

BIRDCALLS

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Long-awaited ESA Listing for *rufa* Red Knot

ABC welcomed the long-awaited December 9, 2014 decision by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to formally list the *rufa* Red Knot as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Though the decision was hailed as an important victory, ABC continues to urge FWS to designate critical habitat—which will facilitate better

management practices for horseshoe crabs—to better protect this and other shorebird species.

The *rufa* Red Knot migrates nearly 20,000 miles each year from the southern tip of South America to the Canadian Arctic, one of the longest journeys in the animal kingdom. The knot suffered drastic population declines throughout the 1990s due to overharvesting of horseshoe crabs from Delaware Bay, where hundreds of thousands of shorebirds pause each spring to fatten up on crab eggs before continuing their northbound migration.

Historically, more than 100,000 Red Knots stopped at Delaware Bay each spring. By 2004, this number had dropped to little more than 13,000. In 2011, a count of the main wintering population in South America found their remaining numbers had declined by one-third.

Since 2005, four formal requests to list the Red Knot under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) have been submitted to the FWS. Citing a lack of resources and other priorities, FWS chose not to list the bird, but placed it on the candidate list in 2006.

“The compelling scientific case for ESA listing fueled our 10-year effort to encourage this listing decision,” says Darin Schroeder, Vice President of Conservation Advocacy for ABC. “While the decision to list the *rufa* Red Knot was certainly a protracted process, we do now have hope that future generations of Americans will be able to witness this migratory marvel.”



Red Knot by Hans Hillewaert, Wikipedia

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Get Boost From
Improved Management

First Predator-proof Fence Completed on Kaua'i

Rare birds nesting on a six-acre area at the Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge will now be protected from predators thanks to the installation of a stainless steel, predator-proof fence that stretches almost a half-mile in length.

This project resulted from collaboration between ABC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Kaua'i National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Pacific Rim Conservation, and the Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provided funding support.

This state-of-the-art fence took about three months to build and will keep introduced mammals, including cats, dogs, rats, and mice, out of the area, making it possible to establish new populations of threatened seabirds, such as Newell's Shearwater and Hawaiian Petrel. Native species currently present on the site, including the endangered Nēnē (Hawaiian Goose) and the Laysan Albatross, are also expected to flourish in the newly-protected environment.

This type of fencing has already been used with great success in New Zealand and at Ka'ena Point on the island of O'ahu, where predator exclusion resulted in record numbers of seabird chicks fledging in the year following the project's completion, as well as natural colonization by Black Noddy, a seabird species not previously recorded breeding on O'ahu.



The state-of-the-art fence (top) at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge will help protect native species such as the Hawaiian Petrel (lower left) and Newell's Shearwater (lower right). Fence photo by Jessica Behnke; bird photos by Brenda Zaun, USFWS

"One of those species that may particularly benefit is the Newell's Shearwater, which is threatened by non-native predators...Creation of a colony protected from predators will be a major step forward in recovering the species."

George Wallace, Vice President, ABC

"Predator-proof fencing is a conservation strategy that we are going to see used more and more in Hawai'i as we struggle to deal with widespread non-native predator populations on very large islands," said George Wallace, Vice President of ABC. "One of those species that may particularly benefit is the Newell's Shearwater, which is threatened by non-native predators in their montane nesting areas. Creation of a colony protected from predators will be a major step forward in recovering the species."

Congressional Actions to Weaken Wildlife Protection Needs Citizen Counterweight

by Steve Holmer, Senior Policy Advisor, ABC

As 2014 drew to a close, the Senate and House approved bills that would keep the many parts of the federal government funded through 2015 and reauthorize National Defense programs. Unfortunately, some lawmakers successfully attached last-minute riders that will hinder conservation of the Greater Sage-Grouse this year.

First, Congress dealt a major blow to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by specifically preventing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from considering the Greater Sage-Grouse for listing in 2015. The grouse population has declined 93 percent from historic numbers and is on the U.S. Watch List of birds of highest conservation concern—it has waited for more than ten years for a listing decision under the ESA.

While the Department of the Interior has pledged to press forward with a decision on whether the grouse needs to be listed regardless of the rider, and to implement federal actions to save the species, this Congressional roadblock could discourage current voluntary conservation efforts designed to prevent the species' listing.

A rider was also added to the Defense bill allowing grazing permits in grouse habitat to be renewed without applying newly

The sum of these actions amounts to a systematic campaign in Congress to weaken our nation's environmental laws, particularly the ESA.



developed grouse conservation measures. Nearly every acre of grouse habitat is grazed so it is crucial that this widespread land use not be exempted from best management practices.

This is likely just the opening round of a long bout to come—additional bad amendments, such as a proposed ESA delisting of the threatened Lesser Prairie-Chicken, are likely to reappear later in the session as stand-alone bills or as amendments to must-pass bills.

The sum of these actions amounts to a systematic campaign in

Congress to weaken our nation's environmental laws, particularly the ESA. But it doesn't have to be this way.

There is a defense for the birds we love—citizen involvement. Your actions make a huge difference. Last year, while advocating against S.1784, a bill that threatened habitat of the Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet, an ABC action alert mobilized ABC members to write their Senators expressing concern. Significant changes for the better were made to this bill as a result.

With your involvement, this current round of threats can be stopped too, just as previous assaults on the ESA have been prevented many times before.

Please contact your elected officials and ask them to let the agencies tasked with protecting the grouse do their job without congressional interference.



Visit www.abcbirds.org/action/index.html to make your voice heard. Thanks for all your efforts to conserve birds!

ABC Opposes Poorly-sited Wind Energy Development Projects in North Dakota and Michigan

ABC has raised serious concerns about a plan by Heritage Sustainable Energy, DTE Energy, Exelon Corporation, and NextEra Energy to construct additional commercial wind turbines in Huron County, Michigan. More than 300 large wind turbines already exist here, and as many as 600 additional turbines could eventually be built.

This project is advancing despite the fact that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) radar studies show vast numbers of birds migrating through or wintering in this area, including protected species such as Bald and Golden Eagle, Short-eared Owl, Henslow's Sparrow, and Kirtland's Warbler, listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). "This triggers serious ESA concerns," said ABC's Michael

Hutchins, National Coordinator, Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign. "Huron County is not an appropriate area for wind

energy development, given the potential and substantial risks it poses to federally protected birds."

In addition, ABC and the International Crane Foundation sent a joint letter to FWS voicing strong concerns about renewed consideration of the Merricourt wind energy project in North Dakota. The Merricourt project, proposed by EDF Renewable Energy, would be located in a key migratory pathway for many

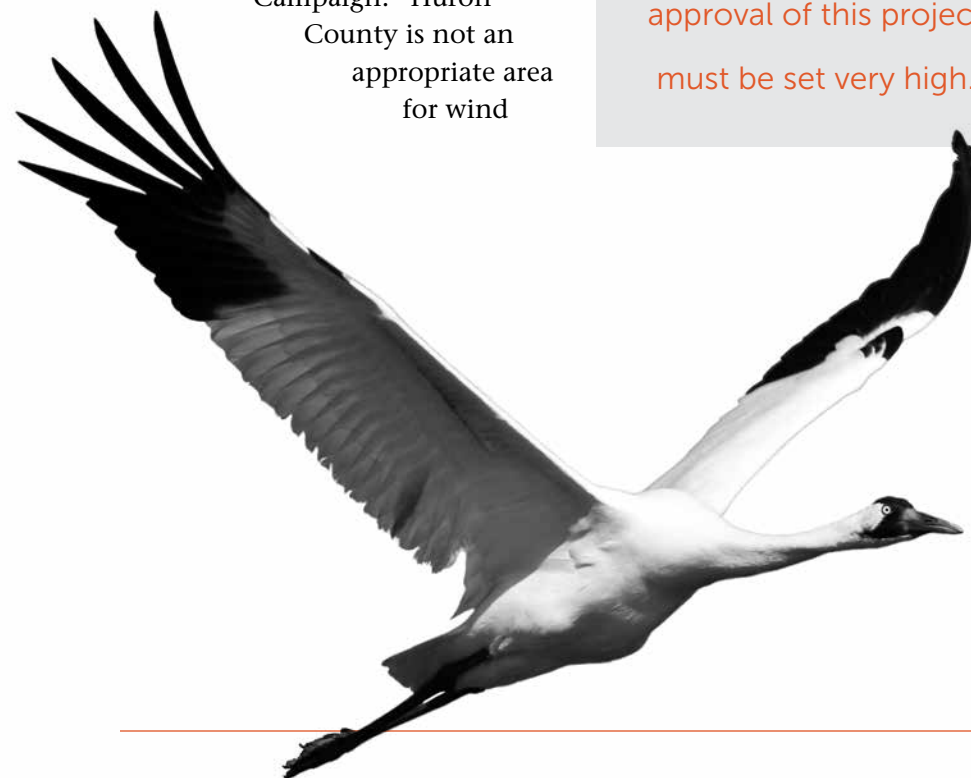
The loss of even a few highly endangered Whooping Cranes could result in a population-level effect, and ABC believes the bar for approval of this project must be set very high.

federally protected birds in the Prairie Pothole region of North Dakota, including Whooping Crane and Piping Plover. The loss of even a few highly endangered Whooping Cranes could result in a population-level effect, and ABC believes the bar for approval of this project must be set very high.

Under FWS' current voluntary permitting guidelines, wind energy companies are not required to apply for incidental take permits under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act or the ESA when the project sits on private property.

To remedy these problems, ABC has requested that an Environmental Impact Statement be prepared for these projects and is calling for independent post-construction monitoring and for the institution of a national permitting process that imposes fines on developers who kill more protected birds than their permit would allow.

ABC supports the development of clean, renewable sources of energy such as wind and solar power, but also believes that it must be done responsibly and with minimal impact on our environment, including native birds. Our Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign, made possible with the support of the Leon Levy Foundation, emphasizes the importance of careful siting and mitigation to minimize impacts to wildlife.



First Reserve Created in Brazil for Araripe Manakin

ABC has supported Aquasis, a Brazilian conservation organization, in the creation of the Oasis Araripe Reserve for the critically endangered Araripe Manakin, a stunning species first discovered in 1996. Fewer than 800 of these birds still

exist and are found only in an 11-square mile area of northeastern Brazil, within fragments of the humid tropical forest that once covered this region. The Araripe Manakin depends on riparian streams in this region for nesting habitat and feeds on fruit found in the dense understory. It shares this habitat with other Brazilian endemics such as the Silvery-cheeked and Caatinga Antshrikes and White-browed Antpitta.

The 140-acre reserve borders the Araripe National Forest to the south and includes a house that will be refurbished into a field station with facilities for tourism. This property holds the possibility of a corridor connection to the Sítio Fundão State Park, a fully

protected 230-acre area managed by the state government. A 27-acre parcel located to the south is now a private reserve that is formally recognized by the Brazilian government as fully protected in perpetuity.

"The Oasis Araripe Reserve will also serve as an important focal point for local education, where visitors can learn about the importance of the bird and see ongoing conservation efforts, such as the Aquasis reforestation project," commented Bennett Hennessey, who heads ABC's Brazil Conservation Program. ABC is actively supporting the reforestation of the newly established reserve, with plans to plant 5,000 saplings of 15 native tree species in 2015.



Araripe Manakin by Ciro Albano

Help ABC Make Wind Power Bird-Smart

Golden Eagles and Kirtland's Warblers are threatened by the possibility of 600 new wind turbines planned in important migratory and wintering areas in Huron County, Michigan. Meanwhile, renewed consideration of the once-stopped Merricourt wind project in a key migratory pathway for many federally protected birds in the Prairie Pothole region of North Dakota could be a disaster for Whooping Cranes and Piping Plovers.

ABC leads the way in protecting birds from improperly sited, operated, and regulated wind

turbines, and **you can help us protect threatened and migratory birds with your extra donation today.**

ABC supports the development of wind projects that prevent unintended impacts to wildlife, yet in just 15 years the explosive growth of wind energy production threatens to kill up to 1.4 million birds annually.

ABC has identified more than 8,400 proposed turbines in areas deemed critical for birds, and we are opposing these worst offenders



nationwide. But we need your help to halt the most damaging projects. Remember, our best opportunity to protect birds is right now, before thousands more turbines are built. **Please donate today using the enclosed envelope, or give online at ABCbirds.org.**

Wading Bird Nesting Declines Continue in S. Florida

One of the nation's largest and most important breeding areas for wading birds is the wet grasslands and hammocks of south Florida, including Everglades National Park. Unfortunately, the most recent edition of the South Florida Wading Bird Report documents that nesting decreased 28 percent below 2013 levels, about 18 percent below the nine-year average for the area.

Most wading bird species showed reduced nesting efforts in 2014; of particular note were Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, and Snowy Egret, which have shown consistent declines in nest numbers in recent years.

Nesting declines have been especially notable in the Everglades,

where numbers have steadily dropped from more than a thousand nests per species in the mid-2000s to only four Little Blue Heron, seven Tricolored Heron, and 122 Snowy Egret nests in 2014. Roseate Spoonbill, White Ibis, and Great Egret also exhibited reduced nesting effort in 2014.

The report blames continuing ecological deterioration for these declines and states that these ecosystem changes will limit the possibility of recovering the essential defining characteristics of the original Everglades.

"An environmentally healthy Everglades region is vitally important to many thousands of wading birds. Clearly, the significant declines in nesting of many of the typical species of the region tells



Tricolored Heron by Elliotte Rusty Harold, Shutterstock

us that much remains to be done to make it a properly functioning ecosystem," said Kacy Ray, who directs ABC's Beach Nesting Birds Program.



See: <http://bit.ly/192OPiN> for more information.

Wind Facility Proposed in Important Whooping Crane Corridor

In a letter to FWS this January, ABC and the International Crane Foundation (ICF) expressed concern about the Ninnescah Wind Energy Project and associated power lines and towers proposed for Pratt County, Kansas. This project lies within the federally-designated migratory corridor of the endangered Whooping Crane.

The planned wind facility is also less than 35 miles south of Quivera National Wildlife Refuge, a well-known staging area for cranes and migratory waterfowl.

"The most significant cause of Whooping Crane mortality is collisions with power lines and towers, making this project highly suspect from a bird conservation perspective," noted Michael Hutchins, National Coordinator of ABC's Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign.

A recent analysis of wind turbine placement by ABC and Mississippi State University showed that 5,500 turbines already exist in this corridor, with an additional 18,518 planned. All of this new infrastructure could create a major gauntlet

for migrating Whooping Cranes, resulting in mortalities or altering migration patterns.

On the wind risk assessment map developed by ABC (www.abcbirds.org/extra/index_wind.html), the Ninnescah Project is in an orange area, indicating that every effort should be made to carefully assess risks before approving construction.

ABC and ICF will be watching the situation closely and will work to ensure that all federal and state guidelines are followed.

ABC Celebrates 20th Anniversary

ABC capped off its 20th anniversary year with a Washington, DC event on January 15, hosted by President George Fenwick and Board Chairman Warren Cooke. Building on our tradition of creating and recognizing partnerships, ABC took the opportunity to thank others for their contributions to bird conservation:

- The Leon Levy Innovation in Bird Conservation Award was given to eBird, the citizen science on-line checklist run by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and launched in 2002. John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Lab, accepted the award.
- The Chairman's Award was presented to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), longtime supporter of many ABC projects, including work to increase populations of Long-billed Curlew. The award was accepted by Ian Davidson, NFWF's Director for Bird Biology and Conservation.

Both received a beautiful and long-lasting way to remember the award's significance: a Long-billed Curlew sculpture created by ABC Board Member Walter Matia.

A keynote speech by Kenn Kaufman focused on the inspiration of birds—and how effective ABC has been in achieving bird conservation results in its first two decades. Kenn and his wife, Kimberly Kaufman, Executive Director of Black Swamp Bird Observatory in Ohio, have become close conservation partners with ABC in recent years, and we very much appreciate their support!



Left to right: ABC friends Kim and Kenn Kaufman and Warren and Kathy Cooke. The Cookes are longtime ABC supporters; Warren is currently ABC's Board Chairman. Photo by Clare Nielsen, ABC, January 2015

Paton Center for Hummingbirds Dedicated



George Fenwick (left) and Victor Emanuel (right) at the official dedication for the Paton Center for Hummingbirds, December 2014. Photo by Jeff Rusinow

In December 2014, the Paton Center for Hummingbirds was officially dedicated by the Tucson Audubon Society (TAS). This event was the culmination of a year's work by ABC, TAS, and Victor Emanuel to purchase the property, a premier birding and hummingbird spot in Patagonia, Arizona. Ownership of the property has been transferred to TAS for long-term stewardship.

"Birding centers such as the Paton Center are, in my opinion, means to a conservation end," commented ABC President George Fenwick, who was part of the dedication ceremony. "Places like Paton don't just spontaneously emerge, but instead result from concerted efforts by partnerships of people interested enough to lend a hand."

New Study Documents Higher Rate of Light-related Mortality in Short-tailed Shearwaters

A new study reports a much greater mortality of fledgling Short-tailed Shearwaters associated with streetlights than was previously believed. The combined impacts of two man-made threats, light pollution and automobile strikes, are four to eight times higher than previously documented.

The study, published in October 2014 in PLOS ONE, systematically recorded the number of fledgling Short-tailed Shearwaters found grounded in evening and morning rescue patrols at Phillip Island, Australia, during a 15-year period (1999–2013). It assessed factors affecting numbers of grounded birds and mortality including date, moon phase, wind direction and speed, number of visitors, and holiday periods.

Of 8,871 fledglings found, 39 percent were dead or dying. Mortality increased through the fledging period, in mornings, and with increased traffic during holidays. Higher numbers of grounded fledglings are expected during adverse weather conditions, but this study found for the first time that wind is also a factor, showing that nights with the highest speed winds resulted in the largest numbers of grounded birds. The report suggests that because shearwaters need a long runway to take off, wind becomes even more critical for fledglings that are not experienced flyers.



Short-tailed Shearwater by JJ Harrison, Wikipedia

...light pollution worldwide is increasing at a rate of about 6 percent per year and is a growing problem for seabirds that has probably been significantly underestimated.

On Phillip Island, the main cause of bird mortality following grounding was collisions with vehicles, although introduced predators and domestic pets likely kill some birds. This explains why morning rescue patrols found a higher number of dead birds than night rescue patrols. During night patrols, the time spent by fledglings

on the road is shorter as they do not leave their nests before sunset, while during the morning, fledglings could have spent much of the night on the road, increasing the chances of being run over by vehicles or depredated.

Thus, two threats interact in a fatal combination: Light pollution disorients birds until they become stranded and later, traffic kills them.

The report asserted that light pollution worldwide is increasing at a rate of about six percent per year and is a growing problem for seabirds that has probably been significantly underestimated. On a positive note, the authors found that reducing light pollution and better traffic management can help mitigate this artificial light-induced mortality.

New Fishing Technique Safer for Rare Birds

Around the Santa Elena Peninsula of Ecuador, the artisanal hake or *merluza* fishery operates daily at a feverish pitch, with hundreds of small boats launched from 26 bustling ports each day. This area is the focus of ABC's latest bycatch mitigation project, led by ABC and partners Giovanni Suarez Espín (ABC technical advisor) and Nigel Brothers (Humane Society International), working with fishermen to implement a new device called "NISURI" to reduce the accidental, and often fatal, bycatch of seabirds.

The NISURI device reduces the time it takes to cast baited hooks

Three rare species are of greatest conservation concern: the critically endangered Waved Albatross and the vulnerable Parkinson's Petrel and Pink-footed Shearwater.

into the water by ten-fold. The device allows the fishermen to prepare up to 400 baited hooks at a time by sliding them along a slit in a six-foot-long tube, which holds the lines while protecting the bait from birds. The tube acts as a chute to deploy the lines, removing the possibility of hooks hanging up on a fisherman's hand or a bird's bill as the boat is underway.

"Line setting is the most dangerous time not only for fishermen but for birds as well, which seize an opportunity to take the bait at the surface of the water, not understanding the peril of being snagged on a hook and drowned. NISURI reduces the exposure to this danger dramatically," said Brothers, who has worked on seabird bycatch issues for more than 30 years.

Three rare species are of greatest conservation concern: the critically endangered Waved Albatross and the vulnerable Parkinson's Petrel and Pink-footed Shearwater. Merluza fishermen regularly interact with these birds while setting 400–1200 hooks per day; unlucky birds get snagged by a line or ingest a baited hook.

Suarez and the ABC team presented the NISURI method to a representative of Ecuador's Ministry of the Environment, Eliecer Cruz, who has endorsed the innovation as a positive step towards mitigating the serious problem of bycatch.

Caroline Icaza Galarza, the Ecuadorian representative for the



Fisherman using new NISURI line setting technology to reduce bird interaction at the port of Santa Rosa, Ecuador. Photo by Nigel Brothers

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), an international agreement to find solutions to reduce seabird bycatch, was impressed by NISURI and pledged to promote and expand its use in artisanal hake fisheries by supporting ABC's fishermen's workshops at ports in Ecuador.

"The solution to the bycatch issue lies in developing ways to minimize fishery and bird interactions, and this technique does exactly that," said ABC Seabird Program Director Hannah Nevins, who traveled to the port of Santa Rosa to see the NISURI in action. "In addition to being safer for the fishermen, the device is simple to use, inexpensive, and can be applied just about anywhere that artisanal fishing takes place."



Feral Cats Overwhelm Hawai'i Reserve

Invasive species are one of the greatest threats to biodiversity worldwide. This is especially true in Hawai'i, which has the dubious claim of "bird extinction capital of the world."

Hawai'i's geographic isolation allowed for an amazing degree of speciation that could have inspired Darwin. Today, introduced species pose grave risks to these unique birds, and could be the final straw that pushes some into extinction.



Feral cat with Hawaiian Coot. Photo by Michael Walther

...a recent news report revealed that more than 1,000 feral cats run at-large around Kanaha Pond Wildlife Sanctuary and in Kanaha Beach Park on Maui. The proximity of such a large population of cats next to federally endangered birds...is a conservation disaster.



Hawaiian Black-necked Stilt by Michael Walther

Feral domestic cats have long been a problem throughout Hawaii, but a recent news report revealed that more than 1,000 feral cats run at-large around Kanaha Pond Wildlife Sanctuary and in Kanaha Beach Park on Maui. The proximity of such a large population of cats next to federally endangered birds such as the Hawaiian Black-necked Stilt, Hawaiian Duck, and Hawaiian Coot is a conservation disaster.

Despite the clear need to remove these cats and protect native bird species, several animal welfare groups are continuing to pursue the failed strategy of maintaining cats on the landscape through TNR. (See story on p. 12.)

Outdoor cats are estimated to kill approximately 2.4 billion birds annually across the United States. Unfortunately, feeding cats does not inhibit their prey drive and only serves to supplement feral cat populations. A study in the *Journal*

of Applied Ecology by Bonnington et al. (2013) showed that even when cats do not directly kill birds and other wildlife, their mere presence indirectly results in reduced health and reproductive success.

Feral cats near Kanaha Beach Park are also a concern for human health. Cats are the definitive host for the infectious parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which is excreted in cat feces. Because cats use sandy areas to defecate and cat feces wash into the sea, people risk contracting this parasite, which causes the disease toxoplasmosis. Results in humans vary but can include miscarriage, blindness, memory loss, or even death.

ABC continues to work with partners to raise awareness about the impacts of roaming cats in Hawai'i and to ensure the responsible removal of these invasive animals from the environment.

Protecting Forage Fish for Seabirds in the Pacific

In September 2014, the Pacific Fisheries Management Council, the governing body for U.S. West Coast fisheries, recognized the importance of forage fish to the California Current Ecosystem by recommending protection for 17 families of forage fish. This action would be beneficial for many seabirds, including the endangered Marbled Murrelet, plus Tufted Puffin, Rhinoceros Auklet, and Pigeon Guillemot. Marine mammals and larger predatory fish would also benefit from this action.

So-called forage fish, which include round and thread herring, mesopelagic or “lantern” fishes, Pacific

sand lance, Pacific saury, silversides, osmerid smelts, and some pelagic squids, are not currently a target of commercial fisheries, but the Council decided to wait on any potential harvests until they gather more information on the importance of these forage fish to the ecosystem. A final decision will be made by the Council in March 2015.

This is not the first time the Council has made a precautionary action—in 2006, it moved to protect krill, a crustacean forage species, from direct harvest.

The California Current Ecosystem is one of the four most richly

productive current systems in the world, stretching from Baja, Mexico to Vancouver Island, Canada. It encompasses a great diversity of foraging habitat for resident and migratory seabirds, all of which depend on the rich abundance of forage fish. The fish species proposed for protection from harvest comprise a large proportion of seabirds’ diets during periods when their most preferred prey are not available, or may be critical at certain life stages, such as during chick rearing. A recent global assessment of seabirds and forage fish suggests we preserve one-third of harvested forage fish for the birds and indicates that harvest exceeding this threshold affects the breeding success of seabirds.

Typically forage fish are used for the fish meal that is fed to pig and cattle as feed. As fisheries expand globally, more and more forage fish, which are foundations of the food web, are harvested.

Other forage fish species, such as Pacific sardine, northern anchovy, humpback and market squid, and Pacific and jack mackerel are excluded from these recent protections, as they are currently fished and managed separately as coastal pelagic species and are subject to regular stock assessment and fishery evaluation.



Read more at: www.sciencemag.org/content/334/6063/1703



Rhinoceros Auklet by Robert L. Kothenbeutel, Shutterstock

The California Current Ecosystem is one of the four most richly productive current systems in the world... It encompasses a great diversity of foraging habitat for resident and migratory seabirds, all of which depend upon the rich abundance of forage fish.

Another Study Shows “Trap, Neuter, Release” Ineffective

Although cats make wonderful pets when kept indoors, feral domestic cats remain a widespread ecological menace despite broad understanding of their impacts.

One of the largest points of contention among animal lovers is how best to remove cats: through birth control or physical removal. The program known as Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) is often promoted by advocates of the birth control method. TNR programs trap feral cats, spay or neuter them, and then release them back onto the landscape. Rather than immediately reducing numbers through removal, TNR practitioners hope to slowly reduce feral cat populations over time.

A new study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, has provided further evidence that feral cat removal is far superior to TNR and other contraceptive strategies. Miller et al. (2014) developed models that evaluated these strategies as management options. The authors, including several well-known TNR advocates, analyzed isolated colonies (no cats joining or leaving) and open colonies.

The conclusion: removal led to more instances of population decline and, in isolated populations, colony elimination. In an isolated environment all control methods resulted in reduced numbers of cats, with removal and TNR more effective than contraceptives. In an open colony, however, cat removal far surpassed TNR as a way of reducing the population.

Although the results showed that both TNR and removal could work in closed environments, the authors acknowledged that such situations rarely occur, saying: “In reality, [cat] populations typically are not isolated but would instead interact demographically with cats in surrounding landscapes.”

Because of this biological difference, removal should be viewed as the only viable solution. As the authors noted, removal “not only eliminates the reproductive potential of treated animals, but immediately subtracts them from the population.”

This latest research further confirms ABC’s position that all feral cats should be removed from the environment entirely or maintained on private property in a secure enclosure.

Report: Many Colombian Birds Face Extinction

A study by ABC partner Fundación ProAves, *The State of the Birds in Colombia 2014*, reports that decades of deteriorating ecosystems have led to 122 of Colombia’s 1,903 bird species now facing extinction.

The gravest situation, according to the report, occurs in the highest elevations of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, an isolated mountain chain in the northwestern part of the country that shelters many endemic species. Uncontrolled burning and cattle grazing have

severely damaged the area’s páramo ecosystem and threaten the survival of three critically endangered species: the Blue-bearded Helmetcrest, Santa Marta Sabrewing, and Santa Marta Wren.

Other Colombian critically endangered species that could become extinct within the next ten years include Antioquia Brush-Finch, Gorgeted Puffleg, Perija Thistletail, Chestnut-capped Piha, Colorful Puffleg, and Urrao (Fenwick’s) Antpitta.

The report establishes an annual baseline against which birds can be monitored across Colombia to guide more effective conservation.

A National System of Protected Areas works to protect most species under the lowest threat category (Vulnerable) while the ProAves network of private reserves works to protect most species under higher threat categories (Endangered and Critically Endangered).

Ecuador's Yunguilla Reserve Expanded

Protected Area Provides Lifeline for One of Earth's Rarest Birds

ABC, Ecuadorian partner Fundación Jocotoco, and Rainforest Trust have partnered to purchase 104 acres to expand the Yunguilla Reserve in the Yunguilla Valley of southern Ecuador—an area of dry scrubland and forest that is critical habitat for the world's only population of the endemic Pale-headed Brush-Finch.

The bird was rediscovered in 1998 in the Yunguilla Valley after a 30-year absence. At that time, the brush-finch was teetering on the edge of extinction, with only around 30 birds remaining in this small area. To head off its extinction, Jocotoco and partners created the Yunguilla Reserve that same year, protecting most of the brush-finch's remaining habitat.

Thanks to intense conservation and management efforts, including cowbird control, the Pale-headed Brush-Finch population has rebounded to 200–250 birds. It is one of the few species in the world that has been downlisted from a status of Critically Endangered to Endangered.

Although the Yunguilla Reserve has been expanded several times since its creation, its size—380 acres before the recent purchase—offered limited room for Pale-headed Brush-Finch numbers to expand. Being restricted to a single site also left the species vulnerable to external threats such as fires.

The recent purchase will create a new protected area, two miles

from the present reserve. The two areas are separated by a mountain ridge, which decreases the risk of fire affecting both sites at the same time. The sites are also connected by a water channel, which will

encourage the dispersal of Pale-headed Brush-Finch between them.

"ABC is particularly invested in this species, since it financed the expedition that rediscovered the bird and provided early support to build the reserve," said George Fenwick, ABC President. "This project demonstrates that protection of small populations restricted to single remaining sites can be an effective way to halt species extinction. With the addition of this new habitat, we expect the continued improvement of this species' conservation status and prospects for its long-term survival."

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George Fenwick, President, ABC



Pale-headed Brush-Finch at nest by A. Sornoza

ABC Partners with Black Swamp Bird Observatory for The Biggest Week



For the second year in a row, ABC will be co-sponsoring the nation's premier birding festival, The Biggest Week in American Birding, with the Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO). The ten-day event will be held May 8–17 in northwest Ohio, “the Warbler Capital of the World.”

Northwest Ohio is believed by many to be the best place to witness the spring migration of songbirds in North America. Lake Erie acts as a barrier, as birds are reluctant to cross open water during migration. Migrating birds tend to “pile up” in the woodlots and marshlands on the lake’s southern

edge to rest and refuel before crossing the lake. The timing of their arrival is early enough in spring that the trees have not fully leafed out, making the birds easier to spot and photograph.

The conservation component of this year’s festival will support ABC’s work on reforestation in Latin America to create habitat for migratory birds and rare endemic species. The program will contribute to offsetting the carbon footprint of participants’ travel to the Biggest Week, and the event will recommend a \$10 voluntary contribution to ABC’s work on this program.

In its sixth year, the event will feature excursions to Magee Marsh, voted the top birding spot in the U.S. by readers of USA Today. The festival attracts tens of thousands of people each year, and according to BSBO’s post-event economic impact study, injects about \$37 million into the local economy. The event offers a large number and variety of guided birding trips, workshops, keynote speakers, and more.



For more information, visit: www.biggestweekinamericanbirding.com/

ABC to Sponsor Detroit Lakes Festival of Birds

The Detroit Lakes Festival of Birds will celebrate its 18th year with a new co-sponsor: ABC. A longstanding co-sponsor for the event is the nearby U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (FWS) Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge.

The event is scheduled for May 14–17 in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota and will showcase Golden-winged Warbler conservation through field trips and workshops. ABC’s Peter Dierker will be leading a trip at Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge on Friday, May 15.



One of the bird stars of the event, and one which every participant hopes to get a glimpse of in the field, is the Golden-winged Warbler, an at-risk species that depends on conservation of key habitat in this region for survival.

Tamarac NWR and ABC have been at the forefront of Golden-winged Warbler conservation

efforts and research in Minnesota, which boasts one of the highest densities of nesting Golden-winged Warblers in the world. ABC, FWS, and other groups have undertaken significant Golden-winged Warbler habitat improvement projects on the Refuge, including restoration of 361 acres of high-quality habitat last year and an additional 130 acres due to be completed this winter.



Find out more at: www.visitdetroitlakes.com/events/festival-of-birds

Key Mexican Grasslands Get Boost from Improved Management

Important wintering areas for migrating birds in Mexico continue to benefit from a cooperative conservation program led by Pronatura Noreste, ABC, and Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory.

Since 2006, overgrazing and intensive agriculture have destroyed grasslands and displaced an estimated one million birds in Valles Centrales, one of the richest areas of wintering habitat for local and migratory grassland species such as the Long-billed Curlew, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Sprague's Pipit, Aplomado Falcon, Baird's, Vesper, and Brewer's Sparrows, and Lark Bunting.

In recent years, cattle ranchers have been cooperating with the conservation groups to improve desert grassland habitat in the Valles Centrales Grassland Priority Conservation Area in Chihuahua. About 75,000 acres of important

grassland habitat are currently part of the project.

In 2014, three properties received technical and financial assistance for infrastructure improvements prior to the annual desert rains. This assistance included increasing

In recent years, cattle ranchers have been cooperating with conservation groups to improve desert grassland habitat in the Valles Centrales Grassland Priority Conservation Area in Chihuahua.

the number of pastures available for cattle on a rotating basis, agreement on more rapid rotation cycles, invasive shrub removal, and soil aeration.

Andrew Rothman, ABC's Migratory Bird Program Director, noted, "There were good rains this year, which provided favorable conditions, but facilitating improved management and restoration activities prior to the rains was key for habitat recovery."

Five large ranches have signed agreements with Pronatura Noreste that have led to improved land management practices as well as improved habitat for priority grassland bird species. The program is also designed to improve grassland conditions for cattle grazing, which provides incentive for ranchers to join.

In addition to continuing to build stronger relations with local ranching associations, the project partners seek funds from government and private sources to offset the costs of management practices such as fencing in new cattle paddocks, providing water tanks for cattle, and improvements to the water distribution systems.

Some of the initial properties will serve as pilot efforts that the partners hope will encourage more landowners to participate.



Long-billed Curlew by Greg Lavaty

AMJV Partnership Receives \$8 Million to Enhance Cerulean Habitat

The Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture (AMJV) supported by ABC recently received an \$8 million grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Regional Conservation Partnership Program to restore Cerulean Warbler habitat. This AMJV-led project will involve dozens of partners to enhance 12,500 acres of forest habitat on private lands for Cerulean Warblers and other wildlife. Approximately 1,000 acres of reclaimed mine lands will also be restored.

The five-year project will be modeled after the Natural Resources Conservation Services' Working Lands for Wildlife Program for Golden-winged Warblers, using the recently released *Cerulean Warbler Habitat Management Guidelines* to guide conservation in focal areas in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Ohio, and Maryland.

"This project will create a tremendous opportunity for our partnership to engage private landowners and promote contiguous areas of viable working



Cerulean Warbler by Bill Hubick

forests to help ensure long-term conservation of Cerulean Warblers," said Todd Fearer, AMJV Coordinator.



See <http://bit.ly/174Ds8y> for more information.

Human Noises Impair Critical Bird Communications

A new study suggests that ambient, human-caused noise—from traffic, construction and other activities—can negatively affect birds' well-being simply through proximity to their habitat. The research, led by Andrew Horn from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia has found that these forms of spreading urbanization and development can break the vital communications link between nestling birds and their parents, leaving the young birds vulnerable or hungry.

Faced with tough competition from hungry siblings, nestling birds instinctively react quickly to any sign that a parent might have food, vigorously begging to attract attention. While this rapid response increases their likelihood

of getting a meal, it also puts them at risk of hastily misidentifying predators as parents. On the other hand, if overly-cautious nestlings fail to hear their parents approach with food, the missed detection could cost them a meal.

The research team suspected that nestling birds' exaggerated begging calls might be an attempt to convey an important message in the face of background noise. To test their hypothesis, they presented nestling Tree Swallows with recordings of a parent warning of a predator or announcing a food delivery. They compared the young birds' responses to the sounds when played with recorded background noise or in a quiet environment.

The team found that background noise reduced nestlings' responsiveness to both feeding and alarm calls: They often failed to beg in response to feeding calls and continued begging instead of crouching and falling silent when parents warned of predators. They received little assistance from their parents, which did not appear to change their calls in noisier situations.

Although not all ambient noise comes from human activity, a busy interstate or a new housing development is a more persistent source of noise than intermittent natural phenomena like wind and rain, Horn said. In future studies, Horn and his colleagues hope to determine which sounds are particularly detrimental for parent-nestling communication.

ABC, NRCS to Lead Forest Restoration Project Targeting Golden-winged Warbler

ABC and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will lead a large forest management and habitat conservation project targeting more than 50,000 acres of key habitat in the Great Lakes states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. This effort will include habitat management on private and public lands with support from the NRCS, Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Fund, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and many other partners.

One of the key anticipated outcomes of this project is the avoidance of an Endangered Species Act listing for the Golden-winged Warbler. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan have the largest remaining breeding population of the species, and habitat management actions there are critical to rebuilding populations rapidly.

The project is expected to create new breeding habitat for an estimated 1,180 pairs of Golden-winged Warblers and result in an increase of 16,000 individuals within four years. This goal will be met by providing technical and financial support to private landowners whose properties lie within designated Golden-winged Warbler focal areas. Recommended management practices may include aspen management, timber stand improvement, and shrubland restoration.

At least 20 other at-risk species will benefit from this project, including American Woodcock, Ruffed Grouse, Black-billed Cuckoo, moose, Canada lynx, and northern long-eared bat.

This project is part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that includes 100 projects in all 50 states. The program will provide more than \$370 million for targeted conservation efforts through NRCS.



Golden-winged Warbler by David Cree

Golden-winged Warbler Wintering Conservation Plan Underway

Bird conservationists from throughout the Americas, including ABC's Andrew Rothman and Jason Berry, met in Honduras in late 2014 to put the pieces together for a Golden-winged Warbler Wintering Grounds Conservation Plan. This plan would be part of a full life-cycle approach to conserving the species, which has suffered one of the steepest population declines of any songbird species in the past 45 years.

In addition to helping the Golden-winged, the actions identified in this plan are expected to benefit other warbler species, including the Cerulean, Canada, Blackburnian, and Chestnut-sided.

After reviewing the ecology and habitat requirements of the species on its wintering grounds, bird conservationists prioritized the core habitat focal areas within their respective countries. Threats to the Golden-winged Warbler within these areas were identified, and potential conservation actions were established.

The top ten threats to the Golden-winged were identified across the entire winter range, and conservation actions to mitigate each threat were proposed.

A draft conservation plan is expected to be available this spring; a final plan should be completed by summer.

Cats Indoors PSA Launched

ABC's Cats Indoors program has launched a 30-second public service announcement (PSA) to air on television in Hawai'i. The PSA's colorful, engaging animations convey the urgency of the bird conservation crisis in Hawai'i and the critical need to keep cats indoors.



Watch the PSA at:
<http://bit.ly/1vAyyjD>

Greater Sage-Grouse by Noppadol Paothong



Greater Sage-Grouse Need Greater Buffers from Energy Development

A new federal study finds that Greater Sage-Grouse need far larger buffer zones from oil and gas, solar, and wind projects than current practices prescribe. The study confirms that grouse are very skittish and seek habitat that is at least three miles away from oil and gas drilling, tall towers, and roads.



The study is available at <http://on.doi.gov/1vAxzMg>.

Oregon Logging Bill Fails to Pass Congress

Thanks in part to ABC supporters who took action in support of the Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl, S. 1784, a bill to increase logging on federal forests in

Marbled Murrelet by USFWS



Oregon, failed to pass Congress in 2014.

More legislation affecting these forests is likely in 2015 and in addition, the Obama administration is planning to begin updating President Clinton's landmark Northwest Forest Plan, which conservation scientists say at age 20 remains the best model for ecosystem restoration in the world.

Federal Duck Stamp Increase Approved

In December, President Obama signed the Federal Duck Stamp Act of 2014, increasing the price of the stamp from \$15 to \$25. This price increase is expected to raise an additional \$16 million for creation of additional wildlife habitat throughout the United States.

At the same time, President Obama signed the Permanent Electronic Duck Stamp Act to expand online stamp sales.

Introduced in 1934, the Duck Stamp has raised more than \$750



FWS

million and has conserved more than six million acres of wetland habitat. All waterfowl hunters age 16 and over must purchase the stamp; birders and other wildlife enthusiasts also buy them, since they allows free entrance into national wildlife refuges that normally charge an entrance fee.

The 2015-16 stamp, which features a male and female Ruddy Duck, is expected to be available for purchase in July 2015.

Palila Report Published

A report on the conservation biology of the critically endangered Palila, *Palila Restoration Research, 1996-2012*, seeks to provide a research foundation that will foster the reintroduction of this native bird to its former range and increase its main population on the western slope of Mauna Kea.

The report, published by the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, was the work of many, including ABC's Chris Farmer.



For more information, see:
<http://bit.ly/1B7LZF8>

Restoring Woodlands in the Central Hardwoods Region

Bird conservationists and scientists from the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture, Mark Twain National Forest, and Missouri Department of Natural Resources have teamed up to develop an example of woodland restoration to benefit target bird species of concern.

This new management paradigm was presented at the September 2014 Bird Conservation Alliance meeting, with presentations on topics ranging from the role of

fire in forming natural plant communities to the varieties of natural communities in these states.

Todd Jones-Ferrand, Central Hardwoods Joint Venture Science Coordinator, discussed forest restoration now underway in the Ozarks, and ABC's Peter Dieser, who is working to restore habitat for the Golden-winged Warbler on public lands in Minnesota, were among the presenters.



See <http://bit.ly/1A6pvVk> for more on the event.

New Bird Described in Northeast Brazil Likely Extinct

In November 2014, ornithologists described a new bird species, the Cryptic Treehunter, from northeast Brazil. This bird is known from only two sites and was last observed in 2007. It has been considered critically endangered based on a population estimate of less than ten pairs.

The Cryptic Treehunter had previously been confused with another species, the Alagoas Foliage-gleaner, but closer study showed important behavioral and vocal differences between the two.

Unfortunately, additional research suggests that this species, along

with the Alagoas Foliage-gleaner and Pernambuco Pygmy-Owl, have all likely gone extinct since 2000, victims of severe loss and fragmentation of forests in northeast Brazil.

First BirdBlitz in Ecuador

In October 2014, ABC partner Fundación Jocotoco held Latin America's first "BirdBlitz" to document bird diversity and numbers at its ten reserves across Ecuador and raise funds for their continuing support.

Over the course of two 24-hour periods, counters (including ABC's Benjamin Skolnik, who counted at the Buenaventura Reserve) documented 6,865 birds of 620 species. In the end, more than \$20,000 was raised for Fundación Jocotoco.

Latest Tree-planting in Peru Tops One Million

On November 29, 2014, 57,100 *Polylepis* saplings were planted in the Vilcanota Mountains of Peru in one day, pushing the total number of trees planted here since 2002 to over one million. This remarkable effort was part of the first Queuña Raymi festival, organized by ABC's Peruvian partner Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (ECOAN.) The festival, named for the local Quechua word for *Polylepis*, was widely covered by Peruvian national media.

The trees were planted by 870 indigenous community members, with the help of a local tour company and park rangers.

These *Polylepis* forests protect a community of endemic and threatened birds, including the Royal Cinclodes, Ash-breasted Tit-Tyrant,



Planting *Polylepis* in Peru by ECOAN

and White-browed Tit-Spinetail. These forests are also vital for protecting local watersheds.

"ABC has helped ECOAN with this project for more than a decade, resulting in the creation of seven community-based Private Conservation Areas spanning more than 15,500 acres in the Vilcanota Mountains," said Daniel Lebbin, Director of International Programs at ABC.

About Bird Calls

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

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

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BE PART of the LEGACY

When we started ABC 20 years ago, we set out to be a fearless group taking on the challenges facing birds in the Americas and achieving results for their benefit. We have accomplished a lot in that time, including:

- ✓ Creating more than 65 international bird reserves;
- ✓ Protecting and improving management of millions of acres for birds here in the U.S. through ABC-led public and private partnerships;
- ✓ Removing numerous pesticides deadly to birds from the environment; and much, much more.

It took the support and dedication of many people and organizations to help create these results.

Who will help ensure ABC's continued success at making the world a better place for birds in the next 20 years and beyond?

In part, those individuals who include ABC in their estate plans and join our Legacy Circle.

Will you join with them and help us by including ABC in your estate plans? By doing so, you will help produce the best results for birds for years to come.

If you would like more information on estate planning with ABC, or if you have already made a bequest, please contact Jack Morrison, ABC Planned Giving Director, at 540-253-5780, or jmorrison@abcbirds.org.

