



Bringing back the birds

Inside Bird Conservation – December 2016

[Saving Migration](#)

Migratory birds are in trouble, and we can act to make a difference. Habitat loss throughout the Americas is impacting entire suites of migratory birds. Flyways are fraught with growing, man-made threats: wind energy projects, pesticides, windows, free-roaming cats. Falling bird numbers tell the story. The challenge is huge, but we believe we can do it. To begin scaling up, we need to raise at least \$1 million by the end of this year. ABC board members and friends are challenging our supporters by matching gifts up to \$500,000 through December 31, 2016. Will you [donate today](#) to save the miracle of migration?

[Calling All Birders: It's Time To Organize](#)

An open letter from George Fenwick to ABC members and everyone who loves birds.

[Alert: Congress Considering Major Environmental Rollbacks Before Adjourning](#)

Right now, the U.S. Congress is considering gutting Endangered Species Act Protection for the Greater Sage-Grouse. That means the species would have no safety net if populations suffer a rapid decline in spite of substantial conservation efforts being made now.

[Please act now!](#) Ask your Senators and Representative to make protecting the Greater Sage-Grouse, endangered species, and other wildlife a priority. [Click here](#) to send your letters today. Thank you.

[Conservation Group Seeks Protection for Threatened Native Sparrow](#)

ABC [has petitioned](#) the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to list the Oregon Vesper Sparrow as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In a letter sent to Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior, ABC describes the Oregon Vesper Sparrow as highly imperiled and threatened with extinction throughout its range. The petition makes the case that this distinct population warrants listing because of a significant population declines and ongoing habitat loss and degradation, among other threats, and because it lacks adequate protection under existing regulatory mechanisms.

Without ESA listing, the sparrows' future looks grim. The current estimated population of Oregon Vesper Sparrow is fewer than 3,000 birds, and Breeding Bird Survey data indicates a statistically significant population decline of more than 5 percent every year over the last 45 years. This

migratory species has a restricted breeding range that historically included southwestern British Columbia, western Washington and Oregon, and northwestern California.

[Next Steps for Endangered Bird Species](#)

ABC recently noted the progress to date to bring back birds on the brink of extinction in our [ESA recovery report](#), and we seek to build on that success. [In a letter](#), ABC has offered several new recommendations, including that the agency initiate a voluntary uplisting of the threatened Marbled Murrelet to endangered status due to a variety of threats, and that it add the Kaua'i 'Amakihi and 'Anianiau to the Service's ESA listing work plan. [Both Hawaiian species have declined over 90 percent](#), and could become extinct before the next seven-year work plan is issued.

Marbled Murrelet Endangered in Washington State and Oregon

The Marbled Murrelet is declining at a steep rate in Washington State due to ongoing habitat loss and the lack of adequate habitat protections on state and private lands. State wildlife managers are recommending that the murrelet be uplisted from threatened to endangered, and ABC submitted a [comment letter](#) in support of this determination, as did a [coalition of groups](#) working to conserve habitat in Washington State.

Four conservation organizations have filed suit against the Oregon Board of Forestry over its dismissal of a petition requesting that the board identify and protect important old-growth forest areas for the [Marbled Murrelet](#), a seabird threatened with extinction. Under Oregon law the board was supposed to have provided such protection after the seabird was protected as threatened under the state Endangered Species Act in 1987.

New Poll Shows Strong Support for Northwest Forest Plan

A [new poll reveals voters' priorities](#) for the management of a 25-million-acre network of America's public lands, forests and rivers in Northern California, western Oregon, and western Washington. The Northwest Forest Plan is the science-based agreement that was struck to manage federal public lands, waters and old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest. Survey respondents overwhelmingly support public land management that prioritizes clean drinking water, water quality, and water supply protection, along with recreation and habitat protection for wildlife.

“The public lands in the Pacific Northwest contain most of the remaining ancient forests in the continental United States,” said Denis Hayes, President of the Bullitt Foundation. “And these forests bring many benefits to the land and the people living nearby. Forests help regulate our climate, prevent erosion, and act as water filters that collect and store water. These forests recharge underground aquifers that ultimately serve as drinking water, but they also contain vast biodiversity, greater than most other ecosystems on earth.”

Because the Northwest Forest Plan will be revised by the next presidential administration, the results of the survey are particularly relevant. The public and our land management agencies must decide on the best course of action for providing cohesive protection for these crucial forests and the drinking water supplies they provide.

Groups Petition for Better Reporting of Pesticides Poisonings of Wildlife

ABC and partners are calling on EPA to fix its ineffectual incident reporting system for wildlife and pets sickened and killed by pesticides. Under the current regulations implementing FIFRA 6(a)2, the registrant need not report any incidents involving fewer than 50 songbirds, 5 raptors, 200 of a so-called “flocking” species of bird. EPA continues to drag its feet on bringing its regulations in line with FIFRA’s safeguards against the unreasonable adverse effects of pesticides. Over 80 groups have sent EPA [a formal petition for rulemaking](#). EPA will now need to go on record and respond to the issues we are raising.

Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge Threatened by Invasive Species

ABC has [written to Florida Governor Rick Scott](#) regarding management of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, which provides important habitat for waterfowl, migratory birds, and the endangered Snail Kite and threatened Wood Stork. We agree that addressing the threat of invasive species needs to be a high management priority, and requested that the governor direct the South Florida Water Management District to work with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in a cooperative effort to address this threat.

ABC believes that the best course for birds, other wildlife, and Florida residents in this instance is maintaining the lease agreement with the Service and continuing the partnership between the State and the Refuge, which provides habitat to over 250 species of birds, including the largest wading bird colony in the Everglades. In 2016, thanks to Florida and the Service working together, the \$5 million estimated needed investment was achieved. Without this teamwork, the State of Florida would be on its own to provide for the management needs of this area and to control invasive Melaleuca and Old World Climbing Fern.

Action Urged to Conserve Migratory Birds

Members of Congress, scientists, and conservation groups have sent letters to the Obama administration in support of a new conservation process proposed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to reduce preventable losses of migratory birds. The groups’ letters support a proposed rule that would permit incidental killing of birds caused by industrial development.

In a letter to Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, 25 members of the House of Representatives led by Rep. Mike Quigley stated: *A permit rule should help to ensure that practical, preventable measures are adopted to reduce mortality by using best practices and technologies, or that meaningful mitigation is utilized when impacts cannot be avoided.*

Scientists including John Fitzpatrick, Ken Rosenberg, and Andrew Farnsworth of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, ABC’s George Fenwick, and Pete Marra, Ph.D., a renowned migratory bird researcher, also [wrote to the administration urging action](#): *Such a rule is urgently needed to help stem a broad-scale decline of migratory bird populations resulting in part from multiple sources of human-caused mortality.*

“There have been great advances in our knowledge of how to birds, and this new process can put that knowledge to work and turn best management practices into standard practices,” said Steve Holmer of American Bird Conservancy.

Many conservation groups also endorsed the letter, which followed a similar [request from the CEOs of national environmental groups](#) in July. In 2015, FWS [announced](#) that it would prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement to evaluate the effects of authorizing incidental take of migratory birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). American Bird Conservancy, which petitioned the administration in 2011 and again in 2015 to adopt a permitting system to reduce or eliminate incidental bird mortality caused by wind energy developments, [applauded this action](#).

FWS' Final Eagle Rule Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

FWS has issued a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on its forthcoming Revised Eagle Rule, with the final rule itself expected later this month. ABC will be carefully reviewing the PEIS and the final rule and remains deeply concerned about the rule’s potential negative impacts on our nation’s Bald and Golden Eagle populations. ABC [submitted](#) detailed [comments](#) on the proposed revisions.

Hawaii Feral Cat Public Service Announcement

Please see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfsAyotGnS8> to view the announcement.

American Birding Association Adds Hawaiian Birds to U.S. List

At the ABA’s annual membership meeting at the organization headquarters in Delaware City, Delaware, in October, the ABA membership officially [voted to include Hawaii in the ABA Area by a significant margin](#). For more, [please see ABA’s blog](#).

No Net Loss: How Mitigation Policy Can Spur Private Investment in Land and Wildlife Conservation by David J. Hayes and Nicole Gentile

On Nov. 3, 2015, President Barack Obama signed a [presidential memorandum](#) that has the potential to tap into billions of dollars of private capital to invest in protecting our natural resources. The visionary memo directs federal agencies to avoid, minimize, and compensate for any environmental harm caused by an agency’s development activities. For example, private investors worked to restore 23,000 acres of wetlands in northern Minnesota in exchange for credits that can be used to offset future wetland development in the state. At its core, the memorandum lays out a vision in which government-sanctioned development is not at the expense of our environment.

How can the government apply compensatory mitigation requirements more broadly? And how can it do so in ways that drive the creation and expansion of market-based conservation solutions? What policies, for example, could spark more private sector investment in wildlife recovery, forest

restoration, or abandoned mine cleanups? To help scale up and test a consistent, effective, and broad-based mitigation policy, this report offers four policy recommendations. [Read more »](#)

Study: Protected Forests on Public Land Burn Less Severely Than Logged Areas

A new study published in the scientific journal [Ecosphere](#) finds that public forests that are protected from logging burn less severely than logged forests. The study is the most comprehensive investigation of its kind, spanning more than 23 million acres and examining three decades' of forest-fire data in the West. Among the major findings were that areas undisturbed by logging experienced significantly less intensive fire compared with areas that have been logged.

As Wyo. drilling increased, bird numbers declined — study

[A new federal study](#) covering oil and natural gas development in Wyoming over a 25-year period found that as drilling density increased, the productivity of Greater Sage-Grouse breeding grounds consistently declined. The conclusions in the latest peer-reviewed study — led by researchers at the U.S. Geological Survey and Colorado State University and published today in *The Journal of Wildlife Management* — analyzed male attendance at grouse breeding grounds near drilling sites in Wyoming between 1984 and 2008. They found that male counts at these sites, called leks, decreased by 2.5 percent every year during the study period. The decline in male attendance was "negatively related to oil and gas well density," the 12-page study concludes. The low male attendance did not appear to be influenced by other factors including the height of sagebrush cover or precipitation patterns. (E & E News)

[FLPMA Deserves a Party, Too](#)

High Country News, Nov. 10, 2016

America has spent the last year celebrating the centennial of the National Park Service. Given that the agency protects 85 million acres — 3.6 percent of the United States — this is a birthday well worth celebrating. But two other important birthdays passed almost unnoticed: October marked the 40th anniversary of both the Federal Land Policy Management Act, or FLPMA (usually pronounced “flipma”), which covers the Bureau of Land Management’s holdings, and the National Forest Management Act, which embraces our national forests. The combined acreage overseen by the two laws amounts to an astounding 20 percent of our 50 states. [Read full story](#)

Conservation Groups Letter in Support of Farm Bill Conservation Funding

Major cuts to spending called for in the 2014 Farm Bill are already undermining conservation programs benefitting grassland birds, and more cuts are being considered. A broad coalition of conservation groups including ABC has [sent a letter](#) to appropriators drafting next year’s spending bill to take further cuts to Farm Bill conservation programs.

[Do It Yourself: Expert Help for Improving Bobwhite Habitat on Your ...](#)

USDA.gov (press release) (blog)-Nov 1, 2016

As a partner biologist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation ... Habitat loss and fragmentation have caused the bird's numbers to dip...

WWF Report: Grasslands at Risk

The [2016 Plowprint Report](#) is a first-of-its kind analysis tracking annual losses of the grasslands that form the ecological foundation of the Great Plains and provide important habitat for grassland birds, waterfowl, and other wildlife. Both the technical and the general report can be downloaded [here](#). Here's a quick preview:

- In 2014, the Great Plains lost more acres to conversion than the Brazilian Amazon lost to deforestation during the same year.
- 3.2 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions were released into the atmosphere due to plow-up of grasslands in the Great Plains from 2009-2015. This is the equivalent of 670 million extra cars on the road.
- Conversion rates are highest in key areas of the PPR in both Montana and Saskatchewan.

Texan Must Pay Nearly \$26,000 for Killing Two Louisiana Whooping Cranes

A Southeast Texas man was sentenced Oct. 27 to five years of probation and ordered to pay nearly \$26,000 in restitution for killing two endangered whooping cranes in January from an experimental Louisiana population. (Birding Wire)

Study: Domestic Cat Attacks Cause Variety of Wildlife Deaths

As part of a new study published in *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, researchers completed an 11-year retrospective study in which they looked at the admission rates of wildlife at the Wildlife Center of Virginia that resulted from cat attacks, the largest wildlife rehabilitation center in the state. (Birding Wire)

Feral Cats are a Serious Threat to Hawai'i's Endangered Birds...

HONOLULU Magazine (blog)-Oct 12, 2016

Cats killing birds may seem a normal, if mildly distasteful, part of nature. Hawai'i's state bird is also one of conservation's hopeful stories.

'Cat Wars' Issues a Call to Action for the Birds of North America Peter P. Marra, coauthor of the new book *Cat Wars*, says free-roaming cats are an urgent problem for bird conservation and public health.... [Read more >>](#)

Stunning Hummingbirds of ABC's Reserve Network More than half of the world's 365 hummingbird species can be found on one or more of the 70+ reserves ABC supports throughout the Americas. Here are a few of those birds—with names as brilliant and varied as their plumage—and the reserves where they can be found.... [Read more >>](#)

ABC and Partners Protect Habitat in the Dominican Republic for Bicknell's Thrush ABC is working with partners to decrease threats to the forest where the rare and threatened Bicknell's Thrush spends the winters. ... [Read more >>](#)

