



*Inside Bird Conservation – April 2018*

## **ADVOCACY**

### **Alert: Change to [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#) Enforcement Threatens Nesting Birds**

The administration has issued a new interpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act weakening enforcement for activities known to kill birds. To make matters worse, the U.S. House of Representatives may soon vote on a bill that would permanently weaken the law. Your Senators urgently need to hear that there is strong support for protecting migratory birds. **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>**

[Elizabeth Shogren of Reveal](#) details how industry was able to successfully influence the Department of the Interior to weaken the highly popular wildlife protection law. And, [Platts News Service reports](#) that the new policy may allow for tree clearing, which is now prohibited during nesting season, to place later into the Spring, threatening nesting birds.

### **Alert: Oil Leasing Planned in Priority Grouse Habitat and Important Migratory Flyway**

Our thanks to Kelly Fuller of Western Watersheds Project for developing [detailed comments](#) on the proposed Converse drilling project in Wyoming. The project threatens priority Greater Sage-Grouse habitat that should be off limits to new drilling, as well as an important migratory flyway stop that averages hundreds of thousands of birds each year. Numerous other conservation groups also objected to this inappropriate leasing plan including Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Parks Conservation Association, Sierra Club, Wildearth Guardians, The Wilderness Society, and National Audubon Society.

Greater Sage-Grouse conservation management plans — designed with dozens of stakeholders over five years and just launched in 2015 — are now being revisited by the Department of the Interior and could open the door to oil and gas drilling in sage grouse habitat across millions of acres of public lands. In addition, Congress has exempted the grouse from Endangered Species Act Protection. [Speak out for grouse by contacting your Senators and Representative today.](#)

### **[Congressional Budget Delivers Benefits for Birds](#) But Leaves Greater Sage-Grouse at Risk**

The \$1.3 trillion spending agreement reached by Congress contains good news for birds and bird conservation. Legislators increased funding for [State of the Birds](#) activities to \$3 million, giving a boost to the conservation of endangered forest birds in Hawaii, including the creation of safe nesting areas.

Congress also indicated that funding levels for work to support migratory bird conservation will remain at or be set above 2017 levels. [Greater Sage-Grouse](#) will continue to receive \$60 million in conservation funding. However, the species is still exempted from listing under the [Endangered Species Act](#) in the new budget agreement — at a time when this iconic species is at greater risk than ever.

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## PESTICIDES

### [Catastrophe as France's bird population collapses due to pesticides](#)

*Agence France-Presse* reports that dozens of species have seen their numbers decline, in some cases by two-thirds, because the insects they feed on have disappeared. Bird populations across the French countryside have fallen by a third over the last fifteen years, researchers say. Dozens of species have seen their numbers decline, in some cases by two-thirds, the scientists said in a pair of studies — one national in scope and the other covering a large agricultural region in central France.

### [Why are big, insect-eating birds disappearing? Maybe we're running low on bugs.](#)

No guild of North American birds is declining so rapidly as aerial insectivores: acrobatic marvels whose maneuvers make our hearts soar, and who provide a vital ecosystem service. Why are their numbers plummeting? A leading explanation is a widespread decline in insect populations — a troubling possibility, hinted at by many studies but also one difficult to pin down. There are few records of historical insect numbers against which to compare our own.

In a study [published in the journal](#) *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, researchers led by biologist Philina English of Simon Fraser University describe their ingenious workaround: they used museum specimens of whip-poor-wills, a medium-sized insect-eater whose populations are falling by 3.5 percent each year, as biological time machines. By contrasting the chemical composition of their bodies with the composition of living whip-poor-wills, the researchers could extrapolate how the birds used to eat.

“These results are consistent with the hypothesis that aerial insectivore populations are declining due to changes in abundance of higher trophic-level prey,” wrote the researchers. To translate that into normal speak: the birds are suffering because there seems to be a lot fewer big bugs than there used to be. If insect populations are indeed falling, surmised the researchers, it stands to reason that bugs higher up the food chain, who consume insects smaller than themselves, would be declining even faster. This would push whip-poor-wills, who prefer to eat larger, more nutrient-rich insects, to eat smaller and less-sustaining fare.

### [Alert: Bill to Ban Dangerous Neonicotinoids](#)

Legislation has been introduced in the United States Congress to halt of the use of some of the most deleterious pesticides. The Saving America's Pollinators Act H.R. 5015 would suspend the registration for neonicotinoids which are linked to wildlife deaths. Given the recent findings discuss above, this bill urgently deserves our support. Click on the following links to write your Representative and Senators in support of banning [neonicotinoid pesticides](#).

**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 >>](#)

[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.

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## INVASIVE SPECIES

### **Video: Surviving the Wild: Cats and Birds**

Few people experience the impacts of free-roaming cats as intimately as wildlife rehabilitators. In this short documentary, meet Dr. Dave McRuer, formerly of the Wildlife Center of Virginia; Brittany Davis of Second Chance Wildlife Center; and Kasey Birtz of City Wildlife — individuals who simultaneously love cats and are tasked... [Read more >>](#)

### **[Feral cats make Western Governors' list of invasive species](#)**

DENVER (AP) — Weeds, feral cats, insects and other pests are invading the U.S. West, and state governors released a list of the worst offenders Thursday in hopes of helping people recognize and eradicate the invaders before they spread. The Western Governors' Association [cataloged the top 50 invasive species in their](#) region, saying the pests have already caused billions of dollars in damage to agriculture and infrastructure.

"Western governors have said the spread of invasive species is one of the greatest risks to the Western environment," said Bill Whitacre, the association's policy adviser for public lands and agriculture. Some of the species on the governors' list have been in the headlines before, including water-gulping salt cedar trees and quagga mussels. Others may be surprises, such as feral cats. "They have huge impacts to native bird species," Whitacre said. They're not pets on the loose, he said, but descendants in a long line of feral cats that have learned to live on their own.

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## SEABIRDS

### **[New Research Suggests Need for Cautious Management of Seabirds](#)**

In new research, some scientists say it's time to reassess the conservation status of the Black-footed Albatross.... [Read more >>](#)

### **[Help Protect Seabirds: Support the Albatrosses and Petrels Conservation Act](#)**

Today, 15 of the world's 22 albatross species are threatened with extinction. These birds, including the Waved Albatross, are often overlooked since they spend the great majority of their lives at sea and breed on remote islands. Petrels and many other seabirds are similarly at risk. These wide-ranging birds cannot be protected by the actions of one country alone. That's why the recent introduction of

legislation that would implement an international treaty among fishing nations for the protection of albatrosses and petrels is so important. But to get Congress to pass it, we need your help.

**[Please act now!](#) Ask your Member of Congress to add their support the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels.**

### **Bye, Bye Birdies?**

It's the 100th anniversary of one of the nation's first environmental laws, which protects migratory birds. Hannah Nevins, Seabird Program Office for American Bird Conservancy participated in a NPR [Radio program "1A" interview](#) with ABC supporter and author Jonathan Franzen on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and a variety of topics relating to bird conservation. Franzen's recent article on "[Why birds matter](#)" appears in National Geographic in celebration of 2018 the [Year of the Bird](#).

### **California Lawmaker Make Progress to Protect Wildlife from Marine Litter**

Seabirds ingest a wide variety of marine litter including plastic bottle caps and cigarette filters, so these proposed new laws could protect birds from these harmful impacts. In California, Assembly member Mark Stone (D-Monterey Bay) has reintroduced legislation to protect California's coast and waterways by banning cigarette filters ([Assembly Bill 2308](#)). Stone has also [introduced AB 319](#), legislation that will require that, by 2020, all single-use plastic beverage containers have a cap that is tethered to the container. Previously, Rep. Stone led the local effort to ban plastic bags and polystyrene in the county, reducing litter and protecting the local and marine environment.

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### **Biggest Week in Birding May 4-13**

Registration Open for Black Swamp Bird Observatory's Ninth Annual Biggest Week in American Birding Running from May 4-13, 2018, this year's Biggest Week in American Birding will feature *Women In Birding and Conservation* and features an outstanding lineup of keynotes, workshops, field trips and much more. (Birding Wire)

*Inside Bird Conservation* is produced by American Bird Conservancy. Past editions and other issue updates are available on the [Bird Conservation Alliance website](#). Please forward to interested conservationists. To subscribe, please send a message to [sholmer@abcbirds.org](mailto:sholmer@abcbirds.org).