

# BIRD CALLS

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## New Protected Areas in Bolivia Offer Refuge for Rare Red-fronted Macaw

**W**ith significant help from ABC, two new protected areas in Bolivia are providing habitat protection for the endangered Red-fronted Macaw and other rare and declining species. The first of these two areas was established in the Andean municipality of Aiquile, while the second, in the neighboring Omereque municipality, will be officially declared later this year.

ABC helped community residents work collaboratively to designate areas of restricted agricultural development, timber extraction and hunting, which were then mapped and documented in formal management

plans by ABC's partner, the Center for Biodiversity and Genetics (CBG) at the University of San Simon in Cochabamba. ABC provided technical expertise to ensure that the project

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Doug Janson

## End of the Road for Two Toxic Pesticides in the U.S.

**T**he EPA announced in late September 2009 that two toxic pesticides, disulfoton and methamidophos, have been voluntarily removed from the U.S. market by the manufacturer, Bayer CropScience. Both chemicals are in a class of insecticide called organophosphates, nerve agents known to be highly toxic to birds and humans. Organophosphates can poison birds when they unwittingly eat granules of a pesticide, when they eat seeds, berries, or insects that have been contaminated, when they prey on rodents, birds, or

other animals that have themselves been poisoned, or even simply by absorbing the chemicals through their skin. Exposure to organophosphates can lead to direct mortality or sub-lethal effects, such as altered breeding behavior, and neurological effects that may increase their likelihood of being killed by a predator, or of dying prematurely from other causes.

As a result of their danger, many organophosphates have been removed from the market, but these two pesticides were still used on a variety

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### ABBREVIATIONS:

BLM: Bureau of Land Management  
 DOI: Department of the Interior  
 EPA: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
 FWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
 USDA: U.S. Department of Agriculture

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## *New Refuges for Red-fronted Macaw in Bolivia, from page 1*



Center for Biodiversity and Genetics

came to fruition with the best possible benefit for birds.

Together, the two areas cover some 500,000 acres of primarily dry scrub forest that lies in the expansive area between the snow-capped Andean mountains and lowland moist forests. Although this habitat type is found nowhere else in the world, these dry valleys are poorly represented

in Bolivia's protected areas system, perhaps because they have been so sparsely studied in the past. As a result, land is being rapidly cleared for agriculture and cattle and goat grazing, making these two new protected areas particularly important for the macaw and a number of other endemic and threatened species, including the Cliff Parakeet, Bolivian Blackbird, and Andean Condor.

***“The new, large municipal protected area is an enormous accomplishment, but the major unspoken conservation success story here is the change in perception among local communities.”***

Benjamin Skolnik, Conservation Projects Specialist and AZE Coordinator, American Bird Conservancy

With continued technical and conservation assistance from ABC and CBG, communities can hope to protect critical feeding and nesting sites for the Red-fronted Macaw while developing alternative economic activities such as beekeeping and sustainable forestry. As an immediate next step for 2010, ranger stations and trails will be installed and conservation programs will continue in the 39 communities located within the municipal protected areas. Contact Benjamin Skolnik, ABC, [bskolnik@abcbirds.org](mailto:bskolnik@abcbirds.org).



Red-fronted Macaws: Hugo Arnal

## Balancing the Budget – At What Cost?

In February 2009, after years of flat or declining wildlife conservation funding, President Obama unveiled a proposed 2010 budget that seemed to acknowledge the previous chronic starvation of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and related agencies, and the unfortunate toll it had taken on the health of our nation's birds and other wildlife. From 2001 to 2007 there had been a 16% cut in the DOI's budget, a 29% cut for the EPA, and a 35% cut for the USDA Forest Service.

Though the House and Senate ultimately passed spending bills slightly less than the President's proposed 2010 increases, many of his original priorities were maintained, including significant increases for our National Wildlife Refuge System and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

Fast forward one year, and our nation's economy continues to falter. If current economic trends continue, the Office of Management Budget has concluded that America's annual deficit may top \$1 trillion in 2020.

So it wasn't entirely unexpected that President Obama's \$3.8 trillion budget for 2011 would call for additional spending on jobs, new tax cuts for small businesses, and increased aid to state and local governments, and would not renew a range of tax cuts soon to expire for families earning more than \$250,000 per year. What is surprising and disconcerting, though, is that he also proposes that the path back to fiscal soundness be realized, in part, at the expense of wildlife and the environment.

The President's freeze on discretionary, non-security spending for the next three years promises to take us two steps back for the one we took forward in 2010. The reality is that while discretionary spending encompasses a wide array of programs, it actually amounts to a relatively small proportion of the federal budget – the vast majority going to the military and entitlements. For example, total DOI spending amounts to just 0.3% of total federal expenditure, making cuts to its budget insignificant in addressing the overall deficit.

President Obama's 2011 budget does shift significant resources to 'green' job creation, renewable energy production on public lands, and programs to study the potential impact of climate change. Most notably, the President calls for a 29% increase in funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is the federal government's primary program to protect important natural, historic, recreational, and other treasured landscapes.

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*If we eliminate the deficit, but lose what is left of our prairie grasslands, can we call it a victory? If our debt is zeroed out, but our neotropical migrant songbirds vanish, will the next generation thank us?*

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While the increases for these worthy programs mark a positive move, many other programs did not fare so well. For example, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, the only source of federal funding explicitly for the conservation of neotropical migrants, was reduced by 20% (\$1 million); funding for Joint Ventures partnerships that improve bird habitats on the ground, was also decreased by \$1 million; science and monitoring expenditure was cut by \$800,000; and funding

for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act was reduced by \$5 million. In addition, while the proposed budget provides for a small increase for Endangered Species Act programs, it is insufficient to fully tackle the backlog of more than 250 species awaiting listing decisions.

Furthermore, the proposed budget does not fund fixed costs for DOI (e.g., overhead) to the tune of \$100 million, which means that individual conservation programs will have to absorb those costs, further eating into their abilities to conduct their core missions. The Environmental Protection Agency's budget was also disappointingly cut 2.5% from last year's enacted level.

In this time of economic uncertainty, the need to address the nation's budget deficit and mounting national debt has never been greater. Yet what we sacrifice to achieve a stable economy must be carefully thought through. If we eliminate the deficit, but lose what is left of our prairie grasslands, can we call it a victory? If our debt is zeroed out, but our neotropical migrant songbirds vanish, will the next generation thank us? What price can we place on saving our most imperiled species: the Whooping Crane, the Marbled Murrelet, the Hawaiian Crow?

As a conservation organization it is ABC's job to hold each government agency's feet to the fire to ensure they protect birds. This often entails opposing what we believe may be poor policy or the failure to enact or implement good policy. But how can we expect those agencies to do the right thing without the necessary financial wherewithal?

Birds, other wildlife, and their habitats are perhaps the greatest legacy we have to leave to our children and subsequent generations. Let's not be pennywise and pound foolish or gamble with our environmental future—the stakes are just too high. Money that is spent now on wildlife programs will be repaid many times over in a cleaner, healthier environment from which we will all benefit. The sooner the President and Congress understand this, the better off this nation will be.

## Encouraging News for the Maui Parrotbill

A recent survey at the Waikamoi Preserve in the forested uplands of East Maui, Hawai'i has revealed numbers of the critically endangered Maui Parrotbill may be double that of the last study there.

Although limited to two weeks, the survey provides encouraging evidence that the bird's numbers are at least stable, but possibly much improved.

The survey was led by Dr. Constance Dusti Becker, an ornithologist and project coordinator for the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project. Her team estimated that there are approximately 12 parrotbills per square mile of forest in the area surveyed.

"In the midst of all the many conservation problems faced by native birds in Hawai'i, it's nice to hear good news about one of America's rarest species," said George Wallace, ABC's Vice President of Oceans and Islands, and head of its Hawai'i program. "The future for the parrotbill looks that little bit brighter in the face of this study."

The parrotbill, a finch in the Hawaiian honeycreeper sub-family, was once widespread on Maui and Moloka'i, but is now only found within a 19-square-mile area on the high, windward slopes of Haleakalā. FWS estimates that only around 500 individuals survive. Like many of Hawai'i's forest birds, it is threatened by invasive mammals and plants and the spread of avian malaria and pox.



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that only around 500 Maui Parrotbills survive in the wild. Recent conservation efforts have boosted the bird's numbers. Photo: Jack Jeffrey

More than a quarter of the known habitat for the parrotbill is within the 5,230-acre Waikamoi Preserve, which is managed by The Nature Conservancy under a conservation easement. The Conservancy has initiated habitat management programs that have included fencing out introduced pigs, removing alien plants, and increasing native plants for the benefit of forest birds. These efforts have led to a three-fold increase in native shrub cover over the past 15 years.

Despite the possible increase in Maui Parrotbill densities in the reserve, there is still more work to be done to increase the population to levels found at the species' other stronghold in the state's Hanawi Natural Area Reserve, where the birds occur at a density of about 25 per square mile. Contact George Wallace, ABC, <gwallace@abcbirds.org>.

## *End of the Road for Toxic Pesticides in U.S., from page 1*

of food and non-food crops, posing a high risk to birds.

"We are glad to hear that the Bayer has done the right thing and finally removed these bad actors from the environmental stage," said Michael Fry, American Bird Conservancy's Director of Conservation Advocacy. "It is time for all the toxic pre-war dinosaurs to be phased out in favor of newer alternatives that pose less of a threat to birds and our environment."

Data from ABC's Avian Incident Monitoring System database document hundreds of bird deaths due to these two pesticides since 1980. However, the vast majority of birds killed likely go undiscovered or unreported, meaning the



Swainson's Hawk: Greg Lavaty

death toll has certainly been significantly higher. Many of the exposed birds are migratory species protected by law under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and include hummingbirds, Canada Geese, American Robins, and Swainson's Hawks.

The cancellations of most uses of these chemicals went into effect on December 31, 2009, with two uses of disulfoton allowed until the end of 2010. Disulfoton was banned by the European Union in 2003, and methamidophos has been banned by 53 countries in accordance with the Rotterdam Convention of the U.N. Contact Michael Fry, ABC, <mfry@abcbirds.org>

## Barbed Wire Fences Take Significant Toll on Imperiled Greater Sage-Grouse

Results of a new study by biologists with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department have elevated awareness of fences as yet another hazard to Greater Sage-Grouse populations. In addition to the threat of loss of sagebrush habitat due to urbanization and agriculture, oil and gas exploration, and wind power development, it appears that collisions with barbed wire fences, used primarily to facilitate cattle grazing, can be a significant source of mortality.

The study was conducted along 4.7 miles of fence that straddles Wyoming's Sweetwater-Sublette County Line, following several anecdotal reports of dead sage-grouse on fences. It involved both monitoring for dead birds and testing potential solutions. The study fence yielded 146 Greater Sage-Grouse deaths over a period of seven months, which could indicate that fences are now the highest direct cause of human-induced mortality for the sage-grouse and a significant threat to the species, whose range and population have declined by as much as 90% in recent decades. The researchers determined that some fences are more dangerous than others. Those constructed with steel T-posts near leks (breeding grounds), or that border riparian areas or bisect winter concentrations are the most deadly. Fences constructed in areas with greater topographic relief result in fewer deaths, presumably because the birds must fly higher to clear the ground, and therefore less likely to hit fences.

Encouragingly, the researchers found that mitigation in the form of fence markers was an effective way of preventing sage-grouse deaths. Currently available commercial markers reduced deaths by 60-70%, but the study authors were optimistic that this figure could be further improved with some

design modifications. The authors recommended that no new fence be built within ¼ mile of a sage-grouse lek, and that existing fences be thoroughly surveyed to learn whether they are a threat (which means walking or slowly driving the fence line regularly so that carcasses are spotted before scavengers have had a chance to take them).



### What Next For the Greater Sage-Grouse?

Citing that numbers of the Greater Sage-Grouse have dramatically diminished in recent decades, and the continued expansion of energy developments that threaten the species' sagebrush habitat, ABC has called on FWS to list the Greater Sage-Grouse under the Endangered Species Act. FWS is currently reviewing the status of the species and is expected to announce its findings at the end of February. The numbers of Greater Sage-Grouse have dropped precipitously, with a loss of more than 30% in the last 25 years, according to recent reports. ABC has also criticized the recent Wyoming Sage-Grouse Management Plan as insufficient to secure stable population over the long-term, and is calling for a comprehensive and region-wide management plan that will protect the species' entire core habitat.

Photo: Alan D. Wilson

In response to mortality at fences, the BLM issued a memorandum to its field offices in December 2009 recommending ways in which sage-grouse deaths can be minimized. This included ensuring that new fence proposals "are carefully evaluated for sage-grouse collision risk, and are sited in a manner consistent with conservation measures outlined in the State Sage-grouse Conservation Plan." Field offices are also to identify priority areas for flagging or marking existing fences to avoid collisions, and to consult in this process with state wildlife agencies.

The recent fence study may have some bearing on the forthcoming FWS decision on whether to give the Greater Sage-Grouse protection under the Endangered Species Act. Any determination by the Service to list the species could have a significant impact on energy and other land management issues such as grazing in areas where the sage-grouse occurs.

In 2005, the Service issued a finding that Endangered Species Act listing was not warranted for the sage-grouse. However, that decision was overturned in a district court appeal due to suspicion that it may have been unduly influenced by former Deputy Assistant Interior Secretary Julie MacDonald, who was forced to resign over a controversy involving her personal involvement in listing decisions of other species. Then FWS Director Steve Williams defended the original decision on the basis of stabilized or increasing sage-grouse populations. The new decision on listing the species must be made by late February 2010 as ordered by the court.

For more information, contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <sholmer@abcbirds.org>.

## Snakes Alive!

Before recessing for the December holidays, the U.S. Senate's Environment and Public Works Committee passed legislation that seeks to ban the importation of several species of python into the United States. Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) authored and introduced the legislation, which is supported by the administration, in an effort to halt new introductions of large constrictor snakes into the Everglades ecosystem, where the Burmese python population is now estimated to exist in the thousands, putting at risk a variety of threatened and endangered species.

In 2008, ABC urged FWS to add pythons, boas, and anacondas to the list of "injurious wildlife" covered under the Lacey Act, the oldest existing wildlife statute in the United States (*Bird Calls*, Vol. 12, No. 2). These aggressive, invasive predators are known to be highly adaptable to new environments and consume a wide variety of prey, including various native mammal, amphibian, lizard, and bird species. Unfortunately, under current law, native fish and wildlife are not directly protected from harmful, non-native species on federal or any other lands.

One-hundred-million acres in the United States, including significant portions of land and water under federal jurisdiction, are infested with invasive species. Each year they continue to degrade or eliminate native vegetation and its dependent wildlife in an area equal in size to a strip of land two miles wide stretching from coast to coast. Populations of long-lived and highly fecund invasive snake species, such as the Burmese python, have great potential to proliferate once introduced outside their native range, causing ecological and economic disasters that can quickly overtake even the most far-reaching eradication efforts to protect endangered species.



White Ibis: Bill Hubick



Purple Gallinule: Greg Lavaty



King Rail: Greg Lavaty

According to a study of the intestines of 56 captured Burmese pythons in or adjacent to Everglades National Park, 50 were found to have eaten multiple bird species, including: Anhinga, American Coot, Pied-billed Grebe, Limpkin, King Rail, Purple Gallinule, Great Blue Heron, White Ibis, Red-winged Blackbird, Virginia Rail, Great Egret, Magnificent Frigatebird, Clapper Rail, and House Wren. The White Ibis and Limpkin are Florida Species of Conservation Concern, and the King Rail and the Clapper Rail are on the U.S. WatchList of birds of national concern. Though not currently found to be prey of the Burmese python, the study notes that snake sightings and captures have occurred in high-priority areas for the Wood Stork, which is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Geological Survey has released climate maps which suggest that the Burmese python could find suitable habitat, comparable to that of the pythons' native range in Asia, in the southern third of the contiguous 48 States. Should these snakes become more widely established, they will further exacerbate the threat they already pose to the health and abundance of many bird species.

Senator Nelson's legislation now awaits full Senate consideration for final passage. Contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <[dshroeder@abcbirds.org](mailto:dshroeder@abcbirds.org)>.

The climate and ecosystem of southern Florida are ideally suited for Burmese pythons, which are native to hot, humid areas of Asia. Pythons eat a wide variety of birds, mammals and reptiles, posing a significant threat to native species in Florida's already-fragile ecosystem. Photo: stock.xchng

## Birds on Film: Testing Mitigation Measures for Bird Strikes on Windows

With support from donor Joan Hero, ABC is testing materials designed to stop birds from hitting glass. Bird strikes on windows are responsible for up to one billion bird deaths every year in the United States. They represent a significant threat to some populations, particularly for WatchList species that are already in decline due to habitat

that owns and manages the reserve and ecolodge, chose images of local species. The film has completely eliminated collisions at the site.

ABC also teamed up with FWS, to reduce bird collisions at their National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. NCTC is both a resource for learning about conservation and

application of the film, collisions have stopped.

ABC's next project is in collaboration with the Philadelphia Zoo. They will use window film to create a pattern of thin, horizontal black lines on glass barriers around a bear exhibit. This pattern has eliminated over 90% of collisions in a controlled testing situation, but this will be the first real-



Jeniam EcoLodge at El Dorado, Colombia, showing use of anti bird strike window film. Photo: Fundación ProAves



Installing CollidEscape strips on an office window. Photo: Annette Prince



In addition to preventing bird collisions, window films can enhance a building's exterior. Photo: Alan Turner

loss or a variety of other threats that impact mortality, survivorship, or reproduction. City office buildings are the most widely written about cause of collisions (particularly in light of the recent trend for buildings faced entirely in glass), but homes, schools, municipal buildings, and factories in suburban and rural areas cumulatively present a significant threat too.

For the first project – the Jeniam Ecolodge at the El Dorado Nature Reserve in Colombia – ABC suggested CollidEscape, a window film that appears opaque outside, yet allows good light transmission and visibility from inside. The film can be made with patterns or pictures on the outside or in plain white, both of which should have the same efficacy in preventing collisions. Fundación ProAves, ABC's partners on the project and the group

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***Bird strikes on windows are responsible for up to one billion bird deaths every year in the United States.***

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sustainability, and a demonstration site for conservation in action, comprising classroom buildings, lodging, and a visitors' center, all surrounded by woodlands. Size and placement of some of the windows on the site resulted in collisions as birds tried to fly to reflected trees or sky. While there are numerous ways to render windows safe for birds, most were ruled out due to restrictions on modifications to federal buildings. ABC provided film for priority windows at the Center. In this case plain white was chosen, and since

world application. Because the lines cover less than 7% of the surface, it will allow for good exhibit viewing by visitors, while providing protection for birds.

Meanwhile, ABC is beginning testing trials for new films and other materials for preventing bird-glass collisions in partnership with the Carnegie Museum's Powdermill bird banding station near Pittsburgh. Without harming any birds, the study will quantify the relative merits of different methods for preventing bird-glass collisions in relation to their impact on both the appearance of a building's exterior and the amount of light transmission each allows through the glass for the benefit of people inside. ABC hopes to publish preliminary results in early 2011. Contact Chris Sheppard, ABC, <csheppard@abcbirds.org>.



## Chesapeake Bay Cleanup is for the Birds

Efforts to revive the nation's largest, but ailing estuary, the Chesapeake Bay, received a boost at the end of 2009 when President Obama used his executive authority to lay out a new strategy for federal involvement in cleanup efforts. Up to now, cleanup of the Bay has been the purview of the states, but they have failed to fully control widespread pollution. The new plan details a coordinated effort between the EPA, Department of the Interior, and USDA to create conservation and education programs designed to reduce pollution. In addition, the USDA is charged with the controversial task of writing new rules that will result in more animal farms being designated as 'concentrated animal feeding operations', in an effort to curtail the sources of the largest contributors of nutrient and sediment contaminants into the watershed.

The Chesapeake Bay is an ABC-designated Globally Important Bird Area and a critical migratory stopover and wintering area for several dozen waterfowl species such as the Red-breasted Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Tundra Swan, and Black and Surf Scoters, with mid-winter estimates of up to one million birds. The Bay also supports

33% of the Atlantic Coast population of Great Blue Heron, and the largest concentration of Bald Eagles outside of Alaska. In a recent survey, 3,000 Osprey nests were counted, triple the number found in the 1960s, indicating the species may have regained its pre-DDT historic numbers in the region.

Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) has also introduced legislation, titled the Chesapeake Clean Water and Ecosystem Restoration Act, in Congress. The bill (S.1816) sets new cleanup goals for the Bay and would grant the EPA new authority over state cleanup plans, including the power to withhold federal clean water funding from states that fail to meet reporting milestones. Under Cardin's measure, states would be required to submit Watershed Implementation Plans to EPA by 2011, outlining how they will meet nutrient and sediment limits by 2025, and would be required to achieve at least half of the cleanup goals by May 2014. For more information, contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <dschroeder@abcbirds.org>.

## Birds Nesting Near Oil Fields at Increased Predation Risk

A new study published in the September issue of the journal *Ecological Applications* assesses for the first time the impact of 'human-subsidized' predators on nesting birds at Alaskan oil fields. Ravens, gulls, arctic foxes, and other predators thrive around oil field-related structures, benefitting from food and other waste upon which they can scavenge, as well as from pipes, buildings, machinery, and vehicles around which they can find cover and make nests or dens.

Biologists from FWS, two environmental groups, and two oil companies tracked more than 1,800 songbird and shorebird nests from 2002-2005 in wilderness areas located on the North Slope of Alaska. They found that the risk to songbirds, particularly Lapland Longspurs, was higher the closer the nest was to oil-related structures, particularly within a three-mile radius. Among wading shorebirds, sandpipers did not face increased risk, but Red and Red-necked Phalaropes did suffer greater predation losses.



Red-necked Phalarope: FWS



Lapland Longspur: Glen Tepke

"These results are perhaps not surprising given what we know already about human impacts on wilderness areas, but they clearly demonstrate that claims by oil companies that their ecological footprint is minimal and does not affect wildlife need to be challenged," said Darin Schroeder,

ABC's Vice President of Conservation Advocacy. "Reduction in the survivorship of some species due to oil facilities could be important given the pressure many already suffer due to habitat loss and the potential future losses due to global climate change."

The researchers recommended targeted management actions to minimize human benefits to predators and suggested additional research be conducted on this issue in the light of further development plans for Alaska's North Slope oil fields. Contact Anne Law, ABC, <alaw@abcbirds.org>.

## Conservation Groups Win Injunction to Halt Feral Cat Program in Los Angeles

A superior court judge has ruled in favor of a coalition of conservation groups that includes ABC, to halt the controversial practice of Trap, Neuter, and Release (TNR) of feral cats in the City of Los Angeles, pending environmental review.

The court determined that the City and its Department of Animal Services had been “secretly and unofficially” promoting the practice of re-releasing feral cats to roam free in the city after they have been trapped and neutered or spayed, even though they were obliged by law to first conduct a review of the program under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The plaintiffs in the suit were led by the Urban Wildlands Group, and included ABC, the Endangered Habitats League, Los Angeles Audubon Society, Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society, and Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society.

ABC has been an outspoken opponent of the practice of TNR due to the mortality the cats cause to wild bird populations. Scientists estimate that owned and feral domestic cats are responsible for hundreds of millions of bird deaths each year, one of the largest ongoing causes of avian mortality in the country. TNR advocates maintain that cat colonies diminish over time due to attrition once the cats have been spayed or neutered. In reality, however, total effectiveness in neutering a colony is nearly impossible to achieve, and as a result, cats continue to breed. Additionally colonies act as dumping grounds for unwanted pets, often actually growing over time.

“TNR is not a practice that should be officially sanctioned by any local government,” said Darin Schroeder,

ABC’s Vice President for Conservation Advocacy. “Studies have repeatedly shown that TNR does not work in reducing the number of feral cats. Instead, well-meaning but misguided volunteers perpetuate the problem and contribute to millions of bird deaths. TNR is simply not the solution.”

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Despite denials by the City that an official TNR program existed, the judge ruled that “...implementation of the program is pervasive, albeit informal and unspoken,” and ordered them to halt their actions and complete the necessary environmental reviews.

In June 2005, the Los Angeles Board of Animal Services Commissioners adopted TNR as their preferred method of dealing with feral cat populations. Under the CEQA, an analysis of the impacts of the program on the environment should have been completed, but never was. Yet the Department went forward in supporting TNR



operations, including discounting spay/neuter procedures for TNR cats, helping establish new TNR colonies on city property, and helping promote TNR programs, while allegedly refusing to accept feral cats at city animal shelters or issue permits to trap feral cats that were not going to be subsequently re-released.

The City must now implement the CEQA process, which includes full scientific review, assessment of alternatives, and potential mitigation measures. The public will have the opportunity to engage in the process and ensure an open, science-based approach to the issue of free-roaming cats in Los Angeles.

To view an ABC video on the problems associated with TNR, visit our YouTube channel, [www.youtube.com/abcbirds](http://www.youtube.com/abcbirds). To read some of the scientific papers published on the ineffectiveness of TNR, visit [www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/tnr.html](http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/tnr.html)

*Order updated copies of ABC’s popular Cats Indoors! brochure by visiting [www.abcbirds.org/cats](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats).*



## Marbled Murrelet Facing Threat from Wind Projects

As though the threatened Marbled Murrelet didn't have enough problems, wind farms may soon be built between the species' nesting areas high up on the branches of old-growth trees, and its near-shore feeding grounds. The Radar Ridge wind development proposal in southwestern Washington is located in what Ken Berg, FWS's Western Washington Manager, described to the press as the "worst possible site for a wind farm in southwest Washington." Scientists with the Pacific Seabird Group, who reviewed the project said, "Installation and operation of a wind energy facility will put Marbled Murrelets at risk of collision with turbines."

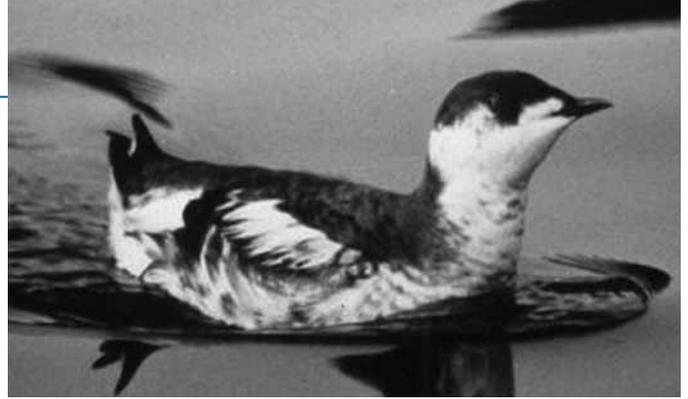
"There are only 4,700 Marbled Murrelets in Washington, and an analysis by the state's Department of Natural Resources conservatively estimates more than 2,600 would be killed by the turbines over the next 30 years," said Steve Holmer, ABC's Senior Policy Advisor. "Actual mortality could be much higher, and there will also be habitat loss as a result of road, turbine, and power line construction."

The proposed project location is the most productive murrelet nesting area in the state, and these concerns have prompted conservation groups, including ABC, to call for the project to be halted pending a full environmental review.

The southernmost murrelet population in California may soon be extinct, the Pacific Northwest population is headed for extinction outside of the Puget Sound area, and the distinct Alaska population is also not faring well and may soon need to be listed as an endangered species. The species is suffering from a lack of good nesting trees, increased predation of its nests by crows and other corvids due to forest fragmentation created by logging, and a decline in food supplies due to changing ocean currents, over-fishing, and pollution.

"We are concerned that the Obama Administration is continuing an effort begun during the last administration to reduce habitat protection in areas occupied by Marbled Murrelets," said Holmer. ABC and its partners recently sent a letter urging FWS to abandon this scientifically-flawed proposal to reduce Critical Habitat designations for the murrelet in favor of a policy of increased protection for this highly threatened seabird.

For more information, contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <sholmer@abcbirds.org>.



FWS

## Murrelet Will Remain Listed

In January, FWS announced that the threatened Marbled Murrelet would remain listed under the Endangered Species Act, despite a 2008 petition from a coalition of forest resource extraction interests to have it delisted. The previous administration's proposal to delist the bird and eliminate endangered species protections was based on the assertion, later discredited by a 2007 USGS report, that the murrelet's population in Washington, Oregon, and northern California is not distinct from other populations in British Columbia and Alaska.

The USGS report also showed that murrelet populations are plunging in Alaska and Canada, with an overall decline of approximately 70% over the last 25 years from more than one million birds to about 350,000 in 2007. The most recent status review of the murrelet concluded that if the current trend of a 4-7% annual decline continues, the species will go extinct in Washington, Oregon, and California outside of the Puget Sound area.

A diminutive seabird that occurs from the Aleutian Islands and the southern coast of Alaska south to northern California, the Marbled Murrelet is unique in its family for building its nest high in old-growth trees, which are disappearing as forests are logged. According to the USDA Forest Service, approximately 2% of murrelet habitat on federal lands was lost between 1996 and 2006, and 12% was lost on non-federal lands primarily due to timber harvest. There is also concern about the rapid loss of murrelet habitat under FWS approved Habitat Conservation Plans. From 1992-2003 an estimated 226,000 acres of murrelet habitat were lost.

"There is no question that the Fish and Wildlife Service made the right call," said George Fenwick, President of ABC. "We appreciate the agency's commitment to sound science as reflected by this listing decision. The Marbled Murrelet is a rapidly declining, fascinating species that is in urgent need of additional rather than less protection."

More on the FWS Listing Decision can be seen at: [www.fws.gov/news/NewsReleases](http://www.fws.gov/news/NewsReleases). The USGS report is available at <http://pubs.water.usgs.gov/ofr20061387>. Contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <sholmer@abcbirds.org>.

## Scientists Call for End to Mountaintop Removal/Valley Fill Coal Mining

A new paper by a group of researchers, led by Professor Margaret Palmer at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Sciences, calls for a halt to the practice of mountaintop removal/valley fill coal mining. The paper, *Mountaintop Mining Consequences*, published in the journal *Science*, reveals that surface mining is now the dominant driver of land use changes in the central Appalachian region. This area is the core breeding range for the Cerulean Warbler, and home to many other forest-interior bird species such as the Wood Thrush and Kentucky Warbler. The study found that mountaintop mining is destroying extensive tracks of deciduous forests, burying streams, and polluting waters downstream.

The authors concluded that current attempts to regulate mountaintop mining were inadequate, stating, “Mining permits are being issued despite the preponderance of scientific evidence that impacts are pervasive and irreversible and that mitigation cannot compensate for these losses...we conclude that mountaintop mining/valley fill permits should not be granted unless new methods can be subjected to rigorous peer review and shown to remedy these problems.”

The EPA has started taking a closer look at these permits, but hasn't yet developed a consistent policy. In October, Arch Coal's Spruce No. 1 mine, the largest proposed mountaintop removal coal mine in Appalachia, had its permit revoked, preventing the burial of seven miles of stream and the deforestation of 2,200 acres of mature forests. However, some new permits have been approved and others modified, including the Hobet 45 permit, which had the amount of stream to be buried reduced from six miles to three.



Vivian Stockman/Southwings

“We appreciate that the EPA is now recognizing the problem and starting to take a harder look at these mining permits,” said Darin Schroeder, ABC’s Vice President for Conservation Advocacy. “The findings of this study make clear that mitigation isn’t viable, and we urge the Agency to follow the scientist’s recommendation and phase-out this harmful practice as quickly as possible.”

The Department of the Interior announced in November that it would begin to review state mining permits for the first time since states began issuing them in the 1980s, and to reassert its right to conduct surprise inspections of state mining regulation enforcement. The Department is also preparing new regulations to strengthen stream buffer rules and revoke relaxed mountaintop mining regulations issued during the last administration. To date no regulations have been offered for public comment.

At the state level, Kentucky and West Virginia are each taking measures to address stream and water quality impacts. Regulators in West Virginia said

in January that the state would stop issuing new permits until new rules to protect downstream water quality are complete. In Kentucky, the state has issued new guidelines to protect streams, reduce valley fills, and better reclaim mountains.

“Citizen involvement and growing public revulsion of this practice are making a huge difference and have helped bring about these changes, but still more needs to be done,” said Steve Holmer, ABC’s Director of the Bird Conservation Alliance, a network of 196 organizations dedicated to protecting birds and their habitats. “As citizens, you and the organizations you belong to can encourage the EPA to deny permits that would harm birds, and support legislation that would restore Clean Water Act protections and prevent stream burials.”

For more information on how you can send a letter in support of bills in the House and Senate that would end mountaintop mining see ABC’s action website at <[www.abcbirds.org/action](http://www.abcbirds.org/action)>. Contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <[sholmer@abcbirds.org](mailto:sholmer@abcbirds.org)>.

## Poisons for Prairie Dogs a No-Go for Birds

American Bird Conservancy has been working to protect migratory birds from the deadly rat poisons chlorophacinone (sold under the brand name Rozol) and diphacinone (Kaput-D). These rodenticides have been registered by the EPA for killing prairie dogs in as many as ten states, which is a concern for predators and scavengers that can be unintentionally killed when they feed on the carcasses of poisoned animals. These include migratory birds such as Bald and Golden Eagles, hawks, and owls, as well as badgers, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, and skunks. The black-footed ferret is an endangered species in the range of the black-tailed prairie dog that could also suffer secondary poisoning, along with the endangered American burying beetle. Both chemicals are blood-thinning agents that can last for weeks in prairie dogs, exacerbating the risk to birds.

The EPA was sued in 2009 by Defenders of Wildlife and Audubon of Kansas for approving Rozol and Kaput-D for use on prairie dogs without protections for the ferret. ABC, Defenders, and Audubon believe EPA is in violation of the Endangered Species Act for failing to consult with the FWS about the potential threat to endangered species. ABC submitted comment letters against both pesticides as they were registered or proposed for registration, and provided Defenders of Wildlife technical information regarding secondary toxicity and the risks to birds.

Data in ABC's Avian Incident Monitoring System database confirm that these pesticides are deadly to birds, with incidents dating back to 1993. Species documented as having



FWS

been killed include Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawks, Snowy Owls, Great Horned Owls, and Barred Owls. "Incidents such as these are significantly underreported, so the threat to birds is far greater than initially apparent," said Moira McKernan, Director of ABC's Pesticides and Birds Campaign. "The fact that there have already been some cases provides evidence that diphacinone and chlorophacinone can and will kill non-target organisms."

One encouraging note is a change in the way EPA is handling registration of new pesticides. For the first time in its near 40-year history, the Agency has allowed public comment on new pesticides prior to their registration, which gives all stakeholders time to comment *before* the chemical goes into use. This additional transparency in the pesticide registration process is a good step towards keeping harmful pesticides off the market, and has enabled ABC to provide comments on Kaput-D prior to its registration for use on prairie dogs. Contact Moira McKernan, ABC, <mmckernan@abcbirds.org>.

## Border Wall Obstacle to Cross-Border Wilderness Agreement

The United States, Canada, and Mexico have signed a wilderness agreement that may facilitate cross-border conservation and restoration projects. The agreement allows land managers on each side of the border to more easily work together to address management challenges and projects. A statement from Sally Collins of the Department of Agriculture pointed out that protection of wilderness was especially important now, given the role that intact forests, grasslands, and other ecosystems play in storing carbon emissions to combat global climate change.

At the signing ceremony, one participant noted that the fence under construction on the U.S.-Mexico border would hinder wildlife connectivity. Ernesto Enkerlin-Hoefflich of the Mexican government's Comisión Nacional De Áreas Naturales Protegidas expressed concern during his remarks

about the wall, but that the agreement may facilitate the creation of small, cross-boundary passageways for wildlife. Biologists have also expressed concern about the impact on the wall on animals from jaguars to Ferruginous Pygmy-Owls, Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks.

There are currently 109 million acres designated as Wilderness in the United States under the Wilderness Act of 1964. Mexico has no similar wilderness designation provision, and according to the IUCN-World Conservation Union, only 0.6% of Mexico's land area is currently protected. Fortunately, there is a growing movement in Mexico to enact a wilderness law and protect additional areas. Contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <sholmer@abcbirds.org>.

## Forests Gain Important Recognition in Global Climate Talks

No major climate treaty was established at the recent global talks in Copenhagen, but the United States and five other nations did commit to a \$3.5 billion down-payment towards REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation), the global system to reduce deforestation and conserve forests in developing countries. With an estimated 17% of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from tropical deforestation, forest preservation and reforestation are important strategies for stemming global warming that also have significant habitat benefits for many bird species in the Americas.

“Much of the REDD funding will be used to prepare tropical nations for participation in a global carbon credit market where they can receive funds for protecting their forests,” said Steve Holmer, ABC’s Senior Policy Advisor. “This system has the potential to provide resources for forest conservation on a scale never seen before.”

While much of the focus of the agreement at Copenhagen was on tropical forests, boreal and temperate forests

also have a role to play. As much as half of the world’s terrestrial carbon stores are found in the trees, soils, and peatlands of the boreal forest. Last year, the Canadian province of Ontario announced the protection of 55 million acres of boreal forest to prevent the escape of CO<sub>2</sub> associated with deforestation. Scientists believe more should be done to preserve this massive carbon store, and are urging that the boreal forests be included in REDD.

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The United States has some of the most carbon-rich forests, found for the most part on public lands in the Pacific Northwest, California, and southeast Alaska. In Copenhagen, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said, “Forests have a vital role to play

in overcoming this challenge. Our Tongass National Forest, a temperate Alaskan rainforest, comprises only 2% of America’s forest land base, but may hold as much as 8% of all the carbon contained in the forests of the United States.”

“Creating a system of climate reserves comprised of the most carbon-rich federal forests would be a major U.S. contribution to greenhouse gas reductions,” said Holmer. “It would also have tremendous benefit for the threatened Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest, and over three-hundred bird species inhabiting the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

In Congress, the House climate bill included language supported by ABC to provide funding for avoiding tropical deforestation, conserving privately-owned forests in the United States, and wildlife adaptation. Similar language is expected to be included in the Senate bill when it is considered later this year. Contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <sholmer@abcbirds.org>

## New Jersey Feral Cat Problem Attracts Federal Attention

Like many other states, New Jersey has a feral cat problem. Cat colonies exist near shorelines, wetlands, forests, wildlife management areas and parks and are causing harm to wildlife, including endangered species and hundreds of species of migrant birds.

In November, FWS wrote to the State's Department of Environmental Protection Division of Fish and Wildlife in opposition to domestic or feral cats being allowed to roam freely, due to adverse impacts on threatened and declining species, migratory birds, and other native wildlife. The letter encourages the state to ensure that cat owners act responsibly to restrain or confine their animals and be held accountable for damages to wildlife. In

addition, FWS recommended that the government take action to eliminate free-ranging feral cats throughout the state.

FWS wants the state to adopt a policy banning so-called 'managed' cat colonies through humane capture. Removal of cat colonies would be prioritized by proximity to habitats important for concentrations of endangered or migratory species. FWS is urging adoption of these cats to new homes or their release into enclosed sanctuaries. To encourage responsible pet ownership, FWS recommends licensing for all cats, leash laws prohibiting owners from allowing their pets to range free, and enforcement and stricter penalties for abandoning cats.

"We need to protect birds and other wildlife from a lovable, but alien predator," said Steve Holmer, ABC's Senior Policy Advisor. "FWS is to be commended for its review of the facts and recommendations grounded in sound science and the law."

The FWS letter points out that anyone involved with the 'take' or killing of an endangered species, including third parties, can be found liable for civil penalties of \$25,000 per take, criminal penalties of \$50,000 per take, and jail time of up to one year. Killing migratory birds is also a crime punishable by up to \$15,000 in fines and six months in prison. For more information, contact Steve Holmer, ABC, <sholmer@abcbirds.org>.

## Ethanol Production Fuels Grassland Bird Declines

A study released in January 2010 by scientists at the University of Michigan finds that government incentives to farmers to convert land for corn production for biofuels is having a negative impact on grassland bird populations of the upper Midwest.

The study, conducted for the National Wildlife Federation, is one of the first to focus on the Prairie Pothole Region, which has already been degraded by two centuries of farming. Some areas have already lost more than half of their pothole wetlands, according to the study. Now, at least 3.2 million additional acres have been plowed under in just three years (2005-2007) to make room for corn crops, according to the researchers. Much of that additional corn was grown to meet U.S. mandates for fuel ethanol.

Many farmers have shifted their lands from CRP (conservation resource program) acres into corn production—a shift which comes at a high cost to



The Grasshopper Sparrow is one of the grassland species threatened by conversion of grasslands to crop fields.  
Photo: Bill Hubick

wildlife. Some areas have experienced marked declines among grassland bird species such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Upland Sandpiper, and Western Meadowlark.

Even with the known effects on habitat and species, land conversion in the Prairie Pothole Region is expected to continue over the next five years as production of blended gasoline expands from 10.57 billion gallons last

year to a predicted 15 billion gallons in 2015.

If biofuels demand remains steady, farmers could plant an additional 10.6 million acres of corn each year to meet ethanol mandates. In addition to loss of wildlife habitat, this dwindling grassland could affect climate conditions, the Michigan researchers concluded. The region's rich prairie soils and plant roots hold vast amounts of carbon, but when those soils are plowed and planted, they can release up to nearly 60 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per acre over 50 years.

David Pashley, Vice President for Conservation Programs at ABC, stated: "Although ABC supports innovative alternate sources of energy, we feel that corn ethanol production is inefficient and has long-term detrimental impacts on many species of wildlife."

To learn more, visit [www.nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/Media-Center/Reports/Archive/2010/Corn-Ethanol-And-Wildlife.aspx](http://www.nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/Media-Center/Reports/Archive/2010/Corn-Ethanol-And-Wildlife.aspx).

## Getting a Handle on Urban Sprawl

**ABC** has helped develop a new scientific tool that could help analyze and therefore mitigate the effects of urban sprawl on bird populations. Research has shown that many forest bird species of conservation concern are less abundant and suffer lower levels of reproductive success in landscapes that are highly fragmented by agriculture and other non-forest land uses. Many conservationists fear that continued urban and rural development associated with burgeoning human populations will exacerbate those problems. The difficulty comes in predicting to what degree this threat exists and in which areas it is greatest.

In an effort to better quantify the magnitude of the threat that urban development could pose to bird populations, ABC's Dr. Todd Jones-Farrand worked with Dr. Anna Pidgeon (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and Dr. Frank Thompson (USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station) to develop a model predicting changes in housing density through 2030. The team then quantified the effects of these changes on populations of 34 priority forest bird species within three Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) in the central and south-central U.S.

Hooded Warbler: Barth Schorre



In the Central Hardwoods BCR alone, conservative estimates are a loss of roughly two million acres of upland forest; 22,000 acres of shrubland; and 18,000 acres of bottomland forests. This includes the loss of over 1.1 million acres considered to support 'source' populations of forest birds (i.e., where reproductive success is such that individuals can disperse out to populate other areas).

Throughout the three BCRs, thirty species' populations were predicted to decline overall from 2000 to 2030, due to increases in housing density and associated land use changes. The patterns of decline and the degree to which populations were affected varied among species. The



Many conservationists fear that continued the development associated with burgeoning human populations will exacerbate declines in many forest bird species. Photo: stock.xchng

Swainson's Warbler was the most negatively affected species, with predicted population declines of 20%. Steep declines were also predicted for the Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Chuck-will's-widow, and Prairie Warbler, while the Northern Bobwhite was predicted to remain stable and Chimney Swift to increase. The study found that concentrating future development within 1,200 feet of

*Research has shown that many forest bird species of conservation concern are less abundant and suffer lower levels of reproductive success in landscapes that are highly fragmented by agriculture and other non-forest land uses.*

existing development lessened the impacts on populations compared with a randomly dispersed growth pattern.

The results of these analyses, and the ability to map species-specific patterns of habitat loss and decline, not only provide conservationists with the ability to quantify potential threats to bird populations resulting from urban sprawl, but can also be used to educate land use planners about the impacts that urban sprawl can have on native birds. Because this work was based on national datasets (e.g., the Breeding Bird Survey, National Land Cover Data), and the methodology well-documented, similar products can be developed for other regions of the United States.

For more information, contact Todd Jones-Farrand, ABC, <tjones-farrand@abcbirds.org>.

## Whooping Crane Crisis in the Aransas Bay

**ABC** has signed on as a supporter of The Aransas Project, an alliance concerned with decreasing freshwater flows in the Guadalupe River Basin of Texas and the resulting increase in salinity along coastal inlets, including the Aransas Bay, where the only remaining natural flock of endangered Whooping Cranes spends the winter.



In December 2009, the Aransas Project filed notice to sue the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality, the state agency which regulates water withdrawals from the state's rivers. The suit claims that the commission has mismanaged the

Guadalupe River Basin, allowing industrial and agricultural permit holders to irresponsibly withdraw water from coastal marshes, causing a decline of blue crabs, a major food source for the Whooping Crane.

FWS officials predicted in early 2010 that the Whooping Crane flock would dwindle because of a lack of food in the coastal marshes where they winter.

For more information, contact Darin Schroeder, ABC, <[dschroeder@abcbirds.org](mailto:dschroeder@abcbirds.org)> or see <http://thearansasproject.org>.

## Unregulated Bird Slaughter on Malta Must End, Say Conservationists

**T**he illegal shooting of birds in Malta has reached critical proportions with the discovery of a mass bird grave on the island. The bodies of more than 200 protected birds, including hawks and falcons, were unearthed in September 2009 in the woodlands of Mizieb. Some of the birds had only been dead a few days or weeks, while others were possibly years old. Only a portion of the woodland has so far been searched, and it is thought likely that many more bird remains are buried elsewhere.

The Maltese government permits a restricted hunting season on Turtle Doves and quail, but there is a long tradition among hunters in Malta of shooting anything that flies overhead without permits. So far, the government has failed to stop this illegal slaughter. The European Union Commission has criticized Malta for its failure to enforce penalties for illegal shooting, and for its breach of an EU directive that requires member states to protect wild birds, their eggs, nests, and habitats.

Although Malta covers only a little over 100 square miles, it is in a major migratory pathway for birds flying between Africa and Europe. It sees a large number of birds passing through, including Hoopoe, Honey Buzzard, Little Egret, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Crane, and Marsh Harrier, all of which are at risk from the hunters. Also recorded as having been shot is the Saker Falcon, whose European population numbers fewer than 550 pairs. Three bird species have already been driven to extinction on Malta, the



Peregrine Falcon: Peter LaTourrette, [www.birdphotography.com](http://www.birdphotography.com)

Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, and Jackdaw, as a direct result of hunting.

“The decimation of dozens of species and the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon in the United States provide a valuable lesson on the perils of unregulated bird hunting,” said George Fenwick, President of ABC. “The situation in Malta is simply untenable and must end.”

The official Maltese hunting club has criticized the illegal hunters and threatened to ban them as members if convicted, yet neither this threat or the condemnation of the EU seem to be sufficient to halt the killings. BirdLife Malta has dispatched volunteers around the island to draw attention to illegal hunters and pressure police enforcement. They have created an informative, but disturbing video of illegal hunting, viewable at [www.birdlifemalta.org](http://www.birdlifemalta.org), where visitors can also sign on to a petition to stop the slaughter.

The situation in Malta is very similar to the problem in Barbados, on which ABC reported in the October 2009 issue of *Bird Calls* (Vol. 13, No 3). Here too, birds are shot in large numbers without permits and with no regard for their scarcity. The Barbadian government has been equally ineffectual in ending the carnage despite promises.

## North Pacific Albatrosses Added to International Seabird Accord, but U.S. Still Not A Signatory

In 2009, the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), an international accord that seeks to conserve these seabirds through coordinated activity, added the three northern Pacific albatrosses to the list of species it covers. The three species (Laysan, Black-footed, and Short-tailed) are the only albatrosses to regularly occur in U.S. waters. The largest breeding colonies of the Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses are on Midway Atoll in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The Short-tailed Albatross has a population of fewer than 2,500 birds and nests on an island off the coast of Japan, but travels throughout the northern Pacific.

Absurdly, the birds were excluded in the original treaty, partly as a result of pressure by the United States, which did not want 'U.S. species' included in an agreement to which it had chosen not to be a party. The United States participates in all of the technical



(Top) Laysan Albatross: Bill Hubick; (bottom) Black-footed Albatross: ClipArt.com

aspects of the treaty work, but has failed to join the other 13 countries (including Australia, Brazil, France, New Zealand, and the U.K.) in signing the Agreement, despite strong

support from the Bush Administration and ACAP's inclusion on President Obama's list of recommended treaties for 2009. The willingness of the U.S. government agencies to now have these species included in ACAP marks a turning point in attitude that may finally result in the United States becoming a signatory to the treaty.

"We are hopeful that the inclusion of the northern Pacific birds will galvanize action by the President and Congress," said Jessica Hardesty Norris, ABC's Seabird Program Coordinator. "Both branches of the government have been dragging their feet on getting the U.S. signed on to this inexpensive and beneficial treaty."

The addition of the three new albatross species brings the total of number species covered to 29, including seven petrel species and all 22 of the world's albatross species. Contact Jessica Hardesty Norris, ABC, <jhardesty@abcbirds.org>.



FWS

The Short-tailed Albatross, whose population has been making a slow recovery since it was decimated by feather hunters in the early part of this century, took an important step in 2010 towards breeding on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge.

Short-tailed Albatrosses number only about 2,500, and nest only on

## Endangered Short-tailed Albatrosses Attempt Nesting on Midway NWR

Torishima Island off the coast of Japan, the site of an active volcano. Here the species is in danger of suffering a catastrophic population loss should the volcano erupt or another unanticipated disaster occur. An international team is collaborating to establish a secondary nesting colony nearby, but there is also good news from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Short-tailed Albatrosses are monogamous and almost always return to the place they were born in order to breed. Nevertheless, birds have occasionally ventured over to Midway Atoll and even lingered into the breeding season. This winter, a Short-tailed pair

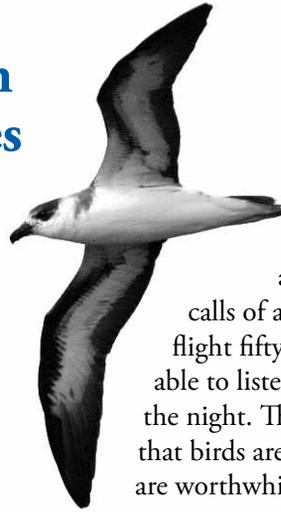
progressed further than ever before: a male and female have been actively engaging in courtship displays, and begun constructing a nest cup. Unfortunately, it seems that they will not have an egg this year (Short-tailed Albatrosses usually lay by January), but this is an extremely encouraging sign and has biologists looking forward to the first successfully fledged chick in coming years. Albatrosses take things slowly, and it is not uncommon for a couple to spend several years building their pair bond before actually laying eggs and fledgling chicks. Contact Jessica Hardesty Norris, ABC, <jhardesty@abcbirds.org>.

## Black-capped Petrel Surveys in Haiti Reveal Future Challenges

Black-capped Petrel: Glen Tepke

After impenetrable forest, drenching rain, and thick mud foiled two previous attempts in 2006 and 2008 to survey Black-capped Petrels on Pic Macaya, southwest Haiti's highest peak, the third time proved to be a charm. Jim Goetz, a PhD. student at Cornell University, had already lead several international expeditions to more accessible sites at La Visite, 15 miles southeast of Port-au-Prince, and Loma del Toro, 40 miles farther east in the Dominican Republic. Along the seven-mile forested escarpment at La Visite, Goetz reported several aggregations of petrels, each containing dozens of calling birds. Troubling, however, was the rapid forest clearing that has reduced critical habitat at this site to a ragged 500-acre fragment. In contrast, at Loma del Toro, the site is currently relatively well-protected inside Sierra de Bahoruco National Park, but Goetz and his crew found only a handful of birds at scattered locations.

In December 2009, with FWS funding, Goetz and his team, including Enold Louis Jean, and Anderson Jean at the Audubon Centre in Les Cayes, and Julie Hart of the University of Wyoming ascended the 7,600-foot summit of Pic Macaya. The first two nights they hiked for miles along the rugged, windswept cliffs and heard distant petrels, but could not pinpoint their location. Finally, on the sixth



night, half-way down a precipitous southern ridge, they heard at close range the haunting courtship calls of a group of six petrels in wheeling flight fifty feet above their heads, and were able to listen to their noisy courtship far into the night. The number detected is low, but shows that birds are present and that additional surveys are worthwhile.

Despite the success of these surveys, the overall population status of Black-capped Petrels is poorly known; they may number as few as 1,000 individuals worldwide. In the wake of the recent earthquake in Haiti, the exodus of people from Port-au-Prince will undoubtedly substantially increase pressure to clear what little forest remains in the mountains.

“The great challenge will be to afford the necessities for those in desperate need, while protecting the biosphere reserve and the critical ecosystem services that it provides to tens of thousands of people who also depend on those services for their daily survival,” said Goetz. For more information, contact Jessica Hardesty Norris, ABC, <jhardesty@abcbirds.org>.

## Largest Peruvian Tern Nesting Colony Protected from Vehicle Traffic

ABC has helped advance conservation of the endangered Peruvian Tern by protecting the species' largest nesting colony in Paracas National Reserve. The tern, which nests on open ground in only a few isolated locations off the coast of South America from Chile to Peru, likely numbers fewer than 2,500 individuals due to habitat loss and disturbance on its breeding grounds.

Vehicle traffic from local fishermen and weekend visitors to the park has resulted in fragile and unprotected eggs being crushed. To remedy this, ABC collaborated with Samuel Amoros, a biologist with the Peruvian Association for the Conservation

of Nature, and Patricia Saravia, the reserve biologist, to develop a system of trails that would channel traffic away from the vulnerable nests. In December 2009, signs were erected and the trail system was inaugurated, with participation from local fishermen's groups and reserve staff.

“This simple solution could prove a lifeline for the Peruvian Tern in the Reserve,” said Jessica Hardesty Norris, ABC's Seabird Program Coordinator. “Getting the buy-in of local fishermen to this project was essential to its success, as they will lead the way in using the new trails”.

Amoros counted 450 terns at Pampas Lechusas in the Paracas National Reserve during a recent survey. This number will serve as a baseline by which to measure the success of the new trail system. Contact Jessica Hardesty Norris, ABC, <jhardesty@abcbirds.org>.

Peruvian Tern: Jeff Blincow



## ABC Partners Expand Latin American Bird Reserve Network

No sooner had ABC completed the Latin American Bird Reserve Network Guide (see page 20) detailing the protected bird reserves that we and our partners have helped create and expand through October 2009, than acquisitions were finalized to add more land to this unique system of protected areas. In addition to the new municipal reserve to protect the endangered Red-fronted Macaw in Bolivia (see article on page 1), Fundación ProAves in Colombia and Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (ECOAN) in Peru have expanded existing reserves for the protection of several threatened species.

Since November 2009, ABC had helped ECOAN add an additional 147 acres to the Abra Patricia-Alto Nieva Private Conservation Area, a flagship reserve for Peru, and the Alliance for Zero Extinction site for the endangered Long-whiskered Owlet and Ochre-fronted Antpitta. This brings the reserve to a total of 7,113 protected acres.

In addition to the reserve expansion, approval has been granted by the Peruvian government for a 17,290-acre 'conservation concession,' which will allow federal lands adjacent to the private reserve to be brought under

ECOAN management. The decree for the concession is expected before the end of this year, and negotiations for the rights to sell carbon credits within the concession are now underway with the government of Peru. This will give corporations the opportunity to offset their carbon footprint to aid in the fight against global climate change while simultaneously helping to save some of the world's most imperiled species and their habitats.

In Colombia, ProAves and ABC completed the purchase of five land parcels needed to better consolidate the Reserva Natural el Paujil, the last population stronghold for the critically endangered Blue-billed Curassow. This project has been underway since 2008, and the acquisition of this additional 703 acres brings the total size of the reserve to 12,093 acres of protected Blue-billed Curassow habitat. ABC and ProAves also added more than 300 acres to the Pauxi Pauxi Reserve, bringing the total area protected for the endangered Helmeted Curassow to 4,070 acres. Contact Sara Lara, ABC, <[slara@abcbirds.org](mailto:slara@abcbirds.org)>.

## Colombia Adopts Strategy to Halt Species Extinction

Colombia recently formed a national Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) that will focus on identifying and protecting endangered species restricted to single remaining sites in the country. Thanks to the leadership of ABC partner Fundación ProAves, 48 institutions joined the Colombian AZE program in just a few months, including several local municipalities that have taken ownership of the imperiled species that reside within their jurisdictions. Colombia's Vice President has shown his support for the effort and plans to celebrate the formal inauguration of the Alliance early this year.

The Alliance for Zero Extinction began as a global initiative to save the rarest species in the world. The Alliance, currently consisting of 69 conservation organizations from around the world, has so far identified 595 sites in 89 countries that represent the last hope for 794 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and some trees. The initiative has not only helped groups prioritize conservation work for the most imperiled species on the planet, but has also spurred countries such as Colombia to form their own national AZE initiatives. Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador have all held initial workshops to form their own Alliances.

By obtaining recognition from policymakers at a local and national level, conservation activities will receive greater support and exposure, enabling many of the species recognized by AZE to continue into the future. 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity, providing a wonderful opportunity for nations – and all of us – to take action. Furthermore, countries will showcase their conservation efforts on the global stage later this year at the Meeting of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Japan. For more information, contact Benjamin Skolnik, ABC, <[bskolnik@abcbirds.org](mailto:bskolnik@abcbirds.org)>.



White-mantled Barbet, an AZE species endemic to Colombia. Photo: Joe Tobias

## Thinking Inside the Box Brings Rewards for Parrots

ABC's Mexican partner Pronatura Noreste is reporting another successful year for the Thick-billed Parrot nest box program.

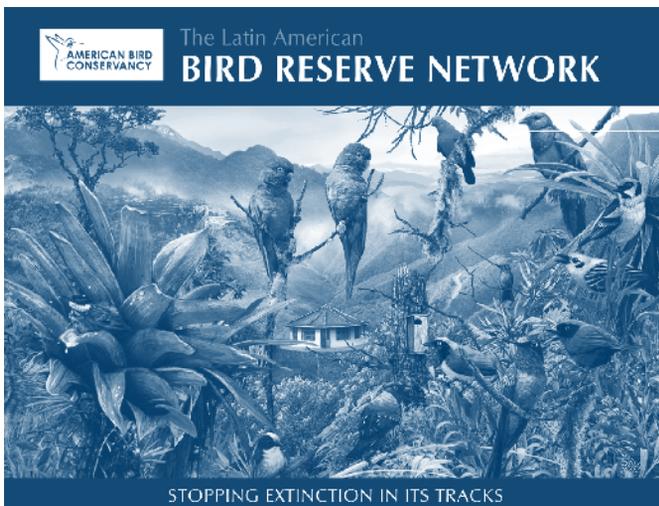
The endangered Thick-billed Parrot breeds primarily at three sites in Mexico's western Chihuahua state. Due to harvesting of timber and fires, the large trees that provide nest cavities for the birds have almost disappeared. Many of the remaining tree cavities are damaged with cracks and openings, and others have built up large numbers of parasites from repeated use year after year. Weather conditions and nestling parasitism have seriously reduced fledging success from these remaining natural cavities.

In 2008 and 2009, ABC helped fund Pronatura and the Instituto Técnico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey to erect nest boxes at two of the sites, Madera and Mesa de las Guacamayas, to replace these lost and unusable nest sites. First year success was minimal, with only three boxes occupied, but experience with nest box programs for other species in Colombia indicated that parrots need time to become accustomed to the boxes and to begin using them. This indeed seems to be the case here too, as in 2009, eight boxes were used by the birds, with 20 eggs laid and 18 young fledged.



The endangered Thick-billed Parrot is responding well to nest boxes made available to them by ABC and Mexican NGO Pronatura Noreste. Photo: Alfonso Banda/Pronatura Noreste

“The birds are clearly beginning to use the nest boxes we have provided, and we expect the number of boxes used in 2010 to increase further,” said David Wiedenfeld, ABC’s Assistant Director of International Programs. “The greater availability of nest sites and increased fledging success at those sites should greatly aid in increasing the populations of this endangered parrot.” Contact David Wiedenfeld, ABC, <[dwiedenfeld@abcbirds.org](mailto:dwiedenfeld@abcbirds.org)>.



## ABC Publishes Latin American Reserve Guide

This beautiful color publication provides details on all ABC-supported reserves throughout the Americas, with supporting information, and texts written by ABC staff and partners to help capture the flavor of each site.

Download the reserve guide in PDF format at [www.conservationbirding.org/reserveguide.htm](http://www.conservationbirding.org/reserveguide.htm).

The 35 reserves featured in the book span 12 countries, protecting habitat from sea level to above the Andean tree line. A total of 2,025 bird species have so far been recorded from the reserves — nearly half the bird species recorded from the entire Americas.

ABC anticipates adding additional reserves to the network, and expanding existing ones, as we move forward with our conservation work.

## ABC Works With NGOs in Three Countries to Help Golden-cheeked Warblers

**ABC** recently assisted its partners in Mexico, El Salvador, and Costa Rica in protecting significant areas of threatened pine-oak habitat through its *Quercus and Aves* Program. The pine-oak forests of Mexico and Central America provide essential migration and wintering habitat for neotropical migratory bird species from the western United States and Canada, including the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler.

With a grant obtained through the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, ABC enabled its Salvadoran partner, Salvanatura, to acquire two properties totaling 69 acres. Although small, these sites are strategically significant. One of the properties is in the buffer zone of Montecristo National Park, which means Salvanatura can now participate in management decisions for this



Greg Lavary

4,500-acre park. In addition to the Golden-cheeked Warbler, the vulnerable Highland Guan will also benefit from these acquisitions.

In Mexico, Pronatura Sur protected significant habitat for the Golden-cheeked Warbler and the vulnerable Pink-headed Warbler in the buffer zone area of La Sepultura Biosphere Reserve. Harvest or exploitation of forest resources will now be prevented on 2,500 acres, and the land maintained solely for conservation, as op-

posed to other land in the Reserve that is sustainably managed for multiple resource values.

The largest areas protected by this project, however, are in Costa Rica, including nearly 11,000 acres on 35 private land parcels set aside through easements as conservation reserves in the area of Braulio Carrillo National Park, and the creation of eight private reserves through easements on over 26,000 acres in the area of La Amistad National Park. One of these private reserves includes 10,000 acres of intact old-growth forest. Under agreements with the Costa Rican government, the landowners agree to preserve their land for conservation in exchange for financial incentives provided under a government private reserve program. The agreements last between five and ten years. Contact Bob Altman, ABC, <baltman@abcbirds.org>.

## Mexican Eagle Program a Real Cliff Hanger

**M**exican conservation group Pronatura Noreste is working to protect a key population of the Golden Eagle through a conservation, research, and education program in San Luis Potosí State in the center of the country. The Golden Eagle is an endangered species in Mexico, where its distribution and status are poorly known due to the remoteness of most nesting sites. San Luis Potosí is home to a small population which, like other eagles in Mexico, is impacted by degradation of grasslands from prolonged overgrazing. Loss of grassland habitat reduces the availability of the eagle's jackrabbit and prairie dog prey.

The eagles usually nest high up on vertical cliff faces, making verification of suspected nest sites sometimes difficult. Nevertheless, Pronatura biologists using climbing gear to scale the cliffs were able to locate four nests observed during the 2009 breeding season. A further three nests were suspected but not confirmed, an encouraging sign for the species.

The primary focus of the project, which is now midway through a two-year effort, is to increase awareness of the species and its problems. Pronatura created a puppet show that was presented at schools in local communities, reaching more than 900 schoolchildren, and also distributed posters throughout the area.



Ed Post

The program also involves protecting some 10,000 acres of habitat for the species through the creation of community reserves and easements, which Pronatura hopes to move forward with soon. Contact David Wiedenfeld, ABC, <dwiedenfeld@abcbirds.org>.

## Birds in Brief

### Endangered Whooping Crane Shot

FWS law enforcement officials and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources are investigating the shooting of an endangered Whooping Crane near the town of Cayuga in central Vermillion County, Indiana. The crane was



FWS

found by a volunteer with the International Crane Foundation on December 1, 2009, and identified by a leg band as a seven-year old female, one of 19 reintroduced whooping cranes migrating from their summer grounds in Wisconsin to their wintering grounds in Florida.

There are approximately 500 whooping cranes left in the world, protected by the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and state laws. FWS is offering a minimum reward of \$2,500 to anyone providing information leading to a conviction. Anyone with information should call the Indiana Department of Natural Resources 24-hour hotline at: 800-847-4367 or FWS at 317-346-7016. Callers can remain anonymous.

### End of the Line for Bird-killing Pesticide?

Carbofuran, America's worst pesticide for birds, was dealt a near-death blow by the EPA and U.S. Federal Court in December 2009. In a scientific, regulatory, and legal battle dating back to 1985, EPA finally revoked all food crop uses of carbofuran. A federal court then rebuffed the manufacturer's (FMC) petition to stop cancellation of the pesticide, meaning that all U.S. uses must end and all imports of bananas, rice, and coffee must now be free of carbofuran. FMC has one final day in court in early 2010, but the judge is expected to uphold EPA's final ban on this pesticide. Millions of birds have been estimated to have died from carbofuran poisoning, with more than 100 species documented in ABC's database as having been killed. EPA estimated that prior to cancellation of the granular formulation up to two million birds were killed each year by carbofuran. If the judge rules as expected in February, this will mark a huge victory for birds and for ABC, which has led the fight to ban carbofuran. ABC will continue to monitor court proceedings and support EPA in its final fight for carbofuran cancellation.

### FWS to Revise Critical Habitat Designation for Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

As part of a January 13<sup>th</sup> settlement arising out of a lawsuit with the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), FWS has agreed to revise the amount of Critical Habitat designated for the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.

At issue was a 2004 Bush Administration designation of only 120,000 acres as flycatcher Critical Habitat, despite recommendations by federal scientists that more than three



Dan Casey

times as much should be set aside in five states. The Southwestern subspecies of the Willow Flycatcher is a small neotropical migrant bird that breeds in streamside forests in New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, and Nevada. It was listed as endangered in response to a 1993 petition from CBD. Critical Habitat was first designated in 1997, but was challenged by industry and re-designated in 2005. It was this re-designation that was challenged by CBD resulting in the recent settlement.

### Western Bluebird Project Update

The San Juan Islands Western Bluebird Reintroduction Project (*Bird Conservation*, Fall 2008) continues to make significant advancements towards its goal of re-establishing a viable breeding population of this species on the San Juan Islands. During the 2009 field season, ABC and its primary partners conducted 11 translocations from Fort Lewis, near Olympia,



Juvenile Western Bluebird

Kathleen Ballard

Washington to the San Juan Islands. Of the 11 releases, four resulted in the bluebirds establishing new territories. Overall, 18 adult bluebirds were located on San Juan Island, six more than in 2008. Project staff and volunteers also installed approximately 100 new nest boxes on at least 40 properties.

## New Population of Long-whiskered Owlet Discovered in Peru

The Long-whiskered Owlet, one of the rarest birds in the world, was filmed and photographed in January 2010 by researchers at La Esperanza, Peru, the main re-



Sacher Alterman/NPC

search area for the organization Neotropical Primate Conservation. The researchers counted five individuals, making this the largest grouping of owlets ever recorded.

This sighting was the first of this endangered species since the May 2008 discovery at the Abra Patricia reserve. The owlet has been recognized by the Alliance for Zero Extinction as one of nearly 800 animals in the world most at risk of extinction.

The relatively small patch of fragmented cloud forest where the owlets were discovered is only a few

miles to the west of Abra Patricia, and is also home to one of the world's most endangered primates, the yellow-tailed woolly monkey.

## Impact of Invasive Alien Species Measured

Invasive alien species are cumulatively one of the top three threats to global biodiversity, according to a paper published in the journal *Diversity and Distributions* by the Global Invasive Species Programme, a partner of BirdLife International.

The paper looked at 57 countries and found a total of 542 invasive alien species, with an average of 50 per country. This included 316 plants, 101 marine organisms, 44 freshwater fish, 43 mammal, 23 bird, and 15 amphibian species. An increase in the number and spread of alien species, which adversely affect the habitats they invade, can be attributed to a substantial rise in international trade over the past 25 years.

If left uncontrolled, invasive aliens can have a serious impact on native species. For example, the chytrid fungus, entirely unknown until 1998, is thought to be the cause of the decline and local extinctions of many amphibians around the globe.

However, with conservation action, the spread of invasive alien species can be successfully controlled. For example, eradication of cats, goats, and



Black-vented Shearwater: Glen Tepke



Bill Hubrick

sheep from Natividad Island off the Pacific Coast of Mexico has enabled the Black-vented Shearwater to be downlisted from vulnerable to near threatened on the IUCN Red List.

## Florida Scrub-Jays Decline

The number of Florida scrub-jays continued to decline in 2009, according to The Nature Conservancy's 2009 Jay Watch report. This scrub-jay, endemic to fire-maintained sandy oak scrub in central Florida, was designated as a threatened species in 1987 due to loss and degradation of its habitat.

The report's findings highlight the need for more controlled burns to help restore scrub-jay habitat. More than one-third of surveyed sites had vegetation too tall for scrub-jays, and more than one-half of the sites had too little bare ground, which scrub-jays use to cache acorns to eat during winter.

The report also included some positive news, however, highlighting sites where controlled burns have helped expand the scrub-jay population. For more information on Project Jay Watch, see [www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/florida/volunteer/art/7303.html](http://www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/florida/volunteer/art/7303.html).

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## Member Support Is Crucial to ABC's Success in 2010



Ovenbird: Fundación ProAves

*ABC relies on the generosity of members and donors to conserve native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. Gifts of all sizes have a direct impact on the work we do every day—in the office, in the field, and on Capitol Hill. We work tirelessly on behalf of birds, but we need your help to meet our 2010 conservation targets, which include:*

- ❖ Establishing mandatory regulations for the wind energy industry that include siting guidelines and mitigation measures for birds and other wildlife. ABC and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology are working with scientists and partners to develop and present recommended regulations during the coming year.
- ❖ Cancelling or restricting the registration of organophosphate pesticides by the EPA. Developed following WWII from nerve gases, these deadly toxins pose documented risks to birds and other wildlife.
- ❖ Conserving Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) and other sites internationally, helping make ABC major partners and flagship reserves self-financing and sustainable in the long-term, and protecting declining U.S. migratory bird species on their wintering grounds.
- ❖ Planting more than 120,000 native trees to restore critical habitat for rare or declining bird species at a dozen reserves.
- ❖ Fostering collaborative action in the bird conservation community through the Bird Conservation Alliance, AZE, and other key partnerships led by ABC to save birds more rapidly and effectively.



*These are only a few items on our lengthy “to do” list. Help us accomplish these and other goals by using the enclosed envelope to make an additional gift today, or save a stamp and give online at [www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org).*