

BIRDCONSERVATION

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From Mountains to Islands, the Journey Is in Every Step

Grasping for breath, I turned one last time on the nearly 14,000-foot Peruvian mountain pass to watch the Mountain Caracara we had seen at eye level an hour before circling far below. My knees had turned to rubber, and my pounding heart and lungs begged for release. Tino Aucca, president of our partner organization, Asociación Ecosistemas Andinos (ECOAN), breathed easily nearby, smiling at my labored condition.

We had just climbed to the Andean pass, known as Abra Malaga, from the *Polylepis* forests on the slopes well below. These are the highest forests in the world. Beneath this stunted forest are soft, rounded, deep beds of mosses—*Aulacomnium*, *Polytrichum*, and a few *Sphagnum*s—that are lovely to see but too wet to lie on. These small fairylands harbor an avifauna unlike any other on Earth.

I have traveled to the Andes many times, but on this day I notched 28 birds I had never seen before: a remarkable collection of cinclodes, tit-spinetails, canasteros, tit-tyrants, and even an antpitta found only in this rare, thin-air habitat. Unlike other antpittas I have seen before, this Stripe-headed Antpitta foraged openly in a streamside meadow cropped close by grazing llamas and alpacas.

We had visited to check on some *Polylepis* trees planted a few years earlier under the direction of ECOAN. The slow-growing trees slightly resemble small, gnarled oaks. Most were faring well, though damage from grazing and trampling was evident near a break in the fence



Stripe-headed Antpitta. Photo by Kazuya Naoki

intended to protect these plants. With some repairs, the trees would continue to grow and expand, creating new fairyland for birds that rely on *Polylepis* to survive.

Most of my travel is for meetings to persuade supporters of the importance of their role in conservation; to negotiate actions with partners; and to explain ABC's work to varied audiences. But when I can, I try to tack on a day to go birding. Those days outside are almost as important as the meetings. I get a chance to see on-the-ground conservation and its attendant problems (such as tree-chewing llamas).

But the real trick of traveling is to enjoy it all—meetings and excursions alike. Ralph Waldo Emerson said it best: "To finish the moment, to find the journey's end in every step of the road, to live the greatest number of good hours, is wisdom."

In this issue of *Bird Conservation*, we are featuring stories of journeys to places as varied as the caatinga of Brazil, the mountain forests of Hispaniola, and remote Laysan Island, a Pacific atoll. In these stories, the travel is fun, but the work and the need for conservation are very real. So journey with us to these and other places. Allow your mind to imagine being there. Envision the birds and habitats benefiting from conservation projects developed by ABC and its partners. And, as an ABC supporter, enjoy reading about what your support makes possible!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George".

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.

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Lear's Macaws landing on a licuri palm. Photo by Ciro Albano

Top: Snowy Plovers in flight. Photo by Marlin Harms

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New Refuge Promises Brighter Future for Rare Honduran Hummingbird

The tiny, iridescent Honduran Emerald may be most remarkable for its rarity: Unrecorded for almost 40 years, from 1950 to 1988, it is now listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

But the future now looks a little brighter for the rare hummingbird that lives only in Honduras. Thanks to Honduran organization La Asociación de Investigación para el Desarrollo Ecológico y Socio Económico (ASIDE), ABC, and other groups, the bird will benefit from the protection of 147 acres in Honduras' Agalta Valley.

Officially designated as El Ciruelo Wildlife Refuge by the Honduran

Forestry Department, the property will preserve dry tropical forests the Honduran Emerald needs to survive. Cattle ranching is widespread in the Agalta Valley, and as a result the land is rapidly changing from dry forest to grasslands.

Increasing summer temperatures, declining rainfall, and soil exhaustion reduce the quantity and quality of milk from cows. Many ranchers compensate for this by clearing forest for additional pasture. To protect the remaining forests, ABC and ASIDE are working to develop a Payment for Ecosystem Services program to provide private landowners with an incentive to maintain and even improve tropical dry forests on their lands.



Honduran Emerald. Photo by Larry Thompson

Conservation of these forests would benefit not just the Honduran Emerald but also declining migratory birds that winter in the area, such as the Wood Thrush and Golden-winged Warbler, along with rare plants, reptiles, and other wildlife.

New York Governor Nixes Feral Cat Support

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has vetoed legislation that proposed the use of public funds to support statewide Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR) programs for feral cats. Under the proposed legislation, up to 20 percent of the state's Animal Population Control Program Fund could have been allocated to TNR. A diverse coalition of groups rallied to oppose the bill, including ABC, Audubon New York, birders, and animal welfare groups.

The governor's stance is consistent with ABC's position on this issue: TNR programs have been shown to be unsuccessful at reducing feral cat populations. The programs maintain outdoor colonies where cats are free to prey on birds and other

native wildlife, and are a potential source of diseases and parasites, such as rabies and toxoplasmosis.



A feral cat colony at Jones Beach, N.Y., that is maintained by human caretakers. Photo by Kathy Baca

"By vetoing this proposed legislation, Governor Cuomo has acted with vision and courage to protect the wildlife of New York," said Grant Sizemore, Director of Invasive Species Programs for ABC, noting that studies have shown that free-roaming cats kill billions of birds in the United States each year.

"This bill was an effort to legitimize the systematic abandonment of cats, and to inappropriately require that public funds prop up a failed TNR strategy," Sizemore added. "We hope that other lawmakers draw inspiration from this decision and recognize TNR is a 'lose, lose, lose' scenario for cats, wildlife, and people."

High in the Andes, a New Reserve for Rare Birds

Rare birds of the high Andes will now benefit from nearly 2,500 additional acres of protected land thanks to a new conservation area created by an indigenous community in Peru.

The Siete Cataratas-Qanchis Paccha Private Conservation Area, named for a dramatic system of waterfalls within its borders, was officially recognized by the government of Peru in August. It is the eighth such protected area that indigenous communities in the Cusco region have formed since 2009 in collaboration with ABC and our Peruvian partner ECOAN.

With this new addition, local communities now protect and manage more than 18,000 acres in the Vilcanota Reserve Network, which protects critical fragments of remaining *Polylepis* forest in this area of Peru. The few bird species that eke out a living here are among the rarest on Earth, and as the forests dwindle, so do their hopes for survival.

More than 14,000 feet above sea level, the reserve will protect several species of endangered birds. The Andean Ibis, Yellow-billed Teal, and Crested Duck use the new area's wetlands, said ECOAN's Gregorio Ferro Meza, while endangered birds such as the White-browed Tit-Spinytail and Ash-breasted Tit-tyrant use the *Polylepis* forest.

In addition to protecting and conserving these imperiled birds, the new reserve also safeguards important watersheds for the Quechua-speaking people of the Quishuarani community. It lies adjacent to the Hatun Queuña-Quishuarani Private Conservation Area, a 580-acre reserve the community formed with ABC and ECOAN in 2009.

The waterfalls for which the Siete Cataratas-Qanchis Paccha Private Conservation Area is named.
Photo by Dan Lebbin, ABC



Dining on Insecticides in Congress

A recent study by ABC and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health has found bird- and bee-killing pesticides in 90 percent of the fruits and vegetables sampled from two cafeterias in the U.S. Congress.

These pesticides, called neonicotinoids, are the nation's most widely used insecticides and persist in soils for months to years. They were banned by the European Union in 2013 and restricted by Ontario, Canada in 2015 because of their connection to the large-scale disappearance of pollinators.

Sixty out of 66 food samples tested contained neonicotinoid residue. Cherry tomatoes, yellow squash, and honeydew melons stood out as the foods with the highest levels of neonicotinoids. Samples of green bell peppers and fresh squeezed orange juice contained as many as five distinct types of the insecticide.



Photo by www.BillionPhotos.com, Shutterstock

While the concentrations were below what the EPA considers dangerous to humans, there is nonetheless reason for concern. Neonicotinoids are killing birds, butterflies, bees, and beetles, which sustain American agriculture by consuming pests and pollinating crops.

Millions of Americans are already trying to limit their exposure to pesticides. Hopefully our Congress will join them—and call on EPA to restrict the use of these harmful pesticides.

Government Says 'Epic Collaboration' Sufficient to Save Sage Grouse

In a closely watched decision with far-reaching impact across the American West, the Department of the Interior announced in September that the Greater Sage-Grouse does not currently warrant protection under the Endangered Species Act.

Citing an “epic collaboration” by dozens of partners across 11 western states, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell expressed optimism for the grouse and its signature ecosystem—largely because of extraordinary conservation work in recent years to restore the grouse’s habitat.

The breadth and scope of the collaborative effort may be unprecedented in the history of bird conservation, said ABC President George Fenwick.

“This gives me hope that momentum can continue, more sagebrush habitat can be saved, that new science will be continuously employed for better outcomes, and that this

work can become a model of cooperative conservation,” Fenwick said. “Real success will require constant monitoring and evaluation—and willingness to make needed changes where we are falling short.”

The grouse’s future now depends on 98 new conservation plans aimed at conserving Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and supporting sustainable economic development on portions of public lands across several western states.

Formally adopted by the Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service, the plans limit future energy development in the most important grouse habitats, provide requirements for sustainable land use, and prioritize new efforts to prevent losses of sagebrush to wildfire. The plans affect more than 67 million acres of public lands, including 12 million acres where strict limits on oil and gas drilling will be enforced.

ABC has advocated for this type of regional approach for several years, said Senior Policy Advisor Steve Holmer. As the strategy took shape, ABC staff worked to make sure the federal plans followed the best available science to be effective in reversing the grouse’s decline.

In the past year, ABC supporters have also sent thousands of letters to Congress in support of the management plans, and to oppose an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would prevent the implementation of the plans.

Now that the plans are formally in place, they need time to take effect, Holmer said. “We’re optimistic. However, we’ll want to see regular reviews of the species’ population trend to learn if the current long-term decline is reversed. If not, the listing issue may have to be revisited in the future.”

Greater Sage-Grouse. Photo by Pat Gaines



Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, Hawaiian Ecosystems May Receive Federal Protection

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed that a suite of 49 Hawaiian species be listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act. Among the species put forward for protection is the Hawaiian population of the Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, a small



Band-rumped Storm-Petrel feeding.
Photo by Mike Danzenbaker

seabird known as 'Ake'ake to native Hawaiians that is believed to have dwindled to only 240 known pairs.

In this ecosystem-based approach, the Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to list the petrel along with dozens of other species that share the bird's important and heavily impacted habitats of Hawai'i's coastal, dry cliff, and wet cliff ecosystems. If the listing is approved, federal legal protection would extend to all 49 species, including the petrel.

Federal officials are urging such protection because of destruction and modification of habitat throughout each of the species' ranges. Non-native grazing mammals have exacerbated erosion

and increased the potential for landslides, rock falls, or flooding, which in turn damages or destroys native plants and disturbs the Band-rumped Storm-Petrel's habitat.

Listing dozens of species that share coastal habitat and have common threats would allow for managing or eliminating these threats at an ecosystem level—a more cost-effective approach that should lead to better protection of resources for all native species. ABC's Seabirds Program, meanwhile, continues to advocate for conservation actions—including protection of the birds' habitat and control of predators—for the benefit of Band-rumped Storm-Petrel and other Hawaiian seabirds.

Interactive Website Offers New Tool to Reduce Seabird Bycatch

Hundreds of thousands of birds are accidentally injured or killed every year in fisheries around the world. A dynamic new website created by ABC and The Pennsylvania State University's Center for Environmental Informatics puts a wealth of information helpful in reducing this bycatch right at the fingertips of those who need it most: fishermen, conservationists, and those promoting fishery sustainability.

The site (www.fisheryandseabird.info) is designed to help users assess the risk for the accidental capture of seabirds in fisheries and take action to reduce bycatch. Seabirds are among the most threatened groups of birds, with approximately

29 percent of seabird species listed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List categories Critically Endangered, Endangered, and Vulnerable.

The website features a database with profiles of all 378 seabird species. Users can create fishery area maps and determine which birds occur there; review protected status, population size, and range maps; produce reports with information such as diving depth and diet that may indicate the risk posed by fishing gear; and find resources on how to reduce bycatch.



Black-footed Albatross are often victims of bycatch.
Photo by Glen Tepke

"The volume of information here used to take months to compile, but now it is all available in a matter of seconds," said David Wiedenfeld, ABC's Senior Conservation Scientist and a lead architect of the site. "We hope this information can be used to reduce the number of seabirds being killed by commercial fishing."

High Hopes for New Colony of Endangered Hawaiian Petrels

A project more than 30 years in the making took place in early November on the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i when 10 endangered Hawaiian Petrel chicks were flown by helicopter from their mountain colonies to create a new, protected colony within Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge.

Endangered Hawaiian Petrels, or 'Ua'u, live only in the Hawaiian Islands. They have declined dramatically due to a number of threats, including predation by introduced cats, rats, and pigs.

The translocation played out in Kaua'i's rugged mountain interior and along the coast. Helicopters dropped two teams of wildlife biologists onto mountain peaks in the early morning. The biologists hiked down to 10 nest burrows they had monitored throughout the breeding season, and carefully removed the chicks from their burrows. They placed the young birds into pet

carriers, and climbed back to the mountain peaks where the helicopters picked them up. After a flight to the coast, the chicks were driven to their new home in the Nihoku area of the refuge, where a predator-proof fence has been installed.

Hawaiian Petrel chicks imprint on their birth colony the first time they emerge from their burrows and see the night sky. As adults, they return to breed at the same colony. Since chicks were removed before this critical imprinting stage, they will emerge and imprint on Nihoku and return to that site as adults. The new colony will be the only fully protected colony of federally listed seabirds anywhere in the Hawaiian Islands and represents a huge achievement in recovering this species.

The effort was led on the ground by Pacific Rim Conservation; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge; Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project, a Hawai'i Department



André Raine from the Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project with a Hawaiian Petrel chick. Photo by Michael McFarlin/Kaua'i Endangered Seabird Recovery Project

of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) project administered by Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit, University of Hawai'i; and ABC. Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative and DOFAW supported predator control within Hono O Na Pali Natural Area Reserve. The National Tropical Botanical Garden provided important assistance with vegetation restoration at the translocation site. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provided critical funding support.

New ABC Campaign Recommends Bird-Smart Glass Products

Collisions with buildings kill hundreds of millions of birds each year in the United States, but simple solutions are available. These can include patterned glass, window films and tapes, and external screens, netting, and louvers.



"With bird-friendly design requirements in over a dozen U.S. cities, it is more important than ever to get the word out about effective materials to save birds' lives," says Christine Sheppard, ABC's Bird Collision Campaign Manager.

Our new Bird-Smart Glass program makes it easy for homeowners and architects to discover effective solutions to stop birds from dying at windows. These choices fit every style, budget, and climate. Although no material can be guaranteed to eliminate all collisions, these products are among the best available.

Products featured in our Bird-Smart Glass program must have documented evidence that prove their effectiveness, either through controlled tests or field studies.

The materials listed on our website as bird-smart have all been documented to reduce collisions, and the list continues to grow as more manufacturers of glass, window films, and external screening systems create new products or document the effectiveness of existing products.

Visit abcbirds.org to learn more.

Life on Laysan

Epic Adventures to Save the Millerbird



In the summer of 2014, Barbara Heindl spent 90 days on a 1,022-acre speck of land in the Pacific Ocean called Laysan Island. Heindl was there to monitor endangered Millerbirds, which ABC and its partners had translocated to the island in 2011 and 2012 from Nihoa Island to establish a second population. But for Heindl and her research partners Megan Dalton and Robby Kohley, the summer involved far more than searching for the tiny birds.

By Barbara Heindl

Halfway into our 90-day tour on Laysan, we had seen nearly all of the 103 Millerbirds that were banded by the end of the previous monitoring season in September 2013. And despite all the time we had already spent in “NIMI Land”—our affectionate name for the Nihoa Millerbird breeding ground in the northern part of the island—we were still seeing new, unbanded birds.

Lifestyle-wise, we were also in the groove. Although the islands in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument have strict bioquarantine protocols—including no fresh vegetables—to prevent the introductions of new species, I had stopped thinking about all the fresh foods I was missing during mealtime. I was constantly delighted by new creations that my campmates seemed to produce from the wood-

work. Where did this pumpkin custard come from? Beet salad? Delightful! Mango lassies? How refreshing! Living was good on Laysan.

It was in the midst of this rhythm that we got the news: Two tropical storms the rest of the team in the main Hawaiian Islands had been keeping an eye on had turned into three and were headed our way.

Life on Laysan



The U.S.S. Comstock. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Jason Swink

We learned the *U.S.S. Comstock*, a naval vessel in the area, would evacuate us within 24 hours. From there, where they would take us was still anyone's guess, but it would most likely be the ship's current destination of Hong Kong.

We immediately started backing up our data and preparing camp not only for our imminent departure, but for the potential beatdown from the forecasted storms. Early the next morning we sadly trudged down to the beach with our buckets of supplies and waited to hear from the ship. Eventually we spotted it on the horizon, and got word that the ship was four miles away and had deployed two small boats to retrieve

us. Operation Jackpot—the Navy's term for the mission, not ours—was underway.

'Don't Look Down'

After some searching, we noticed two vessels speeding toward the island. The smaller of the two boats navigated to the beach, skillfully giving wide birth to a young monk seal swimming in the bay. "Hey! You guys want a lift?" came the greeting. "We just happen to be in the area if you do."

We appreciated their humor, but it was a hard question. We were happy to be safe, yes, but our work on Laysan was definitely not done, and to be leaving prematurely felt a

little unsettling. Regardless, we met them with a smile, and started passing over our buckets.

As we sped past the reef surrounding Laysan toward the large ship, I looked back to see our tiny island disappearing over the horizon. That view was one I hadn't remembered getting when we were dropped off, and it was a hard view to take in not knowing whether we would return—and if we did, what shape the island would be in.

Finally we were alongside the giant windowless wall of the *U.S.S. Comstock*. A rope ladder hung down from a platform somewhere about halfway up the eight-story ship.

Where was the safety briefing on this? I wondered. I tried to time jumping onto the rope ladder with the peak swell of the waves to avoid being pinned between our small boat and the huge vessel we were boarding. As I clambered to the top, I did my best to ignore someone shouting from below, "Don't look down!"

Once on board, we learned our final destination: Midway Atoll. Given the possibilities, hearing that we were headed to Midway was a relief. From there we would be able to enter and proof our Millerbird



Waiting on the beach for the *U.S.S. Comstock*, buckets in tow. From left to right: Whitney Taylor, NOAA Hawaiian monk seal research team; Hope Ronco, NOAA Hawaiian monk seal research team; Robby Kohley, ABC Millerbird monitoring team; and Megan Dalton, ABC Millerbird monitoring team. Photo by Barbara Heindl, 2014



Unpredictable weather like this is one of the many reasons Millerbirds were translocated from Nihoa to Laysan. Fewer than 1,000 Millerbirds remain on Nihoa, so having multiple populations helps to ensure that one storm doesn't take out all the remaining Millerbirds on the planet.

data, assist the Midway biologists surveying local Laysan Ducks, and enjoy their coveted soft serve ice cream machine while we waited for the next flight to Honolulu.

The entire evacuation really demonstrated how remote and exposed we had been on Laysan. Even with a naval vessel able to detour and help us—and that was mostly by chance—it took 30 hours from the moment we heard the Navy was on the way until we set foot on Midway. No other scenario would have had us off the island sooner.

Back to Laysan

After 10 days on Midway, a week in Honolulu, and several more days on a NOAA research vessel heading back through the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, we finally returned to Laysan. There we discovered the best possible news: None of the storms had hit our little island. Laysan, thankfully, had lucked out.

Unpredictable weather like this is one of the many reasons Millerbirds were translocated from Nihoa to Laysan. Fewer than 1,000 Millerbirds remain on Nihoa, so having multiple populations helps to ensure that one storm doesn't take out all the remaining Millerbirds on the planet.

Within 48 hours of our return, Laysan welcomed us back the only way she knew how: with a big, sweaty

hug. She also gave us numerous juvenile Laysan Finches, Wedge-tailed and Christmas Shearwaters, Brown and Black Noddies, and Millerbirds galore. The only noticeable change was an unusually high debris line, indicating large swells from the hurricanes. Otherwise, the island was more or less just how we left it.

Inland, the albatrosses were all gone, fledged and now foraging in the Aleutians. They wisely missed out on the heat and large incoming swells, which would have been difficult for any new flyers to master. We missed the albatrosses. But the island was by no means quiet.

Young Laysan Finches that had fledged while we were gone had

taken over our camp, tackling moths on the screen doors to our tents. Often multiple finches would seize upon a single moth, tear it to pieces and then look for more. You might think it would resemble the iconic scene from "Lady and the Tramp": two dogs slurping up a single piece of spaghetti, meeting in the center for a kiss. Rest assured, it was nothing as graceful or charming as that.

The fearless juvenile finches were so numerous that every entry into a weatherport—a pipe-framed shelter with vinyl fabric walls—required a finch check to prevent the eager birds from getting trapped indoors. Any finches perched on bottom of the door? No. Top of the door?



Brown Noddies on the beach. Photo by feathercollector, Shutterstock

Life on Laysan

No. On the handle to the door?
No. Perched on anything next to the door? No. Did any land on you while you were doing the check?
No. Now check all around the door one more time just to be sure.

Underground, the Wedge-tailed Shearwater burrows that held eggs before we left now contained small, fluffy chicks. The Red-footed Booby chicks that were white fluff before we left had become a sleek gray—almost handsome. The Brown Noddies that were hatching as we left were now vocal, begging to their parents at all hours of the day and night, and tap dancing on rooftops while the human occupants inside tried to sleep.

Millerbirds Come Out to Play

Further inland in the core Millerbird habitat, we were delighted to see the Millerbirds out in full action. By early October, we finally had a population estimate: about 160 Millerbirds on Laysan, more than three times the number originally translocated from Nihoa!

By early October, we finally had a population estimate: about 160 Millerbirds on Laysan, more than three times the number originally translocated from Nihoa!

Much of our work on Millerbirds involved re-sighting color-banded birds. The birds were marked with a unique set of color bands on their legs so we could follow individuals and get a better idea of their breeding history and movements. Re-sighting birds is not an easy task with any species, but because of Millerbirds' secretive nature and the dense, bushy naupaka shrubs they frequent, it was particularly difficult on Laysan.

Most mornings involved waking up before dawn and arriving in NIMI Land just after sunrise. In contrast to our earlier stay on Laysan, the birds were particularly vocal now. But there were still some stealthy

The dense, bushy naupaka shrubs on Laysan favored by the Millerbirds make them very difficult to locate. Photo by George Wallace, ABC





A color-banded Millerbird trying to avoid detection on Laysan. Photo by Megan Dalton

individuals who made us work to earn a re-sight. More often than not, I carefully navigated to a shrub where I had heard a single chip note, only to arrive to silence: no rustling in the undergrowth, no fluttering, nothing.

Moving ever so slightly to gain another view into the undergrowth, I looked to the left, then to the right. Finally I saw it in a small opening no bigger than my thumb: a small, wide-eyed Millerbird.

We had no way of knowing which individual bird it was—or anything about its history or status—until we got a clear look at its legs. At that point, I gingerly lay down on my stomach to try to get an eye-level view into the undergrowth where Millerbirds usually hung out.



Megan Dalton and Millerbird on Laysan Island. Photo by Robby Kohley, 2014

Life on Laysan



An adult Millerbird tending to its nest and chicks on Laysan. Photo by Megan Dalton

Welcome to the Underbelly

The underbrush was a completely different world. A Red-tailed Tropicbird chortled lightly, letting me know that if I came any closer, it would let out a shriek so intense I might have temporary heart palpitations.

The vegetation was thick. Choosing where to place my face for the optimal view was a difficult decision. Changing positions was costly, noisy, and difficult to pull off while wedged between shrubby branches.

A couple of seconds felt like several minutes. My flesh started to crawl as flies settled onto every uncovered piece of skin. Twenty seconds passed. And then I heard it, a rustle just to the right, coming closer. Light hopping sounds. Was it a Millerbird? A skink? A crab?

Trying not to flush it the wrong direction, I held my breath, blinking one eye at a time. Something in the periphery darted behind a broad

naupaka leaf. Definitely a bird. Then a leg slipped out from the edge of the leaf—the black, stocky leg of a Laysan Finch. Not what I was looking for.

Hesitating for just a second, I settled back in. And then a chip note, and before I could even process where it came from, a bird fluttered into view not more than a foot away from my nose: an unbanded Millerbird. Only a moment later I heard, just farther back from the Millerbird in view, a male singing lightly.

He came into view, briefly displaying his color bands. The unbanded bird began fluttering its wings and “churring,” suggesting the unbanded bird was a female, and these two birds were a pair. I

took note of this, watched them for a second longer, and then they were gone—out of sight like it never happened.

2015 Update: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service no longer maintains a field camp on Laysan due to budget limitations, and two evacuations this fall—from a tsunami warning and a tropical storm—thwarted ABC’s brief attempt to survey the Millerbirds. However, the abbreviated field effort found that the Millerbirds seemed healthy and were increasing their range on the island.

Learn more about the Millerbird: abcbirds.org/bird/millerbird



Barbara Heindl is an avian ecologist. In addition to her research on Laysan in 2014, she has worked in the Alaskan tundra, Jamaican mangrove forests, and spent five years in the Hawaiian cloud forest. She holds bachelor's degrees in wildlife ecology and conservation biology from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and is currently working on Ruffed Grouse in central Wisconsin.



LOCO for CUCKOOS

*A Conservationist's Search
for the Bay-breasted Cuckoo*

By Andrew Rothman

Nearly everyone involved in bird conservation has an unseen bird that haunts them—a “ghost bird,” so to speak. My ghost bird, for years, was the Bay-breasted Cuckoo, also known as the “Cua” for its cooing call.

Like most other cuckoos, this bird is exceptionally furtive, but also beautiful, with big eyes and a long, barred tail. Unlike many other cuckoos, it is Endangered, and is only found on Hispaniola, the Caribbean island shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

There are no Bay-breasted Cuckoos left in Haiti, where the mid-elevation forests these birds inhabit have been ravaged by excessive logging, farming, and other problems linked to poverty and human population growth. As a result, all of the world's remaining Cuas now live in the Dominican Republic, where ABC and partner groups are working to preserve the last remaining fragments of the forests that sustain it.

Symbol of Disappearing Landscapes

There are many rare birds in the forests of the Dominican Republic that ABC would like to conserve, but the Cua is one that's come to symbolize our effort to preserve these wild landscapes. Despite this, and despite five trips to the country to develop conservation projects that benefit this species, the total number of Cuas I had seen stood at precisely zero.

During this particular visit in 2013, I was an International Conservation Officer at ABC. I had come to meet with representatives of the government's Ministry of the Environment and with our partners at the Dominican organization SOH Conservation.

We had a lot to discuss: getting more equipment to park guards for improved enforcement, and finding ways to draw more tourists to protected forests near the country's western border so

(Top) Bay-breasted Cuckoo calling.
Photo by Jorge Brocca

Puerto Escondido, within the Sierra de Bahoruco Mountains, is near the entrance to Loma Charco Azul Biological Reserve, and one of the places where Bay-breasted Cuckoos may still be found.
Photo by Andrew Rothman, ABC



local communities could reap the economic benefits. And we talked about ongoing efforts to protect Cua habitat by reducing illegal charcoal production, a serious threat to the Dominican Republic's forests that involves cutting trees into small pieces and baking them in earthen pyres.

There were signs of progress in and near these precious forests. In a remote farm town on the border of two national protected areas, the park administrator reported that dozens of charcoal pyres had been found and destroyed. I also helped to inaugurate a welcome center that ABC had supported to provide additional tourism and education resources for the local community.

The Quest Begins—Again

Soon after the inauguration, I went to the nearby forests of the Sierra de Bahoruco National Park and the Loma Charco Azul Biological Reserve. The time had come to resume my search for the Cua.

The previous year, I had trailed the echoing coo of a Cua through the mature trees found on the Bosque Ensueño nature trail ABC and SOH had created within the reserve. Scanning with my binoculars through clumps of Spanish moss that make these forests like something from a fairy tale, I had hoped for just a glimpse of the cuckoo. But that bird disappeared before I managed to see it, and so I was back in Bahoruco trying once again.

And failing again, despite the best efforts of two expert guides from SOH. The long list of endemic and migratory birds that we did see in these forests was impressive, I should add: It included the colorful Hispaniolan Trogon, the plump robin-like Le Selle's Thrush, and an

If we found the bird here— outside the park's boundaries and along a watershed that encompasses both the park and a nearby community—it would help us develop future projects that would help birds and people.



Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Photo by Jorge Brocca

elusive Western Chat-Tanager. But we neither saw nor heard a Cua.

After a few days of work in the Bahoruco mountains, I drove north with Jorge Brocca, Executive Director of SOH. Our destination was the tucked-away town of Río Limpio and the forests that surround it—forests widely thought to support one of the most important remaining populations of the Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Getting there meant driving for 12 hours on the nasty road that forms the border between Haiti (out the driver's-side window) and the DR (out the passenger side). Before we were done we had passed through areas so thoroughly logged

that it looked like the mountains had been shaved.

Upon reaching Río Limpio, we checked into the Centro Ecoturístico de Nalga de Maco, one of two establishments used by tourists visiting the area. Early the next morning, we set out to survey for the Cua in some woodlands near the oddly named Nalga de Maco ("Frog Butt") National Park.

As usual, I brought along my copy of *Birds of the Dominican Republic and Haiti* and a checklist and GPS to identify and record the location of important birds we observed. And as usual, there was no record of the Bay-breasted Cuckoo. While I certainly had a personal interest in seeing the bird, the conservationist in me began to worry about its mere existence.

Success—Times Six

We had two days left to find a Bay-breasted Cuckoo and determine if we should consider investing in conservation efforts here. During surveys the second morning, we thought we heard the sound of a Cua retreating into the forest. That was a good sign, but, predictably, I did not see the bird itself.

The next day was my last before returning to the States. We got up especially early and picked a couple of final areas to survey along a key waterway that links Nalga de Maco to Río Limpio and feeds the community's aqueduct.

As part of our survey protocol, we used "playback"—recordings of the birds' calls—to stimulate responses from the species whose presence we needed to confirm. If we found the bird here, outside the park's boundaries and along a watershed that encompasses both the park and a nearby community, that would



Bay-breasted Cuckoo. Photo by Cesar Abrill

be valuable information. It would help us develop future projects that would help birds and people.

Despite our best early-morning efforts, we saw little. By early afternoon, we had pretty much given up on the idea that this area was one of the Cua's last haunts. I stopped playing the recording of the Cua call and started playing a recording of an Antillean Euphonia. (Dazzling, but not a Cua.)

Then, at the top of the trees just in front of me, I saw a bird move. Too big to be a euphonia. Just the right size for a Cua. Raising my binoculars, I saw part of a long-tailed, big-eyed something. As calmly as possible, I called to Jorge.

"Come here. What is that?"

"Sí, es ella," Jorge said. "Yup, that's her." As we watched, the Cua crept out onto a branch so we could see her in all of her glory. Then she started issuing a series of loud, rattling "cuuaahh" calls. I had seen my ghost bird!

But this was no ordinary cuckoo. She drove other cuckoos crazy: In response to her calls, a second cuckoo landed in a nearby tree and replied with a coo. Seconds later, from a different spot in the same tree, two more cuckoos sounded off. *Cuuuaa! Cuuuaa!*

This was seriously awesome; I was thrilled. We saw a fifth cuckoo on our walk back to the truck. Then, improbably, a sixth, perched in a tree near the front door of my cabin. Hard to believe—but true.

Unfinished Work

After years of trying to see this bird I was working to conserve, finally I had succeeded. But that was the easy part. The hard part will be saving it. For that, we need all the help we can get.



Andrew Rothman was an international conservation officer for ABC from 2010 to 2013 and now serves as director of ABC's Migratory Birds Program. He has now been to the Dominican Republic a total of seven times—but hasn't seen another Bay-breasted Cuckoo.

For a number of years, ABC has supported the Dominican Republic's Ministry of the Environment in the government's goal of providing better support to a number of the country's national protected areas. It's not an easy task: We need to mark boundaries that have never been outwardly identified, and make sure there is sufficient staff and equipment to conduct patrols. And we need to educate and engage communities in the protection of their own natural resources, which provide fresh water and so many other benefits.

Seeing the Cua was unforgettable. But for me, it was also a reminder of how much work we still have left to do to protect this bird and the forests it needs to survive.

Video: How ABC protects rare birds like the Cua: abcbirds.org/video-protect-the-rarest/



Why we go the extra mile

We are humbled by the beauty, boldness, and endurance of hummingbirds. These fantastic creatures, weighing only slightly more than a penny, go the extra mile. Many travel 600+ miles across the Gulf of Mexico to share their lives with us.

ABC goes the extra mile for these and all birds because they represent so much of what is great in life, including the bird stories we love to tell—like those in this magazine.

We do it also because birds need our help in an increasingly complex world. If we expect birds to continue to provide us with such pleasure and inspiration, we need to go the extra mile for them.

ABC has set very ambitious conservation goals this year, and we are close to meeting them through hard work, smart partnerships, and persistence. We have program funding holes to fill, however, to finish the year strong and not miss a beat going into 2016.

(TOP) Ruby-throated Hummingbird.
Photo by Bonnie Taylor Barry, Shutterstock
(RIGHT) Veery. Photo by Cephas, wikimedia

Double the value of your tax-deductible gift to ABC today!
Donate online at **support.abcbirds.org/donate**
or use the enclosed envelope.

Remember, this challenge expires on December 31, 2015.

Songbirds, raptors, gamebirds, shorebirds—they are all important to ABC. No matter what bird experience turned you into a conservationist—the mesmerizing sky dance of the American Woodcock; the downward-spiraling “liquid silver” song of the Veery; feisty hummingbirds at a feeder; or sitting in a cold blind watching the sun come up over water dotted with ducks—ABC and our partners work to preserve the species, the habitat, and the experience.

This fall, we're offering to match every dollar you contribute to help us go the extra mile for birds. Please act now!

Will you help us?



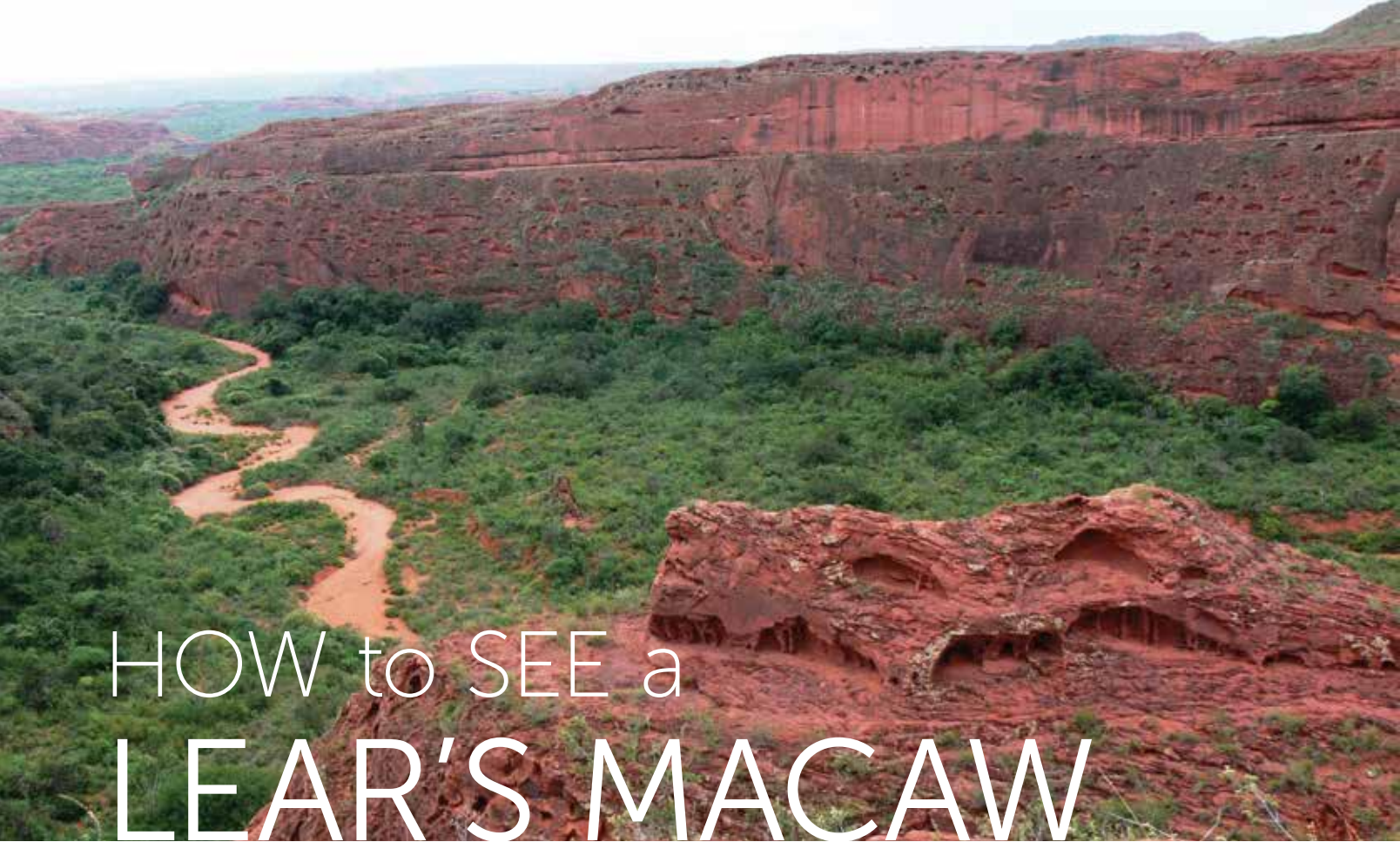


Photo by Eduardo Figueiredo

HOW to SEE a LEAR'S MACAW

By David Younkman

If you ever find yourself in north-eastern Brazil, go see one of the wonders of the bird world: Lear's Macaws emerging by the hundreds from the crannies of a windswept cliff face. Thirty years ago, this species seemed to be on the verge of extinction, with only 60 left in the wild. Now there are more than a thousand Lear's Macaws, thanks to conservation programs launched by groups such as ABC and our Brazilian partner, Fundação Biodiversitas.

The only wild home of the Lear's Macaw is found near the town of Canudos, in the Brazilian state of Bahia. There, in an endless-looking red-dirt landscape called "caatinga country," these birds nest and breed in wind-blown, dried-out, isolated cliffs. Crops and cattle struggle here, but you'll still find lots of spindly corn, yucca, and licuri palm, an important food of the Lear's Macaw.

Before you see the birds themselves, check into an isolated lodge run by Biodiversitas and built with the support of ABC's donors. Then you sleep, but not for long. Well before the sun comes up, you rouse yourself and stagger to the car that takes you to the cliffs where these birds nest. If the skies aren't cloudy, you will see a brilliant sea of stars, and the curving edges of the Milky Way.

After that you wait in the dark under a tree, until just before the sun comes up. That's when you hear the first bird call, and then the second, and then several more.

Macaws on the Move

Shadows moving on the cliff start to show their colors. Then, all at once, an enormous flock of Lear's Macaws explodes out of the cliff, rising as a group—no, several groups—circling above your head. One, then three,

then 10 or more land on a sunlit cactus: large, bright blue, with golden eye rings and cheeks. In the meantime, you see more flocks emerging from the pockmarked cliff face, circling and then landing in nearby trees. After a few minutes they will rise, some flying for more than 50 miles to find their food for the day.

In the car again, you drive for hours on rutted, bumpy roads so you can spy the feeding birds. Then, back at the lodge, you rest until you realize that you must see these birds again. With your guide, you take a long, hot walk through the red rocks and red sand, crossing what appears to be a dried-out river bed with lots of twisted sandbars.

When you reach the cliffs, you wait for the returning flocks. In the waning sunlight everything about these cliffs looks beautiful—the way they

tower overhead, the patterns of erosion, the deep shades of red. While waiting, you marvel at the way the Lear's Macaw digs nest holes in these cliffs, loosening the rocks with its saliva.

Just before the light fails you see flocks of birds you did not see that morning—first, small, green Cactus (or Caatinga) Parakeets, with squeaky high-pitched calls. They flash green across the cliffs before disappearing into foliage. But by then you're focused on the fast-approaching flocks of Blue-crowned Parakeets, bigger and deeper-voiced. Chattering and pecking, they fill up the cliff face on one side of the canyon, leaving the other side open. When something spooks them, 50 of these parakeets shoot up as one

The Lear's Macaw is more than an incredibly beautiful and intelligent bird species. It is also part of an amazing spectacle that was once nearly lost.

and then circle slowly downwards. Is that a Bat Falcon on the opposite cliff? How long has it been there?

Thirty minutes until nighttime now. At this point you're hoping that your guide knows the way back. Then, just as the fading light stops holding colors, you hear the

returning Lear's Macaws. Big, loud voices call out as hundreds of broad shadows fly toward the cliff face left open by the parakeets. As they land you see the gold parts but you cannot see the blue. Bigger, louder flocks are coming after this one—do they use the same roosts every time?—and as darkness falls they start to settle in.

Back from the Brink

The Lear's Macaw is more than an incredibly beautiful and intelligent bird species. It is also part of an amazing spectacle that once was nearly lost. Five hundred years ago, four species of blue macaws thrived in Brazil: the Glaucous Macaw, Spix's Macaw, Hyacinth Macaw, and Lear's Macaw. But destruction of habitat,

Lear's Macaws. Photo by João Quental



hunting, and the illegal pet trade have taken a devastating toll.

The last Glaucous Macaws were observed in the 1960s. The last wild Spix's Macaw disappeared in 2000, although the species persists in captivity. The Hyacinth Macaw and Lear's Macaw are the only two of Brazil's blue macaws that survive in the wild today. More than 4,000 wild Hyacinth Macaws exist.

The Lear's Macaw continues to face a loss of its foraging habitat in licuri palm stands as land is used for the grazing of livestock. Capture for the pet trade and persecution as a pest in corn fields are also threats. And there is still more work ahead to restore stands of slow-growing licuri palms so the birds have plenty of food.

The Lears Macaw Reserve (lodge in background) is the best place to find these birds.
Photo by *Ciro Albano*

Still, the Lear's Macaw has a bright future. Efforts to protect its breeding and roosting sites are working, and the macaw's population is now increasing: In 2012, scientists estimated more than 1,200 birds lived in the wild, up from only 60 birds in 1983. Its conservation status was downlisted in 2009 from Critically Endangered to Endangered due to this increase.

Canudos Biological Station is a perfect example of why this work is important. These red cliffs used to be a place where poachers would

come to collect the striking birds for the pet trade. Now, the reserve provides a safe space for the birds to breed and sleep—and a spectacular sight for visitors to behold.

To learn more about the work that has helped these birds back from the brink of extinction, check out abcbirds.org/programs. And if you are inspired to visit, check out: conservationbirding.org.

Video: The amazing recovery of the Lear's Macaw <http://abcbirds.org/video-lears-macaw/>



David Younkman is Vice President, Western Region at ABC. He formerly served as the head of ABC's international division, which is how he encountered Brazil's Lear's Macaws. David has more than 30 years of experience working for conservation and environmental organizations, including The Nature Conservancy and the National Wildlife Federation.



Poised to Fly

Just days from fledging, two plover chicks face a formidable challenge



As a conservation technician for ABC and Houston Audubon, **Kristen Vale** monitors key areas along the upper Texas coast of the Gulf of Mexico to gather information about imperiled beach-nesting bird species and to educate the public on how to share the beach with the birds. One of Vale's study sites in the summer of 2014 was Galveston Island's East Beach. On a late-August morning, she got some surprising news.

As told to Libby Sander

East Beach is at the tip of Galveston Island. On summer weekends, the beach can hold thousands of people. East of these crowds, at the beach adjacent to the Houston Ship Channel shoreline, there are low-lying dunes, some sparse vegetation, and a large, sandy area where plovers congregate.

At the end of August when the breeding season was winding down, there was still one family of Snowy

Plovers with two chicks. It was quite late in the nesting season for there to be chicks on the ground; most had fledged by this point. The chicks were around three weeks old—it would be only a few days or maybe a week until they would fledge. The family happened to claim its territory within the sandy East Beach parking lot because there was some sea rocket and pickleweed growing there. It was a perfect place to feed on insects and take cover from the hot sun and predators.

I was going to work one morning, and I ran into one of the staff members for the Galveston Parks Board of Trustees. He was familiar with me and knew the work I was trying to do to protect the beach-nesting birds using that site. He said, "I don't know if you're aware, but there's going to be a concert right here in this East Beach parking lot this weekend."

I was worried. It is rare for Snowy Plovers to nest on the upper Texas



A Snowy Plover chick scampers along the sand.
Photo by Kristian Bell, Shutterstock

coast. When we discovered Snowy Plovers nesting on Galveston Island, we were so ecstatic. It was a great sign that this bird is able to nest here on a popular, busy beach with so many people around.

But Snowy Plovers—along with Wilson’s Plovers and Least Terns—are imperiled birds. Every family of Wilson’s Plover, Snowy Plover, and Least Tern counts. It’s programmed into their heads to come to this one site and breed here. Many of the reasons for their decline are human-caused threats: increased recreation on the beach, dogs, feral cats. People aren’t aware that beach-nesting birds also use this beach.

The concert was happening just before the birds’ flight feathers were fully grown. They were not able to escape danger by flying away; they relied on running and hiding. So I needed to figure out how to buy them an extra week. They were so close to having their flight feathers.

As a partner of ABC and Houston Audubon, the Galveston Park Board of Trustees is very supportive of our work on the beach. The staff member informed the concert crew and other staff about this Snowy Plover family that had set up shop

The staff member informed the concert crew and other staff about this Snowy Plover family that had set up shop in the parking lot. They reduced the size of the fenced concert area, and moved the stage so it wouldn’t cover the vegetation the Snowy Plovers were using for protection.



The concert setup was next to an area with vegetation (foreground) the plover family had claimed as its territory. Photo by Kristen Vale

in the parking lot. They reduced the size of the fenced concert area, and moved the stage so it wouldn’t cover the vegetation the Snowy Plovers were using for protection. I was so excited they were willing to help us. I didn’t think anybody would purposely want to hurt these fluffy, vulnerable chicks.

The morning the crews were setting up the concert, the Galveston Park Board of Trustees staff member met me around 7 a.m. to help me urge the birds into a safer area. It was a wrangling effort. Making a wall, the two of us would walk toward the birds, encouraging them to move into the dunes where they’d

be safe. Then we'd sneak around to the left, walk backwards, and swing around and walk forward again. "Twinkling," as we call it in the bird world. We twinkled them into the safety area.

But the second we turned our backs, the chicks ran back into the parking lot. My heart just dropped. This family was so determined to be in this parking lot! That was their territory. That's where they wanted to stay.

So the rest of the day, I just sat down in the parking lot to watch the family while the crews set up the stage. At this point I just had to hope for the best. They were so close to fledging that if they had dodged all these vehicles so far this summer, hopefully they could dodge the people during the concert.

The birds have evolved to blend into their surroundings. But our eyes aren't trained to look down for chicks, watch for birds calling, or notice a broken-wing display—when

adult birds feign injury to lure threats away from a nest or chicks—telling us to get out of the area. People don't understand these signals or know to look for them. They see the signals too late, or not at all.

That evening, I knew there was nothing more I could do. I just had to say, "OK, I've done the best I can to protect these birds. Let's hope for the best." So I went home.

The morning after the concert, I didn't know what I would find. Am I going to find these plovers dancing around their parking lot? Or are they going to be gone?

I knew the concert crew was going to be cleaning up, so I tried to get there before too many of the vehicles were zooming around. I walked past the concert area, and

didn't see anything. I walked past their foraging territory and didn't see anything. I walked a little further toward their nesting habitat and didn't see anything.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw this little thing moving. I couldn't believe it. There were the adults and two chicks, just feeding away, still in the parking lot. They had survived.

A few days after the concert, I was able to see the chicks take flight. I hoped they would come back the following year and raise a family of their own. But not in a parking lot!

Video: Beach-nesting birds on the Texas coast: abcbirds.org/video-plovers-nest-safely-thanks-to-gulf-partnership/

Snowy Plover and chick. Photo by J. Michael Wharton, Shutterstock



Kristen Vale holds a bachelor's degree in wildlife and fisheries science from Texas A&M University and has worked at Canyonlands National Park and Everglades National Park. She is finishing up her master's degree in environmental science at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. Her thesis is on wintering Piping Plovers on the upper Texas Coast.



Beyond the City Lights

Ringed Storm-Petrel Project gives a second chance to grounded seabirds

Every year, residents of Lima, Peru, find stranded seabirds on their city streets. The young Ringed Storm-Petrels are fledglings who've just left their nesting colonies for the first time and are embarking on their maiden journey out to sea. Like others of their kind, the young storm-petrels are attracted to the bright, artificial lights of coastal cities. They become disoriented, collide with power lines or other structures, circle until they're exhausted, and finally drop to the ground.

That's where the Ringed Storm-Petrel Project comes in. Since 2013, the project, which receives financial support from several conservation organizations, including ABC,



has rescued and rehabilitated nearly 500 grounded seabirds. More than 90 percent of the birds are returned to the wild after a few days of care.

In helping the storm-petrels find their way, the project's leaders, **Yovana Murillo** and **Betto Delgado**, both veterinarians, are forging valuable con-

nections with residents of the sprawling metropolis—home to nearly 10 million people—and educating those who find and rescue birds on how to reduce light pollution. They are also collecting essential information about an elusive seabird scientists still know very little about. ABC's **Libby Sander** caught up with Murillo to learn more.

Libby Sander: How do you find the grounded seabirds?

Yovana Murillo: Local citizens find these seabirds all over the city. In the street, in their houses, on buildings, outside train stations. They pick up the birds, because they think they are pigeons. But when they look at the birds' features closely, they see webbed feet and tube-shaped nostrils. They often find and contact us through our Facebook page, Golondrina de la Tempestad de Collar.

The citizens deliver the birds to Ricardo Palma University, where our rehabilitation facilities are located in the Veterinary Medicine School. We give people information about their rescued birds, such as their "pelagic" or open-ocean lifestyle, and we tell them about the problem of light pollution. We also explain our rescue efforts. Finally, we take a picture of them and post it on our

Facebook page. People like that. They share the post in their own social media networks and feel they have made a valuable contribution of time and effort to the conservation of these birds.

LS: When is the rescue season? Why are these months so dangerous for the birds?

YM: Every April to July—the time of year when these birds leave their nesting colonies—citizens of Lima find the Ringed Storm-Petrels. May is the month when the greatest number of fledgling birds are grounded. Once stranded on the ground, the birds cannot get the lift they need to fly off to sea.

LS: You've noticed there are some areas of metropolitan Lima where citizens repeatedly find grounded petrels every year. Why are so many birds found there?

YM: We have identified six such "hot spots." We presume that light pollution is greater in these places than other parts of city, but it does not always seem to be the case. So we are working to understand what makes birds ground in the same area. With ABC's support, we are beginning to characterize the buildings, light fixtures, and other structures the birds might collide with in those areas, such as power lines.

LS: What do you do with the birds once they are brought to you?

YM: The seabirds come to us exhausted, dehydrated, and dirty. In a short rehabilitation period, usually less than 24 hours, veterinarians at our facility evaluate the seabirds' physical condition. We also collect biometric data and band every bird. We rehydrate and feed them, and make sure their feathers are waterproofed. Because birds can land in garbage, oil, or other substances

(TOP) A Ringed Storm-Petrel in hand.
Photo © PGTC



Photo © PGTC

on the ground, these substances can compromise their feathers' ability to keep the birds dry and warm when they go to sea. If they don't stay waterproofed, they will soon become hypothermic and die. We can wash their feathers to make sure they are ready to go to sea.

LS: Do the birds survive?

YM: Every season we have the opportunity to rehabilitate and release more than 90 percent of the storm-petrels Lima residents rescue. Although the project has a high rehabilitation rate, sometimes we receive birds with traumas and lesions, or broken flight feathers. These birds don't survive because it is difficult to maintain seabirds in captivity for a long time. The longer they are in care, the greater the risk of catching a fungal infection in their lungs.

LS: What do you hope to accomplish in coming years with this project?

YM: First, we need to develop a detailed map showing all of the reports we have collected during the last three years of stranded petrels in the cities along the coast of Peru. This way, we can identify hot spots in Lima and other focal areas where

repeated groundings occur. We can then take that information to the municipality and utility companies to help them initiate actions that would reduce light pollution. We would also like to increase the reach of our rescue network to include other coastal cities, where reports of grounded Wilson's, Markham's, and Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels have been recorded.

More broadly, we need more work with storm-petrel experts to create a plan for the species' conservation. Perhaps our work will ultimately help to inform expeditions to determine the Ringed Storm-Petrel's nesting areas and identify its flight corridors. Knowing this would help us take action to protect colonies from light pollution and other potential threats.

LS: Where do you release the storm-petrels, and how?

YM: After a short rehabilitation period, the storm petrels are ready for release into the wild. We release birds at night because that is the time when they are most active. We transport the birds to a spot at the southeastern edge of metropolitan Lima known as *el salto del fraile*, or "the jump of the priest." It is a

This poster, distributed throughout Lima, says: "I am lost...I am a seabird." The poster urges people who find downed seabirds to contact the Ringed Storm-Petrel Project for assistance.



Miguel Angel Arce rescued this Ringed Storm-Petrel from the streets of Lima in July, 2015.
Photo © PGTC

cliff above the Pacific Ocean and is located in the darkest place in the city. We gently toss the rehabilitated birds into the wind, one at a time, and they open their wings and take flight—continuing their path to the open water.

Releasing one of these birds is the culmination of the work of many people: the volunteers who take care of the birds, the veterinarians who do the rehabilitation, and most importantly the people who rescue the birds. All of them give these seabirds a second chance to return to the sea.

Video: Yovana Murillo examines a rescued storm-petrel: abcbirds.org/video-saving-seabirds/

OWL ODYSSEYS

The Ways and Wanderings of Mysterious Birds

Owls capture the imagination like no other bird. Usually well-hidden and more often heard than seen, beautiful yet ferocious, they offer a reminder of nature's mysteries. Even familiar owls are fascinating: Some, like the Snowy Owl, embark on epic journeys, while others, like the Eastern Screech-Owl, are seldom far from home.

>> **Barn Owl** (*Tyto alba*) is the most widely distributed nocturnal bird, with up to 46 different races described worldwide. The North American form is the largest, weighing more than twice as much as the smallest (Galápagos Islands).

Although young Barn Owls may disperse hundreds of miles from their nest sites, adults don't seem to migrate seasonally, choosing to stay put through winter even in the northern-most parts of their range.

This bird's ability to locate prey by sound alone is the best of any animal that has ever been tested.

Photo by duangnapa, Shutterstock





<< **Snowy Owl** (*Bubo scandiacus*) is famous for its journeys. From a site on Victoria Island in the Canadian Arctic, for instance, one young Snowy Owl flew to Hudson Bay, another to southeastern Ontario, and a third to the east coast of Russia. Adult birds also move seasonally, with some wintering in the northern U.S. each year. During extreme years, however, Snowy Owls travel south as far as Texas and Florida.

These far-flying predators are also clever: John James Audubon once saw a Snowy Owl lying at the edge of an ice hole, waiting for fish and catching them with its feet.

Photo by Jeffry Weymier, Shutterstock

>> **Great Horned Owl** (*Bubo virginianus*) can be found in almost any semi-open habitat between the Arctic and Tierra del Fuego. Most are permanent residents of an established home range, but seasonal irruptions—chiefly due to a shortage of prey—can be striking. Birds resident in Canada have moved from Saskatchewan and Alberta to states including Minnesota and Wisconsin—often corresponding with the seasonal movements of Northern Goshawks.

Photo by Lisa Hagan, Shutterstock

>> **Northern Saw-whet Owl** (*Aegolius acadicus*) breeds primarily in extensive forests across northern North America, with many individuals migrating south or to lower elevations for the winter. Others stay closer to home, remaining in one place year-round.

As with some other owl species, periodic irruptions occur, with owls taking flight in greater numbers than usual. Flying at night, these tiny owls use several known routes across the continent, sometimes crossing large expanses of water such as the Great Lakes.

Photo by mlorenz, Shutterstock





<< **Short-eared Owl** (*Asio flammeus*), a ground-nesting grassland bird, is one of the most widely distributed owls in the world. While southern birds may not migrate, northern owls often do; Short-eared Owls that breed in Canada move to central and eastern U.S. states in winter. They also are quick to move on from areas low in prey and move into areas with more rodents.

In a phenomena known as the “niche switch,” Short-eared Owls take to the air in late afternoon as Northern Harriers conclude hunting for the day.

Photo by Jim Chagares

>> **Long-eared Owl** (*Asio otus*) is a wide-ranging species that nests in forested areas but hunts in open country. On the breeding grounds, older nestlings are called “branchers” because they leave the nest to take up residence in surrounding trees.

Reliably migratory and usually traveling at night, some of these owls cover long distances: Individuals banded in the northern U.S. and southern Canada have been recovered in Mexico. Outside of the breeding season, Long-eared Owls can be found congregating in communal roosts of up to 100 birds.

Photo by Peter Krejzl, Shutterstock

<< **Eastern Screech-Owl** (*Megascops asio*) is common east of the Rockies in woods, suburbs, and parks—wherever trees with suitable nest cavities are found. Banding studies of these pint-sized birds have shown that they typically don’t travel far from home, and even juvenile owls departing the nest often move fewer than 20 miles. In suburban areas where food is abundant, screech-owls often travel less than 330 feet to hunt!

The birds go farther afield in winter, probably due to reduced availability of prey. Pairs are usually monogamous and remain together for life.

Photo by artcphotos, Shutterstock





This essay was informed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online Bird Guide (www.allaboutbirds.org) and Bird Cams (www.cams.allaboutbirds.org), and the USDA Forest Service website (www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/animals/bird/).

Legal Challenges Threaten a Landmark Law for Migratory Birds

By Darin Schroeder

Nearly a century ago, in one of the nation's early steps to protect wildlife, Congress passed the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The law was a response to the slaughter and commercial trade of birds that contributed to the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon and nearly finished off the country's Snowy Egrets, too.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act remains a flagship piece of environmental legislation today. Its language is clear: Without a permit, it is illegal to pursue, hunt, take, capture, or kill migratory birds “by any means or in any manner.”

Despite this straightforward mandate to protect birds during their journeys, the law is now under attack. In September, in *United States v. Citgo Petroleum Corp.*, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals—in a regrettably narrow interpretation of the Act—overturned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's successful prosecution of an oil company for the deaths of ducks in its uncovered wastewater tanks.

Toxic wastewater ponds are a foul mix of water, oil, and industrial waste. It's not hard to cover them with netting to make them safe for wildlife, and leaving them uncovered is a known invitation to bird deaths: Uncovered pits have killed hundreds of thousands of birds.

Nevertheless, the appeals court said the oil company wasn't to blame for the dead ducks. The Migratory Bird



If we allow court rulings to erode the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, what protections do birds have from toxic wastewater ponds and other predictable yet solvable threats?

Oiled Pied-billed Grebe. Photo by USFWS

Treaty Act, the court held, prohibits only “deliberate acts done directly and intentionally” to kill migratory birds, like hunting and poaching.

The 5th Circuit's decision allows a variety of corporate practices—building wind turbines along

migratory routes, for instance—that could harm huge numbers of birds. All a company has to do is say with a straight face, “We didn't mean to.”

This is a dangerous precedent. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act may have a long history. But with many bird populations in decline, the law matters just as much now as it did a century ago.

And so we are now at an important juncture: If we allow court rulings to erode the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, what protections do birds have from toxic wastewater ponds and other predictable yet solvable threats?

Migration, after all, is a timeless phenomenon of the natural world. Migratory birds take to the wing each fall and spring regardless of whether companies do the right thing. That's why American Bird Conservancy works every day to ensure that birds can safely travel long distances to and from their wintering and breeding grounds.

We are vigilant amid these challenges to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and we support the government's right to enforce this crucial law.

The birds—and their abiding journeys—depend on it.



Darin Schroeder is Vice President of Conservation Advocacy at ABC. He previously served as Wisconsin Offices Manager for U.S. Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) from 1993 until 2000 and then joined the staff of U.S. Congressman Ron Kind (D-WI) as Press Secretary, and later became Rep. Kind's Communications Director and Senior Policy Advisor.

A Legacy for Birds: Jeff Rusinow

"I've loved birds since I was a kid going to wildlife camp in the mountains of West Virginia. By the time I was 20, I had embraced the writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and Muir, and was particularly drawn to Aldo Leopold and his urgings for us to embrace a 'land ethic.'

"My love of birds, and my interest in protecting them, helps define me, and will hopefully be part of my legacy. As a business guy interested in choosing my charitable donations wisely, it didn't take long to realize that the best return on investment with respect to protecting birds is with American Bird Conservancy.

"Their reach and overall scope of work is truly impressive. In a complicated ecosystem, made all the more challenging with myriad increasing migratory threats, ABC connects the dots and makes a big difference."



Black-throated Blue Warbler. Photo by Michael G. McKinne, Shutterstock



You too can leave a legacy for birds

when you join ABC's Legacy Circle with an estate gift through your will, retirement plan, trust, or life insurance policy. If you would like more information, or if you have already included ABC in your estate plans, please contact Planned Giving Director Jack Morrison at 540-253-5780, or at jmorrison@abcbirds.org



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Great Gray Owl. Photo by Jim Chagares

