

Red Knot May Be Candidate for ESA Listing Despite Horseshoe Crab Harvest Restrictions

A coalition of environmental groups, including New Jersey Audubon, ABC, Defenders of Wildlife, and National Audubon Society has begun proceedings to have the *rufa* subspecies of the Red Knot protected under the Endangered Species Act. Red Knot populations have declined globally in recent decades, but the *rufa* subspecies has fallen as much as 60% since the late-1980s. This population winters in Tierra del Fuego and other parts of South America, migrating some 9,000 miles to its Arctic breeding grounds in Canada. Along the way, the birds concentrate in vast numbers at staging areas, making them particularly vulnerable. The Delaware Bay is the most important of these stop-off points, where the knots feed on the eggs of horseshoe crabs to sustain them on their long journey north.

Overharvest of crabs for use as bait in conch and eel pots has been linked to the declines in Red Knots. The knot has evolved a relatively long lifespan and a commensurately low reproductive rate. Conservationists have predicted that although the population still numbers in the tens of thousands, it could be in peril if declines



The recent victory in regulating horseshoe crab harvest has not yet been able to reverse declines in Red Knot populations. Photo: T. D. Rodda.

continue.

ABC and National Audubon Society have led efforts to protect horseshoe crabs, and the knots and other shorebirds that rely on their eggs. These efforts appear to be paying off, as the 2004 take of crabs reached its lowest levels in more than a decade. In 2004, crab landings in Delaware Bay, a critical place for both crabs and shorebirds, fell by 53% from 2003 levels. Coast-wide landings dropped to just 630,000 crabs. FWS will initiate a public comment period if they decide to proceed with the listing process. Contact: Eric Stiles, New Jersey Audubon, (908) 766-5787.

Swarovski Land Purchase Protects Critically Endangered Hummingbird in Colombia

A grant from Swarovski is enabling ABC and ProAves Colombia to create a new reserve for the Critically Endangered Colorful Puffleg, along with other endangered bird and amphibian species.

The Colorful Puffleg is one of the world's most threatened hummingbirds. It is an extreme habitat specialist, found only in wet montane forests on the Pacific slope of the west Andes, in southwest Colombia. Already

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Po'ouli Dies in Captivity

As was reported by ABC in its November press release, what was likely the last individual Po'ouli died in captivity in Hawaii on November 28, 2004. To view the full text see: www.abcbirds.org.

Top Stories in This Issue

American Vet Association Revises its Stance on Feral Cats. A new position statement by the AVMA states that free-roaming cats represent a significant factor in wildlife mortality. See story page 4.

Battles Over Alaska Wilderness Oil and Gas Drilling Continue. The Federal Government continues to push for oil exploration in Alaskan refuges and wilderness areas. See story page 9.



Photo: FWS

West Coast Purple Martins Flying High. The species status has improved thanks to conservation efforts, but more work is needed. See story page 11.

For complete list of stories see page 2.

ABC and the Corps of Engineers: Dredging for Birds

Operations by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are a major force shaping bird habitat along the coastlines and waterways of the United States. As the federal agency responsible for maintaining navigable waterways and for shoreline protection, the Corps dredges and relocates over 250 million cubic yards of material each year. Coastal dredging and disposal operations have tremendous, and often unrecognized, potential for bird habitat creation and management.

In recognition of the potential benefit to bird populations, ABC and the Corps have initiated a partnership to explore ways of integrating the conservation of priority bird species into the planning and execution of large, coastal, engineering projects. For example, sediments from the routine maintenance dredging of the Atlantic Intra-Coastal Waterway have been used to create productive near-shore and offshore island nesting habitat for many species of terns and for Black Skimmers.

Without the regular placement of sand on dredged material islands, terns and skimmers are forced to nest on mainland beaches where increased



Shorebirds such as the Western Sandpiper benefit from dredge-deposit habitat. Photo: FWS.

disturbance from human recreational activity and predators such as raccoons and cats can significantly reduce nest success. With increasing development along the entire U.S. coastline, there will be a much greater need for the creation and active management of suitable nesting, foraging, and roosting habitats for coastal birds.

In January 2005, ABC and the Corps held the first of four regional

workshops on dredging, beach nourishment, and bird conservation at Jekyll Island, Georgia. Emphasis was placed on the importance of maintaining productive, low-energy, inter-tidal habitats around inlets and estuaries for nesting and wintering Piping Plovers and other migratory shorebirds. Best management practices for large dredge disposal sites that can produce highly productive foraging or roosting habitat for migratory birds were also proposed. For example, seasonal management of water levels at seven disposal sites near the Savannah Harbor attracts tens of thousands of migratory shorebirds each year. In total, over 288 bird species have been documented at the site.

ABC will provide expertise to the Corps on the needs of priority birds, in coordination with the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. Proceedings from the Jekyll Island workshop and information about future regional workshops on dredging, beach nourishment, and bird conservation will soon be available online at: <http://el.erdc.usace.army.mil/training.cfm?Topic=Workshop&List=05feb-dots>. Contact: Casey Lott, ABC, <clott@abcbirds.org>.

Study of Rare Birds in Colombian Oak Forests Encouraging

The Eastern Andes of Colombia is a priority area for bird conservation due to its high level of endemism combined with a lack of protected areas and limited knowledge about its biota. Of particular interest are stands of the endemic Humboldt oak, many of which have been logged. ABC, under its William Belton Small Grants Program, provided funding to ProAves Colombia to study the status of four oak forest

birds, ranked by IUCN-World Conservation Union as globally Endangered or Critically Endangered.

The four species, Mountain Grackle (Critical), Black Inca (Endangered), Rusty-faced Parrot (Endangered), and Gorgeted Wood-Quail (Critical), depend at least seasonally on oak forests. However, between 66% and 85% of their historic ranges have now been converted to agriculture. Yet despite this dire habitat situation, the investigators turned up some encouraging results. From 151 counting points at five sites in the area, the team observed Black Inca at 27 localities, seven of which were

previously unknown; Rusty-faced Parrot was found at 29 localities; Mountain Grackle was found at 22 localities; and Gorgeted Wood-Quail was detected at 20 localities – more than were initially expected.

The study concluded that all four species should be reclassified as Vulnerable. Care is necessary, however, as downgrading a species ranking can impact the attention and funding it receives. The goal of evaluating the status of species is to use the best available information so conservation can be prioritized for the species most in need. Contact: Robert Chipley, ABC, <rchipley@abcbirds.org>.

World's Largest Caspian Tern Colony to be Decimated

Plans to devastate the world's largest colony of Caspian Terns look set to go ahead under a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), completed by FWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The plan calls for the elimination of up to 74% of the tern colony on East Sand Island in the Columbia River on the Washington-Oregon border. All but 1-1.5 acres of the 6 acres of sandy habitat on the island would be destroyed and birds relocated, reducing tern numbers over several years from 9,500 current breeding pairs to as few as 2,500 pairs. The colony currently holds 70% of the Pacific Coast population, due mostly to the loss of suitable alternate nesting habitat (such as the deliberate destruction of habitat at neighboring Rice Island by federal agencies – Bird Calls V. 6, No. 3).

While Pacific salmon in Alaska remain in plentiful supply, salmon numbers in the Columbia River have declined precipitously in recent years. NMFS has long blamed the terns for inhibiting salmon recovery by their consumption of juvenile salmonids – a conclusion disputed by scientists. The EIS was completed in settlement of a lawsuit, filed by

ABC, Defenders of Wildlife, National Audubon Society, and Seattle Audubon Society. The groups contend that the terns have only a minute impact on salmon returns and are being unfairly scapegoated, while the real causes of salmon declines – dams, habitat loss, over-harvest, and fish hatcheries – go largely uncontested.

The plan, estimated to cost \$2.4 million in its first year, calls for new tern habitat to be established elsewhere in Washington, Oregon, and California. However, some of these sites are up to 800 miles from the present colony, and all would expose terns to greater threats from predators and environmental toxins, as well as increased competition from other birds. Until suitable, predator-free habitat is established elsewhere, and terns have colonized and bred successfully there, conservationists do not support moving terns off East Sand.

Long-term ownership of East Sand Island, currently in Army Corps of Engineers hands, is not addressed by the EIS. The Corps and conservationists have urged its addition to the National Wildlife Refuge system. An ABC-designated globally Important Bird Area, the island also has over 6,700 roosting endangered “California” Brown Pelicans, and a large mixed gull colony. Contact: Gavin Shire, ABC, <gshire@abcbirds.org>.

Northern Californians Asked to Stop Feeding Birds

For the second time in less than a year, the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) asked that people take down their bird feeders to slow the spread of avian disease. In this most recent request, DFG asked residents of Northern California to remove feeders for at least one month, starting on February 10, to help slow an outbreak of salmonellosis, a bacterial disease that is affecting Pine Siskins. Hundreds of dead siskins have been reported in Grass Valley, Eureka, and Santa Cruz County – spanning a distance of some 350 miles.

In July 2004, DFG asked that all bird feeders be removed to slow the spread of the deadly parasite trichomoniasis in Mourning Dove and Band-tailed Pigeon populations (<http://www.dfg.ca.gov>).

Human contraction of salmonellosis from wild birds is rare, and even less likely when correct precautions are taken (see below). However, pets can contract the disease, especially if they are exposed to bird droppings below the feeders. Pine Siskins contract salmonellosis from each other, most often by eating fecal-contaminated food, but also by direct contact with the insides of contaminated tube feeders.

DFG recommended that after resuming feeding, residents use only small amounts of food in their feeders and replace uneaten food daily, each time cleaning the feeder



State biologists in California hope that a month-long halt in backyard bird feeding followed by better feeder hygiene practices will help prevent the spread of a disease affecting Pine Siskins. Photo: FWS.

with a 10% bleach solution. DFG also recommends removing spilt food from around the feeders daily, replacing wooden bird feeders with plastic or metal versions, (wood cannot be effectively sterilized), spreading small amounts of seed over a large area in the sun, and varying the location of feeding to avoid consistent concentration of birds at one site. To minimize the risk to humans, DFG suggests gloves should be used when handling feeders and sick or dead birds. Hands should also be washed with anti-bacterial soap. Contact Patrick Foy, DFG, (916) 651-9130.

Obscure Act Poses Challenge to Federal Wildlife Management Agencies

Few people have heard of the Information Quality Act (IQA) of 2000 – not surprising, since it has little or no legislative history, was passed without any hearings, and has seemingly no documentation indicating what Congress intended for this single line amendment to the Office of Management Budget's appropriations bill. Its implications to conservationists could be significant, however, if a recent challenge to FWS's June 2004 *Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Habitats* is any indication.

The Information Quality Act (sometimes referred to as the "Data Quality Act") requires federal agencies to maintain guidelines to "ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information" that they disseminate. Data presented by an agency can be challenged on the basis that it does not conform to these guidelines. This was the case in the recent IQA challenge by the Partnership for the West (PFW), a group of primarily energy companies, which requested that FWS correct or retract information presented in its June 2004 Sage-Grouse Assessment. This 600-page, peer-reviewed, conservation analysis was the product of a year-along effort by 11 state fish and wildlife agencies, yet according to PFW, overstated threats to the sage-grouse, underestimated species abundance, and understated current conservation efforts. The IQA challenge was worded to indicate that it would be dropped if FWS denied the petition to list the sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act. The petition to list the species was denied by FWS in December (See article P. 15).

A growing number of similar IQA challenges have elicited concern by some that the ill-defined act could be used by industry groups to tie regulatory agencies in knots and delay decisions that might otherwise adversely impact them. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency has already been the recipient of several IQA challenges, that have required review of documents and data.

The potential for judicial challenges under the act is as yet unclear, though probably slim. But even without the threat of legal action, the IQA appears to be yet another hurdle that regulatory agencies must leap before making decisions. Contact: Gavin Shire, ABC, <gshire@abcbirds.org>.

Revisions to the Endangered Species Act Anticipated

The Endangered Species Act (ESA), passed in 1972, looks poised to be revised during the 109th Congress. During a February 10th press conference, Senators Crapo and Chaffee joined Representatives Pombo and Walden to discuss a new, coordinated House-Senate approach to improve and update the ESA. Current areas of focus include landowner incentives, creating a bigger role for states, strengthening habitat conservation and recovery, and bolstering the underlying science of ESA decisions. The Administration will wait to see what legislators propose before taking a firm position on changes to the ESA, but Secretary of Interior Gale Norton has stated that the administration would support efforts to add more peer review of the department's science. Members of the Bird Conservation Alliance, including ABC, will be closely following legislative developments. Contact: David Fischer, ABC, <dfischer@abcbirds.org>.

Puffleg continued from front page:

scarce (its population is estimated at only 50-250 individuals), the Colorful Puffleg is further threatened by logging, grazing, and other habitat degradation.

ProAves is in the process of negotiating the purchase of 5,000 acres of land that would protect core populations of the Colorful Puffleg and another critically endangered species, the Munchique Wood-Wren. Surveys at the site have revealed 16 other threatened bird species, two endangered frog species, and high levels of endemism in other flora and fauna. The Alliance for Zero Extinction (www.zeroextinction.org) has declared the property an essential site for conservation.

ProAves Colombia will restore, manage, and protect the site. The Colorful Puffleg population will continue to be studied and monitored, helping to bring this species back from the brink of extinction.

ABC is grateful to Tropical Birding for their assistance in making this grant possible. Contact: Paul Salaman, ProAves Colombia, <psalaman@conservation.org>.



A new land purchase will help the Colorful Puffleg and other birds in the Western andes of Colombia. Photo: Luis Mazariegos.

Battles Over Alaska Wilderness Oil and Gas Drilling Continue

Congress is again considering opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling. The Administration reaffirmed its commitment to developing ANWR in the FY 2006 budget request that assumes \$2.4 billion in revenues from ANWR leasing. Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM) vowed to circumvent any potential filibuster by opponents of ANWR drilling by simply formulating budget reconciliation legislation that cannot be filibustered.

The House is also considering inclusion of ANWR drilling in the comprehensive House energy bill. If both Houses agree, and place ANWR drilling in the budget language, it may well gain passage. ABC and many other conservation groups have opposed drilling in the Refuge, which represents

the last five percent of Alaska's North Slope that is not open to oil exploration or drilling, because of potential impacts to 180 bird species, including 70 breeding species.



Drilling near Teshekpuk Lake could impact the Black Brants and other waterfowl that rely on the area. Photo: FWS.

Meanwhile, the Administration has initiated proceedings to open more lands to oil and gas drilling in Alaska's 23.5 million acre National Petroleum Reserve in the Western Arctic. A vast network of wetlands, the reserve serves as the breeding grounds for over

five million waterfowl and shorebirds, as well as the calving grounds for more than 450,000 caribou. Despite letters of opposition from hundreds of ornithologists and many conservation groups, drilling looks set to proceed in several critical areas, including the Colville River corridor, the Utukok River Uplands, and lands around Teshekpuk Lake, a critical area for molting waterfowl such as the "Pacific" Black Brant and Greater White-fronted Goose (*Bird Calls* Vol. 8, No. 2).

Outside of Alaska, more than eight million acres of environmentally important lands in New Mexico, Wyoming, and Utah will be opened to oil and gas development under BLM resource management plans. The plans include New Mexico's Greater Otero Mesa area, which contains the largest Chihuahuan Desert grassland in the United States, the Wyoming Great Divide, and Utah's 1.9 million-acre Vernal Field Office. Contact: David Fischer, ABC, <dfischer@abcbirds.org>.

Towers: FCC Not Swayed by Bird Kill Stats

Despite a new study further demonstrating the significant bird mortality at communication towers, and the existence of avoidance measures to prevent such mortality, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and telecommunication industry continue to stonewall conservationists.

An analysis of available literature, commissioned by ABC, the Forest Conservation Council, The Humane Society of the United States, and Defenders of Wildlife, concluded that for the ten avian species killed most frequently at towers (including Ovenbird, Red-eyed Vireo, and Tennessee Warbler), total annual mortality ranged from 490,000 to 4.9 million for each species. Statistics for

Bay-breasted Warbler and Blackpoll Warbler were similarly alarming. The study also estimated an annual mortality of thousands of Cerulean Warblers, a species that conservationists have petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The groups submitted the data to the FCC in February 2005, and urged the immediate adoption of mitigation measures to prevent bird kills.

The FCC dismissed the mortality data as inconclusive, and further concluded, "Not enough is known to recommend different types of mitigation for mortality." ABC and its partners have solidly documented that key mitigation measures do exist to dramatically reduce bird kills at the more than 80,000 towers in the United States. The groups support current FWS voluntary tower guidelines as representing the best measures currently known to help avoid fatal bird collisions, including: co-location of

new antennae on existing structures; keeping towers below 200' in height (and thus not requiring lights or guy wires); and the use of only white or red strobes where lighting is necessary. Height, lighting regime, and the presence/absence of guy wires substantially influence the likelihood of significant bird kills at towers.

In an April 6, 2004 memorandum, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the agency responsible for aircraft safety, recommended medium intensity white strobe lights over red obstruction lighting as the preferred system for all new towers (*Bird Calls* Vol. 8, No. 3). Yet the FCC refuses to follow the FAA's lead and require its tower licensees to use strobe lights. ABC and its partners will continue to press a recalcitrant FCC and communication tower industry to better protect migratory birds. Contact: Gavin Shire, ABC, <gshire@abcbirds.org>.

Andean Land Purchase Protects Suite of Rare Forest Birds

On October 13, 2004, Fundación Jocotoco acquired 736 acres of land in the Andes of southern Ecuador, northeast of Macará, close to the border with Peru, to create the Jorupe Reserve (formerly referred to as Jatunpamba).

In January of 2005, the foundation was able to acquire an adjacent 983 acres, as well as a 40%

share of land in Santa Teresa to the north, attaining partial rights to protect the origin of the area's watershed. In February, additional land to the east, containing a large house suitable to use as a reserve headquarters, was purchased. Fundraising is still underway to acquire further property to link the southern and northern sections.

The area has some of the best available habitat for the Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner, Rufous-necked Foliage-gleaner, and the Red-masked Parakeet, all species endemic to this region of dry tumbesian forest, and all considered Endangered under IUCN-World Conservation Union criteria.

ABC is the principal U.S. partner of Fundación Jocotoco, and has supported the development of the Jorupe Reserve with grants from the Western Alliance for Nature, SeaWorld Busch Gardens, and several generous individuals. Fundación Jocotoco also owns six other reserves in Ecuador and Peru for the protection of several endangered, endemic species, such as the Jocotoco Antpitta, El Oro Parakeet, Pale-headed Brush Finch, and Gray-backed Hawk. For more information, and a chance to help these and other international reserves supported by ABC, visit www.abcbirds.org/ counterparts. Contact: Richard Moore, ABC, <rmoore@abcbirds.org>.

Help Us Solve the Mystery of the Cerulean Warbler!

The Cerulean Warbler is one of the most spectacular of America's forest dwelling migrants. Sadly, this magnificent, electric-blue and white bird has suffered precipitous declines in recent decades, with an estimated 70% of its global population lost since the mid 1960s. Although the declines are well documented, their exact reasons remain a conservation mystery.



Photo: USGS



Photo: Jason Jones

We do know that the warbler is threatened both in the U.S. by habitat loss from such devastating practices as mountaintop mining, during migration by collisions with communication towers, and on its wintering grounds in South America by changing land-use patterns. Its migration route, however, is poorly understood, and could hold a valuable key to help save the species.

We urgently need your help to protect the Cerulean Warbler. ABC and its partners have already confirmed an important migration stop-over site in the Maya Mountains of Belize, and plan to search for more, as-yet unknown, critical stop-over habitat in Honduras and Guatemala for future conservation. ABC is also engaging in other conservation efforts throughout the species' range, including land protection in countries where the Cerulean Warbler winters, and policy and legal efforts to mitigate the threat posed by communication towers to this species and other neotropical migrants. Please send a donation using the enclosed envelope, and help us protect the Cerulean Warbler today.

U.S., Canada, Mexico Reaffirm Commitment to Declining Waterfowl

Due mostly to post-European settlement development, less than half of North America's original wetlands now remain. In some U.S. states, such as California, wetland destruction tops 90%. In Canada, figures are similar, with widespread conversion of tidal and salt marshes, swamps, prairie potholes, and estuarine wetlands to farmland, industrial uses, and housing.

This habitat destruction has been, in large measure, responsible for alarming declines in waterfowl populations throughout North America, in particular Mallard, Black Duck, Northern Pintail, and Blue-winged Teal. By the 1980s, breeding surveys were showing that there were more than ten million fewer waterfowl nesting in North America than there had been 30 years earlier. In reaction to this decline, the U.S. and Canadian Governments took action in 1986 by signing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP), a 15-year cooperative agreement aimed at reversing waterfowl population declines through wetland habitat conservation and restoration. Mexico became a signatory to an amended version of the Plan in 1994.

Following three years of review and reassessment, a renewed



Destruction of wetland habitat has resulted in steep declines in some waterfowl species such as the Northern Pintail. Photo: FWS.

15-year plan has now been signed by U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Gale Norton, Canada's Minister for the Environment, Stéphane Dion, and Mexico's Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, Alberto Cardenas-Jimenez, signifying full reaffirmation of the plan.

Since its inception, the Plan has been responsible for protecting, enhancing, or restoring some 1.3 million acres of wetlands, with investments totaling approximately U.S. \$3.2 billion (double the initial expected commitment). Some of the plan's success can be attributed to its unique conceptual framework involving federal, state, tribal, private, and non-

governmental institutions in partnerships called Joint Ventures. These partnerships facilitate local or regional implementation of a plan that is otherwise international in scope. Virtually all Joint Ventures have also now expanded their scope to embrace the conservation of all bird species.

There have been notable accomplishments in reversing some of the population declines, particularly in the case of the Mallard and Blue-winged Teal, and in stemming the rate of decline of the Black Duck. For example, there were close to a million more Blue-winged Teals, and close to 1.5 million more Mallards nesting in the "Prairie Pothole Region" (which covers a vast area of the interior spanning from Iowa northwest to Alberta) in the mid 1990s than there had been in 1986. These populations also faced a severe drought in the late 80s and early 90s, and have almost doubled since their 1988 low. Northern Pintail populations continue to fall range-wide however, and this has been a significant impetus behind efforts to renew the Plan.

Funding from the FWS-administered North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989 has been a major source of U.S. federal funding for NAWMP-related projects (requiring a 1:1 match in non-federal money), as have the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. For more information visit: <http://birdhabitat.fws.gov/NAWMP/nawmphp.htm>.

ABC Publishes New Resource for Longline Regulators

ABC has completed the publication of a new report, *Stopping Seabird Bycatch: Longline Fishing – A Global Crisis for Seabirds*. Working for

Solutions to Benefit Seabirds and Fishermen. Developed from ABC's original longlining report, this new version focuses on the southern oceans, and contains greater detail on the use of mitigation measures that can dramatically reduce the deaths of albatrosses and other seabirds from longlines. An invaluable resource for fisheries regulators, the report has also

been printed in Spanish for distribution to longlining nations in Latin America.

With help from the U.S. Department of State, ABC is distributing the reports, at no charge, to key groups and individuals in at least 20 countries around the world.

ABC will be making both language versions available on its Website at www.abcbirds.org.

Birds in Brief

Cattlemen Prosecuted for Bird Poisonings

Cattle company owner, Roger F. Kahn and his farm manager Glen M. Bramlett pled guilty in U.S. District Court on January 21 to unlawfully killing thousands of birds in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The two men spread corn laced with famphur (a highly toxic pesticide, licensed only for application on cattle hides to control insects) around a pond to kill "nuisance" birds. As a result, 3,326 birds were killed, including Red-tailed Hawks, Mourning Doves, Canada Geese, Red-winged Blackbirds, grackles, crows, cowbirds, a Brown Thrasher, and a Great Horned Owl. The case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's office in Atlanta. The two men could each face up to \$15,000 in fines and six months in jail if convicted. Contact: David E. Nahmias, U.S. Attorney, Atlanta, (404) 581-6000.

Vulture and Waterbird Killing Temporarily Halted

Responding to demands from scientists and conservationists, FWS has, so far, refused to issue any new permits for USDA's Wildlife Services (WS) to kill vultures and fish-eating birds. In 2003, WS killed more than 2,500 "nuisance" vultures nationwide, as well as tens of thousands of gulls, cormorants, terns, and herons that are blamed for reducing fish populations at dams and fish hatcheries.

In Virginia, WS killed at least 400 vultures in the first half of 2004 without a permit before FWS halted all take, pending a review. Conservationists have long maintained that there is no sound scientific basis for the killings (*Bird Calls* Vol. 8, No. 1). Contact: Gavin Shire, ABC, <gshire@abcbird.org>.

Aplomado Falcon Reintroduction Proposed In New Mexico

In conjunction with The Peregrine Fund and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, FWS has announced its intention to reintroduce the "Northern" Aplomado Falcon to New Mexico. Using section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act, the population would be designated as non-essential-experimental, thus placing no burden on private landowners to restrict land use. While relatively common south of the border, the species had been extirpated in the United States prior to reintroduction efforts. Successful reintroductions of the falcon have already taken place in Texas. For more information, visit the Peregrine Fund's Website at: www.peregrinefund.org.



Aplomado Falcon. Photo: Cal Sandfort, The Peregrine Fund

Greater Sage-Grouse Not Endangered Says Government

The Greater Sage-Grouse has been denied listing under the Endangered Species Act, despite efforts by a wide variety of conservation groups to have the grouse recognized and protected as an endangered or threatened species. This decision was based on a recently completed status review of the Greater Sage-Grouse throughout its range.

Current conservation efforts

by state and local officials to increase the sage-grouse population were deemed sufficient to maintain current populations of the birds, which have declined steeply from historical numbers and still appear to be declining. For more information visit: <http://www.r6.fws.gov/species/birds/sagegrouse/>.

Black Hills Population of American Dipper Could be Listed

Under threat of a lawsuit from the Wyoming-based environmental group, the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance, FWS has agreed to review the Black Hills population of the American Dipper as a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Biologists estimate that fewer than 100 American Dippers remain in the Black Hills, which the Alliance claims qualifies as a discreet population segment. Major threats to the birds include water pollution and habitat degradation. For more information, visit the Biodiversity Conservation Alliance Website at: www.biodiversityassociates.org.

California Refuses to Ban Lead Ammunition

On February 4, 2005, the California Fish and Game Commission voted against banning the use of lead ammunition, both statewide and specifically in California Condor habitat. Condors and other raptors frequently ingest lead when scavenging prey that has been killed with lead shot, but not recovered by the hunter. Two Condors have died from lead poisoning over the last eight years, and 19 others have shown signs of high lead levels. Californians are still subject to the federal ban on the use of lead shot in wetlands (*Bird Calls* Vol. 4, No. 3). Contact: California Fish and Game Commission, (916) 445-0411.