Inside Bird Conservation – February 2018

Protecting Children, Pollinators, and Birds from Pesticides

Over 250 Groups Oppose Pesticides Bill Weakening ESA Requirements

Conservation and public interest groups are calling on lawmakers to fight an industry-backed congressional campaign that could make it easier for pesticides to harm endangered or threatened species. A **letter** to Senators and Representatives endorsed by over 250 conservation groups urges opposition to a draft bill that has been circulating on Capitol Hill that would allow U.S. EPA to approve the use of pesticides without consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or NOAA Fisheries, the agencies that jointly implement the ESA. (Corbin Hiar, E & E News)

URGENT ALERT: Click here to please send letters to your Senators and Representatives

Support Bills to Ban Chlorpyrifos and Dangerous Neonicotinoids

Legislation has been introduced in the United States Congress to halt of the use of some of the more deleterious pesticides. The Saving America's Pollinators Act H.R. 3040 would suspend the registration for neonicotinoids which are linked to wildlife deaths, while the Protect Children, Farmers, and Farmworkers from Nerve Agent Pesticides Act, S. 1624/H.R. 3380 would ban the deadly neurotoxin, chlorpyrifos. Those bills deserve our support. Click on the following links to write your Representative and Senators in support of banning chlorpyrifos and neonicotinoid pesticides.

State Pesticides Updates

California Considers Ban on Harmful Pesticides on Public Lands

A good place to start banning pesticides are state wildlife refuges. Fish and game managers can play an important role in protecting endangered species and other wildlife from these chemicals. American Bird Conservancy and Earthjustice are now working with the California Fish and Game Commission to adopt a statewide prohibition on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides on wildlife habitat under its jurisdiction. This ban will plant a flag in the ground and can serve as a model for other state wildlife agencies.

California Puts Freeze on New Uses of Bee-killing Pesticides

California's Department of Pesticide Regulation has announced it will no longer consider any applications by pesticide companies that would expand use of bee-killing neonicotinoid pesticides in the state. "California's decision to halt further increases in harmful neonicotinoid pesticides is an important step toward reversing dangerous bee declines," said Lori Ann Burd, director of the Center for Biological Diversity's environmental health program.

Maryland Considers Ban on Chlorpyrifos

The Maryland Ornithological Society, American Bird Conservancy, and Maryland/DC Audubon sent a letter in support of H.B. 116, which would ban the use of chlorpyrifos in Maryland. Not only is chlorpyrifos dangerous to human health, it is also toxic to birds and to freshwater, estuarine, and marine organisms, as well as honeybees and other wildlife. There is no way to use this pesticide safely.

Pesticides Resources

Video: How Neonics Affect Birds: A single seed coated with neonicotinoids is enough to kill a songbird. Learn more about how these deadly pesticides affect birds.... **See our new animation >>**

A dangerous neurotoxic pesticide—chlorpyrifos—has been killing birds and poisoning children and farmworkers for the past half-century. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was on course to ban chlorpyrifos until last March when EPA did an about-face and extended its registration for another five years—reversing the recommendation of the agency's own scientists. There is no place for this neurotoxin in our nation's food supply.

Neonicotinoids are a relatively new class of chemicals deadly to pollinators and other wildlife, including birds. A single seed coated with these pesticides is enough to kill a songbird, and exposure to just one-tenth of a coated seed per day during the egg-laying season is enough to impair reproduction. Even tiny doses can impair coordination and the ability to fly.

Many home and garden products – such as grub and insect killers and "weed and feed" products – also contain neonics. (Here's an easy-to-use list of products containing neonics from our partner, Center for Food Safety.) Alarmingly, the concentrations of neonics in products sold for residential use on ornamental plants are as much as 30 times what's allowed in the agricultural sector.

The NRDC, meanwhile, is suing EPA for failing to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on neonics' impacts on threatened or endangered species—a clear violation of the federal Endangered Species Act. See Neonic Pesticides Are Killing Endangered Bees and Butterflies—but the EPA Keeps Approving Them Anyway for more information.

Widely Used Chemical May Lead Migrating Birds Astray

A new study in Nature suggests that neonicotinoids and chlorpyrifos can cause migrating songbirds to lose their sense of direction. The researchers captured White-crowned Sparrows during spring

migration. Some birds were fed tiny neonicotinoid-treated canola seeds; others were given chlorpyrifos-treated granules, which the birds consume as grit to aid the digestion of seeds. All birds suffered significantly impaired orientation; in addition, the neonicotinoid-dosed birds lost up to one-quarter of their fat stores and body mass. These results have huge implications for bird migration, as the depleted fat reserves and delayed or altered routes ultimately may result in missed breeding opportunities and death. The National Audubon Society published a blog with more information on the study and its implications.

EPA's Budget has been Devastated for Decades: Here's the Math

With larger populations of people and families to keep safe, EPA has watched its budget go down, down, down.

A Free Pass to Kill Birds? Migratory Bird Treaty Act Under Threat

Proposed changes to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, one of our nation's oldest wildlife conservation laws, threaten to undo current safeguards that protect birds from the negative impacts of energy development, including oil and gas drilling and poorly placed wind energy facilities. The result could be millions of dead birds. Read more.

Take Action: Protect Migratory Birds and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Congress is currently considering actions which could undermine the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the protection of migratory birds. The House Energy Bill, H.R. 4239, would make it difficult, if not impossible, to protect birds from being trapped in oil pits or electrocuted by power lines.

You can support the birds and tell Congress to oppose drastic changes to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by accessing this action page: https://abcbirds.org/action/petition-mbta

With Conservation Plans in Peril, What's Next for Greater Sage-Grouse?

Across the West, plans to save the grouse face an uncertain future. **Read more.**

More prime sage grouse habitat is open for drilling. "The Trump administration has been making it easier for oil and gas companies to drill wells in prime habitat for greater sage grouse. At the end of the year, the Bureau of Land Management officially rewrote important guidance for field staff in charge of leasing parcels of federal land for future oil and gas drilling. But statistics show the staff had already gotten that message: Federal leasing in sage grouse habitat increased dramatically in Wyoming last year and likely will expand further this year." [High Country News, 1/12/18]

Mitigation Strategy under Review

American Bird Conservancy submitted a comment in support of mitigation policies to avoid, minimize, and compensate for development impacts. Mitigation is a key element of the federal sage grouse

conservation plans, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service opened a comment period and is considering changing, or abandoning its mitigation policy. "We are disappointed that this common-sense policy is being considered for revision," American Bird Conservancy wrote on Jan. 5, adding that the standard "had great potential to enable federal managers to foster wildlife and habitat conservation, to avoid the loss of irreplaceable resources, and to encourage private investment in the restoration of natural resources."

City Lights, Suburban Areas with Cats, Setting Traps for Migrating Birds

A new study has examined how light pollution lures birds into urban areas during fall migration, a trend that poses risk for the fowl that often fly into buildings and has increased with the addition of brighter LED lights. The researchers were interested in seeing what factors shape the birds' distributions and why they occur in certain areas.

They found an increasing density of birds the closer you get to these cities. The effect goes out about 200 kilometers [about 125 miles]. We estimate that these flying birds can see a city on the horizon up to several hundred kilometers away. Essentially, there is no place in the northeastern United States where they can't see the sky glow of a city."

The researchers also found that suburban areas, such as people's backyards and city parks, such as Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, harbor some of the highest densities of birds in the northeast. "Domestic cats could be the largest anthropogenic source of mortality for birds. If birds are being drawn into these heavily developed areas, it may be increasing their risk of mortality from anthropogenic sources and it may also be that the resources in those habitats are going to be depleted much faster because of competition with other birds." (Pointblue)

20 percent More Trees in Megacities would Mean Cleaner Air and Water, Lower Carbon and Energy Use

Planting 20 percent more trees in our megacities would double the benefits of urban forests, like pollution reduction, carbon sequestration and energy reduction. The authors of the study say city planners, residents and other stakeholders should start looking within cities for natural resources and conserve the nature in our urban areas by planting more trees. (Pointblue)

Researchers Find Post-fire Logging Harms Spotted Owls

Wildlife ecologists studying the rare spotted owl in the forests of California have discovered that large, intense wildfires are not responsible for abandonment of breeding territories. Instead, the researchers found that post-fire logging operations, which are common on both private and National Forest lands, most likely caused declines in territory occupancy of this imperiled wildlife species. In the absence of post-fire logging, they found no significant effect of large forest fires on spotted owl territory occupancy. Post-fire logging damages important spotted owl foraging areas in "snag forest habitat" that is created by patches of intense fire. This habitat is rich in the small mammal prey species that the owls feed upon, but post-fire logging largely removes this habitat, thereby causing higher rates of territory abandonment. (Pointblue)

Complex, Old-Growth Forests May Protect Some Bird Species in a Warming Climate

Old forests that contain large trees and a diversity of tree sizes and species may offer refuge to some types of birds facing threats in a warming climate, scientists have found. In a paper published today in *Diversity and Distributions*, a professional journal, researchers in the College of Forestry at Oregon State University reported that the more sensitive a bird species is to rising temperatures during the breeding season, the more likely it is to be affected by being near old-growth forest. Researchers studied 13 bird species that have been tracked annually in the U.S. Geological Survey's annual Breeding Bird Survey, one of the most comprehensive efforts of its kind in North America. Only two -- the Wilson's warbler and hermit warbler -- showed negative effects from rising temperatures over the past 30 years, but actual counts of both species show that their populations are stable or increasing in areas that contain high proportions of old-growth forest. (USGS)

Eleven ʻAlalā Thriving In Native Forest after Three and a Half Months

You usually hear them before you see them. There's no mistaking the loud and often times synchronized cacophony of caws from eleven ʻAlalā released into a Hawaiʻi Island Natural Area Reserve (NAR) last fall. These birds, seven young males and four young females, represent what conservationists hope is the beginning of a recovered population of the endangered Hawaiian crow on the island. ʻAlalā have been extinct in the wild since 2002. It's a sweet sound for the many people who've worked decades to get to this point. In time it's hoped the distinctive caw of the ʻAlalā will again be heard loud and clear across broad landscapes of Hawaiʻi island. Plans are underway to release additional birds in the NAR later this year.