

# BIRD CALLS

Vol. 12, No. 1  
March 2008

## Will Changes to Four Seasons Resort Spare the Endangered Grenada Dove?

Public pressure over the fate of one of the world's rarest birds has caused hotel giant Four Seasons to modify its plans for a massive new resort on the island of Grenada. Questions remain, however, as to whether the revised plan for Mt. Hartman National Park and Mt. Hartman Estate will guarantee the survival of the largest and only viable population of the critically endangered Grenada Dove, which numbers fewer than 100 individuals.

During the summer of 2007, following the release of the project's Environmental Impact Assessment, and apparently in response to criticism about the plan, the developers agreed to support a dove survey. They hired a leading expert on the Grenada Dove to conduct a detailed, range-wide assessment of the dove population and to provide feedback to the developer about the plan design. The surveys concluded that the Mt. Hartman population of the dove is by far the most significant, and failure to conserve it could be disastrous for the species.

The resort plan has gone through several iterations since the summer. The most recent retains the proposed golf course, but decreases the number of villas from 200 to approximately 100 on the mainland portion of the estate where the doves are found. The current proposal, which has now been approved by the National Parks Advisory Council, will maintain the total protected area of Mt. Hartman at 155 acres. Significantly, this will all be in



Grenada Dove: Greg R. Homel, Natural Elements Productions

one contiguous block, unlike the three unconnected blocks of habitat that exist now. The protected area would be fenced, and restrictions would be placed on pet ownership at the resort. However, eight dove territories (20% of the total) will be lost under the plan.

As mitigation, the government of Grenada has made a public commitment to protect important dove habitat at another locality called Beauséjour. If the area and number of territories protected is sufficient, this could provide the win-win situation that stakeholders have been looking for.

A trust established to provide ongoing support for the costs of management could result in greater long-term security for the protected area than currently exists. Negotiations are still underway among developers, environmental groups, scientists, and the government of Grenada. Contact George Wallace, ABC, gwallace@abcbirds.org.

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Peregrine Falcon: ClipArt.com

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*Bird Calls* is the newsletter of American Bird Conservancy and is produced for members of ABC and the Bird Conservation Alliance.

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## Petition Filed to Protect Two Hawaiian Birds on Brink of Extinction

In October, American Bird Conservancy and Eric VanderWerf, an expert on Hawaiian birds, petitioned FWS requesting protection under the Endangered Species Act for the Akekee and the Akikiki, two very rare birds restricted to the Hawaiian Island of Kauai. Population surveys indicate that these species may be on the brink of extinction.

"Recent surveys show that the Akikiki and the Akekee are in serious trouble," said George Wallace, Vice President of American Bird Conservancy. "The strongest available measures, such as captive-breeding, fencing out predators, removing invasive species, and listing under the Endangered Species Act, are all necessary to prevent these species from going extinct."

The current population of the Akikiki is estimated to be 1,300 birds, based on surveys conducted in April and May 2007. The population declined precipitously from approximately 6,800 birds in 1970, to 1,470 birds in 2000, and stood at 1,360 in 2005. The species' geographic range also declined by more than half from 1970 to 2000, and may have continued to contract since then, but its current range is unknown.

The population of the Akekee is now estimated to be approximately 3,500 birds, based on surveys conducted in 2007. This is down dramatically from approximately 7,800 in 2000 and 5,700 in 2005. The geographic range occupied by the Akekee was approximately 34 square miles in 1970, and this was reported not to have changed in 2000. But surveys in 2007 failed to find the species in many areas where it was previously observed, indicating there has been a range contraction, though the full extent is not yet known.



The Akekee population is down to fewer than 4,000 birds. Photo: Jack Jeffrey

The primary threat to the Akikiki and Akekee is the habitat loss and degradation caused by invasive alien plants, introduced feral ungulates, diseases spread by introduced mosquitoes, and predation by alien mammals. The damage caused by introduced species means these two native birds are less able to withstand natural catastrophes such as hurricanes. The threat of invasives is severe in magnitude and occurs over a significant portion of the island. The threat from mosquito-borne diseases may worsen if global warming allows mosquitoes to spread to higher altitudes that currently remain cold enough to provide refuge from disease.

The Akikiki and Akekee are not adequately protected by existing regulatory mechanisms, making necessary the proposed listing under the Endangered Species Act. The Akikiki is categorized as critically endangered by the IUCN-World Conservation Union, due to its extremely small and declining population and geographic range. The Akekee is categorized as endangered by IUCN due to its small and declining geographic range and declines in habitat quality.

"Of the 93 U.S. bird species most in need of conservation, 38 are in Hawaii—that's forty percent of the total," said David Pashley, ABC's Director of

*continued on page 4*

## GUEST EDITORIAL DAVID SIBLEY

**“Green Buildings” Should Save Energy *and* Migratory Birds**

It becomes clearer every day that relatively small changes to building designs can be good for the environment and for the bottom line. The Greenbuild International Conference and Expo recently brought the revolution of “green buildings” to Chicago. The gathering of 18,000 industry experts hosted by the U.S. Green Building Council is another indication of the growing environmental movement within the architectural and construction constituencies. One thing that is largely missing from the green building debate, however, is the impact that buildings can have on migratory birds.

Most home owners have experienced the shock of a bird colliding with their living room window at one point or another. In fact, it is estimated that as many as 900 million birds are killed each year when they collide with glass windows on homes, offices, and other buildings across the country. Many of these birds are killed immediately in collisions with the building structures. Others fall to the ground where they subsequently succumb to their injuries, or are too weak or dazed to escape gulls, cats, and other predators. The cumulative toll of these collisions on birds is significant, and when combined with habitat loss, pesticides, climate change, and a host of other human-induced threats, they can exacerbate population declines already being experienced by many migratory songbirds.

There are three critical problems at play in bird/building collisions that can be addressed by architects and building managers. Firstly, birds often see vegetation or sky reflected in windows, and simply try to fly through the glass. In other cases, birds can see right through a building and try to fly through one window into the habitat they can see on the other side. Thirdly, while migrating at night, birds can become confused by the nighttime illuminations on buildings, and can crash into the structures, or get caught in “death spirals”, unable to escape the pull of the lights.

This bird mortality has not escaped the notice of birders, and local “Lights Out” campaigns are starting to catch on in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Toronto, where large, illuminated buildings attract migrating birds that are especially concentrated along shorelines. Many thousands of birds have already been saved as a result. A study in 2000 and 2001 by ornithologist Mary Hennen and other researchers from the

Field Museum of Chicago found that turning off lights during migration season reduced bird deaths by 83%. Building owners and managers also save money, and contribute to energy conservation at the same time. It’s a win-win-win for the environment.

*ABC is taking a national approach to preventing collisions, and aims to encourage “green building” designers to incorporate bird-safe designs.*



Design can make a huge difference too. For example, as reported in *The New York Times* on September 22, the Postal Service’s Morgan Processing and Distribution Center recently retrofitted 440 decorative, reflective glass panels with black vinyl to prevent the reflection of trees in Chelsea Park. The vinyl appears to have virtually eliminated bird collisions there. The *New York Times*’ own headquarters building is also a model for bird safe construction, using ceramic tubing to reduce the reflective properties of the building exterior.

Ultimately, the development of affordable glass that has a less reflective exterior surface could be the best long-term solution to the problem. Already, bird conservation organizations, as well as architects, planners, scientists, and

glass engineers are working under the banner of the Bird-Safe Glass Working Group to promote the use of bird-safe glass products already available on the market, and to develop even more effective products in the future.

American Bird Conservancy is taking a national approach to preventing collisions, and aims to encourage “green building” designers to incorporate bird-safe designs. The New York Audubon Society has published a booklet, *Bird-Safe Building Guidelines* ([www.nycaudubon.org/home/BSBGuidelines.shtml](http://www.nycaudubon.org/home/BSBGuidelines.shtml)), addressing new building construction as well as the retrofitting of old buildings to be bird safe. Other groups, such as the Bird Conservation Network ([www.bcnbirds.org/window.html](http://www.bcnbirds.org/window.html)) and Fatal Light Awareness Program ([www.flap.org](http://www.flap.org)), are at work on efforts in Chicago and Toronto.

Ultimately, everyone from homeowners and office workers, to builders, architects, and city and building managers, has a stake and can make a difference in this issue. To my mind though, the only truly green building is one that is designed to reduce energy consumption and protect neighboring wildlife such as migratory birds.

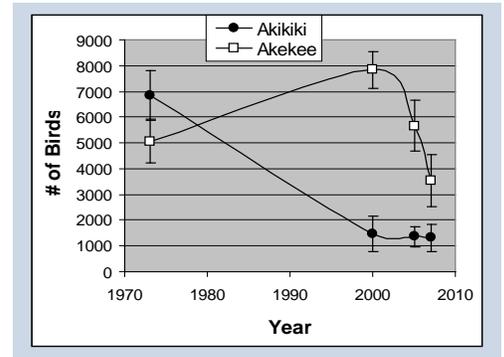
—David Sibley is the author of the *Sibley Guide to Birds* and *Sibley’s Birding Basics*.

## Hawaiian Petition *from page 2*

Conservation Programs and co-author of WatchList 2007, a joint project between ABC and National Audubon Society that identifies the U.S. birds of highest conservation concern (see box on page 19). “How quickly and effectively we act to protect and support the species on this list will determine their future; where we’ve taken aggressive action, we’ve seen improvement. It’s obvious from looking at the WatchList that Hawaiian birds need greater attention.”

Hawaii leads the United States in the total number of endangered and threatened species, with 329, and in extinctions, with over 1,000 plants and animals having disappeared since humans colonized the islands. When

Captain Cook landed in Hawaii in 1778, there were at least 71 endemic bird species. Since then, 26 of those species have become extinct, and 32 more are now listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened or endangered. Two Hawaiian bird species, the Poouli and the Ou, are assumed to have recently gone extinct before captive-breeding or other protection measures could be implemented. In 2007, Hawaiian forests appeared at the top of ABC’s list of most threatened bird habitats in the United States, further demonstrating the need for increased conservation measures for birds in the state. Contact George Wallace, ABC, [gwallace@abcbirds.org](mailto:gwallace@abcbirds.org).



Population estimates of Akikiki and Akekee over time. Data sources: 1968-1973 data from FWS, 1983; 2000 data for Akikiki from Foster et al, 2004; 2000 data for Akekee from Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife, unpublished; 2005 and 2007 data from Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife, unpublished.

## ABC and ProAves Inaugurate El Dorado Nature Reserve

### *Reserve Holds World’s Highest Concentration of Continental Endemic and Endangered Bird and Amphibian Species*

On January 18, 2008, Fundación ProAves, ABC, Conservation International, and others inaugurated the El Dorado Nature Reserve in the San Lorenzo Forest of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. The reserve includes ecotourism facilities designed to help make it self-sustaining, including the spacious Jeniam Ecolodge and the Blue Moon Restaurant. El Dorado is located between 2,900 and 8,500 feet above sea level, amidst a stunning landscape of dense forests. It has views to both the 19,000-foot high peaks and glaciers of the Sierra Nevada, and the Caribbean beaches and mangroves of Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta. This montane spur of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta contains a fragment of humid forest that is gravely threatened and lacking protection until now.

The forest is internationally recognized by the Alliance for Zero Extinction as an area in critical need of conservation.



The Santa Marta Bush-Tyrant is one of the many endemic species in the new reserve. Photo: George Jett.

It boasts the highest concentration of continental range-restricted bird species in the world, with 21 endemics such as the Santa Marta Parakeet and Santa Marta Antpitta. In 2007, a new species of owl, the Santa Marta Screech-Owl, was discovered, and several of the more than 50 endemic subspecies of birds were shown to warrant separate species status. Amphibians, butterflies, plants, and other groups also show exceptional

levels of endemism. The surviving forest is a biodiversity oasis.

Because these forests were at high risk of development and invasion of non-native species, Fundación ProAves launched a campaign to protect the area. With support from ABC, Conservation International, and others, ProAves has acquired over 1,700 acres of this living jewel, named after the legendary city of gold, El Dorado, for its phenomenal biological value. ProAves is now planting native trees, which will ensure the forest can continue to provide clean drinking water for coastal cities. Contact Paul Salaman, ABC, [psalaman@abcbirds.org](mailto:psalaman@abcbirds.org).



One of the many frog species in the reserve. Photo: Fundación ProAves.

## President Bush Announces New Initiative to Conserve Birds

**O**n October 20, 2007, President Bush outlined a series of new conservation initiatives to benefit migratory birds and seabirds while speaking at an event at the Patuxent Research Refuge. This new Administration initiative represents a worthwhile opportunity to advance bird conservation, but the details and funding levels will ultimately determine its substance and effectiveness.

“President Bush and the First Lady appreciate the value of birds and understand the need to boost conservation efforts,” said George Fenwick, President of American Bird Conservancy, who attended the event and talked about birds with the President and First Lady. “Birds don’t recognize political boundaries, so conserving migratory birds requires protecting wintering grounds and stopover sites, both here and abroad.”

The President’s initiative includes additional resources for Joint Ventures and National Wildlife Refuges, funding partnerships with Mexico to protect wintering habitat for migratory birds, creating a “State of the Birds Report” to measure environmental health and conservation progress, cleaning up marine debris that harms seabirds, and creating a system of recovery credits to incentivize protection of stopover habitat (see sidebar).

Nearly two-thirds of the bird species that breed in or migrate through the United States have declining populations. The Cerulean Warbler, which breeds in the eastern forests of North America and winters in South America, has declined by 80% in the last forty years.

“Like the canary in the coalmine, the decline of so many bird species is an indicator of environmental degradation that now threatens society,” said

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Black-footed Albatross: ClipArt.com

Fenwick. “But, as the recoveries of the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Whooping Crane, and California Condor have proven, we can meet environmental challenges and reverse population declines with a focused effort.”

The initiative also calls for greater involvement in the Agreement on

the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), but falls short of calling for the United States to become a signatory. ACAP is a multilateral agreement which seeks to conserve albatrosses and petrels by urging member nations to minimize seabird bycatch by fishermen, protect the birds’ nesting and foraging areas, and confront other threats that jeopardize species listed under the agreement. While America already leads in many of these conservation efforts, signing ACAP could give the United States more leverage to advocate for the protection of its species by international fisheries management organizations. Nineteen out of 22 species of albatrosses are regarded as globally 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 animals. Contact Steve Holmer, ABC, [sholmer@abcbirds.org](mailto:sholmer@abcbirds.org).

### Recovery Credits Proposal Raising Questions

**R**ecovery Credits are a cornerstone of the Bush Administration’s new bird conservation initiative for migratory birds. FWS issued a Federal Register Notice on November 2 (62258–62264) for a proposal to create a market-system of Recovery Credits intended to help protect stopover habitat in areas facing development pressures. Landowners who wish to develop stopover habitat must possess enough Recovery Credits to cover the development’s impact. The landowner can gain credits by conserving stopover habitat elsewhere, or by buying them from another landowner who does not intend to use them.

The proposal is generating controversy because of the large amount of FWS

staff that would be needed to create such a new market system based on imperiled species and ecosystems. It also includes far-reaching exemptions to standard Endangered Species Act protections, such as allowing the take of an endangered species prior to the development of its recovery plan, and eliminating the mandatory interagency review process that imposes an important check on potentially inappropriate federal decisions. A letter from a coalition of environmental groups, including the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Oregon Wild, Idaho Conservation League, Forest Guardians, and others, urged FWS to “rethink this flawed proposal,” suggesting it may face more troubles ahead.

## Biofuels Binge: Colombia to Convert 7.4 Million Acres of “Unused Farmlands” to African Palm

**I**ronically, in a push for a “greener” economy in Colombia, Brazil, Indonesia, and other countries, the demand for biofuels is accelerating tropical forest destruction, eliminating habitat and releasing their vital carbon store, thereby accelerating global warming.

In Colombia, biodiverse and largely unprotected lowland forests are threatened by plans launched by the Colombian government to swiftly expand biofuel production, much of it for export. The government aims to open 20 biofuel plants within the next decade, and plans to convert 7.4 million acres of “unused farmlands” to African palm, which will serve as the biofuel plants’ raw material.

However, it is evident that the so-called unused farmlands are, in fact, primary forests on the colonization frontier of

the Chocó and Amazon regions, home to such rare and declining birds as Great Green Macaw, Recurve-billed Bushbird, and Blue-billed Curassow. The UK’s Guardian newspaper reports that a recent study of 26 biofuels found that 12 had greater total environmental impacts than fossil fuels. These included fuels such as corn ethanol, Brazilian sugar cane ethanol, soy diesel, and Malaysian palm-oil diesel. Biofuels that fared best were those produced from waste products such as recycled cooking oil, as well as ethanol from grass or wood.

For additional information on how biofuel production is creating a global biodiversity crisis, see the recent Greenpeace report “How the Palm Oil Industry is Cooking the Planet” at [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org).

## Picking Up the Pace for Prairie Potholes

**A** recent report by the Government Accountability Office has found that, at the current pace of acquisitions, it could take approximately 150 years to reach the 12 million-acre goal set by the Prairie Potholes Joint Venture for conserving the Prairie Potholes Region. Unfortunately, increased demand for agricultural products such as biofuels has driven land and commodity prices up, and land that provides valuable bird habitat today is likely to be converted for other uses in the next few decades. While the rate of land protection could be accelerated by targeting lower cost sections within high-priority habitat areas, additional funds need to be made available if the land is to be protected while it is still relatively affordable and high-quality habitat still exist.

The Prairie Pothole Region, which covers millions of acres in the upper Midwest and Canada, is unique because of its millions of small, seasonal wetlands that dot the landscape, gouged out by glaciers in ice ages past. It is the interspersed grassland and wetland that makes the region home to a vast and diverse array of birds, from grassland passerines such as Baird’s Sparrow and Sprague’s Pipit, to the millions of waterfowl, marsh, and shorebirds that nest in or pass through during migration.

Since the late 1950s, FWS has permanently protected, through both acquisition and easement, about 3 million of

the 64 million acres of the area within the United States. With a goal to protect roughly 12 million more acres, FWS has begun to use sophisticated biological, statistical, and spatial models to target the areas with the greatest potential to sustain breeding duck and other wetland- and grassland-dependent bird populations.

The Government Accountability Office recommends several options requiring Congressional action that would help to increase resources for the permanent protection of Prairie Pothole habitat. Increasing the cost of the Federal Duck Stamp, which has been fixed at \$15 per stamp since 1991, is one option. House of Representatives bill H.R. 2735, would increase the price of the stamp to \$20 through 2010, and to \$25 thereafter. Another option is to provide additional resources from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This source of funding has been used only minimally in the Prairie Potholes Region, with less than \$200,000 spent annually there in the last two years.

Contact your Representative and Senators, and ask that they support these mechanisms to increase funding for permanent protection of key habitat in the region while there still is time to act. For more information about the Prairie Pothole acquisition project, contact Casey Stemler, Prairie Potholes Joint Venture Coordinator, [Casey\\_Stemler@fws.gov](mailto:Casey_Stemler@fws.gov).

## Tainted Decisions Affecting Endangered Birds Face Scrutiny

Federal decisions affecting the Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, and fifteen other species will be reviewed by the U.S. Department of Interior Inspector General. These decisions are part of the growing controversy over the misuse and quashing of science by political appointees. A prior review by the Inspector General of eight decisions denying increased protection for endangered species led to seven of them being reversed, which offers hope that the decisions harmful to the owl, murrelet, and sage-grouse will also be reconsidered.

The latest review was prompted by extensive negative press coverage, pressure from members of Congress, and a battery of lawsuits from the Center for Biological Diversity concerning decisions affecting 55 species where science is likely to have been undermined. These lawsuits include Critical Habitat decisions affecting the Southwestern subspecies of the Willow Flycatcher, the Western subspecies of the Snowy Plover, and the Piping Plover, the proposed downlisting of the California

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*...federal court judge B. Lynn Winmill recently ruled against the Bush Administration's decision not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse as a threatened species. Winmill specifically cited political interference by former Interior Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Julie MacDonald as a reason for the decision.*

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subspecies of Least Tern, and the delisting proposal for the Marbled Murrelet. In addition, Federal Court Judge B. Lynn Winmill recently ruled against the Bush Administration's decision not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse as a threatened species. Winmill specifically cited political interference by former Interior Department Deputy Assistant Secretary Julie MacDonald as a reason for the decision.

Despite critical peer reviews and tens of thousands of public comments opposed to reducing old growth habitat

protection for the Spotted Owl, FWS announced it would continue the development of a final Spotted Owl Recovery Plan. A contractor has been hired to oversee the work of several teams that will review the draft plan and peer reviews. The contractor will be reporting to the same political oversight team that undermined the draft planning process, raising doubts that a credible plan will result.

Conservationists have been raising concerns about the Spotted Owl Plan with appropriators, who could eliminate funding for the rulemaking if they chose. The recently enacted FY2008 Interior Appropriations bill did not address the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan. However, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Rep. Norm Dicks (D-WA), who chair the Senate and House Interior Appropriations Subcommittees that determine funding levels for all wildlife-related programs, raised substantial concerns about scientific interference and the lack of habitat protection in the draft plan. For more information, contact Steve Holmer, ABC, [sholmer@abcbirds.org](mailto:sholmer@abcbirds.org).

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## Canada Protects Over 25 Million Acres of Boreal Forests

On November 21, 2007, the Government of Canada announced one of the largest land conservation agreements in North American history, protecting 25.5 million acres in the heart of the Canadian Boreal Forest, an area approximately equal in size to 11 Yellowstone National Parks.

Canada's Boreal Forest is North America's largest intact forest ecosystem, and is the summer breeding ground for over 300 species of birds, including the rapidly declining Lesser Yellowlegs and Olive-sided Flycatcher, and the endangered Whooping Crane. It includes nesting grounds for billions

of migratory songbirds and 40% of North America's waterfowl. This fragile area is also home to some of the world's largest populations of caribou, wolves, and bear. The Canadian Boreal Forest stores vast amounts of carbon in the soil; keeping it from being released into the atmosphere is essential for mitigating the threat of global warming.

The lands to be protected include 3.7 million acres reserved for a future national wildlife area, 8.3 million acres identified for a new national park, and 15 million acres to be managed for conservation and appropriate development by local tribes under a pending treaty agreement.

These areas will be protected as management plans and final agreements are completed. These processes have been assisted by several environmental organizations, including the Pew Environment Group, Canadian Boreal Initiative, Ducks Unlimited, and World Wildlife Fund.

More remains to be done. Extensive logging concessions and tar sands development continue to threaten millions more acres of Boreal Forest that need to be conserved for wildlife habitat and climate stabilization. For more information visit the Boreal Songbird Initiative at [www.borealbirds.org](http://www.borealbirds.org).

## Florida County Seeks Federal Help to Eradicate Non-Native Sacred Ibis

Everglades' researchers and park officials fear that, if left unchecked, the Sacred Ibis could pose an eventual threat to breeding colonies of native wading birds and their eggs in southern Florida. Palm Beach County officials have called on the federal government to assist with the eradication of this large, non-native wading species that occurs in and around county landfills and in Everglades National Park.

Sacred Ibis are native to sub-Saharan Africa but have recently been seen in Everglades National Park. In France, where the ibis has become an accepted and established exotic species, there have been documented cases of the ibis preying on the eggs and chicks of native wading birds. While officials are quick to point out that such activity has not yet been documented in Florida, they intend to address any potential problem before it gets out of control.

Some local activists have spoken out against the planned eradication, saying the birds have done no harm, and



suggesting that the eradication of the species in Florida is unnecessary. However, Audubon of Florida agrees with the approach taken by the County, and has spoken in favor of the planned removal of the birds, suggesting that failure to address the issue at this early stage could result in the devastation of the indigenous wading bird population in the region. Contact Grant Ellis, ABC, [gellis@abcbirds.org](mailto:gellis@abcbirds.org).

## Invasive Species Act Passes House, Awaits Senate Action

On October 22, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan Refuge Ecology Protection, Assistance, and Immediate Response Act (or REPAIR Act, H.R. 767), which will direct federal resources to states to help eradicate invasive species that are devastating many Wildlife Refuges (*Bird Calls* Vol. 11, No. 3).

Sponsored by Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI), the legislation provides matching grants to federal land and water managers and non-federal partners to conduct control projects to manage non-native species, detect early infestations, and restore native species and habitats. The bill will also provide



A Laysan Albatross chick, almost hidden amidst invasive *verbesina* plants.  
Photo: Christy Finlayson.

rapid response capability to make emergency funds available for control of an incipient invasive, authorize the funding of the National Invasive Species Council, and provide funds for long-term monitoring of project sites.

Significant portions of land and water under federal jurisdiction, especially National Wildlife Refuges, are infested with harmful, non-native plant species, which subsequently spread unchecked to adjacent private and public lands and waters. Invasive species have taken over 100 million acres of the American landscape, and each year they continue to degrade an area equivalent to the size of Connecticut.

Unfortunately, under current law, native fish and wildlife are not directly protected from harmful, non-native species on federal or any other lands. One striking example of the damage caused by invasive species can be found on Midway Atoll, where non-native golden crown-beard, or *verbesina*, is quickly choking the island and contributing to reduced reproductive success of the Laysan Albatross.

American Bird Conservancy is closely monitoring the bill's status in the Senate, and is working with an informal refuge coalition consisting of staff from ABC, National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Refuge Association, The Nature Conservancy, and Defenders of Wildlife to promote co-sponsorship of the legislation among Environment and Public Works Committee members. Contact Grant Ellis, ABC, [gellis@abcbirds.org](mailto:gellis@abcbirds.org).

## Bill Passed to Halt Illegal Logging

In December 2007, an amendment was successfully attached to the Senate Farm Bill to stem the rise of illegal logging around the world. The provision adds plants harvested or taken illegally in areas outside the United States to the list of items prohibited by the Lacey Act, a 1900 law barring trade in illegally taken fish and wildlife. To comply with the Lacey Act, companies will have to demonstrate they “took due care” to ensure they are not using illegally harvested timber species imported into the United States. The Senate Farm Bill’s expansion of the Lacey Act establishes a legal structure to prosecute parties who import and trade wood found in violation of other countries’ forest laws.

Much of the world’s illegal logging occurs in countries such as Burma, Indonesia, Peru, Brazil, Russia, and Papua New Guinea, but the raw materials are often processed and manufactured into finished products in China, where they enter the marketplace. In Peru, illegal cutting of mahogany in the Amazon region often takes place in

protected areas using cut-and-run logging practices that cause severe damage to forests and wildlife. Species such as the Harpy Eagle, Blue-and-yellow Macaw, Great Potoo, Pavonine Quetzal, and Paradise Tanager are being threatened.

Expanding the Lacey Act to help address the issue of illegal timber imports has garnered the support of the Administration and industry, who have said existing laws are insufficient to stop the problem and prosecute offenders.

In testimony to the House Natural Resources Committee, the American Forest & Paper Association estimated illegally harvested wood products cost U.S. companies about \$460 million annually, and suppress wood prices between 7-16%. In late December, the United States and China discussed illegal logging at a trade summit to determine how the two countries can better coordinate their customs and police officials to prevent this illegal activity. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, [dschroeder@abcbirds.org](mailto:dschroeder@abcbirds.org).



Mike Parr

Blue-and-yellow Macaw (left) and Harpy Eagle (right) are two species at risk from excessive logging. Blue-and-yellow Macaw: ClipArt.com; Harpy Eagles at nest: Pete Morris/Birdquest.

## Debate Rages Over Last Roadless National Forests

The Forest Service is initiating rulemakings to weaken protection of roadless areas in the National Forests of Idaho and Colorado. National Forests contain much of the undeveloped or roadless forest left in the United States, and provide habitat for one-quarter of all U.S. threatened and endangered species. The Idaho proposal would open up 6 million of the state’s 8.7 million acres of National Forest roadless areas to development, which could negatively impact Northern Goshawk and Flammulated Owl. The Colorado plan eliminates protection for 300,000 roadless acres, and

opens the door to old growth logging and extensive energy developments on the state’s remaining 4.1 million roadless acres.

These plans stem from an Administration policy of allowing state governments to petition for creation of new management plans for roadless areas on National Forests in that state. The Administration’s approach ignores strong scientific backing and public support for the Roadless Area Conservation Rule of 2001, a national policy protecting all National Forest roadless areas, precipitated by the ongoing loss

of roadless lands to development. The 2001 Roadless Rule is still the subject of court battles.

Meanwhile, legislation to codify the 2001 Rule and permanently protect National Forest roadless areas has garnered 148 cosponsors in the House and 19 in the Senate. The Forest Service is currently planning logging and mining projects that would impact roadless areas in Alaska, Idaho, and Wyoming.

For maps of all roadless areas in the lower 48 states, see <http://roadlessland.org> or <http://roadless.fs.fed.us/maps/usmap2.shtml>.

## Saltwater Marsh Islands of Jamaica Bay Could Disappear Within Five Years

Last summer, the Jamaica Bay Watershed Advisory Committee, a New York City body, and the National Park Service's Gateway National Recreation Area released a study showing that the rate of marsh island loss in Jamaica Bay was accelerating, and, if it continued at the rate recently measured at several of the islands, would result in almost all of the marsh islands disappearing within five years. Records show Jamaica Bay averaged a loss of 26 acres per year from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s, but the loss increased to more than 40 acres each year by 1999.

Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, located off the south shore of Brooklyn and Queens, offers sanctuary to more than 300 species of birds and nearly 100 species of fish, as well as amphibians, reptiles, and small mammals in its freshwater ponds and saltwater wetlands. The bay's shallow waters and low-lying island marshes stretch over 13,000 acres and are recognized by American Bird Conservancy as a Globally Important Bird Area. In addition to their ecological importance for birds, the marshes of Jamaica Bay perform a significant role in controlling floods and protecting the Brooklyn and Queens shorefronts from storms and erosion.

While it is not clear why the wetlands are disappearing, several possibilities exist, including excessive nitrogen content in the bay's water, a byproduct of the city's four wastewater treatment plants. Large amounts of nitrogen can kill delicate marsh plants, and without their root structures to hold sediment in place, the marsh islands can be quickly washed away. The city acknowledges that more nitrogen than the system can handle is being discharged into the bay, but also states there is no definitive scientific evidence that the nitrogen is the main cause of the wetland loss.

Other potential causes for this marsh loss include sea level rise and human alterations to the shoreline such as "borrow pits", formed when huge amounts of sand were scooped out of the bottom of the bay and used for filling in wetlands. These pits and other dredging activities interfere with the natural flow of sediments, which are essential to maintaining the marshlands.

Visit Natural Resources Defense Council at [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org), or Jamaica Bay Watershed Advisory Committee at <http://nbin.ciesin.columbia.edu/jamaicabay> for more information.

## Proposed Development at Bolivar Flats Threatens Habitat in Shorebird Sanctuary

The Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary on the Texas Gulf Coast, which consists of salt marsh, beach, and uplands, is threatened by a proposed development. The Flats are recognized by American Bird Conservancy as a Globally Important Bird Area, and by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network as an important resting and feeding location for migrating shorebirds from throughout the Western Hemisphere. Thousands of American Avocets and Western Sandpipers winter in the Sanctuary.

Bolivar Holdings, which owns a 47-acre tract surrounded on three sides by the Sanctuary, is partnering with Provident Realty Investors to develop the property with 150 houses. The project would fill six acres of dune-swale wetlands, which are an important source of fresh water for wildlife in coastal systems. Storm water runoff from the proposed development will run directly into the sanctuary wetlands, polluting them with fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and other wastes. The proposed 20.7-acre off-site mitigation tract is inadequate in size and quality to replace the high quality



Thousands of American Avocets winter at Bolivar Flats: Tom Grey.

wetlands that will be filled by the proposed development. In addition, increased vehicular traffic on the beach will impact wildlife including endangered Piping Plovers and Kemp's Ridley turtles.

Allowing a high-density development in such close proximity to the sanctuary will damage the habitat for wildlife and reduce ecotourism dollars coming to Galveston County. Houston Audubon Society has made extensive comments to the Army Corps of Engineers outlining their concerns, and requesting that a public meeting be held. Society members have also had several meetings with Provident Realty Investors and Bolivar Holdings to express their concerns. For more information, visit [www.houstonaudubon.org](http://www.houstonaudubon.org).

## “High Rollers” Arrested for Raptor Killings

An ongoing investigation by FWS ([www.fws.gov/pacific/highroller](http://www.fws.gov/pacific/highroller)) has uncovered thousands of illegal raptor killings in Oregon, California, Washington, New Mexico, Texas, and other states, and has led to calls for stiffer penalties for violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Operation High Roller, a 14-month investigation into “roller pigeon” clubs, discovered that some club members trapped and killed raptors, specifically Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawks, and Peregrine Falcons. Investigators estimated that leaders and members of such clubs in the Los Angeles metropolitan area alone are responsible for killing 1,000 to 2,000 raptors per year.

Roller pigeons are an English breed, with a genetic trait which results in mini-seizures during flight. The seizure causes them to briefly go into a quick head-over-tail spiral. These erratic movements, while prized by pigeon breeders, mimic the actions of a sick

or wounded bird, and quickly attract raptors.

On repeated instances, undercover agents observed roller pigeon fanciers in Los Angeles trapping Cooper's hawks. According to one agent's affidavit, many of the club members openly discussed trapping, shooting, and poisoning hawks and falcons. FWS agents report that the same type of trap found in the California investigation has also been used to catch and kill raptors in many other states around the country.

As a result of the investigation, federal authorities made seven arrests in California, and charged others in Oregon and Texas with violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which makes the trapping or killing of any bird of prey without a federal permit illegal.

Unfortunately sentencing in these cases have so far been relatively light, since these crimes are considered only as misdemeanor violations of the Act. Public outrage over light sentences in the Oregon cases led U.S. Rep. Peter



Cooper's Hawks and other raptors were being trapped and killed by some members of “roller pigeon” clubs throughout the United States. Photo: Glen Tepke.

DeFazio (D-OR) to introduce a bill in November 2007 to amend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to make intentional killing of protected birds a felony.

The Audubon Society of Portland, a Bird Conservation Alliance member, is supporting Rep. DeFazio's amendment, and will be working to build a national coalition of groups to support this legislation. For more information visit [www.audubonportland.org/conservation\\_advocacy/mbta/index\\_html](http://www.audubonportland.org/conservation_advocacy/mbta/index_html).

## Federal Highways Administration Supports Road Through Kansas Wetlands

The Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) recently issued a report supporting road construction through the Haskell-Baker Wetlands, just south of Lawrence, Kansas. The wetlands provide habitat for over 220 species of birds, including the Least Bittern, King Rail, American Woodcock, Willow Flycatcher, and Bell's Vireo. The wetlands also contain areas of historic, cultural, and religious importance to Native Americans.

The Haskell-Baker Wetlands sit between Haskell Indian Nations University and the Wakarusa River. The 573-acre site contains marshes, brushy areas, and riparian woods, and includes

most of the remaining wetlands in the Wakarusa River floodplain, including 45 acres of virgin wetland prairie. In 1969, the National Park Service recognized this area as a National Natural Landmark, and designated it as a Natural and Scientific Area in 1987.

FHWA claims there are no feasible alternatives to building a road through one of the area's last native wetlands. In a separate action, FHWA also announced that it will formally adopt the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Final Environmental Impact Statement, originally issued in 2003, which supports the development.

The project had been in limbo after a lawsuit filed by Sierra Club, the Wetlands Preservation Organization, Jayhawk Audubon Society, and a coalition of Indian tribes halted construction plans in the 1990s. These and other opponents have advocated a route south of the wetlands and Wakarusa River.

“The environmental community and the Haskell community are as committed as ever to protecting these magnificent wetlands,” said Bob Eye, a Lawrence resident who serves as an attorney for the Wetlands Preservation Organization. See <http://savethewetlands.org> for more information.

## Platte River Recovery Legislation Passes House

The House of Representatives passed the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program and Pathfinder Modification Authorization Act (HR 1462), legislation sponsored by Congressman Mark Udall (D-CO) on October 22, 2007. This bill, if enacted, would authorize the Interior Department to resolve Platte River water use disputes between Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska to aid in the recovery of several endangered species, including the Whooping Crane, Interior Least Tern, and Piping Plover.

The human alteration of the Platte River has deprived these species of mid-river sandbars, which used to be plentiful when the Platte was a braided channel river “a mile wide and a foot deep.” Regular spring floods from snowmelt in Colorado and Wyoming would rework the channel each year and knock back any vegetation that began to grow in the river bed.

Since the region has been settled and developed for agriculture, water diversions on the main Platte and several large tributary dams, particularly the one that impounds Lake

McCounaughy on the North Platte, have reduced flows so much that trees have started to grow in the riverbed itself. Consequently, the channel’s width has shrunk by 90%.

Water removal from the river for irrigation has also caused major fish kills. This problem has been addressed with minimum flow requirements, but until the water flows are restored to keep seedling establishment in check, terns and plovers will not be able to nest in their former habitat on the river itself.

Water for the restoration effort would be provided by the three states and from several small projects in the basin. The effort is expected to cost approximately \$317 million over 13 years, which would be shared equally between the Department of Interior and the combined contributions of the three states. It is hoped these changes will eventually recreate a system these bird species need to nest successfully on the Platte.

The bill now moves to the Senate. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, [dschroeder@abcbirds.org](mailto:dschroeder@abcbirds.org).

## Glass Wall Smacks of Death

In August 2007, a six-foot high glass wall was installed by the developer of the Brightwater housing project on the Bolsa Chica Mesa to act as a barrier between the development and the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve. The Reserve is located near Huntington Beach, California, off the Pacific Coast Highway. The 4,400-foot-long glass wall was approved, along with the 356-home project, in April 2005 by the California Coastal Commission. The wall was built to mark a boundary between backyards and the open space below, and it was made of glass to preserve the views of the wetlands.

Because the wall is constructed of clear glass panels, birds cannot see it, causing collisions (see editorial by David Sibley on page 3). State officials and environmental groups asked the developer to take action after dead birds were found near the wall. Scott Thomas, Conservation Director of Sea & Sage Audubon Society ([www.seaandsageaudubon.org](http://www.seaandsageaudubon.org)), led a public walk along the wall to explain the problems, outline potential solutions, and encourage public involvement and monitoring of the area. There are two endangered birds at Bolsa Chica: the California subspecies of the Least Tern and the Belding’s subspecies of Savannah Sparrow.

Ed Mountford, Senior Vice President of Hearthside Homes, directed the company’s project biologist to find a way to



The California subspecies of Least Tern is one species imperilled by a 4,400 foot-long glass wall installed by builders of a California development. Photo: Tom Grey.

make the glass more visible for the birds without obstructing the view of future residents of Brightwater. A chain-link fence with sporadic yellow flags has been erected in response to the outcry over the deaths of the birds. This is an inadequate and temporary solution at best.

Sea & Sage Audubon Society is asking for volunteers to monitor the glass wall on a daily basis to check for injured or dead birds. Their hope is to assess the full scale of the problem, and to make the deaths public and advocate for the removal of the wall. For more information contact Sea & Sage Audubon Society at [www.seaandsageaudubon.org](http://www.seaandsageaudubon.org).

## Appropriations Bill Harmful to Owl and Murrelet Habitat

The reports that accompanied the FY2008 House and Senate Interior Appropriations bills included language harmful to the habitat of the Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet. After identifying and analyzing the problem report language, ABC alerted other organizations working on the Interior bill and urged their support to have this language removed. However, the final report language failed to drop this harmful language encouraging old growth logging in the Pacific Northwest.

Concerns were successfully raised about the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan with Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Chairman of the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, by national environmental groups. Many thanks to our colleagues at American Lands Alliance, National Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense

Council, and The Wilderness Society for their work on this issue.

Many Bird Conservation Alliance member groups signed on to a comment letter concerning the Draft Spotted Owl Recovery Plan that was helpful in shifting the process in the right direction. Several committees have been established by FWS to review the science underlying the draft plan. And while this scientifically-flawed plan is still moving forward, it is now the subject of an Interior Department

Inspector General investigation into political interference with the process that could require the agency to start over (see article Page 7).

Although ABC and our partners were not successful in eliminating funding for the draft Owl Plan in the FY2008 omnibus appropriations bill or logging funds targeting their habitat, important groundwork was prepared for addressing these threats in the FY2009 Interior bill. Contact Steve Holmer, ABC, sholmer@abcbirds.org.

### Key Conservation Programs See Funding Boost

The Omnibus Appropriations Bill for FY2008 includes significant funding increases for the priority programs for ABC and the Bird Conservation Funding Coalition. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) will receive \$4.5 million (up \$500,000 from

last year); The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) will get \$42.6m (up \$2.8m), State Wildlife Grants will get \$73.8m (up \$6.3m), and Forest Service International Forest Programs will receive \$7.5m (up \$600,000).

## Competition from Barred Owl Threatens Spotted Owl

Efforts to recover the Northern Spotted Owl are being complicated by the influx of the Barred Owl, which appears to be driving Spotted Owls out of suitable habitat, speeding their decline. The draft Spotted Owl Recovery Plan concluded that because of the threat from the Barred Owl, habitat protection was now less important for recovery, and the old growth forest reserves created to conserve the owl could be reduced in size or eliminated. This conclusion is flawed, however, because only by protecting additional habitat blocks suitable for the Spotted Owl, can managers hope to ensure sufficient habitat to bring about its recovery.

Barred Owl occupation has made some areas of suitable habitat unavailable to the Spotted Owl. To mitigate for

Barred Owl intrusion, BLM must now provide much larger habitat blocks to fulfill the goal of least 20 pairs of Spotted Owls within each reserve.

The Barred Owl also occupies habitat in the managed forests between the reserves, so these areas are not available for Spotted Owl dispersal. To meet the same level of dispersal anticipated by the Recovery Plan, additional measures must be taken to protect further dispersal habitat between the reserves, in both additional habitat acres and improved habitat quality.

“If you remove habitat it’s just going to enhance the competitive pressures between the two species,” said Robert Anthony, a researcher with the U.S. Geological Survey. Contact Steve Holmer, ABC, sholmer@abcbirds.org.



The Barred Owl (shown above) often outcompetes the Spotted Owl when their ranges meet. Photo: Mike Parr.

## Oregon Proposes Plan to Mitigate Recreation Impacts to Western Snowy Plovers

There are times when recreation on Oregon beaches disturbs or harms the threatened Western subspecies of the Snowy Plover. To mitigate this threat, a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) has been developed by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and submitted to FWS. The draft plan and an Environmental Impact Statement analyzing its effects, were released in November 2007.

The HCP details management strategies proposed at six beach sites, totaling 32 miles of ocean shore, where plovers already nest, and where some limitations on recreation have been in effect for years. Recreation will continue to be allowed in these areas, but the HCP will set restrictions on dogs, people, and off-road vehicles, all of which disturb Snowy Plover nesting behavior.

The plan also establishes protection for 16 miles of shoreline, currently unoccupied by plovers but suitable for nesting, that scientists think the birds are likely to use in the future. These areas will be off-limits to cars, and dogwalkers will be required to keep their pets on a leash. Most of these sites have been used by plovers in the past, both during breeding

season and winter, and are essential for expanding the bird's ever-dwindling habitat, and recovering the species.

The plover has been listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act since 1993. Since the Snowy Plover was first identified as a species of concern in the early 1970s, populations and breeding locations have continued to decline on the Pacific Coast.

Pacific Coast Snowy Plovers breed and nest during the highest period of human beach use—March through September. Plover nests are vulnerable throughout the month-long incubation period, and chicks remain vulnerable until they can fly, about a month after hatching.

The Audubon Society of Portland, a Bird Conservation Alliance member, supports the HCP, but is urging FWS to expand the proposed Critical Habitat as directed by the Draft Recovery Plan. Originally completed in 1999, the Plan called for 4,779 acres of Critical Habitat, but the new proposal calls for only 2,223 acres, and does not protect unoccupied areas of suitable and historically occupied habitat. See [www.audubonportland.org](http://www.audubonportland.org) for more information.

## Black-footed Albatross Listing Proposed

In early October 2007, FWS issued a decision to begin the process for listing the Black-footed Albatross as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. FWS is now conducting a review of the bird's status, which will inform the final ruling. Earthjustice submitted the petition to list the albatross in October 2004.

Currently, the greatest threat to the Black-footed Albatross is from longline fishing. Since the 1992 international moratorium on driftnets, longlining has become increasingly popular. Longline fishing boats release lines up to 80 miles long with thousands of baited hooks. While the longlines are being set in the water behind fishing boats, albatrosses and other seabirds grab the bait and become hooked by their bills, bodies, or wings. The birds, unable to free themselves, are dragged under the surface and drowned.

Though the Hawaiian Islands host over 95% of the species' breeding grounds, Black-footed Albatrosses roam the Northern Pacific, and can be found from Mexico to Russia. Longliners from many countries operate in their foraging range. Some of these fleets employ seabird bycatch reduction methods, such as using bird-scaring streamers and not dumping fish waste overboard during line setting. Using

these methods, the Alaskan and some Hawaiian fisheries have reduced their seabird bycatch by up to 90%.

ABC's Seabird Program has been at the forefront of efforts to prevent needless deaths of seabirds on longlines, and continues to press regulators, industry and the public toward greater appreciation of the scope and seriousness of the problem.

Recent estimates of adult survival rates for the Black-footed Albatross show populations shrinking. While listing under the Endangered Species Act will be an important protection for these birds, efforts to save it must also increase. For more information on ABC's Seabird Program, see [www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/seabirds/index.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/seabirds/index.html), or contact Jessica Hardesty, ABC, [jhardesty@abcbirds.org](mailto:jhardesty@abcbirds.org).



Glen Tepke



ClipArt.com

## California Expands Lead Ban to Further Protect Endangered Condors

The California Fish and Game Commission voted December 7 to adopt strong regulations to restrict the use of lead ammunition in California to protect the endangered California Condor. The Commission voted to implement legislation signed by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in October to prohibit the use of lead ammunition in the range of the California Condor, and went further by restricting additional hunting activities using lead ammunition. The action was intended to continue to promote hunting in the region, but with non-toxic ammunition that is available at most commercial retail outlets.

“The Fish and Game Commission’s decision to expand these protective measures is critical to putting the California Condor back on the road to recovery,” said Michael Fry, American Bird Conservancy’s Director of Conservation Advocacy.

The Fish and Game Commission regulations cover parts of fourteen counties in the historic range of the California

Condor, including the Sierra Nevada Mountains. This is a much broader area than the state legislation, which covered portions of eight counties. All rifle hunting of big game, small mammals, and non-game birds in the affected area will require the use of non-lead ammunition.

In a surprising decision, the Commission also expanded the non-lead requirement to include .22 caliber ammunition, for which there are currently no commercially available non-lead bullets. Commissioners voiced the hope that ammunition manufacturers would now have a strong incentive to produce and market non-lead .22 caliber bullets.

“There have been 276 documented cases of lead poisoning of California Condors since 2000, and a dozen condor deaths linked to lead,” said Fry. “There is also concern about the health impacts of lead on other species of wildlife such as eagles, ravens, and vultures that feed on carcasses, and humans who eat game that has been shot with lead bullets.”



Susan Haig

The Commission expressed concern for other species by requesting a study of lead contamination in birds of prey, such as eagles and hawks, and in ravens, vultures, and scavenging mammals. If other species are being poisoned by lead, California may consider extending the non-lead hunting regulations state-wide. Non-lead shotgun ammunition has been required nationally for waterfowl hunting since 1991. The recent ban makes California the first state to require non-toxic ammunition for hunting big game. Contact Michael Fry, ABC, [mfry@abcbirds.org](mailto:mfry@abcbirds.org).

## New Green Lights May Stop Bird Strikes on Offshore Platforms

Land birds migrating at sea during inclement weather frequently become disoriented and are attracted to the lights of offshore oil platforms. In the Gulf of Mexico, a 2005 study showed that as many as 300,000 birds die in collisions with pipes and wires on rigs each year. These deaths could be avoided if it were possible to develop lighting that did not attract birds. Studies indicate that it is the red portion of the spectrum that most attracts and disorients birds. Hence, red or white lighting is disruptive, while blue or green light is much less so.

A Dutch petroleum company has teamed up with Phillips Electronic to develop a new light bulb with a greenish light that provides good visibility for workers, yet apparently does not attract birds. The lighting system is currently being tried on one major platform in the North Sea off the Dutch coast. More scientific results will be available after this year’s fall migration to quantify the reduction in birds landing on the platform. More than 380 floodlights have been changed to the new green lights, and far fewer disoriented birds have been observed so far.

“This is a good example of how different industrial organizations can jointly solve an environmental problem,” said Michael Fry, ABC’s Director of Conservation Advocacy. “More research is needed to see if these lights really work, and whether or not they can be applied to other uses, such as lighting on communications towers, that also threaten millions of birds.” Contact Michael Fry, ABC, [mfry@abcbirds.org](mailto:mfry@abcbirds.org).

## Major Decline in Seabirds Documented in Puget Sound

Puget Sound is one of the largest estuaries in the United States, covering over 2,000 miles of shoreline in Washington State and Canada. It is also a complex living ecosystem, home to hundreds of species of fish, marine mammals, and seabirds, and thousands of invertebrate species such as clams, oysters, and shrimp.

Unfortunately, the sound's health has been on the decline. Toxic chemicals are concentrating in the water and entering the food chain. Low oxygen levels caused by failing septic



Common Murre: Glen Tepke



tanks, sewage treatment plants, farm runoff, and other pollutants are killing fish and destroying critical bird habitat such as salt marshes and eelgrass beds. Poor development practices and storm water runoff only add to the habitat degradation.

Researchers in Washington State have documented significant declines in Puget Sound seabird populations since studies began in the 1970s. Surf Scoters are down 70%, Western Grebes are down 81%, and Common Murres are down 91%. Overall, the total number of marine birds in the region has dropped by 47%.

"The severity of the population declines in the Puget Sound, coupled with population declines throughout the Pacific Northwest for several of these species, raises real concerns about their population status and an urgent need to address the factors contributing to the declines," said ABC's Bob Altman, Northern Pacific Rainforest Bird Conservation Region Coordinator.

In a recent incident, 200 birds, including Common Murres and Pacific Loons, were found dead on the Olympic Peninsula. Potential causes are still being investigated, but biologists suspect disease, pollutants, or commercial fishing.

Three leading conservation groups, People For Puget Sound, The Trust for Public Land, and The Nature Conservancy, have launched a three-year, \$80 million campaign to protect

and restore Puget Sound's ecologically rich shoreline ([www.shorelinealliance.org](http://www.shorelinealliance.org)). Scientists and resource managers from government and private nonprofit organizations are stepping up efforts to understand declines in marine bird populations. Biologists from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are conducting ongoing studies of selected marine bird populations. The data they gather will help determine if a species can qualify as a candidate for state or federal protection.

Audubon Washington is developing a site conservation strategy for Port Susan Bay, an area considered key habitat for many marine birds. In addition, Washington Governor, Chris Gregoire, recently created a new state agency, the Puget Sound Partnership ([www.psp.wa.gov](http://www.psp.wa.gov)), with the goal of creating a healthy sound by 2020.



Western Grebe: Tom Grey

## San Francisco Bay Oil Spill Raises Questions about Readiness

**O**n November 7, 2007, the Cosco Busan container ship hit a support tower of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, opening a gash in its hull and leaking 58,000 gallons of toxic fuel oil into the San Francisco Bay, which is recognized by American Bird Conservancy as a Globally Important Bird Area. The spill killed thousands of birds, including endangered seabirds and coastal species such as Marbled Murrelets and Snowy Plover, and fouled 40 miles of shoreline. The total number of birds impacted by the spill range from estimates of 25,000 to 50,000. Even a small patch of oil on a bird can compromise the insulating properties of its feathers, leading to hypothermia and death.

The fuel oil spill happened at a time when approximately 360,000 shorebirds come to the bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta for the winter. The birds feed in mudflats at lower tides and in the salt ponds

at high tide. Over 700,000 waterfowl, including ducks, grebes, and loons, also use the open bay and ocean. Oil stretching for miles and trailed by a raft of congealed tar is headed towards the Farallon Islands, an ecologically important area that is the biggest seabird breeding colony south of Alaska, with 200,000 Common Murres at the height of the season in the spring.

Under the umbrella of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network, participating organizations, including PRBO Conservation Science and the Golden Gate Audubon Society, worked to rescue oiled birds. However, the number of trained personnel fell short of what was needed. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Craig Bone acknowledged that the Bay Area lacks sufficient numbers of people trained to help in the capture of wildlife and other tasks related to cleaning up the environment, for which the state is ultimately responsible.

The U.S. Coast Guard estimates the cleanup cost has exceeded \$55 million, and will probably surpass the \$61 million federal insurance liability limit. In the wake of the spill, California Democratic Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein introduced legislation to raise the insurance liability limits set by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. Under that law, the liability limit is calculated according to the size of the ship, and liability caps are higher for oil tankers than for cargo ships like the Cosco Busan. The Boxer-Feinstein bill would raise the liability limit for cargo ships to the same level as that for tankers.

For more information, see PRBO's oil spill web page at [www.prbo.org](http://www.prbo.org), or Golden Gate Audubon Society at [www.goldengateaudubon.org](http://www.goldengateaudubon.org).

## Project PredatorWatch Survey Update

**A**fter over a year of operation, ABC's Project PredatorWatch survey is still collecting information to help determine the extent of predation on birds at bird feeders across America. Started in December 2006, Project PredatorWatch is a citizen science survey consisting of an online questionnaire, designed to be completed whenever members of the public observe or discover evidence of bird predation around their homes. The survey was begun to help scientists and conservationists determine what types of birds are killed, and whenever possible, identify the predators.

The survey includes questions about the predator-prey interaction observed, the surrounding environment, the type of bird and predator observed, and the

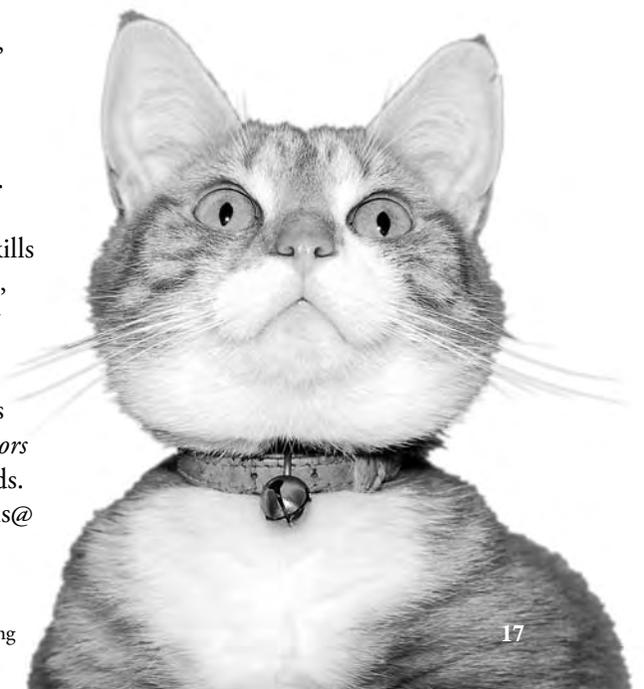
time of year the activity took place. More than 860 responses have been collected thus far.

In 2008, ABC's new *Cats Indoors* Campaign Coordinator, Grant Ellis, will be collaborating with scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to compile, analyze, and report the findings from the survey in a report. The study will, among other things, cover the number of reported bird kills Project PredatorWatch has recorded, and the relative percentage taken by different predators.

For more information, and to access the survey, please visit the *Cats Indoors* page of ABC's website: [www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org). Contact Grant Ellis, ABC, [gellis@abcbirds.org](mailto:gellis@abcbirds.org).



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## Birds in Brief

### Red List Grows

The 2007 IUCN Red List ([www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)) reveals there are 188 more species threatened with extinction this year than there were last year. The IUCN-World

Akikiki: Jack Jeffrey



Conservation Union assesses the status of species on a global scale to highlight those threatened with extinction. Of the world's 9,956 species of birds, the Red List includes 1,217 species, or 12% of the total. There are 189 bird species listed as Critically Endangered, rated by scientists to be most at-risk of becoming extinct. These include 87 species in the Americas, such as the Honduran Emerald, Lear's Macaw, Puerto Rican Nightjar, Royal Cinclodes, Dusky Starfrontlet, Blue-billed Curassow, Fuertes's Parrot, Grenada Dove, Stresemann's Bristlefront, and Akikiki, all priority species for conservation by ABC.

### PIF Releases Landbird Population Estimates Database

The Partners in Flight Landbird Population Estimates Database is now available online. The Database may serve as the first step in setting population objectives for bird conservation. Users will be able to access estimates for landbird populations at a variety of geographic scales (e.g.

continental, state-, or province-wide, across Bird Conservation Regions, or areas where states overlap with BCRs) and view the scientific processes used by Partners in Flight to create these estimates. Visit the Landbird Population Estimates Database at [www.rmbo.org/pif\\_db/laped/query.aspx](http://www.rmbo.org/pif_db/laped/query.aspx)

### Kirtland's Warblers Found Nesting in Canada

The 2007 nesting season continued to show encouraging signs of the Kirtland's Warbler recovery. In addition to the breeding pair found in Wisconsin (*Bird Calls*, Vol. 11, No. 3), another pair was found in Ontario, Canada, the first time the species has bred there in over 60 years. The Kirtland's Warbler was designated as an endangered species in Canada in 1979 by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, when it was rated as one of the world's most critically endangered birds.

Spectacled Eider: FWS



### Spectacled Eider Losing Wintering Grounds

As global warming shrinks areas of polar sea ice, the Spectacled Eider is losing important wintering habitat. The entire world population of this species winters in small holes in the ice on the Bering Sea, where the birds dive for clams and other bottom-dwelling mollusks.

However, as ocean temperatures rise and sea ice recedes, other predators, such as fish and snow crabs, are able

to compete with the eiders for food. Warmer water temperatures open the Bering Sea to commercial fishermen, which could also have a negative effect on the eider's wintering area. The Spectacled Eider is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, and is included on the ABC/Audubon WatchList 2007.



Attwater's Prairie-Chicken: FWS

### Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Finds Safe Harbor

A new safe harbor agreement between the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and FWS will help private landowners participate in conservation efforts to save the Attwater's Prairie-Chicken. Through the agreement, landowners can receive incentives for restoring and maintaining coastal prairie habitat, the historic home of this species.

Forty captive-bred juvenile Attwater's were released on a private ranch last August, the first time this species has been placed on privately-owned land. Officials hope to continue to release birds on the property over the next several years if the pilot project proves successful.

### Small Birds Make a Big Difference in Western Forests

A study recently published by a doctoral student at the University of Colorado shows that the feeding habits of bird species such as the Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted

and Pygmy Nuthatches, and Yellow-rumped Warbler increased the growth of western pine forests by as much as one-third. The birds' foraging habits remove beetles, caterpillars, ants, and aphids from branches, increasing the vigor of the trees.

"The study shows that pine canopies are very complex systems with an unexpected level of biodiversity," said study author Kailen Mooney. "Forest managers really need to look at the big picture of ecosystems and not just focus on trees when implementing regulations aimed at encouraging the growth of healthy forests." The study is available at [www.colorado.edu/news/releases/2007/282.html](http://www.colorado.edu/news/releases/2007/282.html).

Whooping Cranes: FWS



summer nesting and the fall migration have contributed to the high numbers on the wintering grounds. See [www.birdrockport.com/tom\\_stehn\\_whooping\\_crane\\_report.htm](http://www.birdrockport.com/tom_stehn_whooping_crane_report.htm) to read the most recent report.

### FWS Announces Recovery Plan for Rota Bridled White-eye

On October 19, 2007, FWS released a final recovery plan for the endangered Rota Bridled White-eye. The species, which exists only on the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, was federally listed as endangered in 2004. Since 1982, when there were roughly 11,000 birds, the population has dropped 89%. The most recent survey, conducted in 1999, projected the number of birds on the island at fewer than 1,100.

The objectives of the recovery plan are to stop further declines in population, prevent extinction of the species, and restore population levels to 11,000. FWS will try to reduce habitat loss, reduce threats of predators and disease, and conduct an education and outreach campaign to increase public support for conservation of the white-eye.

Copies of the recovery plan are available at [www.fws.gov/pacificislands](http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands), or from the FWS Honolulu office: (808) 792-9400.

### Dogs Voted Off Florida Shorebird Preserve

Shell Key Preserve, a small island at the mouth of Tampa Bay, was established in 2000 for the protection and conservation of wintering and nesting shorebirds. The preserve is popular with human visitors as well, who boat to the island to camp or just enjoy a day on its shores. Unfortunately, some leave litter and waste on the beaches, and let their dogs run off-leash through bird nesting areas.

The Board of Pinellas County, which leases the preserve from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), recently approved a new management plan for the preserve that bans dogs and alcohol on the island.

The original lease agreement between the county and the DEP requires the preserve to be managed for the preservation and protection of shorebirds, and public use that won't disturb them. For more information, see <http://shellkey.org>.

### WATCH LIST 2007

ABC and Audubon have collaborated on a new Watch List of the 217 North American bird species in most urgent need of conservation.

Visit [abcprograms/science/watchlist/index.html](http://abcprograms/science/watchlist/index.html) for more information.



Cape Sible Seaside Sparrow: David La Puma

Mountain Chickadee: Bill Hutbick



### Record Number of Whooping Cranes Wintering in Texas

The only self-sustaining wild population of the endangered Whooping Crane breeds in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park, and winters at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Gulf Coast of Texas. This winter, the flock has grown to a record high of an estimated 266 birds. An aerial census conducted on December 20 located 253 individuals, and more were believed to be at other locations or still in migration at that time. A successful breeding season and extremely good survival of both adults and juveniles through the spring and



Photo: Mike Parr

## Help ABC Stop Bird Collisions

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Is there anyone who enjoys feeding and watching birds who hasn't had the painful experience of hearing or seeing a bird hit a window? Multiply that experience by the number of windows and buildings in the United States, and it is easy to believe scientific studies estimating that tens of millions of birds are killed or harmed annually through collisions with windows and buildings.

Research to prevent this enormous problem is yielding promising solutions, and American Bird Conservancy is stepping up to help lead efforts to bring those solutions to our homes and offices in 2008. Please help support ABC's new Glass and Collisions Program with a tax-deductible gift today. Thank you!

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