



Bringing back the birds

Inside Bird Conservation – November 2016

Special Edition on Eliminating Threats to Birds

Communications Towers

Following years of effort by ABC and partners, bird conservationists now have an opportunity to greatly reduce one frequent source of bird mortality. Steady-burning red or white lights on communication towers attract or disorient migratory birds flying at night. As many as 7 million birds a year die in collisions with towers and support wires as a result, with the tallest towers causing the highest mortality. New policies put in place by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) allow tower operators to turn off these deadly lights.

These federal agencies are encouraging a switch to flashing lights, which reduces bird mortality by approximately 70 percent, saves electricity, reduces tower operating costs, and better alerts pilots to the towers' presence. As of mid-October, [753 tall towers \(over 350 feet high\) nationwide have already updated their lighting systems](#) under the new guidelines. The changeover requires simply flipping switches to reprogram the lights.

Another 15,000 tall towers still need to make this bird and energy-saving change. Thanks to the FCC and FAA and the support of the University of Michigan, ABC now has available a [toolkit for activists](#) to encourage tower operators to update their lights. [A technical guide to assist tower operators](#) is also available. Please take a look around your community; if there are tall towers with steady-burning lights, you can take a few simple steps that will protect birds and save energy.

Public Lands

American Bird Conservancy Statement on the Malheur Occupation Verdict

American Bird Conservancy respects the judicial process but is deeply troubled by the outcome of the Malheur case. Armed occupation of public lands sets a dangerous precedent. It puts our ecologically valuable wildlife at risk and disrespects the men and women charged with protecting our natural resources.

“The occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge was an affront to the millions of Americans who love birds and the public lands that provide bird habitat, and to federal employees for trying to do their jobs,” said ABC President George Fenwick. “National Wildlife Refuges are important for birds

and other wildlife, and for the nearby communities that benefit from tourism generated by wildlife watching, hunting, and fishing. We need to honor these lands, and the public servants that act as our stewards, and make every effort to prevent small groups of armed extremists from taking them over for themselves what belongs to all Americans.”

Open Pipes

In a significant step forward this year, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has taken action to reduce a serious threat to birds by issuing a memorandum in late February to its field offices across the nation with [guidance on how to eliminate the threat](#) of open pipes on public lands (Instruction Memorandum No. 2016-023). The memo also encourages federal claim holders to voluntarily remove open pipes often used as mine claim monuments.

American Bird Conservancy built upon this memo to write [a letter this month](#) to all 17,843 federal mine claim holders to ask for their help in saving the thousands of birds that accidentally get trapped in open pipes and die each year. The National Mining Association, Northwest Mining Association, Forest Service, and BLM teamed up with American Bird Conservancy to create [a flier](#) explaining the threat to birds and other wildlife that open pipes create, and this was included in the mailing.

Invasive Species

Domestic cats can make wonderful pets. But outdoors, cats are a non-native and [invasive species](#) that threaten birds and other wildlife, disrupt ecosystems, and [spread diseases](#). Now numbering well over 100 million in the United States, cats kill approximately 2.4 billion birds every year in the U.S. alone, making cat predation by far the [largest human-caused mortality threat to birds](#). ABC's Cats Indoors Program educates the public and policy makers about the many benefits to birds, cats, and people when cats are maintained indoors or under an owner's direct control. In addition to advocating for responsible pet ownership, we also oppose [Trap, Neuter, Release](#) (TNR) for feral cats because of the persistent and severe threats posed by feral cat colonies. [Take the pledge to keep cats from roaming outdoors](#).

In the last five years, ABC has distributed more than 100,000 brochures to concerned citizens, veterinarians, and conservation groups, helping to spread the word that cats, birds, and people are better off when cats are kept indoors. [Order brochures](#).

New Colony of Chicks Keeps Hope Alive for Rare Newell's Shearwater

To counter the threat of predation by non-native mammals, ABC and Hawaiian conservationists have begun to establish a new nesting site for rare Newell's Shearwater ('A'o) and Hawaiian Petrel ('Ua'u). This year, chicks of both species were moved to a new, predator-proof colony at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge. Last month, the restoration team moved eight threatened [Newell's Shearwater](#) chicks, flying them by helicopter from their montane nesting areas to their new home at the refuge. Both species are endemic to Hawai'i and breed nowhere else in the world. Last week, the [second cohort of 20 Hawaiian Petrel chicks](#) were moved to the predator-proof site.

Window Collisions

Watch a [new video PSA](#) from ABC that calls attention to bird collisions and showcases creative—and attractive—ways to help.

The Vassar Bridge Science complex, which is on the cover of [Bird-friendly Building Design](#), opened this May. ABC's Christine Sheppard was involved with the building's design, which is intended to qualify for the LEED collisions reduction credit. Please see www.birdsmartglass.org for products for home and professional solutions that reduce bird collisions.

Pesticides

In the past, an incident reporting system, or public database of wildlife poisonings, helped conservationists identify the deadliest pesticides. Many of the deadliest organochlorine-based chemicals are now off the market as a result. Unfortunately, the EPA's reporting system is now broken, but efforts are underway to fix it. The agency's incident data system suffers from absurdly high reporting triggers and thresholds, confusing incident-submission portals, minimal public access to data, and a lack of coordination with other federal agencies. The current system has unrealistically high threshold numbers of dead animals needed to trigger reporting requirements under FIFRA 6(a)2. For birds, no specific reports are required unless 200 of a "flocking" species, 50 songbirds, or five raptors are killed. Here are some recent [recommendations on incident reporting](#) from ABC and partners.

Wind Energy

Camp Perry: American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO) have filed a [60-day notice of intent to sue](#) the Ohio Air National Guard (ANG) for violations of the Endangered Species Act and other federal laws in the course of planning to build a large wind turbine at its Camp Perry facility in Ottawa County, Ohio. Close to the shores of Lake Erie, the site lies within a major bird migration corridor and would be the first wind energy development on public land in this ecologically sensitive area. In [a letter](#), the two groups assert that ANG has unlawfully compromised and short-circuited the environmental review process for the Camp Perry wind facility. ABC has also [commented on numerous inappropriately sited wind projects](#).

Power Lines

BLM chooses transmission line routes that avoid private land, sage grouse habitat

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) chose routes for the Gateway West high-power transmission line that avoid private land, sage-grouse habitat, and the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area. The routes have been a source of controversy with residents critical of previous plans that sought primarily to avoid the Birds of Prey area. Idaho State BLM Director Tim Murphy said the agency had to ensure the area received "a heightened level of protection and care."

“Another important effort we’ve undertaken is working with the state and other essential partners to protect high-quality sage grouse habitat throughout Southern Idaho,” Murphy said. “The routes we have selected honor both of these priorities while also providing a path forward for this important project.”

[Read the full story](#) from *The Idaho Statesman*, October 6, 2016 (reprinted from [Your Public Lands](#), BLM's new E-Newsletter).

Mosquitoes and Avian Disease in Hawai'i

Hawai'i is the bird extinction capital of the world, and avian malaria and pox were one of the major factors in the wave of extinctions that occurred around the start of the 20th century. There is a strong negative association between Hawaiian passerines, which are mostly confined to the cooler, higher elevations, and the disease-vector system, which is limited to the warmer, lower elevations. As global climate change increases temperatures and alters rainfall patterns, the mosquito-disease zone will expand upward in elevation, thereby increasing the transmission risk to the remaining bird species and causing another wave of extinctions.

Recent advances in biotechnology hold exciting promise for potentially resolving this decades-long conservation crisis. There are now multiple techniques for modifying, suppressing, or even eliminating mosquito populations to prevent the transfer of avian diseases. Most of these techniques have been limited to small field tests or confined to the laboratory, but within the next few years there is the potential for these techniques to be tested and applied at a larger, landscape scale. Some have already been used in other parts of the world to control mosquitoes to reduce the spread of dengue fever and other human diseases, or to control agricultural pests.

ABC has been actively involved in these discussions, and developing an overall strategy that includes extensive public engagement before any decisions are made or management actions taken. There were two sessions ([12437](#) and [10599](#)) focused on this issue at IUCN's World Conservation Congress in Honolulu, followed by a [two-day workshop](#) on eliminating the non-native mosquitoes throughout the state.

Longline Fisheries

The incidental capture of seabirds is a major threat to Albatross and other seabirds. ABC's efforts to bring attention to the issue of albatross bycatch in North Pacific longline fisheries began in 2007, with a report on the status of this threat and highlighting effective mitigation actions. This work in part led to NOAA Fisheries making regulatory changes to increase use of bird-saving mitigation, including streamer lines and night setting and increased observer effort. As a result, albatross mortality in the North Pacific has dropped significantly.

ABC continues to ask Congress to approve the [Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels \(ACAP\)](#), which would bring international mitigation for seabirds up to par with those already being employed by US fishermen. ABC is also providing information on bird-friendly and sustainable fisheries through providing tools, such as the [Seabird Maps and Information for Fisheries Tool](#) and guidance for seafood certification bodies in a new guide, [Seabird Bycatch Solutions](#).

Lead Poisoning

At IUCN's World Conservation Congress in September, delegates [approved a resolution](#) to help reduce the needless poisoning of birds and other wildlife from lead ammunition. The resolution, *A path forward to address concerns over the use of lead ammunition in hunting*, encourages members to "promote, where feasible, the phasing out of lead shot used for hunting over wetlands and lead ammunition used for hunting in areas where scavengers are at particular risk from the use of lead ammunition, and the replacement of it with suitable alternatives."

[If Lead Ammunition is Bad for People and the Environment, Why do We Still Use It?](#) By Andy McGlashen.

[California Condors](#): Chick born in wild flies from nest at Pinnacles National Park for first time in a century. (*East Bay Times*)

[Condor Country](#), launching this week for IOS and Android devices, is the first mobile game to simulate what it takes to recover an endangered species based on real-life conservation practices used by the California Condor Recovery Program. (Birding Wire)