

# BIRDCALLS

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## Ecuador's Río Canandé Reserve Expands:

*More than 360 Bird Species Better Protected*

**F**orests that are among the most species-rich on earth are now better protected, thanks to an effort in Ecuador among Fundación Jocotoco, ABC, Rainforest Trust, World Land Trust, and March Conservation Fund. The partners added 1,187 acres to the Río Canandé Reserve, bringing the reserve's total size to 6,100 acres of protected land in the highly threatened Chocó region.

"This is an extremely important area for birds, with more than 360 species observed in the reserve," said Benjamin Skolnik, ABC's Ecuador Program Director. "Many are threatened or near-threatened, and several are large species that require expanses of intact forest habitat."

Avian residents of the reserve include the Great Green Macaw—a species known for its rank as the world's second-largest parrot (just behind Hyacinth Macaw) and for its highly endangered status. Other notable reserve birds are the Great Curassow, Banded Ground-cuckoo, Orange-fronted Barbet, Chocó Woodpecker, Rufous-crowned Antpitta, Long-wattled Umbrellabird, and Scarlet-breasted Dacnis.

The Río Canandé Reserve and neighboring properties are situated in the Chocó Endemic Bird Area, which is home to 62 restricted-range bird species—the highest number in the world. These forests have one of the world's largest concentrations of endemic species, with approximately 25 percent of the total species found nowhere else.



Great Green Macaws by Evgeniapp, Shutterstock

The Río Canandé Reserve and neighboring properties are situated in the Chocó Endemic Bird Area, which is home to 62 restricted-range bird species—the highest number in the world.

In addition to its importance for bird conservation, more than 100 mammal species have been recorded at Río Canandé, including jaguar, brown-headed spider monkey, mantled howler monkey, and white-fronted capuchin. There are also 61 species of reptiles and amphibians, many found only in the Chocó ecosystem.

*continued on page 2*

PAGE

9

Forests Re-appearing  
in Hawai'i

PAGE

11

Western Population of  
Yellow-billed Cuckoo  
Listed as "Threatened"

PAGE

17

Good Summer for Gulf  
Beach-nesting Birds

Ecuador's Río Canandé Reserve Expands, *from page 1*

Río Canandé is part of the Alliance for Zero Extinction site for the Mache glass frog, meaning it is the only place left on earth where this species can be found.

The expansion resulted from the purchase of six properties adjacent to the existing reserve in a region ranked as the fourth most significant biodiversity hotspot in the world.

Unfortunately, less than 10 percent of the original Ecuadorian Chocó forest cover remains, due largely to timber extraction and the rapid spread of palm oil plantations.

The acquisition is timely, given the imminent construction of a bridge over the Canandé River. This development is expected to exacerbate habitat destruction,

facilitating an increase in human settlement along with extraction of wood and likely more oil palm plantations.

Fortunately, with the support of World Land Trust and ABC, Jocotoco will be able to hire an additional forest guard and begin management activities to deter these activities.

## Federal Officials: Outdoor Cat Colonies a Bad Idea

Recently, the Panama City Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) issued a statement in opposition to a plan to protect and feed an expanding number of outdoor cats. In a letter to the Board of County Commissioners of Escambia County, Florida, the FWS's Catherine Phillips warned that outdoor cats were having "adverse impacts... on federally listed threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and other vulnerable native wildlife."

Feral cat activists have been lobbying the Board of County Commissioners for a change in local laws that would establish a Trap, Neuter and Release (TNR) program there. Although cat activists claim that these programs are an effective way to shrink feral cat populations, research published in peer-reviewed science journals have concluded the opposite. While many cats are beloved pets, researchers have also established that free-roaming cats spread diseases that harm wildlife

and people and take the lives of billions of birds and small mammals each year.

The FWS-Panama City letter said that it "opposes trap-neuter-release programs that allow...cats to return to free-ranging conditions." Instead of legalizing outdoor cat protection programs, the letter urged Escambia County officials to "ensure that cat owners act responsibly to restrain or confine their animals and hold owners accountable for any damages to wildlife that occur from allowing animals to roam at large."

The letter also recommended supporting educational efforts such as ABC's Cats Indoors Program.

Despite the many concerns raised by FWS and a broad coalition of conservation organizations, the Board of County Commissioners ultimately implemented the TNR program.

To see the letter, visit [ABCbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/helpful\\_resources.html](https://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/helpful_resources.html)



Outdoor cats by Budimir Jevtic, Shutterstock

## Good News: Culture of Conservation Spreading in Peru

*Bad news dominates world news headlines, but outside the spotlight ABC and our partners are achieving great conservation successes for birds in the Western Hemisphere. In one example, ABC and our partner ECOAN (Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos), directed by Tino Auca, have created a world-class nature reserve in northern Peru at Abra Patricia. Most encouragingly, our shared culture of conservation is spreading to surrounding communities and beyond.*

Back in November 2004, I was a grad student traveling with two buddies from the Pacific coast on one of Peru's few paved highways across the Andes. This area is known as the best place to see rarities such as the Long-whiskered Owlet and Ochre-fronted Antpitta. We spent all day birdwatching, hiking deep into the forests and up steep slopes covered in bamboo and gnarled trees. Sweaty, dirty, and rained-upon, we saw a ton of birds and loved every moment of it.

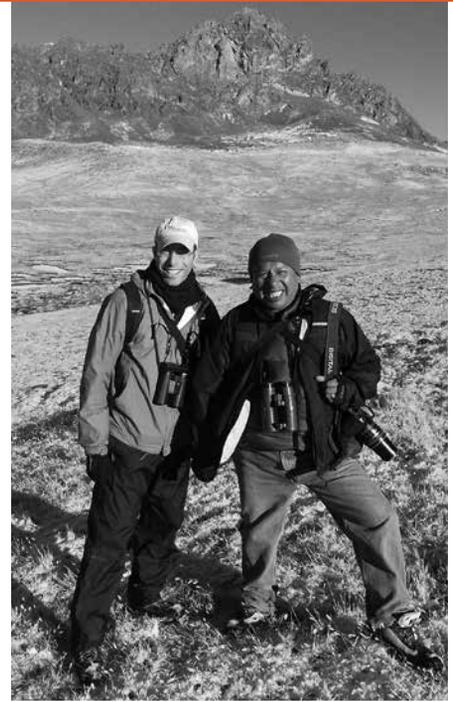
At that time, Abra Patricia was an unprotected frontier with a few hardscrabble colonists from elsewhere in the Andes living in the area. Soon many of these forests would be cleared for pastures. In 2005, ECOAN began purchasing forestland with ABC's support to establish the reserve at Abra Patricia and worked with the nearby community of Pomacochas to create the Huembo Reserve to protect the Marvelous Spatuletail hummingbird.

I joined ABC in 2008 and to my delight started supervising ABC's projects in Peru in 2010, providing an opportunity to return to Peru several times. ABC and ECOAN together expanded the Abra Patricia Reserve to more than 25,000

acres and expanded Huembo to 113 acres. We built a lodge and research center at Abra Patricia and a visitor center at Huembo. We also collaborated with hundreds of people in surrounding communities to plant roughly one million trees and coffee bushes to restore habitat on degraded lands, benefiting both resident and migratory birds.

My most recent visit to Abra Patricia was in April 2014, after an absence of almost two years, and I was amazed by the positive changes. The reserve still faces challenges, but returning to see it functioning better than ever, and bolstered by new properties acquired in 2013, was extremely rewarding.

ECOAN has not only planted trees in the ground but also the seeds of a new conservation culture. In addition to properties surrounding the reserve now being managed by conservation-minded owners, conservation farther afield has been sparked. For example, thanks again to ECOAN, at least four additional hummingbird sanctuaries have been established. ECOAN leads an alliance of tour operators, helping local people benefit economically from protecting nature and, with ABC's support, continues to work with government authorities to



Daniel Lebbin and Tino Auca at the Ushurupata bog of the Tomas Yuayos community, well above 13,000 feet in Peru's central Andes. Photo by Alan Chamorro, July 2013.

establish new protected areas for conservation. Others are following this example.

In Peru and throughout the Americas, ABC and our partners are together bringing back the birds. The global trends may be negative, but we're hopeful—and we're determined to succeed.



For more, please visit [abcbirds.org/Results](http://abcbirds.org/Results) and follow ABC's blog: <http://abcbirds.wordpress.com>

*Daniel Lebbin works in ABC's International Division, leading projects in Peru, Bolivia, and Chile to create and expand nature reserves for the hemisphere's rarest birds. Dan co-authored "The American Bird Conservancy Guide to Bird Conservation" published in 2010. He received his Ph.D. from Cornell University.*

## U.S. Bird Trends: Cloudy, with Rays of Hope

Birds seen as “indicator species” for the health of American natural landscapes are declining at alarming rates, even as new research and creative approaches to bird conservation are raising hopes that the birds and their habitats can be saved.

That’s the essence of “State of the Birds 2014,” a comprehensive study of U.S. bird trends published by the U.S. Committee of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), a 23-member partnership of government agencies, universities, and conservation groups including ABC.

“The good news in this report is that it’s clear that bird conservation programs work,” said Steve Holmer, Senior Policy Advisor at ABC. “The alarming news is that right now about one-third of all the bird species in the United States are declining, and many of their habitats continue to be degraded.”

The report is based on extensive reviews of bird population data from the U.S. Breeding Bird Survey, the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and other studies. It’s the fifth edition of *State of the Birds* to be published since 2009. It examines the overall health of groups of birds dependent on one of seven natural habitats: grasslands, forests, wetlands, ocean, aridlands, islands, and coasts.

### Big Declines in Aridlands, Grasslands

After examining the population trends of birds in desert, sagebrush, and chaparral habitats of the West, the report’s authors identify aridlands as the habitat with the steepest population declines in the nation. A 46 percent loss of these birds has been documented since 1968 in states such as Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. Bendire’s and Le Conte’s Thrashers are the two fastest-declining aridland species. Habitat loss and fragmentation due to development, exacerbated by severe drought, are the largest threats.

Significant declines also occurred in the nation’s grasslands, where the report notes a decline in breeding birds like Eastern Meadowlark and Bobolink of nearly 40 percent since 1968. Since the 1990s, significant investments in bird conservation have leveled off those trend lines, and Holmer says more such investments are needed.

“We’re particularly concerned about the birds that live in deserts and grasslands in the West, such as the Greater Sage-Grouse and the Long-billed Curlew,” Holmer told the BBC in an interview. “These lands are being heavily used and there’s a great deal of oil and gas development, so it’s created a huge conservation challenge.”



The report notes a decline in breeding birds like Eastern Meadowlark and Bobolink of nearly 40 percent since 1968.

### Mixed Results for Forest and Coastal Birds

The report concludes that forest bird species have benefited from targeted conservation. The creation and preservation of large swaths of forests through public-private partnerships in the Appalachian Mountains and the Northwest may slow the rate at which forest-dependent species such as Golden-winged Warbler and Oak Titmouse have been declining, for example. But the report says these programs will need to be expanded before these declines can be reversed: since 1968, western forest bird species have declined by nearly 20 percent, while eastern forest bird counts have declined by 32 percent.

Similarly mixed results were reported for birds squeezed into strips of coastal habitat compressed by development and population growth. Migratory coastal birds including Piping Plover and rufa Red Knot have been crashing for a wide range of reasons, including

loss of critical wintering and migration stopover habitat, human disturbance, and rising sea levels due to climate change. But counts of coastal birds that stay in the United States show sharp increases, thanks to sound strategic planning and the establishment of 160 national coastal wildlife refuges and nearly 600,000 acres of national seashore in 10 American states.

### Watching the Watch List

The 2014 report includes a revised Watch List of 233 declining birds in need of “immediate conservation attention.” Forty-two open ocean birds found in U.S. waters made the latest list due to problems such as overfishing, direct mortality in fisheries, and oil and plastics pollution. All 33 of the Hawaiian forest birds made the Watch List as well, their seriously imperiled state driven by predation, habitat destruction, and disease caused by non-native species ranging from feral pigs and rats to disease-carrying mosquitos. Just over one-third of all bird species listed under the Endangered Species Act in the United States are Hawaiian birds.

Another group of birds on the Watch List will need help on an international scale. It consists of

30 neotropical migrants—species that breed in North America before migrating to wintering grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean. Efforts to protect these birds across their cross-border ranges have been strengthened by research breakthroughs and new international partnerships, but species such as Cerulean Warbler and Bicknell’s Thrush are still declining rapidly.

Declining species making their first appearance on the 2014 Watch List include: Eastern and Mexican Whip-poor-wills, Chuck-will’s-widow, Bobolink, and Evening Grosbeak.

### Good News from the Wetlands

As expected, State of the Birds 2014 reported healthy increases for birds that depend on American wetlands, including both non-game birds and game birds such as Mallard. Scientists who worked on the report attributed those gains to legislation such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, noting that while wetlands are still being lost in some parts of the country, public-private partnerships made possible by this law have helped conserve a collective wetland area larger than the state of Tennessee.

### Learning from the Passenger Pigeon

The new report included a special tribute to the Passenger Pigeon, a bird that went extinct 100 years ago after numbering in the billions. Not coincidentally, the report identified a group of common bird species that have been declining rapidly in recent years, including Northern Bobwhite, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bank Swallow, and Common Nighthawk.

At the official launch on September 9 at the Smithsonian Institution, Peter Marra, a contributor to the report and director of the Smithsonian’s Migratory Bird Center, said it is essential to “keep common birds common” while restoring more imperiled species. Marra also stressed that even the most threatened species can recover when they are properly protected.

“Turnstones, oystercatchers, Wood Ducks, and ibis all bounced back when we protected them,” Marra said. “So did Bald Eagle, Brown Pelican, and Peregrine Falcon. We know what we need to do to make this list much longer, but we have to do it now.”



Read the full report at:  
[StateOfTheBirds.org](http://StateOfTheBirds.org)

## JUST ADDED TO THE WATCH LIST



Eastern Whip-poor-will by Frode Jacobsen



Evening Grosbeak by pcnorth, Shutterstock



Bobolink by David Watkins, Shutterstock

## More Protection Needed for Old-growth Forests

Two former chiefs of the USDA Forest Service are urging the White House to protect what remains of the nation's ancient forests by developing a national old-growth forest conservation plan. Jack Ward Thomas and Mike Dombeck, both of whom worked for President Clinton, have endorsed a letter laying out a proposal recently sent to President Obama. Calling for protection of old-growth forests from logging and expanded efforts to rebuild "depleted" ancient forests across the country, the letter is also endorsed by other top forestry and wildlife conservation scientists.

Supporters of the proposal say the nation's old-growth forests limit man-made climate change by absorbing huge amounts of carbon dioxide and other gases linked to global warming. Efforts to protect

and expand these forests could "play a role in reducing the effects of global climate change," the letter said, adding that "old-growth forests from the Pacific Northwest to southeast Alaska have the highest density carbon stores on earth," in part because the largest and oldest trees store the greatest amounts of carbon.

### An ABC Priority

ABC is a strong supporter of the call to develop a national old-growth conservation plan. ABC's Steve Holmer said preserving ancient forests is one of group's top priorities, both because it could help limit problems linked to climate change and because it would keep habitat intact for threatened birds such as Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet.

"As of now there's nothing about the importance of conserving old-growth in the forest chapter of the administration's National Climate Change Assessment," said Holmer. "At a minimum it needs to be revised to offer climate change guidance to the agencies that manage federal forests."

Peer-reviewed studies in scientific journals leave no doubt that "high-biomass" old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest could significantly limit climate change. "That's because these are the world's most productive forests when it comes to storing carbon," Holmer said.

### New Research Supports the Plan

The author of one old-growth sequestration study, Olga Krankina of Oregon State University, recently concluded that no less than half of the country's remaining ancient forests are in the Pacific Northwest, and that nearly 70 percent of the northwest forests managed by the Bureau of Land Management are made up of old-growth trees.

*The U.S. Senate is now considering legislation that would accelerate old-growth logging in northwest forests.*



To weigh in on this legislation, visit: [support.abcbirds.org/NWForests](http://support.abcbirds.org/NWForests)



Old-growth forest in the Pacific Northwest by Steve Holmer, ABC

## Hurricanes in Hawai'i Raise Concerns for Native Birds

Hawai'i's rarest birds survived the hurricanes that swirled around all the islands this past summer. The possibility that storms like these could soon become more dangerous worries experts on Hawai'i's native birds.

"Scientists who study climate changes linked to global warming say the frequency and severity of potentially catastrophic weather events such as hurricanes are likely to increase in the near future," said Chris Farmer,

endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and most are found in only one location.

### Previous Extinctions Possibly Caused by Storms

Farmer says some experts are convinced that hurricanes have already caused the extinction of several rare bird species in the Hawaiian Islands, either by killing them outright or destroying key portions of the natural

went extinct before 'Iniki hit Kaua'i. Iwa and 'Iniki may have contributed to the sharp decline of the critically endangered 'Akikiki and 'Akeke'e, both of which are only found in the forests of the Alaka'i Plateau on Kaua'i.

### Close Calls this Past Summer

Fears of extinctions caused by hurricanes increased this summer as multiple storms approached the Hawaiian Islands. Hurricane Iselle hit



Palila by  
Robby Kohley

"Critically endangered birds with limited ranges can't get out of the way of major storms. One catastrophic storm could cause the extinction of one of these rare species."

*Chris Farmer, Science Coordinator  
for Hawaiian Birds, ABC*

Science Coordinator for Hawaiian birds at ABC. "Critically endangered birds with limited ranges cannot get out of the way of major storms. One catastrophic storm could cause the extinction of one of these rare species."

Habitat destruction and invasive species have already put 33 of Hawai'i's 43 endemic bird species and subspecies on the federal endangered species list. Many of those species are designated critically

habitats that sustained them. One such storm was Hurricane 'Iniki, which did more than \$3 billion worth of property damage on Kaua'i in September 1992.

The combination of 'Iniki and the earlier hurricane Iwa devastated forests on Kaua'i known as last refuges of extremely rare Hawaiian birds such as the 'Ō'ū, Kaua'i 'Ō'ō, and Kama'o. None of these native birds have been reliably detected since 1992, although it is possible that they

the island of Hawai'i directly, causing major power outages in residential neighborhoods. Runoff ripped a 50-foot hole in a vitally important fence in the forest reserve on Mauna Kea. This fence keeps non-native mouflon sheep and goats out of the māmane forests that sustain the Palila, a critically endangered honeycreeper. The fence was quickly rebuilt by Mauna Kea Forest Restoration Project technicians

*continued on page 8*

## Hurricanes in Hawai'i Raise Concern for Native Birds, *from page 7*

supported by ABC, and apparently, the Palila were unaffected by the storm.

The closest call came when Hurricane Julio seemed to be headed for the isolated island of Laysan, where a team of scientists hired by ABC was monitoring the new population of Millerbirds, previously translocated there from Nihoa. Julio subsequently veered away from Laysan, but not before the scientists were evacuated by a U.S. Navy vessel on maneuvers in the area.

The undaunted researchers have shipped back out to Laysan, where they report that the translocated Millerbirds are thriving.

### Acting to Reduce the Threat

The threat of extinction linked to hurricanes was one of the main reasons that Millerbirds were brought to Laysan from their only home on the island of Nihoa in 2011 and 2012 by ABC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Now that there are two such populations, there is almost no chance that the species will ever be wiped out by a single catastrophic storm," Farmer says.



For more on the evacuation see the ABC blog: <http://abc-birds.wordpress.com/2014/08/28/should-we-stay-or-should-we-go-now-evacuation-from-laysan/>



Translocated Millerbirds on Laysan were unaffected by this summer's hurricanes. The threat of extinction related to such weather-related events was one of the main reasons that this second population was established. Photo by Robby Kohley

## College Cuts Costs While Protecting Birds

**H**uge numbers of migratory birds fly through the Cape May, New Jersey, area while traveling back and forth between their wintering and breeding grounds, and bird deaths from collisions with windows used to be a distressing problem at the Cape May campus of Atlantic Cape Community College.

When the college moved to this location in 2005, students and staff

started finding dead birds near the building's windows and hearing the smack of birds flying headlong into the glass. The glass also had no solar control, and administrators were dismayed by the high costs of cooling the building.

Senior Administrator Lisa Apel-Gedron asked ABC to help the college find an affordable solution to its bird-collision problem. After considering a range of bird-friendly

window treatments, the college decided to retrofit its glass panes with a thin white film called CollidEscape™.

This treatment had the advantage of being affordable, but also significantly reduced the overheating and glare caused by the glass. This white film is a longer-lasting version of "bus wrap" used to place advertising on vehicles while still allowing riders to see out.

The college had a section of windows treated by professional installers then finished the job with their own staff to save money. No more collisions have been reported, and projected cooling costs are forecast to be dramatically lower.

The addition of CollidEscape™ to windows at Atlantic Cape Community College in Cape May, New Jersey, led to an immediate drop in bird collision deaths. Photo by Christine Sheppard, ABC



## Forests Re-appearing in Hawai'i

The forests of the Hawaiian Islands are unique and support an amazing collection of native birds found nowhere else. Many of these birds were extirpated as these forests were converted into farms, pastures, and towns, and further degraded by introduced species ranging from cattle, goats, and pigs to invasive, non-native plants.

But efforts to restore the habitats used by the state's remaining native forest birds are underway. ABC, with critical support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) has been supporting two successful forest restoration efforts with the help of various state agencies and other partner groups. Both of these projects revolve around efforts to restore tree species to former pasturelands on the islands of Maui and Hawai'i.

### On the Island of Hawai'i

The forests being replanted on the island of Hawai'i are the only home of the Palila, a critically endangered honeycreeper that once ranged throughout forests in Hawai'i, O'ahu, and Kaua'i. Now the species is limited to a small subalpine forest on the southwestern slope of Mauna Kea volcano, where the birds feed primarily on seeds produced by māmane trees. The Mauna Kea Forest Restoration Project, the state Division of Forestry and Wildlife, and ABC have been replanting these and other native trees on Mauna Kea since 2009. The state has also been building fences to keep non-native grazing mammals such as mouflon sheep and goats from eating saplings and stripping the bark.

ABC's Chris Farmer says 87,000 native plants and trees have been planted on the edges of existing forests in the last five years, eventually benefiting not only the Palila but other native bird species including the Hawai'i 'Amakihi and Hawai'i 'Elepaio.

### On the Island of Maui

Another expanding forest is located at high altitudes on the southeastern slope of the Haleakalā volcano on the island of Maui, a site that will soon be home to a new population of the Maui Parrotbill, or Kiwikiu, now restricted to the northeastern slope of the volcano. This species once occupied a much larger portion of Maui as well as Moloka'i. The Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, the state of Hawai'i's Division of Forestry and Wildlife, and ABC are restoring part of Maui's Nakula Natural Area Reserve in an effort to create a suitable habitat for a second population of parrotbills, lowering the odds of an extinction caused by a single

catastrophic weather event, disease outbreak, or invasion of non-native species.

Farmer says nearly 7,500 seedlings have been planted to benefit the parrotbill at the Nakula site on Maui since 2013, adding that the Division of Forestry and Wildlife is replanting nearby areas at the same time. The restoration effort will benefit 'Apapane, I'iwi, and Mau'i 'Alauahio, as well as Kiwikiu.

"The tremendous accomplishments on both islands have been made possible by many tireless volunteers, most of whom are local residents," said Farmer. "That's significant because most of the people in Hawai'i live near sea level, where they never see a native forest or a native bird. When they volunteer to help restore Hawai'i's forests they become much more aware of the amazing biodiversity of these islands—and of the urgent need to protect the remaining native species from extinction."



Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project staff and public volunteers working to restore the native forest at Nakula Natural Area Reserve. Photo by Chris Farmer, ABC, 2013

# ABC Opposes Wind Energy Proposals that Threaten Birds

## Victory in Missouri

ABC and other groups are celebrating a successful effort to protect birds from the proposed Mill Creek wind power project in Missouri. The plant would have been located near a globally Important Bird Area in northwest Missouri, and warnings that the facility would kill unacceptable numbers of federally protected birds helped convince the project's backers to find an alternate location.

ABC had provided written comments about this facility to the developer, FWS, and Kansas City Power and Light. "In this case, the developers and owners listened to our concerns and reacted in an admirable way," said Michael Hutchins, National Coordinator of ABC's Bird Smart Wind Energy Campaign. "The example they have set deserves to be applauded."

Anita Randolph of Audubon Missouri, who helped lead the fight to stop the poorly sited facility, concurs. "This is a great victory for birds," she said. Other leading critics of the original siting plan include Greater Ozarks Audubon Society and Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater Kansas City.

Hutchins says it's clear that in the near future, many similar debates over the siting of wind plants will take place. In 2009, 22,000 wind turbines were up and running in the United States, representing 25 gigawatts of energy capacity. That's a small fraction of the 300 gigawatts of wind power capacity required by

federal energy goals. New wind turbines installed to meet those goals could affect nearly 20,000 square miles of terrestrial habitat by 2030—an area larger than the combined area of New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island.

"Wind energy developments are going up in sensitive areas for birds, with little or no consideration for the toll that they take on eagles in particular... Mandatory bird protection regulations seem to be the only answer."

*Michael Hutchins,  
Wind Campaign Coordinator, ABC*



Bald Eagles by Tom Middleton, Shutterstock



## Worrisome Precedent Set

ABC staff provided written comments on a controversial federal plan to allow wind power and other facilities to accidentally injure or kill Bald and Golden Eagles for a period of up to 30 years without fear of prosecution. Objections voiced by ABC and other groups to the new 30-year duration for "take" permits were ignored when the permit plan was finalized last year; ABC expanded upon its concerns in a 13-page comment letter to FWS during the "Eagle Scoping Process" held over the summer.

Among ABC's concerns is the fact that, in establishing this plan, FWS did not follow rules established by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires a thorough analysis of the impacts and public comment *before* such policies are implemented. "After-the-fact NEPA analyses and public scoping such as these set a truly

*continued on page 12*

## Western Population of Yellow-billed Cuckoo Listed as “Threatened”

The FWS recently listed the western population of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act. This listing should provide needed protections for the bird, whose numbers have plummeted to only 350 to 495 pairs in the United States, with a similar number in Mexico. These birds are isolated in small patches of increasingly degraded riparian forest.

As nocturnal migrants, Yellow-billed Cuckoos are also vulnerable to collisions with tall buildings, cell towers, radio antennas, wind turbines, and other man-made structures. An ABC report documenting bird deaths at towers found evidence of a total of 568 Yellow-billed Cuckoo deaths at 17 towers.

The final listing, which will become effective November 3, acknowledges collisions as a significant threat to remaining western Yellow-billed Cuckoo populations. “ABC urges that

a program be adopted to educate and provide financial incentives for tower owners within the species’ range to adopt modern lighting known to reduce Yellow-billed Cuckoo deaths,” said Steve Holmer, Senior Policy Advisor at ABC.

“The final rule recognizes that current environmental regulations are inadequate to eliminate the threats faced by the western Yellow-billed Cuckoo,” continued Holmer. “The listing tells federal managers to chart a new direction and develop a plan to restore riparian areas and regrow lost habitat.”

### Additional Critical Habitat Needed

FWS has tentatively designated 546,335 acres in nine western states as “critical habitat” for the western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Conservation groups, including ABC, say the draft proposal isn’t strong enough to protect the bird. The draft rule covers parts of Arizona, California,



Yellow-billed Cuckoo by Larry Thompson

This listing should provide needed protections for the bird, whose numbers have plummeted to only 350 to 495 pairs in the United States, with a similar number in Mexico.

Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. ABC, in partnership with the Sierra Institute, submitted a comment letter to FWS recommending additional streamside areas for protection.

“We’re concerned that the cuckoo didn’t get protection for enough of the lands required to ensure its recovery,” said Holmer. “This proposed rule is a missed opportunity to identify, conserve, and restore the natural landscapes used by these birds.”



Graphic: Laymon and Halderman 1987

### Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Historic vs. Current Range



Photo by Robert Royse

**ABC Opposes Wind Proposals that Threaten Birds**, *from page 10*

worrisome precedent for this and future administrations,” Hutchins said. He added that, in his opinion, FWS should throw out the new take rule and restart the illegal process that led to its creation.

“The largely voluntary regulations that now govern the wind industry badly need to be strengthened,” said Hutchins. “Wind energy projects are going up in sensitive areas for birds, with little or no consideration for the cumulative toll that they take on eagles in particular and other native birds in general. This is a big experiment, with our public trust resources being placed at risk. Mandatory bird protection regulations seem to be the only answer.”

**Colorado Bird Smart Wind Legislation**

ABC assisted in the development of what could become the nation’s first state bird smart wind energy legislation. To be introduced by Colorado State Senator David Balmer in January, the legislation would codify bird smart principles in the state and help to minimize bird (and bat) mortality from wind energy development.

“Coloradans treasure their environment,” Sen. Balmer said. “This bill will protect ... Bald Eagles and other bird species that currently are being killed in alarming numbers. [It]

will require prudent steps renewable energy producers must take as they site and operate their facilities.”

Scheduled to be introduced in January, the legislation may face an uphill fight. The wind energy industry is said to oppose the legislation, claiming that it is already over-regulated. However, opposition to this bill would call into question the “green” credentials that the industry has worked so hard to maintain.

“We would like to see improved state regulations that can help to fill the gaps created by weak federal rules governing wind energy development,” Hutchins said.



Birds and turbines by J. Marijs, Shutterstock

## Bird-killing Pesticides Banned in U.S. Wildlife Refuges

The FWS is phasing out the use of a class of pesticides linked to widespread bird and bee kills. The first federal suspension on the nerve agents known as neonicotinoids or “neonics” was announced even though the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not yet responded to requests for a ban.

The action builds upon a report issued last year by ABC which showed the serious threat these insecticides pose to birds and to aquatic insects. In particular, ABC found that a single neonic-coated seed can kill a songbird and that neonics are wiping out the aquatic invertebrates on which many birds depend.

Previous research supports the charge that neonics pose a significant threat to birds as well as bees and other pollinating insects. The European Union imposed a two-year ban on three of the leading neonic chemicals in 2013. A new European study, published in the journal “Nature,” shows that bird populations in the Netherlands fell most sharply in areas where neonic pollution levels were highest. The study reported that native tree sparrows, swallows, and starlings showed the biggest declines.

Many of the neonics applied to seeds and crops end up in lakes, rivers, and aquifers, where they poison insects eaten by a wide range of birds.

### Bird Deaths in the Netherlands

The Radboud University research team examined all possible causes

of the bird declines reported in the Netherlands between 2003 and 2010—a period when farmers in that country reportedly increased their use of neonics. In the end a widely used type of neonic, imidacloprid, was found to be the greatest contributor to the declines.

“There is an incredible amount of imidacloprid in the water,” said the lead scientist Hans de Kroon, who described his findings as “very disturbing.” A spokesman for Bayer CropScience, which makes the neonicotinoid examined by the European researchers, called the paper unconvincing and insisted that the controversial chemicals were safe when “used responsibly.”

### Midwestern Pesticide Pollution

A U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) study of neonic pollution in U.S. water bodies indicated that sites near agribusiness centers in the upper Midwest showed potentially dangerous levels of neonic contamination. Nine water bodies in Iowa and Nebraska were tested by the research team, and neonics were found in all of them at levels thought to pose a threat to aquatic insects and other “nontarget” life forms.

“This wasn’t a toxicity study, but there’s research out there indicating that these concentrations could be of concern,” said USGS chemist Michelle Hladik, the lead author of the paper.

Midwestern farmers have increased the use of neonic compounds dramatically in recent years. In Iowa



Western Kingbird by FWS

Many of the neonics applied to seeds and crops end up in lakes, rivers, and aquifers, where they poison insects eaten by a wide range of birds.

the total application of neonic compounds rose from 90,000 pounds in 2004 to 740,000 pounds in 2013. The USGS researchers found high levels of imidacloprid as well as clothianidin and thiamethoxam, two other popular types of neonic.

### Special Threats to Migrants

Neonicotinoid pollution was found to be highest in the spring, when many crops are planted and billions of migrating birds fly from wintering sites in Latin America and the Caribbean to their northern breeding grounds. Many of the birds survive by feasting on the springtime flush of aquatic insects in the upper Midwest. Notably, many of the insect-eating birds found in this region have been declining precipitously.

*continued on page 15*

## ABC Opposes Plan to Kill 16,000 Double-crested Cormorants

**ABC** and other conservation groups oppose a federal plan to kill 16,000 Double-crested Cormorants in an effort to protect endangered salmon passing through the Columbia River Estuary. Roughly 15,000 pairs of the fish-eating birds nest in the estuary, on East Sand Island.

The plan has been proposed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the hydropower dams that have been described as the largest threat to wild salmon in the Pacific Northwest.

Development and implementation of a management plan to reduce avian predation is a requirement under the Corps' Endangered Species Act consultation with NOAA Fisheries concerning operation of the hydropower dams that make up the Federal Columbia River Power System. The Corps' plan, which is outlined in a draft Environmental Impact Statement, calls for the elimination of 25 percent of the Double-crested Cormorants in the western United States in four years.



Double-crested Cormorant by Greg Lavaty

"We have deep concerns about this plan," said ABC's George Wallace. "There are no peer-reviewed studies showing that these cormorants pose a significant threat to runs of wild salmon, or that killing thousands of breeding cormorants on the Columbia River will help endangered salmonids recover. Neither is there any hard evidence that the lethal approach recommended by the Corps would be more effective than nonlethal methods such as hazing and reducing the amount of habitat available to the cormorants for nesting on East Sand Island."

Wallace said the plan to kill 25 percent of the cormorants in the western United States may violate the terms of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which requires that bird kill permits be withheld until nonlethal methods have been proven ineffective. Wallace also argued that the plan was a violation of the "basic tenants" of the Act.

The public comment period for the Corps' proposal ended on August 18. Joyce Casey, chief of the agency's Environmental Resources branch in Portland, Oregon, described the plan to kill the birds as "the one that gives us the most certainty of achieving the requirements that have been put upon us" by the Endangered Species Act. She added that it was "the most cost-effective option and...the one that has the best likelihood of not moving the problem to somewhere else."



Double-crested Cormorant by Greg Homel

ABC's George Wallace said the plan to kill 25 percent of the cormorants in the western United States may violate the terms of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

If the plan is finalized, FWS will issue permits for the shooting, which would be carried out by Wildlife Services, a program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### Bird-killing Pesticides, from page 13

"We've been introducing a toxic, persistent pesticide into the environment on a truly massive scale, and now we're noticing the unintended side effects," said ABC's Cynthia Palmer. "Findings such as these should be a source of concern to anyone who cares about the future of the nation's birds, bees, and bats."

Ironically, a new report from the Center for Food Safety concludes that neonic seed treatments have not increased agricultural yields.

### EPA Reviewing Threats

The EPA is now reviewing the potential threats that neonics pose to nontarget species. The agency's registration reviews of neonics are set to conclude between 2016 and 2019. ABC and

other conservation groups have asked the agency to ban or sharply limit all uses of neonics pending independent review of their effects on invertebrates, birds, other wildlife, and people. So far the EPA has not responded. But that didn't stop FWS from announcing in July that it would phase out use of neonic

pesticides on all of the nation's wildlife refuge lands beginning in January 2016. ABC and pollinator advocates have sent letters to EPA, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the National Park Service urging them to follow FWS's lead in suspending use of neonics.

"Expeditious, meaningful responses to the neonic problem are desperately needed, and the FWS announcement is an important first step in that direction," said ABC President George Fenwick. "It is becoming increasingly clear that these products have an insidious environmental dark side."



Tree Swallow by Mike Parr, ABC

## A legacy of conservation: for birds, their habitats, and future generations



### Your will can be the way!

When you join ABC's Legacy Circle with an estate gift through your will, retirement plan, trust, or life insurance policy, you will ensure bird conservation results for years to come.

If you would like more information, or if you have already included ABC in your estate plans, please contact Jack Morrison at 540-253-5780, or [jmorrison@ABCbirds.org](mailto:jmorrison@ABCbirds.org)

Least Tern and chick by Bill Dalton

## Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan Falls Short

High-stakes federal efforts to protect a rare bird known as a “poster species” for the wide open American West have earned an initial grade of “F” from an environmental coalition that includes ABC. Spokesmen for the coalition say the Obama administration’s efforts to conserve the federal lands used by the Greater Sage-Grouse have fallen woefully short so far, adding that it’s not too late, and that steps could still be taken to strengthen one of the administration’s largest land and species conservation plans.

These are the conclusions reached in the “Scorecard for Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation,” which evaluates the conservation plans according to scientific benchmarks set by endangered species experts with the BLM and published as a National

Technical Report intended to guide attempts to begin managing the federal lands that harbor most of the declining birds.

“These guidelines are a recipe for Greater Sage-Grouse conservation,” said Steve Holmer, Senior Policy Advisor at ABC. “Unfortunately, at least so far, few of them are being followed.”

### Lander Plan at Issue

The scorecard was used to evaluate what’s known as the Lander Resource Management Plan, which was developed by the BLM. Holmer said that Lander is the first of the plans completed for Greater Sage-Grouse conservation in a critically important portion of its sagebrush habitat, found primarily on BLM lands in Wyoming. The Scorecard

finds the Lander plan meets few of the conservation standards recommended in the technical report and indicates that the plan will not stop the grouse population from declining still further.

Holmer praised the Lander plan for designating an extensive 481,000-acre National Trails Management Corridor that meets some of the conservation standards known to benefit grouse. But in nearly every other way the plan falls short of the scientific standards set by the technical team and recommended by the Scorecard.

“Overall, the Scorecard’s Lander review reveals that unless this plan is changed to meet the scientific guidelines of the government’s own scientists, the Greater Sage-Grouse will keep fading toward extinction,” Holmer said. “That decline won’t end until these plans are strengthened or the grouse is officially added to the list of plants and animals protected by the federal Endangered Species Act. What we need now is a demonstration of the leadership required to apply the government’s own best science.”

FWS is under court orders to decide whether to classify the Greater Sage-Grouse as a threatened species in 2015.

 To see the scorecard, visit: [biologicaldiversity.org/species/birds/pdfs/Lander\\_Sage\\_grouse.pdf](http://biologicaldiversity.org/species/birds/pdfs/Lander_Sage_grouse.pdf)

 To express support, go to [support.abcbirds.org/SaveTheGrouse](http://support.abcbirds.org/SaveTheGrouse)



Greater Sage-Grouse by Tom Reichner, Shutterstock

## Good Summer for Gulf Beach-nesting Birds

**ABC**'s Gulf Beach-nesting Bird (BNB) Program has had great success in 2014. This program employs habitat protection, monitoring, and public outreach programs, run with regional partners, to conserve Least Terns, Black Skimmers, Wilson's and Snowy Plovers, and other at-risk shorebirds.

Volunteer stewards work on busy weekends and holidays at critical nesting locations to make sure no one inadvertently (or purposely) enters a protected area. They also educate beach-goers about the birds and how they can help reduce disturbance so these birds can successfully raise young.

This year, we continued work along the central and upper coasts of Texas and in Grand Isle, Louisiana, with Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, Houston Audubon, Galveston Park Board of Trustees, and Audubon Louisiana.

We gained new partners and project locations as well. At Gulf State Park in Gulf Shores, Alabama, we worked with staff and FWS to establish conservation activities and assist in expanding interpretive

programming to include information about target species. In St. Petersburg, Florida, we worked with Eckerd College and Pinellas County at Fort DeSoto Park and on busy St. Pete Beach, where more than 150 Black Skimmer pairs produced 100-plus fledglings.

We worked with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to support a stewardship program at Three Rooker Bar, a small island only accessible by boat within the Anclote Key Preserve State Park. The island is managed by the Florida Park Service and hosts thousands of colonial nesting birds each year. Volunteers educated more than 12,000 people and removed over 200 off-leash dogs from the island. The 23-acre protected nesting area hosted thousands of breeding pairs of Least, Royal, and Sandwich Terns, Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers, as well as plovers and gulls.

"It's on-the-ground partnerships like these, which engage local volunteers and educate beach users, that result in success for the nesting birds," said Kacy Ray, ABC's Gulf Conservation Program Manager.

Gulf-wide, we reached over 18,000 people through on-the-ground stewardship efforts. Over 100 volunteers put in nearly 1,400 hours educating the public about BNBs, standing guard at protected nesting areas, conducting surveys to count adults and young, and checking for Least Tern chicks that fell off



Royal Terns and other beach-nesting bird species on Three Rooker Bar. Photo by Dan Larremore

rooftop colonies in Pinellas County, Florida. (Many survive and can be placed back on the roofs, where they successfully fledge.)

Our BNB technicians surveyed over 3,600 acres of nesting habitat and physically protected 610 acres with signs and symbolic fencing. They monitored more than 1,200 nests and 1,850 breeding pairs of our target species. In Gulf Shores, Alabama, and at East Beach in Galveston, Texas, we documented three breeding pairs of Snowy Plovers per site—marking the first time this species has successfully nested here in five years. We also documented one fledgling per breeding pair at both sites—a very successful rate of productivity directly related to our efforts at these locations.

*ABC's Beach-nesting Birds Program is made possible in part through the generosity of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Shell Marine Habitat Program, the Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation, and Kathryn A. Hale.*



Black Skimmer by FloridaStock, Shutterstock

## New Species Described from Brazil's Atlantic Forest

An international team of ornithologists has described a new bird species from the montane Atlantic Forest of southern Bahia, Brazil. With a recommended common name of Bahian Mouse-colored Tapaculo, the team chose the scientific name *Scytalopus gonzagai* in honor of Brazilian ornithologist Luiz Antonio Pedreira Gonzaga.



Photo by Ciro Albano

The species' isolated populations have been known from the mountains of Bahia state since the 1990s but had been mistakenly attributed to an already-known species, the Mouse-colored Tapaculo. New analysis has confirmed that these populations actually represent a different species.

The new species is known from two Brazilian national parks: Serra das Lontras and Boa Nova, which total 58 percent of the bird's range. Scientists estimate a total population of 2,883 individuals.

The news was published in the October 2014 issue of "The Auk," the official publication of the American Ornithologists' Union. "Under IUCN criteria, this new species should be classified as endangered," the team concluded.

## New Population of Grey-breasted Parakeet Discovered in Brazil

A team of young researchers that spent nearly a year searching for Grey-breasted Parakeets recently found a remnant population of the birds in the humid forests of Brazil. The previously unrecorded population, which consists of only five birds, was nesting in a rocky fissure near the top of a mountain in the Brazilian state of Ceará.

Before this discovery only two populations of this critically endangered species were known to exist in the wild. Fewer than 300 adult Grey-breasted Parakeets are thought to remain, all in the humid montane forests of northeastern Brazil. These colorful parakeets were once much more common, with as many as 15 breeding populations.

In recent years, the birds have been pushed to the brink of extinction by habitat loss and live-bird poaching linked to the global black market for pet birds. The field team that found the birds was organized by Aquasis, a Brazilian conservation group that has been trying to protect the species since 2007. With help from the Loro Parque Foundation and other groups, Aquasis works to preserve the forests used by Grey-breasted Parakeets



Grey-breasted Parakeet by Ciro Albano

and to build local support for anti-poaching programs.

Other efforts could include the creation of incentive programs for landowners who create private parakeet reserves and the construction of artificial nest sites.

## Site for Bird Reserve Sustainability Launched

ABC has introduced an online toolkit designed to make it easier for conservation groups across the Americas to create self-sustaining bird conservation programs.

ABC has long been helping partner groups in Central and South America turn unprotected habitats into economically sustainable centers for "conservation birding," both by raising funds for the construction of lodges and by helping local groups develop long-term strategies for funding, leadership, infrastructure, and more. Now, the "Reserve and NGO Self-Evaluation System" is available not just to partner groups but to everyone.

The online system makes it easier for groups that manage bird reserves to self-assess the financial, managerial, and ecological sustainability of their organizations and private reserves. Planning and financial management tools are featured.

The toolkit is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. For more information, contact ABC's Jason Berry: [jberry@abcbirds.org](mailto:jberry@abcbirds.org).

View the toolkit at:  
[ABCbirds.org/extra/reserves/index.php](http://ABCbirds.org/extra/reserves/index.php)

Development of the toolkit was a joint effort by ABC, blue moon fund, and The Jeniam Foundation.

## New York Urged to Ban Bird-killing Rat Poisons

ABC and other conservation groups want the state of New York to ban a group of notoriously toxic rat poisons that have killed or sickened children, pets, wild mammals, and a wide variety of birds—including the family of Pale Male, a famous Red-tailed Hawk living in New York City's Central Park.

In a petition filed with the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, the conservation groups cite studies of more than 30 wildlife species killed by the rodenticides. Birds such as Great Horned Owls and Golden Eagles are sickened and often die after eating rodents that have ingested the poisons.

"These poisons are indiscriminate killers of raptors all over the United States," said Cynthia Palmer, ABC's Director of Pesticides Science and Regulation. "We want New York to lead the nation in taking these poisons off the market."

The rodenticides cause internal bleeding and death in the rodents that eat them and in predatory birds and other animals that feed on

rodents. Traces of the poisons have been found in 70 percent of the wild animals tested, Palmer said.

The New York petition was filed by a coalition of groups including ABC, Center for Biological Diversity, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Earthjustice, New York City Audubon, and Raptors Are The Solution.



Blue-billed Curassow by Fundación ProAves

## Colombian Bird Reserve Expanded

ABC's partner in Colombia, Fundación ProAves, has added 494 acres to El Paujil Bird Reserve, increasing the land available for the rare Blue-billed Curassow. ProAves also contracted a park guard to patrol this additional large area of forest. ABC and Rainforest Trust supported the effort.

El Paujil was established in 2004 and now totals 8,448 acres of protected rainforest in one of Colombia's most vulnerable ecosystems. The reserve is located in the Quinchas mountains and serves as one of the last refuges for many endangered and endemic lowland forest species in the Magdalena River Valley, including the variegated spider monkey—one of the 25 rarest primates on earth—and large mammals such as jaguar.

Migratory birds such as Swainson's Hawk, Cerulean Warbler, and Scarlet Tanager use El Paujil, among over 350 bird species observed so far.

## Climate Agenda Must Protect Western Forests

The Obama administration has released a report outlining policies affecting management of all natural ecosystems, including forests on private and federal lands.

"While it offers a good package for conserving private forests and working with landowners, policies to conserve the high-biomass forests on public lands are missing, and timber sales that threaten the world's best carbon-storing forests are now moving forward on federal lands in Alaska, Oregon, and California", commented ABC's Steve Holmer.



Read the report at [whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/enhancing\\_climate\\_resilience\\_of\\_americas\\_natural\\_resources.pdf](http://whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/enhancing_climate_resilience_of_americas_natural_resources.pdf)

## About Bird Calls

If you have questions or want more information on our articles, contact Bob Johns at 202-234-7181, x210, or e-mail [bjohns@abcbirds.org](mailto:bjohns@abcbirds.org)

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## Bird Conservation Works!

**T**hat's one of the messages we learn from the recently released "State of the Birds 2014". With the right combination of science, will, and resources, we can make the world a better place for birds. ABC is leading the way as the Western Hemisphere's bird conservation specialist, working every day to secure conservation results for native birds and their habitats. **You can help us with your extra gift today.**

Though there have been gains in recent years for wetland birds and others, many bird species continue to suffer steep declines, including species in desert and sagebrush habitats in the West, as well as "common" birds such as nighthawks and Eastern Meadowlarks. Without conservation action, some birds run the risk of going the way of the Passenger Pigeon and disappearing altogether.

With your help, we can prevent this from happening. ABC's bird conservation efforts span the full breadth of challenges facing the birds of the Americas. **Your extra gift will help our work to halt extinctions, protect habitats, and eliminate threats to birds.**

Please use the enclosed envelope to make an additional gift, or give online at **ABCbirds.org**.

Eastern Meadowlark by Gualberto Becerra, Shutterstock

