

## California Votes to Protect Endangered Condors by Banning Lead Ammunition

**O**n September 4, the California Senate passed legislation to ban lead ammunition that is poisoning endangered California Condors. The bill, sponsored by Assemblyman Pedro Nava, requires the use of non-toxic ammunition for hunting deer and wild pigs within the condor's range,

and will prevent the birds from consuming lead fragments when they scavenge unrecovered carcasses. The measure also creates a program that subsidizes coupons for lead-free copper bullets for hunters venturing into condor territory.

"American Bird Conservancy applauds the California Senate's action, and urges Governor Schwarzenegger to sign the lead ammunition ban into law to protect the California Condor," said Michael Fry, American Bird Conservancy's Director of Conservation Advocacy. "With alternative ammunition now available for hunting that doesn't use lead, there is no logical basis on which to oppose this ban."

Five condors recently suffered from acute lead poisoning after feeding on

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California Condor: FWS

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## Efforts to Reduce Seabird Bycatch in Hawaii Show Dramatic Results

**N**ot many fisheries can boast such a dramatic turnaround on seabird bycatch as the Hawaiian longlining industry. As recently as the beginning of this decade, Hawaiian fisheries were responsible for thousands of dead albatrosses each year—more than any other fishery in the Western Pacific Management Region. However, the 2006 Annual Report on seabird interactions reflects a 90% decline in mortality since 2000.

Seabirds are hard to protect because they follow fishing boats in flocks, looking for the free meal that comes when fish waste is dumped

overboard. The birds go after this waste, but also bait, which can result in their becoming hooked, dragged underwater, and drowned. Because modern longliners may deploy thousands of hooks at a time, the impact on seabird populations can be severe. Large seabirds are slow to mature and long-lived, so the death of an adult albatross on a longline has a much greater impact on populations than the death of a chick.

Hawaiian fisheries began to confront this problem in 2001, in large part because the Short-tailed Albatross was

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**California Condors** *from page 1*

a pig carcass killed by hunters near the Pinnacles National Monument, where condors have been recently released into the wild. Another condor died of lead poisoning in a separate incident near Bittercreek National Wildlife Refuge in central California.

In 2006, biologists trapped 11 condors at Pinnacles National Monument after they were seen feeding on squirrels shot with lead ammunition. They were captured and temporarily housed at the Los Angeles Zoo while their blood was tested for traces of lead and they were x-rayed to identify lead fragments in

their digestive tracts. Birds testing positive for lead were given calcium-EDTA to help them eliminate the heavy metal from their systems, and some underwent surgery to remove lead pieces from their crops.

The California Fish and Game Commission held a hearing on August 27 on the proposed ban, at which Fry testified that there have been 276 documented cases of lead poisoning of California Condors. A decision on the ban will be made at the Commission's November 1 meeting. Contact Michael Fry, <mfry@abcbirds.org>.

**Seabird Bycatch Victory** *from page 1*

federally listed as an endangered species in the U.S. in 2000. This majestic bird was hunted to near extinction in the 1930s for its beautiful feathers, and the current world population has only slowly recovered to 2,000 adults.

When the Short-tailed Albatross gained endangered species status, the managing agencies were able to enforce protection measures. As is often the case, the techniques for protecting this albatross helped other species as well.

In October of 2000, FWS issued a Biological Opinion on how to mitigate the effects of longline fisheries on the Short-tailed Albatross. The species' population is so tiny that interactions with the Hawaiian fisheries were thought to be extremely rare, but the number of other albatross species dying on Hawaiian longlines, and Short-tailed Albatrosses in Alaska, prompted FWS to act.

In 2000, an estimated 2,433 albatrosses were killed in the Hawaiian tuna and swordfish fisheries. Fortunately, none of the observed deaths was of a Short-tailed Albatross.

Hawaiian tuna and swordfish fishermen are now required to employ mitigation measures such as throwing fish waste into the water away from where hooks are being set, using bird-scaring streamer lines, and weighting the fishing lines so they sink faster. When these methods were implemented, and their use monitored by on-board observers, annual seabird deaths plummeted.

Though the problem of seabird bycatch on Hawaiian longlines has been largely solved, agencies still monitor the fisheries closely, and produce a comprehensive report on seabird interactions and improved mitigation techniques each year. Contact Jessica Hardesty, ABC, <jhardesty@abcbirds.org>.



Short-tailed Albatrosses: FWS

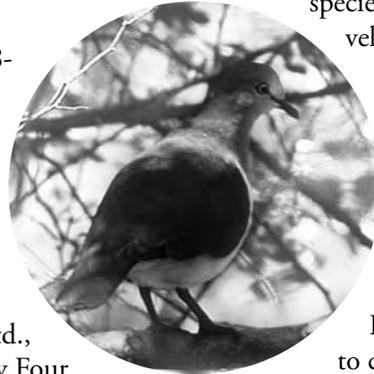
## ABC'S VIEWPOINT

## Development Threatens Grenada Dove

**ABC** recently reported that a major development at Mt. Hartman National Park and Mt. Hartman Estate, Grenada, threatens the largest population of the critically endangered Grenada Dove, the national bird of that country (*Bird Calls* Vol. 11, No. 1). From the start, this project has been characterized by the evasiveness of its developers, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, and the Government of Grenada. An ongoing lack of transparency and good faith has raised concerns that this harmful project may move forward unchanged.

Most of the doves occur in southwest Grenada, where the only protected area for the birds is the 155-acre Mt. Hartman National Park, created in 1996. Doves also occur on unprotected portions of the adjacent 450-acre Mt. Hartman Estate.

The development plan calls for an 18-hole golf course, a central hotel, 107 individual hotel units, and 255 private residential villas, 200 on the mainland and 55 on Hog Island, just offshore. The resort is being developed by United Kingdom-based Capital88 and its Grenadian subsidiary Cinnamon88 Grenada, Ltd., and will be managed and operated by Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, which was recently purchased in part by Bill Gates.



B. Rusk

In November 2006, the environmental consulting firm for this project, JECO Caribbean, issued a “conservation and development strategy” for the proposed resort, triggering an outcry from conservation groups, including ABC, who were alarmed by the report’s failure to incorporate scientific data on the status and distribution of the Grenada Dove into the development plan. The strategy presented would clearly degrade, destroy, and fragment existing dove habitat.

In response, the Government of Grenada and the developers claimed that no development plan had been approved, and that a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was in preparation, with a different resort design that would address our concerns. Four Seasons also maintained that they were not involved in the environmental review process.

In January 2007, photos became available showing that almost half of Hog Island had been cleared by bulldozers, in the same configuration as the maps presented in the conservation and development strategy. In April 2007, the Government of Grenada passed an amendment to

the National Parks and Protected Areas Act, allowing the Governor General to sell any national park to developers or other private interests. Many believe this amendment to be a precursor to developing Mt. Hartman National Park.

By June 2007, the long-awaited EIA became widely available. Regrettably, the EIA is merely a longer version of the “conservation and development strategy,” using an identical development plan. Among its most significant deficiencies, the plan lacks current and accurate biodiversity information. No field surveys of the dove were conducted, and the EIA fails to use available survey data to plot dove distribution in relation to the siting of the development, or the existing park boundaries. The importance of Mt. Hartman to the dove’s survival is understated, and the EIA does not address the severe impacts on dove habitat, or address prospects for the species’ survival. The EIA even intimates that the resort development would improve the dove’s survival prospects.

However, the report does indicate that as much as half of the existing dove habitat could be lost, greatly increasing the species’ extinction risk. Counter to accepted international practices for environmental assessment, the EIA report provides no analysis of alternative resort development options.

Following the release of the EIA, apparently in response to criticism, the developers agreed to support a comprehensive dove survey. However, they have also committed to submitting their final master plan to the government for approval, apparently months before the surveys will be complete. It is unclear whether new survey information will be used to guide the revised master plan. We call on the developers, Four Seasons, and the Government of Grenada to engage in a process of meaningful stakeholder consultation and independent scientific review in order to secure a safe future for the Grenada Dove. For more information, contact George Wallace, ABC, <gwallace@abcbirds.org>.

## Collecting Editorial Clarification

The following clarification and correction are in regard to the editorial that ran in the last issue of *Bird Calls*. The editorial stated that the “type specimen” of the Yarigues Brush-Finch was released, but did not distinguish between the holotype and paratype. The released bird was the paratype. The holotype died accidentally and was retained as a specimen. Three, not “approximately seven” is the correct number of Recurve-billed Bushbirds that were collected. Our position remains unchanged; ABC believes that the world’s rarest species should not be collected.

## International Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels Attracts Greater U.S. Attention

There is growing interest among government agencies, the Administration, and Congress in signing the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), a broad international agreement on seabirds. ABC is advocating strongly for the United States to become a signatory to this treaty.

ACAP urges members to minimize seabird bycatch by fishermen, protect the birds' nesting and foraging areas, and confront other threats that jeopardize species listed under the agreement. The agreement is notable both because of its multifaceted approach to species conservation and because it provides a forum for international collaboration among fishing nations. Eleven countries have already agreed to participate.

Although the United States is not a signatory to the agreement, it sends observers to ACAP meetings, where

significant progress in reducing seabird mortality in fisheries and protecting seabird breeding colonies is being made. However, if the U.S. signed ACAP, it would set the stage for even greater cooperation with other nations.

There are other important reasons for the U.S. to sign on to ACAP. No matter how good our seabird stewardship, solving the problem of seabird bycatch requires concerted action throughout the species' ranges. Signing will also facilitate the listing of U.S. seabirds, such as the Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses, under the treaty, allowing them to benefit from international conservation actions. Finally, becoming signatories would send a strong signal internationally that the U.S. is committed to seabird conservation.

ACAP recently held a workshop on the critically endangered Waved Albatross, which nests on the Galapagos Islands

Black-browed Albatross and chick: ClipArt.com



in Ecuador and forages mainly off the northern coast of Peru. Experts from ACAP nations attended the meeting to share their countries' experiences, with the expectation that this information exchange will lead to multinational conservation actions.

Signing the ACAP agreement would not place new burdens on the U.S. government or fishing industry. Domestic laws, such as the Endangered Species Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, include many of the protections that ACAP requests of its parties. Visit [www.acap.aq](http://www.acap.aq), or contact Jessica Hardesty, ABC's Seabird Program Director, <[jhardesty@abcbirds.org](mailto:jhardesty@abcbirds.org)>.

## Development Threatens Endangered Whooping Cranes

Concerned about endangered Whooping Cranes, the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and other conservation groups have submitted comments opposing plans for a luxury home development adjacent to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge along the Texas Coast.

Seadrift Ranch Partners, Ltd. is proposing the development of two marinas, several inland canals and access channels, and 700 acres of luxury homes. The project would involve excavation and dredging in both the Victorian Barge Canal and San Antonio Bay to provide boat access to the proposed development.

Aransas National Wildlife Refuge is the winter home of the only wild flock of Whooping Cranes in the world. While the cranes live primarily on the refuge, they regularly forage on lands outside its boundaries, which include the areas targeted for development.



Under the Endangered Species Act, any development proposal must not jeopardize the Whooping Cranes in any way, and must not adversely modify their Critical Habitat.

Seadrift has already petitioned the Army Corps of Engineers for a permit to begin building, but conservation groups have urged the Corps to reject the permit until FWS is able to conduct comprehensive studies on the project's impact on cranes and other migratory birds. The NWRA and International Crane Foundation are continuing to monitor the status of the project. The Corps is currently reviewing comments, and should make a decision later this fall. Contact Alicia King, ABC, <[aking@abcbirds.org](mailto:aking@abcbirds.org)>.

Whooping Cranes: FWS

## Northern Spotted Owl in Dire Circumstances

Scientists in British Columbia, Canada are embarking on the world's first captive breeding program for the Northern Spotted Owl, whose population is rapidly declining at the northernmost end of its range. In July, two owls were captured as part of a \$3.4 million government plan to rebuild the population. There are estimated to be only 17 Spotted Owls left in British Columbia.

Canadian conservationists have raised concern that the breeding program is proceeding without adequate habitat being protected. "We are concerned that sites from which owls are being captured and placed in zoos are scheduled for logging," said Andy Miller of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee. "The government seems to have no plan to protect habitat at current owl sites or at potential sites where young captive bred owls can be released in the future."

### Controversy at Home

In the United States, a draft recovery plan for the owl and new plans to boost logging in the owl's old growth forest habitat in the Pacific Northwest are generating considerable controversy. Scientists on the owl recovery team complained that political interference had undermined the draft plan. This plan claimed that the invasion of the Barred Owl into Spotted Owl territory was a greater threat to the species than habitat loss, and was used to justify a concurrent proposal to reduce critical habitat for the owl by 22%.

The recovery team members' concerns were confirmed when the draft owl recovery plan failed scientific peer review. Two scientific societies hired by the administration to review the draft plan The American Ornithologists' Union and the Society for Conservation Biology, found that, "The recovery team failed to make use of the best available science, and, in fact, appears to have selectively cited from the available science to justify a reduction in habitat protection." The reviewers concluded that the plan would fail to restore owl populations and would likely cause the species to be uplisted from Threatened

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***Canadian conservationists have raised concern that the breeding program (for Northern Spotted Owl) is proceeding without adequate habitat being protected.***

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to Endangered. A third review by The Wildlife Society confirmed this finding, and concluded that the recovery plan was fundamentally flawed and needed to be completely redone.

In response to this rebuke from the scientific community, an additional 30 days were added to the comment period on the owl recovery plan. Related decisions to greatly reduce Critical Habitat for the owl and Marbled Murrelet also had their comment periods



Northern Spotted Owl: Kris Hennings/USDA Forest Service

reopened. ABC wrote a comment letter that was endorsed by many Bird Conservation Alliance members. The comments are available at [www.abcbirds.org/spottedowl.htm](http://www.abcbirds.org/spottedowl.htm).

The draft owl recovery plan is already being used to justify a new plan by the Bureau of Land Management to remove protections for 800,000 acres of old growth forests and significantly boost logging of trees more than 200-years old. As part of the Western Oregon Plan Revisions, the BLM is proposing to eliminate most old growth reserves and open these now-protected areas to logging. This area is an owl stronghold and a key connecting corridor between the Coast Range and the Cascades. Public comments are being accepted on this plan until November 9. See [www.blm.gov/or/plans/wopr/index.php](http://www.blm.gov/or/plans/wopr/index.php) or contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <[sholmer@abcbirds.org](mailto:sholmer@abcbirds.org)>.

## Restoration Effort Underway for Northern Bobwhite

The Northern Bobwhite, like many other species of grassland birds, has declined by more than 65% over the past several decades, disappearing from many landscapes where it was once abundant. Concern for the plight of the Northern Bobwhite is felt not only by hunters and state wildlife agencies with jurisdiction over the game bird's management, but by many rural private landowners who no longer hear its familiar whistled call or see coveys trotting along roads and among hedgerows.

Restoration of bobwhite populations can best begin where remnant populations still exist, private lands incentive programs are available, and landowners are willing to volunteer to undertake habitat improvements on behalf of bobwhite recovery goals. One area that scores this trifecta is a 160,000-acre grassland bird focal area in Fulton County, Arkansas, in the Central Hardwoods Bird Conservation Region.

In 2002, biologists from Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC) and staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Service spread the word in Fulton County that funds were available from federal Farm Bill programs, AGFC, and the FWS Landowner Incentive Program. These grants can be used to convert non-native fescue pastures to native grasses and forbs, decrease cattle grazing pressure, disk and mow to promote plantings for bobwhite, thin closed-canopy woodlots to provide habitat, and use prescribed fire to improve the vigor of native grassland and grass-shrub communities.



Northern Bobwhite: Bill Hubick

Since 2002, several thousand acres have been improved in Fulton County, and more landowners are signing up for help with habitat improvements each year. The bobwhite population has already begun to increase, along with other priority grassland birds such as the Bachman's Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Orchard Oriole.

"The early success of the Fulton County bobwhite focal area is especially intriguing because the AGFC and NRCS took a path of more resistance. This area is deep in the Ozark Mountains and is comprised almost completely of forest and exotic fescue pasture, with no cropland," said Don McKenzie, the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative Coordinator, himself a resident of Arkansas. "Typically, quick and simple restoration of bobwhite populations is only possible in cropland regions. This project demonstrates that the land still has potential, and that wildlife managers can restore bobwhites in diverse landscapes." Contact Jane Fitzgerald, ABC, <j Fitzgerald@abcbirds.org>.



The Central Hardwoods Joint Venture (CHJV), formed in 2000 to promote bird conservation within the Central Hardwoods

Bird Conservation Region, has posted a new website at [www.chjv.org](http://www.chjv.org).

The CHJV is one of 19 such partnerships across the United States and Canada dedicated to bird conservation, and will work with partners in Mexico and Canada to conserve key sites for breeding or over-wintering birds. The region protects species such as the Cerulean, Blue-winged, and Prairie Warblers, Henslow's and Bachman's Sparrows, and Northern Bobwhite (see article above).

Visit [www.chjv.org](http://www.chjv.org)

## Red Knot Population Status Review Shows Continuing Decline

In June, a Delaware Superior Court decision repealed a two-year moratorium on the take of horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay. Meanwhile, FWS released their 2007 Red Knot assessment report, which concludes the Red Knot's dramatic population decline is mainly due to the low availability of horseshoe crab eggs in Delaware Bay, a key stopover site for the birds during their migration.

The FWS report confirms that Red Knots could easily become extinct within ten years if adult survival remains low. Studies have shown that Red Knot individuals with lower body weight at departure in Delaware Bay have lower survival rates than heavier birds.

In November 2006, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) imposed a two-year moratorium on the harvesting of horseshoe crabs. The moratorium was imposed as a protective measure for the horseshoe crab

population and the migratory birds that depend on their eggs as a food source. Records show that horseshoe crab populations declined significantly in the 1990s in the Delaware Bay and estuary due to overharvesting.

As a result of the Superior Court ruling overturning the ban, DNREC adopted emergency regulations that reduce Delaware's regular annual harvest quota from 150,000 horseshoe crabs of either sex to 100,000 male-only horseshoe crabs.

The lack of eggs for the Red Knot has been attributed to an elevated harvest of adult crabs for bait in the channeled whelk (conch) and eel fishing industries. Unfortunately, the recent FWS report warns that even if crab exploitation in the Delaware Bay ceased immediately, it would take years before the horseshoe crab population recovers to its former level. The report also states that other possible factors contributing to the decline include loss



Red Knot: Mike Parr

*...the Red Knot's dramatic population decline is mainly attributed to the low availability of horseshoe crab eggs in Delaware Bay, a key stopover site during their migration.*

of critical habitats, contamination, and the increase of uncontrolled tourism activities at Red Knot wintering and migration areas.

A copy of the status assessment can be found at [www.fws.gov/northeast/endangered/Red%20Knot%20Assessment%20May%202007.standard.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/endangered/Red%20Knot%20Assessment%20May%202007.standard.pdf). Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <[dschroeder@abcbirds.org](mailto:dschroeder@abcbirds.org)>.

## Court to Rule on Tower Safeguards on Gulf Coast

On September 11, ABC and a coalition of other conservation groups, represented by Earthjustice, argued before a federal appeals court that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should implement regulations aimed at reducing the number of birds killed in collisions with cellular and television towers in the Gulf Coast region. The lights from communication towers disorient birds during nighttime migration, killing between five and 50 million birds each year, according to FWS estimates. In spite of these figures and FWS recommendations, the FCC has not acted.

"The FCC has refused for decades to comply with federal wildlife conservation laws, handing out tower licenses with virtually no regard for their ecological impact," said Jennifer Chavez, attorney for Earthjustice. "As a result of the agency's 'do-nothing policy,' millions of birds are killed each year by towers, despite simple modifications that could save them. This approach is irresponsible, and it violates the law."

The migratory bird populations that transit the Gulf Coast region, where more than 5,000 towers dot the 1,000-mile stretch from Port Isabel, Texas to Tampa Bay, Florida, are especially at

risk. The hearing was the final opportunity for both sides to argue the case before the matter is decided by a panel of judges.

"American Bird Conservancy strongly believes the court should hold the FCC accountable for their persistent disregard of our nation's well-established wildlife protection laws," said Darin Schroeder, ABC's Executive Director of Conservation Advocacy. "It's time the FCC understand they should be concerned about protecting our nation's ecological heritage and wildlife resources." There is no set date for a decision on the case. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <[dschroeder@abcbirds.org](mailto:dschroeder@abcbirds.org)>.

## ESA Decisions Under Review

In May 2007, Julie MacDonald, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, resigned after a federal auditor found that she had forced agency scientists to minimize protections for endangered species. In response to the media criticism and political pressure that followed, FWS announced plans to review and take further action on eight endangered species decisions made during MacDonald's tenure.

"We appreciate that FWS is moving swiftly to re-examine some of the decisions on the species that have documented evidence of interference by MacDonald," said Darin Schroeder, ABC's Executive Director of Conservation Advocacy, "but the agency should review all of the decisions in question to ensure that, as the Endangered Species Act requires, the best available science was used."

One of the decisions being revisited involves the endangered Southwestern subspecies of the Willow Flycatcher. MacDonald's involvement in a Critical Habitat ruling for the bird in 2005 may have affected the extent of the final Critical Habitat designation. MacDonald was also involved with decisions concerning the Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl, but the agency has not indicated it will review those processes. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <dschroeder@abcbirds.org>.

## Lawsuit on Politicized ESA Decisions Announced

In August, the Center for Biological Diversity announced its intention to sue the Department of the Interior over decisions to down-list or deny listing to 55 species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including birds such as the Marbled Murrelet, Western subspecies of the Snowy Plover, and California subspecies of the Least Tern. The suit also seeks the restoration of 8.7 million acres of protected habitat removed during MacDonald's tenure.

In the case of the Marbled Murrelet, the suit contends the government manipulated scientific review to make it look like the species didn't need further federal protection. The government also illegally shrank the amount of critical habitat for the Western Snowy Plover by exaggerating the economic costs involved in the protections, according to Kieran Suckling, spokesman for the Center.



Western Snowy Plover: Tom Grey



California Least Tern: FWS

## Status Reviews Ordered for 89 Florida Endangered Species

A federal judge has ordered FWS to carry out status reviews for 89 endangered species in the state of Florida by 2010. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires that the status of all threatened and endangered species be reviewed every five years. The agency unsuccessfully argued that it lacked resources to comply with the law. Florida has over 100 endangered species, the third most in the nation following Hawaii and California.

The suit was brought by the Pacific Legal Foundation (PLF) on behalf of the Florida Home Builders Association, which seeks to have protection lifted from many of Florida's endangered species. If the status reviews reveal a species is recovering, it could justify further legal action to remove it from the list or remove building restrictions. Among the species to be reviewed are the Florida Scrub Jay, Wood Stork, and the Everglades subspecies of the Snail Kite.



"Every county in the state has at least one species that must now be reviewed, and at least two of the species that get a re-look—the Wood Stork and eastern indigo snake—are found statewide," said PLF attorney Steven Gieseler.

The lawsuit brought by PLF is part of a systematic effort by the firm to undermine implementation of the Endangered Species Act. Last year, a PLF lawsuit in California led to a settlement requiring the review of 194 species and more than 280,000 acres of Critical Habitat designations. PLF is also leading the effort to remove endangered species protection for the threatened Marbled Murrelet and many other endangered species. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <dschroeder@abcbirds.org>.

The Wood Stork and other Florida species are at risk of losing ESA protections. Photo: Laura Erickson

## Oil and Gas Drilling Plans Threaten Sage-Grouse in Colorado and Wyoming

The Greater Sage-Grouse is in trouble. Sage-grouse range and distribution have decreased by 56%, while overall abundance has been reduced by as much as 93% from presumed historic levels. Approximately half of the sage-grouse's sagebrush steppe habitat has been lost since European settlement. According to the most recent rangewide assessment... "continued loss and degradation of habitat and other factors... do not provide causes for optimism."

Myriad land uses harm sage-grouse, including oil and gas extraction, and particularly coalbed methane development. Recent research in the Powder River Basin in Wyoming found that sage-grouse lek counts in coalbed methane development fields declined by 82%, whereas leks outside these development fields declined by 12%. Sage-grouse populations in the Powder River Basin have suffered sharp declines over the last decade. It is becoming apparent that sage-grouse are being driven from energy production areas.

Despite this evidence, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently approved the Atlantic Rim project—2,000 coalbed methane and conventional gas wells in a sensitive Wyoming landscape, with only token wildlife protection. Field surveys found 88 sage-grouse leks in the project area, which are likely to disappear if the project proceeds. This project uses the same sage-grouse measures that have been used on the Pinedale Anticline and Jonah Fields, where BLM-funded research predicts sage-grouse will be extirpated within 19 years.

To minimize impacts on sage-grouse breeding, BLM requires operations to shut down from March through mid-June for all drilling facilities that are within a two-mile radius of sage-grouse leks. BLM admits there has been no research to determine whether the restrictions work.

### Roan Plateau Now Threatened

The Roan Plateau of Colorado, rising 3,500 feet above the Colorado River Valley and featuring beautiful vistas and abundant wildlife in a wide array of habitats, including sagebrush, is threatened by gas and oil drilling. The area is prized for hunting, fishing, and back-country recreation;

Colorado's Roan Plateau is under increasing threat from energy development and drilling. Many oil and gas wells already exist around the base of the plateau. Photo courtesy of EcoFlight.

drilling on the plateau could threaten the Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle, as well as Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse and Greater Sage-Grouse. In total, 125 species of birds and 33 species of mammals, including elk, black bear, and mountain lion, make their home in the plateau's woodlands and meadows.



Greater Sage-Grouse; FWS

*Myriad land uses harm sage-grouse, including oil and gas extraction, and particularly coalbed methane development.*

Despite the unique character of the Roan Plateau and strong local opposition to energy development, BLM is planning to lease the public lands of the plateau to oil and gas development. The region has been heavily-impacted by the drilling boom on western federal lands. There are already more than 5,000 wells in place on Colorado's Western Slope, and up to ten times that many are being planned. Across the sagebrush steppe, an estimated 107,000 new oil and gas wells will be drilled in Colorado, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming in the next 15-20 years, likely resulting in over 1,000,000 acres being disturbed by energy development.

The Roan drilling plan is currently being reviewed by the state of Colorado, which may seek to limit the size of the project or mitigate its environmental impacts. Colorado Representatives John Salazar and Mark Udall sought to prohibit the BLM from leasing the plateau. Their request was not included in the House Interior Appropriations Bill.

"If we could protect the Roan Plateau from oil and gas drilling, it would become a much-needed sagebrush reserve, free of development," said Mark Salvo, Director of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign. "There are very few protected areas of sagebrush steppe on a landscape that is rapidly disappearing." Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <dschroeder@abcbirds.org>.

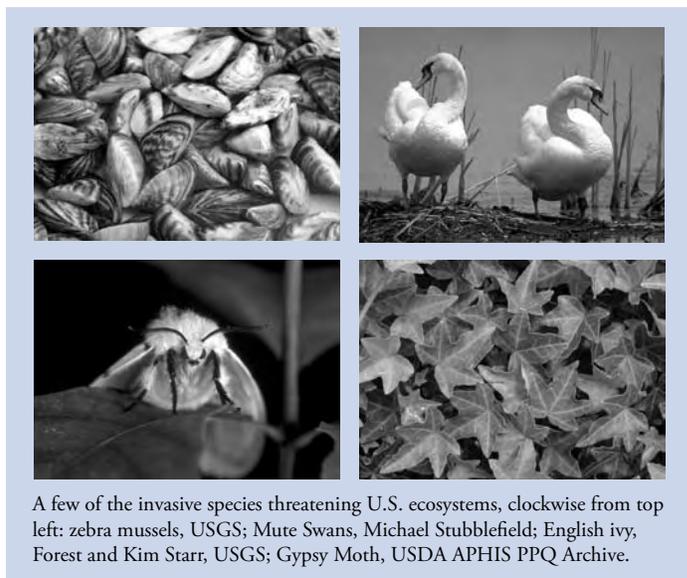


## Legislation Introduced to Tackle Threat of Invasive Species

To address the ever-expanding threat that invasive species pose to many birds, ABC consulted with U.S. Congressman Ron Kind (D-WI) to create legislation to identify harmful, non-native species, and to establish priorities for preserving native birds, fish, other wildlife, and their habitats.

HR 767, the Refuge Ecology Protection, Assistance, and Immediate Response Act, provides matching grants for projects that manage harmful non-native species, detect early infestations, and restore native species and habitats. This legislation would provide rapid response capability to states by making emergency funds available for controlling invasive species outbreaks and long-term monitoring of project sites.

The need for this legislation could not be greater. Under current law, native fish and wildlife are not directly protected from harmful non-native species on federal or any other lands. Significant portions of the land and water under federal jurisdiction, especially wildlife refuges, are infested with harmful, non-native species, which are able to spread unchecked to adjacent private and public lands and waters.



A few of the invasive species threatening U.S. ecosystems, clockwise from top left: zebra mussels, USGS; Mute Swans, Michael Stubblefield; English ivy, Forest and Kim Starr, USGS; Gypsy Moth, USDA APHIS PPQ Archive.

On Midway Atoll, for example, invasive golden crown-beard is quickly choking the island and contributing to nesting failures of Laysan Albatrosses. Cheatgrass has taken over tens of millions of acres of sagebrush, eliminating habitat for sage-grouse and other sagebrush-dependent species.

ABC will continue to lobby for passage of this important legislation when it is considered by the House Natural Resources Committee. For more information, contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <dschroeder@abcbirds.org>.

## House Passes Farm Bill, with a Slight Increase for Conservation

The House of Representatives has passed a \$286 billion, five-year Farm Bill that will impose some new limits on farm subsidies, increase support for fruit and vegetable growers, provide slight increases to conservation and nutrition programs, and cut off some federal assistance to farmers making more than \$1 million. The House rejected an amendment offered by Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) and Jeff Flake (R-AZ) that would have increased mandatory USDA conservation spending by approximately \$3 billion by reducing farm subsidies. The bipartisan reform bill garnered the support of a diverse coalition, including ABC, which actively lobbied for its passage, delivering over 1,300 personalized letters of support to every Representative and their key staff.

The House also defeated an amendment offered by Rep. Mark Udall (D-CO) that would have added 244,000 acres to the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), which provides assistance to landowners in conserving and enhancing ecological value of grasslands while maintaining their suitability

for grazing. GRP maximizes benefits to wildlife, because enrollment acceptance is prioritized to lands with the greatest biodiversity and where the threat of conversion to other land uses is greatest. For example, bird species such as the Greater Sage-Grouse have benefited from GRP assistance, which has protected their sagebrush habitat. Studies have shown that grassland bird populations on GRP lands are comparable to those in natural grassland habitats. Arguing for the need to ease the GRP backlog and protect more grassland and wildlife from development, Rep. Udall singled out ABC's support of his amendment in a speech before the House.

The Senate is expected to write a substantially different Farm Bill from the version passed by the House. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman, Tom Harkin (D-IA), has promised to increase funding for conservation programs 'far above' House numbers. This will likely generate a protracted battle when the bills go before a House-Senate conference committee this fall. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <dschroeder@abcbirds.org>.

## Will Congress Pass a Bird-Friendly Spending Bill?

Congress will soon decide how much to spend on bird conservation in 2008. The U.S. House of Representatives has already approved funding increases for some key programs benefitting migratory birds, such as the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) and Forest Service International Forestry programs. Funding for State Wildlife Grants and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) were also increased. The Senate has yet to take up a similar spending bill; ABC is urging the full Congress to support these increases when the final Interior Appropriations spending bill is negotiated with the Senate this fall.

The House of Representatives approved \$5 million for NMBCA, a 20% increase in funding over this fiscal year. This grant program helps migratory songbirds by conserving their dwindling habitats in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

“The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act is proving to be very effective and should be expanded,” said ABC’s Darin Schroeder. “ABC is asking members of the Interior Appropriations conference committee to fully fund the program.”

State and Tribal Wildlife Grants will receive \$72 million, a \$4.5 million increase over this year’s budget. Projects supported by this program protect and restore important lands and waters, collect information on imperiled wildlife, and develop partnerships with landowners to protect declining species and habitats on public and private lands. In Alabama, a landowner incentive program will focus on longleaf pine ecosystem restoration and in Arizona conservation projects will benefit 108 at-risk riparian and native grassland species including the Ferruginous Hawk. In Nevada and Oregon technical support and funding

to private landowners will help restore sage-grouse habitats.

NAWCA will see a \$3.2 million increase, to \$42.6 million. Other programs supported by ABC and the Bird Conservation Funding Coalition, including the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Management program, will also receive modest increases.

ABC continues to seek dedicated funds to clean up lead contamination on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, which is at the heart of a new Marine National Monument designated by President Bush in 2006. These funds are not currently included in the bill. You can help by contacting your Representative and Senators to urge their support for these essential programs. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <[dschroeder@abcbirds.org](mailto:dschroeder@abcbirds.org)>.

## Crane Conservation Act Seeks Funds

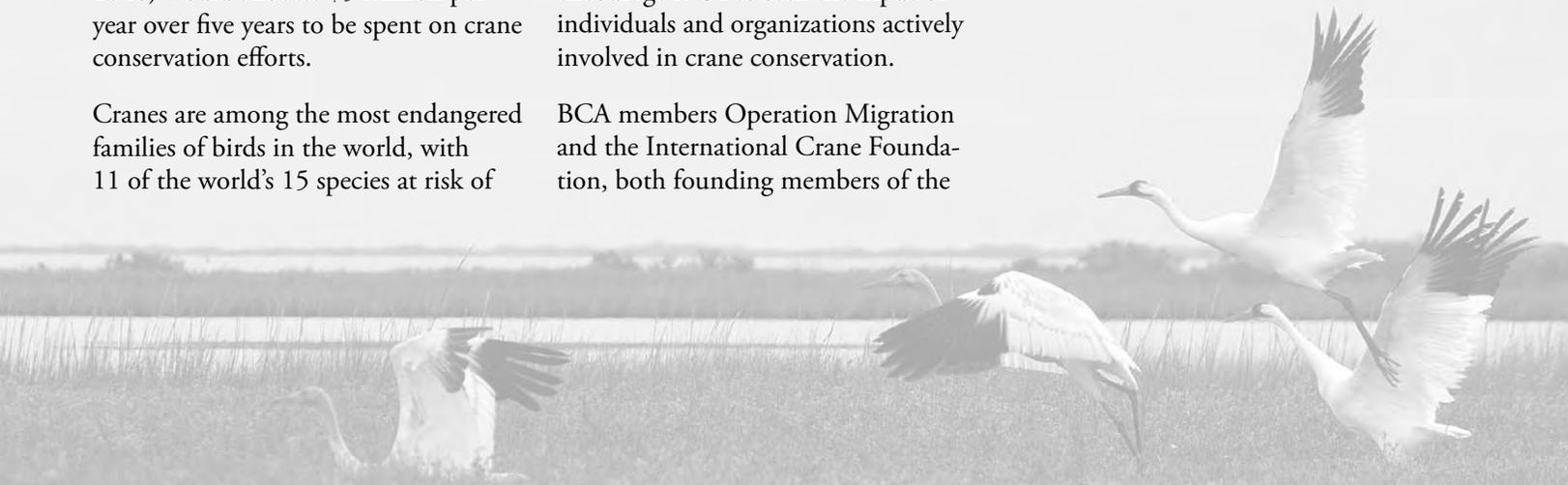
Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Representative Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) have introduced the Crane Conservation Act in the House and Senate to provide federal funding for crane protection and conservation. If passed, the Act (H.R. 1771 and S. 1048) would allocate \$5 million per year over five years to be spent on crane conservation efforts.

Cranes are among the most endangered families of birds in the world, with 11 of the world’s 15 species at risk of

extinction (according to the IUCN Red List). The proposed act would provide funding to help recover several endangered crane species, enlist the Department of Interior (DOI) to help enhance international and domestic crane conservation projects, and encourage DOI to seek the input of individuals and organizations actively involved in crane conservation.

BCA members Operation Migration and the International Crane Foundation, both founding members of the

Eastern Whooping Crane Partnership, have been working to move this legislation forward. The Crane Conservation Act of 2007 is also endorsed by the National Wildlife Refuge Association and Defenders of Wildlife (also BCA members). See [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org).



## Bristol Bay Stripped of Longstanding Protections

**O**n January 7, 2007, President Bush lifted the prohibition on selling oil leases in Bristol Bay, Alaska. The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has proposed beginning lease sales in 2011, but opposition to the drilling plan is mounting. Bristol Bay hosts one of the world's highest densities of breeding seabirds. It is also a staging ground and wintering area for tens of millions of seabirds, endangered marine mammals, and other wildlife. Forty percent of the total U.S. fisheries catch, including the world's largest wild run of sockeye salmon, comes from Bristol Bay.

The bay's richness was recognized as too important to risk in 1989, after the Exxon Valdez disaster. First, Congress included Bristol Bay in a moratorium on funding oil exploration. President George H. W. Bush then affirmed the congressional protection by withdrawing the area from consideration for leasing in 1990. Because of these prohibitions, the Department of Interior negotiated a repurchase for the leases that had already been sold.

However, in 2003, Congress removed a huge swath of the bay from the moratorium. In 2007, President Bush re-opened the bay for offshore oil and gas drilling; now oil leases may be sold for the area, provided that the guidelines of the National Environmental Policy Act are followed and environmental assessments are conducted. A report just released by MMS, after a meeting of agency experts to plan research, concluded that significant analysis of environmental impacts was needed because "...current information is insufficient to address oil and gas leasing issues."



Steller's Eider, a sea duck species already in decline, faces further threats from the proposed pipeline through Bristol Bay. Photo: Glen Tepke.

The MMS seabird working group for the region found that oil spills would be "potentially catastrophic events that could significantly reduce the total world population of certain species." Oil spills are more than a remote possibility; federal studies predict one or more major oil spills if this area is developed. Harsh weather and sea ice would make cleaning up spills doubly difficult, even if they could be contained quickly. The proposed pipeline for the project runs directly through key habitat for declining Steller's Eider, federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The Alaska Marine Conservation Council, local fishermen and communities, and the World Wildlife Fund are actively trying to block these lease sales. Legislation has been introduced in the House and Senate to permanently prevent drilling in the area, but protection is not yet secure. Contact Jessica Hardesty, ABC, <jhardesty@abcbirds.org>, or Kelly Harrell, Alaska Marine Conservation Council, 907-277-5357, [www.akmarine.org/our-work/protect-bristol-bay](http://www.akmarine.org/our-work/protect-bristol-bay).

## Lakewood Forest Preserve Threatened by Chicago's Olympic Bid

**I**f Chicago is awarded the 2016 Summer Olympics, there are plans to build a venue for equestrian events in part of the Lakewood Forest Preserve. At about 3,000 acres of mixed habitat types, Lakewood is the district's largest contiguous preserve, and host to 17 state-endangered species of plants and animals.

The decision to offer 300 acres of the preserve for the Olympics has angered local bird clubs and conservation organizations. The public was made aware of the plans only two weeks before the district voted on the project.

The plans call for a 15,000-seat stadium, an indoor arena, and temporary structures for athletes and broadcasters. Forest Preserves Executive Director, Tom Hahn, has assured

county taxpayers and environmentalists that no additional preserves would be affected if the Olympics deal goes through. The final decision on the venue for the 2016 Summer Olympics will be made in October 2009.

The Bird Conservation Network, a coalition of about 18 organizations in the Chicago area, has concluded that wildlife could be harmed by construction and ensuing activities at the preserve. Noise and disturbance from large-scale equestrian events could affect nearby nesting birds such as the Black Tern, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Sandhill Crane, and Henslow's Sparrow. Great Blue Herons could abandon their rookeries because of increased traffic and other human disturbances. Contact the Bird Conservation Network at [www.bcnbirds.org](http://www.bcnbirds.org) for more information.

## Balancing Birds and Barges

This summer, the Army Corps of Engineers began releasing water from the Gavins Point Dam, on the Missouri River, flooding hundreds of Least Tern and Piping Plover nests. The water was released to enable a tow boat pulling a barge laden with alfalfa to navigate the drought-stricken upper reaches of the river. The resulting rise in river level killed 81 Piping Plover eggs, and 113 Interior Least Tern eggs and chicks. Both species are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The Corps is required by law to provide water for navigation. To enable them to continue such operations without risking lawsuits for each death of an endangered species, they have been issued an Incidental Take Permit by FWS. The permit allows the take of approximately 350 tern and plover adults, eggs, or chicks per year in the Missouri River, based on FWS analysis of both species and their recovery targets. Although the Corps has historically killed far fewer birds than their allowable

maximum under the permit, this incident will significantly raise the total.

Despite this incident, tern and plover numbers have been increasing in recent years. In 1996, a 100-year flood oc-



Piping Plover chick: Glen Tepke

curred on the Missouri River, depositing sediment to form high sandbars, ideal nesting habitat for Interior Least Terns and Great Plains Piping Plovers. The result was a dramatic increase in the numbers of chicks fledging each year along the Missouri, up from an average of 136 to 397 for the terns, and from 125 to 756 for the plover.

However, erosion and re-vegetation has resulted in the gradual decline of

habitat conditions on these sandbars, a situation that has now become acute. In 2005, the Army Corps began creating artificial sandbars below Gavins Point Dam to benefit nesting birds. This resulted in high fledging numbers and a continuing population increase for both species.

While biologists agree that the Corps' habitat creation work has been, on balance, a great benefit to terns and plovers, many are dismayed at this summer's action in support of navigation, arguing the cost to endangered species conservation was too high for just a single barge of grain. Delaying the project by just three weeks would have allowed most of the chicks to fledge safely. Although the Corps has acted within the bounds of their incidental take permit, we encourage them to make stronger attempts in the future to avoid large endangered species mortality events in support of navigation. Contact Gavin Shire, ABC, <gshire@abcbirds.org >.

## Dam Threatens to Drown Columbia National Wildlife Refuge

In June 2007, Washington State and the Bureau of Reclamation released an appraisal for a new dam in Lower Crab Creek that would drown one of the most important bird habitats in that state.

The Crab Creek Dam would be up to 240 feet high, 1.5 miles long, and cost

taxpayers some \$3 billion. The dam would flood 19,000 acres of federal and state lands dedicated to wildlife, including Columbia National Wildlife Refuge and endangered steelhead and salmon fisheries, as well as 8,600 acres of farms.

According to the Washington Department of Fish and Game, Lower Crab Creek is one of the most important waterfowl breeding areas in Washington, used by millions of birds for resting and feeding on their annual migration.

Columbia NWR hosts 200 species of birds, including 25,000 Sandhill Cranes each spring when an estimated

85% of the entire Pacific Coast population stops over. The town of Othello holds an annual Sandhill Crane Festival in mid-March to celebrate their arrival.

Waterfowl populations often peak at more than 100,000 during spring and fall. The Refuge is on the Pacific Flyway migratory bird route and closes to the public during fall to provide undisturbed habitat for the massive flocks of ducks and Canada Geese.

"Building a dam on Crab Creek would devastate the wildlife refuge," said Dr. John Osborn of the Center for Environmental Law and Policy. For more information, see [www.celp.org](http://www.celp.org).



Sandhill Cranes: Laura Erickson

## International Cooperation Drives Yucatán Conservation Project

In the spirit of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative's (NABCI) effort to foster international partnerships, the U.S.-based Central Hardwoods Joint Venture has joined forces with the new Yucatán Peninsula Alliance for Birds (AAPY) to develop a proposal to protect 111,000 acres of bird habitat in the northeastern Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico. The project will combine conservation easements, bird research and monitoring, and improved grassland management.

Over 540 bird species occur on the peninsula, of which more than 200 are neotropical migrants. Fourteen species are endemics, found only on the Yucatán Peninsula, and 15 are migrant species that are shared with the Central Hardwoods region. For transient species moving from breeding to wintering grounds, the coastal and inland forests of the northeast portion of the peninsula provide an important stopover site.

In addition to the birds that flock to the Yucatán each year are tens of thousands of visitors, attracted to the peninsula's tropical climate, white-sand beaches, and Mayan archeological sites. Tourism-related development is now spreading rapidly in several directions from the resort community of Cancún and the forests on which both resident and migrant birds depend are squarely in its path. During the last five years, massive investments in tourism development projects, many with golf courses and marinas, have totaled \$2.5 billion in the state of Quintana Roo alone. As a result of this

ongoing development, land use modifications are about to destroy the majority of natural habitat in the northeastern portion of the peninsula. Pollution from increased agricultural pressures and a reduction in water quality and availability are beginning to negatively impact the quality of life in the region.

In response to these impending threats, local conservation interests have joined to develop a regional plan for migratory and resident bird species. The initial partners include Pronatura Península Yucatán, Niños y Crías, Amigos de Sian Ka'an, The Nature Conservancy, the private reserve El Eden, the federal National Commission for Protected Natural Areas, and the Mexican research institute CINVESTAV.

As part of the effort to protect bird habitat, the partners are working together to establish the first land conservation trust in southern Mexico and a stewardship endowment. Also being developed are a regional bird monitoring network, scientific database, fire management plan, and best management practices guide for cattle-raising in the region.

A detailed proposal was presented to the executive committees associated with NABCI in August of 2007, and APPY partners are now trying to identify and develop sources of funding to implement the work. For a copy of the Alliance's plan, contact ABC's Jane Fitzgerald, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture Coordinator, <j Fitzgerald@abcbirds.org>



Several species found in the Central Hardwoods region winter in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. From left to right: Worm-eating Warbler: Barth Schorre; Louisiana Waterthrush: Bill Hubick; Blue-winged Warbler: Peter LaTourrette/birdphotography.com; Wood Thrush: ClipArt.com

## Canada Recommends Birds for Endangered List

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, alarmed that aerial-feeding, insect-eating birds are disappearing, designated the Common Nighthawk as threatened in April 2007. The Chimney Swift was also assessed as threatened. The nighthawk has shown both long and short-term population declines, especially across its northern range, where a 46% decline was determined for areas surveyed over the last three generations of adult birds.

The cause of declines in Common Nighthawks and other aerial insectivores remains uncertain. Declines may be due to pesticide use that eliminates the birds' prey base, and reductions in habitat availability caused by fire suppression, intensive agriculture, and a drop in the number of gravel rooftops in urban areas. A recovery team will be assembled, and a recovery plan will be created, at which time public comments will be sought. Visit: [www.cosewic.gc.ca/rpts/Detailed\\_Species\\_Assessments\\_e.html](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/rpts/Detailed_Species_Assessments_e.html)

## Izembek “Road to Nowhere” to Set Wilderness Precedent?

Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, an ABC-designated Globally Important Bird Area, has become the center of a national conservation debate.

Almost all of the refuge's 315,000 acres were designated as a Wilderness Area by Congress in 1980, prohibiting the construction of roads and buildings, and the use of motorized vehicles. However, the state of Alaska is now exerting pressure on Congress to permit a road to be built through the refuge, prompting fears from conservation groups that such a decision could set a precedent, and lead to requests for similar road projects or mining and drilling operations in other Wilderness Areas.

The debate centers on a proposal to connect the communities of King Cove and Cold Bay by means of a road that will run through the heart of the refuge. The road would disrupt Tundra Swan nesting habitat and run through waterfowl loafing and feeding areas.

Izembek is critically important to staging waterfowl, including most of the world's Emperor Geese, most of the Pacific population of Brant, and up to 23,000 Steller's Eiders (listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act). The refuge hosts some 285,000 shorebirds during fall migration each

year, and includes what is probably the world's largest eelgrass bed, on which the geese and other waterfowl feed. The refuge is also notable for having been declared the first U.S. Wetland of International Importance under the RAMSAR Convention.

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*The refuge is critically important to staging waterfowl, including ...Emperor Geese, most of the Pacific population of Brant, and up to 23,000 Steller's Eiders...*

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A road linking the 800-person community of King Cove with the small town of Cold Bay was first proposed in the late 1990s, but was scrapped in favor of a \$37 million project that provided hovercraft service and upgrades to the King Cove clinic and airstrip. Despite this, the King Cove Corporation and the State of Alaska are still pressing for the road to be built, and are now offering the refuge a 61,000 acre land



exchange in return for construction approval.

Road proponents also point to a mitigation proposal to build a cable perimeter along the road to prevent incursions by off-road vehicles into the refuge. However, costly maintenance would be required to ensure the cable “fence” is kept in a functional condition. It is unknown what effects such a fence would have on the bears and caribou that can now move freely across the area, and what impacts these large mammals could have on the fence.

A recent report by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (available at [www.refugenet.org/new-pdf-files/Izembek%20report.pdf](http://www.refugenet.org/new-pdf-files/Izembek%20report.pdf)) calls the project a “road to nowhere”, suggesting that it will take longer to drive from King Cove to Cold Bay than it currently takes by hovercraft, and that medical evacuations, a primary stated reason for the road, would actually be more hazardous by road due to avalanches and unstable road conditions. Other opponents point out that previous attempts at road construction in the area have met with severe logistical problems due to the difficult terrain, causing them to exceed budgets and to require significant re-routing. Congressional hearings are expected to commence in the near future. For more information, see [www.izembek.org](http://www.izembek.org).

## Seabird Die-offs Occur for Third Consecutive Year

Since 2005, observers on both coasts have documented large-scale seabird die-offs during the spring and summer (*Bird Calls*, Vol. 9, No. 3). This summer, for the third year in a row, hundreds of dead and dying seabirds, including ABC Green List species such as Greater and Manx Shearwaters and Brandt's Cormorant, and other species such as Tufted Puffin and Rhinoceros Auklet, began to wash up on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

One major cause of these deaths appears to be starvation. Changing ocean currents along the Pacific Coast, which some scientists attribute to global warming, are causing more frequent El Niño events. These weather patterns suppress and delay seasonal "upwellings" of cold water that normally bring nutrients that support the growth of small organisms, such as krill, to the surface. For the past two years, offshore upwelling did not begin off the Pacific Coast until two months later than usual—bad news for the birds, because the warm water provided them little food during the height of the breeding season.

Researchers on the Pacific Coast have also detected large blooms of toxin-producing algae that may be poisoning seabirds. These diatoms (one-celled algae) produce domoic acid,

a potent neurotoxin that accumulates in shellfish and fish, which are consumed by marine mammals and birds. Large bird and mammal die-offs have been observed in areas where these algal blooms occurred, and while a link has not been proven, scientists are analyzing data and waiting for definitive test results.

On the Atlantic Coast, Greater Shearwaters are again experiencing die-offs, with over 2,500 dead birds reported so far this year. Most of the birds appear to have died of starvation during their migration, a periodic natural phenomenon, but one that is becoming more frequent. In response to seabird deaths on the Atlantic Coast, FWS, in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey and the Seabird Ecological Assessment Network (SEANET), is working on a reporting system that will help determine the magnitude of these seabird die-offs, and correlate them to changing oceanic conditions and prey availability.

For more information, or to help collect information on seabird mortality, contact SEANET ([www.tufts.edu/vet/seanet](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/seanet)) on the Atlantic Coast, or COASST (<http://coasst.org/index.cfm>) on the Pacific Coast.



## Proposed Army Brigade a "Stryke" Against Hawaiian Habitat

The creation of a \$1.5 billion Stryker brigade, touted as one of the biggest defense projects in Hawaii since World War II, is currently the center of a lawsuit brought by native Hawaiian groups against the U.S. Army. The plan would convert the Second Brigade, 25th Infantry Division to a Stryker Brigade Combat Team that includes over 300 eight-wheeled, 20-ton armored vehicles.

The project necessitates the acquisition of 1,400 acres on Oahu and 23,000 acres on the Big Island for training grounds. Work on new facilities began soon after the Pentagon approved the project in July 2004; the army also began to bring Stryker vehicles and soldiers to the islands.

Three native Hawaiian groups, aided by Earthjustice, filed a lawsuit in September 2004 against the plan, charging that the project would damage native Hawaiian cultural sites and harm endangered species, including birds such as the Oahu Elepaio and the Palila, and their habitats. Critics have also charged that Congress authorized millions of dollars for the brigade before an environmental review was concluded.

In October 2006, a U.S. Court of Appeals issued a temporary injunction to stop the Army from continuing the

Stryker brigade project, ruling that the Army violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when it failed to consider locations other than Hawaii for the Stryker brigade. The court also ordered the Army to conduct a supplemental environmental impact statement.

The new report, issued earlier this year, analyzes basing options for the brigade, including leaving it in the islands or moving it to Alaska or Colorado. The report admits that keeping the unit in the islands will significantly affect threatened and endangered species, but claims that the Army has developed measures to limit the brigade's effects.

Hundreds of community members spoke at hearings in 2004 against the Stryker Brigade. In a recent news poll, Hawaiians opposed the Stryker Brigade expansion by a margin of three to one. The Army extended the public comment period on the draft environmental impact statement until October 30 to provide additional time for comment. The EIS is available at [www.sbct-seis.org](http://www.sbct-seis.org). Written comments can be sent to Public Affairs Office; U.S. Army Environmental Command; Building E-4460; 5179 Hoadley Road; Attention: IMAE-PA; Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-540.

## Keeping Your Cats Indoors Can Help Prevent Rabies

Keeping cats indoors has multiple benefits to cats, birds and human health, including rabies prevention. This was the message from ABC on the first annual World Rabies Day, September 8, promoting rabies prevention awareness and education. ABC raises public awareness about the impacts of free-roaming and feral cats through its *Cats Indoors!* Campaign.

“Cat owners can reduce the chance their pet will be exposed to rabies by keeping it indoors,” said George Wallace, ABC’s Chief Conservation Officer. “There is a growing problem of rabies in cats—there are now more cases of cat rabies than dog rabies.”

In 1991, there were 155 reported cases of rabies in dogs and 189 in cats. In 2000, 29 cats tested positive for rabies in New York State; 76.3% of all rabid domestic animals. The following year, cases of rabies in cats increased by 8.4%, whereas those in dogs, cattle, horses, sheep, and goats, all decreased. Rabies cases in cats continue to be more than twice as numerous as those in dogs or cattle.

Cats can transmit diseases and parasites such as rabies, cat-scratch fever, and toxoplasmosis to other cats, wildlife

or people. To decrease their chances of exposure to rabid animals, veterinarians recommend that cats should be confined to the home or yard, or walked on a leash. Roaming pets are more likely to be exposed to rabies than those supervised by their owners. To decrease the risk of rabies infecting

***To decrease their chances of exposure to rabid animals...cats should be confined to the home or yard, or walked on a leash.***

humans, health agencies recommend that children should never approach or touch wild animals, pet cats that they do not know well, or stray cats.

There are more than 90 million pet cats in the United States; most roam outside at least part of the time. Millions of stray and feral cats also roam our cities, suburbs, and rural areas.

“Scientists estimate that free-roaming cats kill hundreds of millions of birds, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians each year,” said Wallace. “Cat predation is an added stress to wildlife populations already struggling to survive habitat loss, pollution, pesticides, and other human impacts.”



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### Washington DC Bill Would Promote Cat Colonies

ABC’s Vice President Michael Parr testified before the Washington D.C. City Council in June concerning legislation that adds as one of the Animal Welfare Agency’s duties to promote and encourage trap, neuter, release (TNR), potentially allowing for an explosion in the number of feral cats in the city. Parr’s testimony raised concerns about TNR, and urged city officials to prevent the formation of cat colonies. An ABC fact sheet: “*Managed Cat Colonies: The Wrong Solution to a Tragic Problem*” is available at [www.abcbirds.org/cats/factsheets/coloniespdf](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/factsheets/coloniespdf).

## Second Black Swift Nesting Site Found in Montana

ABC’s Northern Rockies Coordinator Dan Casey has found only the second Black Swift nesting site in Montana. Peering at a waterfall in Glacier National Park, Casey spotted a Black Swift diving headlong into the water. He was then able to find the nest behind the waterfall, lodged into the rock beneath an overhang. The breeding site remains active. A recent visit revealed

three nests with chicks. Black Swifts are almost completely dependent on waterfalls for nesting and are difficult to monitor because at dusk they fly directly to their nests without circling the falls. There is currently no accurate population estimate for the species in Montana. Contact Dan Casey, ABC, <[dcasey@abcbirds.org](mailto:dcasey@abcbirds.org)>.



In Oregon, ABC’s Northern Pacific Rainforest BCR Coordinator Bob Altman, working with local partners and the USDA Willamette National Forest, recently installed a Black Swift interpretive sign at the Salt Creek Falls site on the Cascades Birding Trail. Shown from left to right: Ryan Brown, USFS, Bob Altman, Stacey Smith, USFS. Photo: Steve Holmer

## Birds in Brief

### Kirtland's Warbler Nest Discovered in Wisconsin

An active Kirtland's Warbler nest was discovered by a birder in June 2007 on property owned by the Plum Creek Timber Company in central Wisconsin. In the past two years, several singing males have been found at a single location in Wisconsin, prompting speculation and optimism that the species would ultimately be found nesting in the state. The Kirtland's Warbler lives primarily in jack pine forests in the northern lower peninsula of Michigan. However, the species has been seen in recent years in other areas, including Wisconsin, Ontario, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Kirtland's Warbler numbers have increased steadily since 1990, reaching 1,486 males in 2006, the highest number on record since population monitoring began. Recovery efforts include the work of federal, state, and private partners. In Michigan, successful efforts to recover the Kirtland's Warbler include restoration of nesting habitat, control of the parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird, public information and outreach, and the support and assistance of organizations such as the Michigan Audubon Society and Kirtland Community College.



Kirtland's Warbler: USDA Forest Service/Ron Austing

### New Puffleg Confirmed

A new species of hummingbird has been confirmed in the mountains of southwest Colombia. The Gorgeted Puffleg was first seen in 2005 during montane cloud forest surveys in the Serranía del Pinche region. Subsequent surveys yielded photographs, and the bird has now been officially recognized as a distinct species. Worryingly, the Serranía del Pinche is unprotected and under severe threat from slash and burn agriculture, prompting calls to protect the habitat before it and the puffleg disappear. The site where the puffleg was discovered is almost certain to qualify as an Alliance for Zero Extinction site ([www.zeroextinction.org](http://www.zeroextinction.org)), as it is the only known location for the species.

### Illegal Wild Bird Trade Continues in Nicaragua

Although imports of wild-caught birds into the European Union have been banned since January 2007 (*Bird Calls* Vol. 11, No. 1), and in the United States since 1975, the illegal wild bird trade continues to flourish in the markets of Nicaragua. In Managua, the capital, tourists can easily buy a wide variety of threatened species, especially parrots. A British journalist recently reported being offered an endangered Great Green Macaw by a bird trader while visiting the country.

Conservationists have been trying to establish local support for ecotourism, which would help alleviate poverty while protecting the country's bird life. However, trapping birds is a source of quick and easy cash in Nicaragua, where 70% of the population lives in poverty. The country also has a long tradition of keeping wild birds as pets. For more information on the illegal wildlife trade see <http://web.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/programs/wildlifetrade/>.



Gorgeted Puffleg: Alex Corres

### Wild Bird Conservation Act Enforced

A federal appeals court has upheld the conviction of a bird collector for illegally importing Black Sparrowhawks from South Africa. Thomas Cullen, a raptor collector, tried to import Black Sparrowhawks, but did not qualify under the terms of the Wild Bird Conservation Act. He attempted to skirt the law by having a couple import three birds as pets, then submitted falsified documents to the Wildlife Service about their intended use.

This was Cullen's second criminal conviction related to the wildlife trade. He was convicted in 1986 for exporting Red-tailed Hawk eggs to England in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act. Cullen now faces four months in prison.

### Acid rain contributing to Bicknell's Thrush declines?

Acid rain may be causing die-offs of high-altitude conifer forests, and killing snails and other sources of

calcium needed for egg production in the New York Adirondack Subalpine Forest Bird Conservation Area. The National and High Peaks Audubon Societies, Adirondack Mountain Club, and other groups are exploring the impact of acid rain on the nesting success of Bicknell's Thrush and other high-elevation birds. Reduction of sulphur dioxide emissions and acid rain is now a significant New York State initiative. For more information, contact ABC's Dan Lambert, Northeast Bird Monitoring Coordinator, <dlambert@abcbirds.org>.

## Michigan to Reduce Double-crested Cormorant Numbers

On August 17, 2007, federal agencies released a final amendment to a 2004 Environmental Assessment on Double-crested Cormorant management in Michigan. Measures already approved in 2004 sought to

reduce the cormorant population by oiling eggs, harassing flocks, and in some cases shooting birds. This most recent amendment expands the cormorant program already in place by raising the allowable number killed to 10,500 individuals per year. The increase was sought by sports and commercial fisheries and the aquaculture industry, who claim that cormorants are depleting stocks of perch, smallmouth bass, and other freshwater fish. Large colonies of the cormorants may damage nesting islands and crowd

out populations of other colonial nesting birds such as Black-Crowned Night-Heron, Green and Great Blue Heron, and Common and Caspian Tern. While cormorant populations are at historic highs in many areas—the total estimated population of Double-crested Cormorants in North America is approximately two million birds—this decision appears to be driven more by commercial pressures than sound science.

## Good News for the Hawaiian Petrel

A recent survey of Hawaiian Petrels nesting on the island of Lanai shows a substantial increase in the species' population. Researchers believe that the Lanai population is now larger than that on Maui, where approximately 1,200 birds nest.

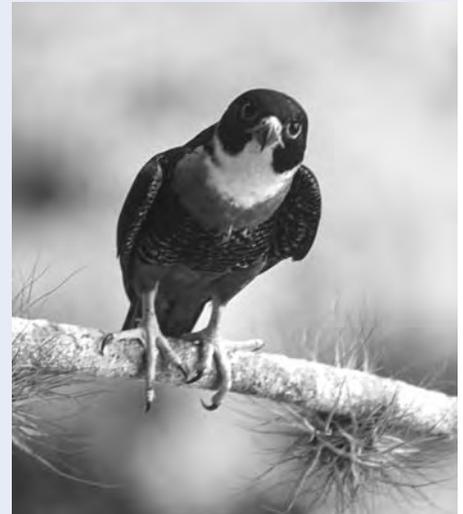
Due to the remoteness of their colonies and nocturnal habits, Hawaiian Petrel nesting populations are difficult to survey. The most effective method for conducting censuses has been by audio recognition, despite attempts to use radar to track the petrels.

According to Scott Fretz of the Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife, goats have been eradicated from the Lanai colony area, which could explain its resurgence, since goats often trample nesting burrows. Fencing and cat trapping will continue to safeguard the Lanai nesting burrows.

Another finding announced by researchers was that some satellite-tracked petrels from this colony flew all the way to the Aleutian Islands to



Hawaiian Petrel: Jack Jeffrey



Orange-breasted Falcon: Angel Muela

forage, and then returned to Lanai to feed their chicks—a round trip of some 7,000 miles.

## Orange-breasted Falcons Back in the Wild

Captive-bred Orange-breasted Falcons have been reintroduced into the wild for the first time since conservation efforts began over 20 years ago. The birds were raised at a Wyoming facility managed by Robert Berry as part of a program run by the Peregrine Fund ([www.peregrinefund.org/default.asp](http://www.peregrinefund.org/default.asp)), and released into parts of their former range in western Belize, where wild-hatched birds had previously been successfully released.

Given its broad range from Mexico to Argentina, surprisingly little is known about this small raptor. Its total population remains poorly quantified, and its population trend is unknown. The Central American population is thought to number as few as 35 birds.

This recent release of six birds could increase the population in the northern part of the species' range by up to 17%, depending on survival rates.





## Help ABC Support Seabirds!

Albatrosses are arguably the most threatened group of birds in the world today. An astounding 19 out of 22 species are regarded as threatened due to a variety of causes, including mortality from longline fishing, lead poisoning, loss of nesting habitat, and predation of eggs and chicks by introduced mammals.

American Bird Conservancy is the only national U.S. bird conservation organization working to solve these problems for albatrosses and other seabirds throughout the Western Hemisphere. So far we have aided the dramatic reduction in longline bycatch in Hawaii and Alaska, brought worldwide attention to the poisoning of

Laysan Albatrosses by peeling lead paint on Midway Atoll, and are collaborating with Latin American partners to protect critical nesting habitat.

We have the partners and the solutions to overcome all the major threats to these magnificent ocean wanderers, but we need your help.

Please use the enclosed envelope to support ABC's Seabird Program. Your donation is vital to our continued success.

Thank you,

George Fenwick  
President, ABC

Black-footed Albatross (bottom); Laysan Albatross and chick (top): ClipArt.com

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