

# BIRDCONSERVATION

The Magazine of American Bird Conservancy

Fall 2014



# The Extinction Avoidance Business

*ABC has a new motto: "We're bringing back the birds." This is what we do. In this issue, we take a closer look at bringing birds back from the brink of extinction. I will begin with the premise that allowing the avoidable extinction of higher life forms is our species' hubris at its worst.*

Arguments to the contrary abound, safely cocooned in the myopic belief that humans come first—always. However, I have yet to hear an argument of this sort that doesn't expose the short-term nature of this perspective.

I often think of this time-honored idea: *Give a man a fish and feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.* It's easy to take this way of thinking and apply it to the current extinction crisis. To wit: *Eliminate a species, help no one for a day; teach to preserve all life forms, benefit mankind forever.* It is inarguable.

ABC is, in part, in the extinction avoidance business. Members know that ABC has helped to create or expand more than 50 reserves throughout Latin America specifically to prevent the last individuals of a species from winking out (see: *Safeguarding the Rarest*, p. 16). In North America, ABC has undertaken a novel and potentially precedent-setting approach to bringing back the Interior Least Tern (see p. 6). More recently, ABC has embarked on the long-term fight needed to stem the tide in the "Extinction Capital of the World": Hawai'i, against steep odds (see p. 12).

ABC's Seabird Program is almost exclusively devoted to stopping extinction: From recovering breeding habitat for the Pink-footed Shearwater in Chile to preventing the accidental capture of Waved Albatrosses in



Bicknell's Thrush on nest. Photo courtesy of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, [www.vtecostudies.org](http://www.vtecostudies.org)

fisheries in Ecuador and Peru...to fencing out predators from Hawaiian Petrel colonies...to working with local communities in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to protect Black-capped Petrel nesting areas (see p. 22).

Most recently, ABC has embarked on a campaign to bring back America's migratory birds, focusing on such diverse species as Long-billed Curlew, Bicknell's Thrush, and Cerulean Warbler (see p. 4, Narupa Reserve). Each of these is on a trajectory to oblivion, but there is time to change that now.

There are countless quotations directed or applicable to the specter of extinction. Here is one from Ecclesiastes 3: "To every thing there is a season,

and a time to every purpose under the heavens...a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity."

Whatever your religious beliefs, it's hard to deny the wisdom of this statement.

Now is the season and now is the time to prevent extinction, and in doing so, help our own kind.

George H. Fenwick  
President, ABC





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



A copy of the current financial statement and registration filed by the organization may be obtained by contacting: ABC, P.O. Box 249, The Plains, VA 20198. Tel: (540) 253-5780, or by contacting the following state agencies:

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## Back from the Brink

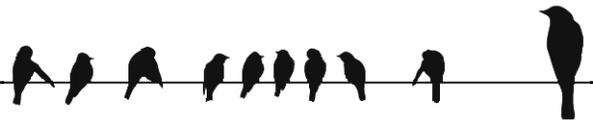
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Above: 'Ākohekohe, a rare Hawaiian honeycreeper. Photo by Jack Jeffrey



## Ecuador's Narupa Reserve Expanded

ABC, Fundación Jocotoco, World Land Trust, and March Conservation Fund recently collaborated to add 117 acres to Ecuador's Narupa Reserve, expanding it to 1,871 acres. Established in 2006, Narupa is a haven for more than 300 bird species, including the rapidly declining Cerulean Warbler. It also shelters threatened resident species such as Black Tinamou, Military Macaw, Coppery-chested Jacamar, and Foothill Elaenia, plus other migrants including Blackburnian and Canada Warblers, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Swainson's Thrush.

Since Narupa lies in the buffer zones of both the lower-elevation Sumaco



Cerulean Warbler by Mark Johnson

Napo-Galeras National Park and the high-altitude Antisana Ecological Reserve, it also serves as an important corridor between these two protected areas, which together cover more than 830,000 acres of rainforests, high-altitude grasslands, and other Andean habitats.

"Narupa is valuable in part because it connects forests at higher and lower elevations," said ABC Conservation Specialist Benjamin Skolnik. "This will allow birds to move freely up and down slope as forests cope with climate change."

Rocio Merino, Executive Director of Fundación Jocotoco, called the expansion "an important step forward" in an effort to protect the birds and other wildlife found in this part of the Andes.

In 2012, ABC funded mapping work that guided this expansion. Many other partners have supported infrastructure within the reserve, ranging from building a guard house and camping platforms to funding forest guards.



Military Macaw by Greg Homell



Coppery-chested Jacamar by Håkan Sandin



Eastern slope forest by Benjamin Skolnik, ABC



Take a virtual tour of Ecuador and the Narupa Reserve on our blog:

<http://wp.me/pZdVT-gZ>

# Help Halt Extinctions Today!

The Araripe Manakin was discovered less than 20 years ago in Brazil. The Dusky Starfrontlet was rediscovered a scant 10 years ago. Today both of these critically endangered species face a better future thanks to ABC's work with partners to protect their habitats.

Across the Americas, ABC is working to protect critical areas identified by the Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) as the most important sites for highly threatened birds. But much work lies ahead to prevent rare birds from disappearing forever. You can help ABC halt extinctions with your contribution today.

Your support will help us advanced protections for the rarest species throughout the hemisphere, including the Juan Fernández Firecrown in Chile and the Marvelous Spatuletail in Peru, as well as our work to preserve the dwindling Atlantic Forest in Brazil, restore māmane forests in Hawai'i; and much, much more.

Please use the enclosed envelope to make an additional gift, or give online at [support.abcbirds.org](http://support.abcbirds.org).

**Your donation will help create a front line  
of defense against bird extinctions.**



Juan Fernández Firecrown by Peter Hodum

## New York Testing Tunnel Seeks to Reduce Bird/Glass Collisions

A new testing facility that is nearing completion in New York City will help save birds by assessing more bird- and user-friendly varieties of glass, which may lead to a reduction in the millions of bird/glass collision deaths in the United States each year.

The New York testing facility, the second of its kind in the United States, is located at a nonpublic area of the Bronx Zoo and is a joint venture of ABC, New York City Audubon, New Jersey Audubon, and Ennead Architects. An earlier version was constructed in Pennsylvania, which provided experience leading to a series of improvements made in the New York tunnel.

The tunnel controls variables like changing weather and light intensity, using a standard daylight simulator. Birds are observed as they fly down the dark tunnel toward the light and presumably attempt to exit either via the invisible control panel, or a test panel.

A mist net prevents birds from actually hitting the glass. Each test is videotaped, and flight type is recorded as well as destination.

Christine Sheppard, who heads up the Bird Collisions Program at ABC, says that ABC's testing program will expand knowledge of what visual signals deter bird collisions with glass, provide comparative ratings of deterrence for existing commercial products, and provide support and feedback for companies developing new bird-friendly products.

The ability to provide quantitative ratings for materials has proved essential in development of ordinances and guidelines for "bird-friendly design." Efforts are underway to expand the capacity of the program as more companies identify bird-friendly new construction and plan to retrofit existing buildings.

"Glass manufacturers are hearing the world's call for more bird-friendly windows and doors, and they are accelerating their research efforts accordingly," said Sheppard. "Our job is to evaluate their new products through highly refined testing protocols and provide scientifically sound feedback that continues to move the ball forward in reducing bird collisions."

Local governments have shown increasing interest in following bird-friendly building codes or guidelines and as a result, the world's glass window makers are lining up to have new glass/window products tested for evolving bird avoidance technology. San Francisco, Oakland, Minnesota, and Toronto have already put bird-friendly building codes into place.

*ABC's efforts to reduce fatal bird collisions in the U.S. are made possible in part by the generous support of the Leon Levy Foundation.*

# Recovering the Interior Least Tern:

## **A Fresh Approach to De-listing a Species**

*By John Nielsen, ABC*



The research boat that picked me up near New Madrid, Missouri was halfway across the Mississippi River when the sandbar appeared in my binoculars. From a distance, it looked unremarkable—no trees, no bushes, no high or low points, just a thin line that seemed to be struggling to stay above water.

“Everything that tries to make a living on sandbars like this gets washed away by spring floods,” said Paul Hartfield, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the man behind the wheel of the research boat, “except for Interior Least Terns.”

## Welcome to Least Tern Paradise

At that point, as if on cue, a mob of tiny birds began rising from the eggs they’d laid in faint depressions in the sand. Several, then dozens, and eventually hundreds, all gray and white with black-capped heads and wings so sharply angled that they looked like living origami.



“Welcome to Least Tern paradise,” said Casey Lott of ABC, as he waded from the boat to the sandbar. Overhead, a swirling crowd of angry terns was urging us to go away by circling, shrieking, and mock-diving.

The birds became more frantic as we walked across the sandbar counting them. Terns from nests we were approaching rose to join the mob; birds from nests we’d passed returned to their nests after swooping down to wet their breast feathers in the river.

“Wet feathers help cool the eggs down,” said biologist Mike Thron of the U.S.

Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). “Watch out where you step. The eggs and the chicks blend into the sand and the nests are spread all over the sandbar. If you’re not careful you’ll crush them.”

The survey took 30 minutes. “That’s 517 adult terns on one sandbar,” said Lott as we sloshed back to the boat, “not bad for a species that many people thought was rare when it was listed as endangered in 1985.” Back then, little was known about river-nesting Least Terns outside of the northern Great Plains, where battles were raging about water management on the Platte and Upper Missouri rivers.

These battles led to the “endangered” listing for “Interior Least Terns” (or ILT), which the FWS defined as any Least Tern nesting more than 50 miles from the Gulf of Mexico.

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**Photos,** above: Least Tern nest scrape with chick and eggs, by John Nielsen, ABC. Below: Heading out to a sandbar to census breeding Interior Least Terns. From left to right, Casey Lott, ABC; Paul Hartfield, FWS; Mike Thron, USACE. Photo by John Nielsen, ABC



"In the listing proposal, FWS estimated there were less than 2,000 Interior Least Terns," said Lott. "However, this number was more of a guesstimate, based on incomplete or rushed surveys that didn't really cover important nesting grounds on the lower Mississippi and the major sand-bed rivers of the Southern Plains. When we finally completed a range-wide survey for ILT in 2005, the count rose to over 17,500 terns, far above the FWS' recovery plan goal of 7,000."

"I don't know how accurate those early '80s counts were," said Hartfield from behind the wheel. "But I know for sure that the Interior Least Tern is now one of the most abundant birds on the Lower Mississippi. In fact, counts are high, stable, or increasing across most of its range. That's a good thing for a bunch of reasons. For many people, these birds are the poster species for the Mississippi and the other large, regulated rivers across the Plains."

Hartfield is a shrimp-boat captain turned endangered species expert who's spent several decades exploring the lower Mississippi River in beat-up boats like this one, studying everything from pallid sturgeon to fat pocketbook mussel to Interior Least Tern. He's also the lead author of a government report that recommends removing the tern from the list of plants and animals protected by the Endangered Species Act.

"If Interior Least Terns are delisted, it will be a major milestone for the Endangered Species Act as it will be the first time a bird species with a large

geographic range has been de-listed for reasons other than restrictions on the use of bird-killing chemicals such as DDT."

## A Long and Winding Success Story

I wondered how a species that nests on such highly managed river systems can be recommended for de-listing. To find out more about these high-profile birds, I spent several days on the river, learning more about this bird's surprising relationship with river engineering and its tenure as a listed species.

It's not a simple story and there have been plenty of rough moments. However, all of the biologists on board (representing FWS, USACE, and ABC) believe that recent large-area conservation plans for ILT are a prime example of how federal agencies can work together to recover listed species and a potentially powerful model for keeping other species off the list in the first place.

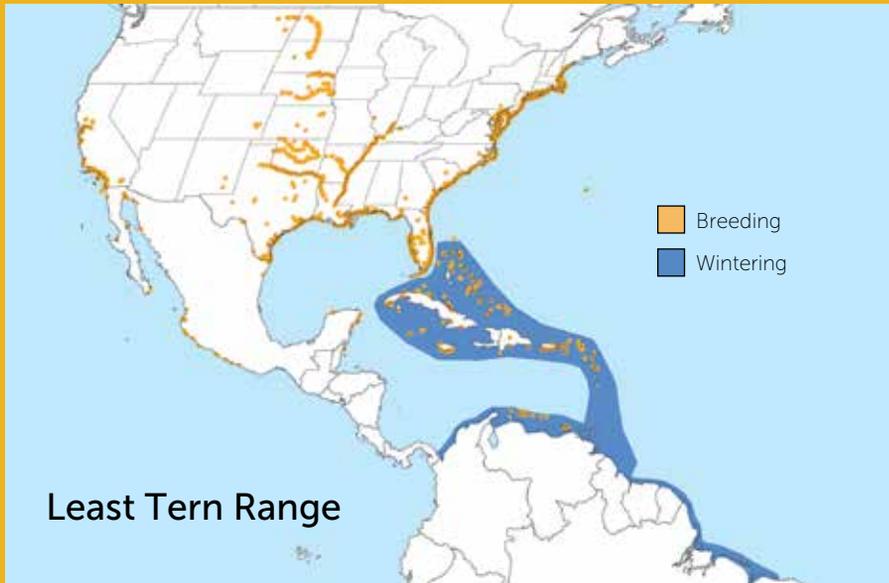
Hartfield began at the beginning. "Before dams and other engineering structures, the sandbars that terns nest on would have been moved around by massive annual flooding during snowmelt from the Rocky Mountains and the Plains. As the water came down, wet floodplains and river backchannels would have been full of small fish for terns to eat. Now, dams store much of the snowmelt, and the large rivers mostly stay within their banks."



Photo by John Nielsen, ABC

Our boat slowed down while a town-sized barge carrying fuel and grain pushed upstream through the navigation channel. "On parts of the Platte River," Lott continued, "where floods have been virtually eliminated by dams and heavy use of river water for irrigated agriculture, bare sandbars have been replaced by large cottonwoods and willow trees growing in the river channel," he said. "Great for migrant warblers, but terrible for terns, since Least Terns *hate* trees."

Thron summed up this key aspect of Least Tern biology: "Predatory birds like crows and owls perch on trees and shrubs while hunting for Least Tern eggs and chicks. Mammalian predators like coyotes or raccoons set up shop on sandbars once they develop enough vegetation to support a prey base. Once sandbars are completely covered by trees, terns stop nesting on them at all."



Least Tern on nest © Michael Stubblefield

## Droughts, Dams, and the Divide

On the Missouri River, droughts resulted in long periods with low dam releases, as water was stored behind dams to meet congressional directives for navigation, irrigation, municipal water use, and hydropower generation. During these years, trees took over sandbars and grew to sizes where small to moderate floods were not strong enough to remove them. River sandbars became less and less suitable for terns. These conditions triggered some nasty fights between people who thought the bird would only be “saved” if the “natural hydrology” of the river was restored (e.g., more flooding) and those who saw the tern as an enemy of flood control, irrigated farming, or navigation.

The USACE, the government agency that manages most of the engineering

projects on rivers with terns, was almost always near the center of these fights. In the early 2000s, FWS formally stated that USACE operation of the Missouri River system “jeopardized the continuing existence of Interior Least Terns” on the Missouri by refusing to use “managed floods” to recreate lost sandbars. After years in court, it was determined that reservoir operations could not be so drastically altered as to bring back major floods. USACE was directed to spend millions of dollars a year to rebuild sandbars with bulldozers in order to comply with the Endangered Species Act.

It was an expensive outcome, said Lott. “Over the years, more than a hundred million dollars has been spent to build sandbars on the Missouri. While these have been used successfully by terns, extremely large floods on the Missouri in 1997 and 2011 also created many

acres of high-quality habitat. Tern populations on the Missouri have been stable or increasing over most of this period. It’s hard to know if this would have been any different without the expense of sandbar creation.”

“When it comes down to it,” said Hartfield, “tern populations on the Missouri and Platte are much smaller than tern populations on the Lower Mississippi and the rivers of the Southern Plains, where the response of tern habitat to river engineering has been much less dire.”

## How Engineering Helped the Tern

In the half-century following the Great Flood of 1927, the Lower Mississippi river system was transformed into what may be the most heavily engineered river system on earth. Massive channel realignment and the damming of major



tributaries resulted in a river that rarely leaves its banks, and floodplain spawning habitat was lost for many river fishes. Many miles of stone dikes were built, jutting out from the bank into the river at right angles to focus the majority of the current into the main channel at low to moderate flows, and using the power of the river to keep the main channel deep enough to support the largest barge navigation system in the world, with little need for dredging.

While these changes have resulted in a Lower Mississippi River that is very different from the pre-engineered system, the transformation has been far from catastrophic for the ILT. Despite the construction of tributary reservoirs, the Lower Mississippi still maintains its historic annual flow pattern: High water in spring inundates sandbars enough to keep trees from growing, rapidly receding flows in summer still expose nesting sandbars, and extreme low flows in fall and winter facilitate extensive dike maintenance and new dike construction.

In fact, dike maintenance and new dike construction to facilitate barge navigation have become the dominant process in creating new sandbars for nesting terns on the Lower Mississippi River. As sand is transported by the river at high flows, it is deposited in lower energy areas between dikes, creating huge sandbars, some more than seven miles long, much larger than Mississippi sandbars prior to engineering.

## Dike maintenance and construction to facilitate barge navigation have become the dominant process in creating new sandbars for nesting terns on the Lower Mississippi River.

Despite the loss of floodplain spawning habitat, terns continue to feast on minnows from a diverse assembly of fish species that spawn in the main channel, including widespread exotics like small-mouth bass and Asian carp.

"I know it may seem counter-intuitive," Lott concluded, "but habitat conditions for ILT on the heavily engineered 770 miles of the Lower Mississippi River Navigation System are better than anywhere else in the world for Least Terns, and this includes coastal beaches. Not only is nesting habitat abundant and very high quality for hundreds of miles, but disturbance from humans is virtually nonexistent due to the relative scarcity of recreation on the Lower Miss."

### Endangered Species: New Ways of Working Together

To make sure it stays that way, the southeastern regional offices of

FWS and USACE took advantage of a little-used part of the Endangered Species Act known as Section 7(a)(1), which is designed to make it easier for federal agencies to use their "existing authorities" to conserve habitat for endangered species.

"I wanted to encourage the Corps to find affordable ways to manage this part of the Mississippi system for flood control, navigation, *and* biodiversity," said Hartfield. "Instead of bringing out the hammer every time we disagreed, we agreed to work together to find win-win solutions for potential habitat problems."

One of those win-win solutions is designed to help keep predators off sandbars in dike fields. Many dike-field sandbars used to be connected to the shore, providing easy access by shore-based predators because dikes cut off the currents that carve backchannels through the sand. Now, however, channel-forming currents rush through inexpensive notches that the Corps has cut in many of those dikes.

"Notching an engineering structure to let water through is not an idea that the engineers would have embraced in the past," said Thron. "But it seems to help the terns and it's inexpensive and it can be done routinely. Terns forage for fish in the new backchannels. Trees and bushes on the shore don't creep out and take over. Habitat complexity increases for river fishes. Around 70



BEFORE



AFTER

To help keep hungry predators away from Least Tern eggs and chicks, an inexpensive engineering solution has been put in place on the Lower Mississippi: notching existing dikes to create backchannels and detached sandbars.

Maps courtesy of Mike Thron, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Least Tern chick and eggs. Photo by Joel Jorgensen

percent of our existing dike fields have been notched so far, and new dike fields are installed with notches already in them.”

## A Plan That’s Good for People—and Terns

In the end, while camping on a shrubby, tern-free sandbar south of Memphis, we discussed a long-term conservation management plan that both USACE and FWS have signed to formalize best management practices for Least Terns that will be easy to continue long after terns are de-listed. The plan is designed to benefit Least Terns, other listed species, and overall habitat diversity on the river.

“The reason this plan is so unique and so successful,” said Lott, “is that it starts by recognizing that the USACE has very specific jobs to do on the Mississippi. It then lists each of these engineering actions in detail and describes ways that impacts to high priority species can be

avoided, or better yet, ways that habitat baselines can be improved, without increasing costs.”

Hartfield added: “We know that not every engineering project can contribute to habitat restoration, and we know that the Corps has a job to do for many different types of stakeholders. However, we’ve found that if both agencies commit to the long-term process of collaborating on river management, we rarely miss an opportunity to do good things for wildlife.”

Thron continued, “We’ve got to the point where we are planning our river maintenance projects several years in advance now—together. This gives us all ample time to figure out the best way to get the job done and to add as many environmental benefits as possible. We’ve worked together on so many projects now, that we can almost always find a way to improve habitat conditions during routine tasks.”

“It’s all about culture,” said Lott. “These two agencies have a long history of conflict. With ILT, the FWS and USACE are breaking this cycle and forging new ground, where the intention from the start is to use every tool both agencies have to conserve wildlife while continuing to manage large rivers for multiple uses. In the end, it’s this kind of collaboration that’s going to be necessary to conserve many of our public lands species. Hopefully, this is just the beginning.”



**Go online to hear audio  
and see more photos:**

[ABCbirds.org/results/terns.html](http://ABCbirds.org/results/terns.html)



*John Nielsen is Senior Writer/Editor at ABC and a former Environment Correspondent at National Public Radio. In 2006 his book *Condor/To the Brink and Back/The Life and Times of One Giant Bird* won the National Outdoor*

*Book Award for Natural History Literature.*

Into the Alaka'i

# Saving Rare Birds in the Forests of Kaua'i

by George E. Wallace, ABC

**T**he trail that led us through the forests of Alaka'i Plateau was not so much a trail as it was a full-body experience, what with all the climbing over moss-covered logs, the slipping down embankments, and the slogging through muddy creek beds. The air was wet, the trees were wet, and the field team from the Kaua'i Forest Bird Recovery Project was soaked to the bone. Surprisingly, it was not raining, even though the forests of the Alaka'i are famous for their rain.

Earlier that morning, we had started hiking up the Mohihi Trail from Koke'e State Park on the island of Kaua'i. Our objective was a campsite several hours away, in a part of the Alaka'i known to harbor some of the rarest birds in the Hawaiian Islands, if not the entire world. Not to put too fine a point on it, but these are birds that might not be around much longer if we don't step up efforts to save them.

Like nearly all of the Hawaiian Islands, Kaua'i used to be a wondrous place with a fantastic range of native birds. Now it is a wondrous place where



'Akeke'e by Jack Jeffrey

an alarming number of native birds are either extinct or declining toward extinction.

## Hawai'i's Bird Extinction Crisis

It's a crisis rooted in the rapid growth of Hawai'i's human population and in the damage done by non-native species introduced to Hawai'i by humans. Non-native rats and feral cats hunt native birds that evolved in the absence of mammalian predators.

Non-native goats, pigs, sheep, and cows destroy forests by devouring saplings and trampling roots. Fast-growing invasive plants crowd out endemic plants that native birds depend on. Non-native mosquitos spread avian malaria and avian pox virus.

Changes wrought by scourges such as these have wiped out dozens of Hawaiian birds. Thirty-three more of these native birds are now on the federal list of plants and animals protected by the Endangered Species Act.



Puaiohi nest and young. Photo by Lucas Behnke

One might think non-native threats like these would fizzle in the seemingly impenetrable rainforests of the Alaka'i Plateau, which lies in the center of Kaua'i. That's a thought that came to mind when I was taken to a scenic overlook near the campsite used by the forest bird team. The Wainiha Valley yawned beneath us, a lush green corridor bounded by nearly vertical slopes punctuated by thin waterfalls. All around the valley was a bumpy sea of green touched by rolling bands of low clouds. Gradually the Alaka'i Plateau rose toward the indistinct summit of Mt. Waialeale, where the average annual rainfall exceeds 450 inches. Breathtaking is the only word for vistas such as that one.

But even in this wilderness, non-native species are pushing many native species toward extinction. We were there to check up on three native birds that have teetered near the brink for years. One, the Puaiohi, is a sweet-sounding thrush found only in the Alaka'i, where it often nests on steep stream valley walls. Non-native rat predation helped put Puaiohi on the Endangered Species List in 1967. No more than 800 are thought to remain.

The other two birds—the 'Akeke'e and the 'Akikiki—are Hawaiian honeycreepers threatened by everything from non-native rats to non-native mosquito-borne diseases. Both were officially classified as critically endangered in 2008, thanks in part to a listing

petition filed by ABC and biologist Eric VanderWerf. Roughly 950 'Akeke'e and 470 'Akikiki—birds known collectively to researchers as "Aks"—survive in these rainforests today.

In 2013, reports that all three of these native bird species were still sliding toward extinction prompted conservation groups and federal agencies to step up their efforts to protect the birds from their non-native "enemies."

### Steps toward Saving Three Species

We left the research camp and hiked down to the bottom of a defile carved by the Mohihi Stream. With support from ABC, researchers from the forest



Puaiohi nest boxes along the Mohihi Stream.  
Photo by George Wallace, ABC

bird project have been testing several rat-resistant nest boxes built for Puaiohi. We saw plastic flower pots mounted on poles with shields pointed downward to thwart climbing rats; electronic sensors and hidden cameras monitor both birds and rats.

So far only one Puaiohi has used a nest box, but birds have apparently entered several others. Nest boxes are being introduced to Puaiohi now being bred in captivity in the hope that, when released, they will recognize the boxes as nest sites.

New types of rat traps are now being trialed in an effort to reduce predation pressure on the birds. Setting, baiting, emptying, and resetting conventional traps can take forever in a rugged rainforest. One of the alternatives is a “repeating” trap that can kill dozens of

rats before requiring maintenance. Rat counts are down sharply in the test plots where the new traps were deployed.

Elsewhere in the Alaka'i two “ungulate-proof” fences are now limiting the spread of feral pigs and other non-native grazers—and the disease-bearing mosquitoes that the ungulates help spread. More ambitious efforts to protect Aks in particular from avian malaria and avian pox may soon move from the drawing board into testing phase, including proposals such as one to combat the spread of mosquito-borne diseases by releasing sterilized male mosquitoes.

### A Ticking Clock on the Alaka'i

The long list of entities now racing to protect the critically endangered forest birds of the Alaka'i Plateau includes not only ABC and the Kaua'i Forest

Bird Recovery Project, but also the Kaua'i Watershed Alliance, the state of Hawaii's Division of Forestry and Wildlife, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and San Diego Zoo Global. I can't speak for all concerned, but I believe that this race can be won with proper funding and resources.

But it's also clear that the extinction clock is ticking on the Alaka'i Plateau. We saw neither of the Aks on our quick trip through those forests. Fortunately though, while hiking through the narrow confines of the Mohihi Stream, we heard one Puaiohi call, glimpsed one as it passed, and craned our necks to watch in awe when one more landed on a branch high above the steep gully carved out by the stream.

Where there are birds, there is still hope.



'Akikiki by Jack Jeffrey



George Wallace has been active in bird research and conservation for nearly 30 years. He served as leader of ABC's International Division during 2002-2009, before shifting over to lead the Oceans and Islands Division, which focuses on the conservation of birds of oceanic islands, especially Hawai'i, and seabirds.



Kyle Pias (left) and Adam Elzinga of the Kaua'i Forest Bird Recovery Project examine an old Puaiohi nest site. Photo by George Wallace, ABC



**Juan Fernández Firecrown  
(Chile)**

This vivid red hummingbird is restricted to small patches of native forest on a single island, Isla Robinson Crusoe, in the remote Juan Fernández Archipelago.

Firecrowns depend on native forests for breeding, and ABC has partnered with the Juan Fernández Islands Conservancy and Oikonos to remove invasive plants from a key breeding area to bolster their numbers. Community outreach and training have resulted in initiatives such as one to control feral cats where many firecrowns spend the nonbreeding season.

Photo by Tom Shreve

## Safeguarding the Rarest:

**W**hat more inspiring way to showcase the results of ABC's work and that of our partners than through a photo gallery of the birds we have helped to save?

These 10 birds are among the most endangered in the Americas. Their continued existence can be attributed, at least in part, to the focus provided through the Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE), chaired by ABC. First launched globally in 2005, AZE began with an ambitious and explicit goal: to prevent further species extinctions.

To start, the coalition identified places where a species' survival depended on the conservation of a single site and agreed to work together to protect them. As of 2014, 88 organizations have joined this effort, aiming to conserve more than 580 sites to protect over 900 species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, conifers, and corals.

The 10 birds featured here are just a few of our AZE focal species. Working with our in-country partners, we have helped to acquire, restore, and sustainably manage enough land to keep these—and many other unique species—from vanishing forever.



Learn more about AZE: [ZeroExtinction.org](http://ZeroExtinction.org) | "See It, Save It." Visit some of these sites on [ConservationBirding.org](http://ConservationBirding.org).



**Pale-headed Brush-Finch  
(Ecuador)**

Although this large finch was downlisted from critically endangered to endangered, it can only be found at one site in southern Ecuador.

ABC's partner Fundación Jocotoco and others have worked to deter nest parasitism by Shiny Cowbirds and control habitat-destroying fires on the Yunguilla Reserve, the finch's stronghold site. Plans are underway to create a second reserve and establish a separate breeding population.

Photo by A. Sornoza

# The Last Stands of Rare Birds

**Palila (U.S./Hawai'i)**

This finch-billed honeycreeper is dependent on the native māmane tree, which provides about 90 percent of its food. Palila once occurred throughout the Hawaiian Islands but now occupy less than 5 percent of their historic range, exclusively on the Big Island.

ABC is working with the Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife to stabilize Palila numbers. Strategies include fencing and restoring the species' designated Critical Habitat, removing non-native grazers that destroy the forest, and predator control.

Photo by Jack Jeffrey





### **Marvelous Spatuletail (Peru)**

This spectacular hummingbird attracts visitors from around the world to its tiny range in northern Peru. ABC and partner Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (ECOAN) created the Huembo Reserve in 2006 to raise awareness and help save this species from extinction. We continue work to reforest the reserve and surrounding private lands, combating the ever-present threat of habitat loss.

The reserve now boasts a visitor center, as well as a trail system, several feeding stations, and blinds that facilitate viewing and photography of the bird.

Photo by Glenn Bartley



### **Araripe Manakin (Brazil)**

This strikingly patterned bird was discovered in 1996 in a tiny area of northeastern Brazil. Its preferred habitat—spring-fed riparian forest—is rapidly disappearing due to unchecked deforestation for agriculture and human settlement.

ABC has supported Brazilian partner Aquasis and the Araripe Manakin Conservation Project in launching a long-term habitat restoration initiative for this stunning species.

Photo by Ciro Albano



Photo by Ian Merrill

### **Long-whiskered Owlet (Peru)**

This tiny, unique owl was discovered in 1976 and assigned its own genus, *Xenoglaux*, from the words meaning “strange owl” in Greek. It can only be found in the Andean cloud forests of northern Peru. ABC and partner ECOAN founded the Abra Patricia-Alto Nieva Private Conservation Area there in 2005 to protect the owlet and other threatened species. It now totals more than 25,000 acres.

ABC continues to support habitat restoration on the reserve and surrounding private lands. An ecolodge, research station, trail system, and canopy tower were built at Abra Patricia to promote ecotourism and generate funding to support the reserve.



### **Cochabamba Mountain-Finch (Bolivia)**

This colorful finch is found mainly in Bolivia's Tunari National Park. ABC has worked with in-country partner Asociación Armonía to encourage communities living in the park to help conserve this rare species. Reforestation, reduced pesticide use, and environmental education are some of the ways communities are now involved.

ABC is supporting Armonía in publishing the first field guide to birds of Bolivia, which will feature this endemic finch.

Photo by Paul B. Jones



### **Lear's Macaw (Brazil)**

This large macaw was named for the poet and artist Edward Lear, who often drew parrots. It is found only in northern Bahia State of Brazil, where it roosts and nests in spectacular red sandstone canyons. Although downgraded from critically endangered to endangered in 2009, the species continues to be threatened by habitat loss and may still be vulnerable to illegal capture for the pet trade.

ABC and partner Fundação Biodiversitas have increased protected habitat at the Canudos Biological Reserve to over 3,500 acres, established two field stations, and hired park guards.

Photo by Ashok Khosla

### **Waved Albatross (Ecuador)**

This is the only albatross species that breeds close to the equator: on Española Island in the Galápagos, and occasionally on Isla de la Plata, both off the coast of Ecuador.

While the AZE site for the Waved Albatross is apparently secure, albatrosses are unfortunate victims of accidental bycatch in fisheries, with significant numbers killed in fishing nets and by hooks. ABC is working with Pro Delphinus in Peru and Ecuadorian conservationists to develop fishing techniques that reduce or eliminate bycatch without affecting fishermen's livelihoods.

Photo by leospek, Shutterstock



### **Dusky Starfrontlet (Colombia)**

The poetically named Dusky Starfrontlet was rediscovered in 2004 by ABC partner Fundación ProAves. The following year, we worked together to create the Colibrí del Sol Reserve in north-west Colombia to protect the species. This 11,000-acre reserve comprises páramo (a high-altitude grassy tundra-like ecosystem) and cloud forest. Several other new bird and plant species have now been discovered in the reserve.

ABC continues to work with Pro-Aves to acquire additional habitat and further enlarge the protected area. Reforestation of degraded habitat is also ongoing.

Photo by Pete Morris





Black-capped Petrels feeding at sea. Photo by Nathan Dias

# Sympathy for Little Devils: Tracking an Elusive Seabird

**B**lack-capped Petrels are among the rarest and most secretive seabirds in the Western Hemisphere. But for several months now they've been sharing their secrets with researchers in their Caribbean breeding grounds and satellite tracking experts based in the United States, in an effort supported by ABC and other partners.

*We asked scientists in the field and in the lab to tell us more about the first successful effort to track the movements of a seabird whose nocturnal habits helped earn it the nickname "Diablotín," or "little devil."*

## FROM THE FIELD:

*Rob Ronconi, seabird biologist  
from Nova Scotia, Canada*

Last April, I spent a cold night near the top of a mountain on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, somewhere near the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. From the plateau below came the distant sounds of cow bells, Haitian music, and cars on gravel roads. Otherwise, except for the rustling wind in the pine forest around me, all was quiet.

It was not your typical Caribbean getaway, but it was a good place to wait for the Black-capped Petrels to soar up from the ocean and then down through the forest to the burrows they nest in, after yet another year at sea. If you fail to see them flashing past

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Black-capped Petrel burrows  
are so well-disguised that a  
field researcher can sit down  
next to one and never know  
it's there.

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you in the darkness, you may hear the haunting calls they make.

Black-capped Petrels are among the world's most mysterious seabirds, in part because they're thought to be declining toward extinction and in part because their burrows are so well-disguised that a field researcher can sit down next to one and never know it's there.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Black-capped Petrels were an important local food source, naturalists and hunters used teams of dogs to roust these birds out of their nesting burrows. That's one of the reasons the Diablotin was thought to be extinct for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until an occupied breeding site was found in the mountains of southeastern Haiti in 1963.

Since then, four more Black-capped Petrel breeding grounds have been "rediscovered," all in remote mountainous areas of Hispaniola. Last spring I had the privilege and pleasure of joining an expedition to one of these breeding areas—in the Sierra de Bahoruco National Park in the Dominican Republic—where we hoped to capture several "little devils" near their burrows and affix

Black-capped Petrel outfitted with transmitter.  
Photo by Tazio Taveres



small solar-powered transmitters to their backs.

These transmitters make it possible for an international team of scientists to do something that had never been done before: follow the movements of Black-capped Petrels as they cruise back and forth across the Caribbean and the North Atlantic.

The ambitious project is taking place thanks to leadership by the U.S. Geological Survey, South Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Clemson University, Grupo Jaragua in the Dominican Republic, and ABC.

My part of the project started in the Dominican capital of Santo Domingo, where I met expedition leader Ernst Rupp as well other members of the Grupo Jaragua team. Grupo's field researchers have been finding Black-capped Petrel burrows in Sierra de Bahoruco for years, using everything from night-vision goggles to portable radar. They've found 45 on the northern slopes of these mountains, where pine

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One of the few things we knew is that these seabirds turned up often off the coast of North Carolina, and—less often—off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia.

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trees and agave plants grow between the large, sharp limestone boulders. Black-capped Petrels often dig their burrows beneath the edges of these boulders, making them extremely hard to find.

As the Grupo field team made its way to the heights of Sierra de Bahoruco—7,200 feet above sea level—we passed through ecosystems ranging from coastal lagoons and dry deserts to humid broadleaf woodlands and tall pine forests, each with a unique mix of endemic and migratory birds. Sadly,

though, we also passed through farmlands that are steadily encroaching on the national park.

As we neared the breeding grounds, the views of neighboring Haiti showed the terrible damage being done to Hispaniola's forests by illegal charcoal operations, unsustainable farming methods, and excessive timber harvests. On some mountains the deforested areas reached all the way to the summit.

Fortunately, the forests where the Black-capped Petrels dig their burrows are still fairly well preserved. A few hours after we reached them, I caught my first glimpse of a little devil chick, which was small and downy and far in the back of its burrow. At this time of year most of the petrel eggs had hatched, but the chicks weren't big enough to leave their burrows. Adult petrels flew off to forage for them, returning with squid and fish they'd plucked out of the Caribbean.



We wanted to capture the adult birds as they returned from their foraging runs, in order to outfit them with transmitters. We set one-way doors over the entrances to several of the shallower burrows—doors that only opened inward—so we could grab the adult birds as they entered. But somehow the returning birds seemed to know that we were waiting, and we didn't see a single one. Silent and shivering, we waited in the dark for four hours before giving up and going to sleep.

The next day, the one-way door design was changed to a wire-mesh trap mounted on the outside of the burrow entrance that captured adult petrels as they tried to enter the burrows. Two petrels were captured that night and one was caught the following day. Previously, researchers from Grupo Jaragua had only done "hands-off research" with the petrels in this area. But on this day we picked the birds up, measured and weighed them, and then attached the transmitters to their backs.

It only took a minute or two. But when you've got a Black-capped Petrel in your hands it's hard not to marvel at their features. These birds may be small compared to other petrels and shearwaters, but their black and white plumage is striking and their sharply hooked bills can cut through a knuckle in an instant. (My knuckle bled freely until the first transmitter was attached.)

When we were done we returned the birds to their burrows. Not long afterward, after dark, they flew out to sea.

### FROM THE LAB:

*Patrick Jodice, director of the tracking operation at Clemson University, South Carolina*

Diablotín are beautiful flyers. In 1916, a passenger on an Atlantic steamer saw one flying toward him from a distance, appearing first as a "thin, vanishing vertical shadow" against the waves, and then as a Black-capped Petrel that flew past him in a heartbeat, with "first

one, then the other wing uppermost... shooting across the wind with almost unbelievable speed and soon out of sight among the distant seas."

Where these birds are going when they pass by so impressively has long been a mystery, however. Until this past April, one of the few things we knew is that these seabirds turned up often off the coast of North Carolina, and—less often and farther away from land—off the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia.

In the past, we did not know where or when the cryptic seabirds foraged in the Caribbean and the North Atlantic. We did not know whether they returned to the same parts of the ocean year after year. We did not know how far they could fly in a day or whether

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**Photos, left to right:** Members of the Grupo Jaragua team, April 2014. From left to right: José Luis Castillo, Esteban Garrido, Gerson Feliz, René Jeune, Jairo Isaa Matos, and Rob Ronconi. Photo by Ernst Rupp. | Black-capped Petrel chick in burrow by J. Volquez, Grupo Jaragua. | Searching for Black-capped Petrel burrows in the Sierra de Bahoruco. Photo by Rob Ronconi



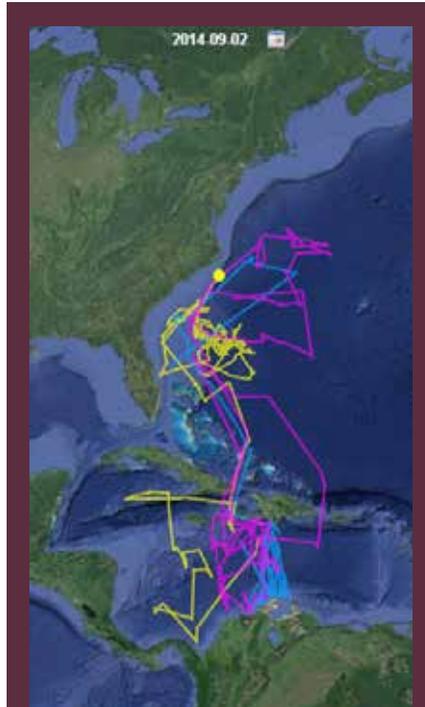
they tended to travel in groups, or whether they followed regular flight paths out over the water. How long did they stay away from their nests before bringing fish back to their chicks? How often do they encounter fishing fleets, oil rigs, and oil spills? How often do they enter areas targeted for offshore wind development?

Answers to some of these questions have been coming in since last April, when the birds that Rob Ronconi tagged took flight. The transmitters on their backs resemble tiny backpacks. Sensors in these transmitters record the locations of the birds several times a day. Tiny solar power strips run the transmitters for eight-hour intervals before shutting them down for 24 hours to conserve power, after which the cycle starts again.

Once a day, location data sent to passing satellites comes to us as an email, and when I say "us" I'm not referring solely to the staff of the South Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Clemson University. Instead, I am referring to anyone and everyone interested in following the real-time movements of these secretive seabirds. You can follow along at <http://www.atlanticseabirds.org/bcpe-new>.

As I write these words, we have been tracking these three birds for more than four extremely busy months. While they were still tending to their chicks, the Black-capped Petrels foraged in Caribbean waters between Hispaniola and South America, which came as a bit of a surprise to us. More surprising was the fact that all three petrels frequently covered 100 miles a day while feeding their young, and on some days they flew for as many as 400 miles.

Once our birds were finished rearing their chicks, they left the Caribbean and headed for the waters off the southeast



### Travels of the Tagged Petrels

Each colored line in the map above shows the path of one of the three satellite-tagged Black-capped Petrels.

Get daily updates on their travels at <http://www.atlanticseabirds.org/bcpe-new>.

Image courtesy of Movebank

coast of the United States, passing just east of Cuba and then flying north/northwest through the Bahamas before stopping in a part of the North Atlantic above the Continental Shelf. Two of the

tagged petrels have since moved on to deeper waters past the shelf break.

If all goes well it won't be long before we're doing more than follow the Diablotin. Satellite data will be combined with footage from cameras in the breeding grounds to tell us more about how Black-capped Petrels raise their chicks. Tracking maps will be compared with maps of ocean temperatures, wind patterns, and depths to help us locate petrel "hotspots." That could make it easier to find out more about how Black-capped Petrels interact with the threats they may face at sea.

We'll also compare our data on little devils with studies of other seabirds tracked by our team in the Atlantic and Caribbean, such as Audubon's Shearwaters, Great Shearwaters, White-tailed and Red-billed Tropicbirds, Masked Boobies, and Magnificent Frigatebirds.

At this point the only firm conclusion we have reached is that these birds know how to get around. If they carried passports that got checked each time they entered new territorial waters, our tagged birds would now have stamps from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Cayman Islands, Netherlands Antilles, Turks and Caicos, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, the Bahamas, and the United States.

We plan to continue updating the petrel tracking maps until the transmitters stop working.



*Rob Ronconi is a seabird biologist who has studied shearwaters, petrels, gulls, terns, and auks in the North Pacific, and the South and North Atlantic oceans. While working as a research associate at Acadia University he led a study on bird interactions with offshore oil and gas platforms. Ronconi lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.*



*Patrick Jodice is a wildlife biologist with the South Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and an Associate Professor at Clemson University's School of Agriculture, Forest and Environmental Science. An expert on marine ornithology and foraging ecology, he is the lead investigator with the tracking project.*



Passenger Pigeon art by Louis Agassiz Fuertes

# Gone but Not Forgotten

## Bird Extinctions that Changed History

*At 2 p.m. on September 1, 1914, a famous bird fell dead from her perch in an aviary at the Cincinnati Zoo. Her name was Martha, and she was the last known Passenger Pigeon, which was once among the most abundant birds on earth. The disappearance of the Passenger Pigeon has been described as the single most influential bird extinction in American history.*

*However, it is not the only one. Not by a long shot. >>>*



Passenger Pigeon art by John James Audubon

>>> So says Mark V. Barrow, Jr., author of the highly praised "Nature's Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology." Barrow says a failed attempt to see a bird that is now extinct is one of the reasons he became a leading authority on extinct North American birds.

To find out more about bird extinctions, ABC's John Nielsen called Barrow in his office at Virginia Tech, where Barrow chairs the History Department.

JN: Let's start with the bird that got away. What was it? Where were you?

MB: I was in Florida, where I grew up. The bird was the Dusky Seaside Sparrow, which is now extinct. In the 1980s, when only a handful of these birds were thought to be left in existence, my dad and I went looking for one of them on Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, which was the bird's last stronghold. We saw many nice birds that day, but no Dusky Seaside Sparrows.

Soon afterward, I remember thinking, "Wow, this bird may not be elsewhere, it may be nowhere, it may be gone forever." It was a strange feeling. Something seemed wrong with the world.

JN: And now you are a professor of extinction studies, among other things. So tell me, how did the Passenger Pigeon become such a well-known symbol of extinction?

MB: Go outside and try to imagine a flock of birds big enough to blacken the sky, and then imagine it blackening the sky for days on end. The Passenger Pigeon was one of the most abundant birds on earth at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when there may have been as many as four billion of them in North America.

Commercial hunters wiped this species out as expanding railroad lines and the growth of national markets made it possible to hunt Passenger Pigeons and many other animals on a truly massive scale.

The tail end of this process took place as more and more people were becoming aware of their impact on the natural world, particularly in regard to birds. Before that, when people thought about extinction at all, they thought of it as a purely natural phenomenon, or as the inevitable side-effect of progress.

*JN: Martha died alone in captivity at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. Has any other bird species gone extinct in such a dramatic fashion?*

MB: No, but there are some that came close. One is the Carolina Parakeet, a colorful member of the parrot family that was once abundant in bottomland forests and river valleys in the southeastern United States. Like Passenger Pigeons, these birds were driven to extinction in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Prominent ornithologists mourned their passing, and the last known Carolina Parakeet also died in captivity at the Cincinnati Zoo, in 1918. It's not a coincidence that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was signed into law in 1918.

*JN: Did the last Carolina Parakeet have a name?*

MB: Yes, it was called "Incas." Generally speaking, it's a very bad sign when all of the remaining individuals of a species are given names.

Another good example is Booming Ben, the last known Heath Hen. Booming Ben was last seen in 1932, near the site of what is now the Martha's Vineyard Airport. Once the species lived in scrubby heath barrens on the east coast of the United States, but by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was only found on Cape Cod and adjacent Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts.

The Heath Hen is important because it was the first bird that Americans actively tried to save from extinction and one of the first endangered species to be extensively studied in its natural habitat. Hunting bans and the creation of a special wildlife reserve failed to save the Heath Hen from extinction, but those early conservation efforts paved the way for those that followed.

*JN: Booming Ben, like Martha and Incas, did not die in vain.*

MB: Exactly. The other bird I should mention here is the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, a legendary resident of southeastern old-growth forests that is, or was, one of the largest woodpeckers in the world. Studies of this bird drew attention to the mounting threat that habitat loss posed to the nation's wildlife. Logging and hunting seemed to drive this bird extinct by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the last definitive sighting took place in 1944. Reports that these birds had not only been seen but briefly filmed in Arkansas drew a huge amount of public interest in 2005, but those reports remain quite controversial. Subsequent attempts to find definitive proof have been unsuccessful thus far.

*JN: Do you think they're out there somewhere?*

MB: I go back and forth on that. Ivory-bill sightings have been reported many times since the 1940s, and many of the people responsible for these reports have been respected birders and not just people who saw something big fly through the woods. The other complicating fact is that the Ivory-bill so closely resembles the Pileated Woodpecker.

I think it's entirely possible that a small number of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers survived for a long time in some southeastern forest. But it's been a long time since the last reported sighting. I'd say the odds are low.

In any case, I think the huge amount of public interest generated by the possibility that Ivory-billed Woodpeckers might still be with us is a very encouraging sign. It's as if the rediscovery of this species offers some kind of redemption for the damage we have done to the natural world.



Carolina Parakeets art by John James Audubon

*JN: Why are bird extinctions and near-extinctions as influential as they seem to be?*

MB: People seem to bond with birds. Birds are conspicuous, most are active during the daytime, they are easily anthropomorphized, they have always been well-studied, and they can fly. When bird species go extinct and we inch closer to what Rachel Carson famously referred to as a "silent spring"—well, that's a nightmare no one wants.

*JN: One last question for the heck of it: If you could bring just one extinct bird back to life what would it be?*

MB: Carolina Parakeets. They were really beautiful.



Mark V. Barrow, Jr. is Professor and Chair of the History Department at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. His first book, *A Passion for Birds: American Ornithology after Audubon* (Princeton University Press,

1998), won the Forum for the History of Science in America Book Prize. His second book, *Nature's Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), was awarded the Susan Abrahms Prize.

# Searching for (and Saving) the Rarest:

## An ABC Specialty

By Daniel J. Lebbin, ABC

**N**ine years ago, in southern Ecuador, a friend and I went looking for one of the world's rarest birds. After an all-night, 12-hour bus ride and bumpy trip up a mountain road in the back of well-worn taxi, we hiked into a patch of scrub surrounded by pasturelands near the community of Yunguilla. The weather was hot and our timing was bad—we'd arrived in the middle of the day—but we got lucky and quickly spotted a Pale-headed Brush-Finch in the dense vegetation.

At the time, these creamy-white birds were classified as critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). They were so rare that no sightings were recorded from 1969 to 1997, leading many experts to believe they were extinct. In 1998, when the birds were rediscovered in the Yunguilla Valley by an expedition funded by ABC, fewer than 20 Pale-headed Brush-Finches were thought to exist.

To protect these rare birds and their only known stronghold, our partner Fundación Jocotoco and ABC created the 370-acre Yunguilla Reserve in 1999, and then worked to control the damage being done to the species' population by the parasitic Shiny Cowbird, a species that leaves its eggs in the nests of other birds.

If those steps had not been taken, I doubt that the brush-finch would still be with us. Instead, the species has been bouncing back. By 2005, when



Pale-headed Brush-Finch by Dušan Brinhuizen

my friend and I hiked back into the Yunguilla Reserve, the brush-finch population had more than doubled in size. By 2009 more than 100 breeding pairs were found in the reserve, and that number may be rising.

Recently, the IUCN "downgraded" the status of the Pale-headed Brush-Finch, moving it from "critically endangered" to "endangered." We at ABC are looking to keep up this momentum by expanding the reserve and creating a second population of Pale-headed Brush-Finch in southern Ecuador. It's the kind of work we specialize in: saving the rarest.

Unfortunately, we're now living in an age where conservation emergencies of this sort are all too common. Even worse, the help that these birds desperately need sometimes arrives too late. That is almost certainly the case for the Alagoas Foliage-gleaner, a reddish-brown wonder that once thrived in the Atlantic Forest of northeastern Brazil. As those forests were destroyed and

fragmented, the foliage-gleaner has likely slipped into extinction. The last known sighting was reported in spring 2012, and thorough searches mounted by skilled researchers have come up empty since then.

Will other birds on the brink of extinction prompt a reaction like the one that helped save the Pale-headed Brush-Finch, or will these birds go the way the Alagoas Foliage-gleaner has likely gone? ABC continues to ramp up its efforts to ensure that the path we take is the one that leads away from brink, including our work with Fundação Biodiversitas to conserve the last known habitat of the Stresemann's Bristlefront in eastern Brazil, among many other possible examples.

Thank you for your support of ABC, which offers a glimmer of hope for the brush-finch, the bristlefront—and many other rare birds.



Join us: [support.abcbirds.org](http://support.abcbirds.org)



*Daniel Lebbin works in ABC's International Division, leading projects in Peru, Bolivia, and Chile to create and expand nature reserves for the hemisphere's rarest birds. Dan coauthored The American Bird Conservancy Guide to Bird Conservation published in 2010. He received his Ph.D. from Cornell University, where he studied habitat specialization of Amazonian birds and spent a year as a Fulbright scholar in Peru.*

# Imagine a Legacy of Halting Extinctions

In 1989, there were fewer than 100 Lear's Macaws in Brazil. Today there are more than 1,200. It took vision and many years of on-the-ground land protection and restoration, but the Lear's Macaw is now a bird conservation success story.

ABC and our partner Fundação Biodiversitas have worked for years to save nesting sites and to protect thousands of acres of habitat critical to the Lear's Macaw's survival, and in 2009 the species was downlisted from critically endangered to endangered.

Who else shares the long-term vision and commitment needed to save threatened birds? ABC Legacy Circle members—those supporters who have included ABC in their estate plans—for one.

**Each Legacy Circle member is leaving a lasting legacy of bird conservation. So can you.**

When you include ABC in your estate plans through your will, trust, retirement plan, or insurance policy, you will help save rare birds such as the Lear's Macaw, and help ensure ABC will "bring back the birds" for years to come.

*If you would like more information, or if you have already included ABC in your estate plans, please contact ABC Planned Giving Director Jack Morrison at 540-253-5780 or [jmorrison@abcbirds.org](mailto:jmorrison@abcbirds.org).*

Lear's Macaws by Mark L. Stafford, Parrots International





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