



*Bringing back the birds*

Inside Bird Conservation – January 2018

## **Migratory Bird Treaty Act Group Sign-On Letter and Action Alert**

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, one of the nation's oldest wildlife conservation laws, is celebrating its 100-year anniversary in 2018—and it's under unprecedented threat. A new administration policy, along with a bill moving forward in the House of Representatives, would weaken the law by eliminating any protection for migratory birds at risk of being killed at industrial developments.

**Organizations can help by [endorsing a letter](#) to Congress, asking Senators and Representatives to oppose any effort that undermines the ability to address the incidental take of birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.**

We also need to generate large numbers of calls and letters to Senators and Representatives from individual activists. Please activate your networks! You can leave a message for your elected officials by dialing the Capitol switchboard at 202 224-3121 and asking to be connected to your Senators and Representative.

The Center for Conservation Biology has drafted an [excellent article on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#) and the potential impacts of this proposed weakening of the law. Earlier this month, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an editorial in support of weakening the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and published [a letter from American Bird Conservancy](#) in response.

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### **[National Geographic: Year of the Bird 2018](#) – and Why Birds Matter by Jonathan Franzen**

American Bird Conservancy board member Jonathan Franzen kicks off National Geographic's Year of the Bird 2018 with an article on [Why Birds Matter](#):

"There is, however, one critical ability that human beings have and birds do not: mastery of their environment. Birds can't protect wetlands, can't manage a fishery, can't air-condition their nests. They have only the instincts and the physical abilities that evolution has bequeathed to them. These have served them well for a very long time, 150 million years longer than human beings have been around. But now human beings are changing the planet—its surface, its climate, its oceans—too quickly for birds to adapt to by evolving. Crows and gulls may thrive at our garbage dumps, blackbirds and cowbirds at our feedlots, robins and bulbuls in our city parks. But the future of most bird species depends on our commitment to preserving them. Are they valuable enough for us to make the effort?" – *Jonathan Franzen*

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## Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign Update



It deeply saddens me to report that Michael Hutchins, American Bird Conservancy's Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign Director, died suddenly January 15 while on his way to a safari. (See [ABC's tribute on Facebook here.](#)) Michael authored over 220 articles and books on various topics in wildlife science, management, and conservation, and has traveled to over 30 countries to pursue his passion for conservation. He will be greatly missed.

The Bird Smart Wind Campaign has had numerous victories this year, including stopping the wind project at [Camp Perry](#) 0.6 miles from the shoreline of Lake Erie—one of the greatest confluences of migratory birds and bats in the world—and continues to hold the wind energy industry accountable for its impacts on our nation's

wildlife and their habitats. Here are a few of Michael's accomplishments as leader of this program:

A [Whooping Crane mapping study](#) in collaboration with International Crane Foundation, which shows the distribution of wind turbines and associated power lines and towers near stopover sites in their migratory corridor. Few turbines overlapped with stopover points; however, the studied identified extensive intersections with power lines and towers, raising considerable concern. Collisions with power lines and towers are known to be a major cause of crane deaths worldwide.

**Analysis with Black Swamp Bird Observatory of the proposed [Icebreaker Wind Energy Project](#)**, the first offshore project in Lake Erie. The comment letter, sent to the Department of Energy (DOE), Army Corps of Engineers and Ohio Power Siting Board, is critical of the science used by the developer's consultants and their conclusion that the impact on birds would be minimal. The developer's goal is to build more than 1,000 turbines in Lake Erie, home to one of the world's greatest concentrations of migratory birds, yet the Environmental Analysis only focused on six experimental turbines in the initial phase, and does not assess anticipated cumulative impacts or existing cumulative impacts elsewhere in the Great Lakes.

**[Letter from conservation organizations on the potential risk to the endangered Roseate Tern from offshore wind energy development](#)** on the Atlantic Coast. Roseate Terns migrate along the entire coast and feed considerable distances from shore when gathering food for their chicks. These behaviors that could put them at risk from collisions with poorly placed wind turbines.

**Analysis of the proposed Land-Use [Planning Process for Fort Drum](#), New York, an Important Bird Area in a major migratory route.** One of the goals of this planning process is to consider future wind and solar development. ABC encouraged the U.S. Army to pay close attention to use of this habitat by birds.

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## Protecting Birds' Full Life-cycles

It's no small feat to conserve birds that travel 4,000 miles or more each year across continents and international borders. We work hard to ensure that priority species have the habitat they require at all stages of their life-cycles: breeding, wintering, and stopover on [migration](#).

In 2016, we announced our hemisphere-wide [BirdScapes](#) approach to migratory bird conservation. In 2017, we made significant strides in putting those plans into action by helping landowners to engage in smart land-use practices that help birds — from wintering Wood Thrush [on a black pepper farm in Guatemala](#) to Yellow-billed Cuckoo along [riparian corridors in Texas](#) — and their habitats.

We also advanced our plans for [two more Birdscapes](#) in California and Arizona that will further benefit [Yellow-billed Cuckoo](#), a species whose western population is listed under the Endangered Species Act, by restoring the southwestern riparian habitat on its breeding grounds. In the year to come, our blueprint for conserving birds' habitat across their full life-cycles will continue to evolve.

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## Cat Predation and Other Threats

### [Hawai'i's Lanai Cat Sanctuary Also Helps to Protect Endangered Birds](#)

Cats live like royalty at the sanctuary, and native birds are safe from predation. Could this be a solution to the ancient conflict between cats and birds?... [Read more >>](#)

### [Alaska Game Board Rejects Release of Feral Cats](#)

In a unanimous November vote, the Alaska Game Board rejected implementing trap, neuter and release programs in the state. American Bird Conservancy submitted [testimony highlighting the impact of feral cats on birds](#).

### [Island Conservation: Protecting Native Wildlife from Cats](#)

Grant Sizemore, Director of American Bird Conservancy's [Invasive Species Programs](#) and the owner of an indoor cat, explains the threats invasive feral cats pose to island wildlife and what individuals can do to save native species.

## Extinction Possible for Florida Grasshopper Sparrows; Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida Establishes a "Sparrow Fund"

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its partners are working to stave off the extinction of a small, ground-nesting songbird that has lived on the prairies of South and Central Florida for thousands of years. If current trends continue, Florida Grasshopper Sparrows could disappear from the landscape in two to three years. In 2017, these sparrows reached a record low of about 75 wild birds. Trends suggest there will be fewer than 40 wild birds in 2018. Only about 50 birds are being sustained in two captive populations. Restoring a self-sustaining wild population seems unlikely, but groundbreaking scientific strides are underway in an effort to beat the odds.

“We still don’t know exactly why the population is declining, but we are concerned disease is a big factor,” said Larry Williams, the Service’s Florida State Supervisor for Ecological Services. “Extinction is a real possibility, but we’ve got to try to save this species.”

The Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida started a “sparrow fund” section on the foundation’s website, providing a link, <https://www.fishwildlifeflorida.org/florida-grasshopper-sparrow-fund/>, for anyone wanting to contribute to the survival and recovery of this sparrow.

### **[Google’s New Bird-Friendly Office](#)**

...one piece of an overall design for the campus that aims for LEED Platinum certification, the highest level possible in the sustainability rating system for buildings. Outside, 20 acres of open space will be planted with native species. Storm water will be collected and treated for reuse in on-site ponds. (Materials will be vetted through Google’s [healthy materials requirements](#).) The windows—which fill the space with natural light—are **treated with a pattern that helps birds avoid crashing into the glass**. The windows can also automatically shade themselves and darken at night to reduce light pollution.

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### **Birds on the Reforestation Team**

You might know that birds help spread seeds by eating fruit in one place and pooping seeds in another. But how important are they really? Can birds help turn unused pasture back into much needed forest? Wonder no longer! Spencer Schubert gives a detailed account of his work on this subject in the Dominican Republic. [Read it on the BirdsCaribbean blog](#).

### **[Birding Festivals on Wildlife Refuges Almost Any Month in 2018](#)**

National wildlife refuges are home to more than 700 species of birds. More than 200 national wildlife refuges were established especially to protect, manage, and restore habitat for migratory birds. So what better place than a national wildlife refuge to find some of the nation’s best birding and outstanding birding festivals?