

JULY 2003

## Landmark Feral Cat Policy Passes in Florida

On May 30, 2003, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) unanimously passed a policy, to: "protect native wildlife from predation, disease, and other impacts presented by feral and free-ranging cats." Domestic cats in Florida prey on migratory songbirds and shorebirds as well as rare, endemic species such as Florida Scrub-Jay.

ABC spearheaded public support for the policy, along with several other conservation groups, federal and state agencies, and wildlife rehabilitators, including the American Birding Association, Defenders of Wildlife, National Audubon Society, the Ornithological Council, The Wildlife Society, FWS, Florida Department of Health, and USDA Wildlife Services.

At the Commission's hearing in Kissimmee, Linda Winter, Director of ABC's *Cats Indoors!* Campaign, and Dr. Christine Storts, DVM, of Brevard County Veterinary Association, led the testimony in support of the policy. Opposition to the proposal came from cat colony advocates, who expressed their fear that all of the state's stray and feral cats would be killed. However, the Commissioners pledged that cats would be removed from FWC lands in the most humane way possible and expressed a willingness to work with all stakeholders.

University of Florida law student, Pamela Jo Hatley, shared with the Commissioners her review of wildlife protection and animal cruelty laws. Her report, "Feral Cat Colonies in



Florida Scrub-Jay is among the many species that will benefit from the new FWC policy. Photo: FWS

Florida: The Fur and Feathers Are Flying (<http://conservation.law.ufl.edu/spotlight.html>), commissioned by FWS, presents a convincing argument that TNR violates the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Endangered Species Act, and Florida state law prohibiting abandonment and release of non-native animals. ABC encourages federal, state and local governments to enforce applicable wildlife protection and animal cruelty laws against the release of domestic cats where they impact native wildlife.

Florida was the first state to adopt ABC's *Cats Indoors!* Campaign, hiring a part-time coordinator who distributes educational materials to veterinarians, conservation groups, animal control agencies, schools, and the public. Florida has now set an example for other state wildlife agencies to follow. To view the policy visit: [www.abcbirds.org/cats/states/florida\\_policy.htm](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/states/florida_policy.htm). Contact: Linda Winter, ABC, <[lwinter@abcbirds.org](mailto:lwinter@abcbirds.org)>.

## Anacapa Island - Rats out, Murrelets Back

Following the eradication of black rats from Anacapa Island in Channel Islands National Park, California (*Bird Calls* Vol. 6, No. 2), the population of Xantus's Murrelet is showing immediate signs of recovery. Radar studies show that nesting activity has increased markedly, and two nests have been found in locations where murrelets have not bred since the 1920s. Both nests have hatchlings.

ABC, Pacific Seabird Group, the Endangered Species Recovery Council, and others intervened on behalf of the National Park Service, whose plans to eradicate black rats from Anacapa Island were blocked by a law suit brought by the Fund for Animals. The Judge ruled in favor of the Park Service, enabling Island Conservation and Ecology Group to begin the successful rat eradication.

Besides rapid improvement for the murrelet, other species such as Ashy Storm-Petrel have also benefitted from the rat removal, and the overall island ecology appears greatly enhanced. The number of birds visiting nesting colonies has more than doubled in some cases, and other Channel Island endemics such as deer mice, side-blotched lizards, and slender salamanders have also begun to rebound.

For more information on the rat removal project visit: [www.nps.gov/chis/naturalresources/airp.html](http://www.nps.gov/chis/naturalresources/airp.html). Contact: Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <[gww@abcbirds.org](mailto:gww@abcbirds.org)>.

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Abbreviations

ABC: American Bird Conservancy  
 FWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
 NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service  
 EPA: Environmental Protection Agency  
 USGS: U.S. Geological Survey  
 IUCN - World Conservation Union

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# Horseshoe Crab Conservation Success Benefits Shorebirds

The Horseshoe Crab Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission voted in June 2003, to dramatically reduce horseshoe crab landings in New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland. The vote was a result of concern over declining Delaware Bay crab populations and associated declines in populations of shorebirds that rely on the crab eggs to fuel their northerly migration (*Bird Calls* Vol. 6, No. 3). New Jersey and Delaware agreed to cap landings at 150,000 crabs each (a drop of about 50 percent), and Maryland agreed to a 170,000-crab cap. Equally significant was a ban on all harvesting from May 1 through June 7, the most critical time for crab spawning and shorebird feeding. This is being hailed as an important victory for shorebirds such as Red Knot and Semipalmated Sandpipers, which congregate in the Delaware Bay in vast numbers each spring. New Jersey has adopted their new quotas, but implementation of Delaware's regulations was delayed by legal action brought by crab fishermen, and will now attempt to adopt their new rules in July. Delaware crabbers have been sweeping beaches clean of crabs and have already landed more than 266,000. A similar gold rush mentality caused Maine to close its crab harvest and legislation has been introduced to the New York State Assembly to cap that state's take at 100,000 crabs.

Most crabs are caught for use as bait in conch pots. In addition to reduced harvest quotas, the new regulations also require the use of devices such as



Shorebirds such as Dunlin will benefit from improved horseshoe crab harvesting regulations. Photo: FWS

bait-bags that cut bait use in half (*Bird Calls* Vol. 5, No. 3). Virginia already mandates the use of such bags.

ABC, National Audubon Society, New Jersey Audubon Society, and other partners have been pressing the Horseshoe Crab Management Board for stricter measures governing crab harvesting. Years of effort by these groups led to significant cuts in crab landings from 1998 to 2002, but as concerns over the decline in shorebirds increased, reported harvests went up in 2002 by 25% to 1.25 million crabs. The Shorebird Technical Committee Report to the Horseshoe Crab Management Board confirmed declines in Red Knots and Semipalmated Sandpipers, and recommended reductions in bait landings for New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. The report noted that a 75% reduction in landings would be required to insure some crab population growth. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad at <gww@abcbirds.org>.

**The next meeting  
 of the ABC  
 Policy Council is  
 at 10am on  
 November 13, in  
 Washington, D.C.**

## Opposition Grows to Cormorant Slaughter

More than 10,000 citizens filed comments on the proposed FWS plan to allow the boundless slaughter of Double-crested Cormorants. More than 90 percent of the comments were opposed to the FWS proposal that would let 24 states begin killing unlimited numbers of cormorants without permits or prior review if the birds are "injurious to a public resource." The proposal would also allow USDA's Wildlife Services to kill unlimited numbers of cormorants at winter roosts in 12 fish-farming states, without permits, and without requiring non-lethal methods to be tried first. More than 47,000 Double-crested Cormorants are killed annually under current FWS permits, but this figure could rise dramatically if the proposal is adopted.

FWS justified their plan to relinquish control of cormorant take saying: "the Service trusts [Wildlife Services]



Double-crested Cormorant. Photo: Clipart.com

personnel to decide which damage management techniques are most appropriate in a given situation." Ornithologists do not share that trust and have resoundingly condemned the FWS proposal, citing a lack of sound science. ABC spearheaded a letter of comment against the order, co-signed by 21 national and regional organizations. ABC also used its action alert system, *BirdWire*, to generate many of the 10,000 comments from the general public.

Some of the strongest criticism came from scientists with the American Ornithologists' Union who stated in their official letter of opposition:

"Every study for about a century has shown that cormorants do not impact significantly the demography of desirable fish, except at very small scales . . . The results of peer-reviewed studies show no significant impact by cormorant predation on desirable fish . . . The evidence does not support control at winter roosts as being effective or having the desired consequences, and we believe that it should not be allowed." They went on to accuse FWS of treating perceptions and sociology in the same way as scientific findings, confusing economics with natural history, and disregarding geographic scale.

ABC and its partners have supported a science-based approach to the cormorant issue. Conservationists are hopeful that the final FWS ruling meets their concerns, and that cormorants are not made scapegoats for fishery declines caused by other factors. Such a depredation order and roost controls, without direct approval and permitting by FWS, would set a dangerous precedent for all fish-eating birds. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad <gww@abcbirds.org>.

## On the Trail of Birds in Oregon

The Oregon Cascades Birding Trail was officially launched on International Migratory Bird Day, 2003, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Songbird Celebration in Portland, OR. The trail, a self-guided tour featuring 184 sites along more than 1,000 miles of scenic roadways, is designed to showcase the birds and the beauty of the Cascade Mountains. Site descriptions in the newly published trail guide provide information for the casual or dedicated birder to see species, such as Hermit Warbler, Chestnut-backed Chickadee,



White-headed Woodpecker can be seen on the Oregon Cascades Birding Trail. Photo: FWS

Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck, Great Gray Owl, and White-headed Woodpecker.

In an effort uncommon among birding trails, corporate, local business, and tourism sponsorship has played a significant role in funding the project. Leupold & Stevens Inc., a fourth-generation, family-owned, Oregon

sports optics company, became a title sponsor along with the National Forest Foundation and ABC. Additionally, several county tourism entities and local small businesses have contributed funding

Birding trails are important tools to enhance the public's awareness and appreciation of nature and birds. Public enjoyment of these trails can translate into support for bird conservation, while also providing important local economic benefits and educational, and recreational opportunities.

To download the trail guide and access more information on the trail, visit: [www.oregonbirdingtrails.org](http://www.oregonbirdingtrails.org). *Contact:* Bob Altman, ABC, <alt8bird@aol.com>.

## Timber Industry Prompts Review of Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet

FWS has begun five-year reviews of two threatened birds, the Northern Spotted Owl and the Marbled Murrelet. The reviews will assess whether new information warrants a change in the Endangered Species Listing status of either. The Northern Spotted Owl was listed in 1990 and quickly became the focus of forest intense debates in the Northwest, with some 6.9 million acres of National Forest land designated as Critical Habitat for the species. The Marbled Murrelet was listed in 1992.

“The purpose of the reviews is to ensure that the species have the appropriate level of protection under the Endangered Species Act,” said Dave Wesley, Acting Regional Director of the Service’s Pacific Region. “Reviewing the latest information will also lead to better management and improved conservation of the species.” However, support for the reviews by



The Northern Spotted Owl is to receive an Endangered Species Listing review along with the Marbled Murrelet. Photo: Clipart.com

the timber industry, combined with their stated goal of reducing Critical Habitat designations for both species, has raised suspicions in the conservation community. Indeed, while required by the Endangered Species Act, five-year reviews of the more than 1,200 plants and animals listed by the federal government are rarely completed. The owl and murrelet reviews are only being undertaken as a result of timber industry pressure that culminated in legal action. A coalition of ten environmental groups, including Portland Audubon Society, Seattle Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society, represented by Earthjustice, tried to challenge the suit,

but the government swiftly settled out of court and agreed to the reviews.

Most Spotted Owl populations in the U.S. are declining rapidly. Murrelet populations are less well documented but are also thought to be declining range-wide. Part of the FWS review on the Marbled Murrelet will focus on whether the Pacific Northwest population qualifies as a “Distinct Population Segment.” Timber proponents are advocating that the Alaska/Canada population is genetically indistinct from the more numerous population in Washington/Oregon and that the species should therefore not qualify for listing. However, a prior court ruling clearly stated that population segments were irrelevant in the murrelet’s case because the species is declining throughout a significant portion of its range.

An announcement is expected from FWS in December, which would trigger a formal rule-making process, including public review and comment. Earthjustice has pledged to challenge any change in listing status of either species. *Contact:* Joan Jewett, FWS, (503) 231-6121, or Kristen Boyles, Earthjustice, <kboyles@earthjustice.org>.

## Mute Swan Removal Blocked

Animal rights groups have temporarily blocked efforts by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to remove up to 1,500 introduced Mute Swans from the Chesapeake Bay. ABC, National Audubon Society, Maryland Ornithological Society, and others supported the removal because of the ecological damage caused by the exploding Mute Swan population. More than 100 birds had been taken

under a FWS permit when the Fund for Animals filed a suit in federal court. DNR subsequently halted its control efforts until completion of an Environmental Assessment. Subsequently, another group has filed a federal suit contesting the efforts of other states to control populations of the swan by lethal methods. Egg addling/oiling has been shown to be ineffective in decreasing populations.

From five escaped swans in 1962, the Chesapeake Bay population has grown to more than 4,000 birds today. This large, aggressive swan is blamed for the disappearance of the last breeding colonies of Black Skimmer

and Least Tern in Maryland. Mute Swans are also believed to pose a significant threat to the well-being of the wintering Chesapeake Bay Tundra Swan population and may affect other waterfowl. The swan has a voracious appetite for submerged aquatic vegetation. Using past studies, the Maryland Mute Swan Task Force Report and Recommendations concluded that the current swan population has the potential to consume more than 12 million pounds of Bay vegetation annually. Localized depletion of vegetation has already been documented. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad <gww@abcbirds.org>.

## Birds & Budgets Facts & Figures

The House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee marked up the Fiscal Year '04 Interior Appropriations bill on June 18, 2003, including some important funding for bird conservation.

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grants (used to fund migratory bird conservation in the U.S. Latin America, and the Caribbean) were increased to the fully authorized level of \$5 million, \$2 million above the FY '03 enacted level and the President's request for '04. The Senate mark-up is imminent, and conservationists are pressing for the full \$5 million.

Funding for the Division of Migratory Bird Management, the

division of FWS charged with conserving migratory birds in the U.S., was also increased \$2.424 million above last year's enacted level, the same as the President's request. However, the subcommittee only provided \$24.56 million for the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund (which provides funds for wetland conservation in the U.S.), almost \$14 million below last year's level and \$25 million below the President's request - a major blow for wetland conservation.

State Wildlife Grants (CARA-Lite) were increased to \$75 million, \$10.4 million more than last year and \$15 million more than the President's request. The Teaming with Wildlife Coalition and other conservation groups have been seeking \$125 million and will continue to press for that amount on the Senate side. U.S. Geological Survey Cooperative

research units (partnerships between the USGS, state natural resource agencies, host universities, and the Wildlife Management Institute to conduct research on environmental issues) were funded at \$250,000 more than the President's request, at \$14.4 million, but still down \$500,000 from last year. USGS Biological Resources Division was funded at \$134.56 million, \$2.43 million above last year and \$527,000 above the President's request. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

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## Canada's Boreal Forest Critical for U.S. Birds

A new report, based on an unprecedented compilation of bird census data from across Canada and the U.S., has revealed that one in three birds across North America owes its existence to Canada's boreal forest. The report, *The Importance of Canada's Boreal Forest to Landbirds* by Dr. Peter Blancher of Bird Studies Canada, was commissioned by the Boreal Songbird Initiative (BSI) in conjunction with the Canadian Boreal Initiative. It concludes that as many as five billion of North America's warblers, thrushes, sparrows, hawks, woodpeckers, and other birds migrate each year from the Boreal Forest.

From the report, it is clear that the



Typical boreal forest. Photo: NASA

fate of much of the continent's birdlife depends on the future of this vast northern landscape, which stretches across the top of the continent from Alaska to Newfoundland. It covers 2.3 million square miles and offers some of the best opportunity left in the world for large-scale forest ecosystem conservation. Yet the boreal forest is under increasing pressure from development, much of it driven by U.S. consumption. The U.S. is the largest user of Canada's oil and gas, and the

U.S. purchased \$20 billion worth of Canadian forest products in 2001, much of it ending up in junk mail and catalogs. More than 30% of the Canadian boreal forest has already been allocated for resource development for logging, agricultural conversion, oil and gas exploration and production, mining, and hydropower.

Over the last year, several new groups and initiatives have been created to ensure boreal ecosystem conservation. BSI is a new project dedicated to educating birdwatchers and conservationists throughout the U.S. about the importance of the boreal forest to migratory birds, and how they can help conserve it. BSI is part of an emerging network of organizations including ABC, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council. To obtain a copy of the report, and for more information visit: [www.borealbirds.org](http://www.borealbirds.org) or [www.borealcanada.ca](http://www.borealcanada.ca).

## Toothfish Advance May Help Seabirds

New developments in the fight to control pirate fishing for Patagonian toothfish (marketed in the U.S. as “Chilean Sea Bass”) may help to reduce the number of seabirds hooked and killed on longlines in the southern oceans. Over the past six years, at least 700,000 seabirds, including 144,000 albatrosses and 378,000 White-chinned Petrels, have been killed in the pirate toothfish fishery. Few if any pirate vessels use seabird avoidance measures. Many of these species are now considered threatened with extinction as a result of this and other longline mortality (*Bird Calls* Vol. 5, No. 3).

The Antarctica Project estimates that nearly 40,000 tons of illegal toothfish were caught in the southern oceans in 2002, seriously jeopardizing the fishery and the toothfish itself. In 2001, the National Environmental Trust and The Antarctica Project (TAP) launched a campaign: “Take a

Pass on Chilean Sea Bass,” aimed at convincing chefs from top restaurants to remove the fish from their menus, thus helping to reduce demand. The restaurant industry accounts for 70 percent of all toothfish sold in the U.S., and U.S. consumption accounts for approximately 33 percent of the global market. The “Pass on the Bass” campaign has enlisted more than 1,000 restaurants in major U.S. cities to date.

This May, NMFS introduced new regulations aimed at curbing the illegal fishery by banning the import of toothfish caught in known pirate fishing hotspots in the Southern Ocean. The new regulations also include a requirement that NMFS approve all shipments of more than 4,400 pounds



Patagonian toothfish on sale as Chilean seabass in a Washington D.C. market. Photo: ABC

of toothfish before landing at port, and that foreign importers designate a U.S. agent. These measures supplement the current “Catch Documentation Scheme” that has been widely criticized as unenforceable due to the lack of monitoring and ease of falsification. Environmental groups still consider these new regulations insufficient however, and continue to press forward with their consumer-based campaign.

An alliance of legal toothfish fishing vessels has also recently offered a \$100,000 reward for information leading to the capture of toothfish pirates, and an international telephone hotline has been set up that can be accessed from 15 countries and can take toll-free calls in five languages. The “Coalition of Legal Toothfish Operators” described the pirate fishery as “syndicated crime on a global scale.” Australia is in the process of sinking a confiscated, illegal toothfish vessel, the *South Tomi*, and the Republic of Seychelles has recently revoked toothfish licenses to three nationally flagged vessels over pirate fishing concerns. *Contact:* Andrea Kavanagh, NET, (202) 251-2802, or Beth Clark, TAP, (202) 234-2480.

## Ted Turner Hosts Rare Parrot

On May 7, 2003, a guest at Ted Turner’s Armendaris Ranch in New Mexico found a Thick-billed Parrot in a small grove of pine trees next to the ranch buildings. If this is a wild bird, it is the first definitive, documented record of this species in the U.S. in decades. The species nests only in the Sierra Madre Occidental of western Mexico, and is listed as Endangered under IUCN-World Conservation Union criteria. The last large influx of Thick-bills was in 1918-19, and since that time, the species’ population

has declined rapidly range-wide due to logging practices in Mexico.

The Armendaris Ranch bird, though fully feathered and behaving normally, has sparked speculation as to its origin. The area where the bird was found lies at 4,800 feet in the Chihuahuan desert, some 200 miles from the nearest regularly occurring, wild Thick-bills in northern Mexico. Although it is possible that the bird escaped from captivity, there is no evidence of this. It is more likely to be a wild bird, or potentially a survivor of the Arizona Game and Fish Department reintroduction program that took place in Arizona between 1986 and 1993. A group of reintroduced birds was seen

flying in the direction of New Mexico early in the program, and sporadic reports from the Arizona-Mexico border area since 1993 are thought to have been of birds from this group. Ted Turner has given permission for birdwatchers to visit the area to see the parrot, which is still present at press time (though it was absent for a period of three days at one point). To date, birders from 30 states and 5 countries have made the pilgrimage. The ranch manager has requested that visitors do not arrive prior to 8:00 a.m. and check in with the ranch office before searching for the bird. *Contact:* Tom Waddell, Armendaris Ranch, (505) 894-6782 for visitation details.

## Flightless Grebe Plummets

The last of the world's truly flightless grebes is undergoing a severe population crash. The species is likely headed for extinction unless action is taken to control gill-net fishing on Lake Titicaca and surrounding lakes in southern Peru and northern Bolivia. Lake Titicaca is the world's largest high mountain lake, with a surface area of 3,200 square miles. It straddles the Peru-Bolivia border at an altitude of 12,500 feet. Survey results along the Peruvian side of the lake have shown a recent decline of 75 percent in the grebe population there. Population declines have also been noted on lakes Apapa and Umayo, but the Bolivian lakes Uru-uru and Poopó remain without a complete recent census. The population has crashed from a maximum of around 10,000 birds in the 1970s and 1980s, to a current maximum population assessment of 750 birds. Until recently, the Titicaca Grebe was not even considered Vulnerable, but has now been listed as Endangered, and may yet be upgraded to Critically Endangered unless some improvement in its conservation is seen.

Two other species of grebe, not strictly flightless but extremely poor fliers, are both listed as Critically Endangered, and also confined to high altitude lakes in the Neotropics. The Atitlan Grebe (or Giant Pied-billed Grebe) is now widely considered to be extinct, and the Junín Flightless Grebe is confined to Lake Junín, also in Peru. ABC is providing support to Fundación Armonia to survey the Titicaca Grebe's remaining habitat in the hope that a population that is not subject to fishing pressure can be located and subsequently protected. *Contact:* George Wallace, ABC, <gwallace@abcbirds.org>.

## Red Siskin Discovered and Protected in Guyana

A paper published in the April 2003 issue of *The Auk*, the journal of the American Ornithologists' Union, has unveiled one of the best-kept secrets in international bird conservation. On April 12, 2000, a team of researchers led by Mark B. Robbins of the University of Kansas and Michael J. Braun of the Smithsonian Institution made a stunning discovery: a Red Siskin population in southwestern Guyana, approximately 600 miles from the nearest known population.

The siskin once occurred widely from eastern Colombia through northern Venezuela, but its numbers have been greatly reduced by intense, illegal trapping and it now persists in small, isolated populations consisting of no more than a few hundred individuals each. As a result, the bird is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List and by FWS. It is also listed in Appendix I by CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), which recognizes that the species is threatened with extinction, and prohibits international trade.

The report details that the new population appears to be larger - perhaps as many as a few thousand individuals - than any known extant population, offering new hope for the species' survival in the wild. The discovery remained undisclosed for three years to enable the Guyanese government to officially protect the bird. A petition to list the siskin as an endangered species in Guyana was submitted to the Office of the President by the Guyana Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), with follow



Red Siskin. Photo: Mike Braun.

up by the Wildlife Division through the Wildlife Management and Scientific Authorities. Thanks to Guyana's EPA and Wildlife Division actions and the combined support of an international coalition of concerned groups, including ABC, Conservation International, the Smithsonian Institution, Bushnell Sports Optics, American Federation of Aviculture, the National Aviary, Rupununi Conservation Society, Rupununi Development Corporation, the University of Guyana, and the University of Kansas.

In May 2003, the Guyanese government added the Red Siskin to Schedule III of its Species Protection Regulations. Schedule III contains native Guyanese plants and animals that are considered threatened with extinction. Under these regulations, trade in the siskin is now prohibited except for zoos and scientific purposes. The exact location of the new population is being kept secret to prevent trapping, and several groups, including ABC, are working to secure the future of the bird through on-the-ground conservation efforts that combine strict controls on trapping and protected area designation. *Contact:* George Wallace, ABC, <gwallace@abcbirds.org>.

## Privatization Plan: Precedent for Refuges?

ABC and others are attempting to block plans to turn over management functions at the National Bison Range (NBR) and related National Wildlife Refuges to private interests. The U.S. Department of Interior is negotiating an agreement to contract management functions on 20,000 acres of land that includes NBR and its affiliated Ninepipe and Pablo Refuges, and other lands to the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) in Montana. Several groups, including ABC, have written letters to key Interior officials and Congressional members detailing concerns over such a turnover.

Because of the national implications, ABC suggested that a public hearing be held in Washington, D.C.

A large portion of the NBR consists of native Palouse Prairie. Elk, deer, pronghorn, black bear, and coyote share the range with 350 to 450 bison. Ninepipe Refuge was established by Congress to function "as a refuge and breeding ground for native birds." More than 200 species of birds are found in the region including FWS-designated Species of Conservation Concern, such as Northern Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's Phalarope, Short-eared Owl, Black Swift, Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Brewer's Sparrow. ABC is demanding that FWS, with the input of all stakeholders, including the tribe, first complete a comprehensive

Conservation Plan for the lands before any consideration is given of a management change. Compatibility issues still unresolved include the tribe's grazing and farming practices, expansion of a stock car racetrack onto refuge lands, gravel pits, and placement of overhead power lines.

Conservationists are concerned about the precedent of taking management away from wildlife professionals and passing it to private entities. The Department of Interior has listed all National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska and 18 other refuges nationally, plus 34 National Parks as potential management takeover targets for Native American tribes. 2003 is the centennial year for the National Wildlife Refuge system. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

## ABC Pressures EPA Over Carbofuran

ABC and members of the National Pesticide Coalition recently submitted a letter to EPA, signed by 61 organizations from around the country, urging EPA to deny requests from Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas for emergency exemptions to use the liquid ("flowable") form of the highly toxic pesticide carbofuran on up to 3.4 million acres of cotton.

In the 1990s almost all uses of the granular form of carbofuran were withdrawn from the market due to its high toxicity to wildlife. FWS wrote multiple letters to EPA urging cancellation of all formulations of carbofuran, including flowable. They stated, "There are no known circumstances under which carbofuran can be used without killing birds." Birds documented as having been



ABC is fighting the application by four southern states to use flowable carbofuran on cotton fields. Photo: National Institute of Health.

killed by carbofuran include many species that are protected under the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, yet EPA has not consulted with the USFWS regarding these exemptions.

EPA has been granting similar "emergency" exemptions to these states for more than five years even though safer, equally effective, chemical and non-chemical alternatives are available. "Carbofuran has not been deemed safe for use on cotton because of its extreme risk to wildlife. The states are using the

emergency exemption process as a loophole for obtaining this extremely hazardous pesticide for routine use," said Dr. Patti Bright, Director of ABC's Pesticide and Birds Campaign. "This is a particularly important issue because EPA is reviewing all formulations of carbofuran to decide if the substance should continue to be registered in the U.S."

If these emergency exemptions are granted, the impact on wildlife could be devastating because of 1) the vast amount of acreage involved, 2) carbofuran's persistence in the environment (up to 120 days), and 3) the timing and location of the applications, which could potentially impact millions of birds migrating south during late summer and early fall along the central flyway. Earlier this year, ABC and other conservation groups successfully blocked an attempt to grant an emergency exemption request from Louisiana to use the granular form of carbofuran on rice. *Contact:* Dr. Patti Bright, ABC, <pbright@abcbirds.org>.



## Critical Habitat in Critical Situation

According to a FWS press release, “the Endangered Species Act is broken.” The phrase is being used with regard to the controversial system of Critical Habitat (CH) designation for species protected under the Act, which requires the Service to allocate areas essential to the survival of Endangered or Threatened species. According to FWS, Critical Habitat is only of “marginal value” in a few cases - those where it covers “unoccupied,” federally-owned land. Rather than automatically protecting land (in the same way a refuge would), designation of CH triggers a consultation process, which, argues FWS, usually occurs anyway because a species is listed as Endangered or Threatened. It costs the same amount (\$400,000 on average) to define CH for one species already included under the Act as it does to add two entirely new species to the Act.

However, following multiple lawsuits over the past six years, by such groups as the Center for Biological Diversity, FWS has been forced to pursue CH designations for species such as Spectacled and Steller’s Eiders,



The debate continues over CH Designations for endangered species. Birds recently apportioned CH include the California Gnatcatcher. Photo: USGS.

Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, and California Gnatcatcher. In the process, it has used up a substantial portion of its available budget for the endangered species program. “We are simply unable to run a scientifically prioritized system that addresses the most urgent needs first,” said FWS spokesperson, Megan Durham, of the lawsuits.

FWS says that rather than relying on mandated CH regulations to protect essential habitat, it favors cooperative measures such as Safe Harbor Agreements, Private Stewardship Grants, and Habitat Conservation

Plans. Safe Harbor has been used to aid in Hawaiian Goose reintroduction on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, and 113 Private Stewardship Grants have been awarded this year totaling more than \$9.4 million to individuals and groups undertaking conservation projects on private lands in 43 states.

FWS is due to run out of money in its FY ‘03 budget for CH designations in July, and has asked Congress to shift funds from other endangered species programs to cover the shortfall. The Service is now advocating a CH system whereby no deadlines are imposed, thereby eliminating lawsuits. This has set off alarm bells in the conservation community as being tantamount to eradicating CH designations altogether. CH proponents believe that a system without mandated deadlines will be a system where designations are never completed.

There are currently 280 species proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act and 13 CH lawsuits on 31 species pending. In addition, several lawsuits have been filed on behalf of industry, farming, or other private groups against CH designations already enacted by FWS. *Contact:* Megan Durham, FWS, (202) 208-5634.

## West Nile Migrates South

The first cases of West Nile virus were confirmed in the Caribbean this spring, with the discovery of pathogen-specific antibodies in birds in the Dominican Republic. This would seem to indicate that migratory birds have carried the virus from the eastern U.S., where incidents of West Nile have been steadily accelerating for the past four years.

Testing positive were Hispaniola Lizard Cuckoo, Red-legged Thrush, and Ruddy Quail Dove, but of particular concern to biologists is the Critically Endangered and declining Ridgway’s Hawk. This species is now confined to a small corner of the island, the same area where West Nile virus was discovered. In the U.S., hawks have been some of the hardest hit birds after the corvids. As yet, no Ridgway’s Hawks have been trapped and tested.

Despite the presence of West Nile-specific antibodies in the Dominican Republic, however, no sick or dying birds have yet been found, leading

some scientists to speculate that there may be cross immunity in birds with other flaviviruses, or that West Nile has been on the island long enough to promote West Nile-specific immunity in native species.

The discovery of West Nile in the Dominican Republic coincides with the first reports of the disease in Mexico. Alerts have been issued by the municipalities of Lampazos, San Pedro, Pesqueria, and Los Aldamas, where dead birds have been discovered that yielded positive results for West Nile. *Contact:* Dr. Patti Bright, ABC, <pbright@abcbirds.org>.

## Cause of Mystery Deaths in Vultures Identified?

Over the past 10 years, India has lost more than 95 percent of its vulture population to a mystery cause. Three species of vulture, Indian, White-rumped, and Slender-billed are all now considered Critically Endangered, and population models predict that they could all be extinct in as little as five years.

This dramatic vulture die-off has enormous implications for the ecosystem. Vultures perform a vital function as scavengers, acting as efficient waste disposal systems particularly for livestock carcasses, which are typically left in fields with the expectation that the vultures will dispose of them. Without vultures, the carcasses can accumulate leading to increased risk of disease transmission

in both people and animals.

Researchers have been working hard to determine the cause of the vulture deaths, and, after ruling out several possibilities, many believed a new strain of virus was likely to blame. This gave rise to concerns that migrating birds might spread such a disease to Central Asia and Africa.

In a recent presentation at the Sixth World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls, held in Budapest, Hungary, Dr. Lindsay Oaks, a veterinarian and microbiologist at the Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine, presented the results of work in Pakistan that may indicate an alternative cause: an over-the-counter drug. Dr. Oaks and others discovered many of the symptoms exhibited by the vultures, including gout, mirrored symptoms found in birds poisoned by a certain class of drug. Further research led them to a cheap and widely available painkiller called diclofenac sodium (DS). In the U.S., DS is used to treat people with

rheumatoid arthritis, but in Pakistan and India it is widely used to treat a variety of ailments in livestock. It appears that the vultures are being poisoned when they eat the tissues of dead animals that had been treated with DS.

If DS is indeed the cause, the real challenge will be how to remedy the situation. Preventing the sale of DS for use in livestock could prove to be extremely difficult. It would be the equivalent of trying to stop the sale of a widely available drug like aspirin in the U.S., requiring government intervention. The drug manufacturers would almost certainly oppose such a move. Educating the public, especially farmers, about the impact of using DS on livestock will be a challenging task, but perhaps the most likely to succeed. Further research will also be required to determine if other similar drugs that farmers could use to replace DS would have the same effect. *Contact:* Dr. Lindsay Oaks, (509) 335-6044, <loaks@vetmed.wsu.edu>.

## To Save the Ogallala Aquifer, Save Playa Lakes

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV), a cooperative public-private partnership in the western prairies, has recently launched a campaign aimed at saving the Ogallala Aquifer. The aquifer underlies approximately 174,000 square miles of the Great Plains region, primarily in Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska, and has been a major water source for agricultural, municipal, and industrial use since the turn of the century.

The conservation community is well aware of the value of playa lakes - shallow depressions that collect



Playa Lakes are valuable for a vast array of bird species such as Blue-winged Teal. Photo: Clipart.com

rainfall and runoff to briefly become wetlands - to birds and other wildlife in the western Great Plains. About 200 species of birds and 40 species of mammals have been documented on playas. Millions of waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, and land birds use playas during portions of their life cycle each year. What is less well known is that playa lakes play a critical role in replenishing and protecting the

Ogallala Aquifer. Educating the public and regulators about the importance of playas for the aquifer may help conserve the lakes for the mutual benefit of birds and people.

PLJV is sharing this information with natural resource managers, landowners and policy-makers. In May 2003, PLJV Coordinator Mike Carter met with top Kansas government officials to discuss the role of playa lakes and aquifer recharge. "This is a new and emerging issue for the PLJV," Carter said. "If we can tie aquifer recharge protection to playa protection, then we can directly benefit landowners and wildlife with the same programs."

The full text of the press release sent to the local media is available at [www.pljv.org/newsarchive/release061603.html](http://www.pljv.org/newsarchive/release061603.html). *Contact* Debbie F. Slobe, PLJV, (303) 926-0777, <Debbie.slobe@pljv.org>.

## AVM Declining but Still Killing

During the migratory and wintering season of 2002-2003, two Bald Eagles submitted to the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Athens, Georgia, were diagnosed with Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy (AVM). A third Bald Eagle is suspected to have died from the disease. This is a considerable reduction from fall and winter 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, when 16 and seven Bald Eagles respectively were confirmed or suspected to have AVM. A further positive sign was that during 2002-2003, the disease was not detected in other avian species as it was during previously.

AVM was first detected in 1994, when 29 Bald Eagles were found dead during the fall and winter in southwestern Arkansas. Since then,

the disease has claimed the lives of at least 93 Bald Eagles, a large number of American Coots, several species of duck, Great Horned Owls, Killdeer, and Canada Geese in four southern states. Affected birds often appear intoxicated, frequently flying erratically or unable to fly at all. According to the USGS National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) eagles have been observed flying into rock walls, and water birds have been seen trailing a wing or leg while swimming, or lying on their backs in



Adult Bald Eagle with chicks. Photo: Clipart.com

the water.

The most consistent finding in affected birds is microscopic lesions in the brains and spinal cords. Examinations of fresh brain tissue revealed open spaces in the white matter of the central nervous system. The spaces are caused by separation of the myelin layers that surround and protect the nerves. Researchers have been able to reproduce these microscopic lesions in ducks and chickens by feeding them tissue from birds that died of AVM.

Both the cause of the disease and the route of exposure are still unknown. Wildlife experts believe that a man-made or naturally occurring toxin is the most likely cause. Tissue samples from the birds have been tested for a wide range of toxins, including those previously associated with vacuolar myelinopathy in other species, but so far no cause has been identified. *Contact:* Dr. Patti Bright, ABC, <pbright@abcbirds.org>.

## Reprieve for Mountain Top Warblers

Responding to pressure from ABC and other partners, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has put on hold its proposal to mine coal from Braden Mountain in the Koppers Coal Reserve, pending the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement. The groups are concerned with the effect the mining would have on Cerulean Warbler habitat (*Bird Calls* Vol. 7 No. 1), as well as the overall ecological effects on biodiversity of permanently altering large landforms. Royal Blue Wildlife Management Area, of which Braden Mountain is a part, was designated by ABC as a Globally

Important Bird Area, in large part because of the high densities of Cerulean Warblers that breed there. TVA estimates a potential loss of more than 100 breeding pairs of Cerulean Warblers if the Braden Mountain project were to proceed.

An official letter of comment, submitted by Tennessee Ornithological Society, ABC, Tennessee Environmental Council, and the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, called for comprehensive surveys for all federal and state listed plant and animal species, and species of conservation concern in Tennessee. This includes four species of state listed birds (Golden-winged Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Swainson's Warbler) and several other species of conservation concern occurring or potentially occurring within the boundaries of

Royal Blue WMA. The letter suggested that high quality warbler nesting areas on Royal Blue WMA be designated as "Lands Unsuitable for Mining." Breeding Bird Survey data indicates that Cerulean Warbler populations have declined by 50 percent or more in recent years and the species has been petitioned for protection under the Endangered Species Act. *Contact:* Melinda Welton, Conservation Director, Tennessee Ornithological Society, <weltonmj@earthlink.net>.

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## Battle for Vieques Begins as Navy Leaves

On May 1, 2003, the U.S. Navy officially handed over its former bombing range on the small Puerto Rican island of Vieques to the Department of the Interior, to be managed by FWS as a National Wildlife Refuge. The island is home to more than 120 bird species, many rare, such as White-cheeked Pintail, West Indian Whistling-Duck, Brown Pelican, and Caribbean Coot. In 1978, a lawsuit was brought to have the range shut down because of the damage caused to the environment by the bombing, but a federal judge ruled that the Navy was actually protecting endangered species by keeping people out. Now, with the Navy finally gone,



Brown Pelicans are under increased pressure from islanders on Vieques. Photo: Clipart.com

the threat of human encroachment is being renewed. Incidents of locals shooting Brown Pelicans from boats, using scuba equipment and spear guns to harvest marine life, and collecting eggs have already been reported.

Wildlife is being further threatened by citizen protest groups, gaining

momentum in their efforts to have the land turned over to private interests. The groups claim that the cleanup of the island's polluted areas and unexploded ordinances will not be effectively or efficiently carried out by the federal government, but many believe that the groups' real motive is to gain access to prime beach real estate for development.

Now encompassing some 15,500 acres, the island is one of the largest refuges in the Caribbean, and includes beaches used by threatened and endangered sea turtles for nesting, subtropical dry forest, mangrove lagoons, salt flats, and bays noted for their bioluminescence. The Navy's former 900-acre Live Impact Area, on the tip of the eastern end of the island, was designated as a Wilderness Area and closed to public access by an act of Congress. *Contact:* Brian & Sue Robertson, Vieques, (787) 741-0865, <briansue@coqui.net>.

## New Jersey *Cats Indoors!* Campaign Launched

Thanks to a generous grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, a statewide New Jersey *Cats Indoors!* Campaign was launched earlier this year by New Jersey Audubon Society (NJAS) and ABC. Outreach to key constituencies such as New Jersey members of the American Veterinary Medical Association has already begun, with materials that include a *Cats Indoors!* brochure and a new poster, endorsed by the Association of Avian Veterinarians and the Alliance of Veterinarians for the Environment. Campaign materials have also been sent to 250 animal shelters and 2,200

Environmental Commissioners in the state. Additional outreach is being accomplished through nine NJAS centers, public nature centers, and other Audubon Society chapters. A co-branded Web page has also been created and posted on the NJAS Web site at: [www.njaudubon.org/Conservation/CatsIndoors](http://www.njaudubon.org/Conservation/CatsIndoors).

"Located at the crossroads of migration, and home to several threatened and endangered species of birds, New Jersey is a logical place for reducing the ecological paw print cats have on the environment," said Brian Vernachio, the program's Campaign Manager. Mr. Vernachio is focusing special attention on Cape May and other coastal areas where stray and feral cats are a problem for nesting shorebirds such as Piping Plover and Least Tern. A flyer explaining the hazards associated with cat abandonment was developed for

inclusion in welcome packets to 7,000 summer renters in the popular vacation spot. For more information, contact Brian Vernachio, (609) 897-9400, <brianv@njaudubon.org>.

**Take the *Cats Indoors!* Pledge and Sign Up to be a *Cats Indoors!* Activist.**  
Visit  
[www.abcbirds.org/cats](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats)



## Bayer Withdraws Fenthion, Florida Birds to Benefit

The chemical and drug manufacturer Bayer announced in March 2003 that it intends to voluntarily withdraw the pesticide, fenthion, from the market. Fenthion has been at the center of a major ABC Pesticides and Birds campaign following the deaths of several species of bird on Marco Island in Florida, where it is used to kill mosquitoes. Included in the list of birds killed was an Endangered Piping Plover. ABC pressured EPA to cancel the pesticide based on the extreme toxicity of fenthion to birds, and the existence of safer and equally effective alternatives. In October 2002, ABC, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Florida

Wildlife Federation initiated a lawsuit against the agency for violations of the Endangered Species Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act in the bird deaths on Marco Island, between October 1998 and August 1999 (*Bird Calls* Vol. 6, No. 3). One of the complainants demands was that Bayer be required to carry out avian safety testing, and in its letter to EPA, Bayer cited a reluctance to complete these tests as one reason for their withdrawal.

"This is a very important victory for birds and for the pesticide and wildlife movement as a whole," said Dr. Patti Bright, Director of ABC's Pesticides and Birds Campaign, and spokesperson for the National Pesticide Coalition, a consortium of 20 groups working for improved restrictions on pesticides to protect wildlife, the environment, and human and worker health. "We have been adamant that this pesticide must be

cancelled, and it is gratifying that Bayer has elected to do the right thing."

Under the proposed withdrawal, use of the pesticide will still be permitted until the end of November 2004. However, EPA has agreed to increased label restrictions for the months that the chemical remains available. This will help to protect the largest wintering flock of Great Lakes Piping Plovers and other birds such as Dunlin, Black Skimmer, and Sanderling in Collier and other Florida counties. ABC will also attempt to safeguard against the possibility that Bayer will sell the license to manufacture fenthion to a local Florida mosquito control district that could then begin producing fenthion on its own. Meanwhile, the lawsuit is in negotiation between the plaintiffs, the EPA, and the Department of Justice. *Contact:* Dr. Patti Bright, ABC, (540) 253-5780, <pbright@abcbirds.org>.

## Wild Peregrine Chicks May Go to Falconers

In April 2003, the FWS Division of Migratory Bird Management released a Draft Revised Environmental Assessment on the take of wild Peregrine chicks in the western U.S. for falconry. The total Peregrine population west of 100° longitude has grown ten percent since 1998, and FWS now believes that a take of one in twenty western Peregrine chicks will slow population growth by just 0.5 to 0.7 percent.

Following a precipitous decline, the American (eastern) race of the Peregrine Falcon was classified as endangered in 1970 (prior to the passage of the Endangered Species Act), but has since sustained a long-



Juvenile Peregrine Falcon. Photo: FWS

term recovery following the ban on DDT. This pesticide and its metabolites caused eggshell thinning that frequently led to eggs breaking during incubation. By 1998, the total U.S. population had rebounded to 1,650 pairs, and after substantial public consultation, the American race was removed from the Endangered Species List a year later (*Bird Calls* Vol. 3, No. 2). Today 82 percent of all Peregrines

nesting in the U.S. occur in western states (the western Peregrine was never listed).

All Peregrines are still protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which allows for permitted take for uses such as falconry. An initial Environmental Assessment on falconry use was released by FWS in February 2000, followed by a finding of no significant impact in spring 2001. FWS later acknowledged that this was based on a potentially erroneous estimate of the minimum breeding age of Peregrines, which had been calculated at age two years instead of the more usual three. The new model is based on this latter age but still presents the same conclusion regarding allowable take. Comments on the new assessment were due to FWS by June 30, 2003. A final Environmental Assessment and finding will follow. *Contact:* George Allen, FWS, (703) 358-1714.

## Birds in Brief

### Reprieve for Humbolt Penguin Reserve:

The Chilean government has formally decided against allowing private tourism development on Isla Damas, part of the National Humboldt Penguin Reserve. ABC had sent a formal letter opposing the proposed development (*Bird Calls* Vol. 7, No. 1) because of potential detrimental effects to several bird species including the Endangered Peruvian Diving-Petrel and globally Vulnerable Humboldt Penguin. Although Isla Damas has been officially ruled out of future development plans, doubt still exists as to the extent to which development on neighboring Isla Gaviota (outside the reserve) may be pursued. *Contact:* George Wallace, ABC, <gwallace@abcbirds.org>.

**MBTA Violation Punished:** A Maryland man has been fined \$3,000 after he drove over a Black Skimmer nest on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, Virginia, killing two chicks. David Myers drove past beach closure signs and a refuge employee who attempted to stop him from entering the area. He had been warned the day before that the area would be closed to beach vehicles pending a biologist's examination of the skimmer nests, leading prosecutors to push for a severe penalty. He was charged and convicted of taking a migratory shorebird without a permit and trespassing, both Class B misdemeanors. Refuge administrators said they were pleased with the court's ruling.

### Arsonist Convicted Under ESA:

Paul James Valdez, a supervisory census surveyor for the Mexican Spotted Owl Program has been found guilty of arson for starting the Lower Cooley Fire on June 2, 2002, and

violating the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by the attempted take of the threatened Mexican Spotted Owl. Valdez pled guilty to the arson charge and was ordered to serve 30 months in prison and to pay a fine of \$15,700 in restitution. He also pled guilty to a Class A misdemeanor under the Endangered Species Act, and will serve an additional twelve months in prison for that offense. *Contact:* Tom MacKenzie, FWS, (404) 679-7291; Victoria Fox, FWS, (505) 248-6455.

### Po'ouli Capture Plan Postponed:

The recent attempt to capture the three remaining Po'oulis on the island of Maui (*Bird Calls* Vol.7, No.1) was hampered by weather, and researchers will now try for a capture program later in the summer or fall. The species may now be the world's rarest bird, and as the three known individuals do not have overlapping home ranges, the only hope to save the bird is a captive-breeding program. The capture program is being conducted by the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project run by the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), San Diego Zoo, and FWS. *Contact:* Jolie Wanger, DLNR, (808) 587-4188.

**Aplomado Releases Continue:** The Peregrine Fund has transported 12 more Aplomado Falcon chicks to release sites at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and South Padre Island, Texas (both ABC-designated Globally Important Bird Areas). Having been extirpated from the U.S. by 1950, the species now numbers 38 pairs in Texas, all resulting from a reintroduction program that commenced in 1995. Though extremely rare in the U.S., the Aplomado Falcon is widespread, though generally uncommon, in Mexico and Central and South America. *Contact:* Jeff Cilek, The Peregrine Fund, (208) 362-3811.

**Condors May Have Chick:** Three pairs of reintroduced California Condors nesting in Arizona have produced eggs, and although two nests failed, a third may now contain a young condor. The nest known as "Salt Creek" lies in an inaccessible part of the Grand Canyon, and so visual confirmation of the chick is impossible. The behavior of the adult birds however, seems to indicate that a hatchling, perhaps as much as three weeks old, may be present. If so, the bird would likely fledge in October. There are presently 35 free-flying condors in Arizona. At press time there is also still a surviving condor nestling in California. Last year, three nestlings that hatched there died at around five months of age. Breeding failure is common among inexperienced condor pairs, and these early failures, while tragic in themselves, may indicate that a success is just around the corner. The reintroduction program involves a range of partners including the Peregrine Fund, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and FWS. *Contact:* Jeff Cilek, The Peregrine Fund, (208) 362-3811.

### Bird Migration Comes to the Big Screen:

The Academy Award nominated film *Winged Migration* is opening in theaters around the country to critical acclaim. Produced by the makers of the insect documentary, *Microcosmos*, the film has been hailed as a "technologically and aesthetically riveting documentary" by Time Magazine. Some 590 miles of film were shot by 450 filmmakers in 40 countries to produce 90 minutes of aerial and close-up footage of bird migration around the globe. Despite the accolades it has received in the nation's press, the movie lost its Oscar bid for best documentary to Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine*. Visit [www.wingedmigration.org](http://www.wingedmigration.org).

## FWS Prefers Continued Swan Hunt

FWS issued a January 15, 2003, finding that a petition to list the Tri-State (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming) Area Trumpeter Swan flock under the Endangered Species Act provided insufficient information that the flock was a 'Distinct Population Segment' that would be required for listing. This finding was quickly followed by a U.S. District Court ruling in favor of FWS in a case brought by a coalition of environmental and welfare groups, challenging the Service's actions to approve Trumpeter Swan quotas under the Tundra Swan hunt. Then, on April 24 (Federal Register May 16), FWS

issued a Draft Environmental Assessment proposing that the Tundra Swan hunt in Montana, Utah, and Nevada be allowed to continue with permitted incidental take of Trumpeter Swans (and also Mute Swans, should any reach that area and be killed).

Under the Assessment's preferred alternative, the hunt would continue to allow a limited number of permits (3,150) close early in hopes of avoiding late-migrating Trumpeters; and be limited geographically in the hope of minimizing Trumpeter kills. Experienced birders are frequently given pause when confronted by a lone Tundra or Trumpeter Swan. This similarity of appearance means that hunters too cannot always be sure which species they are shooting until it is too late. It is estimated that up to 60 Trumpeter Swans may have been killed this way in the Pacific Flyway

since 1994, with the majority of these shot in Montana and Utah.

The allowable take of Trumpeters began in 1995, with an annual cap of 25 birds, divided among the states. Should any state reach its quota, the season would automatically be closed. Reporting in Montana is currently required only by mail, though both Nevada and Utah require independent examinations by state wildlife officials. The public comment period on the Draft Assessment closed June 16. *Contact:* Robert Trost, Pacific Flyway Representative, (503) 231-6162.

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## Alliance for Zero Extinction Formed

The Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) is a new initiative, led by an international coalition of biodiversity conservation organizations, to identify and protect the last remaining habitats for the world's most threatened species. The Alliance aims to stem species extinctions, beginning with terrestrial vertebrates whose populations and distributions are best known. Other species are to be included as soon as sufficient information becomes available to assess their threat level systematically. By starting with the species that are most imperiled, the Alliance aims to create a front line of defense against extinction that will hold until broader scale conservation efforts can restore



The Araripe Manakin is representative of an AZE species in Latin America. Photo: Paul Noakes.

sufficient habitat to enable populations to rebound.

Some current AZE members are BirdLife International, The Nature Conservancy, World Parks and Conservation International. These groups are working collaboratively to identify all the places worldwide where IUCN-defined Endangered (EN) and

Critically Endangered (CR) species are confined to a single site (95 percent of their population or more), and to gain adequate protection for them. A preliminary analysis for Latin America and the Caribbean indicates that there are likely at least 120 sites that hold the last remaining population of an EN or CR bird, reptile, mammal, or amphibian species. The initial findings also indicate that more than 90 bird species that are regarded as either EN or CR in the Americas may now have the vast majority of their population confined to a single site.

The Alliance will now work with local groups to refine this analysis for publication in 2004, and begin to develop conservation plans for the sites that are identified. A website has been established at [www.zeroextinction.org](http://www.zeroextinction.org) where you can learn more, review the answers to frequently asked questions, and find the current list of AZE members. *Contact:* Mike Parr, ABC, <[mparr@abcbirds.org](mailto:mparr@abcbirds.org)>.

# Globally Important Bird Areas Book to be Published

Following a six-year research program led by ABC scientists in collaboration with hundreds of ornithologists and wildlife managers nationwide, the book "The ABC Guide to the 500 Most Important Bird Areas in the United States," will be published shortly by Random House. The book will be

available in bookstores across the country, and from online retailers. Each site is covered in detail, with information on conservation issues, priority bird species, habitats, and visitor information. The book also contains maps, illustrations of key species, and a checklist of IBAs that birders can use to keep track of sites they have visited.

The goal of ABC's IBA program is to mobilize the resources needed to safeguard these sites for future generations. Recognition is an important first step in raising

awareness among the public, managing agencies, and private owners of the special value of these sites to bird conservation. Identifying threats, conservation and management needs, and finding additional resources to manage these sites will ensure their long-term protection. In total, 60 percent of the IBAs are found on federal lands, with the remainder on state and private lands. More than six percent are owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy. *Contact:* Robert Chipley, ABC, <rchipley@abcbirds.org>.

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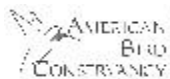
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