Double-crested Cormorant population can recover from a cull of this magnitude and how long it might take. ABC has contended that it does not believe a depredation permit issued under the MBTA can be used to undertake this kind of

population-level control of a protected species.

In mid-April, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a permit for the cull. Just a few days later, Audubon Society of Portland, Center for Biological Diversity, Wildlife Center of the North Coast, Animal Legal Defense Fund, and Friends of Animals brought suit against the Corps, FWS, and USDA Wildlife Services. In their complaint, the groups asserted that the agencies are using native Double-crested Cormorants as a scapegoat while ignoring the primary cause of salmon declines: mismanagement of the federal hydropower system. On May 8, the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon denied the groups' request for an injunction to halt the killings.

## Feds Abandon Plan to Protect Rare Sage Grouse

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has abandoned its plan to give Endangered Species Act protection to the Mono Basin Greater Sage-Grouse, a small and isolated population of Greater Sage-Grouse in Nevada and California threatened by grazing, habitat loss, and energy development. The agency's decision ignores scientific recommendations for reversing the birds' steep decline and instead relies on unproven conservation agreements with state and local communities that only affect a small portion of the population's range.

"The Service is failing to keep up its end by not protecting enough public lands to ensure the grouse's conservation," said ABC's Steve Holmer. "We support an endangered listing for this population due to its very small size and inadequate federal management plans."

The Mono Basin Greater Sage-Grouse population, located in eastern California and western Nevada and also known as the "bi-state" population, is fragmented and geographically isolated from all other grouse populations. The 2013 listing proposal of this distinct population cited its small size and "inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms." Also at issue were threats from livestock grazing; invasive plants such as cheat grass; fire; energy development; mining; and urbanization of habitat.

The six populations in the Mono Basin area have contained fewer



The six sage-grouse populations in the Mono Basin area have contained fewer than 2,500 birds over the past decade. The largest population of Gunnison Sage-Grouse, which the Service recently protected as a "threatened species" under the Endangered Species Act, is nearly 5,000 birds.

than 2,500 birds over the past decade, according to official estimates. By contrast, the largest population of Gunnison Sage-Grouse, which the Service recently protected as a "threatened species" under the Endangered Species Act, is nearly 5,000 birds.

Given the known threats to bi-state sage grouse, the conservation measures proposed do not ensure

adequate protection, Holmer said. Among the measures' shortcomings: no restrictions on mining, or on geothermal leases that would cover 143,000 acres of habitat; and no requirement that would limit development to under 3 percent of the grouse's priority habitat, which studies indicate is the most disturbance the birds can tolerate before abandoning the habitat.

Greater Sage-Grouse by Tom Reichner, Shutterstock

## Study Finds Small Numbers of Oregon Vesper Sparrow

A range-wide inventory of the Oregon Vesper Sparrow has intensified scientists' concerns about the bird's long-term fate.

"The results confirm our initial concerns of a small and severely declining population based on Breeding Bird Survey data and suggests a population certainly not larger — and likely smaller — than our earlier estimate of approximately 2,100 birds," said Bob Altman, ABC's Northern Pacific Conservation Officer and the study's lead.

The Oregon Vesper Sparrow is a subspecies of the Vesper Sparrow. It was once a common bird

that inhabited grassland and savanna areas west of the Cascade Mountains in southwestern British Columbia; western Washington and Oregon; and a small portion of northwestern California.

Funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service multi-state grant program supported the extensive survey effort throughout nearly all the bird's range. Researchers detected sparrows at only 13 percent of the approximately 700 roadside point count stations. This was true even though researchers targeted places where the birds were recently detected and that were adjacent to potential habitat.

Populations in the Puget Lowlands and Willamette Valley ecoregions are of particular concern: Fewer than 500 birds remain in each ecoregion. Meanwhile, the stronghold appears to be light to moderately grazed rolling hills and pasturelands in the Umpqua Valley of southwestern Oregon, where large ranches are the norm.

"The next step for ABC will be to complete a conservation status assessment to recommend conservation actions. It may even be necessary to petition that this bird receive federal protection under the Endangered Species Act," Altman said. The conservation assessment will be completed within the next year.



Oregon Vesper Sparrow by Klamath Bird Observatory

## Blue-throated Macaw Declared National Heritage Species in Bolivia

The Bolivian national government has declared the critically endangered Blue-throated Macaw a national heritage species. This designation, made in late 2014, is significant, said Bennett Hennessey, Executive Director of Asociación Armonía, a Bolivian organization and ABC partner. “It means that both the national and local governments in Bolivia will be more responsive to and supportive of Armonía’s and ABC’s conservation work for this parrot.”



Blue-throated Macaws by Daniel Alarcon

## Researchers Confirm Blackpoll Warblers’ Incredible Journey

For more than 50 years, scientists suspected that the Blackpoll Warbler took an epic migratory journey each fall, flying nonstop from New England and eastern Canada in a direct line over the Atlantic Ocean toward South America.

Now there is proof. Researchers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst attached light-level geolocators to 40 blackpolls to track



Blackpoll Warbler by Greg Lavaty

their travels. Data gathered from five recaptured birds reveal that they completed this marathon flight of roughly 1,400 to 1,700 miles in just two to three days — one of the longest nonstop over-water flights ever recorded for a songbird.

## ABC Collisions Expert Recognized

Christine Sheppard, Bird Collisions Campaign Manager for ABC, was named one of 2014’s top 25 newsmakers in the engineering field by the Engineering News Record. This honor recognized Chris for her efforts to reduce bird fatalities caused by collisions with building glass.

Chris was instrumental in writing the LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) green building rating system’s Pilot Credit 55 for bird-collision deterrence, released in 2011.

## Rare Ducklings Hatch in Hawai’i

The successful translocation of Laysan Ducks to Kure Atoll passed another critical milestone in May with the hatching of 19 ducklings. Successful breeding among the birds brought from Midway Atoll last year is great news for this highly endangered species, which has the smallest geographic range of any duck species in the world: It lives only on three small islands within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

The translocation of 28 ducks in late 2014 was a collaboration among the State of Hawai’i Department of Lands and Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Hawai’i Wildlife Center, Kure Atoll Conservancy, and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument.



Laysan Ducks by DLNR

## ABC Continues Work to Keep TNR Contained

Earlier this year ABC and a coalition of animal welfare and wildlife conservation organizations testified before Virginia lawmakers on the unintended consequences of several bills in the state legislature that would have



Stray cat by Jixin Yu, Shutterstock

permitted and funded the feral cat program known as Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR). All four bills were ultimately defeated. ABC also worked with a coalition to defeat similar legislation in Maryland.

TNR by public shelters remains illegal in the state of Virginia. If you know of an animal shelter or other organization practicing TNR in the state, contact Grant Sizemore, [gsizemore@abcbirds.org](mailto:gsizemore@abcbirds.org).

## Solar Plant Kills Thousands of Birds Annually

A new report on the world’s largest solar thermal power station near the California-Nevada border has found that more than 3,500 birds died during the project’s first year of operation. In preliminary findings announced last year, the U.S. Fish



Black-throated Sparrow by Alan Wilson

and Wildlife Service had described the facility as a “mega trap” for birds and insects.

The report found that 83 species of birds were estimated to have been killed by the facility, which opened in 2014. Black-throated Sparrow and Costa’s Hummingbird were among the species most frequently killed.

## Native American Group Files Amicus Brief on Eagle Rule

Twenty-one Native American tribes have jointly filed a friend-of-the-court brief in ABC’s lawsuit contending that the Department of the Interior’s “30-year eagle take rule” violated federal law. In their brief, member tribes of the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona say FWS did not, as required by law, consult with them before issuing the rule.



Golden Eagle by TT Studio, Shutterstock

Eagles are fundamentally important to the spiritual and traditional cultural practices of tribal members, the brief said, and the agency failed to consider these unique interests in its preparation of the final rule.

## Major Report Features ABC Research on Neonics

A major report released this spring by the European Academies Science Advisory Council found that



Bee on blueberry flower by Betty Shelton, Shutterstock

widespread use of neonicotinoid insecticides is harming birds, butterflies, bees, and other organisms that control pests, pollinate crops, enrich soils, and keep diverse ecosystems functioning smoothly. The Academies’ report features ABC’s research finding that a single neonic-treated seed is enough to kill a songbird, and that these pesticides are poisoning the aquatic invertebrates on which birds rely. ABC is now conducting a new assessment on pesticides, focusing on insect-eating bats and birds.

## About Bird Calls

If you have questions or want more information on our articles, contact Bob Johns at 202-234-7181, x210, or e-mail [bjohns@abcbirds.org](mailto:bjohns@abcbirds.org)

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## *A Legacy for Birds: Regina Phelps*



Photo by Dave M. Kieffer, 2014

**"I came to my love of birds in my mid-thirties.** I am not sure what happened but I literally woke up one day and started to notice birds and then quickly grow to love birds. Really! I jokingly tell people I wonder what I ate the night before.

The wonderful thing about birds is that they are everywhere and anywhere. I travel extensively for work and fun, and you can look at, learn about, and enjoy birds everywhere: major cities, the countryside, parks, and beaches to name just a few. What other hobby can be enjoyed in so many places? Put binoculars in your suitcase and you are good to go!

When you begin to love birds, you begin to follow what is happening in the world. Habitat loss, pesticides, outdoor cats, collisions, water issues, and more. I was drawn to ABC because this organization fights the hard fights – the sometimes unpopular causes to do the right thing for birds – and I want to ensure they will be able to do that for years to come.

**That is why I decided to include ABC in my will and join ABC's Legacy Circle. This organization fights for birds, and that is incredibly important to me."**

*You too can leave a legacy for birds when you join ABC's Legacy Circle with an estate gift through your will, retirement plan, trust, or life insurance policy. If you would like more information, or if you have already included ABC in your estate plans, please contact Planned Giving Director Jack Morrison at 540-253-5780, or at [jmorrison@abcbirds.org](mailto:jmorrison@abcbirds.org).*