

AUGUST, 2001

Federal Court Decision Victory For Terns and Sound Science

On August 8, 2001, a Federal Judge in Seattle issued an order prohibiting the Army Corps of Engineers from further destroying any Caspian Tern habitat or hazing any more birds in the Columbia River estuary on the Oregon-Washington border, until completion of a comprehensive EIS. In her order, Judge Rothstein also found that the FWS erred in granting a permit under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act for taking eggs without such an EIS. Pleas to federal and state officials by ABC and other conservation groups had been ignored for the previous three years while the Corps, pushed by NMFS and state fishery agencies, continued to extirpate birds from the world's largest Caspian Tern colony. Their reasoning was that Tern predation of salmon was causing declines in the fishery and impeding recovery of listed salmon species. Noting that there was no sound science on which to base this link, conservationists emphasized the need to concentrate on proven causes of wild salmon declines - hydroelectric dams, hatchery practices, habitat loss, and over-fishing. The birds had concentrated at Rice Island because it is one of the few remaining habitat-rich and predator-free breeding sites in the Pacific



Caspian Terns are being wrongfully made scapegoats for salmon declines in the Pacific Northwest. Photo: Michael Wilhelm.

Northwest. But despite the peak in Tern numbers, chinook salmon returns to the Columbia were the highest in over 20 years. The entire Rice Island Tern colony (comprising 30% of the entire North American population, and 75% of the west coast population) was subsequently displaced to East Sand Island by means of habitat destruction and hazing, and has now been reduced from 20,000 breeding birds to 16,000. Finally, ABC, Seattle Audubon, National Audubon Society, and Defenders of Wildlife were driven to legal action to protect the Terns. Gerald Winegrad, Vice President for Policy at ABC, stated, "the Court's decision is a victory for sound science, for the Terns, and ultimately for salmon. An EIS will examine whether these birds
Continued on page 2.

Smithsonian Research Center Closure Halted

ABC and its Policy Council partners assisted in reversing a Smithsonian decision to close both the Center for Research Conservation (CRC) and the Migratory Bird Center at the National Zoo. Along with other conservation groups, ABC attended a meeting with Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA) to plan strategies to prevent the closure. ABC was able to persuade 23 international, national, and regionally-based groups to sign a joint letter objecting to the proposed closures, and sent additional letters to key Smithsonian officials, Trustees, and Congressmen. For more than 25 years CRC, based at its 3,200 acre facility in Front Royal, Virginia, has been a leading force within the zoo and conservation community. It pioneered work on Kentucky Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, and Golden-cheeked Warblers, and was the first to document threats to neotropical migratory passerines and birds of the Pacific Rim. The Smithsonian has appointed a "blue ribbon panel" to review Secretary Lawrence M. Small's "science reorganization" that still includes a proposal to close the CRC. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

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Abbreviations

ABC: American Bird Conservancy
 FWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 NMFS: National Marine Fisheries Service
 EIS: Environmental Impact Statement

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Successful Puerto Rican Parrot Program Suffers Robbery Setback

On April 22, 2001, an undisclosed number of federally Endangered Puerto Rican Parrots were stolen from the FWS captive-breeding facility in the Caribbean National Forest, Puerto Rico. The burglary is a violation of the Endangered Species Act and a \$2,500 reward for information leading to the conviction of those involved has been offered. A spokesman confirmed that FWS is following up several leads, although no parrots have yet been returned to the facility. The captive-breeding effort is the centerpiece of a recovery program for the species which was launched in 1968. Although the population reached an all-time low of just 13 birds in 1975, the species has undergone a slow but steady recovery thanks to intensive management, growing to 47 by September 18, 1989 when Hurricane Hugo struck. Despite losing half the birds during this single catastrophe, re-dedicated efforts have since increased the population to around 50 birds in the wild and 100 in captivity. Earlier this year, 16 captive-reared birds were released into the wild flock and all but one have survived. Future plans include an effort to establish a second wild population through re-introduction, to insure against future hurricane damage or disease outbreaks. *Contact:* Agustin Valido, FWS, (787) 887-8769.



Puerto Rican Parrot. Photo: J. Michael Meyers, National Biological Survey.

Caspian Terns

From page 1.

are truly having any effect on adult salmon returns, for which we believe there is no current evidence." As part of the clean-up of an abandoned superfund site, another Tern breeding colony was destroyed in 2001. The Corps, NMFS, and state fishery agencies have not re-established or created habitat outside the estuary, which is required under their own plan. A successful experiment to establish a Tern colony on a sand-covered barge in Commencement Bay was abruptly halted when Washington Fish and Game, with approval from the FWS, destroyed the colony by taking all 969 eggs. Seattle attorney Richard Smith, with Smith & Lowney, represented the plaintiffs *pro bono* and is to be thanked. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

CARA Means \$\$\$\$ for Wildlife

The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) passed a major milestone in the House of Representatives on 25th July. The House Resources Committee voted 29-12 to report the bill (H.R.701) to the full House for consideration. There are now 239 House co-sponsors on H.R. 701, evidence of major support behind CARA, largely due to the work of the Teaming With Wildlife Coalition. The bill would permanently reinvest \$3.1 billion annually, a portion of the revenues from federal offshore oil and gas leases, into state-based wildlife con-

servation, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), coastal conservation and impact assistance, historic preservation, and urban parks. Title III, the wildlife section of CARA, would provide \$350 million annually for state wildlife agencies to manage wildlife, including birds and their habitats, by carrying out wildlife conservation, recreation, and education projects. This presents real opportunities for creative bird conservation and watchable wildlife work in all 50 states. The legislation would provide another \$900 million for park and open space acquisition and improvements under the LWCF, with half on the federal side and half to the states. A vote in the House is expected this fall. Senator Mary L. Landrieu (D-LA) has just re-intro-

duced the CARA legislation that failed to pass the Senate last year as (S. 1328). Senator Landrieu's bill is the version of CARA that passed the U.S. House of Representatives last year, 315-102. Now may be the time to remind your two Senators that wildlife and wild places cannot wait for the next Congress to take up this cause. *Contact:* <www.teaming.com> or teaming@sso.org.



\$5 Million Possible for Neotropical Bird Funding

The House Appropriation Subcommittee on Interior will convene after September 4th, 2001, to decide 2002 appropriations for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA), enacted last year, but not funded. The Bush budget did not include funds for this Act, but the House Appropriations Committee recommended full funding at \$5 million. The Senate counterpart recommended no funding. This \$5 million would be the largest ever appropriation for "all bird" conservation outside the U.S. The program would be administered jointly by the FWS Division of International Affairs and the Division of Habitat

Conservation. Funding under the NMBCA requires that at least 75% be used for international projects to conserve migratory birds and their habitats. Grants will require a 3:1 non-federal match, but this can include in-kind support, such as volunteer time, and equipment. The developing groundswell of support for the "all birds - all habitats" approach to conservation, championed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) makes the timing of this subcommittee decision particularly important. In recognizing that birds are an international resource and that birding is fast becoming America's number one leisure pursuit, the House and Senate Interior Appropriators have a real opportunity to back both the professional conservation community and concerned birders through full fund-

ing of this Act. ABC helped with the passage of the original NMBCA and testified before Congress in support, while emphasizing the need to fully fund the conservation work under the Act. ABC has spoken with key staffers and sent letters in support of the \$5 million in funding. The bird conservation community can help gain this needed funding by contacting the Conference Committee members and asking that they appropriate the full \$5 million for the Act. *Contact:* Gerald Winegrad, <gwwabc@erols.com>.

**Visit ABC's
Website
www.abcbirds.org**

Condors Lay Eggs in the Wild

On March 25, 2001 a reintroduced California Condor in Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona laid the first egg in the wild since 1986. Biologists discovered the egg in a cave after observing a pair of birds for several days. Unfortunately the egg was broken, not an unusual occurrence for captive condors, but disappointing for the program. In May, at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, near Ventura, California, where a second Condor population is being restored, a FWS biologist discovered a Condor nest containing two eggs and being frequented by a male and two females. Both eggs were taken to the Los Angeles Zoo where one was successfully hatched. Another captive-laid

egg was fostered to a wild pair and subsequently hatched. However, the chick died soon after, possibly killed by the female. The news of this first wild productivity is very positive for the program.



California Condor.
Photo: David Clendenen, FWS.

On June 27, a captive-bred male California Condor that had recently been released into the wild was found dead after an apparent collision with a power line near the Sepse Condor Sanctuary in Arizona. The year-old bird was released only a month earlier with five other juveniles, paralleling a similar release at Ventana Wilderness Area along California's Big Sur coast. Seven birds have been killed by power line collisions since the captive-bred Condors were first released to the wild in 1992 as part of the California Condor Recovery Plan. The plan aims to establish two geographically separate populations, one in California and the other in Arizona. There are currently 55 birds in the wild and 129 in captivity or in field pens. *Contact:* Bill Heinrich, The Peregrine Fund, <bheinrich@peregrinefund.org>.

Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo Candidate for ESA Listing

On July 25, 2001, following a law suit by the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and others (*Bird Calls* Vol.5, No.1), FWS announced its intention to list the western population of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The suit had been filed for the entire species. According to FWS, the precipitous decline of the western Yellow-billed Cuckoo has been

caused by loss and degradation of riparian habitat due to livestock grazing and other agriculture, dams, the invasive non-native plant tamarisk, and destruction of habitat on wintering grounds in Central and South America. The service had previously resisted listing the Cuckoo under the ESA, citing a lack of resources. Since November 2000, following a moratorium issued by then FWS Director Jamie Clark, prompted by a lack of funds (*Bird Calls* Vol. 5, No. 1), the only way to achieve new ESA designation has been through legal action (see article p14). In order to be eligible for ESA listing, a species, subspecies or Discrete Population Segment

(DPS) must be defined. In its notice in the Federal Register, FWS declared the Yellow-billed Cuckoo west of the Rocky Mountains to be a DPS, based on its physical, behavioral, and ecological discreteness from the eastern population. FWS determined that the extinction of the western Yellow-billed Cuckoo would result in a significant gap in habitable range and loss in genetic diversity for the species as a whole. It specifically cited severe habitat degradation and lack of protection in Mexico as the reason for greater protection needs in the U.S. *Contact:* Patricia Foulk, FWS, (916) 414-6566, or Kieran Suckling, CBD, (520) 623-5252.

Ecuador Oil Pipeline Will Pass Through Mindo IBA

On June 7, Ecuadorian President, Gustavo Noboa gave his approval for an international consortium to build the Oleoducto de Crudo Presado (OCP), a \$1.1 billion crude oil pipeline, along the controversial "northern route." The route which is claimed to be of "least impact" takes the pipeline straight across the Mindo Important Bird Area (the first IBA to be designated in South America) on the slopes of the Pichincha volcano. The pipeline is scheduled to cut through territories of the IUCN-listed, Critically Endangered Black-breasted Puffleg - a hummingbird found only on this one volcano - and is likely to cause damage to surrounding cloud forests. The area is home to more than 450 bird species, including many neotropical migrants such as the Blackburnian Warbler, and declining, Partners in Flight Watch Listed



Local school children learn about Mindo's birds; jobs as nature tour guides may await some. Photo: Mike Parr, ABC.

Cerulean Warbler. Mindo is also home to a burgeoning ecotourism industry that local people fear will be adversely affected by the pipeline. Environmental groups including the Ecuadorian Accion Ecologica, mounted protests against the northern route, including a demonstration involving 2,000 people outside public hearings on the pipeline. The pipeline is expected to nearly double Ecuador's oil output to 700,000 barrels, and is backed by an international group of financial, construction, and oil development companies. The principal anticipated market for these oil exports is the U.S., mainly California. En-

vironmental criticism of the project included complaints that only 27 days were allotted for public review of the project's 1,500 page Environmental Impact Study. The Ecuadorian Environment Ministry received 72 objections to the project on ecological grounds, but studied the pipeline consortium's responses to these for just five days before giving its approval. The consortium has indicated a willingness to try to avoid damaging particularly sensitive areas through local re-routing of the pipeline, and a local bird monitoring project is planned to attempt to lessen the impact on threatened species. However, future oil spills are almost inevitable. The existing state-owned pipeline has spilled 145,000 barrels of oil in the last three years, principally because Ecuador is prone to earthquakes and landslides which cause ruptures in the pipe. The new pipeline will be built across the slopes of an active volcano which rises above the capital city of Quito and the city's water supply is also potentially at risk. Construction is expected to begin this month, and to be finished in 2003. Contact: Mike Parr, ABC, <mparr@abcbirds.org>.

ABC Assists Citizen Action on Towers

ABC has been at the forefront in trying to gain resolution to the problem of bird mortality at communication towers. Several groups, acting independently of ABC, have begun filing blanket appeals to the FCC against tower registrations, with a view towards litigation. ABC continues to provide information

and advice to citizens and other organizations around the nation contesting individual towers. The ABC tower kill report (2000) is widely used by citizens to protect birds in many tower siting disputes. In one case, private citizens, led by a Boston attorney, successfully fought a proposed tower that was to be constructed in the flyway of migratory birds near Penobscot, Maine. With ABC help, the tower was made bird-

safe after the tower company agreed to remove all planned lighting (widely thought to be the cause of the bird strikes) and guy wires. Citizens have also used the ABC materials and information to protect birds in communication tower cases in Florida, Texas, New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Visit www.abcbirds.org, or *contact*: Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

Raptor Electro- cution Reduction Program

Each year hundreds of eagles, hawks, and owls are being killed by electrocution on power lines. The magnitude of the problem is likely much greater than studies suggest, as carcasses may be scavenged before they are found, or may simply die unnoticed because they do not cause a power outage. In a landmark case in 1999, the Moon Lake Electric Association of Colorado was found guilty of violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act after raptors were killed on their poles. This sent a strong message: the MBTA is violated if bird deaths were foreseeable, even if unintentional. In practice, however, FWS is unable to prosecute every electrocution and retrofitting every pole and line in the nation to be raptor-safe is deemed too expensive by the industry.

Now, a partnership between HawkWatch International (HWI) and Utah Power is determining ways that the most potentially hazardous situations can be identified before mortalities occur. Through the *Raptor Electrocution Reduction Program*, volunteers and researchers are conducting surveys throughout a large portion of Utah Power's coverage area. Electrocutions, raptor use, habitat, and pole configura-



Great-horned Owls are frequently victims of power line electrocutions. Photo: George Jameson.

tion data are being collected to develop a model that can subsequently be used to identify problem areas and prioritize lines for retrofitting before they kill birds. It is hoped that the study will aid smaller companies, lacking the resources to carry out large-scale retrofitting, to target specific, high-risk poles and lines and significantly reduce electrocutions. HWI has also produced a training manual for preventing raptor electrocutions and is seeking similar partnerships with other large utility companies in Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada. Independently, FWS has recently produced a 30 minute video entitled 'Raptors at Risk', explaining the electrocution problem and the federal laws that protect birds, while providing practical information on prevent bird deaths. The video points out the benefits of "bird-safe" lines to utilities and their customers. *Contact:* Sherry Liguori, <sliguori@hawkwatch.org>. For information on FWS's video, visit <http://www.edmlink.com/raptorvideo.htm>.

Xantus's Murrelet to be Aided by Island Rat Clearance

The rare Xantus's Murrelet breeds on nine island sites in southern California and in Northern Baja California, Mexico with a total population of only 5,600 breeding birds. Colonies have already been extirpated from Todos Santos, San Martin, and San Geronimo Islands, primarily due to introduced predators such as black rats and cats. Beginning in 1995, cats were removed from North Coronado Island, and efforts

are now underway to protect the Murrelet, IUCN-listed as Vulnerable, by removing mammalian predators from other islands. Over the next 12 months, using \$700,000 from an oil spill settlement fund, the National Park Service plans to rid the one square mile Anacapa Island of its 3,000 or so rats, which eat the Murrelet's eggs. Helicopters will be used to drop poison pellets over the island to kill the rodents. Anacapa, part of the Channel Islands National Park, has between 100 and 200 pairs of Xantus's Murrelets that nest on cliffs and in caves accessible to the rats. Radar will be employed to ob-

tain accurate Murrelet population data, and will continue to track numbers once the rats are removed. To adequately protect this species, it is necessary to remove predators from all remaining breeding islands. Toward this end, surveys are being planned for the Mexican breeding islands. Scientists have prepared a draft petition to list this nocturnal seabird under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, but the petition has not yet been filed. Visit <www.nps.gov/chis/nationalresources/airp.html>. *Contact:* Carol Gorbics, FWS, <carol_gorbics@fws.gov>.

Shade Coffee Goes Mainstream

By making a simple choice, coffee drinkers can now help maintain forest habitat vital for endemic and migratory songbirds, instead of contributing to its destruction. The nation's leading specialty coffee stores, Starbucks and Seattle's Best, sell shade-grown coffee, as do many other large-scale retailers. Some 85% of coffee sold by Seattle's Best is shade-grown and both companies now sell brewed shade coffee by the cup as well as beans by the bag. Conservation International (CI) has partnered with Starbucks since 1998 in an effort to make shade coffee mainstream. More than 300 small-scale coffee farmers in Chiapas, Mexico participate in one of the

three cooperatives growing for Starbucks near El Triunfo Biosphere Reserve, home to some of southern Mexico's last remaining cloud forest.



Coffee Berries. Photo: Francisco Osuna, Elan Organic Coffees, courtesy FWS.

Conventional "sun coffee" plantations clear-cut forest land, and use more pesticides and fertilizers than traditional shade farming. Shade farmers plant coffee shrubs beneath the existing tree canopy that provides habitat for birds and other wildlife. Shade coffee farms that

have retained their tropical forest canopy provide essential, mid-elevation habitat for migratory birds in Mexico, Colombia, and the Caribbean. Studies in Mexico and Columbia found 94-97% fewer bird species in "sun grown" than in "shade grown" coffee plantations. Americans consume one third of the world's coffee but shade coffee represents only 1% of the total U.S. gourmet coffee market. Peter Seligmann, CI's chairman and CEO, said, ". . . the leaders of the coffee industry can integrate biodiversity conservation into their business, creating a net benefit for the environment and their bottom line." Since its inception, the Chiapas cooperative's international coffee sales have grown by 50% and increased growing acreage by 220%. For more information visit ABC's web site: www.abcbirds.org/policy/shade_coffee.htm

Record-breaking Birdathon Supports Panamanian Conservation

The Amos Butler Audubon Society's spring Birdathon has raised more than \$12,000 for conservation at El Chorogo, the highest priority Important Bird Area (IBA) for on-the-ground conservation identified by the Panama Audubon Society. This follows on from a \$6,744 total last year, almost doubling the Society's fundraising success. The partnership between the Amos Butler and Panama Audubon Societies was forged

through ABC's *Conservation Counterparts* program which links North American bird clubs and societies with Latin American and Caribbean groups and projects. "ABC's Conservation Counterparts program brought together two Audubon chapters, one in Indianapolis, the other in Panama to work towards saving El Chorogo. This is a winning combination for all of us," said Mary Ellen Gadski, who helped organize the Birdathon. El Chorogo is the largest area of intact lowland forest remaining in western Panama, and lies along the Panama-Costa Rican border. The Panama Audubon Society is setting up a conservation project in the area. Among the bird species that will

benefit are the spectacular, IUCN-listed, globally Threatened Three-wattled Bellbird, and several restricted-range species such as the appealingly-named Charming Hummingbird, Baird's Trogon, and Fiery-billed Aricari. In all, El Chorogo contains nine bird species not found in any current protected area. ABC will publish further updates on conservation at the site as the project evolves. The *Conservation Counterparts* section of ABC's website (www.abcbirds.org) profiles a range of international bird conservation projects, along with birding and travel information, easily accessible through a clickable map of the Americas. *Contact:* Mike Parr, ABC, <mparr@abcbirds.org>.

Mayport Naval Base Stops Failed Cat Program

Mayport Naval Station, FL recently shut down a stray and feral cat trap/neuter/release (TNR) effort that had been in place since 1998. During that time about 130 cats had been captured, neutered and released and approximately 44 cats had been adopted. However, the cat population, which grew to an estimated 700-800 cats, living mostly along the jetties, outpaced the ability to fund and run the project. These cats

are now being humanely trapped and held for 10 days to allow people to claim lost pets or to adopt them. The cats remaining after 10 days are taken to Jacksonville Animal Care and Control or to the Jacksonville Humane Society. Feeding the homeless cats has also been prohibited. According to Lt. Brad Fagan, Public Affairs Officer at Mayport, it is against Navy policy to allow stray and feral animals to run loose on base. In an attempt to control cat abandonment in the future, pet owners at Mayport must now register their pets and microchips containing information about the pet's vac-

cinations, health and owner are also required. Owners are strongly encouraged to spay or neuter their pets. Mayport is yet another example where TNR efforts have failed to effectively reduce the stray and feral cat population. A number of scientific studies show that cats do not prevent additional cats from joining a colony, and limitations on funding and volunteers is a common problem. For more information see "New Florida Trap/Neuter/Release Study Contradicts Cat Feeders' Claims" *Bird Calls* Vol. 5, No. 1. *Contact*: Linda Winter, ABC, (202) 452-1535, <lwinter@abcbirds.org>.

Ultralight-Led Whooping Crane Reintroduction Begins in Wisconsin

Ten Whooping Crane chicks, hatched at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland, are now undergoing training at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin, to follow an ultralight airplane. The project, a cooperative effort between FWS and the non-profit group, Operation Migration, in conjunction with numerous state wildlife agencies, aims to lead the Cranes behind the ultralights this coming fall from Necedah to Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. The 1,200 mile migration will mark the return of the first migratory Whooping Crane

flock to the eastern U.S. in over one hundred years. This historic migration comes nearly ten years after the first ultralight-led migration experiment with Canada Geese, and follows on directly from last year's successful migration of Sandhill Cranes (see *Bird Calls* Vol. 4, No. 1). Eleven Sandhills were led from Wisconsin to Florida and allowed to migrate back on their own. Ten of the eleven birds returned unaided to the training grounds at Necedah, demonstrating the viability of this technique as a reintroduction tool. Currently, the only migratory population of Whooping Cranes, numbering just 188 birds, winters at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. Its vulnerability to catastrophic natural events such as hurricanes prompted officials to attempt the reintroduction of this second flock to a geographically distinct area - one that was part of the Crane's former historic range. A non-migratory flock of Whooping Cranes already lives year-round in



Young Whooping Cranes learn to follow the ultralight on the ground with help from a crane puppet carried by a costumed handler. Photo: Heather Ray, Operation Migration.

Florida and is part of a separate reintroduction effort. The ruling to grant the project permission to stage the migration was announced by the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton, and circumvented the current hold on new listings in the Federal Register (*Bird Calls* Vol. 5, No. 1). For more information visit www.operationmigration.org/ or *contact*: Operation Migration, (800) 675-2618, <opmig@durham.net>.

Alien Highway Shrubs Lure Birds to Death

A study requested by the FWS and conducted by the College of William and Mary Center for Conservation Biology has revealed that a particular species of shrub commonly planted on highway medians is putting migratory songbirds at unusually high risk from being killed by cars. The study was commissioned when over 450 birds, mostly Cedar Waxwings, were collected during the spring migration season of 1999 along stretches of highway around Richmond, Virginia. The shrub, thorny elaeagnus, is an invasive Asian species whose fruiting cycle is the reverse of native bushes, producing berries at

times that coincide with the spring migration season. The study shows conclusively that cars are striking birds flying across the roadway to reach ripe fruit crops. More than 1,600 dead Waxwings were collected along 1.3 miles of highway in 2001, with more than 350 birds killed in just one night of the study. The shrub has been used extensively throughout the U.S. for more than



Cedar Waxwings are being killed trying to reach the berries of thorny elaeagnus, a close relative of Russian olive. Photo: FWS.

thirty years as a median planting to shield drivers from the headlight glare of oncoming vehicles. Virginia Department of Transport (VDOT) estimates that 12 miles of highway in Virginia are planted with elaeagnus and costs removal of the shrub at \$50,000/mile. Sprays to retard the fruiting cycle have been suggested as an alternative, but this would involve continuing yearly applications. FWS, VDOT and the College of William and Mary Center for Conservation Biology will meet later in the year to discuss removal options and ways to prevent further planting of the shrub in Virginia and other states. *Contact:* Brian Watts, College of William & Mary, Center for Conservation Biology, (757) 221-2247 or Dan Hurt, Senior Resident Agent, Division of Law Enforcement, FWS, (757) 890-0003.

National Parks' Migratory Bird Program

The U.S. National Park System, comprising 384 units covering more than 83 million acres, provides critical habitat for migratory birds. But because these species use parks on a seasonal basis, their protection cannot be assured without the conservation of habitats they use throughout the rest of the year. This requires cooperative, coordinated programs between the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean. One such initiative is 'The Park Flight Migratory Bird Program,' a partnership between the National Park Service (NPS), National Park Foundation (NPF), National Fish & Wildlife

Foundation (NFWF), and University of Arizona, with support from American Airlines. The program works to protect shared migratory bird species in both U.S. and Mesoamerican national parks and protected areas, through developing conservation and education projects, and a program of technical exchange and cooperation. Projects focus on two areas: migratory species assessment, protection, and management; and park interpretation, environmental education, and outreach. NPF has selected bird conservation and education projects involving 13 parks in the U.S. National Park System: Sequoia and Kings Canyon, North Cascades, Bandelier, Pecos, Aztec Ruins, Capulin Volcano, Fort Union, New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail,

Cuyahoga Valley, Great Smoky Mountains, Golden Gate, and Point Reyes. In Mesoamerica, Park Flight is working with Mesoamerica, in cooperation with the NFWF/USAID Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Program, Partners in Flight (PIF) for priority projects at sites in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, and Mexico. Another international component will be a program of technical assistance, including training workshops, personnel exchanges, and the participation of Central American professionals in U.S. National Parks. 41 units managed by NPS have now been designated Important Bird Areas by ABC. *Contact:* Carol Beidleman, Program Coordinator, (970) 586-3776, or <BeidlemanC@aol.com>.

Conservation Groups Seek Avian West Nile Vaccine

ABC and the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) and its members, have teamed up with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases to develop a vaccine for prevention of the West Nile virus in birds. The study will test the efficacy of a new vaccine that has already shown to be effective on horses. West Nile virus, first identified in the U.S. in New York in 1999, is transmitted by mosquitoes and has been responsible for the deaths of thousands of birds from over 70 species, many of these in captive breeding facilities and zoos in the northeast U.S. Although the majority of infected wild birds documented have been crows and other urban-dwelling species, other

more ecologically sensitive birds such as warblers, thrushes and eagles have died in significant numbers. Spraying pesticides to kill adult mosquitoes has been shown to be ineffective in controlling or preventing outbreaks of West Nile virus in birds. The chemicals used are often toxic to birds and the ecosystems in which they live, further compounding the risks of the virus. These pesticides also kill non-target insects, depleting the food source for birds.



Crows are some of the most common birds to be found dead from West Nile virus. Photo: Mark Cassino.

Some of the world's rarest birds are bred in captivity in the U.S. as part

of reintroduction programs, and experts fear that the spread of West Nile virus could decimate these invaluable populations. In 1984, an outbreak of Eastern Equine Encephalitis, a close relative of West Nile virus, was responsible for the deaths of seven of the 39 federally Endangered Whooping Cranes at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. Further deaths were only prevented by use of a vaccine, and biologists need to be armed with just such a solution for future outbreaks of West Nile. Initially the trials will seek to identify an injectable vaccine for use in captive birds. However, if successful, it could also be used on select populations of endangered wild birds e.g., Whooping Cranes and California Condors. If the vaccine can be effectively administered orally, it is possible that large numbers of urban-dwelling birds could be immunized at feeding stations. *Contact:* Linda Farley, ABC, (202) 452-1535, <lfarley@abcbirds.org> or Jane Ballentine, AZA, (301) 562-0777, <jballentine@aza.org>.

DOD To Control AWOL Cats

Free-roaming cat populations have been a long-standing problem on military installations. Many residents on bases allow their cats to roam at will, while personnel transfers often result in cats being left behind to fend for themselves. Free-roaming cats have become such a problem that some bases, such as Fort Lee, in Virginia, and Mayport Naval Station, Florida, now require all pets to be microchipped to dis-

courage cat abandonment and to more easily re-unite stray animals with their owners (see article p. 8). Recent high-visibility disputes between a base's desire to conduct humane trap and removal and proponents of trap/neuter/release programs have prompted the Department of Defense (DOD) to take steps to assist base commanders in preventing cat overpopulation in the future. Education is the key, and through its Legacy Resource Management Program, DOD has contracted ABC to produce a brochure

for cat owners on military installations. A total of 120,000 copies of the brochure, reviewing free-roaming cat issues and the many good reasons to keep cats indoors, will be distributed to all of the armed services in the U.S. and abroad. ABC will also produce a more detailed background paper for the Public Affairs Officers and base commanders. Both will also be made available on-line from ABC's website, www.abcbirds.org. *Contact:* Linda Winter, ABC, (202) 452-1535, <lwinter@abcbirds.org>.

Longline Update

Progress has been made by ABC, the Policy Council, and other conservation groups to protect seabird populations from further decimation by the hundreds of millions of longline hooks set annually. ABC gained a meeting with the acting Director of NMFS on seabird-longline issues and invited other conservation groups to attend. Some of the simple, cost-effective measures that longline vessels can employ to eliminate seabird mortalities are: paired streamer or 'tori' lines that scare birds away from longlines; heavier line weights to sink hooks more rapidly, preventing seabirds from reaching the bait as the lines are set; dyeing bait blue, which makes it less visible to seabirds; and strategic discharge of offal away from hooked lines, to give birds an easy alternative to diving on bait. In Hawaii, longline regulations, published on June 12, prohibit shallow sets used for swordfish where there is higher incidence of sea turtle and seabird mortality. This will reduce longline deaths in Hawaii significantly. However, at least 20 Hawaiian longliners are making use of a loophole that allows

them to land their catch in California and evade the closure. ABC is pushing NMFS to close this loophole. NMFS has also said it will allow an "experimental" swordfish fishery to continue in the future to test sea turtle avoidance measures. The Hawaiian regulations also require longlining vessels to use avoidance measures such as thawed, blue dyed bait, strategic discharge of offal, and a line-shooter with attached weights of at least 45g to cause the bait to sink faster.



A Wandering Albatross feeds with Spectacled Petrels alongside a longline fishing vessel. Photo: Fabio Olmos.

ABC and its partners have repeatedly urged NMFS to adopt new regulations for the Alaskan longline fishery that would require the use of paired streamer lines (shown to reduce seabird mortality by up to 92%) and greater line weights. Un-

der a FWS program these paired streamer lines are being given free to all longliners who apply - more than 500 vessels so far (see *Bird Calls* Vol 3, No 2). ABC has also been pressing NMFS to require observer coverage on board Alaskan Pacific Halibut vessels as there is no reliable data on Short-tailed Albatross or any other seabird bycatch from the fishery. Nationally, ABC requested NMFS support of a Department of Interior *Solicitor's Opinion* that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act applies to the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around the coast of the U.S., and beyond. This would make killing a seabird on a longline hook illegal. However, ABC has learned that Interior has now delayed this important policy change another six months. FWS has written NMFS noting their displeasure in the handling of the National Plan of Action for Seabirds required under an international agreement. Conservationists have called this weak plan a "Plan of Inaction". *Contact*: Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>.

ABC Co-publishes Spanish Language Edition of Birds of Colombia

ABC is pleased to announce the publication of the long-awaited Spanish language edition of the *Birds of Colombia* by Steven Hilty and William Brown, illustrated by Guy Tudor. It is co-published by ABC, Princeton University Press, the Universidad del Valle, and Sociedad Antioqueña de Ornitología (which is distributing the book). The text includes updates such as a text account for the newly discovered Choco Vireo and has an introductory section authored by Luis Naranjo and Walter Weber. The text was translated by Humberto Álvarez-López. To order copies (\$35 plus post and packing) contact Sociedad Antioqueña de Ornitología, <sao@epm.net.co>.

Bill Deformities in Alaskan Birds

The Alaska Biological Science Center has reported a significant increase in the number of birds observed with deformed bills in recent months. The Center's records of this type of deformity go back as far as 1991, but show a dramatic escalation over the last two years. The degree of deformity varies but usually takes the form of a severely elongated, curved and crossed bill. The Black-capped Chickadee is the most frequently observed species (533 individuals) and the fact that this species is non-migratory is evidence that the source may lie locally



Chickadees with deformed bills are turning up in larger numbers in Alaska. Photo: Alaska Biological Science Center.

in Alaska. Along with the Black-capped Chickadee, 19 other species, totaling 98 individuals, have been observed with the deformity. Black-billed Magpie, Northwestern Crow, Steller's Jay, and Downy Wood-

pecker are the next most numerous. Other species as diverse as Boreal Chickadee, Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Canada Goose, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet have also been observed. The Center is trying to determine the cause of the abnormalities and is not ruling out contaminants as a possible factor. Disease, genetic defects, parasites, and nutritional deficiencies are also being investigated as potential causes. None of the observed birds is behaving abnormally but many are so deformed that they are hindered in their feeding activity and unable to preen properly, likely lowering their survivability. For more information visit www.absc.usgs.gov/ and click on the Chickadee Alert button.

Critical Habitat May Help Fen- thion Campaign

The coastline of Marco Island in southern Florida has recently been designated as Critical Habitat for the Piping Plover by FWS. There are only thirty breeding pairs of the federally Endangered Great Lakes population of Plovers left, and each year a significant number of them overwinters on Florida's beaches. The new designation will offer the Plovers, and therefore any other birds in the area, greater protection from disturbances or hazards such as pesticide spraying. Fenthion is one such pesticide that is regularly used in Marco Island and other areas in Florida to kill adult mosquitoes. It is lethally toxic to birds at extremely small doses and has been

strongly implicated in the deaths of more than 300 shorebirds on Marco Island over the last two years, including at least one Piping Plover. These deaths have been investigated by the FWS, and the case has now reached the U.S. Department of Justice. However, there has been no indication from federal lawyers that prosecution will commence any time in the near future. With West Nile Virus emerging in Florida, the threat of increased spraying of fenthion increases. In the absence of a federal case proving that the shorebirds in Florida died from fenthion exposure, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will not be forced to cancel fenthion use. The situation is critical, and more input is needed from scientists and the public, particularly in Florida, to stop the spraying. Each Florida county Mosquito Control District makes its decisions independently, with no oversight from scientists or

biologists, and is responsive to local constituents. ABC will be meeting with FWS scientists, Florida State pesticide officials, and Florida NGOs this month to discuss alternatives to fenthion. ABC has already generated over 10,000 letters from the public to the EPA, in opposition to fenthion. Research conducted by Warren Porter, at the University of Wisconsin, has demonstrated that with current application methods (a fine mist sprayed from a helicopter), most birds will inhale a lethal dose of fenthion in less than thirty minutes. With the new Critical Habitat designation for the Plovers' Florida wintering areas, it is hoped that fenthion spraying will be prohibited on Marco Island, an amazingly rich environment for birds and other wildlife. *Contact:* Linda Farley, ABC's Pesticides and Birds Program, (202) 452-1535, <lfarley@abcbirds.org>.

Conservation of Murici Focus for Brazilian Government

A decision by Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso on May 29, 2001 has upgraded the conservation status for one of the most ecologically significant areas in the Americas by designating the forests at Murici an "Ecological Station." This action comes after a sustained campaign by conservation organizations, including American Bird Conservancy and BirdLife Brazil. Murici lies in the center of the small state of Alagoas in northeast Brazil. Extending for around 15,000 acres, these severely fragmented forests hold key populations of 12 globally threatened birds, two of which, the Alagoas Foliage-Gleaner and Alagoas Antwren, occur nowhere else. Several other birds, including the Alagoas Tyrannulet, and Orange-bellied Antwren occur in

only a few additional, tiny forest fragments. The remaining forest would probably already be extirpated were it not for a Brazilian law that requires landowners in the region to leave 20% of their land forested. Though beneficial, this law tends to create a landscape of small, unconnected fragments surrounded by pasture lands and sugar cane plantations, which are more difficult to protect than larger forest blocks. Small-scale logging, principally for fence posts and clearance for small holders, still threatens the dwindling forest, where some bird trapping and hunting also takes place. The designation will limit land use to approved research projects, and restrict visits to educational purposes only. A management plan will also be drawn up for the future conservation of the forest. It is recognized that this designation is the first step in the long process of providing more permanent protection for Murici and its birds. As well as taking many years to complete, it will also require a considerable increase in funding from Instituto Brasileiro

do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis (IBAMA). Currently there is no one employed to effectively protect the forest, and two placards designating the protected area are the only outward sign that it is significant for conservation. A recent change in Brazilian law allows IBAMA to receive external assistance in the management of protected areas. BirdLife Brazil and the locally-based Sociedade Nordestina de Ecologia are collaborating towards the development of conservation plans for the area.

Contact: Mike Parr, ABC, <mparr@abcbirds.org>.



Ecotourists view some of Murici's unique birdlife. Photo: Mike Parr.

ABC Publishes Bird Conservation Directory

The first ever comprehensive listing of bird conservation contacts in North America has been compiled and published by ABC. The 2001 Bird Conservation Directory provides information on individuals working actively in bird conservation in the Americas at the regional, national, and international level, from government agencies, indus-

try, academia, non-profit organizations, and elsewhere. The Directory lists representatives from Partners in Flight, North American Waterfowl Management Plan and Joint Ventures, North American Wetlands Conservation Council, Flyway Councils, the North American Waterbird and U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plans, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, North American Bird Conservation Initiative, American Bird Conservancy Policy Council, the Ornithological Council, and several game

bird conservation groups. With contact information for more than 1,200 individuals, this is an invaluable resource for facilitating communication in the world of bird conservation. The Directory can be accessed on-line through ABC's web site at www.abcbirds.org/directory/directory.htm, or ordered by the box (containing 38 Directories) from ABC, for only the cost of shipping and handling (\$20/box), as supplies last. *Contact:* Elizabeth Ennis, ABC, (540) 253-5780, <eenis@abcbirds.org>.

Endangered Species Listings Still Hamstrung

Recent months have seen an end to the Bush Administration's attempts to alter the Endangered Species listing process, yet the future of new listings is still in the balance due to a swath of court cases and underfunding. The Administration had attempted to attach a rider to Interior's 2002 appropriations bill suspending Endangered Species listing deadlines. This would have prevented citizens from being able to sue to get species added to the Endangered Species List. Sole discretion for new listings would have been turned over to Gale Norton. Both the House and Senate rejected the planned rider, but insufficient appropriations still leave the future of new listings in question. Last November, Jamie Clark, then Director of FWS, issued a memorandum preventing any new listings for the entire fiscal year be-



On hold! Gunnison Sage Grouse Listing.
Photo: www.hccaonline.org

cause they were running out of Endangered Species funding dealing with Critical Habitat-related law suits. It now appears likely that the only help will come in the form of an additional \$2-2.5 million in the Interior Budget to help clear the backlog. A report released this May by Defenders of Wildlife, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Endangered Species Coalition states that FWS staff have costed the work needed to clear the backlog on listing at \$24 million per year over five years, nearly three times the current budget. In another related develop-

ment, Federal Judge Kelly set a precedent by her July 31st ruling on a suit to list the Sacramento checkerspot butterfly, that FWS's move to halt listings on budgetary grounds was illegal. As reported in the last issue of *Bird Calls*, a situation has now been created where FWS is so busy dealing with ESA-related law suits, that the only way for citizen groups to get them to act is by filing a law suit, further exacerbating the problem. As a result of successful suits, Critical Habitat has recently been declared for Spectacled Eider, Steller's Eider, Piping Plover, and the Mexican race of Spotted Owl. In the mean time, listing decisions remain pending for Band-rumped Storm Petrel, Lesser Prairie Chicken, Mountain Plover, Gunnison Sage Grouse, western Sage Grouse, Kauai Creeper, and western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. It seems inevitable that yet more law suits will be needed to move these species onto the Endangered Species List. *Contact*: Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gwwa@erols.com>.

Yanbaru Forest: Asian Biodiversity Threatened

ABC continues to work with partners in Japan and with Policy Council members such as the World Wildlife Fund-U.S. (WWF) to protect what has been called the most important bird areas in Japan: the Yanbaru Forest on Okinawa. ABC is requesting that the U.S. Marine Corps abandon plans to construct seven helipads in the southern part of their Northern Training Area (NTA), maintaining that there are

other suitable sites available. The seven helipads would be built in what scientists call "two of the best preserved natural forest areas in the NTA." ABC and WWF are also pressing for official protection of the Yanbaru Forest by Japan, and presented Okinawan officials with their argument at a meeting in Washington, DC, on May 21, 2001. The Japanese delegation was well aware of Yanbaru Forest and its conservation issues, and expressed an interest in bringing ecotourism to the island. Much of the subtropical rain forest outside the Marine Corps lands has already been destroyed,

and there is concern that, if not adequately protected, the remaining forest will meet the same fate once the U.S. returns much of its holdings back to the Okinawans. Twenty-two species of resident birds breed in the forests of Yanbaru, nineteen of which are endemic to the Ryukyu Islands at the species or subspecies level. Two of these, the IUCN-listed, Critically Endangered Okinawa Woodpecker and the Endangered Okinawa Rail, are found only in Yanbaru. *Contact*: Gerald Winegrad, ABC, <gww@abcbirds.org>, or Yosiaki Ito in Japan, <itoyos@sam.hi_ho.ne.jp>.

Windy City: Most Bird- Friendly in U.S.?

Since the signing of the Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds with FWS in March 2000, the City of Chicago and its residents have joined forces to make the city a leading contender for "most bird friendly in the U.S." Each spring, an estimated five to seven million neotropical migrants pass through the city's parks and natural areas as they funnel along the shores of Lake Michigan on their way to their northern breeding grounds. Many of them also stay to nest in the Chicago area, which, despite being one of the most urbanized regions in the country, boasts some important wildlife areas, including wetlands,

savanna, and prairie habitats. The Treaty provided \$100,000 in matching grants, adding to an annual \$600,000 commitment from FWS to support the Chicago Wilderness Partnership launched in 1996. One group that has taken the lead in implementing hands-on conservation is the Bird Conservation Network (BCN), a partnership of 17 local birding clubs and organizations, which originally set out to co-



Chicago skyline. Photo: Marge Beaver
www.photography-plus.com/chicago.htm

ordinate bird monitoring through volunteer efforts in the Chicago area. Spurred on by their early success, and the opportunities presented by the City's commitment to bird conservation, BCN has now developed into an urban conservation partnership that tackles avian issues from cat predation, to bird mortality at lighted buildings. The Network has also advised the Chicago Park District on habitat management and restoration projects, such as planting native rather than exotic tree species and establishing set-aside programs for natural habitats. The success of Chicago and BCN provides an excellent model for urban areas elsewhere in the U. S. The editors of *Bird Calls* would like to hear from other urban conservation groups with their success stories for future updates. *Contact*: Donald Dann, <donniebird@yahoo.com>.

ABC Names First 100 Globally Important Bird Areas

American Bird Conservancy has announced the designation of the first 100 Globally Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the U.S. From the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge to the Apalachicola National Forest in Florida, these sites embody the ongoing effort to conserve wild birds and their habitats throughout the nation, and the importance of preserving America's avian heritage for future generations. The sites are the first of 500 to be included in a new book, sched-

uled for publication in 2002. The book will contain detailed site descriptions for each IBA, as well as illustrations of representative birds. ABC's IBA program, supported in part by The Nature Conservancy and the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, aims to identify and protect a network of key sites to further bird conservation efforts. IBA programs have been initiated throughout the world, including Europe, The Middle East, Africa, Canada, Mexico and Ecuador as well as the U.S. ABC hopes that the designation of the first 100 Global IBAs in the U.S. will further illustrate the importance of bird and habitat conservation across the country and draw attention to the significance these particular areas

have for birds and the millions of people who visit them each year to birdwatch – one of America's most popular hobbies. The list of the first 100 Global IBAs can be downloaded from ABC's website at www.abcbirds.org/iba/first100IBAs.PDF. *Contact*: Robert Chipley, ABC, (540) 253-5780, <rchipley@abcbirds.org>.

**The next meeting of the
Policy Council will be
on November 8th, 2001
at 1250, 24th St. NW.
Washington, D.C. 20037
For more Details Call
ABC at (202)452-1535**

Ducks Down - Geese Up

For the second straight year, breeding duck populations declined from their record highs reached in 1999. The total population of breeding ducks, estimated by traditional FWS aerial surveys in Canada and the northern U.S., fell to approximately 36.1 million birds from last year's index of 41.8 million birds, a decline of nearly 14%. Dry habitat conditions in western Canada and the northwestern U.S. likely contributed to this decline, according to FWS. Concentrated efforts to stem wetland loss and restore and enhance wetlands across the country are essential to healthy duck populations. Breeding populations of Mallards fell 17% from 2000 levels; Blue-winged Teal and Redhead were down 23%; Green-winged Teal were down 21%; and Canvasbacks were down 18%. With the exception of the Canvasback, all of these species were at or above their

long-term averages dating back to the start of the census in 1955, and it is too soon to tell whether this is the start of a more alarming trend.



Canada Goose. Photo: FWS

The Atlantic population of migratory Canada Geese has rebounded after years of steep population declines beginning in the late 1980s. Recent aerial surveys on the breeding grounds in northern Quebec documented a record high of 146,000 nesting pairs, a 57% increase over last year. "The resurgence of the Atlantic population of Canada Geese is a true success story, and a testament to what can

be achieved when partners work across state, national, and watershed boundaries for the benefit of migratory birds. It's exciting to see these birds returning again in such numbers to the Eastern Shore of Maryland and other traditional wintering areas across the Atlantic Coast," said acting FWS Director Marshall Jones. Record low numbers of this migrant population observed in the spring of 1995 prompted FWS to close the hunting season for Canada Geese in the Atlantic Flyway, and Canada quickly followed suit. Limited hunting was not resumed until the 1999-2000 season. Exponential increase in numbers of resident Canada Geese masked the decline of the migratory Atlantic population, contributing to a delay by wildlife managers in recognizing the problem and responding with reduced harvest levels. The entire 2001 Trends in Waterfowl Breeding Populations Report can be accessed from the FWS Web site at: <http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/reports/reports.html>.

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