

Avian Influenza Spreads: Role of Wild Birds Debated

Recent outbreaks of the avian influenza type ‘A’ virus, known as H5N1 or “avian flu” are causing worldwide concern. All subtypes of type ‘A’ influenza viruses occur naturally in wild birds, particularly waterfowl, most causing little or no threat to the health of birds or people. However, H5N1 is an especially virulent and contagious strain, and was first recorded in domestic poultry in Asia. It has since spread to some wild birds in Asia and Eastern Europe. It has also infected



American Bird Conservancy strongly opposes the culling of wild birds, such as these Brant, in response to H5N1. Photo: Gary Smyle.

more than 100 people and caused the deaths of 61 of them. Almost all human cases to date have been transmitted from poultry, and there have been no recorded instances of transmission from wild birds to humans.

Wild Birds and H5N1

Whereas wild birds may play a role in the spread of this disease, the early spread through Asia appears to more closely track the commercial movements of domestic poultry. If migratory birds were the key factor in its movement, outbreaks could also have been expected to occur in areas where they have not yet been recorded, such as the Philippines, Taiwan, and Australia, which lie along regular migratory pathways for Asian birds. Nonetheless, recent outbreaks in China, Russia, and Eastern Europe may be linked to wild bird movements.

Transmission from human to human has only been recorded in very rare cases, and in those cases the disease has not progressed past the second individual. Unless the virus mutates to be readily transmissible from

human to human, the risk of a major human outbreak is low. Most human infections currently respond to drugs commonly used to treat human influenza strains, though resistance to those drugs has been recorded in Vietnam and may become a more significant factor in the future.

ABC’s Position

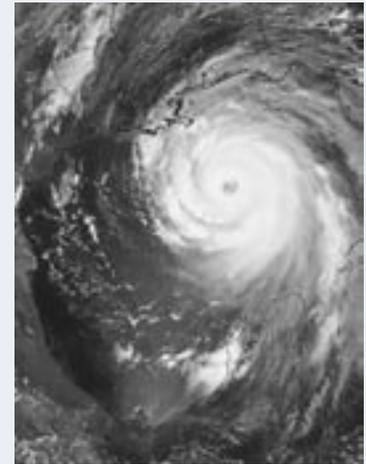
American Bird Conservancy strongly opposes the culling of wild birds and the draining of wetlands in response to H5N1. The best science, as well as common sense, indicates that these actions are impractical, and could even result in an increase in the spread of the virus by causing birds to disperse more widely. The World Health Organization and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization have also taken this position.

Effective control of the disease should instead first focus on the domestic poultry industry, including: stringent global monitoring programs; immediate culling and correct disposal of infected flocks; limiting contact between domestic

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ABC Project News—Projects underway to improve and protect habitat in ABC’s domestic and international programs. See stories page 9.

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Abbreviations

ABC: American Bird Conservancy
 FWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Arkansas Water Projects Controversy

Arkansas' Grand Prairie is bisected by the White River a number of miles from where the Ivory-billed Woodpecker was recently rediscovered, and where FWS is now spending upwards of \$17 million protecting habitat for the species. An Army Corps of Engineers project that will remove 150 billion gallons of water each year from the river to irrigate rice fields has recently been approved, and is now being challenged in court by The National and Arkansas Wildlife Federations, who cite potential harm to Ivory-billed Woodpecker habitat as a reason to halt the project. The Army Corps of Engineers submitted a biological assessment to FWS, contending that the project would not damage wetland habitat, and won the right to proceed following a court case earlier this year. Congress has since appropriated \$12 million dollars for the project, meaning that work on the pumping stations can begin any time. Jim Bodron, the project manager, was quoted in the Washington Post as saying, "This project has no significant negative environmental impacts."

The hydrology of the White River is also governed by outflow from previously constructed upstream dams, and the entire system is now subject to significant human manipulation. The currently proposed project will remove approximately 2% of the river's normal flow. Some claim that this alteration may dry out Ivory-billed Woodpecker habitat while others believe it may aid in restoring the normal hydrology, thus benefiting the woodpecker. ABC believes that



Ivory-billed Woodpecker, from *American Ornithology*, (published 1800s) by Alexander Wilson and Charles Lucien Bonaparte.

ABC believes that all partners should work to maintain the seasonal hydrology as close to natural conditions as possible.

all partners should work to maintain the seasonal hydrology as close to natural conditions as possible. At this stage, it is clear that this will likely be achieved through a combination

of altering or halting pumping activities and discharge regimes from upstream dams.

Another proposed project would dredge a nine-foot-deep channel in the lower White River to accommodate year-round barge traffic.

Although the project

has alarmed conservationists due to its potentially negative impacts on seasonal wetland hydrology, water quality, sedimentation, and the course of the White River itself, there seems to be little probability that it will be approved and completed. Contact: Arkansas Wildlife Federation, <awf@aristotle.net>, or The Army Corps of Engineers, www.mvm.usace.army.mil/grandprairie/contact_us/default.asp.

Bottomland swamp forest. Photo: Clark Jones/
 Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Endangered Species Act Faces Extinction?

In a move that could significantly weaken the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the deceptively-named Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005 (HR 3824). The 229 to 193 vote occurred on September 29th. An earlier vote on an alternative, offered by Congressmen George Miller (D-CA) and Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), and supported by a broad coalition of conservation groups, including ABC, was narrowly defeated by a margin of 206 to 216.

The Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act was introduced by Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA), Chairman of the House Resources Committee, and Dennis

Cardoza (D-CA). The legislation was strongly opposed by environmental groups, wildlife enthusiasts, and scientists for sacrificing

America's precious natural heritage for the sake of corporate interests and property developers.

Since its passage in 1973, the Endangered Species Act has been responsible for saving numerous species from extinction, including the Bald Eagle (which nearly disappeared in the lower 48 states due to DDT poisoning in the 60s and 70s), the Whooping Crane, gray wolf, Florida panther, and countless other birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and plants.



The Brown Pelican is one of the many species that has benefitted from the protections of the Endangered Species Act. Photo: Gary Smyle.

Among H.R. 3824's most disturbing changes are the elimination of mandatory habitat protections in favor of voluntary measures, the elimination of oversight by endangered species

experts in the registering of hazardous pesticides, the ability for political appointees to unilaterally overturn science-based decisions, and the

potential to bankrupt the ESA's budget by forcing maximum reparation to developers who plan the biggest, most destructive projects on the most ecologically valuable land.

The Senate is expected to write its own ESA legislation early next year, and ABC and other conservation groups will be working to ensure that any new bill strengthens protections for endangered species rather than weakens them. Contact: Perry Plumart, Director, Conservation Advocacy, ABC, <pplumart@abcbirds.org>.

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Key Provisions of H.R. 3824 That Weaken the Endangered Species Act

- Eliminates Critical Habitat (CH) designation, which sets aside both land currently occupied by an endangered species and areas that can be restored to allow for future recovery and range expansion. H.R. 3824 replaces CH with poorly-defined 'areas of special value.' The lack of specificity on this issue leaves the door open to varied interpretation, thus hampering enforcement.
- Eliminates mandatory consultation between government agencies and endangered species experts at FWS, replacing them with voluntary measures. This would enable registration of new toxic pesticides or the re-registration of pesticides previously deemed unsafe without biologists ever being given the opportunity to review data, comment, or influence the process.
- Allows the Secretary of The Interior to unilaterally disregard scientific evidence and overturn decisions regarding endangered species, with no recourse for the public.
- Provides for massive financial hand-outs to those who seek to develop important wetlands, forests, and prairies. The government would have to pay developers for the most expensive potential use of land should the presence of an endangered species prevent them from undertaking development projects. This could encourage property owners to plan the most destructive and expensive development conceivable, and bankrupt the endangered species program.
- Currently, federal agencies must adhere to Recovery Plans, set in place to ensure adequate protection for endangered species. H.R. 3824 allows federal agencies to pick and choose which aspects of the Recovery Plans they wish to follow. It further mandates that species be delisted in individual states regardless of their national status.

California Condor. Photo: FWS.

Thanks to ESA protection and concerted conservation efforts, Whooping Cranes have begun to make a comeback. Photo: FWS.



Battle Over Eagle-killing Pesticide Carbofuran Not Over Yet

In June, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) produced a scathing Ecological Risk Assessment on the remaining legal uses of the pesticide carbofuran. It was estimated, for example, that 85% of a flock of Mallards feeding just once in an alfalfa field within a week of spraying would be killed.

The report concludes that "...birds are being exposed to carbofuran levels that result in direct mortality," and that "exposure and mortality of non-target birds occur frequently with carbofuran registered uses."

The report, produced by the EPA's Environmental Fate and Effects Division, documents more than 27 incidents

in which at least 7,300 birds were killed by legal uses of the pesticide. ABC's Avian Incident Monitoring System database (www.abcbirds.org/aims) has documentation of at least 371 incidents due to both legal and illegal uses of the pesticide. These incidents resulted in more than 40,000 bird deaths including Bald Eagles, other raptors, shorebirds, and songbirds.

...in spite of the recent damaging report, the EPA has not suspended any current uses, is continuing with its re-registration review, and is not scheduled to make any decision until late 2006 or 2007.

As much as 2.8 million pounds of liquid (or "flowable") carbofuran is applied each year in the U.S., mostly on corn, alfalfa, cotton, and tobacco. In 1992, the manufacturer, FMC Corporation, withdrew the granular formulation from the market to

avoid having it banned by the EPA due to environmental concerns. An American ban would have severely limited the company's ability to sell the pesticide overseas, as the U.S. has international agreements that require the reporting of chemicals cancelled in this country, but voluntary withdrawal of a chemical by the manufacturer prevents the government from notifying other countries.

The EPA is now in the process of conducting a re-registration review of carbofuran to determine its permitted uses. Yet, in spite of the recent damaging report, the EPA has not suspended any current uses, is continuing with its re-registration review, and is not scheduled to make any decision until late 2006 or 2007, meaning all current uses will continue unchanged at least until then. FMC is actively fighting the report's conclusions, and senior staff at EPA have indicated that re-registration of the chemical is likely, regardless of its effects on birds. Contact: Michael Fry, Director, Pesticides and Birds Campaign, ABC, <mfry@abcbirds.org>.



Bald Eagle. Photo: ClipArt.com

Avian Flu, continued from page 1:

poultry and wild birds to limit the possible spread to wild flocks; and restrictions on the movement of domestic poultry, including banning poultry and other live bird imports and exports where needed. Because there have been recent records of cage birds transported in the international pet trade testing positive for H5N1, a ban on the trade in cage birds should be implemented to limit the spread of the virus.

ABC also supports efforts to monitor the spread of the virus in wild birds,

as well as research into any differential effects across species and regions, as well as gathering more data on the ecological strategy of the virus, so that H5N1 may be more fully understood and future outbreaks prevented.

To date, H5N1 has not been recorded in North America. The observation of dead wild birds does not necessarily indicate the arrival of the virus to America, as bird deaths can be caused by a variety of diseases as well as other factors such as pesticide poisoning. Large bird die-offs should be

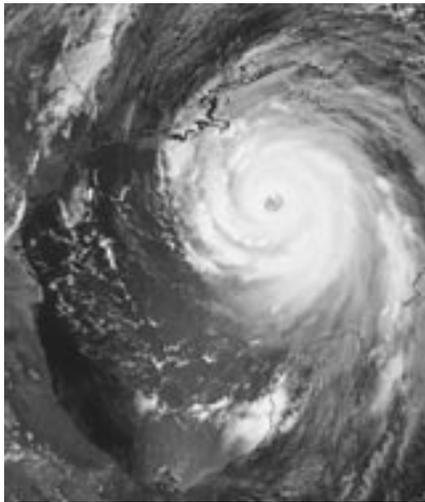
reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service so they can investigate the exact cause. There is no evidence that feeding of wild birds plays a role in the spread of the disease, but people should clean bird feeders regularly to limit the spread of other diseases.

ABC will continue to monitor the situation and issue additional advisories if and when new information comes to light. Contact: Michael Fry, Director, Pesticides and Birds Campaign, ABC, <mfry@abcbirds.org>.

Hurricanes Pound Wildlife Refuges Along Gulf Coast

National Wildlife Refuges in three states sustained considerable damage as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita rampaged through the Gulf Coast region. Sixteen refuges in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama—a total of 365,000 acres—have been temporarily closed due to the destruction caused by these powerful storms.

The worst damage was wrought in Louisiana's Breton National Wildlife Refuge, an ABC-designated Globally Important Bird Area, comprised of a series of barrier islands including Breton Island and all of the Chandeleur Islands—13,000 acres in all. This refuge is now half the size it was before the storm. This land loss will affect bird species that nest on the refuge's various islands, including Brown Pelican, Laughing Gull, and Royal, Caspian, and Sandwich Terns.



Hurricane Katrina approaching the Gulf Coast. Image courtesy of MODIS Rapid Response Project at NASA/GSFC.

Sixteen refuges in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama—a total of 365,000 acres—have been temporarily closed due to the destruction caused by this powerful storm.

Endangered and threatened species found at Breton, such as the Least Tern and wintering Piping Plovers, will likely also be impacted.

Hurricane Katrina brought down many trees at Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge in Mississippi, including cavity trees where endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers roost and nest. Foraging habitat for these woodpeckers was also destroyed.

Fortunately, the endangered Mississippi population of the Sandhill Crane made it through the hurricane with minimal losses. A captive flock at an Audubon center in New Orleans survived the storm, and the 140-bird flock at the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge is relatively intact. Of 38 birds that have radio transmitters, 25 have been found alive.

Data continues to be collected on Hurricane Katrina's impact on Gulf Coast wildlife. For more information, visit the FWS Website: www.fws.gov.

Gulf Coast Parks to be Opened to Energy Exploration

The Emergency Military Spending Bill signed by President Bush in May contained language that will permit oil and gas exploration on National Park properties. This marks the first time that the federal government has allowed seismic exploration on National Park property, although energy exploration has been allowed on rare occasions on other park properties over the last decade.

The bill contains four paragraphs, written by Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), that would secure the State of Mississippi's claim to natural gas lying under the Gulf Islands National Seashore, a network of islands along the Gulf Coast that have been designated by ABC as a Globally

Important Bird Area; two of the five Mississippi islands are also designated Wilderness Areas, ostensibly the highest form of federal protection.

Gulf Islands National Seashore is a prime location for breeding birds such as Brown Pelicans, Wilson's Plovers, Royal and Least Terns, Black Skimmers, and a number of egret and heron species. It is also an invaluable stopover site for thousands of migrating landbirds, and migrating and wintering shorebirds, including Piping Plovers.

A state bill signed last year by Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour will allow oil and gas leases in state waters surrounding the islands. The governor also signed legislation shifting drilling authority from the state's



Oil and gas exploration on National Park properties will threaten nesting habitat for many species, including this Black Skimmer and Royal Terns. Photo: ClipArt.com

Department of Environmental Quality to the Mississippi Development Authority, an economic agency with no responsibility for the environment. Contact: Perry Plumart, Director, Conservation Advocacy, ABC, <pplumart@abcbirds.org>.

American Kestrel Rebounds in 2005?

Preliminary reports from East Coast hawk watch sites indicate dramatically higher numbers of American Kestrels than have been seen in recent years. Counts at the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory at Kiptopeke are more than double the numbers recorded over the same period in each of the last three years, and numbers at Cape May are also up.

This is a welcome change from recent data from Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys, as well as from hawk watch sites, which showed that the American Kestrel has declined precipitously in the Northeastern United States. While no single factor has been identified as the primary cause, the varied habitat requirements of this small falcon (open or semi-open foraging areas with perches and nest cavities) may make it especially vulnerable to a combination of threats.

In some areas, the decline of family farms has resulted in the loss of suitable habitat, while elsewhere, nest cavity availability has decreased commensurate with declines in the cavity-creating Northern Flicker (which has been given a consistent 'significant declining trend' by the Breeding Bird Survey).

The Cooper's Hawk, which experienced a population resurgence following bans on both hawk shooting and DDT, has also been observed preying on American Kestrels. A nest box study at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania for example showed a 55% decline in the kestrel population over five years due to Cooper's Hawk predation.

Finally, West Nile Virus (WNV) seems to have hit northeastern kestrel populations hard. The kestrel is on nearly every state's list of WNV-affected species, and the steep declines over the past five years appear



American Kestrel populations face a wide variety of challenges, including West Nile Virus and loss of suitable habitat. Photo: Gary Smyle.

to coincide with the virus's spread throughout the region.

While too early to conclude that preliminary 2005 counts constitute a turnaround for the kestrel, biologists hope that the news will continue to be encouraging. Contact: Gemma Radko, ABC, <gradko@abcbirds.org>.

Navy Kept in Holding Pattern Over North Carolina Airstrip

Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in eastern North Carolina was designated a Globally Important Bird Area by ABC in 2002 due to its significant concentration of wintering waterfowl, particularly the 30,000 or so Tundra Swans and 40,000 Snow Geese that call the area home during the winter months. The refuge was subsequently classified by Defenders of Wildlife as one of the ten most threatened in the country, in part because of plans to build a major naval airbase less than five miles away. The resulting noise and pollution from thousands of takeoffs and landings would, biologists feared, have irreparably harmed the refuge. The high potential for bird strikes by low-flying jets also posed a serious risk to both birds and pilots.



A Washington Appeals Court decision has, for now, halted plans by the U.S. Navy to build an airbase close to Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Photo © 2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved..

Defenders and three other environmental groups, plus the counties of Washington and Beaufort, subsequently filed two lawsuits opposing the Navy's plans, citing insufficient environmental review.

In early September, a Washington D.C. Appeals Court sided with the environmentalists by upholding an earlier lower court decision to halt progress on the landing site, and demanding a more thorough environmental review. The Navy has not been prevented from continuing the process of land acquisition, but conservation advocates hope that this most recent court decision will prompt the Navy to abandon its plans and seek an alternative location that has less impact on wildlife. Contact: William Lutz, Defenders of Wildlife, (202) 772-0269.

Seabird Deaths—A Bicoastal Issue

Scientists are blaming warmer ocean temperatures for a sharp increase in the number of dead and dying seabirds recovered along the Pacific Coast, from California to British Columbia, between May and July this year. Biologists working with the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST), based in Washington State, estimate that mortality was some 100,000 birds (mostly Brandt's Cormorants and Common Murres) above normal. These were nearly all adult birds, meaning that in some areas, this year's breeding productivity was close to zero. The seabirds, collected by volunteers from COASST and other citizen science groups, were emaciated and had no food in their stomachs, suggesting starvation.



Greater Shearwater deaths along the East Coast could be part of a cyclical event. Photo: Bill Hubick.

Oceanographers have traced the cause of the die off to weaker than usual northerly winds, which in turn caused a decrease in "upwelling," a process whereby nutrient-rich water from lower depths is drawn to the surface by cool winds, providing fuel for an entire food chain. The upwelling failure was amplified by a very mild preceding winter, which left more seabirds alive to compete for very limited resources.

Meanwhile, on the East Coast, biologists from Florida to Maryland have also recovered an unusual number of dead seabirds, particularly Greater Shearwaters, which washed ashore between late June and mid July this year. In total, some 700 birds were recovered, with the highest concentration found in South Carolina. Examination of the birds revealed no sign of exposure to toxins, but most were emaciated, likely indicating a scarcity of food. No conclusions have been made as to the exact cause, but there is some historical evidence that this could be a ten-year event corresponding to shearwater breeding cycles. For more information, contact: Julia Parish, COASST, (206) 221-5787, or visit www.coasst.org.

Marine Toxins Impact Arctic Seabirds, Then Other Wildlife via Bird Droppings

A recent Canadian study, published in the journal *Science*, has shown pesticide and heavy metal toxins that are polluting the world's oceans are being passed up the food chain and eventually showing up in otherwise pristine areas of the Arctic. Seabirds exposed to toxins such as mercury, DDT, and other pesticides are expelling high concentrations of these contaminants or their metabolites in their droppings, which in turn impacts other species and habitats.

Seabird breeding colonies form the basis of the food chain in otherwise resource-deficient regions of the north. Guano from these nesting colonies nourishes algae and plankton that grow in and around pools at

the base of the colony cliffs. Invertebrates that feed on the plant life are eaten by fish, which are preyed upon by other fish, birds, and finally, some mammals.

Researchers working in the Canadian Arctic discovered contaminant concentrations of up to 60 percent above normal while testing chemical levels in pools below cliffs supporting Northern Fulmar nesting colonies. Pools nearest the cliffs, where more of the birds' guano and food remnants fall, showed the highest concentrations of pollutants. Three of these pools contained so much mercury that they neared or surpassed Canada's limit for wildlife safety.



Northern Fulmars, exposed to high concentrations of pollutants through fish, are passing those toxins on to other species in the food chain. Photo: ClipArt.com.

The discovery of high levels of contaminants in this food chain is cause for concern for these Arctic landscapes and wildlife. It is yet more evidence that continuing marine pollution is having a severe impact on all aspects of life on the planet, however remote. Contact: Michael Fry, Director, Pesticides and Birds Program, ABC, <mfry@abcbirds.org>.

Conservation News—Recent highlights from ABC's

First Range-wide Survey for Endangered Interior Least Tern

In 2005, ABC coordinated the first range-wide survey of the interior population of the Least Tern, providing the first complete picture of its numbers and distribution.

The Least Tern nests along both coastlines of the United States and Mexico, and on sandbars in large rivers, primarily within the Mississippi, Missouri, Platte, Arkansas, and Red River systems. In 1985, the “interior” Least Tern, (all Least Terns nesting more than 30 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico) was federally listed as Endangered due to low numbers and concerns about habitat loss. At the time, survey coverage for interior Least Terns was incomplete and their range-wide distribution was poorly known. Survey coverage improved steadily following listing, though large portions of the range remained inadequately surveyed, and local monitoring efforts were rarely coordinated or analyzed at larger scales.

In April 2004, ABC and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers brought together biologists from across the

tern's entire range, resulting in the formation of the ‘Interior Least Tern Working Group,’ with the aim of improving monitoring and trend analysis.

Then, during the 2005 breeding season, ABC coordinated the first national survey of all known interior Least Tern nesting areas. The primary objectives of this survey were to provide a minimum count of the number of adult terns occurring in North America during the breeding season, document the distribution and abundance of nesting colonies, and describe the types of habitats that are being used for nesting.

Crews surveyed 4,515 river miles, over 14,000 acres of salt flats, 12 reservoirs, and 61 sand pits. A total of 17,871 terns were counted at a minimum of 487 different colonies. A majority of adult terns were counted on rivers (89.9%), with much smaller numbers at sand pits (3.7%), reservoirs (2.7%), salt flats (2.1%), industrial sites (1.5%), and roof-tops (0.3%). Just over 62% of all adults were



ABC has coordinated the first interior Least Tern survey to serve as the basis for a long-term monitoring plan for this species. Photo: Michael Guilfoyle, US Army Corps of Engineers.

counted on the Lower Mississippi River between Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

More than 140 participants from a large number of agencies and organizations took part in this survey, which will provide the foundation for ongoing efforts to devise a range-wide monitoring plan. Contact: Casey Lott, Interior Least Tern Monitoring Program Coordinator, ABC, <clott@abcbirds.org>.

Colorful Pufflegs Thrive at Swarovski Reserve

Evidence that protection and habitat restoration efforts are working to save the Colorful Puffleg in Colombia came this past month when a record number of birds were observed in the newly-created “Reserva de Aves Mirabilis-Swarovski.”

When ProAves Colombia identified the key population of this Critically Endangered hummingbird, and revealed that its tiny population was at enormous risk, ABC and Swarovski Optik rapidly moved to secure the funds for ProAves to purchase and



Record numbers of Colorful Pufflegs have been observed at the new Swarovski Reserve. Photo: Fundación ProAves.

protect its only remaining habitat, designated as an Alliance for Zero Extinction site (*Bird Calls* Vol. 9, No. 1).

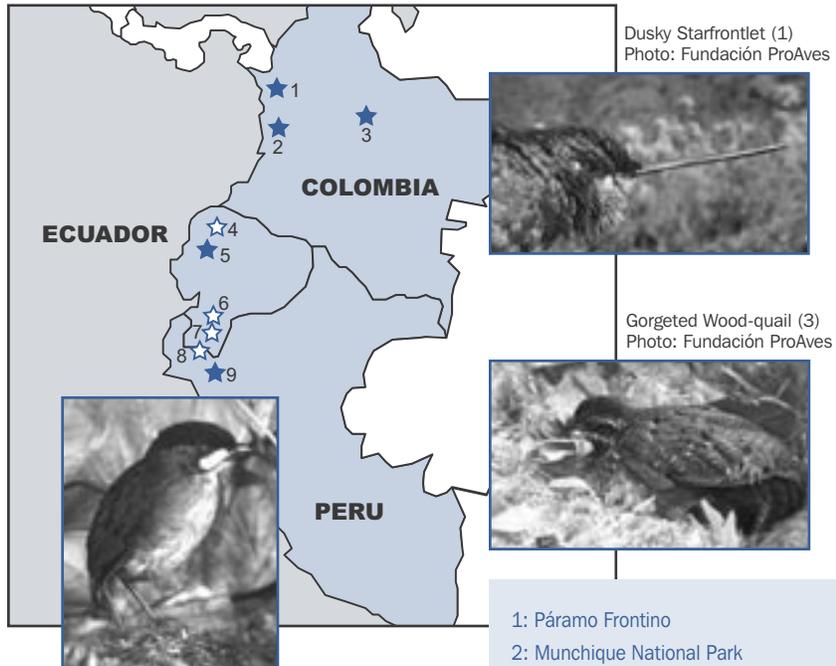
New feeders, placed at the recommendation of Swarovski Optik Director Gerold Dobler, have been a great success, visited by flocks of hummingbirds. The project is looking for small financial donations to provide feeders and sugar. Contact: Paul Salaman, Director, International Programs, ABC, <psalaman@abcbirds.org>.

programs across the Western Hemisphere

ABC Expands Andean Reserve Network in 2005

So far in 2005, ABC has helped partner groups in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru purchase more than 21,500 acres to create five new private bird reserves, and expand four others. The reserves are located at key sites for endangered and critically endangered endemics, and declining habitat-restricted species. These include the Dusky Starfrontlet, Colorful Puffleg, Gorgeted Wood-quail, Long-wattled Umbrellabird, Jocotoco Antpitta, and Pale-headed Brush-finch.

One of the Colombian reserves (map location 3) is also designed to protect an important wintering concentration of the declining Cerulean Warbler. ABC is extremely grateful to the many foundations and individuals that have contributed to this program, and to our partner organizations in the Andean region whose hard work has made these projects possible. ABC is working with its partners in the Alliance for Zero Extinction (www.zeroextinction.org)



Jocotoco Antpitta (7)
Photo: Doug Weschler/VIREO

Dusky Starfrontlet (1)
Photo: Fundación ProAves

Gorgeted Wood-quail (3)
Photo: Fundación ProAves

to halt imminent bird extinctions by effectively safeguarding the 89 sites in the Americas to which the 109 endangered and critically endangered single-site, endemic species are confined. Contact: Paul Salaman, Director, International Programs, ABC, <psalaman@abcbirds.org>.

- 1: Páramo Frontino
- 2: Munchique National Park
- 3: Hacienda La Victoria, Cordillera Oriental
- 4: Río Canande
- 5: Río Silanche
- 6: Yunguilla Reserve
- 7: Tapichalaca Reserve
- 8: Utuana
- 9: Alto Mayo

★ Solid stars indicate new ABC reserves.
☆ Outlined stars indicate reserves ABC has added to in 2005.

New Domestic Habitat Projects at ABC

ABC has entered into a cooperative agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop land management guidelines to assist private landowners in improving habitat for high priority birds across the U.S. The project will help to guide conservation actions supported by the Farm Bill, and has the potential to benefit hundreds of bird species across millions of acres of the U.S. over the next decade. Contact David Pashley, Vice President for Conservation Programs, ABC, <dpashley@abcbirds.org>.

ABC has received a multi-state three year grant to design and manage a major bird monitoring program for the north-eastern U.S. that will be implemented in partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences. Under the grant, species of high conservation concern, such as migrating shorebirds, owls, and rails, will benefit from new, standardized monitoring protocols. Without effective monitoring, the effectiveness of conservation actions are difficult or impossible to measure and quantify. Contact David Pashley, ABC, <dpashley@abcbirds.org>.

Please support the



The Saltillo savanna is one of the last refuges for the Endangered Worthen's Sparrow and other high-priority grassland species such as Long-billed Curlew and Mountain Plover.

To learn more about this and other on-the-ground conservation projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to donate on-line through ABC's secure server, visit: www.abcbirds.org/counterparts

Condors Stomach New Threats

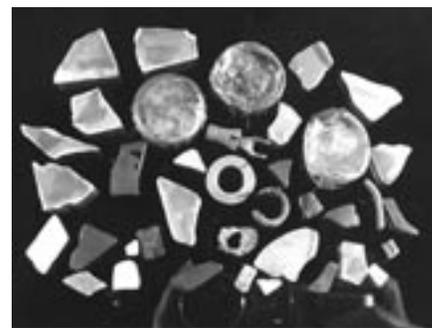
Elation at the hatching of four wild California Condor chicks this year quickly turned to disappointment and concern when one of the fledglings died from West Nile Virus, and a second had to undergo an emergency operation to remove material impacted in its gut.

The chick that died from West Nile was one of two hatched at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in California.

Since 2002, concern over the dangers posed by West Nile Virus has prompted biologists to trap and vaccinate all captive and released condors (*Bird Calls* Vol. 6, No. 3). Lab tests had indicated that inoculation of the parent birds conferred some immunity on their young, but this now appears to be insufficient to protect them for an entire season. Biologists will now likely capture future offspring earlier to vaccinate them individually.

When one of two chicks hatched at Vermillion Cliffs, Arizona was observed to be losing weight, it was taken to the Los Angeles Zoo, where veterinary surgeons found an astounding amount of foreign material impacted in its gut. This included 14 shotgun shell casings, one shotgun shell, five bottle tops, a metal bracket, three electrical fittings, several washers, plastic bag pieces, and enough fragments of broken glass and plastic to fill a coffee cup. Miraculously, the chick survived and was placed in captivity for possible future re-release.

This was by no means the worst case of parent condors feeding hazardous materials to their young, though this chick was particularly underdeveloped as a result. The reasons behind this behavior are not fully understood. Condor release program biologists have enlisted volunteers to clear up trash hot-spots, but to little effect.



Material removed from the gut of a condor chick in 2003. Photo: Jesse Grantham, FWS.

Behavior modification techniques on captive-raised birds are now being considered as a possible solution, though no specifics have yet been forthcoming.

Despite these recent setbacks, the total wild condor population now stands at 125, with 151 in captivity—a definite conservation success story. Contact: Denise Stockton, FWS, (805) 644-5185.

EU Ban on Wild Bird Imports

As a direct result of the avian influenza epidemic, the European Union has imposed a temporary ban on the import of wild-caught birds into Europe. The decision followed revelations that a parrot had died from the H5N1 strain while in quarantine in Britain. The ban will last until December 2005, when it will be re-reviewed by the EU's Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health.

The ban covers all captive live birds, other than poultry, imported for commercial purposes. Birds will still be allowed to be moved between approved zoos and similar institutions,

and eggs of non-poultry birds can be imported for use in authorized hatcheries if their shells are decontaminated upon arrival, or if they are being sent to zoos.

According to the German animal charity Pro Wildlife, the EU legally imports 1.76 million caged birds each year. Organizations such as the World Parrot Trust and ABC have campaigned to halt the pet bird trade, citing insufficient controls and monitoring, and, in many cases, a lack of sustainability. For more information visit: www.birdsareforwatching.org.

As of press time, drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is being considered for inclusion in the budget reconciliation process.

Until this process is finalized, the fate of ANWR's coastal plain and its wildlife remain uncertain.

Call your elected representatives to request that ANWR remains off-limits to oil exploration. See www.congress.org for the names of your elected officials.



Snowy Owl.
Photo: ClipArt.com

Jimmy Buffett Supports New Home for Endangered Parrots

Musician Jimmy Buffett has joined a group of local and international supporters, including ABC, working to provide a new home for the only existing captive flock of Puerto Rican Parrots. The parrot is one of the world's rarest birds, with approximately 30 individuals in the wild and 150 in captivity. The species, listed as Critically Endangered under IUCN-World Conservation Union criteria, is slowly recovering under a captive breeding and reintroduction program, which likely prevented its extinction after the population dwindled to just 13 birds in 1973.

The new building, costing \$2.4 million, will replace the current aviaries that have deteriorated substantially



Puerto Rican Parrots are among the world's rarest birds. Photo: FWS.

in recent years, and will also provide state-of-the-art breeding facilities. A range of organizations are assisting the fundraising effort, which is being coordinated by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). The bulk of the funding has been contributed by FWS.

Jimmy Buffet (whose fans refer to themselves as "Parrotheads") agreed to help with the project by designing a T-shirt based on the parrot, and distributing it through his Margaritaville stores, with all profits going towards the new facility. He will also be providing an autographed directors' chair to be auctioned on eBay. To help, contact Sona Chambers, NFWF, 404-679-7209.

On September 13, the House of Representatives passed legislation to protect more than 10,000 acres of wilderness in the heart of the Caribbean National Forest, vital habitat for the Puerto Rican Parrot and a suite of other endemic species, including the Puerto Rican Tody, Puerto Rican Screech Owl, and Elfin Woods Warbler. The measure now heads to the Senate for final approval. This legislation would create the first tropical forest wilderness area in the National Forest System. Advocacy efforts to support the legislation were led by the Campaign for America's Wilderness, with support from ABC and other members of the Bird Conservation Alliance.

El Yunque, part of the Caribbean National Forest. Photo: Alan A. Lew

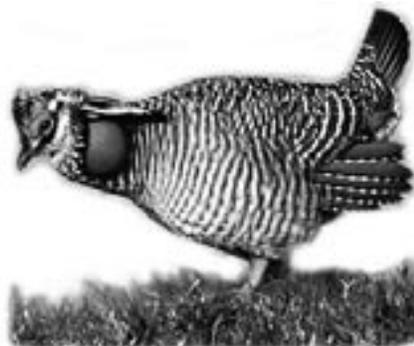
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act Passes Senate

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act (S.260) moved one step closer to becoming law in June, when it passed the Senate with unanimous approval. The bill seeks to formalize an existing program that provides financial assistance to private landowners interested in restoring and managing wildlife habitat on their property.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is a voluntary scheme that was originally established in 1987. Funds for the existing program would be doubled under the new law, making \$75 million per year available to landowners for the next five years. Typically, supported improvement projects include restoring or enhancing wetland habitats, replanting areas with native plants, or fencing riparian

areas to exclude livestock. The interested landowner must first contact FWS, and then work with the agency to develop a project design before funds are made available for project implementation.

Projects that contribute to the survival of endangered, threatened, or



Bird species such as the Lesser Prairie Chicken could benefit from the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act. Photo: FWS.

candidate species, or migratory birds of management concern are favored, as are projects that contribute to achieving the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Since its inception, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has helped restore 722,500 acres of wetlands, 1,573,700 acres of prairie and native grasslands, and nearly 5,900 miles of riparian and stream habitat. Bird species of conservation concern, including Lesser Prairie Chicken, Gunnison Sage Grouse, and Mountain Plover, could make significant strides towards recovery if interested landowners act to take advantage of these funds. For more information visit: www.fws.gov/partners.

Wind Farm Near Horicon Marsh Advances

A proposed 133-turbine wind farm, to be located near Horicon Marsh in northern Wisconsin, moved forward in early September when the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin denied a petition from conservationists for a second complaint hearing, following approval of the project. The wind farm would cover nearly 32,400 acres, and be sited within two miles of Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, posing a threat to the birds that migrate through the marsh each year.

Horicon Marsh is the largest freshwater cattail marsh in the U.S. and has been designated a Wetland of International Significance under the RAMSAR Convention. It is an important stopover site for thousands of migrating shorebirds and hundreds of thousands of waterfowl each year, and is also the largest nesting grounds for the Redhead east of the Mississippi. It has also been designated by ABC as a Globally Important Bird Area.

Advocates for the marsh contend that the wind project should be located a minimum of five miles from the refuge, as studies show that the numbers of birds that would be impacted decrease significantly that far from the marsh.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association, National Audubon Society, and ABC have voiced their opposition to the project, and collaborated in a radio advertising campaign aimed at gaining the attention of the Governor and other Wisconsin regulators.

Following the rejection of the hearing, Horicon Marsh System Advocates filed a petition in Dodge County Circuit Court demanding a review of the approval of the wind farm. Despite this legal action, the builder of the wind farm, Forward Wind Energy Center, expects the project to be completed as scheduled in 2006. Contact: Perry Plumart, Director, Conservation Advocacy, ABC, <pplumart@abcbirds.org>.

Studies have shown that while wind power produces clean, renewable energy, the incorrect siting of a wind farm can lead to significant numbers of bird and bat kills. The most egregious example of this is the Altamont Pass wind farm in California (*Bird Calls* Vol. 9, No. 2). With some 5,000 turbines, Altamont is the largest wind power facility in the world, and has been at the center of legal wrangling following the deaths of Golden Eagles and thousands of other birds. The facility is located in an area with significant concentrations of raptors.

In September, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors renewed permits for the controversial turbines, ignoring many of the concerns voiced by conservationists, state and federal regulators, and the state's Attorney General. The permits require the power company to shut down the facility—initially for two and eventually for three and a half months in the winter, fit power lines with devices that prevent raptor electrocutions, produce an environmental impact report, and 're-power' the entire site (replace numerous existing turbines with fewer, more efficient ones) within 13 years. However, there are significant loopholes that could enable them to delay, or avoid acting altogether on many of the permit's provisions. Groups opposing the board's decision have 30 days under the state's Environmental Quality Act in which to file a legal challenge.

Photo: Mike Parr

Recorded Calls Appear to Confirm Ivory-bill

A series of hooting calls captured by digital recording units left out in the swamps of Arkansas seem to confirm the rediscovery of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. The recordings were made public after three ornithologists announced plans to publish a paper challenging the existence of the woodpecker, which had been based on video and observer evidence. The paper was withdrawn after the challengers heard the recordings.

Researchers have stated that they do not believe that the recordings are of taped Ivory-bill calls used by volunteers to lure woodpeckers to respond, though they stop short of saying that the recordings are definitively those of Ivory-bills (see story page 2).

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology Website provides the recordings in downloadable form, along with similar calls from White-

breasted Nuthatches and Blue Jays, so that members of the public can draw their own conclusions.

Meanwhile, Cornell has chosen volunteers for this winter's Ivory-bill search program. Volunteers commit to a two-week stint in the swamp, with the field season commencing in December 2005, and ending in April 2006. Contact: Mike Parr, ABC, <mparr@abcbirds.org>.

Hawaiian Birds Benefit from \$14 million in Federal Funding

Native bird protection programs in Hawai'i received a boost this August, as the Senate Appropriations Committee allocated \$14 million for Department of Interior-related projects there.

The Hawai'i Endangered Bird Conservation program, which manages captive propagation facilities at the Keauhou and Maui Bird Conservation Centers, received funding to continue maintenance of endangered avifauna. These centers play a key role in endangered species recovery by creating captive populations that can then be reintroduced into recovered or protected habitats.

The Hakalau National Wildlife Refuge, part of the last known habitat of the 'Alala (Hawaiian Crow), received funding for habitat recovery and restoration. A reintroduction effort



The 'Alala (Hawaiian Crow) will benefit from the newly-received funding. Photo: Alan Lieberman, San Diego Zoo.

using captive-raised 'Alalas is being planned once appropriate reintroduction sites have been identified and protected.

Funds were also provided to facilitate the purchase of a native rainforest, known as Wao Kele o Puna, on the Big Island. This 40-square mile area,

where the last known sighting of the now likely-extinct O'u occurred, provides essential wildlife habitat for a vast number of native Hawaiian plant and animal species, including several that are listed as Threatened or Endangered. The nearby Volcanoes National Park also depends on this forest as a seed bank to provide new growth after fresh lava flows destroy the park's own native forests. In addition, Wao Kele o Puna protects the aquifer that provides water to rapidly growing population centers outside the park.

Other Hawai'i-related initiatives receiving funding include an expansion of Haleakala National Park, and the program to prevent the invasion of the brown tree snake. For more information visit Senator Daniel Inouye's website, <http://inouye.senate.gov>.

New Colombian Bird Species Found: Conservation Urgently Needed

Two new species of tapaculo have recently been discovered in Colombia's Central Cordillera region. Tapaculos are small, mouse-like birds, usually dark colored, that skulk in thick forest undergrowth, making them difficult to study in the field.

Stiles Tapaculo is the more widespread and common of the two, and although not considered threatened at this time, is still vulnerable to deforestation. The Upper Magdalena Tapaculo is rare, and restricted to a narrow belt of montane forest along a few valleys on the east slope of the Magdalena Valley. It was first reported by ABC's Robert Ridgely in 1980, but it was not until 23 years later that ABC International Programs Director Paul Salaman, in conjunction with ABC's partner organization, Fundación ProAves, was able to return to

the site and confirm this new species' existence.

The Upper Magdalena Tapaculo faces an uncertain future. It is known from only one protected area, 371 acres of privately-owned forest known as the Merenberg Reserve. Alarmingly, the owners have been logging throughout the area, and other suitable habitat is being converted from oak woodland to cattle pasture. Today, less than 39% of the original vegetation survives, and much of what remains is fragmented. This tapaculo species has been categorized as Endangered, and there is a high risk of extinction within the next two decades if conservation action is not taken.

The Upper Magdalena Tapaculo occurs alongside other globally threatened or range-restricted birds, such as the Magdalena Parakeet, Dusky-headed Brush-finch, and Tolima Dove



Upper Magdalena Tapaculo. Photo: Fundación ProAves.

(an Alliance for Zero Extinction-listed species).

ABC and Fundación ProAves are presently working with the Colombian National Parks administration and local communities to implement conservation actions and secure a safer future for these new tapaculo species. Contact: Paul Salaman, Director, International Programs, ABC, <psalaman@abcbirds.org>.

FWS Plans to Remove Mallards from Hawai'i

In August, FWS released a draft of their first new plan in 20 years aimed at recovering Hawaiian waterbirds. Following a public comment period, which ended in October, the service is now finalizing the plan, which will be released next year.

Among a range of actions aimed at protecting habitat, eliminating introduced predators, and countering disease for the Hawaiian Coot, Hawaiian Common Moorhen, Hawaiian Stilt, and Hawaiian Duck, the draft plan includes an ambitious program to remove feral mallards and hybrid Mallard-Hawaiian Ducks from the islands.

While recent surveys have shown that the Coot, Common Moorhen, and Stilt are all stable or increasing in numbers, the Hawaiian Duck has become increasingly hard to monitor due to the rise in the rate of hybridization between it and introduced, feral



Feral Mallards pose a significant threat to native Hawaiian Duck populations. Photo: ClipArt.com

Mallards. Biologists have grown concerned that without action, the native species could be hybridized into extinction.

Of the four birds covered by the plan, only the Hawaiian Duck is recognized as a full species by FWS. The others are recognized only as subspecies of mainland forms.

Although culling programs typically provoke opposition from animal welfare groups, the proposed program will represent only a minute fraction of the four to five million Mallards shot legally by hunters each year in the U.S. Contact: Mike Parr, ABC, <mparr@abcbirds.org>.

Study Links Outdoor Cats to Mental Illness in Humans

A review of numerous studies over the past decade of the pathogen *Toxoplasma gondii* has linked outdoor cats to mental illness and other serious medical conditions in humans. Evidence is mounting that toxoplasmosis, which can be spread by cats, appears to cause increased rates of schizophrenia and other psychiatric disorders in people. Though toxoplasmosis can infect other animals and humans, cats are the only animals that can transmit it by shedding the organism in their feces.

The review was recently published in the journal *Veterinary Parasitology*, and announced at a global conference on parasitology, held in New Zealand in October, by Professor Milton McAllister from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Professor McAllister stated that cats usually become infected with *Toxoplasma* by ingesting an infected animal "so a cat gets infected by catching and eating mice or birds, or by eating raw meat scraps."

In his review, McAllister noted a long list of maladies made worse by toxoplasmosis infection in people with suppressed immunity, such as encephalitis in AIDS patients. He also cited a growing list of studies that link toxoplasmosis with problems in people whose immune systems are not impaired. These include: fever, enlarged lymph nodes, weakness and debilitation, damaged vision, and multi-systemic infections with serious complications such as pneumonia and hepatitis. These problems are in addition to the mental conditions mentioned above.

"Cats that remain indoors have a low potential to become infected if they don't have access to mice and if they are not fed raw meat or meat products," McAllister said. "Owners can safely keep an indoor cat simply by practicing good hygiene with the litter box and washing hands after daily cleanings," he added.

Needless to say, wild birds as well as people will benefit from keeping cats indoors. McAllister also stated that the feeding of stray cats by cat protection groups to spare homeless cats from euthanasia unfortunately increases the spread of toxoplasmosis to wildlife, domestic animals, and people. Contact: Linda Winter, Director, Cats Indoors! Campaign, ABC, <lwinter@abcbirds.org>.

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Birds in Brief

Albatrosses Helped by Taiwan Fishing Fleet Reduction

Taiwan has announced that it will reduce its longline tuna fleet by 120 vessels or 5%. This reduction will help reduce some of the pressure on seabirds such as albatrosses, and on marine turtles, which are killed on longline hooks. For more information on the seabirds and longlining issue read ABC's report at www.abcbirds.org/policy/seabird_reports.htm.



Spotted Owl. Photo: ClipArt.com

FWS Pushes Back Spotted Owl Review

In August, FWS reopened the public comment period for the status review of the California race of the Spotted Owl. The review was initiated by a 90-day finding on a petition to list the owl as Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

On June 21, 2005, FWS published a positive 90-day finding (*Bird Calls* Vol. 9, No. 2), thereby taking the first step in a process that triggers a more thorough review

of all the biological information available to determine if listing under the Act is warranted. The original comment period closed on August 22, 2005, but FWS extended the deadline until October 28. The listing petition was triggered by a lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity.

First Nesting Attempts by Reintroduced Whooping Cranes

Several pairs of Whooping Cranes established nesting territories in Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, Wisconsin, this spring. One pair produced the first egg laid by reintroduced Whooping Cranes in the eastern migratory flock. The egg did not hatch, but hopes are high that this and other pairs will nest successfully next year. The eastern crane flock, which consists of 42 birds, has been established over the last five years from birds taught to migrate behind ultralight aircraft from Wisconsin to Florida. For more information, visit the International Crane Foundation's Website, www.savingcranes.org.

Gnatcatchers Catch a Break

An agreement in the Rancho Mission Viejo case in Orange County, California will permanently protect more than 17,000 acres for the Endangered "coastal" California Gnatcatcher and other species, while allowing for the development of 14,000 new homes over the next 25 years. The agreement is the result of 18 months of negotiations between the county's Board of Supervisors, land owners,



California Gnatcatcher. Photo: Scott Streit, www.bird-friends.com

and six conservation groups, including Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, and Audubon California. The groups had sued following the county's approval of an original development plan, which set aside less protected land. See: www.seaandsageaudubon.org/RanchoMVSettlement.htm

New Canadian Law Prevents Bilge Oil Dumping

Canada enacted a law this May that ends bilge oil dumping at sea, which in the past has resulted in the deaths of some 300,000 seabirds annually off the coast of Newfoundland alone.

Before this new law was passed, fines for bilge oil dumping in Canada were much lower than those in the United States. Some irresponsible shippers, instead of properly disposing of bilge oil, would simply dump it in Canadian waters. Under the new Canadian law, polluters can now be fined between \$100,000 and \$500,000 per violation.

Point Reyes Publishes Marine Bird Conservation Plan

PRBO Conservation Science, has published 'The California Current Marine Bird Conservation Plan.' This report summarizes information on 92 species of marine birds, and provides science-based recommendations for their conservation. The California Current System is a rich and varied marine ecosystem reaching from southern British Columbia to central Baja California. For more information visit: www.prbo.org/cms/index.php?mid=66.

Threatened Flame-winged Parakeets Flock to New Nest Boxes

Little did ProAves Colombia's Parakeet Project staff know just how desperate the Flame-winged Parakeet would be for nesting sites until they began erecting nest boxes. The Loro Parque Fundación-sponsored project (www.loroparque.org) had been studying the species—endemic to Colombian Andean forest near the capital city of Bogotá—throughout 2005, when they suspected that a lack of mature trees and nesting cavities could be a limiting factor for the species' population, that stands at just a few thousand individuals in an area where little natural forest survives.

The Parakeet Project erected 20 nest boxes, beginning in mid-September. When field workers revisited



Flame-winged Parakeets, which have little natural nesting habitat remaining, are being helped by the Parakeet Project's nest box program. Photo: Fundación ProAves.

the boxes ten days later, they were astonished to find five boxes were already occupied by pairs of parakeets, some already having laid up to 13 eggs. This was obviously no coincidence, and clearly shows that

simple and economical solutions can often be found to help threatened species' populations.

ProAves staff will continue to monitor and study the nest boxes and assess rearing success before expanding the nest box campaign. The Parakeet Project also works with the local community to promote awareness of the parakeet, which continues to be threatened by logging, and lacks adequate long-term protection. ProAves Colombia has partnered with ABC on several other rare bird projects and is a member of the Alliance for Zero Extinction. Contact: Paul Salaman, Director, International Programs, ABC, <psalaman@abcbirds.org>.

ABC Welcomes the Following New Members to the Bird Conservation Alliance:

Central New Mexico Audubon Society: www.newmexicoaudubon.org/cnmas

Golden Gate Audubon Society: www.goldengateaudubon.org

Greenville County Bird Club: <http://gcbirdclub.org>

North Dakota Birding Society: www.ndbirdingsociety.com

Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society: www.smbas.org

Saving Birds Thru Habitat: www.northbirding.com/SBTH/sanctuary/

Southern Maryland Audubon Society: www.geocities.com/smdaudubon



Ruby-throated Hummingbird Photo: ClipArt.com

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