

Site for Globally Endangered Santa Marta Parakeet Protected

Fast action by ABC, Conservation International (CI), and Fundación ProAves of Colombia has saved one of the world's most important sites for endangered species. The three organizations stepped in to purchase 1,600 acres on the northwest slope of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta massif, on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, before the land could be developed for vacation homes.

The site is the sole breeding ground for the Globally Endangered Santa Marta



The new reserve is the last stronghold for the Santa Marta Parakeet. Photo: Fundación ProAves.

Parakeet. Another 18 bird species and five threatened amphibians can also only be found there. The site is a vital stopover point for neotropical migratory birds such as the Cerulean and Golden-winged Warblers that breed in the United States and Canada. In a report issued in December (see article p. 7), the Alliance

for Zero Extinction listed the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta as one of the world's most important sites for endangered species.

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Endangered Species Act Saving America's Birds: New Report by ABC

A new ABC report shows that the Endangered Species Act has been and continues to be successful in saving America's rarest birds. Of 43 birds listed under the Act that breed in the continental United States, 63% have either increased since listing, are stable, or have been stabilized by conservation measures.

Less than a quarter of the species are declining, and many of these were added to the list relatively recently, giving conservation measures less time to work. In fact, species that have increased since listing have been on the endangered list an average of ten years longer than those that have decreased,



showing that given time, conservation efforts can recover populations.

The report highlights many success stories, with nine species having experienced more than tenfold population increases since they were first protected by the Act. These include our national bird, the Bald Eagle, whose population has increased to 20 times its 1970s levels. Other success stories include the Brown Pelican, Peregrine Falcon, Aleutian Canada

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Abbreviations

ABC: American Bird Conservancy
 BLM: Bureau of Land Management
 EPA: Environmental Protection Agency
 FAA: Federal Aviation Administration
 FCC: Federal Communications Commission
 FWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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Arctic Refuge Saved—For Now

In December 2005, the Senate voted to remove an amendment to the Defense Bill that would have allowed drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), a Globally Important Bird Area. Forty-three U.S. senators, led by Washington State's Maria Cantwell, voted to sustain a filibuster to prevent a vote on the Defense Bill. When the ANWR amendment was subsequently stripped out, the Defense Bill passed.

After several attempts to approve drilling in ANWR through the budget process failed, the Congressional leadership of both the House and Senate added the ANWR provision to the military spending bill in the hope of forcing a vote. Alaska Senator Ted Stevens, who has pushed to open ANWR to oil and gas production since he joined the Senate in 1980, led the effort.

ABC and other conservation groups have long opposed drilling in ANWR

because of the coastal plain's fragile ecosystem and its abundance of bird life. The coastal strip provides nesting habitat for 70 species of migratory birds, including ABC Green List species such as the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, and American Golden-Plover.

The battle for ANWR is only one of the many oil threats to key habitat in Alaska. More permits for oil exploration in Alaska are now being sought than ever before, and areas such as Teshekpuk Lake are being opened up to drilling without the public fanfare that has surrounded ANWR (see article p. 16).

Although plans to drill in ANWR have been temporarily halted, those in favor of oil and gas recovery there will likely continue to push for drilling in 2006. Contact: Perry Plumart, ABC, <pplumart@abcbirds.org>.

Santa Marta *from page 1*

In late December, Fundación ProAves learned of the impending sale of plots of land for the construction of vacation homes. Less than a month later, ABC and CI had secured the \$130,000 necessary for Fundación ProAves to buy the entire site that will now be called the El Dorado Nature Reserve.

"We were able to save this site from the bulldozer in the nick of time and managed to safeguard the parakeet's last remaining stronghold," said George Fenwick, President of ABC.

"This is an important conservation success and a superb example of international cooperation."

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is one of the highest coastal mountain ranges in the world, rising from the shores of the Caribbean Sea to almost 19,000 feet. It contains extraordinary numbers of species found nowhere else, across a multitude of isolated ecosystems. Protecting the new El Dorado Nature Reserve not only prevents destruction of valuable and rare biodiversity, it also ensures a clean water source for coastal towns that depend on two watersheds that have their sources at the site. Contact: Paul Salaman, ABC, <psalaman@abcbirds.org>.

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is one of the highest coastal mountain ranges in the world. Photo: Fundación ProAves.

Crab Regulation Tied up in Knots

ABC and other members of the Bird Conservation Alliance, including Defenders of Wildlife, New Jersey Audubon, and National Audubon Society, continue to push for strong regulations to restrict the take of horseshoe crabs in Delaware Bay.

In late February, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Horseshoe Crab Management Board voted unanimously to send a variety of possible horseshoe crab management strategies out for public comment. The option favored by ABC and the conservation community is to impose a two-year moratorium on the take of horseshoe crabs in Delaware and New Jersey. Another option (promoted by the commercial seafood industry) is to take only male horseshoe crabs in Delaware Bay.

Overfishing of the crabs has led to dramatic declines in the *rufa* subspecies of

the knot, prompting fears that it could become extinct by the end of the decade unless crab numbers are allowed to recover.

Overfishing of horseshoe crabs has led to dramatic declines in the *rufa* subspecies of the knot.

Public hearings will be conducted this spring, and the Board will meet in May to determine which management option will be implemented. More details can be found at www.asmfc.org.

Meanwhile, New Jersey has set a deadline of April 7 for public comment on its own proposed statewide two-year ban on crab take, with a promise of "the most aggressive protection" for the knot made by the Deputy Commissioner for Natural



The *rufa* Red Knot has shown an alarming population decline. ABC and other conservation groups have recommended that the species be listed under the Endangered Species Act. Photo: T.D. Rodda.

Resources for the state's Department of Environmental Protection.

In related news, an emergency petition to list the *rufa* subspecies of the Red Knot under the Endangered Species Act was denied by FWS in January, though the agency is still considering listing the knot as endangered and is currently reviewing population data. Contact: Perry Plumart, ABC, <pplumart@abcbirds.org>.

Horseshoe crabs. Photo: Mike Parr.



New Decisions Favor Economics over Endangerment

Two recent legal challenges have led to decisions highlighting an apparent trend: economic interests of developers and landowners taking precedence over endangered species concerns.

In September 2004, following a five-year review of the Marbled Murrelet prompted by a logging industry lawsuit, FWS concluded that murrelets nesting in old-growth forest in California, Oregon, and Washington do not constitute a Distinct Population

Segment. This decision contradicts the findings of the review's independently commissioned report and the Service's own field office in the region. Widely considered to be politically motivated, the move is a step towards delisting the murrelet and easing federal logging prohibitions on millions of forested acres.

In August 2005, following legal challenges by two homebuilders' associations and a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals opinion that found in favor

of the developers, FWS proposed the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl for delisting. The owl is listed in Arizona as a Distinct Population Segment. Essentially dismissing the birds as unimportant, the court stated, "While the Arizona-based owls are discrete from other pygmy-owls, the Service did not adequately articulate that they are of sufficient biological and ecological significance to the whole pygmy-owl subspecies." For more information, visit: <http://news.fws.gov/NewsReleases>.

Proposed Gas Drilling Project Threatens Greater Sage-Grouse



FWS

The Biodiversity Conservation Alliance has vowed to fight a new proposal by the BLM to drill 7,700 new gas wells in Wyoming's Red Desert, important habitat for the Greater Sage-Grouse.

The announcement by BLM came just weeks after the results of a study were released showing that natural gas development is affecting population size, nest selection, and distribution of Greater Sage-Grouse in western

Wyoming. The study, conducted by University of Wyoming doctoral student Matt Holloran, found that drilling activity cut male sage grouse populations at nearby mating grounds by an average of 51 percent, compared with three percent at undisturbed sites.

The study took place in the Pinedale Anticline and Jonah development fields, huge sagebrush basins slated for additional coalbed methane development. Of the 313 square miles of the Pinedale Anticline field, only 7.3 square miles (approximately 2%) are not leased for oil and gas development. The current Administration, members

of Congress, and the energy industry are pushing for an even greater expansion of drilling in the region in the coming decade.

Distribution of the Greater Sage-Grouse (an ABC Green List species) is limited due to the increasing scarcity of sage-brush habitat. The species is currently restricted to 11 Western states. FWS denied the species protection under the Endangered Species Act in January 2005, contending that state, local, and private conservation efforts were adequate. Contact: Erik Movar, Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, (307) 742-7978.

Florida Scrub-Jay Not Endangered, According to FWS

FWS will not upgrade the status of the Florida Scrub-Jay from Threatened to Endangered, the agency announced in February. FWS received two separate petitions in 2002 and 2003 from several local organizations, including Indian River Audubon Society, Barrier Island Preservation Association, and Save Our Big Scrub, to reclassify the species. When FWS failed to issue a decision, several of the petitioners filed suit, resulting in a court settlement in which the agency agreed to make a determination.

FWS noted several threats to the scrub-jay, a U.S. endemic, in its "90-day finding," including habitat loss, malicious shooting, susceptibility to disease, and predation by cats, but in the end, the agency decided that these threats were not significant enough to indicate that the species is "in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range." Contact: Gemma Radko, ABC, <gradko@abcbirds.org>.

New ESA Report *from page 1*

Goose, California Condor, San Clemente Loggerhead Shrike, and Whooping Crane.

In contrast to continental species, Hawaiian birds have fared less well, with several having become extinct in recent decades. Nevertheless, conservation measures have helped 14 of the remaining endangered Hawaiian birds to stabilize or increase, whereas only five are currently in the decrease category. Hawaiian birds have suffered from a barrage of threats that are hard to counter, such as introduced diseases, alien predators, hurricanes, and severe habitat alteration.

ABC's report comes in the light of recent attacks on the ESA. In October, the House of Representatives passed the Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act (HR 3824), an amendment to the ESA largely viewed in the conservation community as weakening endangered species protections in favor of business interests (*Bird Calls* Vol. 9, No. 3). The bill was sponsored by House Resources Committee Chairman, Richard Pombo, who claims that the Endangered Species Act "drastically interferes with landowners rights to use their property." However,



Aleutian Canada geese—saved from extinction by the Endangered Species Act. Photo: FWS.

a review of legal cases posted on the Committee's own Website cites only five occasions in the last decade when compensation has been sought as a result of ESA restrictions.

The Senate will now debate its own ESA legislation, which had been delayed pending completion of a report by the Keystone Center. The Center released its findings this February, and while the group failed to reach consensus on the contentious issue of Critical Habitat, it did recommend that the role of Recovery Plans be elevated to make them the primary management tool for listed species, and that more incentives be provided to landowners.

To download the entire ABC report, visit www.abcbirds.org/esa. For information on the Keystone report visit: www.keystone.org.

A Bleak Time for Blackwater

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, 27,000 acres of tidal marshes on Maryland's Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, may soon be bordered by a massive new development if a proposed plan receives final Dorchester County planning permission. The Blackwater Resort Community Development Project will turn 1,000 acres of land beside the Little Blackwater River, along the refuge's northern border, into a jumble of more than 3,000 houses, plus a complex containing a hotel, conference center, and golf course.

Hundreds of people, including representatives from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, voiced their opposition to the plan at a February 9 hearing, citing the potential detrimental effects to the Little Blackwater River, the refuge, and its wildlife. Part of the development would occur in what is currently a "Critical Area," designated for resource conservation, and would



Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge is an ABC Globally Important Bird Area, providing crucial stopover habitat for many species of migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, and landbirds. Photo: FWS.

entail the largest growth allocation in Maryland history. FWS has voiced concern over the project, stating in an official letter to the Directors of the Dorchester County Planning and Zoning Office and the City of Cambridge Department of Public Works, "The proposed changes to the headwaters area from this and other development activities could have significant and long-lasting effects on the Little Blackwater River and

associated natural habitats." The letter, cosigned by Glenn Carowan, the Manager of Blackwater, goes on to say, "Development activities that affect sedimentation and storm water management also affect our ability to restore the health of the Chesapeake Bay."

Blackwater has some of the best remaining habitat on the Chesapeake Bay, and is vital for migrating landbirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl. The refuge contains the largest population of Bald Eagles on the Atlantic Coast north of Florida and hosts up to 60,000 ducks and geese during the winter. Important populations of breeding Prothonotary Warblers, Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows, and other birds are also present. It has been designated a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention and a Globally Important Bird Area by ABC. To get involved, visit Chesapeake Bay Foundation's "Say No to Blackwater Resort" campaign at www.cbf.org.

A Slow Demise for Harmful Rat Poisons

The Environmental Fate and Effects Division of the EPA's Office of Pesticides has drafted a plan that will severely limit the sale and use of rat poisons. The plan reflects recommendations made by ABC and other members of the National Pesticide Reform Coalition. In official letters to the EPA Director of Pesticide Programs, Coalition members demanded that the three most toxic rat poisons, (brodifacoum, bromodialone, and difethialone) be banned for consumer sales and only made available to certified pest control operators—only the less toxic alternatives should be permitted for over-the-counter sales. The Coalition further demanded that all outdoor uses of rat poisons be restricted to tamper-resistant bait

stations that prevent children and non-target wildlife from accessing the poison, and contain label instructions that clearly outline the legal uses of the product.

The poorly regulated use of rat poisons has been responsible for the deaths of thousands of raptors including Golden Eagles, Great Horned Owls, and Red-tailed Hawks, which consume the poison by preying on the carcasses of dead or dying rodents. Brodifacoum is also responsible for more cases of child poisoning than any other pesticide in the United States.

Before the plan is accepted, however, it must be subjected to further analysis to evaluate the costs of the proposed changes and the benefits they will

provide to wildlife and consumers. Due to the paperwork requirements, this analysis must be available for public comment, meaning a final decision may not be forthcoming until September 2006.

Even after a decision is made, removal of these highly toxic rat poisons from the market will likely be further delayed because industry could request a grace period to change over to the new products and packaging, and to allow for the sale of existing stocks on store shelves. Despite these delays, it appears the battle over rat poison, birds, and children may nearly be over, culminating in a likely victory for wildlife and public health. Contact: Michael Fry, ABC, <mfry@abcbirds.org>.

Dramatic New Tower Kill Statistics Released

An ABC-funded study, conducted by Land Protection Partners, has concluded that for the ten avian species most frequently killed at towers, including Ovenbird, Red-eyed Vireo, and Tennessee Warbler, total annual mortality likely ranges from 490,000 to 4.9 million birds for each species. Blackpoll Warblers are killed at an estimated rate of 136,452 to 1.36 million per year, and Bay-breasted Warblers, an ABC Green List species, were assessed with an estimated annual mortality ranging from 225,000 to 2.25 million. The Cerulean Warbler, another Green List species, and one that has been proposed for Endangered Species Act listing, was estimated to be killed at a rate of 3,550-35,498 birds per year. The results from this study further highlight the need for reform in the construction and siting of communication towers.



This Red-eyed Vireo was killed in a collision with a tower. This neotropical migrant species is one of the ten most frequently killed in such collisions. Photo: Andrew Paulios/WBCI.

ABC has been monitoring permit applications made to the Federal Communications Commission for individual towers, and is appealing any that present a potential hazard to birds. Surprisingly, no new towers have presented such a threat since September 2005. While this could be chance, it is also possible that tower companies are no longer putting forward applications that they know will now be subject to a challenge from ABC, a very favorable result for birds.

ABC is also having some success in working with the tower companies themselves to limit avian mortality. ABC has held meetings with industry leaders to persuade them to voluntarily adopt bird avoidance measures such as strobe lighting and keeping towers unguyed.

“...for the ten avian species most frequently killed at towers ...total annual mortality likely ranges from 490,000 to 4.9 million birds for each species.”



morguefile.com

Research being conducted by Dr. Joelle Gehring at towers in Michigan appears to confirm the efficacy of keeping towers shorter, unlit and unguyed, and using only strobe lights. For more information, visit ABC, www.abcbirds.org/policy.

Town Takes Independent Action on Towers

Aside from efforts being made at the national level to limit bird mortality at towers, some local communities are taking steps independently to provide for the safety of migratory birds and to keep light pollution in check. For example, on December 13, 2005, the Town Board of Hector, New York enacted Local Law No. 2 of 2005, known as “Tall Structures over 199 Feet above Ground Level.”

Hector, a town of approximately 5,000 people, sits on the east shore of Lake Seneca, the largest of central New York’s Finger Lakes and a major natural migration funnel. The new law mandates an application and review process for proposed tower construction. Towers will only be permitted if consistent with the town’s comprehensive siting plan. For example, towers must be less than 199 feet high (thus not requiring lighting under FAA regulations), and antennae must be placed

on existing towers and buildings to the greatest extent possible to minimize the need for new tower construction.

Local residents, including field ornithologists from the Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory in Burdett (part of Hector township), contributed testimony to support passage of the law, and ABC provided scientific information. Regrettably, this victory may be temporary, as cellular phone and other communications companies (with FCC support) are increasingly challenging local zoning regulations unless communities can demonstrate “hazards to human health and safety.” Furthermore, the proposed Ensign/McCain Broadband Investment & Consumer Choice Act (Senate Bill S.1504), introduced in July 2005, could effectively abolish all zoning restrictions on cellular towers if it gains Senate and House approval.

Study Pinpoints Epicenters of Imminent Extinctions



ABC has joined conservation groups around the world to stave off an imminent extinction crisis. New research, published

in December 2005 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (www.pnas.org), shows that safeguarding 595 sites would save hundreds of Earth's species.

Conducted by scientists working with the 55 member organizations of the

Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE), of which ABC is a leading member, the study identifies 794 vertebrate and conifer species threatened with imminent extinction, each of which is in need of urgent conservation action at a single remaining site on Earth.

The study found that just one-third of the sites are known to have legal protection, and most are surrounded by human population densities that are approximately three times the global average. Conserving these 595 sites should be an urgent global priority involving people from national governments to local communities, the study's authors state.

The United States ranks among the ten countries with the most sites. These include Torrey Pines in California, a cave in West Virginia, a pond in Mississippi, and six sites in Hawaii. The Whooping Crane and the recently rediscovered Ivory-billed Woodpecker are two American bird species that qualify for inclusion. Particular concentrations of sites are also found in the Andes of South America, in Brazil's Atlantic Forests, and throughout the Caribbean.



The Worthen's Sparrow is an AZE species that occurs in Mexico's Saltillo grasslands. Photo: Ray Bieber.



UPDATE

Efforts by Bird Conservation Alliance (BCA) member organizations are moving forward on the *Mexican Grasslands Appeal*. The American Birding Association has pledged \$5,000 towards the campaign, BirdPAC has pledged to donate 10% of its fundraising efforts for 2006, the Los Angeles Audubon Society has committed \$1,000, and the Northern Virginia Bird Club has committed fundraising and financial support. ABC has further pledged to match total donations up to \$20,000.

The BCA launched its 2006 joint fundraising project to support vital bird conservation in the Saltillo region of northern Mexico, just south of the U.S. border. Working with Mexican partner group, Pronatura Noreste, the campaign seeks to raise \$100,000 for

the purchase of over 1,000 acres of prime grassland, strategically positioned around a 46,000-acre Nature Conservancy reserve for the endemic Mexican prairie dog, whose grazing helps maintain the short-grass habitat. The land purchase will help protect the globally endangered, endemic Worthen's Sparrow (for which the site is recognized by the Alliance for Zero Extinction), migratory birds such as the Long-billed Curlew and Mountain Plover, and other key species such as the Burrowing Owl, Sprague's Pipit, and Ferruginous Hawk.

TO DONATE, visit:

www.birdconservationalliance.org, or contact Alicia Craig, BCA Director, <acraig@abcbirds.org>.

ABC led in identifying the AZE bird sites in the Americas and is currently involved in conservation projects with partners at 19 of the 88 AZE bird-triggered sites in the region. For example, in the past year ABC has helped partner groups in Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Peru purchase approximately 20,000 acres to create four new private bird reserves, and expand seven others for AZE species. These species include the Colorful Puffleg, Blue-billed Curassow, Long-whiskered Owlet, Jocotoco Antpitta, and Pale-headed Brush-Finch.

Also published are a site map and a report that details the actions required to save these sites and species. These items, along with a searchable database of sites, web links for the Alliance's member organizations, and photos of AZE sites and species, can be found at: www.zeroextinction.org.

Global Warming: Avian Malaria Races Resistance up Hawaiian Mountains

Hawaii's native birds are locked in a race for survival, pitting the spread of malaria to higher elevations against their ability to develop resistance to the disease.

New research, conducted by Leonard Freed and colleagues at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, indicates that avian malaria may be on the increase at higher elevations in Hawaii, areas that have previously been cool enough to remain largely free of the disease.

Avian malaria and poxvirus (spread by mosquitoes) arrived on Hawaii with the human introduction of exotic birds that occurred throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries. Both are now widespread at lower elevations throughout the Hawaiian Islands, and have caused the extinction of several native bird species and severely reduced the populations of others.

A rise in global temperatures had been predicted to cause malaria to spread to higher elevations (one climate model for Hawaii predicts that a temperature increase of 2°C over the next 100 years will eliminate nearly all malaria-free bird habitat). This new

research indicates that these predicted higher temperatures have already been reached, and malaria is beginning to occur at higher elevations.

The news is not all bad, however. The studies also show that as well as malaria being on the rise, resistance to the disease may also be increasing. The researchers provided the first documentation of malaria resistance among wild 'Iiwis, and observed an Hawaii 'Akepa that may also have been resistant.

While this new evidence of resistance is very encouraging, it is not yet known if endangered honeycreepers, which have generally lower reproductive rates than more common Hawaiian species such as the 'Iwi, can evolve resistance quickly enough to dodge extinction. Resistance could also create new reservoirs of the disease at these high elevations.

More than half of Hawaii's birds are listed under the Endangered Species Act (see article p. 1), and 21 species have gone extinct since the turn of the 20th Century. Contact: George Wallace, ABC, <gwallace@abcbirds.org>.

Bird Trade Ban Extended in Europe

Prompted by the continuing spread of avian influenza, the European Commission voted to extend its October 2005 ban on wild bird imports until at least May 31.

Prior to the bird flu outbreak, the ban had been advocated by ABC and other members of the Bird Conservation Alliance, including Defenders of Wildlife, over continuing concerns about the global bird trade.

Since the United States passed the Wild Bird Conservation Act in 1992, and similar bans were imposed in Australia and New Zealand, Europe has become the world's largest importer of caged birds, with an estimated average of 1.7 million birds per year arriving at European ports from around the world. It is thought that a similar number die during transit—a conservation and animal welfare disaster. This trade includes parrots and other familiar pet species, as well as songbirds from the Americas, such as the Painted Bunting and the range-restricted Lawrence's Goldfinch. Both species are included on ABC's Green List as birds of conservation concern. For more information, visit www.birdsareforwatching.org.

Operation Bunting Cages Bird Crooks

On February 6, a jury convicted Miami bird dealer Jorge Hernández of illegally selling migratory birds at a Florida parking lot in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The birds were offered at an illegal market that was held almost every Sunday from October 2004 to July 2005 and drew a regular crowd of 50-100 people. Officers infiltrated the ring by posing as buyers and were offered more than 3,500 birds for sale. Agents

dubbed the sting "Operation Bunting," and gathered evidence through concealed video cameras and tape recorders. The birds involved included Painted and Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks. It is thought that most of the birds were trapped on the edge of Everglades National Park.

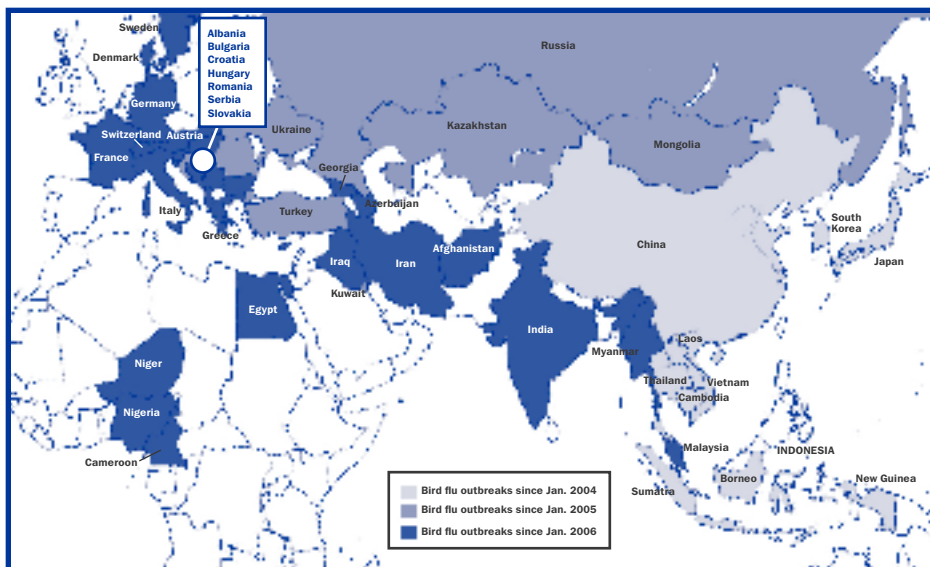
Five additional defendants had already pled guilty to charges brought in relation to the bird sales, one of whom, Giraldo Wong, was taken into custody at Miami airport after returning from

Cuba with two Cuban Grassquits in his underwear. Charges were also filed against three pet stores linked to the ring. Sentencing in the present case has been set for April 26, when Hernández could face up to two years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000 on each of four counts. The Painted Bunting is considered a species of conservation concern and included on ABC's Green List. Contact: Mike Parr, ABC, <mparr@abcbirds.org>.

Fowl Play: Avian Flu Spreads

Signs of panic are becoming evident as H5N1 avian influenza spreads around the globe—the disease has now been confirmed in several European, Asian, and African countries.

As a result of some new cases of H5N1 in cats in Europe, thousands of Germans are reportedly abandoning their pet cats to shelters, fearing that close contact could lead to human infection. Animal shelters in France, Austria, and elsewhere are bracing for a similar reaction. ABC has long stressed the importance of keeping cats indoors for the health of birds and cats, and bird flu now appears to be another important reason for European cat owners to not let their pets roam free outdoors.



of domestic poultry and poultry products along trucking, rail, and airplane routes. Especially egregious examples

The disease continues to be absent from the Americas, though many public health officials predict that it will only be a matter of time before it shows up on U.S. shores. While the import of chickens into the United States from countries where H5N1 has been confirmed is now on hold, it is still permitted from other countries, and it is likely that importation bans will lag behind the spread of the virus. Illegal smuggling also continues to be a threat. In March 2005, 9,000 pounds of chicken feet, a potential source of the flu virus, were discovered to have been smuggled into the United States from Asia, and duck tongues have been seized by customs officials at New York and other airports. Contact: Michael Fry, ABC, <mrfry@abcbirds.org>.

“Strong evidence indicates that the primary spread of H5N1 is through the movement of domestic poultry and poultry products along trucking, rail, and airplane routes.”

There have also been suggestions in Germany of eradicating birds such as swallows, and driving away nesting White Storks, eliciting concern from environmental groups such as the Federation of Nature Conservation (NABU). While the role wild birds are playing in the transmission of the disease is still being debated, ABC continues to stress that culling of wild birds or draining wetlands is an inappropriate response to the outbreak, and could actually exacerbate the spread of the disease by causing birds to disperse farther. To date, all cases of human H5N1 infection have been traced to domestic birds, with no known cases resulting from contact with wild birds.

Although it is now clear that wild birds are victims, and can spread the disease when they become infected, strong evidence indicates that the primary vector is through the movement

are the Cabinet Minister in Nigeria, who authorized live poultry shipments to his private farm, thus spreading the disease to Africa, and the continued importation of chicken guano from China into Europe to feed farmed fish. Fish farm ponds are traditionally open to wild waterfowl, exacerbating the risk of transmission to wild and domestic birds.



Most evidence indicates that domestic fowl are the primary vector in spreading the H5N1 virus. Photo: morgueFile.com.

For more information, visit:

Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov

World Health Organization: www.who.int/en

PandemicFlu.gov: www.pandemicflu.gov

World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE): www.oie.int/eng/en_index.htm

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): www.fao.org

2006 International Migratory Bird Day

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) celebrates the incredible journeys of migratory birds between their U.S. and Canadian breeding grounds and their wintering sites in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. The event, which takes place on the second Saturday in May each year, encourages bird conservation and increases awareness of birds through a series of public events and education programs.

The theme for 2006 is *The Boreal Forest: Bird Nursery of the Americas*. North America's Boreal Forest encompasses approximately 1.5 billion acres (2.35 million square

miles) and stretches from Alaska to Newfoundland. The region includes one of the world's largest intact forests, which is dotted with lakes, rivers, and wetlands.

The region's importance, however, extends far beyond Canada and Alaska to the Lower 48 states, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Billions of birds of over 270 species migrate long distances from these locations to the Boreal Forest, where they nest and raise young in what is known as North America's "bird nursery." Although still relatively undisturbed, less than 8% of the Boreal is protected, and much of it is under threat from industrial pressure due to logging, oil and gas exploration, mining, and hydroelectric dams. Boreal trees provide more than a third of all newspaper used in America, and the forest feeds the ever-growing supply of catalogs and mail that are sent out every day.

IMBD will officially be on May 13 this year, but many organizations will



Poster art © 2006, Radetux

continue to conduct hikes, festivals, bird watching events, and a range of educational programs throughout the entire month of May and beyond.

For more information on events in your area, or to find out how you can register your own organizations' event, visit www.birdday.org or e-mail MigratoryBirdDay@aol.com. For information on birds and the Boreal Forest, visit www.borealbirds.org.

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What unfortunate designation do the Long-billed Curlew, Golden-cheeked Warbler, and Red Knot share?

They are all neotropical migrants designated as species of "Highest Continental Concern" on ABC's Green List.

No birds are more in need of help in the United States than the species in this category, and ABC is delivering that help by galvanizing the bird conservation community around the most pressing threats. Engaging partners on multiple projects, ABC is working hard to restore declining neotropical migratory bird populations at home and on their southern wintering grounds. For example, ABC is helping to stop the rapid decline of the Red Knot by ensuring that its main food source is not overfished (see article p. 3). But we urgently need your help to provide additional funding to advance this and other projects.

Can you help us recover these species?

Please use the enclosed envelope to send your tax-deductible donation today. Thank you!



Golden-cheeked Warbler: FWS; Red Knot: T.D. Rodda; Long-billed Curlew: Neal Maine/North Coast Land Conservancy

A Banner Year for ABC Grants

This year is proving to be the best ever for ABC's William Belton Conservation Grants Program, both in quality and number of grant applications. As part of its ongoing commitment to the goals of the Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE, see article p. 7), ABC again made it a prerequisite that all proposals for 2006 focus on the conservation of Endangered and Critically Endangered



Chestnut-capped Piha, a newly-discovered endemic species from Colombia. Photo: Paul Salaman.

bird species in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly at AZE sites.

More than 50 proposals were reviewed, but unfortunately, only 15 could be funded. Many of the best proposals that could not be funded by ABC will be shared with other conservation organizations such as the Neotropical Bird Club and England's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. In a promising development, Conservation International has offered to match ABC funds for nine projects.

Among the proposals approved for funding is one for the conservation of the spectacular Bay-breasted Cuckoo in the Sierra de Bahoruco National Park, Dominican Republic. The grant will continue ABC's long-term commitment to the conservation of this Globally Endangered species, whose primary breeding population is in this park.



Bay-breasted Cuckoo nestlings. Photo: Lance Woolaver.

Other approved proposals include the conservation of the Colorful Puffleg at the newly created Swarovski Mirabilis Reserve in Colombia's Western Andes (see *Bird Calls* Vol. 9, No. 1); the conservation of another Colombian endemic, the Chestnut-capped Piha, a species so recently described that it is not yet in the field guides; and conservation of several species of endangered island endemics in Mexico and Chile through habitat restoration and control of feral cats and ungulates. For more information on ABC's William Belton Conservation Grants Program, contact Robert Chipley, ABC, <rchipley@abcbirds.org>.

Researchers Track Frigatebirds' Remarkable Journey

An ongoing study into the migration of the Christmas Island Frigatebird has already yielded some interesting results. Using satellite transmitters attached to the backs of four birds, researchers are gaining new insights into this long distance traveler.

Breeding only on a tiny island in the Indian Ocean off Australia, this Critically Endangered bird (recognized as an Alliance for Zero Extinction species—see article p. 7) has a population of fewer than 5,000 birds. In 2005, scientists from Parks Australia attached the transmitters to the four birds to learn more about their behavior and feeding patterns. Initial data have already been gathered. One female frigatebird nicknamed "Lydia" was tracked

for more than 2,500 miles on a non-stop journey from Christmas Island to Sumatra and Borneo and back, including an overland flight across Java's mountains and volcanoes.

This new satellite-tracking data will add enormously to existing knowledge of the species. Continuing research by Parks Australia will use the transmitters to gain a better understanding of frigatebird dispersal outside of their nesting season, the oceanographic conditions they prefer, their use of non-breeding roost islands, and the threats they face in Southeast Asia.

The transmitters were awarded to Parks Australia through a grant from North Star Science and Technology, LLC (www.northstarst.com). ABC

coordinates North Star's grant program, assessing incoming grants and recommending awards for projects on avian research. For more information on North Star grants, contact George Wallace, ABC <gwallace@abcbirds.org>.



Photo: David James.

First U.S. Wildlife Charity Postage Stamps Issued

ABC has announced the launch of the first U.S. charity postage stamps to support wildlife conservation. The new stamps, which carry the messages “Save our Songbirds” and “Stamp out Extinction,” feature illustrations of the declining Cerulean Warbler and the recently rediscovered Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Each stamp measures 2.5” x 1.5”, and carries a face value of 39 cents.

The stamps are available through the ABC Website at www.abcbirds.org, and are being distributed by Zazzle.com in association with Pitney Bowes.

“The concept of individualized postage stamps is a new one, and ABC is delighted to partner with Zazzle in issuing the first charity postage stamps to support wildlife conservation,” said George Fenwick, ABC’s President.



“Not only will these stamps contribute funds to priority bird conservation projects, they will also help raise awareness of the need to conserve America’s birds,” he added.

The stamps are themed to reflect two important bird conservation goals, halting species extinctions and restoring American songbird populations, and will generate funds for ABC’s on-going conservation programs.

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker illustration was painted by Washington-based artist Todd Telander (www.toddtelander.com). The Cerulean Warbler image was adapted by ABC graphic designer Gemma Radko from a photograph by bird bander Robert Mulvihill. Contact: Mike Parr, ABC, <mparr@abcbirds.org>.

Tricolored Blackbird Populations Plummet

Millions of Tricolored Blackbirds once ranged in dense flocks from Washington State south to Mexico. Today, their population is a fraction of its former size, estimated at 162,000 birds in 2000. The remaining birds are concentrated in California’s Central Valley, where urban and agricultural development continue to erode their numbers.

The Tricolored Blackbird is a U.S. endemic species and classified as a bird of “Highest Continental Concern” on ABC’s Green List. “The Tricolored Blackbird underwent very significant declines when California’s Central Valley wetlands were largely drained a



Tricolored Blackbird populations have declined drastically. Formerly abundant, this species is now on ABC’s Green List as a species of Highest Continental Concern. Photo: FWS.

century ago. Their continued decline is a cause for great concern,” said David Pashley, ABC’s Vice-President for Conservation.

In February, the Center for Biological Diversity filed suit against FWS, claiming the agency has failed to act on a petition filed in 2004 to list the Tricolored Blackbird under the Endangered Species Act. FWS has promised to complete its assessment of the initial listing petition by the end of this year. Contact: Kieran Suckling, Center for Biological Diversity, (520) 275-5960, or visit www.biologicaldiversity.org.

Longline Fishermen Towing a Better Line

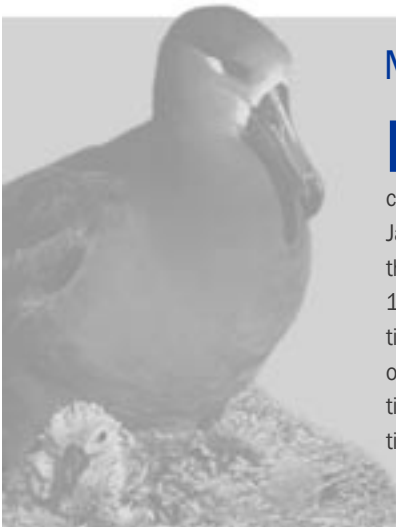
Newly released data show that, thanks to conservation measures pushed for by ABC and other members of the Bird Conservation Alliance, the number of albatrosses killed on Hawaiian longline hooks reached its lowest level since records began, and numbers of albatrosses killed in Alaska are also being dramatically reduced. In both fisheries a record number of hooks were set and

more observers were onboard vessels to record bycatch, making these statistics even more encouraging.

In 2004, the Hawaiian longline fleet took just 11 Laysan and 16 Black-footed Albatrosses; a significant reduction from the average of 1,010 Black-footed and 856 Laysan Albatrosses killed each year between 1994 and 2003. Preliminary data suggest 2005 levels could be similarly low or even lower.

In 2004, Alaskan longliners took 4,979 seabirds including 123 albatrosses. While still too high, these numbers are down significantly from an annual average of 14,300 seabirds, including 795 albatrosses killed each year between 1993 and 2002.

ABC has been at the forefront of efforts to compel the fishing industry to adopt simple measures that prevent bird deaths on longlines. For more information visit www.abcbirds.org/policy.



Midway Albatross Numbers Soar

Record numbers of Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses were tallied during an annual count on Midway Island in December 2005/January 2006. Volunteers noted 511,612 nests—the highest number since the count began in 1991. Midway shelters the world's largest populations of both albatross species, which are included on ABC's Green List due to their restricted distribution. Although the increase in the albatross population cannot conclusively be shown to be due to the

decrease in longline mortality reported above, there is likely a strong correlation between the two.

ABC has pushed for mitigation measures to counteract flaking lead paint on former army buildings on Midway that has poisoned many albatross chicks. While the temporary measures so far enacted have dramatically reduced the number of deaths, they have not been in place long enough to have impacted the results of this survey of adult albatrosses.

Black-footed Albatross and chick. Photo: FWS.

Altamont Wind Turbine Dispute Spins On

The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) has stated that it will not be withdrawing its lawsuit against companies operating the 5,000 wind turbines at Altamont, California (*Bird Calls* Vol. 9, No. 2), despite recent concessions made by the wind industry.

In a dispute that has dragged on for more than two decades at what is America's largest wind farm, the Altamont operators agreed in September 2005 to shut down half of the turbines during peak fall migration periods, and to shut down some others all winter to protect over-wintering raptors. Despite the shutdown, only

10% of revenue would be lost to the industry as less power is generated during the calmer winter months. Additionally, the wind companies agreed to replace many of the most dangerous turbines with fewer, newer, and larger turbines, sited in areas less likely to impact birds. All of these efforts are designed to reduce the number of raptor deaths by at least 50% over the next three years.

However, CBD, National Audubon Society, and the state's Attorney General, had requested that the industry go further and shut down all the turbines throughout the winter until they can be replaced with newer models.

Meanwhile, Golden Gate Audubon and Californians for Renewable Energy filed suit in October of last year against Alameda County for allowing the continued killing of raptors at Altamont. The County has already agreed to set up a Scientific Review Panel to evaluate efforts to reduce raptor deaths, and to oversee mitigation measures to compensate for wildlife losses, but the plaintiffs allege that the new regulations, though an improvement, still violate state laws.

For more information visit, www.biologicaldiversity.org and www.goldengateaudubon.org.

Birds in Brief

Critical Habitat Slashed for Flycatcher

In October 2005, FWS reduced the amount of proposed Critical Habitat for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher by more than half, after assessing potential economic impacts and receiving public comments. For more information, contact Jeff Humphrey, FWS, 602-242-0210 ext 222.



Ivory Gull. Photo: Stuart Tingley/USGS

Ivory Gulls Show Alarming Decline

Surveys by the Canadian Wildlife Service in the summer of 2005 have shown that possibly fewer than 600 Ivory Gulls remain in North America, a decline of more than 80 percent from early 1980s levels. Exact numbers are difficult to assess as the species breeds in the high Arctic, but fewer than 14,000 pairs are thought to exist worldwide at latitudes as high as 88° North. Reasons for the declines are uncertain, but could be linked to climate change, chemical contamination, or human disturbance.

Spotted Owl to Finally Receive Species Recovery Plan

In response to legal action by the Seattle and Kittitas Audubon Societies last November, FWS has agreed to complete a Species Recovery Plan for the Northern

Spotted Owl within the next 18 months. Although the owl has been listed since 1990, no recovery plan (required by the ESA for all listed species) currently exists.

FWS officials had claimed that the Northwest Forest Plan did enough to protect the owl on federal lands. However, logging in the old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest and competition with invasive Barred Owls continue to drive down the spotted owl population—now numbering only 7,500 breeding birds.

See www.seattleaudubon.org or www.kittitasaudubon.org for more information.

Toronto Creates Policy to Protect Migrating Birds

On January 31, the City Council of Toronto adopted a resolution requiring that bird-friendly design procedures, including light control measures, be incorporated into all new building plan reviews. A public awareness campaign will urge the owners of existing buildings to turn off lights, install blinds and timers, and take other measures to control light pollution and reduce the number of bird collisions. For more information, visit the Fatal Light Awareness Program at www.flap.org.

New Towerkill Incidents

In September 2005, hundreds of dead birds were recovered on two separate occasions at a 1,000-foot tower in Madison, Wisconsin. Officials were alerted to the first kill by an observer who noted many dead birds while watching her son's ball game at a nearby field. According to this observer, a food vendor on the property was "scooping up" dead birds all day that had been killed the previous night.

The second kill involved at least 200 birds (possibly as many as 400), including Cape May Warblers and

Golden-winged Warblers, a species listed on ABC's Green List as being of the Highest Continental Concern.



Tower killed birds. Photo: Andrew Paulios/WBCI

Is Your Backyard a Bird Sanctuary?

If not, the Wild Bird Feeding Industry (WBF) wants to help you make it one. The association of bird feeding and backyard wildlife industry companies (which includes manufacturers of seed, feeders, and backyard accessories, as well as retail stores) is making an effort to increase available urban and suburban bird habitat through the promotion of its new program "6 Steps to Turn Your Yard into a Sanctuary for Birds." WBF enlisted the help of FWS and several other groups, including ABC and the Bird Conservation Alliance, National Audubon Society, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in the preparation of the materials. Visit www.backyardbirdcare.org.

Scientists Request De-listing of California Brown Pelican

The Endangered Species Recovery Council has submitted a petition to remove the "California" subspecies of the Brown Pelican from protection under both the federal and California state Endangered Species Acts. California Brown Pelicans have recovered dramatically since the 1970s and 80s, now numbering around 200,000 birds, having sustained an upward population trajectory for years. The restored

population and the viability of this subspecies represent the success of state and federal conservation efforts and should be recognized as such, the Council maintains. Efforts to delist the pelican began in 1980, with the Atlantic Coast, Florida, and Alabama populations delisted in 1985.

Woodpecker Searchers Still Hopeful

Following the release of compelling video and audio footage of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the swamps of Arkansas last year, biologists remain hopeful that more evidence will be found of a population of the species, which was, until recently, believed extinct. Search teams continue to transect the area where the recent sighting was made, but so far have found no further confirmation. Given the impenetrable nature of the habitat, however, this is perhaps not unexpected.

Researchers Practice Albatross Transfer

Ten young Laysan Albatrosses are being translocated from Midway Atoll to Kilauea Point National



Short-tailed Albatross. Photo: FWS

Wildlife Refuge on the island of Kauai. Through the program, U.S. and Japanese researchers hope to learn how best to encourage the formation of new colonies for possible future translocations of the much rarer Short-tailed Albatross. Breeding of the Short-tailed Albatross is restricted to small volcanic islands off the coast of Japan, where its main colony faces the constant threat of eruptions. New colonies on nearby islands could provide an insurance population for the species.

Gunnison Decision Expected in March

FWS has said it will announce a decision on whether to list the Gunnison Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act by March 31. The action

results from a recent settlement with a coalition of environmental groups following a January 2000 listing petition. Despite recent increases, the Gunnison Sage-Grouse (an ABC Green List species that was recognized as a separate species from the Greater Sage-Grouse in 2000) has experienced a long-term decline.

New Bobolink Wintering Site Discovered

Researchers from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science believe they may have discovered the largest single wintering concentration of Bobolinks ever recorded. The roost in Bolivia was estimated to contain approximately 60,000 birds. Prior to this discovery, few ornithologists even suspected that Bobolinks wintered in Bolivia.

Bobolink declines have been noted on their breeding grounds in North America, but threats to this neotropical migrant on its wintering grounds are poorly understood. For more information about the study, see www.vinsweb.org/cbd/Bobolink.htm.

EPA Seeks to Place Geese on The Pill

Over the written concerns of ABC, the EPA has registered a veterinary drug to be used as a "birth-control" chemical for wild birds. The drug, called nicarbazin, has been used for several years to treat intestinal parasites in farmed chickens, but has also been found to prevent egg laying at relatively low doses. A California company, Innolytics, LLC, has been licensed to produce the drug in edible pellet form, to be broadcast in areas frequented by resident Canada Geese, with the intent of preventing breeding.

The resident Canada Goose population has skyrocketed in recent decades, particularly along the East Coast. While the idea of using this non-lethal method of birth control may have merit, there is concern that non-target birds will also eat the baits and so be prevented from breeding. Particular concern has been raised regarding native waterfowl, songbirds, and gamebirds on golf courses and in suburban locations.

Because the Canada Goose is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, all applications of nicarbazin must first be permitted by FWS, which could limit impacts to non-target species. The EPA had also planned to license the drug for use on pigeons in urban areas, which would require no such permit and review process, but the agency has since suspended its regulatory decision because of ABC action, and is now requesting further studies. Contact: Michael Fry, ABC, <mfry@abcbirds.org>.

Teshkepuk Lake IBA Up For Grabs

In January 2006, the federal government opened up the entire Teshkepuk Lake Special Area for oil and gas leasing, despite ongoing protests from environmental groups, scientists, sportsmen, and Native Alaskans (*Bird Calls* Vol. 8, No. 2). The decision to drill eliminates wild-life and environmental protections that have been in place since 1977.

Although part of the National Petroleum Reserve, Teshkepuk Lake has been recognized and protected by three previous administrations for its ecological significance. The wetlands around the 315 square-mile lake are key summer molting and nesting areas for many migratory ducks, geese, swans, loons, and other bird species. Up to 60,000 molting Black Brant, Greater White-fronted, Canada, and Snow Geese also shelter in these wetlands each summer. Spectacled and Steller's Eiders (both federally listed species) frequent the reserve, and the region is also home to 26,000 caribou. The National Petroleum Reserve,



The Spectacled Eider is one of the many species threatened by oil and gas development in the Teshkepuk Lake Special Area. Photo: Pete Morris.

including Teshkepuk Lake, is also recognized by ABC as a Globally Important Bird Area.

The new plan will fragment the area north and east of the lake into seven large tracts that are open to leasing, and although it contains a provision to include thousands of acres where structures will be banned to protect wildlife, the definition of "structures" does not include pipelines or roads. The breakup of the area could result in important ecological areas becoming surrounded by industrial development.

Teshkepuk Lake is typical of the many ecologically important areas in Alaska and elsewhere that are increasingly under threat from oil drilling (see article on ANWR, p. 2). On March 1, investors bid more than \$30 million for new oil exploration leases on some 830,000 acres on Alaska's Northern Slope and surrounding Beaufort Sea, one of the largest ever sales for the area.

A coalition of environmental groups including the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit in March seeking to block the leasing plan. They contend that the plan violates the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act, among other federal laws.

An oil lease sale for Teshkepuk Lake could be held as early as this September, and oil drilling could follow in the winter of 2007-08. Contact: Gemma Radko, ABC, <gradko@abcbirds.org>.

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