



Inside Bird Conservation – January 2017

Petition: Standing Together for Birds

Are birds and wildlife important to you? If so, please sign our Together for Birds petition now. Tell the incoming Administration and Congress that you won't stand by to see bedrock laws like the Endangered Species Act rolled back and public lands of critical importance to birds be developed. We will present the petition and signatures to the new Administration and Congress on January 23, just after the Inauguration. [Sign now! Please show your support for bird conservation today!](#) Please forward the petition to friends, family and colleagues.

Organizations Can Endorse the Together for Birds Petition

Over 100 bird and habitat conservation organizations have signed on. To add your organization's endorsement, please fill in the name in the box provided at the link below:

<https://secure2.convio.net/abcb/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=290>

ABC Blog: [Endangered Species Act Facing Its Own Extinction?](#)

For more than 40 years, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has been one of the nation's cornerstone environmental laws—a lifeline to prevent rare species from becoming extinct. However, the ESA now faces threats to its own existence, notably from some members of Congress. Steve Holmer, ABC's Vice President for Policy, talked with Jennifer Howard, ABC's Director of Public Relations, about the future of this vital legislation—and what people can do to protect it.

[Invasive Mammals Are Pushing Native Birds to the Brink](#)

Invasive mammalian predators are killing endangered species around the world at much higher rates than previously known and are “arguably the most damaging group of alien animal species for global biodiversity,” according to a [Doherty et al \(2016\)](#) published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS). The findings are the latest evidence that cats and other invasive species pose a major threat to birds and other wildlife worldwide. The researchers estimate that cats have contributed to the extinction of 63 species, including 40 bird species—approximately double the number of extinctions previously attributed to these non-native predators. [Read the ABC press release on the study here.](#)

The study evaluated the impacts of invasive mammalian predators on birds, mammals, and reptiles worldwide. Using a meta-analysis of data from the IUCN Red List, researchers compiled threats to species listed as vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered, extinct, or extinct in the wild. Invasive mammalian predators impacted 596 threatened and 142 extinct species and were causal factors in the extinction of 87 bird, 45 mammal, and 10 reptile species (58 percent of modern bird, mammal, or reptile extinctions). Cats, in particular, were linked to the extinction of 63 species and threatened the largest number of species (n=430). Cats were linked to 26 percent of modern bird, mammal, and reptile species extinctions. The authors, recognizing the potential for facilitation between multiple invasive species, recommended an ecosystem-wide approach to invasive mammal eradications and an urgent need for action to reduce global biodiversity loss.

Doherty T.S., A.S. Glen, D.G. Nimmo, E.G. Ritchie, and C.R. Dickman. 2016. Invasive predators and global biodiversity loss. PNAS 113: 11261-11265.

Updated Executive Order to Address Invasive Species

[Executive Order 13112](#), first enacted in 1999 and instructing the federal government on responsibilities regarding invasive species, was amended by the Obama administration on Dec. 5, 2016. This amendment reaffirms the administration's commitment to invasive species eradication and control. Among the updates to the EO are a call to incorporate new technologies; the addition of climate change as an important consideration; and the addition of the Department of Health and Human Services to the National Invasive Species Council as part of a more concerted effort to consider the human health impacts of invasive species, "especially as vectors, reservoirs, and causative agents of disease."

ABC strongly supports the need for more comprehensive invasive species management. According to Grant Sizemore, Director of Invasive Species Programs at ABC, "invasive species are one of the leading causes of biodiversity decline worldwide. In order to effectively conserve our native species and the ecosystems upon which they rely, we must address the ever-growing invasive species epidemic."

Invasive species are particularly damaging to island birds and the habitats they need. Many of these species, such as native Hawaiian forest birds, cannot adapt quickly enough in the face of a rapidly changing climate. Non-native avian malaria, spread by invasive mosquitos is killing endangered Hawaiian forest birds such as the 'i'iwi. Climate change is increasing the impact of these invasive species, reducing the amount of high elevation refuges with mosquito-free nesting areas. Invasive mammals also depredate seabirds – taking adults, chicks, and eggs. This marks a new commitment by the US government to protecting places like Hawai'i from pest species such as invasive mosquitos, rodents, and mongooses.

New Book Calls Attention to Outdoor Cat Debate

[Cat Wars: The Devastating Consequences of a Cuddly Killer](#), a new book written by Dr. Peter Marra, head of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, and journalist Chris Santella, highlights the history, ecology, and conflict surrounding outdoor cats and their management. This book has generated lots of positive attention—and generated controversy—while calling more much-needed attention to a challenging conservation crisis. [Read ABC's Q&A with Dr. Marra.](#)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology on Outdoor Cats

A new [Frequently Asked Questions document](#) from Cornell Lab of Ornithology addresses common questions and misconceptions about free-roaming cats and their impacts on wildlife. The lab's thoughtful responses include plenty of references and a slideshow of staff cats. Add this resource to your Cats Indoors portfolio!

Media Highlights

Outside Magazine: In "[Hawaii's Crazy War Over Zombie Cats](#)," Paul Kvinta investigated the state of conservation and policy surrounding feral cats, endangered Hawaiian wildlife, and politics.

Smithsonian Magazine: Rachel Gross questioned [the moral cost of cats](#) as she profiled Dr. Pete Marra, head of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, and his new book, *Cat Wars*.

Morbidity and Mortality Weekly: As reported in this publication from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [six cats recently tested positive for plague in Idaho](#). In comparison to dogs, "cats are highly susceptible to plague illness and can transmit disease to humans directly."

Buzzfeed: Popular news outlet BuzzFeed explored the consequences of [Toxoplasma gondii contamination from cat feces in Hawaii](#). Endangered Hawaiian monk seals and many other species are increasingly testing positive for exposure to this parasite.

The Roanoke Star: [This article by H. Bruce Rinkler](#) categorized feral cats as invasive species in need of effective management and advocated for keeping owned pets indoors.

Smithsonian Magazine: Abigail Tucker chronicled [the fight to save the Key Largo woodrat](#), an endangered species threatened by cat predation at Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park in Florida.

Los Angeles Times: This Op-Ed asked, "[When will people learn to treat cats like dogs?](#)"

Outreach to Communication Tower Operators

[In a letter](#), ABC has asked the owners of tall communications towers to switch their lights from steady burning to flashing. This energy saving change will reduce bird mortality from collisions with the towers by as much as 70 percent.

Detroit Free Press: [Birds get a boost from Michigan findings on cell phone tower hazards](#)

[Toolkit for Bird Conservationists:](#) Bird enthusiasts can play an active role in reducing communications tower collisions by urging tower owners and operators to replace steady-burning lights with flashing ones. This simple improvement will make communication towers more bird-friendly while reducing

operating costs. It is worth the effort: Every tower made safer now will benefit birds for years to come.

[New Eagle Management Rule Leaves Eagles at Risk](#)

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) has [released](#) the final version of its long-anticipated revised [eagle management plan](#). American Bird Conservancy's initial assessment finds some positive elements in the rule, including a promise that eagle mortality data will be collected by independent, third-party experts using standardized methods. But we also see significant weaknesses and omissions.

Under the rule, FWS would issue 30-year take permits to wind energy companies, which are protected from prosecution if their activities harm eagles. Internal reviews of the permits should provide an opportunity to cancel or amend the permit if the wind energy facility is killing more eagles than anticipated. However, under the new rule, these 5-year reviews will usually not include feedback from the public. That also excludes conservation groups and other stakeholders from the process. Instead of public input, the Service would use what it calls adaptive management. But given FWS's already stretched resources, ABC believes that enhanced public oversight is essential.

ABC Comments on Offshore Wind Development

[ABC commented](#) on the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan concerning the development of many offshore wind energy projects, which if poorly sited, have the potential to threaten species of marine birds and other federally protected wildlife. The letter includes recommendations useful to BOEM, state regulators and wind energy developers to help avoid conflicts with wildlife.

[Meet Elmer](#) and Unlock the Secrets of Migration

All right, Elmer doesn't look heroic. But this **Cerulean Warbler** completed a herculean six-week journey last spring from Colombia to Pennsylvania that is exhausting just to consider. And thanks to the tracking equipment he carried, we know more about Cerulean Warbler migration than ever before. The upshot? Modern threats have turned Elmer's migration route into a deadly gauntlet--and additional conservation efforts for Cerulean Warblers and other migratory birds can't come soon enough. [Migration secrets unveiled: The inside story of Elmer's epic trip >>](#)

[Saving Gulf Coast Shorebirds, One Beach at a Time](#)

Kristen Vale stands on the shore of the Gulf of Mexico, toward the end of the **Bolivar Peninsula**, trying to solve a dilemma. Wilson's Plovers and Least Terns come to this coastal area each spring to nest and breed after spending the winter in Central and South America. But high tides and too much rain have washed away the eggs that the birds had recently laid in the sand. Her challenge on this

day: to figure out where to replace the washed-out fencing that instructs beachgoers not to trespass into the birds' nesting territory.

[Cuba Welcomes Migratory Birds \(and Ecotourists\)](#)

Cuba boasts 373 species of birds, most of them migratory; 26 are found nowhere else on the planet. Arturo Kirkconnell, Curator of Ornithology of the National Museum of Natural History in Cuba and author of *A Field Guide to the Birds of Cuba*, has spent most of his career as an ornithologist studying the island's birds. He has led birding tours for nearly three decades. Now that diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba are warming and the country is welcoming more visitors from the U.S., many conservationists are wondering: What will be the impact on Cuba's wildlife? We asked Kirkconnell to tell us more about Cuba's birds, and what Americans can do to support ecotourism and conservation across the island.

Grouse Declining in Wyoming—10-Million-Acre Mineral Withdrawal Proposed

Recent field data indicate the Greater Sage-Grouse is again in decline in its core habitat in Wyoming where the majority of grouse are found. In 2016, there were 0.9 chicks per hen, down from 1.7 to 1.8 documented in 2014 and 2015. This ratio is near the low of 0.8 chicks per hen noted in 2012. The 10-year average, from 2006-2015, was 1.2 chicks per hen. Grouse numbers declined in most of those years due to ongoing habitat loss and degradation.

The [BLM has issued a draft EIS](#) in support of a proposed 10-million-acre mineral withdrawal for the most important remaining sagebrush habitats. This 20-year mining moratorium is a key part of the regional conservation strategy that led to a not-warranted ESA listing finding by the FWS in 2015. ABC and partner conservation groups [weighed in to support the proposed withdrawal](#), and believe it is crucial if the Sage Grouse conservation effort is going to succeed. Current grouse population data from Wyoming show a significant decline in 2016, indicating the existing federal management plans may not be enough to recover the species.

75,000 Acres of Tennessee Mountains Protected From Future Surface Mining

At the request of the State of Tennessee, the Department of the Interior has agreed to designate approximately 75,000 acres of mountain ridgelines as unsuitable for surface coal mining operations. The action helps to protect a spectacular area of eastern Tennessee that is critical to the region's tourism and outdoor recreation economy, provides valuable fish and wildlife habitat, and supports a healthy watershed. In its petition, the State said coal mining in the North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area and Emory River Tract Conservation Easement would be incompatible with existing local and State land use plans and programs, and that such mining would result in significant damage to natural systems and cultural, scientific and aesthetic values. Birds such as Cerulean Warbler and Wood Thrush are expected to benefit from the protection of this forest.

Audubon Connecticut Announces [Schoolyard Habitat Grants](#)

Audubon Connecticut has awarded grants to eight Connecticut schools to support the creation of schoolyard habitats that also serve as outdoor classrooms. (Birding Wire)