

# Bird Calls

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Great Horned Owl by  
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## Victory: d-CON Agrees to Pull Super-Toxic Rat Poisons from Stores

Following years of pressure from ABC and other groups, the maker of the rat poison d-CON has agreed to pull from retail shelves its super-toxic products by early next year. Reckitt Benckiser, the parent company of d-CON, had been fighting for years to keep these rodenticides on the market. In late May, the company settled its legal cases against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the state of California.

“This is a huge victory for eagles, owls, hawks, and other wildlife—and for children and pets as well,” said Cynthia Palmer, Pesticides Program Director at ABC. “While the fight isn’t over until all of these poisons are off the market, this decision keeps the worst of the worst products from residential consumers.”

Reckitt Benckiser has agreed to stop making its second-generation anticoagulant rat poison products by the end of this year and to stop distribution to retailers by March 31, 2015. Represented by the environmental law firm Earthjustice, ABC—together with the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, and Defenders of Wildlife—were intervening parties alongside EPA in the cancellation proceedings against Reckitt.

The poisons interfere with blood clotting, resulting in uncontrollable bleeding that leads to death. Second-generation anticoagulants, including the compounds brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difethialone, and difenacoum, are extremely hazardous and persist for a long time in body tissues. These slow-acting poisons are often eaten for several days by rats and mice, enabling the chemicals to accumulate in their tissues at many times the lethal dose.

The dying rodents then become deadly prey for predators, scavengers, and pets.

Studies have documented second-generation anticoagulants in more than 70 percent of wildlife tested, including Bald Eagles, mountain lions, and endangered San Joaquin kit foxes. In addition, these rodenticides cause more than 160 severe poisonings of pets annually. According to data from EPA, up to 10,000 children are accidentally exposed to rat poison in their homes each year.

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Safe alternatives to rat poison can be used to control rodents in homes and rural areas. Effective measures include rodent-proofing of buildings by sealing cracks and crevices and eliminating food sources; providing owl boxes to encourage natural predation; and utilizing snap and electronic traps that don’t involve these highly toxic chemicals.

Under the agreement with EPA, second-generation anticoagulant rat poisons will still be available for bulk purchase by agricultural users and by licensed pest-control operators—and ABC will continue to push for a ban on these dangerous substances.



For more information on safe alternatives to rat poison, visit [SafeRodentControl.org](http://SafeRodentControl.org)

## ABC, Partners Oppose Idaho Raven Kill Proposal

Conservation groups want the state of Idaho to junk a plan to protect key populations of Greater Sage-Grouse by poisoning as many as 4,000 Common Ravens. The sage grouse—well known for elaborate mating dances—once thrived in the sprawling sagebrush habitats that used to cover much of the American West. But in recent years the species has been declining rapidly, as more and more of its natural habitat has been converted into farms, cattle ranches, extensive energy facilities, and towns and cities.

Ravens sometimes eat the eggs of sage grouse, and they tend to be more common on disturbed lands. Spokesmen for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game say that is why they decided to spend up to \$100,000 killing ravens found near three of the state's more imperiled sage grouse populations. The plan was developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), which issued the necessary permits.

But critics of the raven kill proposal say there is no hard evidence that it protects sage grouse, noting that the plan itself concedes that raven predation

does not pose a “significant range-wide threat” to Greater Sage-Grouse in Idaho. That conclusion is supported by a recent report from the FWS, which ranks raven predation as the 17<sup>th</sup>-highest threat to Greater Sage-Grouse populations, and by research conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey.

Steve Holmer, Senior Policy Advisor at ABC, argued that best way to keep

ravens away from sage grouse eggs is not to kill the ravens, but to limit the developments that bring them closer to the grouse.

“Remarkably, only three percent of grouse habitat has protections from extensive grazing or energy infrastructure development,” said Holmer. “Putting those protections into place should be our number-one management priority. Otherwise the grouse population will not recover.”

The list of groups opposed to the poisoning plan includes Golden Eagle Audubon Society, Advocates for the West, Western Watersheds Project, and the Idaho Conservation League. These groups have signed letters to FWS Director Dan Ashe and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, asking that the effort be halted. A citizen petition opposing the plan was also sent to the Governor of Idaho and the Director of Idaho Fish and Game.

As of now, the plan to kill the ravens has been put on hold for a year due to permitting delays. If the plan ultimately moves forward, it could prompt other western states to launch similar poisoning programs, and—perhaps—to put less emphasis on cooperative efforts to protect more sage grouse habitat. That could raise the odds of an endangered species listing that could lead to mandatory habitat restrictions, massive legal battles, and political turmoil in some western states.

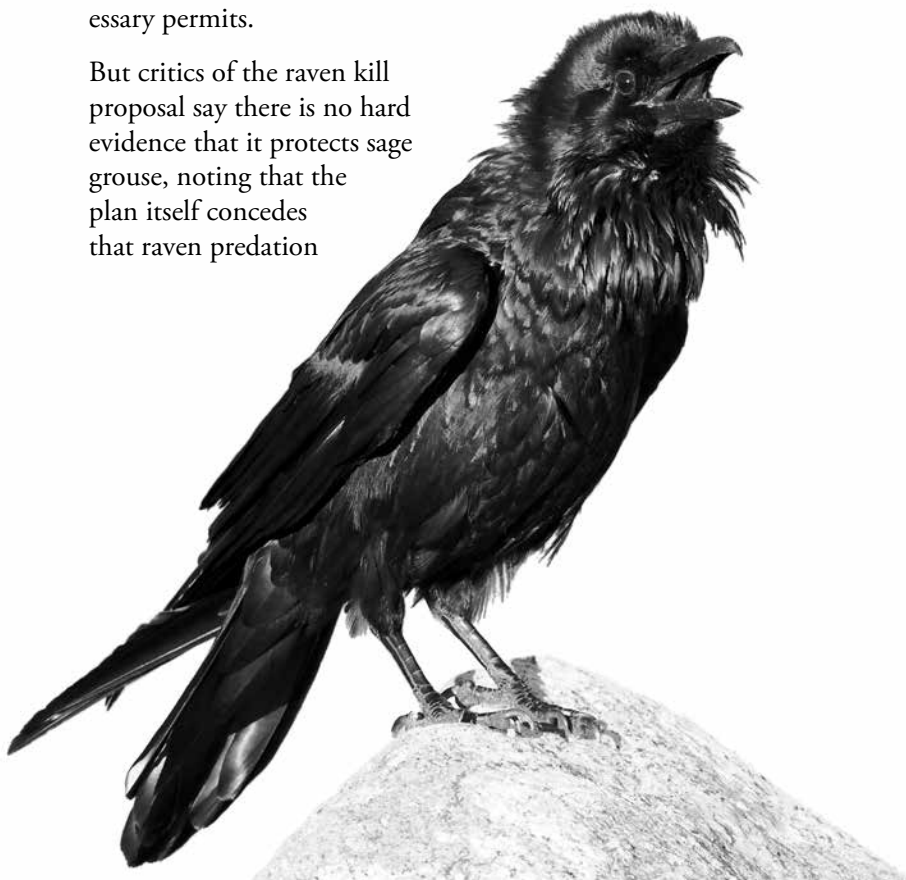
FWS will decide by 2015 whether the Greater Sage-Grouse will be added to the list of plants and animals protected by the Endangered Species Act.

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## d-CON Company Capitulates: Behind the Victory

By Cynthia Palmer, Pesticides Program Director, ABC

Recently the makers of a notoriously toxic line of rat and mouse poisons announced that they would stop selling these rodenticides to U.S. retail outlets by March 31, 2015 (see cover). The \$37-billion Reckitt Benckiser, the British multinational that makes d-CON rodenticides—as well as Woolite, French’s Mustard, Lysol, and other brands—forged a settlement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on the last day of May.

We’re thrilled with this hard-won victory: For more than a decade, ABC and other groups have been urging rat poison manufacturers to reduce the risks or to pull their products off the market entirely. Instead, Reckitt filed spurious and time-consuming lawsuits, ignored consumer boycotts, and repeatedly challenged research linking d-CON products to the deaths of hawks, eagles, and owls, and to poisonings of low-income kids—all the while crowing of its commitment to “environmental justice.”

Observers have described Reckitt’s long battle with the EPA, ABC, and other groups as the single most egregious act of noncompliance with the nation’s pesticide laws in more than 20 years. The company’s no-holds-barred approach raised fears that other companies might start doing the same.

Here at ABC we worried that more wildlife and children would be sickened and killed by the poisons as a result of d-CON’s defy-and-delay strategy, which put a huge drain on the EPA’s overburdened and underfunded scientists and attorneys. We would have preferred to see those resources used to clean up toxic waste sites, protect drinking water supplies, or replace leaking underground storage tanks.

And then, abruptly, it was over. On May 30, unexpectedly, Reckitt announced that it would cease U.S. production of the 12 noncompliant d-CON products by the end of 2014 and stop all sales to U.S. retail outlets by the start of the following spring.

Spokespersons for Reckitt have yet to explain the sudden change of heart, but a ruling in the state of California may have been the tipping point. The huge California market for rodenticides is critical to Reckitt, and in May the company lost a significant battle there. This defeat happened when San Diego Superior Court Judge William S. Dato denied Reckitt’s motion for a preliminary injunction against California’s more restrictive rodenticide laws, scheduled to go into effect on July 1.

The decision meant that if Reckitt Benckiser wanted to keep defying the EPA, the company would be forced to make a choice. Either it would have to start manufacturing two separate lines of d-CON rat and mouse poisons—one for California and one for the rest of the country—or it would have to start producing safer rodenticides for the entire country.

The settlements that Reckitt reached with EPA and the state of California do not end the country’s rodenticide problems. The most toxic rodenticides may soon disappear from retail shelves, but they will still be sold in bulk at feed- and farm-supply stores. ABC will continue to serve as a watchdog for any dangers posed by d-CON’s yet-to-be-announced replacement chemicals.

But for now, let’s celebrate this unexpected victory as we say goodbye to a dozen retail products that cause fatal hemorrhaging in Bald Eagles, hawks, and other wildlife, not to mention children and pets.

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## ABC Asks Interior to Address Feral Cat Threat to Wildlife

Conservation groups have urged the Department of the Interior (DOI) to pay more attention to the nation's leading bird-killers: domestic cats that have either been abandoned or allowed to roam outdoors.

Although cats kept indoors can make wonderful pets and companions, studies have established that free-roaming cats kill more than 1.4 billion birds each year in the United States alone. (For perspective, consider that 1.4 billion is equivalent to the entire human population of China, the most populous country in the world.) Many of these birds are killed on public lands by cats that live in booming outdoor colonies, where they catch and transmit diseases dangerous to humans, including rabies and toxoplasmosis.

"The number of domestic cats in the United States has tripled over the last 40 years and continues to rise," said George Fenwick, President of ABC. "These cats are now decimating birds and other animals in wildlife refuges, national parks, and on other public lands."

ABC is part of an alliance of 200 conservation groups that recently asked DOI Secretary Sally Jewell to address these problems, partly by specifically prohibiting feral cat colonies on lands managed by the DOI. Many towns and cities are now considering ill-advised proposals to protect



Outdoor cats continue to prey on birds and other wildlife on federal lands. Photo by infinityyy, Shutterstock

outdoor colonies of feral cats by instituting what are known as "Trap, Neuter and Release" (TNR) programs. Scientists who study outdoor cats say those programs have failed to stop the outdoor colonies from growing, or to prevent the feral cats they harbor from killing native wildlife and spreading dangerous diseases.

ABC's Fenwick noted that these problems aren't caused by cats. "People—and not cats—are responsible for these problems. Irresponsible pet owners are the reason that cat predation is now the leading cause of bird mortality in the United States."

## Florida Wildlife Refuge to Start Fining Cat Owners

One wildlife refuge, the Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, has announced that it will fine cat owners for repeated violations of rules banning free-roaming house cats. Crocodile Lake's rules require that cat owners be warned for initial violations. When particular cats are seen on refuge lands for a second time, the owners can be fined up to \$175.

The rules were instituted to protect the Key Largo cotton mouse and Key Largo woodrat—native species listed as "Endangered" under the Endangered Species Act and known to be threatened by domestic cats—but bird conservation groups such as ABC are hailing the new rules as well.



"Domestic cats are the number-one source of direct mortality for birds and mammals in the United States," said Grant Sizemore, ABC's Cats Indoors Program Officer.

The Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge, located in north Key Largo, is an important stopover site for migratory birds. It's believed that one of the main sources of predatory outdoor cats found in the refuge is a nearby facility that engages in a TNR program.

"TNR programs create serious conservation problems when they are near wildlife refuges," said Sizemore. "It's our hope that these new rules will draw attention to that underappreciated fact."

The Key Largo woodrat is an endangered native species that continues to be threatened by free-roaming house cats. Photo by FWS

## Pioneering Project Tracks Black-capped Petrels

Satellite tracking experts are following the daily movements of one of the world's more mysterious seabirds: the Black-capped Petrel. The first-ever tracking project is taking place thanks to leadership by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), South Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Clemson University, Grupo Jaragua in the Dominican Republic, and ABC.

These elusive birds spend nearly all their lives over the North Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea. They only come to land to breed, and their only known breeding sites are hidden in the rugged mountains of Hispaniola, the Caribbean island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Local people refer to them as “Diablotín” or “little devil,” thanks in part to their eerie calls.

Efforts to learn more about the lives led by the ‘little devils’ gained momentum when researchers from ABC partner Grupo Jaragua found several dozen Black-capped Petrel nests in the Dominican Republic. In April, a field team captured three of the birds at their nesting burrows. The petrels were equipped with lightweight, solar-powered transmitters designed to help develop detailed, real-time maps of the long trips these birds take over the open ocean.

The tagged birds flew out to sea the next evening to start looking for food, according to Canadian seabird expert Rob Ronconi, who led a field team from Grupo Jaragua. Ever since, the daily journeys of these birds have been recorded by the transmitters affixed to their backs, which send precise locations up to passing satellites and then down to electronic maps maintained by Pat Jodice with the USGS South Carolina Cooperative Fish and



Black-capped Petrel outfitted with a transmitter by Tazio Taveres

Wildlife Research Unit at Clemson University.

Dr. Jodice said the petrels surprised him right away, partly by foraging in “somewhat unexpected” places in the southern Caribbean Sea and partly by covering as many as 420 miles in the

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**The tracking data will be used to help identify the leading threats to Black-capped Petrels when they are at sea.**

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course of a single day. Holly Freifeld, co-coordinator of the tracking project, says the tracking data will be used to help identify the leading threats to Black-capped Petrels when they are at sea. The list of potential threats includes exposure to oil spills, ingestion of marine debris, and attraction to the lights of oil rigs and fishing boats.


“What we need is detailed information about where and when petrels forage, for example,” Freifeld said. “That will

make it easier for us to locate areas that need protection and to assess other threats that these birds face at sea.”

Once the birds were relatively common, but hunters helped push them to the brink of extinction in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Now, habitat destruction linked to poverty is a major threat to the petrel’s breeding grounds on Hispaniola. Approximately 2,000 breeding pairs are thought to exist.

The Black-capped Petrel is classified as “Endangered” by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and is under review for potential listing under the Endangered Species Act. ABC is working with partner groups to protect key petrel habitats in the Dominican Republic.

 You can follow along! See Black-capped Petrel travels here: [www.atlanticseabirds.org/bcpe-new](http://www.atlanticseabirds.org/bcpe-new)

 Go behind the scenes of the petrel tagging project on ABCs blog: [abcbirds.wordpress.com](http://abcbirds.wordpress.com)

## ABC to Help Advance “Bird-Friendly” Timber Management

**ABC** will use a major grant from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) to partner with timber companies that practice sustainable forestry, helping to expand efforts to better manage important bird habitats. The project has the potential to benefit birds across millions of acres of forestland.

SFI is a forest certification system set up to promote sustainable forest management practices in the United States and Canada and, at this point, it has certified more than a quarter-billion acres of forestland. The grant to ABC was part of more than \$400,000 in grants awarded by SFI's Conservation and Community Partnerships Program in 2014.

ABC will use the funds to ascertain best management practices for birds in forests managed by SFI program

participants, according to Mike Parr, ABC's Vice President for Program Development. He added that both ABC and some SFI program participant companies are already well-versed in managing forest lands for birds, but that there is still considerable potential for expanding pilot projects across larger areas. For example, in some eastern states, ABC has helped landowners and timber interests to use sustainable harvest methods to create early successional (or young forest) habitats that birds such as Golden-winged Warblers use for breeding.

“The goal is the development of practical, effective, and affordable forest management options that sustain and create more bird-friendly habitats,” said Parr. “We want to work with these companies to find the ‘sweet spots’ where bird conservation and

good business are the same thing.” He added that “some of the larger forest management companies already have significant programs to benefit birds on their lands. We can learn from each other as we seek to find more of these opportunities.”

Since 2010, SFI has awarded more than \$1.9 million in funding for field studies and pilot programs. Their total investment exceeds \$7.1 million when funds leveraged by contributions from other partner groups are taken into consideration.

“The SFI program is the only forest certification standard in North America that requires participants to support and engage in research activities to improve forest health,” said Kathy Abusow, President of SFI.

### Longtime ABC supporters Kathy Burger and Glen Gerada are leaving a legacy of bird conservation as members of ABC's Legacy Circle. Here's why:

“In developing our estate plans, **we believed it was important to give back**, not just to specific people in our families, but also as a lasting gift to ideas we are passionate about. For us that means a commitment to preserve and protect bird species and their habitat, which in a larger sense protects the vital ecosystems we all depend on.

“ABC is included in our estate plans because it is laser-focused on critical birds and habitat, such as preserving summer and wintering grounds for the Cerulean Warbler; **ABC addresses ‘big issues’ critical to birds**, such as poorly sited wind farms; and through the Bird Conservation Alliance, ABC brings together diverse environmental groups to work as partners for the benefit of birds.

“We have had the opportunity to meet and to bird with many of the ABC staff. They have invariably impressed

us with the passion and extreme work ethic they bring to their efforts. **ABC is a nimble, results-oriented group** and has earned our respect and our financial support.”

If you would like more information on how to make a bequest or other estate gift, or if you have already made a bequest to ABC, please contact ABC Planned Giving Director, Jack Morrison, at 540-253-5780, or [jmorrison@abcbirds.org](mailto:jmorrison@abcbirds.org).



Cerulean Warbler by Frode Jacobsen

## Guatemala Establishes Sierra Caral Reserve

Conservationists are hailing the creation of a 47,000-acre protected area in the cloud forests of eastern Guatemala. The National Congress of Guatemala voted overwhelmingly to establish the Sierra Caral Water and Forest Reserve in an area that harbors a spectacular array of animals, including a dozen globally threatened frogs and salamanders, the recently discovered blue Merendon Palm-pitviper, and a host of migratory and endemic birds.

The “core zone” of this new protected area, the 6,000-acre Sierra Caral Amphibian Conservation Reserve, was established in 2012 by Guatemalan conservation organization and ABC partner Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación (FUNDAECO) with assistance from ABC, Global Wildlife Conservation, Southern Wings, World Land Trust, and others. The conservation value of the area is reflected by its designation as a global Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) site because it is the last known home of an amphibian found nowhere else: Wake’s hidden salamander.

The new reserve is tucked away in the eastern corner of Guatemala near the Caribbean Sea and the Honduran border, in the Sierra Caral mountain range. Exploration of these mountains over the past two decades has yielded several beetles, salamanders, frogs, and snakes new to science. At least 118 species of amphibians and reptiles are reported for this area, including seven endemic amphibians only recently discovered there.

Sierra Caral contains overwintering and stopover sites for nearly 120 species of neotropical migratory birds—birds that breed in North America and



spend the winter in Central and South America. Thirteen of Sierra Caral’s resident species are regionally endemic, and three are threatened species: the Highland Guan, Great Curassow, and Keel-billed Motmot.

Migratory birds include Canada, Kentucky, and Worm-eating warblers, Wood Thrush, Painted Bunting, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Thirty-three migratory species with population declines on their breeding grounds have been reported in Sierra Caral.

“We have been working to obtain the legal declaration of this new protected area for more than seven years,” said Marco Cerezo of FUNDAECO. “Now, finally, the biological importance of Sierra Caral has been recognized by our National Congress.”

“The new Sierra Caral reserve safeguards key stopover habitat for millions of migrating birds,” said ABC President George Fenwick. “It’s an invaluable addition to Central America’s roster of protected areas and a benefit to U.S. bird conservation efforts.”

Kentucky Warbler by Greg Lavaty

## ABC Partners Convene in Colombia’s Sky Island

Critically endangered birds, nature reserve management, reforestation, and tourism development were among the leading topics of conversation at a recent Sustainability Summit in the town of Minca, in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta of Colombia.

The nearby El Dorado Nature Reserve—a mecca for both birds and birders—was created in 2006 by groups including ABC and is managed by Fundación ProAves, one of ABC’s close long-term partners.

At the April gathering, ABC’s international team collaborated with representatives of partner groups from the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America, along with donor agencies. Our partners learned from one another how to pay for managing conservation areas by generating income through tourism, ecosystem services, and fundraising. They also shared insights for measuring success in restoration and reforestation projects.

Along the way, sightings of the Santa Marta Parakeet, White-tipped

Quetzal, Black-and-Chestnut Eagle, and other remarkable birds reminded participants that many spectacular species benefit from the well-managed reserves we support.

This summit was made possible by Blue Moon Fund, Jeniam Foundation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



To visit El Dorado or other ABC-supported reserves, see: [ConservationBirding.org](http://ConservationBirding.org)

## Drought Hurts Birds in California

In California's Central Valley, giant flocks of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl descend into big flooded rice fields every year, resting and refueling before flying off to northern breeding grounds. Fields like these are the next best thing to the once-extensive wetlands in this valley, which have long since been replaced by orchards, farms, vineyards, and suburbs. For that reason, these fields have become vital rest stops used by more than seven million birds each year during migration.

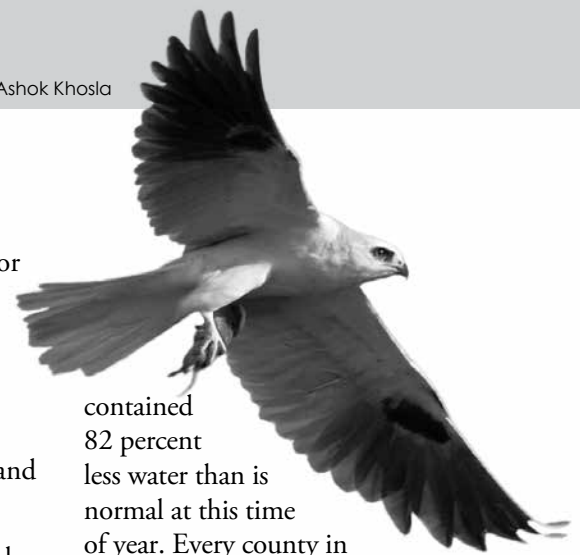
But this spring's historic drought left many of those farm fields dry, cracked, and useless to the birds that count on them. Migratory bird experts say it's not a coincidence that counts of migratory water birds in this state have fallen sharply in the last few years, from 1.2 million in 2012 to 450,000 in 2014.

In southern California, researchers are investigating possible links between the state-wide drought and what appears to be a sharp decline in

raptor populations. Longtime raptor expert Pete Bloom recently told the Orange County Register that these declines were caused by an extraordinarily high rate of nest failure, which could be related to drought-related shortages of mice and other prey.

Bloom, a veteran ornithologist, said he'd never seen the region's raptor populations fall so quickly or so far. But he added that it's too soon to blame the raptor crash on the drought, since factors ranging from rat poisons to West Nile Virus may also be involved.

In recent months, wind and sea surface and sub-surface temperatures suggest that an El Niño weather system, which could bring large amounts of rain to California, is increasingly likely. In the meantime, the historic drought continues. Recent readings of the water content of the snowpacks in California's mountains—waters that feed the rivers that flow down to farms and cities—showed that the snowpacks



contained 82 percent less water than is normal at this time of year. Every county in the state is now suffering from drought conditions, five months after California Governor Jerry Brown declared a statewide drought emergency.

George Wallace, ABC's Vice President for Oceans and Islands, said the long-term effects of the drought are extremely difficult to calculate, in part because birds that use California's wetlands during winter and in migration have moved on at this point.

"Right now, the best thing we can do is root for rain in the coming months and hope that state officials find ways to alleviate the impacts of the drought on birds as well as people."

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## New Research: Birds Wary of Powerlines

Birds and some large mammals don't see powerlines as drooping cables strung from poles but as bursting, sparking lines of electricity that should not be approached. That's the gist of a new study in *Conservation Biology*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

It's long been known that birds see light at frequencies below the range of human eyes. That's because bird eyes have an extra type of cone cell that detects those UV wavelengths. This new study painted a vivid picture of the flashing lines of light that birds detect

when they look at power lines: Flashes that occur as ion gases near the lines build up and then dissipate suddenly.

The authors of the paper argue that the large eyes of mammals such as reindeer are capable of detecting these "standing coronas and irruptions." Other studies have identified a range of other mammals that appear to have the same abilities.

The paper has made headlines because it may explain why many birds and other animals avoid not only power lines but the structures they hang

from. Ground-nesting birds such as Greater Sage-Grouse stay far away from power lines. Some migrating mammals will not cross under them, even when the lines are far overhead.

Nick Tyler of the University of Tromsø in Norway, one of the authors of the paper, hopes it draws attention to the profound ways in which natural habitats can be divided into pieces.

"Human infrastructure is a major and ubiquitous cause of [habitat] fragmentation," Tyler said. "It is a major global issue."

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## Oregon City Becomes First to Ban Neonics

The city of Eugene, Oregon, has become the first community in the nation to ban from city property the use of neonicotinoid insecticides, or “neonics” for short.

Neonics are the world’s most widely used class of pesticides. But in recent years concerns have arisen about the threats neonics pose to birds and bees. The Eugene City Council action banning the substances was prompted by reports that neonics might be linked to massive die-offs of the bees that pollinate many crops. Conservation groups including ABC believe the ban will also protect local birds.

Last year, ABC reviewed 200 studies about neonics and their impacts, including 2,800 pages of industry data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. ABC’s subsequent report called on the Environmental Protection Agency to pull many neonics off the market until more

comprehensive safety tests could be conducted. The report concluded that neonics are lethal to birds, noting that a single neonicotinoid-treated seed is enough to kill a songbird.

The ban in Eugene was imposed after a bill that would have restricted the use of neonics in all of Oregon was rejected by the state legislature. Instead the state created educational guidelines for farmers and others who use these pesticides and established a task force to look into the impacts neonics are having on bees, birds, and other pollinators.

Federal pesticide laws allow individual states to ban the possession, sale, and use of products that do not meet their health and safety standards. Historically, local governments had this power as well. Now, however, most states prohibit towns and cities from imposing local pesticide bans that extend beyond city property. Oregon is one of those states, which is why the legislation in Eugene applies to public parks, schools, and municipal centers but not to private property.



See ABC report on neonics. Visit [ABCbirds.org](http://ABCbirds.org) and search “neonics report.”



(Left) Eastern Meadowlark by Peter LaTourrette (Right) Bee by Betty Shelton, Shutterstock

## Rare Finch Breed in the Galapagos

The most endangered bird in the Galapagos Islands may be stepping back from the brink of extinction. In February, the first successful hatching of a



Mangrove Finch took place at the Charles Darwin Research Station on Santa Cruz Island, and 11 more finch chicks have hatched since then. If all proceeds as planned, these chicks will eventually be released in the last known habitats of Mangrove Finch: two small mangrove forests on the west coast of Isabella Island, which is part of the Galapagos Archipelago.

Researchers say there may be as few as 60 Mangrove Finch living in those forests now. For years, they say, the wild finch population has been shrinking rapidly, due in part to habitat degradation and in part to the spread of a parasitic fly called *Philornis downsi*.

The larvae of this fly feed on the blood of newborn finch nestlings and their mothers, weakening or killing the chicks.

Recently, however, researchers from the University of Utah reported that they had found a way to protect the finch chicks from the blood-sucking larvae: by enticing adult finches to incorporate cotton soaked in a weak permethrin solution into their nests. The researchers say the pesticide fumes in the cotton repel and kill the larvae without harming the birds. Further tests of this fumigation system will be conducted before the finches hatched in captivity are released into the wild.

## 2010 Gulf Spill Lethal to Huge Numbers of Birds, Says New Study

Although the exact number is uncertain, as many as 800,000 birds may have been killed by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, according to a study to be published in *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

The study was conducted by Jeffrey Short, a marine chemist who spent more than 30 years with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Chris Haney, the chief scientist at Defenders of Wildlife.

Fewer than 3,000 dead birds were recovered by responders when the 200-million-gallon spill took place in spring 2010, but conservation groups and some marine scientists have speculated that the total number of birds

affected might be far higher, partly because many bird carcasses would have been swept out of sight by oceanic currents and partly because scavenging animals would have eaten many of the birds that washed ashore.

Short and Haney tested those ideas by developing computer models that calculated estimates of the number of birds that would have died after coming into contact with oil slicks created by the massive spill. Oil can affect birds in many ways, including poisoning, causing reproductive problems and feeding interruptions, and damaging feathers. The fatality estimates developed by the models differ from species to species, based on variables such as population size, landing behaviors, and the length of time spent in potentially oiled water.



Oiled Royal Tern. Photo by Mike Parr, ABC

Many of the bird experts now working on the Gulf spill were unable to comment on the new paper because they are involved in a Natural Resource Damage Assessment Study (NRDAS) that will presumably include an estimate of the number of the birds killed by the spill. By federal law, the NRDAS process will be used to determine the extent of BP's liability for the environmental damage attributed to the spill. The study to be published in *Marine Ecology Progress* is independent of the federal process.

BP is participating in the NRDAS work, but the company made it clear that it did not think much of the new estimate. Jason Ryan, a spokesman for BP America, told *The New York Times* that he questioned the assumptions and the methodology behind the new bird kill estimate, arguing that the company's "analysis of field observations collected to date indicate that population and nesting impacts from the spill on birds were limited."

Gulf bird experts who were able to discuss the study had mixed opinions of its findings. Some noted that the estimate of 800,000 bird kills far exceeds the typical ratio of 10 or fewer bird deaths per recovered carcass. Others said the estimate may be too low, since it didn't account for marsh birds affected by the spill.



This oiled Roseate Spoonbill is one of thousands of Gulf birds affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill. Photo by Mike Parr, ABC

## Birds Incinerated by Solar Plant in California

The world's largest solar facility may be a "megatrap" for passing birds, according to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) report on bird kills at the \$2.2 billion Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System in southern California. The report concluded that birds, bats, and insects had been incinerated while flying through the superheated layer of air produced by the "solar flux" technology used at Ivanpah, which sprawls across 3,200 acres of desert about 45 miles southwest of Las Vegas.

Rather than use photovoltaic panels to absorb solar radiation, the Ivanpah facility uses more than 300,000 massive mirrors to bounce radiation toward a set of boilers mounted on 450-foot towers. That process creates a superheated "solar vortex" between the mirrors and the solar towers.

The study—still considered inconclusive—was prepared by scientists from the FWS Forensics Laboratory, who were asked to examine 147 bird carcasses found while the solar plant was being built and tested. The report concluded that many birds had been badly singed while flying over the mirrors, noting that at one point the FWS investigators "observed a falcon or falcon-like bird with a

plume of smoke arising from its tail as it passed through the solar flux field." The smoking bird fell 400 feet before leaving the vortex, landing, and then disappearing.

The investigators wrote of watching other flying objects burst into flames as they entered the furnace-like layer

birds, which are incapacitated by solar flux injury, thus attracting predators and creating an entire food chain vulnerable to injury and death."

The study recommends that the Ivanpah facility be shut down during peak migrations while further studies are conducted and that video cam-

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of air. Ivanpah employees referred to the lines of smoke created by those objects as "streamers." The report said new streamers were seen above the mirrors every few minutes when the angled mirrors were in use.

Temperatures inside the solar vortices created by the mirrors are said to range from roughly 200 to roughly 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The report concluded that, "Bird species [most] affected by solar flux include both insectivores [such as swallows, swifts, and flycatchers] and raptors that prey on insect-eating birds."

Thousands of scorched insects were found at the facility, and more were seen flying toward the light produced by mirrors. The investigators wrote: "It appears that Ivanpah may be acting as a 'Mega Trap,' attracting insects which in turn attract insect-eating

eras be installed to track birds flying through the flux.

Ivanpah was built by BrightSource Energy and is operated by NRG Energy. The bird kill report did not delay the opening of the new complex, which produces enough electricity for 140,000 homes.

BrightSource wants to build a similar solar energy facility near Joshua Tree National Park in California's Riverside County. There, more than 150,000 billboard-sized mirrors would bounce solar radiation toward boilers mounted on 750-foot towers. FWS biologists have warned that the heat produced by those mirrors could kill Golden Eagles that nest in the area. The California Energy Commission wants BrightSource to replace the mirrors and towers with more conventional technologies, such as photovoltaic panels.



The Ivanpah solar facility in southern California.  
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia

## Conservation Groups Object to Poorly Sited Wind Power Proposals in Ohio and Maryland

**ABC** and other groups involved in efforts to promote bird-friendly wind facilities are questioning proposals to build wind power plants in bird-rich areas near Lake Erie and the Chesapeake Bay.

In Maryland, ABC has urged the state legislature to conduct a “detailed re-analysis” of the Great Bay Wind Project, which would be built on the eastern shore of the

Chesapeake Bay, in Somerset

County. Michael Hutchins, National Coordinator of ABC’s Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign, said the proposed facility poses a threat to a major nesting area for Bald Eagles.

“If this project is built to current projections, it could become the biggest single threat to America’s national symbol,” said Hutchins. “It’s more than ironic that this project would be a virtual stone’s throw away from our nation’s capital.”

The Great Bay proposal has been scaled back by its owners, but Hutchins says it still puts Bald Eagles and other birds at risk. Current plans allow for the construction of as many as 50 turbines, with blades reaching as high as 600 feet. Hutchins adds that these turbines could kill more than 40 Bald Eagles per year. At a minimum, he believes the project should be put on hold while further studies are conducted.

“Bird-Smart wind energy development is primarily about appropriate risk assessment, especially of the cumulative impacts of wind and other sources of mortality,” Hutchins said. “We don’t think that happened here.”

In Ohio, ABC and Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO) are objecting to two proposals to build wind power facilities in the middle of major migratory pathway near the southern shores of Lake Erie. One of those facilities would be built in a business park in Port Clinton, Ohio. The proposed facility is close to the Camp Perry National Guard facility, where plans to build a different wind facility were

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**Like the facility in Port Clinton, the “Icebreaker” project would rise in the middle of the migratory corridor used by millions of birds each year.**

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recently abandoned after federal regulators warned that it could violate the nation’s bird protection laws. Hutchins said that, because of the voluntary federal guidelines currently in place, the prospective owners of the business park wind plant are not required to consult with regulators because they would be building on private lands.

According to a February 26 letter to U.S. Fish and Wildlife (FWS) Director Dan Ashe from ABC, “This wind energy project is being built with no Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) ever being conducted. [We] are concerned that this project represents

an even greater threat to our public trust resources than the turbine that was planned for Camp Perry.... [and] another failure of the current voluntary permitting guidelines to protect our public trust resources.”

Kimberly Kaufman, Executive Director of BSBO, said the area is one of the five most important bird migration routes in the United States.

ABC and BSBO have shared similar concerns about an “experimental” wind facility with 400-foot-tall turbines that would be built in the waters near the southern shore of Lake Erie. Like the facility in Port Clinton, the “Icebreaker” project would rise in the middle of the migratory corridor used by millions of birds each year, including endangered species such as Kirtland’s Warbler and Piping Plover.

ABC and BSBO voiced concerns about the project in a letter to the chairman of the Ohio Power Siting Board. “There is a high likelihood of major mortality events involving federally protected birds associated with wind turbines in this area,” the letter said.

Hutchins said a recent study of wind power technologies showed that taller turbines, such as those proposed for the Icebreaker project, pose a greater danger to birds.

The Icebreaker project was recently denied a federal grant to assist in construction. Instead, \$47 million in public support was awarded by the Department of Energy to three projects off the coasts of New Jersey, Oregon, and Virginia.

## ABC Sues Over 30-Year Eagle Take Rule

**ABC** has filed suit in order to block a federal rule that allows wind energy companies and others to accidentally kill Bald and Golden Eagles for as many as 30 years without being charged with violations of the country's bird protection laws.

The legal action is based on ABC's assessment that the Department of the Interior (DOI) committed multiple violations of federal law in connection with revised eagle take rules published last December. Earlier versions of these rules put a five-year limit on eagle take permits.

ABC sent DOI and its U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) a formal Notice of Intent to Sue on April 30, charging that the new rules were developed in ways that violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. ABC is represented by the Washington, DC, public interest law firm of Meyer Glitzenstein & Crystal.

"Eagles are among our nation's most iconic and cherished birds," said ABC's Michael Hutchins. "They do not have

to be sacrificed for the next 30 years for the sake of unconstrained wind energy." Hutchins called the 30-year take permits "a reckless gamble" with the future of the nation's eagles.

The previous rule, providing for a maximum duration of five years, was adopted in 2009. According to a statement issued at that time by FWS, a permit of any longer duration "would be incompatible with the preservation of the Bald or Golden Eagle." Yet just four years later DOI has increased by six-fold the time during which eagles could be killed, without offering a strong scientific justification for this change.

"In the government's rush to expand wind energy, shortcuts were taken in implementing this rule that should not have been allowed," said Hutchins. ABC President George Fenwick says that the process, by circumventing environmental law, sets a dangerous precedent. "Everyone who cares about wildlife in this country should be concerned about this rule," he stated.

Fenwick said the lawsuit was a last resort. "The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is one of ABC's most important partners," he stated. "We collaborate frequently, share many goals, and have enjoyed many successes together. Unfortunately, our previous entreaties that the government slow its headlong rush on 30-year eagle take permits were ignored."

Wind energy facilities are expanding rapidly. In 2009, 22,000 U.S. wind turbines were in operation, representing 25 gigawatts (GW) of installed capacity. That number will skyrocket in the near future if the wind power industry meets federal goals that call for 300GW of electricity from renewable power sources.

By 2030, wind energy projects could affect almost 20,000 square miles of land in the United States (an area larger than the combined areas of New Jersey, Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island) and more than 4,000 square miles of marine habitat.



Golden Eagle by Michal Ninger, Shutterstock

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**"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is one of ABC's most important partners. We collaborate frequently, share many goals, and have enjoyed many successes together. Unfortunately, our previous entreaties that the government slow its headlong rush on 30-year eagle take permits were ignored."**

*George Fenwick, President, ABC*

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## BIRDS IN BRIEF

### Reintroduced Curassow Breeds Successfully in Wild

The Red-billed Curassow continues its comeback at Brazil's Reserva Ecológica de Guapiaçu (REGUA), where captive-bred curassows have been released to the wild. This once-widespread bird remains in only a handful of protected sites within Brazil's Atlantic Forest.

Fifty-three young curassows raised in REGUA's breeding center were released from 2006 to 2008. Researchers say the birds bred at least six times in the wild between 2009 and 2014. The reintroductions are designed in part to establish a permanent breeding population on the 18,500-acre reserve.



Black Skimmer by Shutterstock

### Beach-nesting Bird Program Now in Alabama

ABC is expanding its efforts to protect beach-nesting birds, including Black Skimmers and Least Terns, to Alabama's Gulf State Park. There, in partnership with Alabama State Parks and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Alabama Ecological Services Field Office, ABC will work to monitor imperiled nesting species and to teach visitors how to minimize disturbance.

The partners are reminding visitors that activities too close to nesting and breeding areas can drive parent birds away from nests, leaving eggs

and chicks exposed to the hot sun and predators. New interpretive signs in the park urge people to give the birds the space they need to successfully raise their young.

### California City Adopts Bird-Safe Building Guidelines

Sunnyvale, a city near the south end of the San Francisco Bay, has adopted new guidelines for bird-safe buildings, incorporating bird protection standards from the state's Green Building Standards Code. Bird-friendly designs are now required for all buildings in Sunnyvale near one-acre vegetated or aquatic sites—places that could attract birds. Other new buildings must consider designs that minimize window collisions. These new guidelines could become law in 2016.

Up to a billion birds are killed each year in the United States when they collide with windows they can't see.

### ABC's Dan Casey Receives Partners in Flight Award

Dan Casey, ABC's Northern Rockies Conservation Officer, recently received the Partners in Flight Leadership Award for exceptional contributions to bird conservation, including his current leadership of an effort to coordinate protection of Long-billed Curlew populations and breeding habitat throughout western North America.



Casey has a long history of conservation achievement, including six years as chair of Montana Partners in Flight and past chair of the Partners in Flight Western Working Group. He authored the *2000 Montana Bird Conservation Plan* and was named 2006 Montana Conservationist of the Year. In addition, Casey has served on the technical committees of the Prairie Potholes, Northern Great Plains, and Intermountain West Joint Ventures.

### Biggest Week Helps ABC Protect the Golden-Wing

Generous supporters, including many who attended the Biggest Week in American Birding in northwest Ohio, provided more than \$14,000 to benefit the rapidly declining Golden-winged Warbler through the "Save the Golden-Wing" project, an effort of ABC and Black Swamp Bird Observatory.

The Golden-winged Warbler is a priority of ABC's Migratory Birds Program, which is working to provide "full life-cycle" conservation for the species—restoring habitat needed for wintering in Central America and breeding in North America.

### "Loophole" in ESA Listings Concerns Conservation Groups

ABC and other groups say the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may be overusing a part of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that allows the agency to relax the protections normally afforded to threatened and endangered species.

The "4(d)" rule is supposed to make it easier for landowners and others to adjust to ESA restrictions, but only when the relaxed rules do not affect efforts to save listed species from extinction.

ABC staff, left to right: George Fenwick, David Pashley, Dan Casey, and David Younkman.

## ▶ TAKE ACTION

ABC has created several action alerts that enable you to quickly and easily request policy-makers' attention on important issues for birds:

### Petition to President Obama for Greater Sage-Grouse

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is developing new management plans for 62 million acres of public land in the range of the Greater Sage-Grouse. Those lands, stretching from the Dakotas to California, harbor a variety of wildlife including elk, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope, and birds including Golden Eagle, Sage Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, and Brewer's Sparrow.

>>See our petition designed to urge the Obama administration and BLM to strengthen the protections for the lands that sustain the grouse and many other species: [support.abcbirds.org/SaveTheGrouse](http://support.abcbirds.org/SaveTheGrouse)

### Opposition to Oregon Logging Bill

The O & C Land Grant Act, S. 1784, introduced by U.S. Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), would increase logging in Northwest forests used by Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl, according to endangered species experts and conservation groups including ABC.

>>Urge your Senator to oppose the bill: [support.abcbirds.org/NWForests](http://support.abcbirds.org/NWForests)

### "Threatened" Listing for Bi-State Greater Sage-Grouse Called Inadequate

ABC is warning that a federal plan to add a key population of Greater Sage-Grouse to the federal Endangered Species list may not be strong enough to protect the iconic bird or the sagebrush habitats it requires. The "bi-state" Greater Sage-Grouse found in Nevada and California are rapidly declining, but FWS is planning to declare the bird "threatened"—not "endangered"—and to limit the amount of land that would be classified as the grouse's "critical habitat."

>>To speak out in opposition to this plan, go to: [support.abcbirds.org/SaveTheGrouse](http://support.abcbirds.org/SaveTheGrouse)

### Time for EPA to Get Serious about Neonics

Neonicotinoid pesticides—now the most commonly used insecticides on earth—have been shown to have lethal effects on birds and bees. ABC and a coalition of wildlife organizations, beekeepers, and agricultural practitioners are asking the EPA to immediately suspend these products pending review of their environmental impacts.

>>Write your U.S. Representative and ask her or him to support H.R. 2692, the Save America's Pollinators Act of 2013. This bill will direct the EPA to suspend registration for neonics. [support.abcbirds.org/neonics](http://support.abcbirds.org/neonics)

Lesser Prairie-Chicken by Eleanor Bricecetti



Recently, the 4(d) rule was used to grant exemptions to ESA rules protecting the Lesser Prairie-Chicken, allowing participants in largely voluntary conservation programs in five states to "take" an incidental number of prairie chickens.

ABC is also concerned about proposed uses of the 4(d) rule related to Streaked Horned Lark and the bi-state population of Greater Sage-Grouse.

Streaked Horned Lark by Rod Gilbert



## About Bird Calls

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

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

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## From Atlantic to Pacific: Seabirds Need Your Help

Seabirds and albatrosses are among the most threatened birds in the world—for example, 15 of 22 species of albatross are threatened with extinction. ABC is the only U.S. bird conservation organization with a program dedicated to protecting these magnificent birds.

ABC is working on oceans and islands across the hemisphere to bring back seabirds and restore their habitats, including:

- in the Dominican Republic to identify new habitats and protect rapidly disappearing breeding habitat for the endangered and mysterious Black-capped Petrel.
- in Ecuador with artisanal fisheries to protect the critically endangered Waved Albatross, and other seabirds, by developing solutions to their being hooked or entangled in fishing gear.
- in Hawai'i to create the first colony of endangered Newell's Shearwaters and Hawaiian Petrels completely protected on their nesting grounds from terrestrial predators.

Your extra gift will help support ABC projects such as these. And you will be making a real difference for threatened petrels, shearwaters, and albatrosses!

Help protect seabirds from the Atlantic to the Pacific by donating using the enclosed envelope, or online at [ABCbirds.org](http://ABCbirds.org).

