

Researchers Find Cozumel Thrasher

A remarkable discovery by biologists on the island of Cozumel, off the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, has restored hope for a species that was feared by many to be extinct. Previous recent expeditions to find the Cozumel Thrasher had proved unsuccessful, but in early June 2004, a single bird was sighted by a team of field biologists working in conjunction with Villanova University and the Mexican counterpart of the Island Endemics Institute.

“This is terrific news for this species,” said Dr. George Wallace, Vice President for International Programs at ABC, which has sponsored the project to relocate the species under its William Belton Small Grants program, along with Conservation International. “It opens a door to a range of possibilities that might eventually even see the establishment of a protected area or breeding program if more birds are found.”

Despite the heartening news, the reason for the species’ decline remains a mystery. Hurricanes, particularly

Gilbert in 1988, have clearly taken their toll, but given that the thrasher evolved with this natural phenomenon (frequent in this region), they are likely only to be a contributory factor rather than the primary cause. Predation by boa constrictors, introduced on Cozumel in 1971 and now abundant throughout the island, is an additional potential threat. Fortunately, large tracts of deciduous and semi-deciduous forest, thought to be the species’ preferred habitat, still remain, and the birds are not hunted or trapped for the cage-bird trade.

The team will try to determine the size and range of the population represented by this single bird, and then return in January 2005, when the birds are known to sing more frequently, to attempt further surveys. To protect this and potentially other birds from disturbance, the exact location of the discovery is not being disclosed to the public. For more information visit <http://oikos.villanova.edu/cozumel>. *Contact:* Juan Martínez Gómez, <endemicos_insulares@yahoo.com.mx>.

Congress Rallies to Protect ESA

On June 15, 2004, a letter, signed by 66 Congressional Representatives, was sent to Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton, requesting that a proposal to amend the Endangered Species Act be reconsidered.

The letter, sponsored by Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ), Lois Capps (D-CA), Howard L. Berman (D-CA), and Hilda L. Solis (D-CA) addressed the

Continued on page 9.



The Endangered Species Act protects America’s rarest species such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Members of Congress are asking that moves to weaken the act be reconsidered. Photo: Greg Lasley.

Top Stories in This Issue

Efforts to Reform Migratory Bird Treaty Act Move Forward in House and Senate. Congressional moves would exclude Mute Swans and other exotic species from MBTA protection. See story page 2.

Devastation of World’s Largest Caspian Tern Colony Proposed.



Caspian Tern. Photo Dan Roby, FWS.

Federal agencies intend to eliminate 75% of the East Sand Island Colony, circumventing a recent court ruling. See story page 7.

El Oro Parakeet Protected in Ecuador. Fundación Jocotoco has acquired a critical in-holding in southern Ecuador to provide further protection for the highly endemic El Oro Parakeet. See story page 16.

For complete list of contents see page 2.

CONTENTS

Cozumel Thrasher Found	1
Congress Rallies to Protect ESA	1&9
Reform of MBTA Advances	2
Despite Gains Refuges Losing Out	3
Chilean Seabass Certification	3
Teshekpuk Lake Habitat Threatened	4
ABC Files Notice to Sue on Towers	4
Proposed Change to MBTA for DoD	5
USDA to Manage Migratory Birds?	5
Will the Bald Eagle Be De-listed?	6
Plans for Mexican Gas Facility	6
ADVERT	7
Devastation of Caspian Tern Colony	7
Rabbit Eradication Helps Shearwaters	8
Cormorant Slaughter Begins	8
Bird Funding Initiatives for 2005	9
Suisun IBA Oil Spill	9
Trumpeter Swan Lead Poisoning	10
Hawaiian Swordfish Fishery Re-Opens	10
Mountain Top Mining Draws Fire	11
East Coast Red Knot Plummetts	11
Last Gasp for Po'ouli?	12
Lead Paint Poisons Albatross Chicks	12
ABC's Wind Energy and Birds Policy	13
Expedition Seeks Cerulean Habitat	13
Brown Tree Snake Eradication	14
FWS Cracks Down on Smugglers	14
Birds in Brief	15
El Oro Parakeet Protected in Ecuador	16
Plover Population up for De-Listing?	16

Abbreviations

ABC: American Bird Conservancy
 FWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service

**Bird Calls is the Newsletter of
 American Bird Conservancy (ABC)
 and the Bird Conservation Alliance.**

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**The next meeting of the Alliance will be
 held in Washington D.C. on
 November 11, 2004**

Bird Calls is funded in part by a grant
 from the International Affairs Division
 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Efforts to Reform Migratory Bird Treaty Act Move Forward in House and Senate

Moves to have non-native species such as the Mute Swan excluded from the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) took important steps forward when H.R. 4114, the Migratory Bird Treaty Reform Act, passed the House Resources Committee in May, and S. 2547, (the Senate companion bill) passed the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in June.

The alien Mute Swan has flourished in parts of the U.S. and is blamed for local extirpation of native breeding species such as the Black Skimmer in the Chesapeake Bay, and for a reduction in native bay vegetation. Yet, in 2001, a Federal Appeals Court in *Hill v. Norton* ruled that the MBTA fully protected Mute Swans, and subsequently all Mute Swan control in the U.S. (including egg addling) ceased (*Bird Calls* Vol. 6, No.1). Protection for 94 other species of non-native migratory birds could be implied by the *Hill* case. Most of these (80%) are escapees from captivity - many have only been seen once or twice, but others, such as the Rock Pigeon, have flourished.

In December 2003, ABC testified at a Congressional hearing on the need for MBTA reform legislation that would allow Mute Swan control to resume and prevent the inclusion of other non-native species in the Act. An additional 40 national conservation, ornithological, and wildlife management groups signed a letter in support of reform legislation. If enacted, H.R. 4114 would restore the application of the MBTA to only avian species listed by FWS as native migratory birds prior to the *Hill* court



The Mute Swan was the center of a recent court decision that could imply MBTA protection for several introduced species. H.R. 4114 would limit the MBTA to native species. Photo: Clipart.com.

decision.

H.R. 4114 was combined with a stronger re-authorization of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA), extending it beyond FY '05. Authorized funding for projects that help conserve neotropical migrants would increase from the current \$5 million level to \$10 million in FY '07, and to \$15 million in FY 2008. Requirements of grant recipients to match NMBCA funds with funds raised elsewhere would be lowered from 3:1 to 1:1. After 2007, funds would also, for the first time, be available for use in Canada, which is currently excluded despite the value of habitats such as the boreal forest to neotropical migratory birds (*Bird Calls* Vol. 7, No. 2). Under the bill, funds for grant administration by FWS are increased to at least \$125,000 from \$80,000. The re-authorization maintains the requirement that at least 75% must go for projects in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Conservationists are hopeful that H.R. 4114 will pass the House in July and S. 2457 will gain prompt passage in the Senate. The opportunity to move the NMBCA re-authorization together with an amended Migratory Bird Treaty Act presents a unique double-play potential for bird conservation. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Despite Gains, Refuges Still Losing Out

The National Wildlife Refuge System comprises 544 refuges, totaling approximately 100 million acres (roughly 15 million acres more than the National Park system) and provides wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities for more than 40 million Americans each year.

Of these refuges, 163 have been designated as globally Important Bird Areas (IBAs) by ABC, yet the Refuge System faces a \$2 billion funding backlog for operations and maintenance, and eight million acres - and growing - of the system is infested with invasive species. For example, before successful control programs, 30% of the tidal mud flats at Willapa Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Washington State (an ABC-designated IBA) were covered by *Spartina alterniflora*, an invasive plant native to the East Coast. The invasion rendered the flats useless to thousands of migrant shorebirds that previously depended on the bay as a staging area. Other invasives such as yellow starthistle, melaleuca, and salt cedar, continue to have significant impacts on bird populations at refuges.

Throughout the Refuge System, volunteers outnumber paid staff by ten to one. While it is encouraging that the refuges receive so much support, more than 1,000 priority staff positions are currently unfunded, and 200 refuges have no staff at all. Despite modest funding increases in the last two years, stimulated by a growing movement to restore the Refuge System, led by the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) and the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA), funding is still not keeping pace with needs, and a substantial increase is desperately required. Current refuge funding allows just over \$4 per acre for management, compared to \$20 per acre for the National Park System, though the parks must cater to around 275 million visitors annually, and themselves face a major funding deficit.

CARE and NWRA are calling for the Refuge System budget to be almost doubled to \$700 million to resolve the current crisis. *Contact:* Evan Hirsche, NWRA, <www.refugenet.org>.

Environmentalists Question Chilean Seabass Certification

Despite objections from some in the environmental community, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has announced that it intends to certify the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Chilean seabass (Patagonian toothfish) fishery. This means that fish from this particular fishery moves one step closer to being sold bearing the MSC seal identifying it as "sustainably-caught."

The MSC is a non-profit organization that uses a certification program to harness consumer preference for environmentally-friendly seafood. The MSC seal of approval implies that a fishery is well-managed, and eco-minded consumers can purchase the product in good faith. In this case, however, some other environmental groups are questioning the organization's blessing of this controversial fishery.

Patagonian toothfish populations have plummeted in recent years, some by as much as 90%, due to over-fishing, mostly by illegal or "pirate" vessels. The fish are caught on longlines, which also kill thousands of seabirds each year, including endangered and threatened albatross species such as the Wandering and Black-browed. There is no oversight of these pirate boats, which launder their illegal catch in other countries so that it can then be sold "legally"



Chilean seabass certification premature? Black-browed and other albatrosses are still threatened by pirate Patagonian toothfish longlining practices. Photo: Clipart.com.

to consumers in America, Europe, and Japan, who are none the wiser. The course that a particular fish takes between being caught and ending up on the dinner plate is extremely difficult to verify. It can pass through many hands in many different countries, each one multiplying the opportunity for fraud and confusion.

It is this complex chain of custody that has caused organizations such as the National Environmental Trust (NET) to speak out against the MSC decision. Gerry Leape, NET's Vice President for Marine Conservation, has stated that the only effective way

to ensure the safety of the fishery and the seabirds that are killed on the toothfish longline hooks is to regulate the entire fishery through CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna. Following such statements, the MSC convened an Objections Panel to re-review the toothfish certification. While dismissing some of the environmentalists claims as unfounded, the panel did agree that chain of custody is a potential weak point and is requiring this be better verified and monitored before the MSC seal of approval can be applied to fish in the supermarket. *Contact:* Gerry Leape, NET, <GLEape@environet.org>.

Teshekpuk Lake's Unique Habitat Threatened

This June, the Bureau of Land Management released its revised plan for oil and gas drilling and exploration in the northeast portion of Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve. The Reserve, a 4.6 million acre expanse, is home to a broad diversity of wildlife, including vast numbers of waterfowl and caribou. Drilling and exploration efforts currently take place on 1.4 million acres, or about 30% of available land, though drilling is permitted on 4 million acres, as defined by BLM's existing 1998 plan.

The preferred alternative in the new plan will open up a further 387,000 acres to drilling, making 4.387 million acres out of the 4.6 million available acres (all but 4.6%) open for exploration. While only a small increase in percentage terms, the change is significant for birds because it is centered around the Teshekpuk



Teshekpuk Lake Area provides valuable breeding habitat for the Steller's Eider and many other waterfowl species. Photo FWS.

Lake Special Area. Originally designated in 1977 at 1.7 million acres, the area now stands at just 600,000 acres that are off limits to drilling. The new BLM plan would further reduce it by more than half to only 213,000 acres.

Teshekpuk Lake (the largest Arctic lake in the U.S. and part of the National Petroleum Reserve global IBA) provides an important stop-over area for large numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds. No other area of the Arctic Coastal Plain provides such extensive areas of open water and prime grassland habitats required by molting

ducks and geese. With up to 60,000 geese, the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area sustains the largest goose molting concentration in the Arctic. These include 'Lesser' Snow, Canada, and Greater White-fronted Geese, and up to 20% of the entire 'Pacific Black' Brant population. The coastal plain of the Reserve, including the Teshekpuk Lake area, supports 95% of the breeding population of the Steller's Eider and 80% of the Spectacled Eider, both species listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The lake itself and the coastal plain would remain off limits to drilling for now.

The BLM plan comes little more than a year after the government was forced to shelve its plans to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration. A 45-day public comment period on the plan has been opened, including a public hearing. The comment period will close in early August. To view the complete DEIS visit http://nenpra.ensr.com/nenpra/documents_DEIS.htm. *Contact:* Jennifer Schmidt, Campaign for America's Wilderness, <jschmidt@leaveitwild.org>.

ABC Files Notice to Sue FCC Over Avian Mortality at Towers

ABC and the Forest Conservation Council continue to make progress in preventing the killing of as many as 50 million birds each year at communication towers. In April, the two organizations filed an Endangered Species Act 60-day letter with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regarding the threat posed by certain Hawaiian towers to the Newell's Shearwater and Hawaiian Petrel. Both species are listed as Vulnerable under IUCN-World

Conservation Union criteria.

Thousands of breeding seabirds on Kauai, Maui, Hawaii, Lanai, and Oahu make nightly flights between foraging areas at sea and inland nesting areas. These birds, particularly the young, are attracted to artificial lights on man-made structures. They may circle around the lights until they strike the structure, or until they become exhausted and fall to the ground, where vehicles and predators kill them. Towers that are lighted and supported by guy lines may be particularly harmful to these birds.

Since 1978, *Save our Shearwaters*, an Hawaiian conservation program, has recovered 26,000, mostly young, Newell's Shearwaters, a species whose population has plummeted in recent years.

ABC and the Forest Conservation

Council also filed a petition regarding the tallest towers in Hawaii, urging the FCC to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and to refrain from authorizing new towers until its completion. The groups also requested that new towers comply with FWS voluntary standards for towers that include lighting specifications, the construction of towers without guy wires, and that use of other mitigation methods.

Individual appeals have also been filed with the FCC to block construction of nine towers in five states. Representatives from the two groups met with FCC officials in June to urge that the agency act to prevent mortality of endangered Hawaiian species and to other birds in Hawaii and elsewhere. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Regulations Proposed on DoD Take of Migratory Birds

On June 2, 2004, FWS proposed regulations to authorize the incidental take of migratory birds resulting from military readiness activities. The 2003 National Defense Authorization Act specifically required FWS to issue these proposed regulations.

Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), it is unlawful "by any means or in any manner, to pursue, hunt, take, [or] kill" migratory birds *except* as permitted by regulation. Importantly, the MBTA currently does not exempt the Department of Defense (DoD) or other federal agencies.

In 2002, the Center for Biological Diversity obtained an injunction prohibiting the Navy from continuing live fire military training exercises that incidentally killed migratory birds on the island of Farallon de Medinilla near the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific Ocean. The Navy had failed to obtain a permit from FWS and thus violated the MBTA. Subsequently, Congress took the highly unusual interim step of explicitly exempting military readiness activities from the MBTA in the 2003 National Defense Authorization Act. The Congressionally authorized exemption remains in force until the FWS regulations take effect.

DoD actions that qualify as "military readiness" activities, and therefore allow the incidental take of migratory birds, include (a) all training and operations of the Armed Forces that relate to combat, and (b) all adequate and realistic testing of military equipment, vehicles, weapons, and sensors for proper operation and suitability for combat use. Currently, military readiness activities are authorized only if the DoD implements measures to minimize or mitigate significant adverse effects on migratory bird species of concern.

Under the new regulations, FWS would retain the authority to withdraw authorization of take if they feel it would not be compatible with the MBTA. In addition, the DoD is still responsible for ensuring that military readiness activities are implemented in accordance with all applicable statutes, including the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

FWS is soliciting public comment on the proposed regulations. Comments are due by August 2, 2004 and should be sent to: the Division of Migratory Bird Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 4107, Arlington, Virginia 22203-1610, fax: (703) 358-2217, <DODMBTARULE@fws.gov>. *Contact:* David Fischer, ABC, <dfischer@abcbirds.org>.

Proposal to Shift Migratory Bird Management to USDA

Congressmen Mike Ross (D-AR), Charles Pickering (R-MS), and Marion Berry (D-AR) have introduced H.R. 3320 that would strip the authority for controlling all take of migratory birds away from FWS, placing it in the hands of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services (WS).

The legislation, dubbed the *American Aquaculture and Fishery Resources Protection Act*, would also remove these management actions from public review by exempting WS from the National Environmental Policy Act.

WS has been steadily killing thousands of birds across the U.S.

Even prior to an October FWS Cormorant depredation, WS had killed some 47,000 Double-crested Cormorants annually, and destroyed thousands more eggs. This new depredation order (see article P. 8) allows WS to kill unlimited numbers of cormorants in 24 states, without



Black-crowned Night Herons and other fish-eating birds have been targeted by Wildlife Services. New legislation could broaden WS authority. Photo: FWS.

requiring permits, if the birds are "injurious to public resources," regardless of scientific evidence to the contrary.

WS is already escalating cormorant control and kills thousands of other fish-eating birds around the country under FWS permits (see article P. 8). These include Black-crowned Night Herons, Great Blue Herons, Belted Kingfishers, mergansers, and tens of thousands of gulls. ABC will be opposing this legislation along with other conservationists and scientists, and has been asked by the House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Conservation, Wildlife,

and Oceans of the House Resources Committee to testify at a coming hearing. Those wishing to voice their concern can email Harry Burrows, staffer for Subcommittee Chair Wayne Gilchrest, <harry.burroughs@mail.house.gov>. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Will the Bald Eagle Ever be De-listed?

It has been five years since FWS first proposed de-listing the Bald Eagle in the lower 48 states as a Threatened Species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Yet the eagle remains listed.

A press release that accompanied the formal 1999 Federal Register notice emphatically declared, "The Bald Eagle is Back!" Indeed, the number of nesting eagle pairs in the lower 48 states has mushroomed from a low of 417 in 1963 to nearly 6,000 today. Yet the decision to de-list remains controversial. While some conservation groups have applauded the proposal, saying that the eagle's recovery demonstrates that the Act works and that once placed on the Endangered Species List, a species need not remain there forever, a number of other organizations have been reluctant to have these impressive statistics serve as the basis for de-



Bald Eagle de-listing has been pending for five years. The decision to remove it from the ESA remains controversial. Photo: FWS.

listing the Bald Eagle.

The main concern raised is the continuing need to ensure that sufficient habitat is protected to sustain a healthy, fully recovered population. Without the protection that Critical Habitat designations afford the Bald Eagle as a Threatened Species under the ESA, some believe that eagle

populations could decline again. Neither the Migratory Bird Treaty Act nor the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act provide for Bald Eagle habitat protection. ABC's President, Dr. George Fenwick stated, "The decision to de-list should be taken carefully with the expectation that the species will never need to be listed again."

A final FWS de-listing decision is still pending, despite initial expectations that it would be made within a year of the Clinton Administration's 1999 proposal. In what may be an acknowledgment of concerns expressed by some, Department of Interior Secretary Gale Norton recently expressed the need for "developing guidelines describing how Bald Eagles would be managed and protected in the future, which must be in place prior to a final de-listing action." In addition, according to Jody Millar, Bald Eagle Monitoring Coordinator at FWS, a re-proposal to de-list the Bald Eagle is scheduled to be published this August for public comment. *Contact:* David Fischer, ABC, <dfischer@abcbirds.org>.

ChevronTexaco Plans Mexican Liquid Natural Gas Facility

ChevronTexaco is poised to construct a \$650 million liquid natural gas (LNG) facility close to the Coronado Islands Important Bird Area, located just off the coast of Baja California, Mexico. The precise location of the platform has yet to be determined, but it is anticipated to be a mere 600-800 yards from South Island, the largest of the Coronado Islands. The proposed facility would consist of a platform approximately 1,000 feet long that would serve as a receiving dock for

supply ships, house LNG storage tanks, and contain a regasification installation that would then send natural gas via underwater pipeline to the mainland.

ChevronTexaco's proposed facility has garnered the attention of numerous conservation and sport fishing organizations concerned about the facility's potential impact on the rich marine and bird life of the Coronado Islands. In particular, the islands support globally significant populations of the Xantus's Murrelet, a species currently being considered for Endangered Species Act listing by FWS. The southernmost colony of the rare Ashy Storm-Petrel, and a significant colony of Black Storm-Petrels also occur on the Coronado Islands.

In addition to potential impacts on

wildlife during construction of the massive LNG facility, the platform's lights may attract birds causing fatal collisions. Carlos Atallah, the project director for ChevronTexaco, has assured concerned organizations that the facility's environmental impact will be minimal. With regard to facility lighting, current plans call for the minimum number of lights possible, pointed toward the coast, not toward the island. The Pacific Seabird Group and Island Conservation have been advocating for a more comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). According to these organizations, the current EIS fails to address impacts of the platform construction and operation on seabirds breeding or roosting on the islands. *Contact:* David Fischer, ABC, <dfischer@abcbirds.org>.

Help Buy and Protect an Acre of Andean Cloud Forest

Throughout the Andes, key sites for endangered endemic bird species and Neotropical migrants are being cleared for pasture. Many of these important forests are available for purchase and ABC and its partners are working to buy and protect the most threatened of these sites. In many cases, land can be bought for as little as \$100 per acre. Please contribute to ABC's Andean land purchase fund. Send your check for \$100 or more today to: American Bird Conservancy, P.O. Box 249, The Plains, VA 20198.



Devastation of Largest Caspian Tern Colony Proposed

FWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) intend to propose the elimination of 75% of the world's largest Caspian Tern colony. The Services' preferred alternative outlined in their Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is to reduce the breeding colony on East Sand Island, at the mouth of the Columbia River, on the Washington-Oregon border, from approximately 18,000 breeding terns to just 4,000 birds. The EIS had been ordered by an August 2001 court ruling prohibiting the Army Corps of Engineers from destroying tern breeding habitat and hazing birds (*Bird Calls* Vol. 5, No. 2).

The population of terns in the colony (which is an ABC-designated globally Important Bird Area) has already decreased - down by 16% in 2003 and seemingly at the same level this year. It represents about two-thirds of the total Pacific Northwest population and 25% of the entire North American population. Tern habitat has been destroyed on neighboring Rice Island, and birds hazed away from this and other sites. The colony is now concentrated on just six acres of East Sand Island.

These federal displacement efforts are being imposed because the terns eat salmon smolt and are being blamed for hampering salmon recovery. Since the Rice Island

colony was dispersed, salmonid consumption by terns has dropped by two-thirds. ABC and partners are insisting that no terns be moved off East Sand Island until adequate habitat has been identified and prepared elsewhere. ABC has further urged that East Sand be included in the National Wildlife Refuge system.

Dr. Cynthia Tynan, a former scientist at NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center had written: "At present, there is no scientific evidence to support the statement that piscivorous birds may be one of the factors that currently limit salmonid stock recovery . . . Removal of Caspian terns from the estuary could actually have an adverse effect on the recovery of salmon."

In a June 2000 letter to Will Stelle, the NMFS Regional Director, the FWS Regional Director, wrote: "From a longer term perspective, the actual benefit of reducing smolt predation on salmon recovery remains to be seen . . . We also know that salmon declines were not caused by seabird predation, since the declines occurred before there was any significant predation in the [Columbia River] estuary." The draft EIS is scheduled to be released this July. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Introduced Rabbit Eradication Helps Shearwaters on Santa Clara

While still too early to claim total victory, biologists on the island of Santa Clara, off the coast of Chile, have made significant progress in the eradication of rabbits to protect one of the world's three Pink-footed Shearwater breeding colonies. Sitting some 400 miles west of Santiago in the Pacific Ocean, Santa Clara is one of three islands that make up the Juan Fernández archipelago. The island chain was designated a National Park in 1935 and, like the Galapagos Islands to their north, has a remarkable rate of endemism. Indeed, some 60% of the plants there are found nowhere else.

Unfortunately, the islands suffer from the same threat as many others around the globe: pressure from introduced plants and animals that are out-competing the native species. Rats,



Pink-footed Shearwater. Photo: Juan Fernández Islands Conservancy.

goats, and rabbits are three of the main species that have prompted the IUCN-World Conservation Union to classify Juan Fernández as one of the 12 most threatened National Parks in the world. Rabbits have been a particular concern for the Pink-footed Shearwater, considered Vulnerable under IUCN criteria, which breeds on only one other island outside of Juan Fernández. Not only do the rabbits compete for burrows where the shearwaters nest, they also take over burrows in mid-breeding cycle, ejecting the birds' eggs. Furthermore, the damage caused to vegetation by the rabbits leads to soil erosion that destabilizes the shearwater burrows.

The Corporación Nacional Forestal (CONAF), which administers the Chilean park system has been trying for five years, with limited resources, to rid Santa Clara of rabbits by poisoning and shooting. They have been hampered by the island's rugged terrain, which makes some burrows difficult to access. But the statistics speak for themselves: rabbit numbers quickly decreased from 220/acre in 1998 to 25/acre in 2001. From mid-January to mid-March 2004, researchers failed any evidence of rabbits on the island.

Vegetation is already making a remarkable recovery, with formerly denuded areas now covered with grass several feet high. Egg ejection rates at burrows are down significantly, and while this bodes well, it is still too early to determine the effect on the shearwater population. CONAF and visiting researchers from the Juan Fernández Islands Conservancy will continue to monitor the island in coming years and implement additional eradication measures if necessary. *Contact:* Michelle Wainstein, <mwain@u.washington.edu>.

Cormorant Slaughter Begins

The Michigan Wildlife Services (WS) division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has finalized plans for the eradication of thousands of Double-crested Cormorants on the Les Cheneaux Islands in Lake Huron. WS is acting under a Cormorant Depredation Order issued last October by FWS (*Bird Calls* Vol. 7, No. 3). WS alleges that the cormorant control is necessary because the birds eat yellow perch. ABC, National Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, and top waterbird scientists are among those who have challenged this program and submitted comments on the Environmental Assessment, and met

with WS officials—so far to no avail.

Michigan WS Director Peter Butchko is planning to reduce cormorant populations in the Les Cheneaux Islands from 15,000 to 2,000 birds within 6-10 years, referring to the area as “ground zero of the cormorant.” Scientists and conservationists have repeatedly noted the lack of scientific documentation linking cormorants to declines in yellow perch populations in Lake Huron or anywhere else in Michigan. A definitive, peer-reviewed study to examine the impact of cormorant predation on yellow perch in the Les Cheneaux Islands concluded that cormorants removed only 24,000 out of a total of 2.76 million legal-sized yellow perch in 1995 - less than 1%. Since total annual perch mortality was estimated at 45%, researchers concluded that other sources must

therefore account for the remaining mortality.

Despite a FWS study that demonstrated the conservation significance of the Les Cheneaux Islands because of the high number of breeding waterbirds they sustain, FWS signed-off on the plan. Scientists believe that control efforts will disturb the Great Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night-Heron (a Michigan Species of Special Concern) nests that are mixed with cormorant nests on these islands. Nationally, WS is proceeding with proposals to control cormorants more broadly under the FWS Depredation Order. The public can email the Michigan WS Director, <peter.h.butchko@aphis.usda.gov>, to voice concerns over the situation. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Bird Funding Initiatives for 2005

Intense pressure to rein in federal discretionary spending was evident in the 2005 Interior budget, approved by the House Appropriations Committee in June. The funding levels mirrored those approved earlier in the month by the appropriations subcommittee but were nonetheless lower than amounts requested by the Bird Conservation Funding Coalition. This included the State Wildlife Grant Program, funded at \$67.5 million (the Coalition had requested \$125 million), the North American Wetland Conservation Fund, which received \$38 million (the Coalition had requested \$54 million), and the Joint Venture program (regional based partnerships of public and private organizations for which the Coalition had asked for \$11.6 million) at \$9.4 million.

Funding for science support of the Migratory Bird Management Program was set at \$23.595 million, the same level requested by the Administration, but below the Coalition requested figure of \$26.095 million. Grant funding under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) was allotted \$4.4 million,



The U.S. Capitol. Photo: Mike Parr, ABC.

\$400,000 more than the \$4 million requested by the Administration, but still less than the \$5 million authorized and pushed for by the Coalition. The NMBCA provides critical funding for migratory bird conservation initiatives in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the U.S. Conservationists are hoping for passage of HR4114, which includes a re-authorization of the act at higher funding levels and a change in the matching funds requirement from 3:1 to 1:1 (see article P. 2).

The Interior funding bill is expected to be voted on by the full House later in June. *Contact:* David Fischer, ABC, dfischer@abcbirds.org.

Suisun IBA Oil Spill: Disaster Averted

On April 27, approximately 60,000 gallons of diesel fuel leaked from a ruptured oil pipeline into a 240-acre diked area of Suisun Marsh, a globally Important Bird Area (IBA), and the largest estuarine marsh in the U.S. Fortunately, due to the timing of the spill, the rapid closure of the flow, and the type of fuel involved, a major bird disaster was averted. Fortuitously, the spill also occurred just five miles from

a new, state-of-the-art oiled wildlife rehabilitation center - the International Bird Rescue Research Center's Northern California Bird Center - which was able to treat the few birds that were affected. To date only 22 dead birds and 14 live birds have been collected.

The spill could have been disastrous, however. During the winter, the marsh hosts up to 250,000 waterfowl, the vast majority of which, fortunately, leave before late April. The ruptured pipeline also sometimes carries crude oil rather than the more volatile - and more easily dispersed - refined diesel. For more information see: www.ibrrc.org/suisun_marsh_spill.html.

Congress continued from page 1.

government's proposal to rescind consultation requirements for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the case of toxic pesticide registration. Currently, the EPA must consult with wildlife experts at FWS or National Marine Fisheries Service when pesticides up for registration or review by the EPA may affect endangered species (*Bird Calls* Vol. 7, No. 1). If successful, the proposal would mean that EPA could register or re-register pesticides that could poison America's rarest species such as the Bald Eagle and Piping Plover, without consulting with those agencies most qualified to evaluate the threat.

Alarmed at this potential for self-regulation and lack of oversight, wildlife organizations have rallied their supporters to oppose the proposal, stating that it stands to benefit the chemical industry at the expense of endangered wildlife. "EPA has not voluntarily complied with the consultation process for some time, but instead of trying to fix the system, the government is electing to scrap it altogether," said ABC's Vice President for Pesticides and Birds, Dr. Patti Bright.

ABC, along with several other groups, including Defenders of Wildlife, the Pesticide Action Network of North America, and Earthjustice, backed the Congressional efforts, and asked their members and colleagues to contact their own Representatives to request that they sign on to the letter. This followed a coordinated campaign by these and other National Pesticide Reform Coalition members to encourage their supporters to contact the Department of Interior under their public comment period opposing these regulations. It has since been reported that more than 80,000 responses were generated. *Contact:* Dr. Patti Bright, ABC, pbright@abcbirds.org.

Lead Poisoning of Pacific Coast Trumpeter Swans Accelerates

Poisoning of Trumpeter Swans from ingested lead shot has recently become an acute problem in northwest Washington and adjacent portions of southern British Columbia. More than 400 swans were found dead during a four month period between late 2003 and March 2004, bringing the total to over 1,500 swans killed since 1999. In the United States, FWS and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are leading efforts to identify the lead source, but had no funds budgeted to test suspected field sites prior to this year's spring plowing.

Trumpeters wintering in Washington and British Columbia belong to the Pacific Coast Population (PCP), which numbers about 75% of the world's



Trumpeter Swan mortality from lead shot consumption has escalated in recent years. Photo: Clipart.com.

wild Trumpeters. When last surveyed in 2000, the PCP contained 14,225 adult swans. PCP adults had been increasing by about 5% annually from 1980-2000, as the population continued to recover from severe reductions caused by over-hunting, prior to the 1918 enactment of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Known mortality from lead poisoning is high

enough to impair this recovery. In addition, mortality of weakened birds on the long spring migration back to Alaskan nesting areas and the sub-lethal effects of lead on cygnet production remain largely unknown. The full population-level impacts of the lead poisoning will not be ascertained until the next total survey of the PCP is completed in 2005.

The swan deaths continue to occur despite a 1991 ban on the use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting. The shot that remains in the ground and on lake beds, left behind after decades of hunting, constitutes an ongoing threat. Furthermore, lead shot is still legal for hunting upland game species in many states, as is the use of lead weights for fishing.

The Trumpeter Swan Society (TTSS) is currently soliciting funds needed to complete the summer 2005 survey, and longer-term funding to continue source detection and subsequent remediation efforts. *Contact:* Martha Jordan, TTSS, <swanlady@drizzle.com>.

Hawaii Re-opens Albatross Killing Swordfish Fishery

Despite letters from ABC, Defenders of Wildlife, and Environmental Defense, the shallow setting, Hawaii-based, longline fishery for swordfish was reopened in May by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). This fishery had been closed under a federal court order and subsequently by NMFS under the Endangered Species Act because of endangered sea turtle mortality. This closure benefitted seabirds that are caught on the same longline hooks. NMFS is now requiring the use of so-called "J" hooks to reduce sea turtle mortality, but has introduced no new measures to protect seabirds.

Between 1994 and 2002, Hawaiian

longliners killed 8,447 Laysan Albatrosses and 9,987 Black-footed Albatrosses, mostly in the swordfish fishery. By comparison, after closure of the swordfish fishery, Hawaii-based longliners took 65 Black-footed and 51 Laysan Albatrosses in 2002. Albatross mortality may now escalate again unless better regulations to protect seabirds are adopted.

A loophole in U.S. laws resulted in the killing of 450 Black-footed Albatrosses and 17 Laysan Albatrosses between October 18, 2001 and February 4, 2003. This mortality resulted from the ability of Honolulu-based longline vessels that fished in international waters to land their catch of swordfish and some tuna in California. NMFS closed this loophole this spring after the fishery council refused to do so.

Longline mortality has led to new international listings of several more species of albatross, and an increase

in the threat level for others. The Laysan is now listed as Vulnerable and the Black-footed has been raised from Vulnerable to Endangered. Both of these species also are killed in Alaskan longline fisheries. Meanwhile, new research and data document the effectiveness of avoidance measures such as paired bird-scaring lines and integrated line weights in reducing albatross and other seabird mortality.

ABC is continuing its global efforts on behalf of albatrosses and petrels and is co-sponsoring, with Aves Uruguay and other organizations, the 3^d International Albatross and Petrel Conference in Uruguay this August. With State Department funding, ABC is also preparing to release a Spanish translation of its seabirds and longlining report "Sudden Death on the High Seas," which promotes solutions to this global problem. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Government's Mountain Top Mining Proposal Draws Sharp Criticism - Cerulean Warblers Threatened

A March 31, 2004 hearing on the federal government's mountain top mining proposals, held at the Department of Interior offices in Washington, DC, drew a sizeable turnout, notably including Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Congressman Frank Pallone (D-NJ). The hearing was on a proposed rule to weaken protection for streams by changing buffer zones, allowing increased levels of this destructive mining practice (*Bird Calls* Vol. 8, No. 1).

Biologists estimate that the practice of removing the tops of mountains to extract otherwise hard to reach coal and dumping the removed portions in neighboring valleys would destroy some 380,000 acres of deciduous woodland in the Appalachian Mountains. Populations of birds, particularly forest-dependent species such as the Worm-eating, Kentucky, and Cerulean Warblers, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Acadian Flycatcher, would suffer. The declining Cerulean Warbler would be particularly hard hit, with an estimated 137,000 birds lost over the next decade. Indeed, according to the government's own figures, 1,200 miles of streams and associated riparian habitat have already

been destroyed by mountain top mining in the Appalachians, and a further 2,200 square miles of mountain, stream, and forest habitat will be wiped out if the practice is allowed to continue.

In addition to a letter of opposition, prepared by ABC and signed by 50 environmental groups representing millions of concerned citizens, the government's DEIS prompted 82,000 other public comments, the vast majority of which were in total opposition to the plan. At the March hearing, 29 out of 30 speakers opposed the government's proposal - the only voice of approval coming from a mining group. ABC's Vice President for Policy, Gerald Winegrad, testified on behalf of the organization's members, supporters, and activists. ABC, Defenders of Wildlife, and Friends of the Earth also sent a letter to the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement further laying out the case for leaving current regulations for stream buffer protection areas unchanged for the benefit of birds and other wildlife. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

East Coast Red Knots Plummet, Recovery Starts Here

The Red Knot is a widely distributed shorebird that breeds in the high Arctic in both the old and new worlds. One important population breeds in the North American Arctic and migrates to the coast of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego each year - a round-trip journey of approximately 20,000 miles. Recent data show that this population has crashed since the mid-1980s, the principal reason being a paucity of horseshoe crab eggs on the beaches of Delaware Bay, upon which a large proportion of this population relies for food during spring migration.



Red Knot populations decline but horseshoe crab conservation will likely

during their stopover in Delaware Bay. Both of these alarming trends are linked to over-harvesting of horseshoe crabs, leading to a shortage of crab eggs.

There is good news for the Red Knot, however. A recent ban on harvesting of crabs around Delaware Bay during the critical spawning period - pressed for by ABC and its partners - will help to allow crab numbers to climb, and contribute to the restoration of Red Knot populations along the East Coast flyway.

Also, on 14 May, a Red Knot that had been banded in Brazil by researchers with Manomet Center for Conservation

Sciences more than 20 years ago was photographed on the coast near Jacksonville, Florida. This is the world's oldest known Red Knot, showing that the species is even longer lived than previously thought. A longer average life span indicates a higher potential for the population to rebound after temporary food shortages have ended. For more information see: www.cooper.org/cos/condor.html, www.manomet.org/WHSRN/redknotstory.htm, and www.pubs.royalsoc.ac.uk.

Last Gasp for the Po'ouli?

A lack of funding is placing the Po'ouli, perhaps the world's rarest bird, in even greater danger of extinction. This small Hawaiian honeycreeper was only discovered as recently as 1973, at which time it numbered just 200 or so birds. The decline of the species has been correlated with an increase in damage to the forest understorey associated with introduced feral pigs. Today, just three are believed to remain on the island of Maui, where biologists have been attempting to bring them into captivity for more than a year. However, bad weather has prevented their helicopter from reaching the remote forest sites on several occasions, and hampered mist-netting

efforts on the few occasions when access to the three birds' home ranges has been possible. To make matters worse, a temporary funding crisis has led to the cancellation of three expeditions this year, and the FWS budget for the project is expected to be much reduced next year.

In March 2004, ABC's Dr. Patti Bright accompanied the biologists on one forest foray as a visiting veterinarian, and reports that, while disappointed that the efforts have not succeeded to date, scientists remain hopeful that the birds will be caught soon for a captive breeding program.

The Po'ouli's plight shows disturbing parallels to that of the Mariana Mallard and Guam Broadbill. Endemic to the islands of Guam, Tinian, Saipan, and possibly Rota in the Mariana Archipelago in the western Pacific ocean, the Mariana Mallard (either a subspecies of the common Mallard, or

a hybrid of the Mallard and the Gray Duck) has suffered alarming declines due to excessive hunting and loss of wetland habitat. Listed as endangered in 1977, three of the last remaining birds were taken into captivity in 1979 but failed to breed. The last two known birds died in captivity at the San Diego Zoo shortly after. In February 2004, FWS published their final determination in the Federal Register that the species is officially extinct.

The same Federal Register item declared extinction for the Guam Broadbill. This small flycatcher had not been reported since 1984, after an abortive rescue effort only managed to capture a single male. Its extinction is blamed on introduced predators, primarily the brown tree snake (see article P. 14). For more information on the Po'ouli, *contact*: Kirsty Swinnerton, Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, <kirsty@hawaii.edu>.

ABC Acts to Resolve Laysan Albatross Chick Poisoning

Peeling lead paint from 120 aging U.S. Navy buildings on Midway Island National Wildlife Refuge is killing more than 1,000 Laysan Albatross chicks annually according to research published by Dr. Myra Finkelstein. Laysan chicks eat peeling lead paint from the buildings and paint chips that have fallen around their nests, resulting in extremely high blood lead levels.

Midway was given National Wildlife Refuge status in the 1990s, in large part because it serves as important habitat for over two million nesting seabirds. It also forms part of the ABC-designated Northwestern Hawaiian Islands globally Important Bird Area. Midway currently supports the world's largest breeding population of the Laysan Albatross and the second largest breeding population of the Black-footed Albatross. Laysan Albatross populations are declining, and the species has been designated as Vulnerable under IUCN-World Conservation Union criteria.

Dr. Finkelstein is working with ABC under a Switzer Fellowship Grant to assure the remediation of the lead-



"Droopwing" followed by paralysis are signs of lead paint poisoning in albatross chicks on Midway Island. National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: Myra Finkelstein.

based paint on and around the buildings. A private contractor, hired to run facilities on Midway when the Navy left, was to bring the lead paint problem under control, but lead-based paint still remains.

In June, Dr. Finkelstein spent a week on Midway and met with the refuge manager and other FWS personnel who will be involved with remediation efforts. FWS has allocated \$20,000 this year for the project, and since this funding is far short of the estimated \$50 million needed for total removal of the paint, the money may have to be used to fence out the Laysan chicks from a few buildings during the next breeding season. The current fencing does not extend far enough away from the buildings, failing to prevent birds

from eating the loose paint chips on the ground. Many Laysan chicks were observed suffering from "droopwing" close by. The situation may be further compounded by a possible change in refuge status to "remote" that will mean it is no longer open to visitors, reducing staffing levels.

Contact: Myra Finkelstein, <myraf@cats.ucsc.edu>.

ABC Releases Wind Energy and Birds Policy

ABC has completed its *Wind Energy and Birds Policy*, with comprehensive information on wind energy, data on bird impacts, and siting criteria to avoid such impacts. The policy was developed over the last year in response to increasing requests for ABC to provide information on wind energy and its impact on birds, and to intervene in new wind farm construction.

ABC believes that with proper siting, operation, and monitoring, wind energy can provide clean, renewable energy for America's future with minimal impacts to birds or bats. ABC emphasizes that prior to approval of new wind energy projects, and before construction proceeds, potential risks



Wind Turbines. Photo: Bureau of Land Management.

to birds and bats should be evaluated through site analyses, including assessments of bird and bat abundance, timing and magnitude of migration, and habitat use patterns. Wind energy project location, design, operation, and lighting should be carefully evaluated

to prevent or at least minimize bird and bat mortality, and adverse impacts through habitat fragmentation, disturbance, and site avoidance.

ABC's policy statement also references several sets of guidelines that are useful for such evaluations. ABC also worked with colleagues in the Bird Conservation Alliance (BCA), other scientists, and the wind industry to organize a two-day Wind/Birds/Bats workshop held on May 18-19, 2004 in Washington, DC. The workshop engaged bird enthusiasts, scientists, conservationists, the wind industry, private consultants, and government regulators to help foster a collaborative approach to preventing bird and bat impacts, while allowing wind energy to grow as an alternative energy source. Proceedings of this workshop will be published soon.

The ABC Wind Policy can be viewed at: <http://www.abcbirds.org/policy/windenergy.htm>. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Expedition Seeks Critical Cerulean Warbler Stop-off Habitat

This spring, ABC, The Nature Conservancy, and a Belizean partner, the Toledo Institute for Development and the Environment, mounted a successful expedition into the forests of Belize in an effort to confirm and review Cerulean Warbler migration stop-over sites.

It is clear that Cerulean Warbler populations are declining, but the forces driving this decline are less evident. One aspect of the species' life history that is virtually unknown is what these birds require during migration. Unlike many neotropical migrants, there are few records of Ceruleans between their breeding grounds in eastern North America and their wintering grounds in northern South America.

Most of what is known comes from a paper written by the late, renowned ornithologist Ted Parker, who reported seeing at least 100 Cerulean Warblers in April 1992, while completing a biological assessment in the Columbia River Forest Reserve in the Maya Mountains of southwestern Belize. He speculated that the reason there are so few reports of Ceruleans during migration is that they make two over-water flights. The first leg of their journey is over the western Caribbean Ocean and the second over the Gulf of Mexico, stopping for a few days or weeks in mid-elevation forest (2,000–2,500 feet) in Belize and perhaps

other Central American countries to gain weight prior to their onward migration. If this is indeed their migration route, then these mid-elevation forests are highly important habitat for the global population of Cerulean Warblers and perhaps other species that use a similar migration path.

The recent expedition, led by biologist Melinda Welton of the Tennessee Ornithological Society, was timed to coincide with same time of year as Parker's observations. The primary objective was to confirm that Ceruleans were still using the forest around Union Camp in the Columbia River Forest Reserve after the devastating effects of Hurricane Iris in October 2001. The expedition was a success, not only finding Ceruleans in numbers similar to those found by Parker, but finding them to be the most common neotropical migrant in the area.

A follow-up expedition is planned for next year, to include surveys in four or five mid-elevation forested sites in Belize (and possibly Honduras and Guatemala), and simultaneous migration monitoring studies. Efforts will then be made to work with local land managers to develop conservation plans to secure long-term protection for Cerulean Warbler stop-over habitat. *Contact:* Melinda Welton, Tennessee Ornithological Society, <weltonmj@earthlink.net>.

Brown Tree Snake Eradication Moves Forward

On June 3, the House Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, Conservation, Wildlife, and Oceans unanimously passed H.R. 3479, the Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Act. The bill, sponsored by Representatives of Guam and Hawaii, would strengthen efforts to control and eradicate the brown tree snake on Guam, and prevent the introduction of this invasive species to other areas of the U.S. It now moves to the full House Resources Committee for consideration.

The brown tree snake is believed to

have been introduced to the island of Guam by way of a military cargo ship after World War II. Its introduction has led to widespread ecological and economic devastation. Guam's native bird populations have been particularly impacted. Nine bird species have been extirpated since the snake's introduction, including the Guam Rail, Guam Flycatcher, Micronesian Kingfisher, and Guam Broadbill (see article P. 12). In addition, the snake is responsible for innumerable power outages throughout Guam because of its propensity for scaling power lines and transformers. At a density of up to 13,000 snakes per square mile, the brown tree snake poses a growing threat of dispersal to other Pacific islands, including the Northern Mariana and Hawaiian Islands.

H.R. 3479 would authorize \$18

million for each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2010 for brown tree snake control, interdiction, research, and eradication through the Departments of Interior and Agriculture; not more than \$2.6 million of which would be allocated for activities conducted by FWS.

In addition to providing needed funding, H.R. 3479 designates the brown tree snake as an agricultural pest (under the Federal Pesticide Act); requires the establishment of pre-departure quarantine protocols to prevent the introduction or spread of the brown tree snake elsewhere; and establishes a Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Committee to coordinate efforts among federal, state and local governments. *Contact:* David Fischer, ABC, <dfischer@abcbirds.org>.

FWS Cracks Down on Wildlife Smugglers

Investigations by FWS and Brazilian authorities led to the 14 May arrests of 11 Brazilians linked to an international wildlife trafficking ring. The arrests follow the 2003 sentencing of a Florida tribal art dealer, Milan Hrabovsky, who received 40 months in prison for trafficking in tribal artifacts containing wildlife parts, including feathers from Red and Green, Scarlet, and Blue and Gold Macaws. The recent arrests stem from an investigation into Hrabovsky's business contacts, which has also led to charges against the dealer's ten largest U.S. customers.

Hrabovsky pled guilty to smuggling, obstructing justice, and violating the Lacey Act, which prohibits international and interstate commerce in illegally acquired wildlife. The species involved are also protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna



Bird feathers such as those from the Blue and Gold Macaw have been illegally imported as part of the tribal art and artifacts trade. Photo: Microsoft.

and Flora (CITES).

The 11 Brazilians were employed by the National Indian Foundation, a Brazilian government agency tasked with defending the interests and rights

of indigenous peoples in Brazil. To acquire the wildlife parts, the smugglers took advantage of laws that allow native tribes to hunt animals and sell wildlife products for their own sustenance.

On 23 January, 2004, Lawrence M. Small, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, pled guilty to violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) in federal Court in Raleigh, North Carolina, and was sentenced to two years probation, and 100 hours of community service.

The case focused on a 1998 shipment of 1,000 pieces of Brazilian tribal art which included 206 pieces that contained parts of species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), CITES, and/or the MBTA. The shipment included feathers from Jabiru, Crested Caracara, and Roseate Spoonbill.

The investigation also revealed that during his career, Small personally imported 13 items that contained parts from Scarlet Macaw, Roseate Spoonbill, Harpy Eagle, and Hyacinth Macaw. *Contact:* Sandra Cleva, FWS, (703) 358-1949.

Birds in Brief

Condor Update

Five pairs of California Condors are currently incubating eight eggs in both the Arizona and California reintroduction populations. Last season's chick, the first to be hatched in the wild in more than 20 years is doing well and socializing with other birds. The total condor population, both wild and captive, now stands at 245 - a remarkable achievement given that at one point the species was down to just 21 birds. For more information visit www.peregrinefund.org.

27,000 Pelicans Vanish

Spring surveys at Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota, revealed that some 27,000 American White Pelicans mysteriously disappeared from two major nesting colonies over the course of a single week. Some sick pelicans were found, and a coyote den was also found close to the colony, but it is unknown whether either of these were primary factors in the disappearance. Birders are asked to report sightings of unusually large numbers of pelicans to FWS on (701) 752-4218. Chase Lake holds the largest breeding colony of American White Pelicans in the U.S., and was declared a globally Important Bird Area by ABC in 2003.



White Pelican. Photo: FWS.

Chicago Reduces Night-time Bird Collisions at Buildings

Conservationists have convinced 30 building managers in downtown Chicago to turn off their lights during migration season to minimize bird collisions. Birds are confused and attracted by large lighted structures during migration, and many collide fatally with the buildings as a result. Ornithologists from the Chicago Field Museum had recorded approximately 1,000 dead birds per year at one large convention complex in the city. Thanks to the lights-out policy, this has been reduced by nearly 80% over two years. Other cities are urged to follow suit. Visit the Fatal Light Awareness Program Web site at: www.flap.org.

Bermuda Petrels Relocated

After last September's Hurricane Fabian damaged nesting burrows (*Bird Calls* Vol. 7, No. 3), an attempt is being mounted to restore breeding Bermuda Petrels to Nonsuch Island that offers better protection against hurricanes than more exposed colonies. Ten juvenile birds have been relocated to artificial burrows on the island and are being fed by staff from Bermuda's Department of Conservation Services. It is hoped that the birds will imprint on the island and return to the same burrows to nest as adults. The species, once thought extinct, was rediscovered in the 1950s, and its population has been steadily increasing in recent years. This petrel is occasionally sighted by birders during pelagic trips off the eastern seaboard of the U.S.

New Alliance Members

ABC is delighted to welcome six new members to the Bird Conservation Alliance: Arkansas Audubon Society, Friends of Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge, Golden Gate Raptor Observatory, Hawk Migration Association of North America, The National Wildlife Refuge Association,

and Operation Migration. For more information on the Alliance, visit www.birdconservationalliance.org.

FWS Grants Awarded

FWS has announced \$3.8 million in new grants under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (see articles P.2 and 9). Grants are being provided to groups working in 16 U.S. states and more than 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries. The federal funding will be matched by \$16 million raised by grantees. North American Wetlands Conservation Act grants totaling \$18 million were also awarded for projects in the U.S. and Canada, along with Federal Duck Stamp funds to acquire 3,500 acres to augment existing National Wildlife Refuges in Michigan, Texas, and West Virginia. See <http://birdhabitat.fws.gov/NMBCA/projectsNar.htm> and <http://northamerican.fws.gov/NAWCA/projects/USprojects/USmap.htm>.

Tropical Birding

ABC and the tour company Tropical Birding have teamed up to offer an exciting series of conservation-related international bird tours during 2005. Visit: www.tropicalbirding.com, or call ABC at (540) 253-5780.

SHOP ABC

For all your birding and backyard bird feeding needs, visit the ABC store: <http://shop.abcbirds.org>. ABC members receive a

15% discount on all store items, so join ABC today.



El Oro Parakeet Protected in Ecuador

ABC partner Fundación Jocotoco has acquired a critical in-holding in southern Ecuador to provide further protection for the endangered El Oro Parakeet. The 75-acre plot links 2,800-acres in existing parcels that make up the Buenaventura Reserve, and protects an apparent "hotspot" for the species, that contains several nests and where more parakeets have been seen than anywhere else.

The parakeet was discovered in August 1980 by Dr. Robert S. Ridgely, now ABC's Vice President for Endangered Bird Conservation. The El Oro Parakeet, described as *Pyrrhura orcesi* (honoring one of Ecuador's most famous naturalists, Gustavo Orces), has a tiny range encompassing a narrow band of humid cloud forest at around 3,000 feet.

The discovery of the parakeet, and later of the spectacular Jocotoco Antpitta close to Podocarpus National Park, inspired Ridgely and others to establish Fundación Jocotoco in the late 1990s to purchase and manage the habitats of Ecuador's most critically threatened birds.

Beginning in 1999, much of the parakeet's habitat was protected by the creation of Fundación Jocotoco's



El Oro Parakeet. Photo: Michael Dietrich.

Buenaventura Reserve. In recent years the reserve has grown to include guard stations and visitors' cabins. But one especially important piece of land remained in private hands: the "hotspot" for the parakeets. The owner only grudgingly allowed access to researchers and birders, and the parcel was deteriorating from heavy grazing and illegal logging. Knowing that his land was a high priority for conservation, the owner wanted many times its market price.

This year the price went down for the owner's own reasons (possibly related to financing an election campaign), and he offered to sell at a reasonable price if the deal could be settled in two months. Ridgely and ABC swung into action, gaining the generous support of many friends. A matching donation from the Western Alliance for Nature was critical. Timing was tight, but the funds were wired to Ecuador in late May, and the purchase was made on the June 7. *Contact:* Robert Ridgely, ABC, <rbridgely@abcbirds.org>.

Western Snowy Plover Population Up for De-listing

On May 21, 2004, FWS published a Federal Register notice of its intent to consider the Pacific Coast population of the 'Western' Snowy Plover for removal from the Endangered Species List. The Service announced that it has sufficient evidence that de-listing may be warranted, and will proceed with a full status review.

The Pacific Coast population of the Western subspecies of the Snowy Plover breeds primarily on coastal beaches from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico. The species was originally listed as Threatened in 1993. A draft recovery plan was drawn up in 2001 but has yet to be finalized. Recent surveys indicate 157 breeding locations along the entire Pacific Coast of the U.S., five in Washington, 19 in Oregon, and 133 in California.

The decision to continue with the de-listing process has been opposed by National Audubon Society, which launched a campaign based on the lack of sound scientific evidence to show that the threats to the population's survival have been reduced. *Contact:* Dan Cooper, Audubon California, <dcooper@audubon.org>.

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