



AMERICAN BIRDS 2016

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

A RECORD OF SUCCESS



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Golden-cheeked Warbler by Greg Lavaty

RECOVERY OF ESA-LISTED BIRDS



Brown Pelican by John Turner

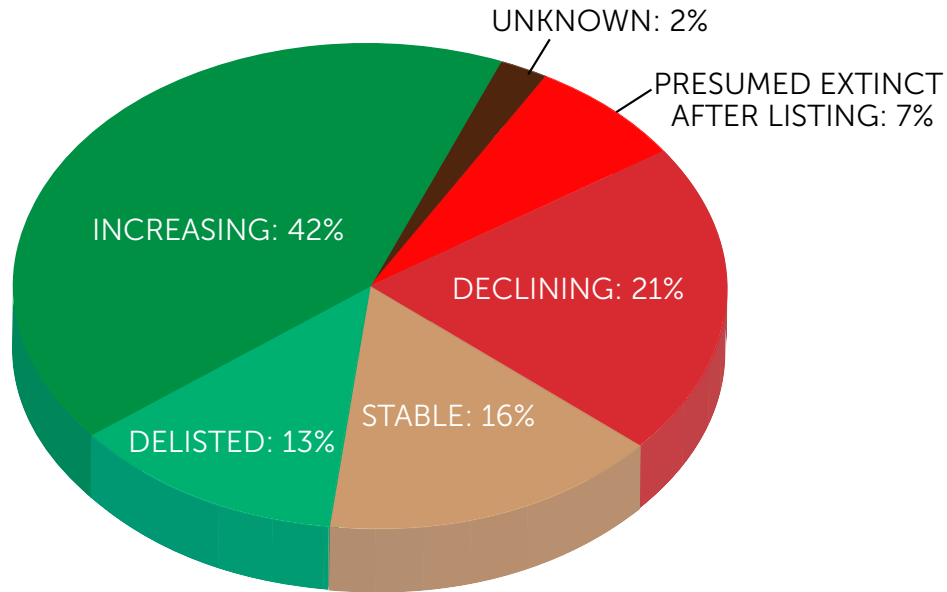
This report is intended to assist policy-makers, the conservation community, and the interested public in determining how the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is performing in its goal of preventing extinction and recovering endangered birds. Vital for bird conservation, the ESA is a last resort to prevent species extinctions. By the time a species is listed under the ESA it may be extremely difficult to recover, and recovery should be expected to be slow due to past habitat loss or degradation. But despite these challenges, the ESA is working to recover more than two-thirds of all listed U.S. bird species.

The American public overwhelmingly supports endangered species conservation and the Endangered Species Act that serves as the legal basis

for this fundamental national philosophy. [Polls](#) show this over and over again including one taken in 2015 showing a record level of support with 90 percent of the public favoring the ESA. Despite this consensus, some special interests still seek to weaken or abolish the ESA.

Overall, 70 percent of all listed U.S. birds are stable, on the road to recovery, or already delisted, while only 21 percent are in decline.

Much recent Congressional debate on the ESA has focused on exemptions for bird species whose conservation conflicts with land uses or resource extraction, such as the Greater Sage-Grouse, which was exempted from listing in the FY 2015 and 2016 spending bills. The possibility of ESA listing was an essential driver for the recently adopted sage grouse management plans that better balance development with conservation. However, it is



Population Trends of All U.S. Bird Species Since Listing

inappropriate to exempt the sage grouse from ESA protection in the future because the plans may prove ineffective at recovering the population.

As our [2006 edition](#) and other reportsⁱ have found, the ESA is successful at recovering listed species. With proper funding, we can continue to recover populations of many endangered species and with these efforts, restore habitats that provide additional benefits to society such as clean drinking water, flood control, and carbon storage. With most ESA listed bird populations stable or growing, we can expect more species being removed from endangered status, the ultimate indicator that the Act is working.

Summary

This report, produced by [American Bird Conservancy](#) (ABC), outlines the current status and population trends of all U.S. bird populations that breed in the continental United States, U.S. dependent territories, and Hawaii listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). It includes individual accounts documenting the current status of listed mainland species, subspecies, and distinct population segments. Foreign-listed species are excluded, as are birds that were recently listed or likely became extinct before they were listed.

Analysis of population data shows that more than twice as many birds listed under the ESA are increasing than are decreasing (41.6 versus 20.8 percent). An additional 12.5 percent have recovered sufficiently to be delisted, including Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Brown Pelican. After being extirpated in the wild, the Hawaiian Crow population is being recovered through captive breeding, and 12 young birds will be released back into the wild in fall 2016.

Another 15.6 percent of birds are stable, but a number of these populations have fewer than 1,000 individuals, including Yuma Clapper Rail, Audubon's Crested Caracara, Puerto Rican Broad-winged Hawk, Mariana Common Moorhen, Laysan Duck, and Maui Parrotbill.

Unfortunately, 20.8 percent of listed birds are in decline, and a handful of these declining species are at such low numbers they must be considered at high risk of imminent extinction. Declining populations with less than 1,000 birds include Akekee, Akikiki, Mariana Crow, Puerto Rican Sharpshinned Hawk, Attwater's Greater Prairie-Chicken, Florida Grasshopper Sparrow, and Guam Kingfisher, which is extinct in the wild and now occurs only in captivity.

There are also two species that lack adequate population data and their status is currently uncertain: the Coastal California Gnatcatcher and the Mexican Spotted Owl.

Seven bird species have likely become extinct after listing. Attempts to recover several of these species, including the Dusky Seaside Sparrow and Poouli, began too late and were unsuccessful at staving off extinction. Six other Hawaiian species had less than 100 birds and were effectively extinct at the time of listing. Another nine species are presumed extinct prior to their listing, including Eskimo Curlew, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and Bachman's Warbler.

However, it is important to remember that species declines occurred over decades, and recovery for most species will also take decades. Progress is also confounded by ongoing habitat loss and degradation.

Despite the challenges, 12.5 percent of listed bird populations—including our national symbol, the Bald Eagle—have recovered sufficiently thanks to ESA protection that they could be delisted. Scientists estimate the ESA has prevented the extinction of more than 200 plants and animalsⁱⁱ, including 16 avian species, between 1994 and 2004ⁱⁱⁱ.

Status Changes Since ABC's 2006 Report, by Species

Continental Listed Species - Status Changes 2006 -2016	Hawaiian Listed Species - Status Changes 2006-2016
Improved Brown Pelican (CA) Delisted Brown Pelican (Caribbean) Delisted Brown Pelican (West Gulf) Delisted Brown Pelican (SE) Delisted Bald Eagle Delisted Western Snowy Plover Decreasing -> Increasing San Clemente Bell's Sparrow Stable > Increasing Golden-cheeked Warbler Decreasing -> Increasing Black-capped Vireo Decreasing -> Increasing Least Tern (Interior) Unknown -> Increasing Willow Flycatcher (SW) Unknown -> Increasing Steller's Eider Unknown -> Stable	Improved Millerbird Unknown -> Stable Hawaiian Crow Decreasing -> Stable Hawaii Creeper Stable -> Increasing Nihoa Finch Unknown -> Increasing Intermediate Laysan Duck Increasing -> Stable Small Kauai Thrush Increasing -> Stable Deteriorated Hawaiian Duck Increasing -> Declining Hawaii Akepa Stable -> Declining Laysan Finch Stable -> Declining Palila Stable -> Declining
Deteriorated Ridgway's Rail (CA) Stable -> Declining Grasshopper Sparrow (FL) Stable -> Declining	



Trend category changes since ABC's 2006 ESA report: A significant number of species in our previous ESA report found to be in decline are now on the rebound, including San Clemente Bell's Sparrow, Western Snowy Plover, Black-capped Vireo, Golden-cheeked Warbler, Interior Least Tern, and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. In addition, the Brown Pelican and Bald Eagle were delisted.

ESA Recovery Success Rate: Results

In total, the ESA has a recovery success rate of 78 percent for listed mainland birds, and a success rate of 70 percent for all listed U.S. bird populations.

Recovery Success Rates in 2006 and 2016

Group	Extinct After Listing	Declining	Stable	Increasing	Delisted	Unknown	Recovery Success
2006 Mainland Species	1	10	8	17	2	4	64%
2016 Mainland Species	1	7	6	22	8	2	78%
2006 Hawaiian Species	4	5	7	7	0	2	56%
2016 Hawaiian Species	4	9	7	7	0	0	52%
2016 Islands and Territories	2	4	2	11	4	0	73%
2016 All U.S. Birds	7	20	15	40	12	2	70%

Notes: The ESA recovery success rate is defined as the number of stable, increasing, and delisted species divided by the total of extinct after listing, declining, stable, increasing, delisted and unknown. Species that were extinct or effectively extinct prior to listing, or recently listed species (since 2011), have been excluded.

The 2006 mainland species dataset included the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl "Cactus" subspecies, which was determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to not be a listable population, and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, which we now assume was extinct prior to listing. In the 2006 report, four listed Brown Pelican populations, three listed Piping Plover populations, and two Roseate Tern populations were lumped together. Two Hawaiian species, Akikiki and Akekee, were listed in 2010.

Oahu Elepaio by Eric VanderWerf, Pacific Rim Conservation



How Birds Benefit from ESA Listing



Peregrine Falcon by Chris Hill, Shutterstock

The implementation of the ESA needs to be bolstered through increased funding, additional measures to protect and restore Critical Habitat, and a stronger consultation process between federal agencies concerning actions that may affect listed species. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the many strengths and victories of the current legislation. We seek to highlight these, and to show how they have benefited birds.

Species that are considered to be in danger of extinction, or that may become so, can be considered for listing under the ESA. (An excellent resource on the ESA listing process can be found [here](#). Information on endangered species can be found [here](#).)

Once a species is listed, it receives certain mandatory protections to aid its recovery. Such protections include prohibitions on taking, trading, or harming a species, its nest, or its eggs. “Take” is defined by the Endangered Species Act as any action to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect any Threatened or

Endangered species. This includes significant habitat modification or degradation that results in death or injury to listed species by significantly impairing behavioral patterns such as breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Exceptions may be made to allow for an agency-prescribed level of incidental take, and to allow subsistence activities by native Alaskans. Penalties under the Act can include fines and (very rarely) imprisonment when flagrant violations occur.

Critical Habitat designations further protect endangered birds by safeguarding areas deemed essential for a species’ survival and recovery. To achieve recovery, areas must sometimes be designated as Critical Habitat even though they are not currently occupied by the species, allowing for future population increases and range expansion. Without this, some species may be restricted to tiny populations and destined to remain at risk of extinction forever. The Secretaries of the Interior and Commerce are provided with latitude to prevent the designation of Critical Habitat from interfering unduly with economic development or national security.

Federal Protection

Any federal agency that believes an action they plan to authorize, fund, or carry out could affect an endangered species must consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), or with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for marine species, to determine whether the action will jeopardize the species concerned. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is also required to initiate consultations as part of its pesticide registration process.

If a federal action has the potential to jeopardize a species, a series of consultations (both informal and formal) and biological assessments are required. These can result in the positive conservation action to improve a species' status, amendments to proposed actions to reduce negative impacts, or mitigation measures to counterbalance detrimental outcomes. Of the more than 6,800 formal inter-agency consultations that took place between 2008 and 2015, only two projects (0.03 percent) resulted in the conclusion that the proposed agency action would likely place a species in jeopardy.

Another avenue for species protection is to mitigate for harmful impacts when making planning and project decisions. This requires that to the degree possible, impacts be avoided or minimized, and those that remain be fully compensated for. President Obama issued a [memorandum](#) in November 2015 that outlined this mitigation hierarchy and promised no net loss of federal lands or wildlife resources resulting from development. This policy can complement efforts to conserve listed and candidate species by increasing habitat connectivity and reducing non-climate stressors.

Recovery Plans

A Recovery Plan must be produced for each listed species. These plans summarize the species' status and threats, set recovery goals and criteria, and estimate costs for recovery actions. The budgeting process involves a number of factors, including the cost of answering petitions and lawsuits. A species prioritization process grades the taxonomical uniqueness of each listed species and how likely it is that conservation efforts will succeed. This helps

further determine the amount of funding a species can receive. Funds cover activities such as habitat management and land purchase. However, very few listed species have active recovery teams with the funding they need to pursue the strategies outlined in most recovery plans.

Public Involvement

A range of other benefits accrue to listed species, including increased awareness, which can lead to greater involvement in public land management decisions, and voluntary management programs such as Safe Harbor Agreements, which provide incentives to landowners to manage endangered species with minimal regulation. Several National Wildlife Refuges have also been established specifically to protect ESA-listed species. In addition, cooperative agreements with states provide funding for endangered species recovery efforts. In the case of species that are considered "Candidates" for protection under the Act, conservation agreements and landowner incentives can help to increase species populations while preventing the need for additional regulation.

Although federal agencies and states are responsible for much of the ESA's success, major credit must also be given to the many private individuals and conservation organizations that have made critical contributions to the prevention of extinctions and to species recovery. The ESA includes a citizen enforcement provision that provides for accountability and has been instrumental in the conservation of many species listings.

In 2011, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reached agreements with the Center for Biological Diversity and WildEarth Guardians to make final decisions on candidate species based upon an agreed schedule. This has rapidly reduced the backlog of candidate species that had been determined to be warranted, but precluded, from listing.

The 2015 listing decision date agreed to for Greater Sage-Grouse was also cited by Department of the Interior officials as the main instigator for an unprecedented national planning strategy that led to stronger habitat protection for 35 million acres of the most important sage-grouse habitats on federal lands.

History and Impact of the ESA



Passenger Pigeon by James Dean,
Smithsonian Institution

By the early 1900s the United States had witnessed the disappearance of several spectacular bird species, including the Great Auk, Passenger Pigeon, Carolina Parakeet, and Labrador Duck—lost mostly to excessive, unregulated market hunting.

Hawaii suffered even greater losses during this period, with more than 10 Hawaiian species—such as Bishop’s Oo, Laysan Rail, Ula-ai-hawane, Greater Koa Finch, and Maui-nui Akialoa—going extinct due to invasive species, non-native avian diseases, and habitat loss.

In 1918, as bird declines continued, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) was enacted to regulate “take” (including hunting and “live” collection for the bird and egg trade). While the MBTA provided invaluable protection to birds, it did little to help species that were affected by human-induced threats such as habitat loss, introduced predators, and environmental toxins. Birds such as the Whooping Crane and Aleutian Canada Goose continued to decline.

Dramatic Bird Declines

In the 1950s and ‘60s, populations crashed in some very visible bird species, namely the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Brown Pelican. Research showed that the culprits were organochlorine pesticides such as DDT, which caused eggshell

thinning and dramatically reduced breeding success. As the Bald Eagle tumbled towards extinction in the lower 48 states, the impetus mounted for greater legal protection for the country’s most imperiled wildlife. In 1966 the Endangered Species Preservation Act was passed. This was strengthened in 1969, and in 1973 finally became the ESA we know today.

The scope of the ESA legislation was broad and included a process for identifying species that qualified for listing, habitat protection measures, and a mechanism to ensure that the federal government itself did not contribute to endangered species declines. It also mandated cooperation with states, international cooperation, and trade and take restrictions.

Since its passage, the Act has undergone significant amendments on three occasions, once under President Carter, and twice under President Reagan. Among the amendments made under Carter were Critical Habitat provisions, to be drawn up concurrently with species listings wherever possible, and the creation of a Cabinet-level committee with the power to exempt certain federal projects from compliance with the Act (though few such exemptions have been granted).

Amendments made during the Reagan presidency included: the introduction of Habitat Conservation Plans, which permitted landowners to alter habitat if

they also implemented mitigation measures; a prohibition on considering the economic implications of listing a species; a requirement that “candidate” and de-listed species be monitored; a framework to improve the implementation of Recovery Plans, and the establishment of a “Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund.”

ESA Under Pressure

Over the last few decades, against the original spirit of the Act, the ESA has become the focus of attacks from interest groups bent on relaxing species protections to allow increased development. Numerous bills have been introduced to weaken or waive protections of the Act. While efforts to eliminate the law have failed, several species-specific exemptions have been successful.

In addition, federal agencies administering the ESA have sometimes offered controversial reforms to alleviate this relentless pressure. Regulations that could reduce species protection have also been proposed. Several recent rules, decisions, and proposed settlement agreements have also raised concern for failing to provide enough protection, including the 4(d) rule for the Streaked Horned Lark, the Northern Spotted Owl Critical Habitat rule, a

Over the last few decades, against the original spirit of the Act, the ESA has become the focus of attacks from interest groups bent on relaxing species protections to allow increased development.

proposal to vacate the Marbled Murrelet Critical Habitat designation for six years, and the not-warranted for listing finding for the Bi-State distinct population segment of Greater Sage-Grouse. The 4(d) rule allows the Service to alter the protections that species normally receive.

A recent 5th Circuit Court decision also stripped federal protection from the Lesser Prairie-Chicken.

Many groups are concerned that federal forest management projects in the Pacific Northwest pose unacceptable risk to listed Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, and Coho Salmon populations. Moreover, the California Spotted Owl is now being considered for listing as a result of excessive logging on federal lands.

As this report illustrates, the Act continues to help endangered birds recover, and there are more than twice as many listed bird species that are increasing or stable than are decreasing. Species that are increasing have also been protected under the ESA an average of 10 years longer than those that are decreasing^{iv}, indicating that the longer conservation efforts continue, the better the results. It is essential the law not be weakened through legislation, regulation, or inappropriate land management.

Marbled Murrelet by Mike Danzenbaker



The ESA and Landowners

Many landowners are proud to play host to America's endangered species. They work cooperatively with state and federal biologists to maintain healthy species populations, at the same time preserving the natural beauty of their surroundings and the economic productivity of their property. Landowners who wish to develop lands that harbor endangered species can apply for permits to do so, as can industries that may cause incidental take such as wind farms.

Agency permission for these developments is contingent upon the approval of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that provides for the mitigation of unavoidable, incidental take of listed species. To date, over 700 such plans have been implemented for the birds covered by this report alone. Unfortunately, not all HCPs have been effective, however, and some have been abandoned.

Federal Support

The Department of the Interior helps to conserve endangered species through grant programs that will provide more than \$85 million to support a range of activities undertaken by states and private landowners in the current budget year. The USDA Forest Service and many states also offer financial assistance to landowners, through the federally funded Landowner Incentives Program for example, to help manage endangered species on their lands.

A "Conservation Banking" program also allows landowners to protect habitat for endangered species and then sell conservation credits to developers to mitigate habitat alteration. For example, the Hickory Pass Ranch Conservation Bank in Texas placed



Red-cockaded Woodpecker by USFWS

a conservation easement on several hundred acres of a 3,000-acre ranch to protect Golden-cheeked Warblers, in exchange for USFWS credits that can be sold to mitigate impacts to warbler habitat elsewhere. However, it is important that such easements include restoration, and that this program does not result in a net loss of habitat for the species in question.

In some cases, the boundaries of Critical Habitat may be designated so as to alleviate potential economic impacts. The Act also contains provisions to prevent hardship to individuals, to facilitate disaster relief efforts, and to ensure that actions deemed

necessary to national security are not impeded.

Landowner Assurances

Two programs, "Safe Harbor" and "Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances," allow landowners to gain assurance that their voluntary actions to improve habitat or increase species numbers will not result in additional regulation. The Safe Harbor program has been particularly successful in restoring Red-cockaded Woodpecker populations in the Southeast.

The Act does place reasonable restrictions on projects that could result in the decimation of habitat for endangered species. The Act's system of checks and balances has stood America and its endangered species in good stead for more than 40 years. With the growth of birdwatching and wildlife tourism, the ESA is helping to build the foundation for future economic prosperity and is preserving a precious resource that has enormous educational and scientific value.

ABC's ESA Actions

American Bird Conservancy has been active in supporting the conservation of several bird species that are either listed under the ESA or require listing to ensure their survival.

- ABC and Dr. Eric VanderWerf petitioned to list the Akikiki or Kauai Creeper and the Akekee or Kauai Akepa because they have small populations and geographic ranges, are undergoing rapid declines in population and range, are currently impacted by a variety of threats, and were not adequately protected by existing regulatory mechanisms. USFWS agreed protection was warranted and both were listed as Endangered in 2010.
- Another bird population in dire need of protection was the *rufa* subspecies of Red Knot. ABC and a coalition of conservation groups petitioned USFWS for emergency listing in 2005, again in 2008, and in 2014. The Red Knot was ultimately listed as a Threatened species in December 2014. Similarly, ABC sought protection for the Streaked Horned Lark, which was listed as Threatened in 2013.
- ABC has also been heavily engaged in a long-term science-support role to assess the effects of river regulation and management on the Interior Least Tern and Piping Plover—a project that will likely lead to the successful delisting of the tern. ABC has also provided input on rules for listing Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Bi-State Greater Sage-Grouse, and California Spotted Owl, as well as Critical Habitat designations for Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, and Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Red Knot by Arend Trent, Shutterstock



SPECIES ACCOUNTS

We have categorized each species according to its population trend since the time it was listed under the ESA. This section provides the current status of ESA-listed mainland species, subspecies, and distinct population segments. Conservation measures undertaken for each are indicated by symbols (see below) that follow the listing date. All species listed under predecessor Acts at the time the current ESA was signed into law are considered here to have been listed since 1973. Population figures refer to the estimated total number of breeding adults, except where noted.

Species are allocated to categories as follows:

- **Increase** – Population has increased since listing.
- **Stable** – Current population is similar to that at the time of listing, or population has stabilized since listing.
- **Decrease** – Population has decreased since listing.
- **Undetermined** – The lack of population data or current monitoring prevents accurate assessment of population size or trend.
- **Extirpated from U.S. Prior to Listing**
- **Extinct After Listing**
- **Extinct Prior to Listing**
- **Effectively Extinct When Listed** – Pertains only to six Hawaiian species that all had populations of less than 100 birds at the time of listing and could not have recovered without substantially increased funding.

KEY

CH

Critical Habitat designated

SSRPSubject of a Single Species Recovery Plan
(includes species with multiple regional plans)**MSRP**

Included in a Multi-Species Recovery Plan

HCP: XBenefits from Habitat Conservation Plans
X=number of plans**NWR: X**Occurs on National Wildlife Refuges
X=number of refuges**SH: X**

Benefits from Safe Harbor Agreements

NOTE: An increasing population does not necessarily indicate that conservation measures have fully succeeded. Many species in this category require ongoing conservation attention. Conversely, a decreasing trend does not necessarily show that conservation measures have failed. Even if large amounts of a species' habitat are effectively protected, the overall population will still decrease if habitat loss continues, or if key management issues are not addressed. Also, for species with extremely limited habitat, stabilizing populations at current levels may be the only realistic recovery goal at present, although translocation to new suitable habitats should be considered.

Least Terns by Ivan Kuzmin, Shutterstock



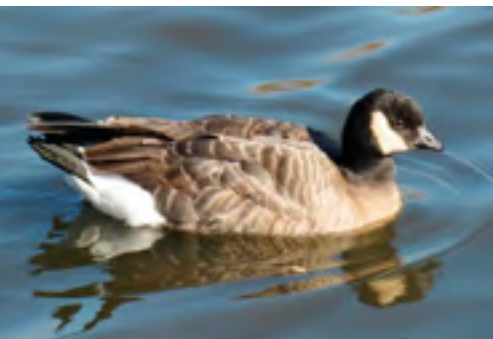
Increase



Bald Eagle by Chris Hill, Shutterstock

Bald Eagle 1973 DELISTED

The Bald Eagle has been delisted in the lower 48 states, where it has recovered dramatically following the cancellation of the pesticides DDT and dieldrin, and through a program of reintroduction and nest site protection. In the 1950s and '60s, eagle numbers plummeted because of widespread breeding failure due to DDT-caused eggshell thinning. The Alaskan population largely escaped this threat and was never listed. In the lower 48 states the eagle has recovered from a low of just over 800 breeding birds to approximately 69,000 today. The species continues to be protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.



Canada Goose, "Aleutian" subspecies 1973 DELISTED

By the mid-1970s, this subspecies had been reduced to approximately 800 individuals, having been extirpated from most of its breeding islands by introduced arctic foxes. Following large-scale efforts to remove these foxes, along with hunting restrictions, the population has soared to more than 60,000 birds. It was removed from the endangered list in 2001. Subsequent taxonomic reclassification of the Canada Goose has resulted in this being considered a subspecies of the Cackling Goose. This subspecies migrates south to Pacific Coast states after nesting in the Aleutian Islands.

"Aleutian" Cackling Goose by Ethan Winning

Increase

Brown Pelican 1973 **DELISTED**

The Brown Pelican has rebounded dramatically from 1970s lows thanks to the ban on DDT, reintroductions, and the establishment of several key National Wildlife Refuges. The pelican's Southeast population segment now number more than 100,000 birds and was delisted in 1985. In 2009, the West Gulf, California, and Caribbean populations were also delisted.

Peregrine Falcon 1973 **DELISTED**

By 1975, the American Peregrine Falcon had been reduced to just 650 breeding birds in the lower 48 states and virtually eliminated from the East and Midwest. By 1999, however, following a ban on DDT and a major effort to reintroduce captive-raised birds, the breeding population had recovered to at least 3,350 individuals. The American Peregrine Falcon was removed from the list of endangered species in 1999.

Peregrine Falcon, "Arctic" subspecies 1973 **DELISTED**

Arctic Peregrine Falcons may have declined by as much as 80 percent during the 1950s and '60s due to DDT use, but enough survived to make the release of captive-bred birds unnecessary. Arctic Peregrine numbers increased after the cancellation of DDT for broad-scale agricultural use, and the subspecies was eventually delisted in 1994. The population of Arctic Peregrines in North America now approximately numbers 1,000, up from 103 individuals in 1976.

Wood Stork 1984 **NWR: 50** **SSRP**

This species formerly ranged across most of the southeastern United States and Texas, but breeding is currently limited to Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Its nesting population declined from an estimated 40,000 birds in the 1930s to a low of 5,000 in 1978 due to habitat loss and water level changes, particularly in southern Florida. Despite some local declines, the stork has since rebounded following a northerly range extension, adaptation to managed wetlands, and the provision of nesting platforms. It now has a growing population of approximately 10,000 nesting pairs and was upgraded to Threatened status in 2014.

California Condor 1973 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 3**

The California Condor declined due to persecution, poisoning (consuming lead fragments from carcasses left behind by hunters, and by consuming poisoned animals), and collisions with power lines. In 1987, with just 22 left, the last remaining wild birds were taken into captivity. After five years of intensive captive breeding, reintroductions began at sites in Arizona and California. By December 2014, the total wild condor population stood at 228 birds, with a further 193 individuals in captivity. Released birds are now nesting in the wild, and the State of California is phasing in a ban on lead ammunition, which should help speed its recovery. An experimental population has been established in Arizona and another is being planned for Oregon.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Snail Kite by Erni, Shutterstock; California Condor by Susan Haig; Wood Stork by Mike Parr, ABC



Increase

Snail Kite, "Everglade" subspecies 1973 CH MSRP NWR: 3

In the U.S., Snail Kites are only found in Florida. Reduced to just 65 birds in 1975, the kite recovered to a reported 3,577 birds by 1999 due to management, and favorable water levels that created ideal nesting and foraging conditions. The subspecies is especially vulnerable to drought, which depletes its primary food source, the apple snail, and allows predators access to nests, which are built over water. Despite a recent 50 percent population decline attributed to water level management problems in the Everglades, the population has increased 23 percent since listing. This subspecies also occurs widely throughout the Neotropics.

Aplomado Falcon, "Northern" subspecies 1986 SSRP HCP: 1 NWR: 3 SH: 2

This species was extirpated from the U.S. by the 1950s, likely as a result of habitat conversion and pesticide use. A reintroduction program involving the release of more than 1,000 birds has recently been launched in south Texas. To date, this has resulted in the formation of 44 pairs and the production of more than 170 young. The birds are found on public and private lands in the vicinity of Laguna Atascosa, Matagorda Island, and Aransas National Wildlife Refuges. Experimental populations were established in New Mexico and Arizona beginning in 2006.

Clapper Rail, "Light-footed" subspecies 1973 SSRP HCP: 7 SH

This subspecies ranges from San Diego Bay, California into northern Mexico. Although there are no range-wide population estimates before 1980, significant habitat alteration within its range likely had a major negative impact. Annual surveys began in 1980 when 406 breeding birds were located. The population climbed to more than 600 by the mid-1990s, and the 2014 count located 528 breeding pairs (1056 individuals). Management activities include habitat restoration, predator control, and the provision of artificial nesting rafts.

Sandhill Crane, "Mississippi" subspecies 1973 CH SSRP NWR: 1

The original range of this subspecies was thought to extend east along the Gulf Coastal Plain from southern Louisiana into Mississippi, Alabama, and the western Florida panhandle. Once so abundant it was considered a farm pest, by the 1970s, as a result of habitat loss and hunting, fewer than 40 birds were left. With the establishment of the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge and the reintroduction of captive-raised birds, the wild population has now grown to more than 125 birds, 60 of which are breeding.

Whooping Crane 1973 NWR: 49 CH SSRP HCP: 1 SH: 1

Though it once ranged throughout the Great Plains and Gulf Coast regions, the Whooping Crane population was decimated by hunting and habitat loss, reduced to just 16 birds by 1941. A major captive-breeding effort was mounted to rescue the species. Today, the main wild population, which migrates between Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, and a smaller group of non-migrants in Florida, numbers approximately 414 individuals. There are 161 in captivity. It also recently nested in Louisiana. An HCP for wind energy development within the Midwest migratory flyway of Whooping Crane is now under consideration.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Aplomado Falcon by Gualberto Becerra, Shutterstock; "Light-footed" Clapper Rail by Charlie Moore; Whooping Crane by Kent Ellington, Shutterstock



Increase



LEFT TO RIGHT: Piping Plover by Greg Lavaty; "San Clemente" Loggerhead Shrike by USFWS; "Least" Bell's Vireo by Tom Grey

Piping Plover 1985 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 5** **NWR: 90**

Overall, the U.S. population increased by nearly 300 percent since 1985 to an estimated 6,500 birds. During that period the Atlantic Coast population also increased 300 percent thanks to intensive management efforts, including restricted beach access during sensitive nesting periods and predator control. The Great Lakes population increased 390 percent, and the Great Plains population increased by 270 percent. The species also breeds in Canada.

Least Tern, "California" subspecies 1973 **SSRP** **HCP: 7** **SH**

Habitat loss caused the population of the California Least Tern to plummet to an estimated low of 1,164 breeding birds in 1974. Since then, recovery efforts, including predator control programs, have led to increases, with the population assessed at approximately 8,600 nesting birds in 2014. Significant concentrations of these birds benefit from management on Department of Defense lands.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker 1973 **SSRP** **HCP: 21** **NWR: 15** **SH**

This species declined precipitously from historic levels to less than 10,000 birds in approximately 3,000 active clusters at the time of listing. Thanks to intensive management, the number of clusters had increased to 6,303 in 2014, for an estimated population of greater than 15,000 birds.

Loggerhead Shrike, "San Clemente" subspecies 1977 **MSRP** **HCP: 8**

After teetering on the brink of extinction for decades, this subspecies' fate has been dramatically reversed thanks to cooperative captive breeding, predator control, and habitat management efforts that have increased the population. Restrictions on naval training exercises that included live bombing of the shrike's territory have also contributed to its recovery. By 2013, there were 136 breeding birds on San Clemente Island, up from 50 in 1975.

Bell's Vireo, "Least" subspecies 1986 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 18** **SH: 2**

This Californian subspecies was reduced to approximately 600 breeding birds by 1986, but has since rebounded thanks to management efforts. Up to a ten-fold increase has been achieved in some populations over the past two decades, mostly due to the control of Brown-headed Cowbirds that parasitize vireo nests. The vireo has reappeared in the Central Valley of California after a 60-year absence. It migrates south to Mexico outside the breeding season.

California Towhee, "Inyo" subspecies 1987 **CH** **SSRP**

This once-widespread subspecies declined to approximately 100 individuals by the late 1970s due to a dramatic reduction of its riparian forest habitat. It increased to 729 birds by 2011.



Kirtland's Warbler by Robert Royse

Kirtland's Warbler 1973 **SSRP** **NWR: 2**

This rarest member of the wood warbler family breeds primarily in Michigan, with a few birds also nesting in Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada. The species declined due to fire suppression programs that altered habitat and as a result of nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. Thanks to intensive management, the number of singing males counted during the breeding season rose from 167 in 1974 (and 1987) to 2,365 in 2015. The species spends the non-breeding season in the islands of the Bahamas.

Bell's Sparrow, "San Clemente" subspecies 1977 **SSRP**

Restoration on San Clemente Island has expanded the range and population of this subspecies from only 93 birds in 1976 to an estimated 4,381 in 2015. Its habitat was being degraded by invasive goats and other ungulates. When the U.S. Navy took control of the island, a goat eradication program was begun and ran through 1993. Following an updated taxonomy in 2013, the Sage Sparrow species was split into Bell's Sparrow and Sagebrush Sparrow, thus re-naming the San Clemente endemic subspecies as the San Clemente Island Bell's Sparrow.

Snowy Plover, "Western" subspecies 1993 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 11** **NWR: 2** **SH:1**

The population was approximately 2,600 birds in 2014, an increase from the 1,500 reported at the time of listing. Populations have shown increases in response to management actions such as beach closings during nesting and anti-predator fencing at nest sites.

LEFT TO RIGHT: "Inyo" California Towhee by Jack Dean III, Shutterstock; "San Clemente" Bell's Sparrow by Jacob Spendelow; "Western" Snowy Plover by USFWS





LEFT TO RIGHT: Black-capped Vireo by Larry Thompson; Golden-cheeked Warbler by Greg Lavaty; "Southwestern" Willow Flycatcher by Tom Grey

Black-capped Vireo 1987 **SSRP** **HCP: 14** **NWR: 3** **SH: 1**

This species has an estimated population of 11,000 individuals, a huge increase considering only 153 singing males were known in 1987. Threats include habitat loss, fire suppression, and Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism. Cowbird control and habitat restoration has been very effective at boosting the population. In 2013 a 90-day finding concluded that the species could be upgraded to Threatened status from Endangered.

Golden-cheeked Warbler 1990 **SSRP** **HCP: 160** **NWR: 3** **SH: 1**

This species, with an estimated population of 21,000, breeds only in the Edwards Plateau of central Texas. Habitat restoration and cowbird control have increased some populations, particularly at Fort Hood, but habitat is still under threat elsewhere. The species winters in Central America.

Interior Least Tern 1985 **SSRP** **HCP: 1** **NWR: 38**

Nesting on sandbars in the Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas, Red, Platte, and other major rivers, the "Interior" Least Tern (those nesting more than 50 miles inland from the coast) was listed due to concerns about the alteration of natural river dynamics caused by dams, channelization projects, and water level manipulation for barge traffic. While USFWS indicated an estimated population of 5,000 terns in 1990, more than 17,500 were observed in the first range-wide survey in 2005. Long-term conservation management plans, developed in collaboration among ABC, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and USFWS under Section 7(a)(1) of the ESA, should allow this population to be removed from the list.

Willow Flycatcher, "Southwestern" subspecies 1995 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 24** **NWR: 8** **SH: 9**

This subspecies declined due to large-scale loss of riparian forest caused by cattle grazing, water extraction, and habitat destruction. Surveys conducted in 1995 detected 700 breeding birds, although the estimated population has since grown to approximately 2,000. Much of this apparent growth can be attributed to increased survey efforts, but biologists also report recent increases at key sites such as the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, Arizona, in response to habitat restoration. Proposed Critical Habitat was reduced by 68 percent following a public comment period and USFWS support for the development of a 2-million-acre Habitat Conservation Plan. The flycatcher migrates south to Mexico outside the breeding season.

Stable

Spectacled Eider 1993 **CH** **SSRP** **NWR: 4**

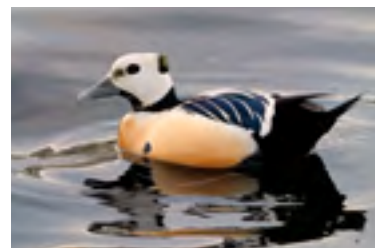
Surveys indicated a drastic decline from close to 95,000 birds in the 1970s, to 3,400 in 1992 at key breeding grounds in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. This has since been linked in part to the ingestion of spent lead shot by the birds. Pesticide residues have also been found in their eggs. The use of lead shot was phased out in the Delta by 1998, and subsistence hunting has also since been closed. The total U.S. population (including North Slope birds) appears to have stabilized at approximately 12,000 breeding individuals since listing.

Steller's Eider 1997 **CH** **SSRP** **NWR: 9**

Estimates of the Alaskan breeding population made from 1989 to 2000 ranged between 350 and 5,000 birds, but it is generally considered to be stable. Numbers may have since declined, but breeding areas are remote and difficult to survey. High concentrations of lead have been found in dead birds. The species also breeds in Russia, and mixed flocks of Russian and American birds winter along the Alaskan Peninsula.

Crested Caracara, "Audubon's" subspecies 1987 **MSRP** **NWR: 1**

In the U.S., this species occurs in Arizona, Texas, Louisiana, and Florida, but only the Florida population is listed under the ESA. Numbers appear to have stabilized around 500 and prior to listing were estimated at 400-500 birds, having reached a low of possibly fewer than 100 birds in the mid 1970s. Reserve purchases and easements provide a measure of habitat protection.



Jack Dean III, Shutterstock



Birds and Dragons, Shutterstock

Spectacled Eiders by Robert L. Kothenbeutel, Shutterstock





Roseate Terns by USFWS

Clapper Rail, "Yuma" subspecies 1973 **SSRP** **HCP: 4** **NWR: 4** **SH**

This rare subspecies is confined to marshes along the Colorado River and around the Salton Sea. There is also a population in northern Mexico. It is the only race of Clapper Rail found in freshwater marshes. Estimates suggest that the U.S. breeding population in the early 1970s was between 700 and 800 birds. This increased to more than 1,000 in the early 1990s, but had declined to 641 birds in 2008. Dam construction and dredge spoil dumping have created additional habitat for this species.

Roseate Tern (Northeast Distinct Population Segment) 1987 **SSRP** **HCP: 1** **NWR: 13**

This migratory species is widespread around the globe but relatively rare in the U.S. Here it occurs in two distinct populations, one nesting in the Northeast and another in Florida and the Caribbean (now much reduced). After excessive market hunting was curtailed by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, tern populations recovered. However, this species began to decline again in the 1950s, reaching a low of around 5,600 total U.S. breeding birds in 1977. The population peaked at approximately 10,000 birds in 2000, thanks to management efforts such as the provision of artificial nesting sites. The loss of natural nesting sites, human disturbance, predation, and competition remain threats, and the population again shows a recent trend back toward late 1980s numbers of approximately 6,000 birds.

Decrease



"Attwater's" Greater Prairie-Chicken by Noppadol Paothong

Greater Prairie-Chicken, "Attwater's" subspecies 1973 **SSRP** **NWR: 2** **SH: 2**

This subspecies numbered approximately 1 million birds and ranged across some 6 million acres of southern coastal prairie at the turn of the twentieth century. Today, fewer than 130 individuals remain, restricted to just two protected locations. Captive breeding is underway, but the subspecies is on the verge of extinction in the wild due to development and the spread of invasive plants.



Grasshopper Sparrow, "Florida" subspecies 1986 **MSRP**

This non-migratory subspecies occurs at a handful of state Wildlife Management Areas that are managed for it, as well as on Department of Defense lands. It has a small, declining population of approximately 75 birds. A captive-breeding program by the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation is now underway and is showing some early signs of success.

"Florida" Grasshopper Sparrow by Paul R. Reillo

Decrease

Marbled Murrelet 1992 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 14** **NWR: 1** **SH: 2**

This species' ESA listing covers a distinct population segment that nests in old-growth trees in Washington, Oregon, and California. An estimated 19,000 breeding birds occur, down from approximately 25,000 at the time of listing. The 2015 20-year monitoring report of the Northwest Forest Plan found that the Marbled Murrelet population in Washington State is declining by 5 percent annually and that populations in Oregon and California are currently stable. However, the 2009 status review predicted long-term declines and extinction in those states within 100 years. Logging of old-growth forest (used for nesting), mortality due to gill nets and oils spills, and overfishing of the species' food sources are all threats. Oregon's Elliot State Forest abandoned its HCP in 2008 after logging all murrelet habitat allowed under the permit, and to date has not reached a new conservation agreement.

Spotted Owl, "Northern" subspecies 1990 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 17** **NWR: 1** **SH: 6**

The Northern subspecies of the Spotted Owl requires old-growth forest for nesting, making it vulnerable to habitat loss caused by logging, and it declined at a rate of 3.8 percent annually between 1995 and 2015. It is also falling victim to an influx of the Barred Owl, which out-competes the Spotted Owl for nesting territories and hybridizes with it. There are currently an estimated 5,000 breeding Northern Spotted Owls, and an additional 1,000 territorial individuals, with isolation of some population segments due to habitat fragmentation. A revised Critical Habitat rule in 2012 increased the amount of protected habitat but also included controversial language allowing for the logging of "non-high-quality" Critical Habitat.

Ridgeway's Rail (formerly known as the California Clapper Rail) 1973 **MSRP** **NWR: 1**

Between the late 1800s and the late 1900s, the San Francisco Bay area lost approximately 85 percent of its tidal marsh to agriculture, development, and salt pond creation, resulting in a catastrophic population decline in this species. Pollution and predation by foxes and free-roaming cats have likely exacerbated the threat. However, a predator management program at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge has proven effective. The species expanded its range into Suisun Marsh after 1978 due to salinity changes there. The overall population declined since the time of listing but has remained stable since the mid-1980s and was estimated at 1,167 birds in 2010.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Marbled Murrelet by USFWS; "Northern" Spotted Owl by Chris Warren; Ridgeway's Rail by Chris Cochems





Florida Scrub-Jay by Steve Byland, Shutterstock

Florida Scrub-Jay 1987 **SSRP** **HCP: 139** **NWR: 5**

This species' population, estimated at approximately 6,000 birds in 2011, has seen an approximate 25 percent decline since 1993 when there were an estimated 8,000 birds. Sprawl, fire suppression, cat predation, and other human-induced factors are the main threats. Efforts are underway to buy land and conduct managed burns that will create early successional scrub-oak habitats for this species.

Seaside Sparrow, "Cape Sable" subspecies 1973 **CH** **MSRP**

Cape Sable numbers declined from 6,656 birds in 1981 to 2,720 in 2014. The population has remained stable in recent years; the significant drop was likely due to the effects of water level changes and habitat damage caused by Hurricane Andrew.



"Cape Sable" Seaside Sparrow by Andrew Spencer

Undetermined



"Mexican" Spotted Owls by Dave Palmer

Due to a paucity of data, birds in this category are those that cannot definitively be allocated to another category at this time. Population monitoring and trend assessments are urgently needed.

Spotted Owl, "Mexican" subspecies 1993 **CH** **SSRP** **HCP: 1** **SH: 1**

This subspecies of the Spotted Owl is well adapted to fire and nests in mature trees and in rocky canyons. It has an estimated population of between 777 and 1,554 birds in Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas, but its U.S. population is currently not being closely monitored. It also occurs in northern Mexico.



"Coastal" California Gnatcatcher by Ian Davies

California Gnatcatcher, "Coastal" subspecies 1993 **HCP: 36**

This northern subspecies had an estimated population of 2,562 birds in 1993, but no recent rangewide surveys have taken place. A partial survey in 2008 found 2,648 birds, indicating the population may be stable or slightly increasing. A petition to delist the gnatcatcher has prompted a USFWS status review. Habitat loss and nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds are the principal threats. Cowbird trapping and habitat restoration have begun at some sites, and parts of the population have been stabilized. The gnatcatcher also occurs throughout Baja California in northwestern Mexico.

Extirpated from U.S.



Brendan O'Connor

Northern Bobwhite, "Masked" subspecies 1973 **SSRP** **NWR: 1**

This subspecies was extirpated from its restricted U.S. range in Arizona in the late 1800s and early 1900s, due to habitat alteration caused by overgrazing and drought. Despite the purchase of the Buenos Aires Ranch as a National Wildlife Refuge, and the sustained release of captive-raised birds, a wild population has not yet been successfully established. There are close to 1,000 birds in captivity, and a small population also occurs in Mexico.

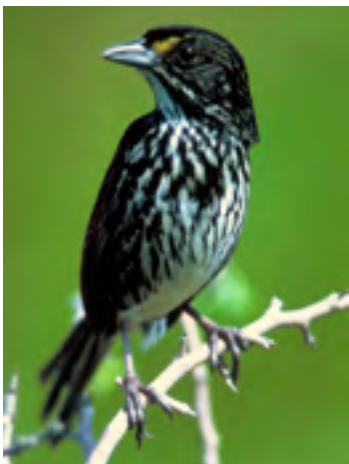


Rich Hoyer, WINGS

Thick-billed Parrot 1970 **SSRP**

The last recorded occurrences of Thick-billed Parrot in the U.S. were in 1938 and 1964. An effort from 1986 to 1993 to reintroduce captive-bred birds to the Chiricahua Mountains of southeastern Arizona was unsuccessful when the birds were unable to survive in the wild. In 2012, about 2,000 Thick-billed Parrots were thought to remain in the wild in Mexico.

Extinct



USFWS

Seaside Sparrow, "Dusky" subspecies

A denizen of the saltwater marshes of Brevard County, Florida, this once-common subspecies became extinct as a result of mosquito control efforts that included the flooding of Merritt Island, the draining of marshes along the St. John's River, and the application of pesticides. The only remaining birds (all males) were brought into captivity in 1979. The last bird died at Disney World in 1987.

SPOTLIGHT ON HAWAIIAN BIRDS



Palila by Jack Jeffrey

Hawaiian species face a more severe barrage of threats than most mainland species, and many either became extinct, or were on the verge of extinction, when the ESA became law. Of the 23 listed species, 14 are stable or increasing, while nine are in decline.

The ESA has clearly worked for species in which we have invested significant funding. A 2015 study of listed species by Luther *et al* found a positive association between conservation funding and population trend.^v

Unfortunately, not all species have been treated equally under the Act. The Hawaiian Bird Conservation Action Plan^{vi} argues that a lack of support for conservation measures has limited conservation successes (Restani and Marzluff 2002, Male and Bean 2005, Leonard 2008). The lack of support has had serious consequences: only 52 percent of the Hawaiian species are stable or increasing, compared to 78 percent of mainland birds. In fact, one study (Leonard 2008) showed

that 33 Hawaiian birds, despite comprising more than one-third of all listed species, have received 15 times less than mainland listed species and only 4.1 percent of ESA bird funding. ABC is now asking Congress and the Obama administration to boost funding for the endangered species in Hawaii.

The need for additional resources is even more urgent due to global climate change. Hawaii's remaining native birds will be increasingly exposed to avian diseases as non-native mosquitoes spread upslope.^{vii}

When funding is available, species-saving work gets done. Take the case of the Palila. Introduced domestic and mouflon sheep, brought to Hawaii in the 1960s as sport for hunters, were destroying mamane saplings and trees used by the bird for food, leading to its steep decline. Fortunately, timely funding allowed for forest restoration work, fencing to protect remaining habit, and removal of grazing animals, preventing the Palila's extinction.

Population Trends of Island Species Since Listing

HAWAII		OTHER ISLANDS/U.S. TERRITORIES	
Increase Nene (Hawaiian Goose) Hawaiian Coot Common Gallinule, "Hawaiian" subspecies Black-necked Stilt, "Hawaiian" subspecies Hawaii Creeper Akohekohe (Crested Honeycreeper) Nihoa Finch		Increase Bermuda Petrel Short-tailed Albatross Micronesian Megapode Guam Rail Puerto Rican Parrot Puerto Rican Nightjar Mariana Swiftlet Puerto Rican Plain Pigeon Rota Bridled White-Eye Mona Yellow-Shouldered Blackbird Puerto Rican Yellow-Shouldered Blackbird	
Stable Laysan Duck Hawaiian Petrel Hawaiian Hawk Hawaiian Crow (captive population) Small Kauai Thrush Millerbird Maui Parrotbill		Stable Puerto Rican Broad-winged Hawk Mariana Common Moorhen	
Decrease Hawaiian Duck Hawaii Akepa Newell's Shearwater Akiapolaau Oahu Elepaio Palila Akikiki Laysan Finch Akekee		Decrease Puerto Rican Sharp-shinned Hawk Guam Kingfisher (captive population) Mariana Crow Mariana Nightingale Reed-Warbler	
Extinct After Listing Large Kauai Thrush Maui Akepa Poouli Ou		Extinct After Listing Mariana Mallard Aguiguan Nightingale Reed-Warbler	
Effectively Extinct When Listed Molokai Thrush Kauai Oo Kauai Akialoa Oahu Creeper Kauai Nukupuu Maui Nukupuu		Extinct Prior to Listing White-necked Crow Guam Broadbill Pagan Nightingale Reed-Warbler Guam Bridled White-Eye	
Extinct Prior to Listing Molokai Creeper		Delisted Palau Owl Palau Ground Dove Palau Fantail Flycatcher Tinian Monarch	

ABC'S STANCE ON THE ESA



Cerulean Warbler by Tessa Nickels

Keeping Birds Off the Endangered List

The ESA acts as an emergency room for our rarest species—but what should we be doing to treat the less severe cases before they need intensive care? With few exceptions, non-listed declining bird species do not receive nearly the level of funding they require—and typically orders of magnitude less than listed species—in many cases allowing them to drift towards endangerment. Not only is this a colossal risk, it is bad economics, as the cure will likely come at a much higher cost than would prevention.

Many more species than those listed under the ESA have seriously declining populations or major threats and should be considered for additional conservation attention. Examples include Sprague's Pipit, Tricolored Blackbird, and Cerulean Warbler.

Several subspecies and so-called "Distinct Population Segments" are also slipping toward extinction. These include the eastern populations of the Black Rail and Bewick's Wren, and the northeastern U.S. population of the Loggerhead Shrike. ABC produced a [report](#) on subspecies in 2012 to help ensure improved focus on this under-appreciated group of birds. Given the recent trend toward separating

subspecies into full species, this list provides a road map to the potential group of endangered species.

Alternative conservation strategies that deploy significant resources to halt species declines, or prevent the threats that could lead to ESA listing need to be implemented for a wide range of species. Good models already exist—conservation plans for the Greater Sage-Grouse provide a prime example, along with Natural Resources Conservation Service support for this species and others such as the Golden-winged Warbler. Other mechanisms and groups capable of helping to deliver the needed action include bird conservation Joint Ventures, State Wildlife Grant programs, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, non-profit conservation organizations, and federal and state wildlife and related agencies.

These efforts need the full support of federal and state governments. The recent Blue Ribbon Panel working to determine funding strategies for wildlife, primarily at the state level, could provide the support needed to continue and expand important conservation efforts being conducted under State Wildlife Action Plans, which are designed to help species before they become endangered.

ABC's Stance on the ESA



Greater Sage-Grouse by Tom Reichner, Shutterstock

Many more bird species outside the U.S. also face imminent extinction, requiring us to adopt a systematic approach to halting the global extinction crisis and averting the loss of Earth's biodiversity. For more information on some current conservation initiatives, see the [Alliance for Zero Extinction](#), [North American Bird Conservation Initiative](#) (NABCI), and [Partners in Flight](#).

ABC's Position Statement on Endangered Species

The Endangered Species Act is perhaps the most important piece of environmental legislation ever passed in the United States, and arguably anywhere. The ESA sets a high standard for the protection of threatened species that can be emulated around the world, and it can be credited with numerous success stories over its 40-plus year history. The recovery of the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, and growing or stable populations of many other listed species, such as the Whooping Crane and California Condor, are living examples of the Act's success.

ABC believes the ESA is fundamentally sound. We also know that the Act could be improved to offer better protection for birds, plants, and other wildlife, and more incentives for landowners to provide some of that protection. ABC believes a strong and effective ESA should, as a minimum, contain the following provisions:

- All practical resources must be made available to prevent the extinction of any species, even those with perilously small populations, as evidence shows that even these can recover.
- Decisions about the listing of species, their recovery goals, and their habitat and management requirements should be made by professional biologists in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, not by members of Congress, and be based on the best available science. Enforcement of the ESA has given rise to collaborative habitat conservation planning across the country to the benefit of numerous species.

- Recovery Plans should be updated and better standardized; expenditures and progress to recovery goals must be more easily trackable.
- Because habitat loss and degradation, and invasive species, remain the greatest threats, enhanced monitoring and adaptive management are needed. The federal Greater Sage-Grouse management plans include—for the first time—mandatory adaptive management in the form of soft and hard triggers to ensure that any habitat and population declines remain within acceptable limits.
- Protected habitat must allow for the inclusion of areas that are not currently occupied by a species but can be restored so that habitat becomes suitable. In addition, as ranges for some species shift due to climate change, habitats must be available to allow for recovery. Without this, many species with small populations might remain on the endangered list forever. Designation and conservation of such habitat should be made in conjunction with landowner incentive packages aimed at encouraging active engagement from stakeholders.
- Through consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, all federal actions must be held to a recovery standard that prohibits activities that would hamper recovery or significantly delay or increase the cost of the recovery of a listed species.
- If a species' recovery is being impeded by an ineffective Habitat Conservation Plan, the Act should require that the Secretary of the Interior or other authorizing official retain full authority to intervene and amend the HCP, while not imposing additional costs on participating landowners. The Act should provide economic

Sandhill Cranes by Mike Parr, ABC





Apapane by Jack Jeffrey

incentives, such as priority treatment for federal grant programs and tax credits to landowners who voluntarily conserve habitat, particularly those who own land that currently harbors threatened and endangered species.

- Endangered species conservation efforts must be adequately funded. The Act could be even more effective if it wasn't being starved for funding. All birds that need to be listed according to biological need should be listed regardless of political expediency, and full funding should be made available for their recovery.

In addition, ABC believes it is also essential that greater support be provided for systematic efforts to identify and address the conservation needs of declining species before they reach the point where they need to be listed as threatened or endangered.

We believe it is unethical to let species go extinct, especially since humanity is the ultimate cause of these extinctions in most cases. These creatures are the product of millions of years of evolution, and for us to destroy them in a matter of a few years forever

should be considered unthinkable. We can strive to be better than that, and the Endangered Species Act embodies that ideal.

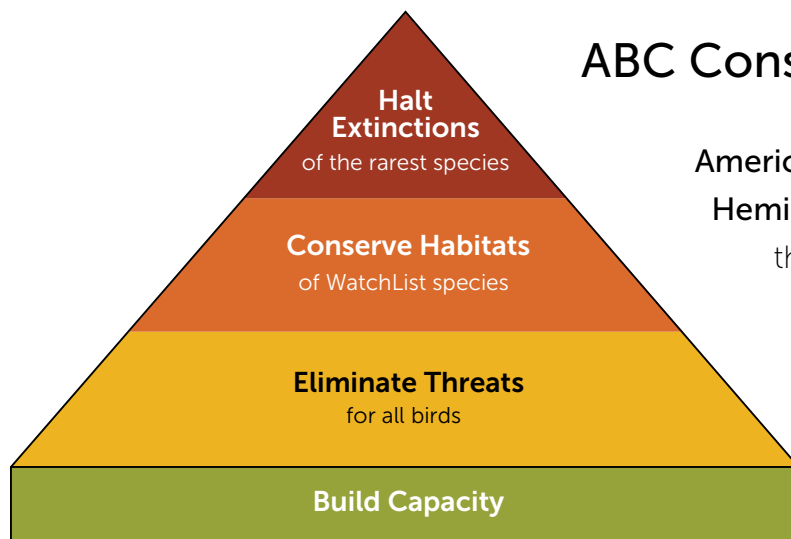
Research shows that the vast majority of Americans believe that preventing the extinction of species is important. Most Americans also believe, correctly, that the Endangered Species Act is an effective safety net that has been successful in protecting species.

With the basic foundations listed above, we believe that the Act will retain its position as one of the cornerstones of environmental law in the United States. But the ESA remains under threat, and lawmakers must be reminded that the public wants to see endangered wildlife and the ecosystems they depend on protected.

What You Can Do To Help!

Write your U.S. Senators and ask them to uphold strong endangered species legislation. ABC has provided a draft letter and an easy way to contact your Senators and Representative [here](#).

REFERENCES



ABC Conservation Framework

American Bird Conservancy is the Western Hemisphere's bird conservation specialist—the only organization with a single and steadfast commitment to achieving conservation results for birds and their habitats throughout the Americas.

abcbirds.org

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For more information, contact Steve Holmer, sholmer@abcbirds.org



P.O. Box 249
The Plains, VA 20198
540-253-5780 | 888-247-3624
abcbirds.org