

# BIRD CALLS

*The Newsletter of the Policy Council  
of American Bird Conservancy*



**AUGUST 1998**

## **AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY**

***Conserving Wild Birds and their Habitats throughout the Americas***

Bird Calls, Vol. 2, No. 2.

### **A Message from Bruce Beehler, Chairman, Policy Council of the American Bird Conservancy:**

I chaired my first ABC Policy Council Meeting at the North American Ornithological Conference in St. Louis in April. The success of that session has me looking forward to our fall meeting, to be held on September 1st in Washington at Conservation International headquarters. We are indebted to CI and the World Wildlife Fund, normally our host in Washington. It is our active and committed institutional membership that makes the Policy Council successful in acting as a network of key players in the local, regional, national, and international bird conservation sphere. There are now 73 member organizations on the Policy Council. Through teamwork and coordinated action we accomplish our best work. I urge all delegates and observers to attend our September 1 meeting in Washington, DC. The lunchtime presentation will be by Jamie Clark, Director of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Director Clark may have some exciting news about new programs related to migratory birds. The meeting will also feature panel discussions on the control of fish-eating birds and exciting Congressional developments with regard to the Teaming With Wildlife and parallel initiatives to fund state non-game wildlife programs. I want to emphasize the considerable successes of ABC's efforts to ensure the future of healthy horseshoe crab populations in the mid-Atlantic region which is critical to migratory shorebirds. I also want to congratulate Gerald Winegrad for his recent election to serve as an expert advisor to the U.S. Delegation to the FAO global negotiations on seabird by-catch in longline fisheries. Gerald will report on the July FAO meeting in Rome at our upcoming Policy Council meeting. I look forward to seeing you on September 1.

Bruce M. Beehler  
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## I. SUCCESS STORIES

### **BRIEF REPRIEVE FOR CASPIAN TERNS ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER**

In April, the National Marine Fisheries Service advocated disturbing and moving perhaps the world's largest colony of nesting Caspian Terns on Rice Island in the Columbia River estuary. A Double-crested Cormorant nesting colony would have also been disturbed. The first year of a two-year study on the feeding ecology of these birds indicated that they consume a large quantity of hatchery-raised smolts of Federally listed populations of salmon. Objecting to these actions, the Pacific Seabird Group, ABC and Portland Audubon Society wrote NMFS and the FWS urging them to assess whether disturbing the colonies would increase the survival of the smolts -- only a tiny fraction of which ever survive long enough to breed. Conservationists pointed out that the agencies had not complied with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or the National Environmental Policy Act, and had failed to make a compatibility determination under the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act. FWS and the Army Corps of Engineers, which has jurisdiction over Rice Island, agreed that the planned two-year study of dietary information should be completed and that no disturbance would occur in 1998. If the birds continue to eat smolt, pressure for intervention will be strong next year. NMFS continue to push for removal of the terns. In July, the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife may act on a draft action plan related to seabirds preying on salmon, trout and steelhead. PSG and ABC have submitted written comments on this plan urging that the birds not be disturbed pending the studies and compliance with all Federal laws. Actions under consideration include modifying habitat, hazing and changing hatchery practices. An estimated 8,000 pairs of Caspian Terns, about 25% of the North American population, 5,300 pairs of cormorants and 7,100 pairs of hybrid Western X Glaucous-winged Gulls nest on this Island. Recovery efforts for endangered salmon populations should focus on habitat destruction and other real causes for depleted salmon runs on the Columbia River. Contact: Craig S. Harrison of the Pacific Seabird Group at 202-778-2240 or <charrison@hunton.com>.

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### **VENEZUELAN WORKSHOP DEVELOPS COLLABORATION ON DICKCISSELS**

As previously reported in Bird Calls, the population of Dickcissels has declined by 40% over the last 30 years due to deliberate killing of the "rice bird" by farmers in the rice and sorghum fields of Venezuela. Regarded as an agricultural pest, Dickcissels are sprayed and their water sources poisoned with organophosphate pesticides. In order to resolve these conflicts, ABC, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Venezuela Audubon Society sponsored a three day workshop in Acarigua, Venezuela in June with stakeholders. Gian Basili, of Florida Audubon, while a student of Stan Temple, had documented the problems of the Dickcissel in the llanos of Venezuela. The Policy Council gave support for the development of solutions. Gian coordinated the workshop, attended by George Fenwick President of ABC, which was very successful. Rice and sorghum farmers were represented as were officials of Venezuelan Government agencies and farmer and conservation NGO's. After an introduction on the natural history of the Dickcissel, there was a frank exchange on the issues. Farmers and conservationists worked collaboratively to develop steps to resolve the

problems. An alliance of groups has been formed to develop a plan of action. The hiring of a coordinator to enhance communication within the group and externally and to oversee a research program is being pursued. With this groundwork being completed, it is hoped that the Dickcissel populations will eventually increase. For information, contact Clemencia Rodner of Venezuela Audubon Society, <audubonvenezuela@compuserve.com> or Gian Basili at <gbasili@audubon.org>.

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### **SCHOOL DISTRICT YIELDS TO CACTUS FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL**

When a judge ruled that the Tucson, AZ school district could build on a site used by an endangered Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Defenders of Wildlife and others appealed to stop the project. A week before a temporary restraining order was due to expire, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals granted the conservationists' request for an injunction. While not a total victory, Defenders can now appeal their narrow trial-court loss on Endangered Species Act issues without worrying that construction would render the ESA claim moot. In more good news, surveys this year located more than 30 pygmy-owls; previous surveys had turned up as few as a dozen. Meanwhile, Defenders and others are advocating a larger, regional Sonoran Desert Protection Plan, for which the county has preliminarily approved ordinances to implement. Contact: Laura Hood at Defenders of Wildlife, 202-682-9400 or <lhood@defenders.org>.

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### **SPOONBILL WINTERING AREA PROTECTED**

Good news for Black-faced Spoonbills! As reported in the March 1998 "Bird Calls," more than half the world's 550 Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* winter in Tseng-Wen estuary in southwest Taiwan. This region has been threatened by the proposed construction of a giant petrochemical complex known as the Bin-nan Project. Having evaluated developers' environmental impact assessment for the proposal, the Taiwanese Environment Protection Agency has ruled that no part of the wetland can be affected by the development -- all but defeating the proposal. The Taiwanese EPA is required to complete its review by the end of July. Many thanks to all the individuals and organizations, led by ABC, who gave the Pacific Seabird Group their support and signed the petitions against the Bin-nan proposal. Contact: Malcolm Coulter, co-chair of the IUCN specialist group on Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills, at 603-323-9342 or <coultermc@aol.com>.

## **II. NEW ISSUES**

### **SLAUGHTER OF 1,000 CORMORANTS PART OF GROWING MOVEMENT**

On July 29, nearly 1,000 Double-crested Cormorants were found dead or dying on Little Galloo Island in eastern Lake Ontario, 12 miles offshore from Watertown, New York. Partially paralyzed chicks were euthanized by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) staff in Watertown. One pile of dead chicks contained 91 bodies. Buckets of 12 gauge shotgun shells were recovered at the scene. One official with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) stated that "The slaughter of adult birds at their nesting sites is particularly inhumane, as they leave young birds that are still flightless and dependant on their parents for care." About 100

Cormorants were killed by shotgun on the same island in June. Local charter and other recreational fishing interests had been threatening for months to take the law into their own hands if the FWS did not act to control the fish eating birds. New York State's DEC already has permits from the FWS to kill or disturb Cormorants where they are impacting endangered or threatened bird species. FWS has been under siege by fishermen and State, local and Congressional politicians to act on Cormorants in N.Y. State and elsewhere in the U.S. As reported in the last Bird Calls, the FWS issued its first depredation order in 25 years for lethal controls of Cormorants in aquaculture fish farms. Cormorant populations have recovered from slaughter in the earlier part of this century and from organochlorine pesticides in use until the 1970's. The FWS, expressing revulsion at the senseless slaughter of the Double-crested Cormorants in Lake Ontario, is offering to pay for information leading to the arrest and conviction of individuals responsible for "a brazen act of environmental terrorism." Over 30 studies to date, including one on Lake Ontario, have not shown that Cormorants are having a significant impact on sport fish populations. According to the New York DEC, from 1992 through 1996, game fish comprised less than 2 percent of the Little Galloo cormorant diet. To help minimize cormorant predation on young fish, New York State has changed its fish stocking methods. With increasing harvest and competition for fish, spawning area blockages from dams and highways, and pollution of critical fish habitat, Cormorants and other fish eating birds are being made scapegoats for declines in fish populations. (Please see the lead story above on Caspian Terns in the Pacific Northwest). The pending Interior Appropriations Bills before Congress have riders inserted both in the Senate and the House that push the FWS and APHIS to control migratory fish eating birds. Legislation is expected to be introduced soon to require the development of a Cormorant management plan and some Congressmen have expressed interest in establishing hunting seasons for Cormorants. Efforts to control populations of Double-crested Cormorants and many of the other 45 species of piscivorous birds are intensifying. While not related to the bird's fish eating, recent slaughters have occurred in Texas (without a permit) and Oklahoma (permit for Cattle Egrets) of nesting Great Egrets. These incidents were nuisance situations or as the Texas town dubbed its illegal bull dozing of nesting Egrets "Operation Remove Excrement". Conservationists need to pursue an education outreach campaign to prevent the recurrence of these slaughters. For further information on this issue, contact Gerald Winegrad at ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>. To report information about the killing of cormorants on Little Galloo Island, contact Bob Garabedian, FWS field agent in Albany, at 518-431-4341 or place a confidential call to the DEC at 1-800-TIPP DEC.

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### **SEABIRDS UNDER SIEGE ON SOMBRERO ISLAND**

Sombrero is the northernmost islet in the Lesser Antilles. It is a 95-acre, rocky Caribbean island, one-mile long and a quarter-mile wide. Sombrero is an exceptional seabird breeding Island with an absence of introduced predators and only lighthouse keepers on the Island. Beal Aerospace Ltd. of Texas is working with the Anguillan Government and the British Space Agency to construct a satellite launching rocket facility on the Island. No action can be taken until a Environmental Assessment is completed and ICF Kaiser of Northern Virginia is expected to complete the EA by the end of August. ABC and others have insisted that the ICF Kaiser biologist be accompanied by a seabird specialist in her Island visits and that the visits be conducted over various nesting periods. Beal did not permit a seabird biologist to accompany the consultant in her May visit but in July,

Judy Pierce of the Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife, accompanied the consultant for a three day visit. She and other biologists have concluded that Sombrero is exceptional and probably one of the most important islands for breeding seabirds in the eastern Caribbean. Hundreds of Brown Boobies, Brown Noddy Terns, Bridled Terns and Sooty Terns nest all over Sombrero. Magnificent Frigatebirds roost on the island, but there was no evidence of nesting. Roseate Terns were not found but others have documented their presence. The Island was free of rats and cats and nearly all other predators, although there were 16 Laughing Gulls. Threats from predation are exceptionally low with flying fish highly abundant. Of particular note were the 50 pairs of nesting Masked Boobies as there are low numbers in the local vicinity. ABC, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and Caribbean groups such as the Island Resources Foundation are alarmed at such prospects and have been communicating their concerns to Beal, Anguilla and the British. The Anguilla National Trust has requested that a public meeting be part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. Birders may want to contact Beal, Anguilla, and the British Space Agency to express their concerns over the construction and operation of a rocket launching facility on Sombrero. For more information, visit <<http://www.ICFKaiser.com>> or contact Gerald Winegrad of ABC at <[gww@abcbirds.org](mailto:gww@abcbirds.org)> or Bruce Potter of Island Resources Foundation at <[etowle@irf.org](mailto:etowle@irf.org)>

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### **ABC TO HIRE COORDINATOR FOR PESTICIDES AND BIRDS PROGRAM**

Building on successes on Swainson's Hawks and pesticides, American Bird Conservancy is launching an Advocacy Campaign on Pesticides and Birds. ABC is seeking to hire an individual to coordinate this program and build on initiatives already begun by ABC. The coordinator will work closely with ABC's Vice president for Policy, Gerald Winegrad, to advance strategies to protect birds from pesticides. The Program will strengthen an existing pesticide work group formed by ABC, disseminate information on pesticides acutely toxic to birds, help focus attention to pesticides killing and sub-lethally affecting birds, and strengthen wildlife protections in pesticide management. The Campaign will be conducted in partnership with other conservation groups and through cooperation with wildlife agencies. Applicants for the new position should submit: a cover letter; a resume; a writing sample; and the names, addresses and phone numbers of three references to: American Bird Conservancy, Attn: Pesticide Coordinator, 1250 24th Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20037. No phone calls, please. Deadline for applications is September 1, 1998.

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### **BRAZILIAN DAM MAY TAP OUT NEWLY DISCOVERED TAPACULO**

A newly discovered bird species, the 'Wet Tall-grass Tapaculo' *Scytalopus iraiensis*, was found upstream of the Irai dam project by Brazilian ornithologists, Marcos Bornschieen and Bianca Reinert in late 1997, and was formally documented in the magazine of the Brazilian Society of Ornithology this July. Although the species remains almost completely un-studied, the construction project, which was already underway when the bird was found, threatens its habitat and could render it extinct in the near future. Having previously supported the work of the two scientists involved, American Bird Conservancy has now added its voice to the project to 'save the Tapaculo'. Word of the discovery recently reached the World Bank which had provided a loan to the project. The bank has very strict environmental guidelines and has suspended the loan while other potentially suitable habitat is surveyed and hopefully alternate populations found and protected. So far, the Tapaculo

has only been found in three tiny areas of wet tall-grass meadow, two of which are already under development. The third, which is also the most important for the species, would be completely flooded if the dam went ahead as planned. This habitat type has already been seriously depleted by urban development around Curitiba, and other areas where the species may yet be found also face land-use conflicts, including additional dam projects. ABC and other environmental NGOs have congratulated the Bank on its decision to suspend financing. Meanwhile the Brazilian Ornithological Congress has called upon the Brazilian Government to classify the species as Endangered. As the ultimate decision does lie with the Brazilian authorities, it is important that conservation organizations contact them and congratulate them on their actions to suspend construction. The people most directly responsible are: Ilmo. Sr. Carlos Afonso Teixeira de Freitas M.D., Presidente da Companhia de Saneamento Básico do Paraná - SANEPAR, Rua Engenheiro Rebouças 1376, Curitiba, PR, CEP 80215-900, Brasil; Exmo. Sr. Jaime Lerner M.D., Governador do Paraná, Praça Nossa Senhora Salete s/n, Curitiba, PR, CEP 80530-909, Brasil; Ilmo. Sr. José Antonio Andreguetto, M.D., Presidente do Instituto Ambiental do Paraná - IAP, Rua Engenheiro Rebouças 1206, Curitiba, PR, CEP 80215-100, Brasil; Letters of support for the World Bank's actions can be sent to: James Wolfensohn, President, The World Bank, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington DC 20433. Photographs of the bird and its habitat, as well as additional information on the campaign in Brazil can be obtained from Dimas Pioli at <aves-br@triang.com.br>. Copies of the World Bank's position statement on the issue can be obtained from Angela Furtado at the World Bank office in Brasilia on +55 61 329 1000 (tel) or +55 61 329 1010 (fax).

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### **BIRD CONSERVATION IN THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN**

Many of the species found in the West Indies and nowhere else in the world unfortunately are highly endangered, while many more species are becoming increasingly vulnerable. While there are many conservation issues involving vulnerable birds on the bigger islands or archipelagoes-- Bahamas, Puerto Rico, and Cuba - the plight of birds among the islands of the Eastern Caribbean, often collectively referred to as the "Lesser Antilles", is of concern. Since fewer species of North American migrants winter in the Eastern Caribbean, these island-nations often receive proportionately little attention from U.S.-based conservation groups. However, some migrant species may depend greatly on habitats found only on islands of the Eastern Caribbean. The Lesser Antilles harbor globally important ecosystems and support many endemic and highly vulnerable species of plants and animals. However, an attitude has evolved in some conservation circles that influences potential major funding sources that precious financial resources should not be wasted on biodiversity on small islands. The islands of the Eastern Caribbean collectively support 25 endemic bird species and an additional 11 subspecies. Of these species and subspecies, at least 23 are likely vulnerable or known to be highly endangered using criteria developed by Partners in Flight and Bird Life International. More than endemics are of concern as smaller more isolated islands serve as important colonial seabird (e.g., terns, boobies, tropicbirds) breeding sites. Increasing disturbances from uncontrolled tourism and development (such as a proposed rocket-launch site on Sombrero, see the story above on page four) are likely to lead to further declines among the many vulnerable species involved. Among locally breeding landbird migrants commonly occurring within the Eastern Caribbean, six species breed primarily in the Caribbean region proper, and at least one (White-crowned Pigeon) is highly vulnerable throughout the Caribbean. Although these Caribbean

Neotropical migrants are overall less vulnerable than the endemic resident species, the Caribbean region represent areas of high responsibility for maintaining healthy populations. Among migrants breeding to the north of the Caribbean, the Eastern Caribbean has long been known for supporting important stop-over sites along the Trans-Atlantic route for Arctic breeding shorebirds migrating to South America. Recent radar data indicate large numbers of migrating landbirds pass through the Eastern Caribbean during southbound migration including several species of thrushes, vireos, cuckoos, and warblers. At least one species, Blackpoll Warbler, migrates through the Eastern Caribbean in large numbers - potentially most of the world's total population during autumn. North American conservation organizations need to influence funding organizations and agencies to more seriously consider proposals targeting Eastern Caribbean conservation needs. Information on the ecology and conservation of all these Caribbean bird species is published regularly in "El Pitirre" which is the newsletter of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology. The Society is a non-profit organization whose goals are to promote the scientific study and conservation of Caribbean birds and their habitats. For more information about the Society and on how to receive "El Pitirre," contact Rosemarie Gnam at <rosemarie\_gnam@mail.fws.gov>.

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### **SHOREBIRD SITES: THREATS AND ISSUES GROWING**

New threats to shorebirds and their habitats are developing, and populations are suffering rapid, substantial declines. Of the 41 species that migrate through North America, five have declined by 25% or more over the past five years; 16 others have projected or actual population declines of 5 to 20% per five years. Inland, shorebird habitats compete for water with agriculture and municipal demands. California's Mono Lake has long struggled to preserve its viability in the face of Los Angeles' water requirements. In Kansas, Cheyenne Bottoms is the major area of shorebird concentration in the central U.S. and hosts at least 39 species of shorebirds -- up to 600,000 individuals during spring and more than 200,000 during fall migration. But the region may have to share the Arkansas River with a large-scale hog production and processing project that will need three million gallons of water daily. A proposed Legacy Parkway over wetlands on the eastern shore of Utah's Great Salt Lake would directly impact another important inland site. San Francisco Bay is invaded by at least one new exotic species (mollusks, fish, etc.) a week that may disrupt natural productivity vital for over one million shorebirds. Oil spills and new highway construction threaten Alaska's Copper River Delta, where over 15 million shorebirds stage during spring and fall migration. Issues facing shorebird habitats are complex, and sustainable protection requires dedicated support from local scientists, environmentalists and communities, as well as from regional and national organizations. For more information on Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network sites currently facing serious threats, see the Manomet website <<http://www.manomet.org/threaten.htm>>. Contact: Jim Corven, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, 508-224-6521 or <jmcorven@manomet.org>.

### **MULTIPLE-USE PATH LOOMS OVER JAMAICA BAY, GLOBAL IBA**

Hosting more than 325 species of birds, New York's Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge has been named an Important Bird Area of Global Significance by ABC and the National Audubon Society. But this preeminent bird watching hotspot is now under threat. A two-way, multiple-use asphalt path currently slated for construction would punch a 16' wide, meandering corridor through the length of the refuge; the land's slope would require an additional 60 feet of shrub-thicket habitat to be leveled along much of the path. Such development is counter to the goals of a wildlife refuge and to the 1972 legislative Act that created the Gateway National Recreation Area, of which the refuge is a part, and is specifically prohibited under Gateway's Resource Management Plan. The path is being funded by the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which requires state matching funds. Ironically, this funding is coming from monies earmarked for restoring, replacing or acquiring tidal wetlands. Jamaica Bay is the only wildlife refuge administered by the National Park Service, which should be encouraged to drop this ill-conceived plan or at least perform an Environmental Impact Statement. ABC has written letters outlining the concerns of conservationists. Please write Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C St. NW, Washington, DC 20240. Send copies to National Park Service Director Robert Stanton, National Park Service, Interior Building, Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013 and Alfred Ott, Save Our Sanctuary, 170-25 Highland Ave., Jamaica, NY 11432. Contact: Alfred Ott at 718-526-2467.

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### **BRINGING BACK LOST NEW YORKERS -- UNSCIENTIFICALLY**

The New York City Parks Department's Project X, which proposes to re-introduce two plant or animal species to five city parks every year, has been enthusiastically endorsed by The New York Times. But such attempts rarely succeed even in relatively intact habitats -- let alone the urban environment. The Parks Department lacks resources for proper follow-up; the stated plan is "Let's throw them out there and see if they survive." Nor is there an affiliation with a research institution that could perform monitoring. Opposition has fallen on deaf ears and comes not only from restoration ecologists, but from within the Parks Department itself. Planned re-introductions for 1998 include Eastern Screech-owls in Central Park and Bobwhites in Pelham Bay Park. Many believe the plan has more to do with photo opportunities than with sound science. Both the effort's image and its chances for success would benefit from the creation of an advisory panel to ensure a more solid scientific framework than the present plan reveals. Please write Commissioner Henry Stern, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, The Arsenal, Central Park, New York, NY 10021 and copy Rebekah Creshkoff, 300 West 106 St., #67, New York, NY 10025. Contact: Rebekah Creshkoff at 212-493-3525 or <[rcreshkoff@mindspring.com](mailto:rcreshkoff@mindspring.com)>.

### III. UPDATES

#### **EFFORTS TO PROTECT HORSESHOE CRABS AND SHOREBIRDS CONTINUE**

Conservationists, led by members of the Policy Council, have succeeded in gaining significant reductions in the catch of the Delaware Bay population of Horseshoe Crabs. New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland now have all acted to greatly restrict the take of the Crab. Many species of shorebirds are dependent on the excess Crab eggs while stopping in Delaware Bay during their spring migration to Arctic breeding grounds. Unfortunately, trawlers and dredgers have shifted their landings to Virginia where reported catch has already tripled over 1997 levels. Responding to pleas from ABC, National Audubon and others, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission held public hearings in June and July to discuss staff proposals to restrict the take and landing of Horseshoe Crabs in Virginia. ABC and National Audubon testified at the hearing in July. Despite the documented increase in catch of the Crabs and the unrestricted take that occurs beyond Virginia's three mile limit, the VMRC rejected all staff recommendations for action to restrict the take of and landing of Horseshoe Crabs in Virginia. The VMRC tabled further consideration until November after the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is supposed to make recommendations. The VMRC expressed no interest in protecting the Crab, only interest in protecting the users of the Crab for bait or those who capture the Crabs. Readers are urged to write the Governor of Virginia, James Gilmore, State Capitol, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Richmond, VA 23219. Contact: Josh Eagle, National Audubon <jeagle@audubon.org>, or Gerald Winegrad at <gww@abcbirds.org>.

#### **INTERNATIONAL BODY TACKLES GLOBAL SEABIRD BYCATCH**

Efforts to reduce or eliminate the killing of seabirds on hooks in longline fisheries around the world continue. The U.N. Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) Committee on Fisheries (COFI) agreed last year to a consultation to draft a Plan of Action and Guidelines on global seabird bycatch. The U.S. and Japan have been leaders in this effort and a Seabird Technical Working Group has met and agreed upon the Plan and Guidelines. A preparatory meeting of the FAO was held in late July in Rome and was attended by Gerald Winegrad of ABC as an advisor to the U.S. Delegation. The goal of these consultations is to gain FAO approval of a Plan of Action to reduce the incidental catch of over 60 seabird species in longline fisheries globally. In early June, FAO released the draft Plan of Action and seabird mitigation Guidelines. They can be found on the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration website at <<http://kingfish.ssp.nmfs.gov>>. The U.S. again exerted leadership in taking a strong position at the FAO meeting in July as did Japan. Other nations argued for weaker plans and guidelines. For example, the E.C., Mexico and others were insisting that only endangered or threatened species of birds should be considered in the Plan. Negotiations continue and the FAO will reconvene at the end of October to conclude the seabird Plan of Action with full approval planned for the COFI meeting next February. A U.S. steering committee with representatives from various government agencies has been briefing Congressional staff and constituents and developed a strong draft U.S. position; response has been very positive. A 1996 Bird Issue Brief on seabird bycatch is available on the Ornithological Council website at <[www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET)>. Contact: Gerald Winegrad at ABC or Al Manville, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, at 703-358-1824 or <[albert\\_manville@mail.fws.gov](mailto:albert_manville@mail.fws.gov)>.

### **KIRTLAND'S WARBLERS CONTINUE RECOVERY**

Continuing efforts to restore the population of Kirtland's Warblers have met with success in the 1998 nesting season. The number of singing males in Michigan was up to 804 birds in 1998, an increase from the 728 last year. The number of Brown-headed Cowbird traps was, at 67, the highest in the program's history. Over 3,143 Cowbirds were trapped aiding in efforts to prevent nest parasitism. Management of Jack Pine forest continues in the Huron-Manistee National Forests and on State lands but not yet at the recommended levels. The Kirtland's Warbler recovery team has established a collaborative working relationship with Bahamians to document the warbler's wintering habitat and assure its protection in the Bahamas. Visits and communications with the Bahamians continues as do the research efforts in Michigan and Wisconsin. Tours led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service guided 1,379 visitors from 41 States and nine foreign countries to view the endangered Kirtland's Warbler in 1998. For further information, contact Mike DeCapita, FWS, at <mike\_decapita@mail.fws.gov>.

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### **COMMUNICATION TOWERS AND BIRD KILLS**

The massive kill of Lapland Longspurs at a Kansas communications tower last January ("Bird Calls," March 1998) has prompted a flurry of media attention, constituent calls, and Congressional requests. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has proposed an expedited siting process for an expected increase of tens of thousands of high digital television (DTV) towers. In response, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Office of Migratory Bird Management and its Ecological Services Division have been meeting with representatives of the FCC. Discussions currently involve issues of tower siting, including concerns raised by the environmental community over compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. The issue is complicated by a separation of authority within the FCC, with wireless communications falling under one bureau and radio and television communications under another. While the agency is required to pay close attention to NEPA regulations (including tower impacts on birds, flood plains and historic sites), Congress wants to see greater competition between telecommunications companies as soon as possible. FWS still needs to meet with the Federal Aviation Agency to discuss tower lighting and its impact on birds, as well as possible mitigation measures. FWS also recently met with an official at Motorola, and hopes to begin discussions with others in the communications industry soon. In a separate effort, a decision on the placement of two telecommunications antennae in Washington, D.C.'s Rock Creek Park has been delayed. This will give the U.S. National Park Service more time to study various factors, including impacts on migrating birds. Contact: Al Manville, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office of Migratory Bird Management, at 703-358-1824 or <albert\_manville@mail.fws.gov>. Meanwhile, on the overcast night of April 30, more than 300 neotropical migrants -- including 131 Black-throated Blue Warblers, 108 Blackpoll Warblers, 35 American Redstarts, 21 Ovenbirds, 9 Black-and-white Warblers, 6 Northern Parulas and 5 Cape May Warblers -- were killed by colliding into an 829' tall communications tower in central Florida. The Florida Audubon Society is looking to organize an effort this fall to monitor that state's 2,000+ towers. Contact: Gian Basili, Florida Audubon Society, at 407-539-5700 or <gbasili@audubon.org>.

**ALTERNATE FUNDING SOURCE FOR TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE**

Recognizing the need to fund non-game fish and wildlife, key House members -- Reps. Young (R-AK), Dingell (D-MI), John (D-LA) and Tauzin (R-LA) -- have come up with an alternative to the proposed Teaming With Wildlife (TWW) excise tax. Monies would come from Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) revenue from oil and gas leases beyond state waters, and may even exceed the sought-after \$350 million a year for TWW. This is part of the OCS Impact Assistance proposal, which would send 27% of OCS revenue back to coastal (including Great Lakes) states to mitigate environmental and economic impacts of OCS activity. Thirteen percent of OCS revenue would be permanently appropriated to all states for land-based conservation and recreation, similar to and in addition to the \$900 million Land & Water Conservation Fund authorization. This funding package would include 10% for primarily non-game wildlife conservation and education. The TWW coalition has worked closely with congressional staff drafting this legislation to ensure the new approach addresses TWW's goals. A bill is expected to be introduced in the House this summer or in early fall. A companion bill may be introduced in the Senate about the same time. For up-to-date information and action alerts, visit the TWW web site at <<http://www/teaming.com>>. Contact: Naomi Edelson, International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, 202-624-7890 or <[iafish@aol.com](mailto:iafish@aol.com)>.

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**SAN CLEMENTE SHRIKE UPDATE**

The most endangered species or subspecies of bird in North America continues its fight for survival. The San Diego Zoo successfully hatched 27 San Clemente Loggerhead Shrikes from a captive population of 12 birds at its breeding facility on the Island this spring. All of these birds will remain at the Zoo's San Diego facility until predator control efforts on San Clemente Island can assure their safe release. In the wild, there were 14 birds hatched but at least four have not been seen for some time and may have been lost to predators. The number of adult wild Shrikes is probably no more than 13 birds. A Shrike emergency rescue planning group organized by the Zoo and the Navy has developed a game plan for continued efforts but the plan has yet to be agreed upon by all parties. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services conducts predator control on the Island. They are preparing an Environmental Assessment on predator control to step up efforts to prevent the further decline of the Shrike. Predators include cats, Island foxes, rats, Ravens, and Kestrels. For further information, contact Gerald Winegrad at <[gww@abcbirds.org](mailto:gww@abcbirds.org)>.

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**LEGISLATION ATTEMPTS TO DEAL WITH SALTON SEA'S PROBLEMS**

The troubled Salton Sea ("Bird Calls," Nov. 1997) is receiving attention from Congress. HR 3267, the Sonny Bono Memorial Salton Sea Reclamation Act, was approved by the House and will be considered by the Senate in September. It funds a \$350 million unspecified project to reduce the salinity, which is approaching lethal levels, and to stabilize the shoreline. \$22.5 million is authorized for an 18 month feasibility study and preparation of a reclamation plan to consider options, such as building dikes to concentrate high salinity in a limited area. In an unusual procedure, the project is to commence as soon as 60 days after completion of the study unless disapproved by Congress. \$5 million is provided for wildlife and ecological studies. An additional \$3 million is allocated to clean up the rivers that flow into the Sea, including through construction

of wetlands. This dynamic, complex and poorly understood ecosystem is de facto mitigation for the 92% of wetlands destroyed in the central valley of California. Engineering and rehabilitation solutions will likely have significant impact on the sea's value as habitat. Any solutions must be flexible to enable management to be adjusted as long-term research and monitoring yields new information. Related issues that also need to be taken into account include future increases in human population and water availability. While attention has focused solely on outbreaks of mortality due to a variety of diseases (a total of 250,000 birds may have been killed since 1994), the environmental and biological factors that led to the outbreaks are poorly understood. There is a strong likelihood that present proposals that focus solely on salinity will not deal with the causes of disease. For more information, contact: David Blockstein, The Ornithological Council, at 202-530-5810 or <OC@CNIE.org> or see <<http://www.sci.sdsu.edu/salton/SaltonBasinHomePage.html>>.

## **IV. ABC'S WORKS IN PROGRESS**

### **PARTNERS IN FLIGHT AND THE SUBSPECIES PROBLEM**

As Partners in Flight develops Bird Conservation Plans for all of the physiographic areas of the United States, one of the first issues dealt with is determination of which birds within the area are in need of some sort of conservation attention. One of the more vexing problems in making these decisions is treatment of subspecies. Every described subspecies and (given the poor state of knowledge concerning variability within North American bird species) many undescribed populations presumably are genetically distinct. Given time, many of these subspecies will be elevated to species status, which will immediately increase the perceived conservation importance of at least some birds. Such has been the case recently with, for example, Bicknell's Thrush, Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and Oak Titmouse. Weighing against treating subspecies as independent conservation units is the dilution of perception of importance of the whole effort. Any group could use the potential genetic uniqueness of a bird population as justification for all manner of environmental causes. Regardless of the other merits of such causes, misuse of bird issues could harm the credibility of Partners in Flight and bird conservation in general. What is needed is a consistent policy for use in deciding which subspecies and populations should and should not be treated as separate units of conservation. This is an extremely challenging task in that there are few existing rules for such decisions. Subspecies listed under the Endangered Species Act must, by law, be considered as separate conservation units. Those United States subspecies that are disjunct by a great distance from conspecifics should probably be treated separately, but the only examples of these are the Swallow-tailed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk, and Snail Kite. Decisions regarding birds represented by multiple subspecies within the United States are more difficult. Issues such as whether or not they are disjunct, or whether there are threats to a subspecies can come into play. Partners in Flight Regional Coordinators are currently wrestling with this problem, but it will take a good deal of time and consensus building within the ornithological community before firm conclusions can be drawn. In the meantime, the Appalachian Bewick's Wren is almost surely extinct, and the Eastern Bewick's Wren and Eastern Henslow's Sparrow are in dire condition. How many more perilous situations do we face, and how many more distinct units of evolution can we tolerate losing? For more information on PIF, contact David Pashley at ABC, 540-253-5780 or <[dpashley@abcbirds.org](mailto:dpashley@abcbirds.org)>.

**CATS INDOORS! PROGRAM PROGRESS--BROCHURES & POSTERS AVAILABLE**

Word about ABC's *Cats Indoors!* campaign continues to spread. ABC has distributed nearly 1,700 education kits to activists, members of the Policy Council, and to all 518 chapters of the National Audubon Society. The new brochure, *Keeping Cats Indoors Isn't Just For The Birds!*, is being distributed to the public at parks, nature centers, veterinarians offices and through bird clubs. Some of the major national environmental education organizations have agreed to advertise the campaign in their newsletters and magazines. Oil Dri, the second largest manufacturer of kitty litter, has offered to insert a *Cats Indoors!* piece in 500,000 containers of litter. *Cats Indoors!* is also advertised on the web sites of National Audubon, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, California Department of Fish and Game, Native Species Network, and the Rouge River Bird Observatory. In addition, ABC gave a poster session at the AOU conference in April, ran a booth and gave a presentation at an Oregon birding festival in May, and ran a booth at the recent American Veterinary Medical Association's 135th annual convention in Baltimore. A survey conducted at the convention showed that veterinarians strongly support efforts to convince cat owners to keep their cats indoors. While several Policy Council members are very active in the campaign, we have not heard from many members and other birders. It is time for those concerned with avian conservation to take action and help spread the word that cat predation of birds and other wildlife is avoidable and is a serious bird conservation issue. Action you can take includes advertising the campaign in your organizations' newsletters and magazines, on your web site, and distributing campaign materials to your membership. For more information, or to obtain kits, brochures, and posters, contact Linda Winter of ABC at 202-778-9619 or <lwinter@abcbirds.org>.

**V. THE BIRD IS THE WORD****WILDLIFE WATCHING IS BIG BUSINESS**

If wildlife-watching were a corporate enterprise, it would rank 23rd on the Fortune 500 list, says a new U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service report. Americans spent more than \$29 billion to observe, feed and photograph wildlife in 1996 -- up 21 percent from 1991. Those expenditures translated into \$85 billion in economic activity, \$5 billion in tax revenues, and 1 million jobs. In many communities, the economic potential of local wildlife watching opportunities may still be unrealized. The report, "1996 National and State Economic Impacts of Wildlife Watching," looked at the spending habits of 34,000 people whose principal motivation for spending or traveling is to watch wildlife, fish or hunt. Binoculars, cameras, wild-bird food, memberships, camping gear and motor homes accounted for 57 percent of total spending. Trip-related expenditures constituted 32 percent; books, magazines, contributions and land-leasing, 11 percent. In 1996, more than 63 million people age 16 and older--31 percent of the U.S. population--went birdwatching or fed birds. The report is based on the Service's 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, which is conducted every five years by the U.S. Census Bureau. Copies of both reports are available by calling the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's publications unit at 304-876-7203. Contact: Laury Parramore at 202-208-5634 or <laury\_parramore@fws.gov>.

**BIRD COLLISIONS BIBLIOGRAPHY AVAILABLE ON-LINE**

Those seeking data on bird collisions with man-made structures have been hampered by the lack of a current, comprehensive bibliography -- until now. Inspired by increasing concerns about bird collisions, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Office of Migratory Bird Management has posted an annotated bibliography on their website. The goal: to increase public awareness of the potential impacts of towers and other man-made structures on bird populations by highlighting some of the pertinent literature on the subject. The bibliography focuses primarily on collisions with communication towers, lighted buildings and, to a lesser degree, windows. No effort was made to cover collisions with power lines or wind turbines, which have been addressed elsewhere. Of the 125 citations listed, 83 have been published since 1980 (the last comprehensive bibliography was published in 1979); 24 citations are to Internet sites. "Bird Kills at Towers and Other Man-Made Structures: An Annotated Partial Bibliography (1960-1998)" is available at <<http://www.fws.gov/r9mbmo/issues/tower.html>>. If you are aware of other references published since 1980 that should be added to this bibliography, please send the information to John L. Trapp at <[john\\_trapp@fws.gov](mailto:john_trapp@fws.gov)>.

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**CONSERVATION A CENTRAL THEME IN NEW WEST INDIAN BIRD GUIDE**

Endemic species are featured in "A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies," the first comprehensive guide to all 564 bird species of the Caribbean in more than 50 years. A collaborative endeavor by U.S. and Caribbean experts led by Herb Raffaele, the guide is central to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of International Affairs' program to conserve West Indian birds. Text focuses on conservation issues, with the goal of inspiring local pride in each island's endemic birds and preventing further extinctions. Endemic species -- many of which are highly threatened and require special conservation actions for their survival -- are the subject of 18 separate plates. This artwork will be featured in a series of environmental education projects, including outreach posters and a calendar. Mini-guides will feature the most common birds of each island to help promote awareness among local schoolchildren and adults. The FWS Office of International Affairs has worked to conserve Caribbean birds for nearly 20 years. To obtain a copy of "A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies" at a 20% discount, send a check for \$40 (U.S. funds only) to Rosemarie Gnam, 13 East Rosemont Ave., Alexandria, VA 22301.

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**PARROT BOOK DISTRIBUTED TO LATIN AMERICAN CONSERVATIONISTS**

American Bird Conservancy will be distributing copies of the book 'Parrots' to NGOs and wildlife trade enforcement personnel in Latin American and the Caribbean to help them identify threatened species encountered in trade. TRAFFIC USA has also contributed to the effort and will be distributing copies of the book to government customs personnel in Central American countries. 'Parrots' written by Tony Juniper of Friends of the Earth, and ABC's Director of International Development, Mike Parr, is the most up to date review of the world's 350 species in this amazing group which range from the familiar Budgerigar, to the majestic macaws of South America, and the mysterious nocturnal and flightless Kakapo of New Zealand. The book shows that more than a third of all parrots are either at risk of extinction (90 species) or will soon become so (40 species) if the decline in their numbers is not halted. 'Parrots' is available from bookshops at \$55. Parrots: A Guide to the Parrots of the World ISBN 1-873403-40-2, 580 pp., 88 color plates.

## **BIRD-CONSERVATION RESOLUTIONS PROVIDED TO DECISION-MAKERS**

Immediate and long-term threats to bird populations and habitats were the focus of ten resolutions passed by four societies -- the American Ornithologists Union, Cooper Ornithological Society, Wilson Ornithological Society and the Association of Field Ornithologists -- at the North American Ornithological Conference in St. Louis last April. Several resolutions were subsequently provided to various decision-making bodies: (1) Snow Geese population management (later submitted as written testimony to an oversight hearing held by the House Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife & Oceans); (2) National forest management; (3) Natural resource science funding; (4) Public Lands Funding Initiative; (5) Northeast National Petroleum Reserve; (6) Izembek National Wildlife Refuge; (7) Exxon Valdez Restoration Reserve Fund (provided to the Science Coordinator of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council); (8) Bird collisions with radio and TV towers (presented to the Federal Communications Commission regarding its proposed rule pertaining to communications towers); (9) Bird collisions with glass and buildings; and (10) Salton Sea restoration (submitted to the House Committee on Resources). The full text of the resolutions can be found on the Ornithological Council website, BIRDNET, at <[www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET)>.

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American Birding Association  
American Museum of Natural History  
American Ornithologist's Union  
Archbold Biological Station  
Association of Avian Veterinarians  
Association of Field Ornithologists  
Audubon Naturalist Society  
Bucks County Audubon Society  
Center for Avian Biology - UC Davis  
Center for Marine Conservation  
Chicago Zoological Society  
Colonial Waterbird Society  
Colorado Bird Observatory  
Columbus (OH) Audubon Society  
Connecticut Ornithological Association  
The Conservation Fund  
Conservation International  
Cooper Ornithological Society  
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Delmarva Ornithological Society  
Endangered Species Recovery Council  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Federation of Ontario Naturalists  
Field Museum of Natural History  
Florida Audubon Society  
Georgia Ornithology Society  
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Gulf Coast Bird Observatory  
Hawk Migration Assoc. of North America  
Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association  
Hawkwatch International  
Houston Audubon Society  
Humane Society of the U.S.  
Institute for Bird Populations  
International Crane Foundation  
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National Wildlife Federation  
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