



Bringing back the birds

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ENDANGERED SPECIES AND PUBLIC LANDS

Feral Cats Caught on Camera Killing Endangered Hawaiian Gallinules



Hawaiian Common Gallinule and chicks. Photo by Hob Osterlund.

[Hawaiian Common Gallinule](#) are the latest victims of feral cat predation of an endangered species on the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i. The attacks were captured on remote cameras installed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in partnership with ABC. A pair of breeding adults was attacked and killed while sitting on their nest in a National Wildlife Refuge in late April. With no adults left to tend the nest, the birds' remaining three eggs and two hatchlings did not survive. Parents incubating eggs on two other nests were also killed by a feral cat on April 22 and May 19, and six more eggs subsequently failed to hatch.

“This predation by cats on endangered birds represents a major setback for conservation efforts and is a harsh reminder of the dangers feral cats and other invasive animals create for Hawai'i's native species,” said [Grant Sizemore](#), ABC's Director of Invasive Species Programs.

“Feral cats, whether they are dumped on the wildlife refuge by irresponsible owners or they find their way onto the refuge from nearby feral cat feeding stations, are having a very significant and tragic impact on Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge's endangered birds,” said FWS Deputy Project Leader Michael Mitchell. “Throughout Kaua'i, natural resource managers are doing everything they can to save our native birds. But some species are running out of time, and extinction is forever.”

Grouse Plan Revisions Risk Endangering the Species

Conservation of one of the nation's fastest-disappearing birds took a step back in August when the U.S. Department of the Interior ordered revisions to Greater Sage-Grouse management plans, opening the door to expanded development across the American West. (Interior's statement is available [here](#).)

"Habitat protection for the grouse is already at a minimum level based on the plans put in place just two years ago," said [Steve Holmer](#), Vice President of Policy at American Bird Conservancy. "Weakening these plans puts the grouse at grave risk of further population declines."

In addition to one of the West's most iconic species, more than 350 species of High Plains birds and wildlife are also at stake. The [existing grouse conservation plans](#) were designed to halt the loss of sage grouse habitat and to balance conservation with limited oil and gas drilling, mining, and renewable energy development. They also include safeguards for adaptive management and mitigation should grouse populations continue to decline, bolstering the decision not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse under the [Endangered Species Act](#).

Plan to Shrink National Monument Threatens Habitat for Spotted Owl

The Interior Department review of National Monument designations has led to a recommendation that would reduce protection of endangered species' habitat. One of the targeted monuments is the [Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument](#) in Oregon and California, the only monument created specifically to conserve biodiversity, including habitat for the federally listed [Northern Spotted Owl](#). The monument also provides important habitat connectivity for the species by protecting a mountain ridge that connects populations in the Coast and Cascade ranges.

"The Northern Spotted Owl is one of the big losers in this decision," said Steve Holmer, Vice President of Policy for American Bird Conservancy. "Reducing protection of the owl's habitat in Oregon and California is a sure way to reduce the population of this threatened species."

The charismatic Great Gray Owl and many other species could also lose important habitat if the size of the monument is reduced. "The monument area, especially the expansion areas around Howard Prairie Lake and Grizzly Peak, is famous among West Coast birders as perhaps the easiest place to see this species," said Pepper Trail, Conservation Chair of the Rogue Valley Audubon Society and a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society. "Mountain meadow habitats around Hyatt and Howard Prairie Lakes used by Great Grey Owls for hunting are also important nesting areas for Sandhill Cranes and the sharply declining Oregon Vesper Sparrow."

[Threat to Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge](#)

ABC is very concerned that portions of a border wall might be built through the [Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Texas, where federal officials and private contractors have been surveying portions of the refuge for construction. ABC strongly opposes any action that would put the conservation integrity of these irreplaceable public lands such as the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge at risk.

From the [Birding Community E-bulletin](#) by Wayne Peterson and Paul Baicich: Santa Ana NWR represents 2,088 acres of vital borderland habitat along the banks of the Rio Grande River. The refuge was originally created in 1943 to protect migratory birds, and almost 95 percent of the property was acquired through Duck Stamp/MBFC dollars.

Some 400 bird species have been recorded in the refuge, including migratory waterfowl, raptors, warblers, and a suite of "South Texas specialties" that are Mexican in character and barely range into Texas. Moreover, Santa Ana NWR is an essential part of that intricate network of natural hotspots in

the four-county LRGV that draws an economic income of over \$465 million per year from eco-tourists and birders.

Presently the plan is to build the wall on the levee that goes through and beyond the north end of the refuge. If building the border wall through Santa Ana NWR becomes a reality, nearby properties upriver and downriver will also be at risk. These would include sections of the associated Lower Rio Grande NWR, and Texas state properties such as wildlife management areas and the birder-friendly Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park, county lands, and even private properties along this important wildlife corridor.

Hawai‘i's Airport, Harbor Lights Killing Endangered Seabirds

Hui Ho‘omalulu i Ka ‘Āina, Conservation Council for Hawai‘i and the Center for Biological Diversity have filed a lawsuit against the Hawai‘i Department of Transportation for failing to address the injuries and death to critically imperiled seabirds from bright lighting at state-operated airports and harbors on Kauai, Maui and Lānai. The Newell’s shearwater is a threatened species, and Hawaiian Petrels and [Band-rumped Storm Petrels](#) in Hawaii are endangered species. The groups are represented by nonprofit law firm Earthjustice.

The seabirds are attracted to bright lights like those at the department’s airport and harbor facilities, which are among the largest documented sources in the state of injury and death to the birds. On Kauai, bright lights have contributed significantly to a catastrophic 94 percent decline in the Newell’s Shearwater population since the 1990s. At the same time, Hawaiian Petrel numbers on Kauai have plummeted by 78 percent. The groups seek to compel the department to minimize and mitigate harm to the imperiled seabirds by securing incidental take permit coverage of its activities on all three islands.

“It is incredibly saddening to know how endangered these seabirds have become,” said Marjorie Ziegler of Conservation Council for Hawai‘i. “They are integral parts of our island ecosystem and native Hawaiian culture. We hope this lawsuit will finally spur our government to take the necessary steps to protect them.”

Legal Action Taken to Save Texas Songbird

Travis Audubon Society, Texas Ornithological Society, Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife seek to intervene in a lawsuit challenging Endangered Species Act protection for the Golden-cheeked Warbler, a tiny Texas songbird severely threatened by urban sprawl. The warbler is endemic to the Hill Country of central Texas, where clearing of the warbler's habitat for ranching and urban sprawl has endangered the songbird, which was protected under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. Austin and central Texas — home to the mature Ashe-juniper woodlands that are the only place in the world where the warbler breeds — are some of the fastest-growing regions in the country. Between 1999 and 2011, 29 percent of the warbler's habitat was destroyed.

“It's simply too soon to remove protections for the warbler, which continues to lose habitat to urban sprawl,” said Joan Marshall, executive director of Travis Audubon. “The Golden-cheeked Warbler only breeds in the Hill Country of central Texas and as more land is lost, its survival hangs in the balance. If

we manage nature and the golden-cheeked warbler with an eye towards only shortsighted, short-term gains, nothing will be left for future generations.”

BIRD CONSERVATION LEGISLATION

Take Action for Birds by Contacting Congress

ABC has reviewed [bills affecting bird conservation](#) and public lands and offers the following recommendations to advance bird conservation.

You can make a difference by [contacting your Representative and Senators](#) about these pending bills.

Like to get your organization more involved with bird conservation issues? Please [sign up for the Bird Conservation Alliance](#), which connects over 200 groups in collective action for birds.

Deadly Pesticide May Yet Be Outlawed

Bills have been introduced in Congress to ban chlorpyrifos, a widely used pesticide that has been killing birds and poisoning the environment for the past half-century. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was on course to ban the pesticide until March when the EPA leadership decided to extend chlorpyrifos' registration for another five years. If the bill passes in Congress, this harmful pesticide may finally be banned. [Read more about the legislation and chlorpyrifos' detrimental effect on birds, children and farm workers.](#)

[NRDC Blog: Chlorpyrifos Announcement Leaves California Communities at Risk](#)

ADVANCES IN CONSERVATION

Scientists Rediscover One of South America's Lost Birds

An international team of researchers solved one of South America's great bird mysteries when they found the Táchira Antpitta—a species not seen since the 1950s—deep in the mountainous forests of western Venezuela. Long feared extinct, the antpitta is now being carefully studied as scientists consider ways to ensure its survival. [Click here to find out more about this elusive antpitta and the team that found it.](#)

Bird Data Reveal Crucial Role for Wintering Grounds

After merging bird observations from eBird along with projections for land use and climate change, a new Cornell Lab study finds that loss of habitat on the wintering grounds may be the greatest threat faced by 21 species of eastern forest birds that winter in Central America in the coming decades. These flycatchers, warblers, and vireos spend nearly 60 percent of the year on their wintering

grounds. The study is the first to measure the impact of climate and land-use change throughout the birds' entire life cycle, including breeding, wintering, and migration. [Read more.](#)

[Birds at Greater Risk of Hitting Windows in Rural Areas](#)

(Birding Wire) Nearly 1 billion birds in North America are estimated to die annually from striking windows or building exteriors, and researchers conducting a recent comprehensive study published in Biological Conservation of the phenomenon found the threat is greater for birds in rural areas than it is for urban birds.

New Satellite Data Program to Track Wildlife Habitat Loss

Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) released a pilot report demonstrating how satellite data, remote sensing, and cloud computing can be used to monitor wildlife habitat loss. Defenders' [Center for Conservation Innovation](#) (CCI), which focuses on the use of technology and data in protecting endangered species, relied on figures from NASA and the European Space Agency along with Google Earth Engine to measure habitat disturbances in the range of the Lesser Prairie Chicken. Specifically, the new method detects three forms of habitat disturbance: oil and gas well pads, wind turbines, and agricultural conversion.

In a [press release](#), Jamie Rappaport Clark, Defenders President and CEO, stated that technique "can even help determine whether developers are complying with their [Endangered Species Act] (ESA) permits, thereby increasing protections for imperiled species and their habitats." She also described the initiative as "a new and cost-effective way to monitor wildlife habitat."

In the study, [Monitoring Habitat Loss for Endangered Species Using Satellite Data: A Case Study of the Lesser Prairie Chicken](#), Defenders used algorithms developed in-house to measure habitat disturbance of the Lesser Prairie Chicken between September 2015, when ESA protections for the species were removed, and April 2017. It was determined that more than 258,000 acres of habitat were lost in the species' ranges within Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas. The majority of this loss resulted from agricultural conversion, while the development of [oil and well gas pads and wind farms](#) also caused habitat disturbances.

USDA Releases Strategy to Help Golden-winged Warbler

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released a new [five-year conservation strategy](#) to support private landowners managing for healthier forests in the Appalachian Mountains, part of an ongoing effort to help the [Golden-winged Warbler](#) rebound and to avoid the need for regulation of the species. This strategy serves as a game plan for how USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) and its conservation partners can best meet their goal of helping landowners adopt bird-friendly practices on more than 15,000 acres of young forests and shrublands over the next five years.

The Golden-winged Warbler has suffered one of the steepest population declines of any songbird species in the last 45 years, largely attributed to the decline of young forests that the migratory bird needs for nesting. NRCS selected the Golden-winged Warbler in 2012 as a priority species of [Working](#)

[Lands for Wildlife](#) (WLFW), the agency's premier, science-based partnership for wildlife conservation. The Golden-winged Warbler, with a black-and white facial pattern and touches of yellow on its wings and head, breeds in the deciduous forests of the Great Lakes and Appalachians and then spends its winters in Latin America.