BIRDCONSERVATION

The Magazine of American Bird Conservancy

WINTER 2020-2021

AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY

ABC is dedicated to conserving wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. With an emphasis on achieving results and working in partnership, we take on the greatest threats facing birds today, innovating and building on rapid advancements in science to halt extinctions, protect habitats, eliminate threats, and build capacity for bird conservation.

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Red-crowned Parrot by Simon Kiacz

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View at The Farm at Sunnyside by Amy Johnson

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LEFT: Flame-faced Tanager. Photo by Glenn Bartley

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20 Seconds of Backyard Birding Bliss

I trust that this edition of *Bird Conservation* magazine finds you and your loved ones safe and well. Fortunately, we at ABC continue to be healthy — and I am pleased to report that we are forging ahead, making solid bird conservation progress despite the pandemic.

I'm delighted to present this issue of our magazine, and especially to welcome J. Drew Lanham as a guest author. Lanham is one of the great nature writers of our generation, and his article (see p. 14) is another important step in ABC's journey to support greater inclusion and diversity in the bird community. I'm also pleased that we focus on birds close to home through Daniel J. Lebbin's article on his backyard bird paradise. Cap that with Red-crowned Parrots in Texas, Virginia grassland birds, and Millerbirds in the northwestern Hawaiian Islands, and I hope you'll agree we have assembled a terrific edition for you!

There are so many things I could write about in this column: how ABC's programs have adapted to the new COVID-19 reality; how our court victory reinstated Migratory Bird Treaty Act protections; or how the Commonwealth of Virginia bucked the political trend this spring by introducing strong new bird protection regulations. But instead I decided I just wanted to write about how great birds are — how much better they can make our lives — and how they inspire me every day to work harder to conserve them and to protect and manage their habitats. And, hopefully, how they can continue to keep our spirits up during the pandemic. With this in mind, I wanted to share one backyard birding experience I had this spring that was especially rewarding for me.

> At ABC, we continue to dedicate ourselves to ensuring that birds like the Olive-sided Flycatcher and many, many others continue to grace backyards, forests, shorelines, and grasslands — forever.

Around our small Washington, D.C., yard, we are fortunate to have a number of beautiful, large trees. One neighbor has a large Tuliptree, and there's a Black or Lombardy Poplar, a catalpa tree, and Black Cherry on the other side. I think it was the poplar that had a couple of dead emergent branches in a "Y" shape that rose above the surrounding trees. Knowing that Olive-sided Flycatchers (OSFL) like to perch on such snags, I always fantasized that one would grace our yard with its presence.

After 14 years with no OSFL, I had more or less given up hope. But being cooped up this spring meant I was spending more time in the yard, and I would occasionally glance up at that snag — hoping. By late May, I was locked in a good-natured yard listing competition with Dan Lebbin (see article p. 36), and so I was excited when the cool, misty morning of May 23 revealed a Yellow Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, and other birds moving through. The Great Crested Flycatcher was calling incessantly, so when a large flycatcher landed on the aforementioned snag, I presumed that's what it was. But there was something a bit wrong with the shape — a bit too stocky, and the tail seemed too short. I lifted my bins just to check and BAM! Huge bill, dark vest, white stripe up the center of the belly…an OSFL! It perched in my neighbor's tree for all of about 20 seconds, then flew, never to return.

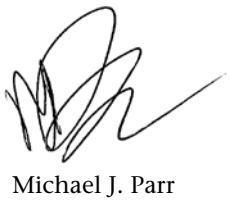
A few weeks later, my neighbor decided to cut down the tree. Looking back now, it's as if the birding gods decided to send me a gift: I looked up during the only 20 seconds in which I would ever see an

Olive-sided Flycatcher on that snag. It was probably the most fun birding moment in my yard and one that I'll remember for years.

I hope that you, too, have had fun moments with birds during this challenging time, whether those birds are common ones, unusual ones, ones you hope to see, or ones that you enjoy as old friends. Who knows, maybe a flock of Pine Siskins has descended on your feeder today, or tomorrow an Evening Grosbeak will stop by? Perhaps you too saw an OSFL from your yard for the first time! That's one of the great things about birds. You really never know.

At ABC, we continue to dedicate ourselves to ensuring that birds like the Olive-sided Flycatcher and many, many others continue to grace backyards, forests, shorelines, and grasslands — forever. To this end, I would be deeply grateful if you are able to help with our "Together for Birds" campaign (see p. 10). We have included an envelope to make it as convenient as possible. You can also donate online at abcbirds.org/together-for-birds/.

Thank you for considering an end-of-year gift for the birds that bring us so much joy.



Michael J. Parr
President, ABC

Olive-sided Flycatcher by Tom Ingram, tomingramphotography

Western Bird Die-Offs Raise Alarm

Experts estimate that this summer, hundreds of thousands of birds may have suddenly died across New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Texas, most of them migratory species such as swallows, warblers, and flycatchers.

A record cold snap that started September 9 likely caused the majority of these deaths. While birds usually tolerate cold weather (feathers are excellent insulation, after all), cold leads to declines in insects and food shortages for insectivorous bird species. While sudden cold fronts have killed migratory birds before, scientists are concerned about the scale of this event, and they wonder if other factors might be in play. For example, before the cold snap, as early as August 20, unusually high numbers of dead birds were already turning up in parts of southern New Mexico.

"The drivers behind these earlier events are less clear," writes ABC's Director of Threatened Species Outreach John C. Mittermeier in an article posted on ABC's website. "They could be related to local factors, or to the severe drought in the southwestern United States and the extensive wildfires across Oregon and California." Forensic analyses of bird specimens may reveal if smoke inhalation from fires played a role.

The severity of wildfires and droughts in the western U.S. have been exacerbated by climate change, and it may have played a role in increasing the impact of this year's events. "Migratory birds traveling across the western U.S. this September faced record-breaking wildfires at the same time as the most severe drought in 1,200 years, at the same time as the most severe cold snap in over a century," Mittermeier adds. "Alone, each of these factors presents a challenge for migrating birds. Together, it is easy to see how their impact could be particularly deadly."

Mittermeier also wonders how the bird deaths this summer might impact bird populations. "Research shows that die-offs of birds due to sudden weather events can lead to 25- to 90-percent declines in the number of breeding individuals the following year, and local populations can take up to seven years to recover from these events," he writes. "If those populations are already declining due to habitat destruction, agricultural intensification, and increased pesticide use (as we know they are) and are already stressed by climate change-related events such as droughts and fires, we can only imagine that those recoveries will be slower, if they happen at all."

Species with healthy populations are resilient to events such as this summer's sudden cold snap, and there are clear steps that we can take to help birds maintain their populations. Fortunately, most of the birds found during the die-off are still widespread, generally common species. ABC continues to lead efforts to stop the declines in bird populations and to ensure that our birds are more resilient to climate change and weather events.

To find out more about ways to help, visit: **bit.ly/HelpReverseBirdDeclines**

Read John's full article about the fall 2020 bird die-offs: **bit.ly/WesternBirdDieOff**

LEFT: Townsend's Warbler by John C. Mittermeier

TOP: Violet-green Swallow by Feng Yu, Shutterstock

Wedge-tailed Shearwaters Make Historic Return to Moloka'i Site

The return of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters provides the latest evidence of success in a bold effort by the Moloka'i Land Trust and ABC to bring back nesting seabirds to 90 acres of remote coastal habitat on the Hawaiian island of Moloka'i's north shore. The shearwaters, which historically nested there, were found breeding at the site for the first time in recent history in August. Signs of shearwater burrow excavation were found in three different areas, and included five active nests. Two chicks were found in nests.

Key in efforts to protect the area, called the Mokio-Anapuka Restoration Site, will be the construction of a predator-proof fence. "Burrowing seabirds like Wedge-tailed Shearwaters are a critical part of restoring this site," says Brad Keitt, Director of ABC's Oceans and Islands program. "Once the predator-proof fence is complete, it will be safe for burrowing seabirds to return in force."

The enclosing barrier will allow seabirds such as the Laysan Albatross, Wedge-tailed Shearwater, and other species to colonize the site, free from the leading cause of seabird declines — introduced, invasive predators such as rats, mongooses, and cats. A temporary fence to keep out deer allowed for successful native plant restoration over the majority of the site.

Acoustic monitoring systems, called song meters, were set up in 2016 to determine if nocturnal seabirds were present. "There had been a few detections of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters on song meters, suggesting they were in the area, but no successful nesting until now. This is a direct benefit of protecting the site," says Hannah Nevins, ABC's Seabird Program Director. "This great news lends more urgency to getting the fence built as soon as possible."

"Mokio is a special place, and it has been phenomenal to see the transformation from a degraded area, dominated by nonnative Kiawe (a tropical mesquite tree) to primarily native coastal strand habitat with blooming native species carpeting the ground," says Butch Haase, Executive Director of Moloka'i Land Trust, who has been leading the effort to protect this site since 2010.

The successes at the Mokio site are the result of a partnership among ABC, Moloka'i Land Trust, the Maui Nui Endangered Seabird Recovery Project, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Hawai'i State Department of Land and Natural Resources, Maui-Nui Native Ecosystem Protection and Management team.

ABC is grateful to the following supporters for making this project possible: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program, Science Applications Program, and the Partners Program; the David and Lucile Packard Foundation; Lynn and Stuart White; the BAND Foundation; and the Sacharuna Foundation.

The Mokio-Anapuka Restoration Site, where a predator-proof fence to protect nesting seabirds is planned. Photo by Butch Haase, Moloka'i Land Trust

One of two Wedge-tailed Shearwater chicks found at the Mokio-Anapuka Restoration Site. Photo by Butch Haase, Moloka'i Land Trust

Record Fire Season Takes Toll on Birds

Kaempfer's Woodpecker by Tulio Dornas

More than 5 million acres burned in California, Oregon, and Washington in 2020. Dozens of people died, tens of thousands were displaced, and thousands of buildings burned. The many record-breaking blazes and widespread smoke and haze also took a toll on birds.

For example, nine California Condors went missing and two chicks died in a sanctuary in Big Sur when the Dolan Fire ripped through. In Washington State, the Pearl Hill Fire destroyed at least half of the Greater Sage-Grouse leks in a stronghold in Douglas County, perhaps claiming as much as 70 percent of the population there. It likely wiped out a reintroduced sage-grouse population in Lincoln County as well. Off Oregon's coast, haze from fires may be responsible for disoriented storm-petrels colliding with boats. And the region's fires may have contributed to mass bird deaths that occurred during fall migration (see p. 6). While wildlife has adapted to fire as part of natural cycles in many western habitats, scientists worry that climate change makes these events both more frequent and more damaging. When the smoke clears and biologists and birders can get back out to survey local bird populations, it will be important to determine if the damage wrought by this record-breaking year changed the long-term status of any bird populations.

Fires also raged elsewhere, including in Brazil, where an estimated 16 percent of the world's largest expanse of tropical wetlands, the Pantanal, was consumed. For a second year, fires also threatened habitat for the recently rediscovered Kaempfer's Woodpecker, an ABC priority species in the Cantão region of Brazil. This was by far the worst fire season in living memory in this region. ABC partner Instituto Araguaia led efforts, with ABC and Global Wildlife Conservation support, to put out four separate fires. Fortunately, the vegetation that burned is among the most fire resilient in the region, and Instituto Araguaia successfully prevented the fire from entering areas of mature forest in their reserves.

New Study Links Increased Neonic Use with Bird Declines

The widespread use of neonicotinoid (neonic) insecticides, now applied to many crops, often as a seed coating, has long been suspected to affect bird populations. Prior studies revealed neonics' persistence in the environment and their toxicity to non-target invertebrates. Now a recent study directly links their presence to bird declines.

Western Meadowlark by Kerry Hargrove, Shutterstock

Published in the online journal *Nature Sustainability* in August, the study linked neonics' expanded use to a decline in U.S. breeding bird diversity between 2008 and 2014, when compared with areas where neonics were not used. Particularly hard hit were grassland and insectivorous birds, whose diversity dipped 4 and 3 percent, respectively. The authors propose that neonics may affect birds directly via coated seeds and indirectly by sharply cutting back insect prey and "by decimating the population of birds that can reproduce in the future." When this last impact was considered, the researchers boosted the average annual effect of neonics on grassland birds to 12 percent, and 5 percent for insectivorous birds. They added: "This research provides compelling support for the re-evaluation of policies permitting the use of neonicotinoids by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, particularly around bird habitats."

With Help, Nuthatch Returns to Missouri

Over the past few centuries, fire suppression and overharvesting greatly reduced Missouri's open pine and mixed-pine woodlands. As these habitats dwindled, the Brown-headed Nuthatch, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and other pine-specialist species vanished from the state.

In August and September, however, 46 Brown-headed Nuthatches found their way back — flown in on a Missouri Department of Conservation plane from neighboring Arkansas and released into Missouri's Mark Twain National Forest. The translocation was necessary because pine woodlands are not continuous from Arkansas to Missouri and because the nuthatches are nonmigratory. Within the national forest, years of habitat restoration laid the groundwork

Brown-headed Nuthatch by Matt Cuda, Shutterstock

for what will hopefully become a new breeding population there.

Under the U.S. Forest Service's Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, ten years of funding was awarded to the Mark Twain National Forest in 2012. To help build a coalition, ABC and the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture (CHJV) helped bring together key partners, including federal, state, and nongovernmental organizations and agencies that formally agreed to work together to restore pine woods in the same large landscape, the Current River Hills, which is also designated an ABC BirdScape. Today, around 100,000 acres of Shortleaf Pine and pine-oak woodland has been or is being restored, including crucial habitat for the newly released nuthatches.

In addition to ABC and CHJV, partners in the restoration and nuthatch translocation include the USDA Forest Service's Northern Research Station, the Missouri Department of Conservation, the University of Missouri, and Tall Timbers Research Station.

Recently Named Hillstar Gets New Reserve

The recently named Blue-throated Hillstar, a hummingbird discovered in 2017 and described as a new species in 2018,

Blue-throated Hillstar by Roger Ahlman

now has its first area of protected habitat thanks to Fundación de Conservación Jocotoco's purchase of 110 acres of land in Ecuador. The Cerro de Arcos Reserve was established in August with support from ABC and Rainforest Trust.

Currently known from just one mountain range, the hillstar likely warrants listing as Critically Endangered, but has yet to be formally evaluated for conservation status. "With a small population likely between 250 and 750 individuals, and its habitat threatened by burning for pastureland and conversion to exotic pine forests, the time to protect this bird is now," says Martin Schaefer, Jocotoco's Executive Director.

ABC has been working to promote the hummingbird's conservation since its discovery. "For underprotected birds like the Blue-throated Hillstar, this land protection is a crucial first step," says Daniel J. Lebbin, ABC Vice President of Threatened Species.

The project is a joint effort by Jocotoco, Rainforest Trust, and ABC, and aims to protect at least 616 acres of the bird's alpine meadow, or páramo, habitat by the middle of 2021, with an ultimate goal of 1,235 total acres.

ABC gratefully acknowledges the following supporters for making this ongoing project possible: David and Patricia Davidson, the estate of Mary Janvrin, Mark Greenfield, and Marge Duncan.

Birds

provide comfort, beauty, awe, and much more. From shimmering hummingbirds to diving falcons, birds connect us to nature, and to each other. Their presence, song, and flight inspire us to hope for a brighter future.

Our love for birds is endless. But the time we have left to conserve them is not. In our backyards, forests, and prairies, and along mountain ranges and coastlines, there is an urgent need to better conserve the birds we care about before they vanish forever.

We've already lost 3 billion birds within one human lifetime. We cannot allow birds we know and love — widespread species such as Barn Swallows and increasingly scarce beauties such as Cerulean Warblers — to meet the same fate as the Carolina Parakeet, Labrador Duck and other birds lost to extinction.

That's where you come in.
Will you step up to a 1:1 match to help ABC raise $1 million by December 31?

Thanks to several generous donors, we already anticipate raising $500,000 by December 31. Please contribute to our $1 million match today!

Together, we are a powerful force for birds, for our Earth, and for future generations.

Barn Swallow in flight by Joe McDonald, Shutterstock
RIGHT: Barn Swallows by Harry Collins Photography, Shutterstock

Donate by December 31 for Our 1:1 Match!

Please fill out the enclosed reply envelope and mail in your gift today, or visit us online at: **abcbirds.org/together-for-birds/**

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BIRDS in BRIEF

Partners in Flight Celebrates Its 30th Anniversary

Partners in Flight (PIF) is marking its 30th anniversary in 2020. A coalition of more than 150 conservation groups, including ABC, PIF aims to conserve the Western Hemisphere's landbirds with this mission: "Keeping common birds common and helping species at risk through voluntary partnerships." PIF brings together birders, scientists, and others to provide both data and a public voice for bird conservation.

ABC's David Pashley, who passed away in 2018, served as the first PIF National Coordinator. PIF has elevated the conservation of nongame bird species, especially migratory birds, with lasting contributions including the continental-scale Partners in Flight Landbird Plan, the Species Assessment Database, a peer-reviewed process that prioritizes Western Hemisphere species in need of conservation action, and the now-well-known World Migratory Bird Day.

Making a S.P.L.A.Sh along the Gulf Coast

ABC, the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, and Black Cat GIS are launching a new program designed to clean up marine debris in coastal and bay areas on the upper Texas coast. Called "S.P.L.A.Sh" (Stopping Plastic Litter Along Shorelines), this program will work to directly reduce trash accumulating on coastal beaches and will also launch an education and outreach campaign to engage local communities, stakeholders, and natural resource managers.

Snowy Plover by Paul St. Clair, Shutterstock

Las Balsas Reserve Expanded

Fundación de Conservación Jocotoco, with support from ABC and Rainforest Trust, has taken the next step in efforts to conserve the Endangered Lilacine Amazon, a parrot found only in western Ecuador. Jocotoco purchased 46 long-term lease agreements with Ecuador's Las Balsas community to protect the largest-known population of the species. Created in 2019 with the protection of 32 acres, Las Balsas now covers 246 acres, about a third the size of New York City's Central Park.

California Bans Deadly Rodenticides

In September, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill that prohibits most uses of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs). These potent poisons are used to kill mice and rats, but also accumulate in and kill wild animals up the food chain, including owls and other raptors, as well as mammals such as Bobcat and Mountain Lion. The bill was enacted in response to studies that showed that detectable levels of SGARs in wildlife had not declined. Although a consumer ban on the products was enacted in 2014, commercial pest-control operators have continued to use them.

Red-tailed Hawk by rck 953, Shutterstock

Hawaiian Petrels Returning to Kaua'i

Hawaiian Petrels translocated as chicks and fledged from the Nihoku Restoration Site at Kīlauea Point National Wildlife Refuge continue to return after several years at sea. To date, five banded Hawaiian Petrels from the 2016 and 2017 cohorts of translocated chicks have returned, and two pairs have shown interest in the artificial nest boxes.

Hawaiian Petrel chick by Jason Gregg

Project partners hope additional birds will return to Nihoku to nest within protective fencing there. The ultimate goal is to establish a thriving new colony of these seabirds that is safe from introduced predators.

Horseshoe Crabs by Mike Parr

COVID-19 and Crab Blood

Bleeding horseshoe crabs for the extraction of Limulus amebocyte lysate (LAL), used to test the purity of drugs, has always been a threat to the animals, with a mortality rate of around 30 percent. Now, as scientists work to develop a vaccine for COVID-19, horseshoe crab blood is in even higher demand, further threatening these primitive invertebrates and the shorebirds that depend upon them as a key food source during migration. A synthetic alternative to LAL exists and is used in Europe, but it has not yet been approved in the United States.

Learn more: **Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition: hscrabrecovery.org**

Eastern Black Rail Gains ESA Protection

The eastern population of the Black Rail has been listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This elusive, thrush-sized bird has all but disappeared from many parts of its range. The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture (ACJV), with which ABC partners, is one of the parties

Black Rail by Agami Photo Agency, Shutterstock

that will help guide actions aimed at this population's recovery.

The ACJV recently released the Black Rail Management Plan: **bit.ly/BlackRailPlan**

Meanwhile, the Red-cockaded Woodpecker was proposed for downlisting from Endangered to Threatened.

Learn more: **bit.ly/WoodpeckerDownlisting**

Red-cockaded Woodpecker by USFWS

Wildlife Protection Provisions Part of House Energy Bill

In September, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 4447, an energy bill that includes a number of important provisions to advance the conservation of birds and their habitats.

The House energy bill, which proposes to expand renewable energy development, also includes key provisions to promote the use of distributed solar technologies and to mitigate and avoid impacts to birds and other wildlife from industrial solar and wind energy facilities.

The bill was sent to the Senate in October. If there is another COVID-19 relief, stimulus, or infrastructure bill this year, this provision could become law as part of that package.

Pandemic Shutdown a Boon for Singing Sparrows

A study published in the journal *Science* in September revealed that during the pandemic, San Francisco's quieter streets provided the perfect backdrop for urban White-crowned Sparrows to up their singing game.

Prior study by University of Tennessee, Knoxville behavioral ecologist Elizabeth Derryberry revealed that the city's Whitecrowns strained to be heard above traffic noise. The pandemic changed that. Derryberry and her colleagues found that with the drop in street noise, basically at mid-1950s levels, the birds' songs greatly improved in quality and reach. By comparison, rural birds in Marin County did not change their songs.

The study underscores the stresses faced by urban wildlife, and birds' resiliency in the face of sudden changes.

White-crowned Sparrow by Johanna van de Woestijne

A Black Birder's Ramble

Through the Thicket of Opinion

For birdwatchers, identity is everything.

From feathered creatures' reptilian origin to current taxonomy, we go to extremes to know, understand, and label the things we see. Attaching names is critical. Even as some of those names come into question because of associations with racists or other ne'er-do-well human beings, our avi-centric world is one of pigeon-holing. We classify, lump, split, and list. Then we debate it. And even as we're assailed by the life and death struggles of a global pandemic, climate change, devastating political policies linked to catastrophic losses in birdlife, and social justice being meted out inequitably by color line, many try to distract themselves, forgetting all the troubles by watching what the birds are doing.

Although I've built a life that pays me to pay attention to birds, the world since mid-March has made that living hard. As a Black man whose life is calling the birds as I see them, I feel compelled to write about my own self-identity caught in the same grind between all these struggles. Increasingly, I find I'm spending more time talking to those who are not Black, explaining why race even has to enter into the equation. Those conversations mean identifying confusing fall warblers might get bypassed to address failures of society at large and the conservation community specifically, to intentionally (and sustainably) confront institutional racism; to see it as essential as habitat protection or climate change.

I sat in somewhat of a spring migration daze those first few weeks of quarantine from mid-March through mid-May. My university shut its doors and I sheltered in place with the virtual world my new reality. But as news of Ahmaud Arbery's death and Breonna Taylor's death and George Floyd's death and Elijah McClain's death and the resultant protests rose above the persistent fear of viral death for me as a Black man, the usually pleasant questions of which

on Social Movement and Bird Conservation

by J. Drew Lanham

warblers might show up on the next morning's rising sun dimmed with worries over my own identity costing me my life. Already identified by race and health status as being many times more likely to die from COVID-19 than a white person, I was reminded by ongoing scrolling deaths of unarmed Black people that no matter who I was or what I did or how many birds might be on my list, that my skin color was a target for some to reduce my being to a lump of non-living flesh.

When Amy Cooper assaulted (yes, assaulted) Christian Cooper with racialized intent of what she hoped might happen to a Black man "called down" by a white woman in the allegedly progressive innards of Manhattan, it reminded me of how gravely identity matters beyond a bird in my field of view. More so for Black people than Black-and-white Warblers or Black-throated Greens. Birders don't have problems calling out the blackness of birds and appreciating it. Red-winged Blackbirds, Black-necked Stilts, American Black Ducks, Black Oystercatchers, Black-crowned Night-Herons. Yet even as many seek and value blackness among some birds, some have issues dealing with it when it comes to human beings. These days I think, speak, and write to the cognitive dissonance in those who might love black birds but despise Black people. And to be fair, it's not that I think most birders are racist. Many if not most are non-racist. The problem is that not enough are anti-racist. Although some might be led to think the struggles are somehow new — like police brutality or systemic bias — they aren't. In this current, stressful context, some of our bins have just close-focused down on it.

I was fortunate to have been part of what seemed the vanguard of some promising change, working with a passionate group of folks who gathered at three meetings that took place between 2011 and 2013, organized exclusively around the theme of "Changing the Face in American Birding." We had large audiences in attendance (Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Harlingen, Texas) and good feelings after the gatherings ended, but somehow, things have largely remained the same. Even as conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies, said the right things, little has happened because those organizations didn't do enough of the right things. I'm not sure they really knew how.

Listservs, multi-day meetings, phone calls, and good intentions don't have the effective leverage that social media does. And so even as the embers of early efforts glowed, much remained the same, with Black birders

Photo courtesy of J. Drew Lanham

being harder to find than Black Rails. Enter Black Birders Week (BBW). Millennials and Z-er's blew on the embers with Instagram and Twitter. The flames roared. This new vanguard of bird enthusiasts presses inclusion and diversity issues of social justice in a movement that has re-sparked the importance of thinking beyond plumage color — to how skin color, especially as it applies to Black people, impacts bird-centered vocations, avocations, and conservation/environmental issues writ large.

The timing of unfortunate horrific events and a captive quarantined audience looking for good news provided an opportunity for a re-sparking with the fuel of global protest for racial justice. Where before the fire had little fuel or oxygen to feed it, the spring and summer of 2020 provided more than enough. The week was a conflagration that spread to other nature-based hobbies and occupations. It's a movement within a movement, the Black Naturalists' Emergence, and like many outdoor-centered efforts of the past, birds are the conduit for enlarging the conversation. It's timely, and it's about time.

But even as conditions ripe for societal change have converged, there are still some within the "ranks" who ask the question: "Should bird conservation be concerned with social change?" In a word, yes. Bird study has been closely aligned in the past with women's suffrage, the wilderness movement, and the environmental movement (see Scott Weidensaul's most excellent *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*). Outside of racial justice, one might argue that suffrage and the environmental movements forged some of the greatest changes associated with saving birds with some larger greater good as the priming impetus. But then those movements were still homogenized protests of white people around rights still largely subject to separate and unequal.

Somehow, the environmental and civil rights movements, though running parallel in time and some shared agenda, never merged. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rachel Carson should've sat down to talk about things at his marsh cabin in the South Carolina Low Country. Clapper Rails would've been an appropriate audience for a conversation about human rights and environmental justice.

Fast forwarding, it seems that now there's an opportunity to go forward with some new momentum gathered and on several fronts, to spark movements and momentum. Let's think about this not as a single movement, but one that can evolve on different "flyways." Even though

Use grassroots to line the nest.

those migratory flight paths that we envision as narrow, well-defined highways in the sky are in truth broad and diffuse fronts, it is instructive to envision the move to make birding and bird conservation a multipronged effort that springs from several different sources to ultimately converge on making things better for birds and humanity. Those two destinations of mutual benefit must be considered the same if we are to make headway into these challenges of "saving" birds, habitats, and ourselves.

If you attended BBW then you did so virtually/remotely. This was obviously a function of the pandemic and the necessity to keep people safe, but then it also proved how rapidly and effectively a movement can spread (a weekend or two). More people got to listen in and engage than at any physical meeting that might be convened. Thousands watched, listened, and hopefully learned. If you didn't get to attend BBW, go back and watch the panels. They are available online. Find the older efforts as well. Some of the work done with the original Diversity in American Birding efforts set the stage for what is happening now. Read John C. Robinson's *Birding for Everyone*. Don't forget the ground that's been made a little softer for the new seeds that have been sown. Embrace this new generation's genius with an open heart and mind.

I don't have easy solutions but rather suggestions for going forward. There must be conscious, intentional, intensive efforts to bring the nature of bird-related activities back to being accessible by all who might choose to take part. This can be a top-down and bottom-up initiative. Conservation organizations can make their boards less about the good ol' boy fiduciary "give" and more about the great new whomever talent "get." That means seeing the value in service beyond dollars. It means that along with darkening board tables by skin color, seeking non-traditional points of view from people who know and love birds, but also have fresh takes on how to get things done.

Viewpoint matters. All one has to do is go back and listen to the panel discussions from BBW or read the wonderful paper on female singing (Casey D. Haines, et al. "The Role of Diversity in Science: A Case Study of Women Advancing Female Birdsong Research," *Animal Behaviour*, 2020.) to get

a quick grip on just how critical different eyes, experiences, and opinions can be.

From the grassroots level, we must recognize that in many ways, birding, ornithology, and wildlife conservation writ large bear some of the same racist ills that the larger society does. Cases in point were all the birding listservs that excluded any mention of BBW as distractions or being "too political." This is birding at its worst, an exclusionary, elitist activity that sees itself above and beyond any fray except arguing over gull identification. It's a frustrating blind spot I've frequently observed first hand as folks refuse to drop their binoculars for a moment to see the larger context around them. This has to change. Many of the organizations responsible or associated with those dismissive attitudes and actions found themselves "outed." Perhaps not the place you want to be if inclusion and diversity is a goal.

Yes, there are racist birders and racist places where Black birders would rather not be. This has to be recognized and reckoned with on every level, from the largest NGO to the smallest bird club, to the individual who thinks that all birders are "woke." Calling it out where it occurs is important. The historical racism has to be called out when discovered (or known) just as present bias is. Iconic names will be tarnished with the truth. John James Audubon, John Bachman, John P. McCown, and likely more to come who may even bird among us now. There is no "sin" in earnest striving. There is corruption, though, in silence. See something. Hear something. Say something. Find the established white folks out there doing the hard work and taking the risks. Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman are two of the exemplars who've bravely stepped forward, at times at great costs of friends and funding. Work locally with your own birding group to make the difference at home. Use grassroots to line the nest.

I call myself a Cultural and Conservation Ornithologist because I've taken this task on as my calling. It falls into another of my mantras: "Connecting the dots as I color the conservation conversation." It leads back into that issue of relevance but expands beyond, to an attention that must be paid to audiences and stakeholders that are much more diverse. If the goal is to conserve, then we need all involved that we can muster. Language and thinking, then, have to be inclusive. The intentions should be clear, but the words cannot be such that BIPOCs (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) feel put off by what we hear. Who belongs? Who doesn't?

Each one of us must take stake in our vocation or avocation and look circumspectly at it as something we hope to move forward in ways that broaden the enjoyment of watching, but also widen the capacity for conservation. All policy begins with personal agenda. Movements are the means by which agendas might wind toward some greater good. Here we have the opportunity as bird lovers to be a part of something greater that serves humankind and birds. Selfishly, it also makes ornithology and bird study at all of its levels more appealing and relevant.

I often look at things from two viewpoints: from the inside, as a lover of wild birds, and also from the outside, how others perceive me as a human being with Black skin. And I've wondered: Why aren't there more people who look like me doing what I do? Sure, ornithology is a tight vocation with very few getting paid living wages as professionals to immerse themselves in birds. But then from the hobbyist perspective, those defining themselves as "birders" are overwhelmingly white. I didn't see my first Black birder (Dudley Edmondson of Duluth, Minnesota) until I was almost 30 years old. I didn't make contact with a Black ornithologist (Keith Russell of Philadelphia Audubon) until I was in my mid-forties. And still even to this day, as I find myself rounding up to six decades of life, I only know a half-dozen professionals and maybe a dozen or so birders who share my ethnicity.

It seems that not much is changing, yet here we are in the midst of a wave of unwelcome change wrought by a global viral pandemic. We are forced (hopefully voluntarily, following the science) to quarantine. To stay at home. To mask up and socially distance to protect ourselves. Even as spring migration, breeding season, and now the autumnal return south has filled three-quarters of the avian annual cycle, those of us bird-obsessed have sat and watched the human world surrounding us shrink wrap itself around hard issues that sometimes would seem disconnected from feathers and wings. I would argue that if we drop our binoculars for a bit, the connections to all of it might just come into clearer view. Birding can't afford to look away any longer.

J. Drew Lanham, Ph.D., is a Cultural and Conservation Ornithologist, author, and poet who holds ranks of Endowed Chair and Master Teacher in Clemson University's Department of Forestry and Environmental Conservation.

ABOVE: Hooded Warbler by Jacob Spendelow
RIGHT: Pine forest by Darren Miller

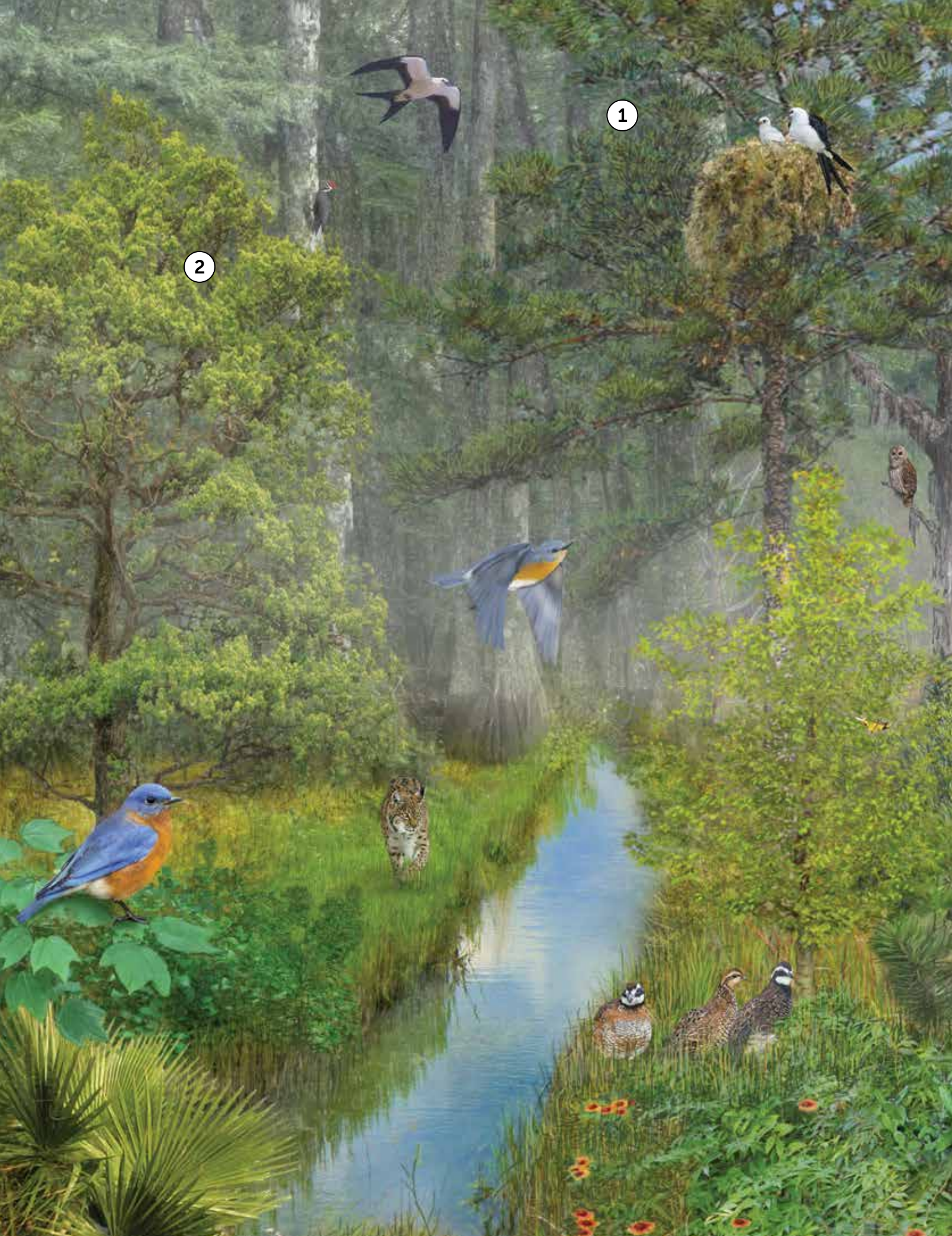
Managing Bird Habitat in Southeastern Working Forests

In the Southeast, forests shelter rich biodiversity, including more than 80 breeding bird species, ranging from Swallow-tailed Kites to Hooded Warblers. They also provide the source for goods we rely upon every day, including cardboard boxes, lumber, paper towels, toilet paper, and packing and printer paper. Forestry has always been an integral part of the Southeast's economy. Today, some 90 percent — approximately 134 million acres — of the region's forested land is owned by private individuals and families, many of whom strive to meet certification needs set by large companies to which they provide lumber. With thoughtful management decisions focused on sustainability, these forests can provide the best of both worlds — landscape-scale stretches of commercially productive land and habitats that protect birds, other wildlife, and water quality.

"Many people in the forest industry want what we want," says EJ Williams, ABC's Vice President of Migratory Birds and Habitats. "They want both economic and ecological viability into perpetuity." Williams, who lives in South Carolina, works on the ground with regional Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) partners. "Companies and their customers want to know their products come from well-managed forests, and birds can tell you a lot about the sustainability of forests," she says.

One important partner is International Paper, a leading producer of renewable, fiber-based packaging, pulp, and paper. Through its large and diverse supply chain, the company works with private forest landowners ranging from large forest management investment companies to small family forest owners. ABC works with International Paper to develop bird-focused management recommendations for private forest landowners, including special practices landowners can employ to ensure habitat is maintained for at-risk species.

The artwork on the following pages illustrates some ways that sustainable timber management can benefit a range of the region's iconic bird species.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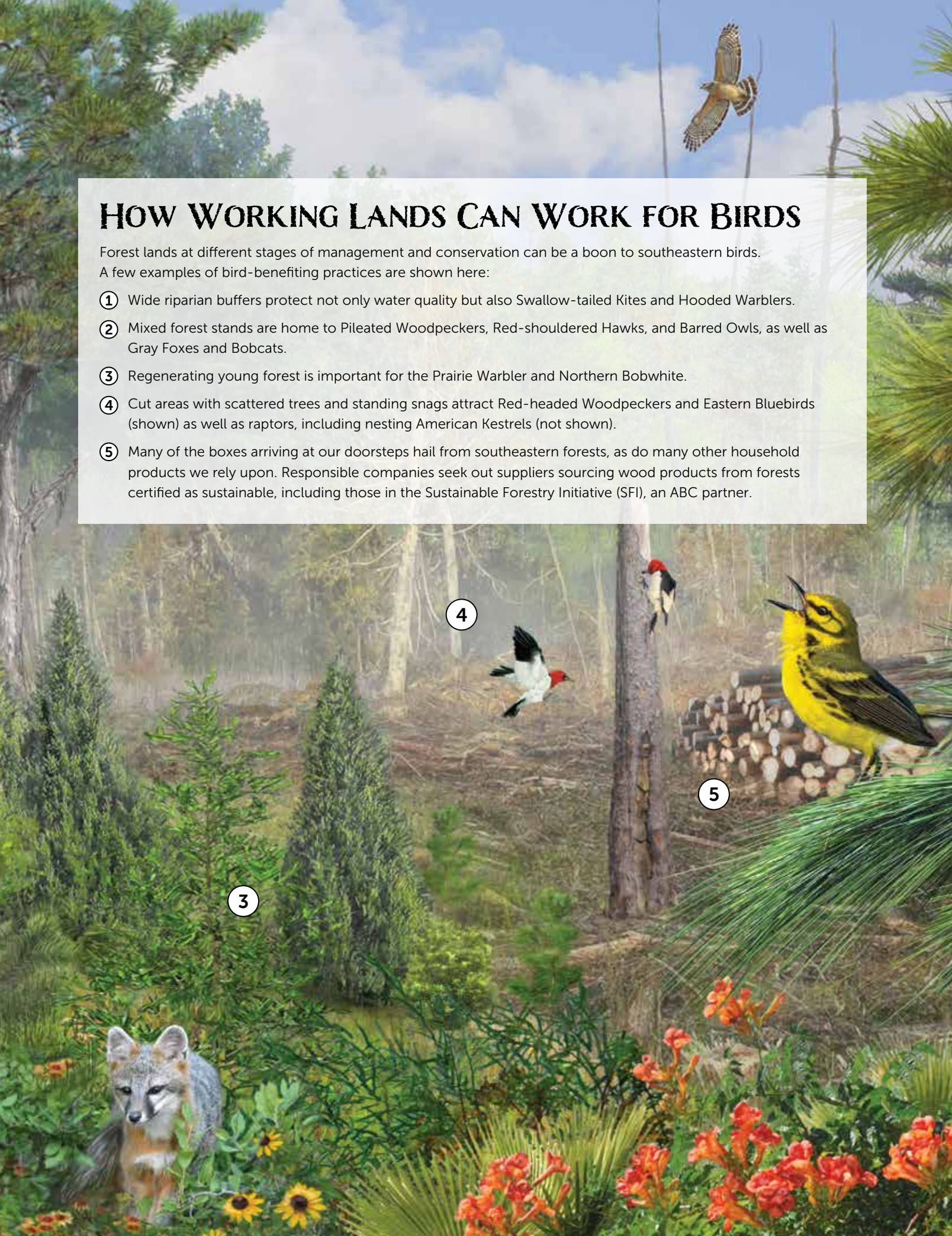
How Working Lands Can Work for Birds

Forest lands at different stages of management and conservation can be a boon to southeastern birds. A few examples of bird-benefiting practices are shown here:

1. Wide riparian buffers protect not only water quality but also Swallow-tailed Kites and Hooded Warblers.
2. Mixed forest stands are home to Pileated Woodpeckers, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Barred Owls, as well as Gray Foxes and Bobcats.
3. Regenerating young forest is important for the Prairie Warbler and Northern Bobwhite.
4. Cut areas with scattered trees and standing snags attract Red-headed Woodpeckers and Eastern Bluebirds (shown) as well as raptors, including nesting American Kestrels (not shown).
5. Many of the boxes arriving at our doorsteps hail from southeastern forests, as do many other household products we rely upon. Responsible companies seek out suppliers sourcing wood products from forests certified as sustainable, including those in the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), an ABC partner.



Meadows, carefully timed haying, and regenerative grazing are among the tools Northern Virginia farmers are using to bring back grassland birds in the most recently declared BirdScape.

by Amy Johnson and David Wiedenfeld

In VIRG

The Mid-Atlantic region is known for its symbolic Blue Ridge Mountains, bays and marshes, and flourishing deciduous forests. While these important habitats harbor some of North America's most admired bird species, there's one important ecosystem that's often overlooked for bird conservation in these human-dominated landscapes — eastern grasslands.

The majority of eastern grasslands are on privately owned land under some form of agricultural management. They provide critical habitat for some of our nation's most sharply declining species: For example, the Eastern Meadowlark, which has declined by more than 70 percent since the 1970s, relies upon private lands for 97 percent of its remaining habitat in the U.S. To conserve this iconic bird, it is essential for landowners, scientists, and conservation managers to collaborate on effective management of these landscapes. What's happening in Virginia provides a hopeful example for how this can work elsewhere.

Rolling Out a Green Carpet for Grassland Birds

Nestled among the bucolic rolling hills just west of Washington, D.C., and coincidentally surrounding the home office of ABC in The Plains, Virginia, there exists a community of farmers, land managers, and homeowners who are collaborating with a team of Smithsonian scientists to help bring back grassland birds.

Virginia Working Landscapes (VWL), a program of the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute in Front Royal, collaborates with landowners, community scientists, universities, and other local partners to study the region's biodiversity on private lands. Since 2010, the VWL team has surveyed more than 150 properties across 16 counties in Northern Virginia's Piedmont and Shenandoah Valley. Together, these properties cover more than 80,000 acres, from hilly Loudoun County to the mountains bordering Augusta County. With much of this region under private ownership, it is an ideal landscape to gain a better understanding of how the actions of landowners influence the wildlife with which we share our grasslands. These properties now also form an integral part of a newly declared conservation zone, or BirdScape, established this year by ABC, VWL, and partners at the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC). It's called the Northern Virginia Piedmont and Shenandoah Valley BirdScape.

ABOVE: Northern Virginia farmers are helping to bring back grassland birds by maintaining meadows and timing hay harvests to accommodate nesting. Photo by Amy Johnson

RIGHT: Bobolink nesting, from egg to fledgling. Photos by Bernadette Rigley

INIA'S PIEDMONT:

a Firmer Foothold for Grassland Birds

A BirdScape defines a focal area for conservation efforts, where partners can work together to address the issues affecting declining bird populations. Throughout the year, Virginia's Piedmont grasslands are frequented by more than 100 bird species, including breeding and wintering grassland specialists that are in steep decline. Efforts are now underway to help study, protect, and restore some of the grasslands within the new BirdScape, which is only the second one east of the Appalachians and the first to focus on the Virginia Piedmont's working grasslands.

Grass of the Past

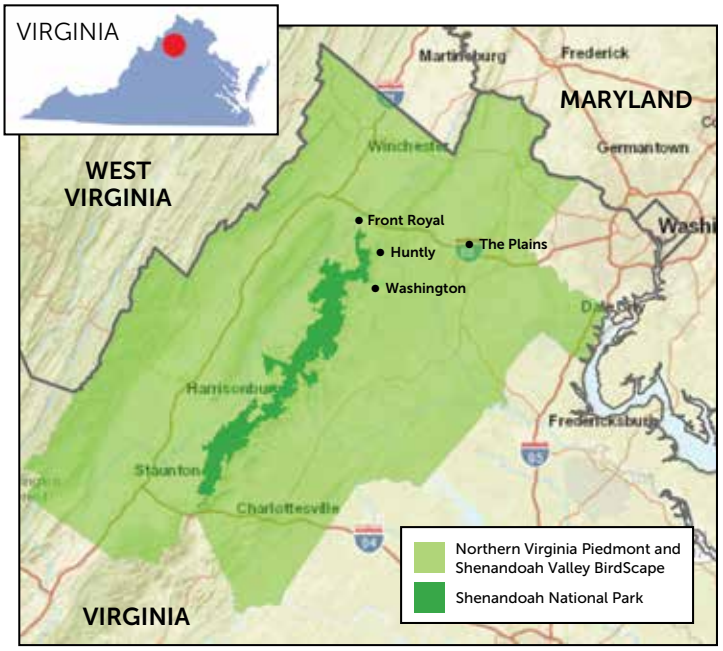
From pre-European times up to the mid-1700s, lands between the Atlantic Ocean and Appalachian Mountains included some extensive and important grasslands and savannas. Many of these were maintained by frequent burning, either by Native Americans or natural, lightning-started fires, but they also occurred on shallow soils, balds, and barrens. The Virginia Piedmont grasslands, like other prairies, were home to a great many native plants, including endemic species, and even to large animals such as Elk and American Bison. But they were also breeding and wintering areas for many bird species, including some now mostly gone from the area.

European settlers in the 1600s and early 1700s plowed the grasslands and suppressed fires that had maintained the region's prairies. By the early 1900s, only small patches of this habitat remained. Then, when agriculture began to shift to the Great Plains in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many farms were abandoned in the Piedmont.

But the prairies did not return. Today, few people living where they once stood have any idea they existed. Over the decades, properties not maintained in agriculture grew to tall, dark woodlands. Meanwhile, those utilized for grazing were mostly converted to nonnative grasses, robust introduced plants that provided forage for cattle, sheep, and horses. While some grassland bird species have adapted to these nonnative grasslands, the intensity with which they have been managed, combined with the loss of important native grasses and forbs, have contributed to the significant bird population declines we see today.

For example, Northern Bobwhites, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Grasshopper Sparrows have greatly declined in the northern Piedmont; Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows have become rare breeders south of Pennsylvania; and some, like the Henslow's Sparrow and the Loggerhead Shrike, a predatory songbird, are now only rare visitors.

TOP: A Red-winged Blackbird nest in a field of cover crops at Bean Hollow Grassfed in Huntly, VA. BOTTOM: A Common Yellowthroat in a native wildflower meadow at The Farm at Sunnyside in Washington, VA. Photos by Amy Johnson



The ecological impacts of these losses could be devastating. As we lose diversity of species, we lose resiliency — making our ecosystems less adaptable to change.

Returning What Was Lost

In recent years, there has been growing interest in recovering some of what was lost in the Piedmont, with landowners trying both to rebuild native grasslands and regenerate existing working grasslands, while ensuring indefinite land protection through conservation easement programs. The new BirdScape will help to focus these efforts and provide a framework for bird conservation efforts.

Conservation is already at the forefront of many land management decisions in the region. For example, land protected by conservation easements in PEC's nine-county service area accounts for nearly 20 percent of the total land area, making this particular region "one of the best examples of private land conservation in the nation," according to Michael Kane, PEC's Director of Conservation and a key partner on the new BirdScape. This achievement reflects "a decades-long partnership between landowners and conservation organizations to preserve — for the benefit of the public at large — the natural resources, rural economy, history, and beauty of the Virginia Piedmont," he adds.

Conservation easements will play an important role in establishing the new BirdScape, as permanent protection of farmland will help connect and preserve critical grassland habitat in perpetuity. In addition, the BirdScape partners will work together to study, document, and promote grassland management practices that benefit bird conservation, including rotational grazing, bird-friendly mowing, riparian buffers, and native grass and wildflower restorations.

Sowing the Seeds of Crops and Conservation

A prime example of how farms can make a huge difference for the region's grassland birds sits in the heart of Washington, Virginia, where rich wildlife habitat is nurtured alongside rows of highly sought-after organic produce. The Farm at Sunnyside (http://thefarmatsunnyside.com/), owned by Nick and Gardiner Lapham, has converted nearly 40 acres of farmland into diverse native meadows supporting populations of Northern Bobwhites, Indigo Buntings, and Field Sparrows, to name a few. "Agriculturally driven land use change and management is the single greatest cause of biodiversity loss globally," says Nick, a former member of ABC's Board of Directors. "We want to be part of the effort to change that."

Research conducted by VWL and their team of community scientists has shown that meadows like these support significantly higher densities of declining shrubland bird species such as Prairie Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Common Yellowthroats, compared with traditional hay fields and pastures.

"It's been tremendously gratifying to see how habitat enhancements such as planting native meadows have, over a relatively short time period, resulted in expanded bird populations," says Nick. By converting old fields into native meadows, farmlands like this contribute to biodiversity conservation by diversifying insect communities, boosting pollinator populations, and providing critical habitat for birds year-round. "It's rewarding to see birds taking advantage of habitat in the agroscape," Nick adds, "whether a flock of migrating Bobolinks using a field of spring cover crop or a family of rodent-devouring Barn Owls nesting in our silo."

Of Birds and Beef

Just down the road in Huntly, farmers at Bean Hollow Grassfed (www.beanhollowgrassfed.com/) are collaborating with American Farmland Trust and VWL to study how regenerative grazing practices influence grassland birds. Now in its pilot year, this project is engaging producers in several Virginia counties in an effort to identify conservation metrics that could be used to create a market for bird-friendly beef.

Regenerative grazing is a form of agriculture that seeks to achieve improved soil health, boosted vegetation productivity, and extended grazing opportunities for livestock. There are also multiple ways that this approach can benefit birds. Earlier this year, VWL's team of biologists ventured out to Bean Hollow Grassfed and several other farms in the area to monitor nests of some of the most vulnerable grassland bird species, including Eastern Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, and Grasshopper Sparrows. The team located and monitored more than 60 nests, providing promising data to be built upon over the next few years.

"The data collected by VWL scientists has given us back-up for telling our story of using innovative grazing to restore the ecological health of the farm," says Mike Sands, owner and operator of the farm, who worked with the VWL biologists to co-design the study. "This is of significant interest to our customers," he adds.

Which Day to Hay?

In Front Royal, a gateway to Shenandoah National Park, Beatrice and Adie Von Gontard are graced with the bubbly songs of more than 100 Bobolinks that return to the farm each year. Owners of a 1,400-acre hay operation named Oxbow Farm, the couple has collaborated with VWL for ten years, dedicating time and acres to intricate ecological studies from bird-banding and bumblebee sampling to developing metrics for bird-friendly hay. While hay production is their primary business, the Von Gontards have recognized that the Oxbow fields host some of the region's most productive populations of grassland birds. Just this year, for example, VWL biologists documented the first breeding record for Savannah Sparrows in the county.

TOP: Beatrice and Adie Von Gontard pose with their herd of Texas Longhorns at Oxbow Farm in Front Royal, VA. Photo by Amy Johnson

The Von Gontards have dedicated several fields to the conservation of these delicate grassland species and changed the timing of hay harvests in some of their fields to accommodate the nesting season. "It's rewarding to alter hay timing for birds because you're giving them a chance to nest and fledge their young," says Beatrice, who is often found waist-deep in grasses, assisting VWL biologists with their research. "And you get to see the incredible beauty of these birds in their breeding plumage, singing their melodious courtship songs and bringing food to their young. It's one of the biggest thrills of a lifetime."

It is the Von Gontards' hope that by collaborating with organizations like VWL, they can contribute to research that lays the foundation for the widespread adoption of bird-friendly hay practices. "What I've learned is, when you farm the land in a sustainable way, you increase the diversity of species, which, in turn, makes the land a healthier and more vibrant place to live," Beatrice adds.

Conservation Is Year-Round

Adopting conservation practices that benefit breeding grassland birds is essential for their recovery and conservation, but we mustn't ignore the needs of these birds the rest of the year. Many studies hypothesize that what happens on wintering grounds likely contributes to the decline of many of these species, yet studies of grassland birds on their wintering grounds remain limited. To help fill this gap, VWL has been collaborating with landowners to explore how winter management of fields impacts birds wintering in Virginia grasslands.

Using results from this research, the region's landowners now have the means to understand how they can optimize grassland habitat, both for resident and migrant

species. For example, Bruce and Susan Jones of Washington, Virginia, own Jones Nature Preserve (https://jonesnaturepreserve.wordpress.com/), which they carefully manage to maximize biodiversity on their property. Most of the fields there are composed of native grasses that VWL research has shown to provide critical habitat to birds overwintering in grasslands.

When left unmowed through the winter, native grasses provide thick cover, protecting birds from predators and the elements. They also maintain an abundance of nutrient-packed seeds that can sustain birds through the worst winter storms. "As the taller warm-season grasses tend to topple from the wind and snow, the seed heads stay low, and that makes for a ready food supply that also provides safety, warmth, and cover," says Bruce, who regularly hosts workshops in collaboration with VWL and PEC to help educate community members about the importance of native plants for birds and other wildlife.

Species never or rarely seen in the area during breeding season, like Savannah, Fox, and American Tree Sparrows, flock to these fields to take advantage of the winter seed bounty. In addition, VWL biologists have documented Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls using fields like these to roost, among sturdy clumps of native grasses that form protective dome-like shelters. While we often think of winter as the silent season for birding, places like Jones Nature Preserve remind us that our lives needn't be devoid of birds through winter — if we build it, they will come.

TOP: The Smithsonian's Amy Johnson and landowner Bruce Jones meander through the native grass meadows at Jones Nature Preserve in Washington, VA, where the Virginia Working Landscapes team conducts some of their grassland bird research. Photo by Olivia Cosby

TOP RIGHT: Wintering sparrows, like this American Tree Sparrow, flock to the native grass meadows at Jones Nature Preserve in Washington, VA, to forage for seeds throughout the winter months. Photo by Amy Johnson

Sharing the Work

The new Northern Virginia Piedmont and Shenandoah Valley BirdScape shines a light on the landscape scale and focus of efforts by VWL, PEC, private landowners, and other partners promoting bird conservation in Virginia's Piedmont grasslands. That this BirdScape includes ABC's own home office puts ABC directly in the picture, but another distinction is that this is the first in the network to be proposed not by ABC but one of its partners. This added momentum underscores the goal of the network — all working together for one objective: bird conservation.

Amy Johnson is a Conservation Ecologist at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and Program Director of Virginia Working Landscapes.

David Wiedenfeld is ABC's Senior Conservation Scientist.

PARROT PARADOX:

The Unprotected, Endangered Red-crowned Parrot

How humanity threatens, benefits, and can save an endearing, range-restricted bird.

by Howard Youth

The Red-crowned Parrot could be a poster-bird for the travails facing wild parrot populations around the world. Pummeled for decades by the one-two punch of habitat loss and capture for the bird trade, this chunky green bird with red cap and wing flashes has vanished from 50 to 85 percent of its original range, its population down an estimated 95 percent. Not surprisingly, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists the species as Endangered. But there is a silver lining: Usually a bird of remaining wild,

scrub-forest habitat in its small range in northeastern Mexico, this parrot now also occupies South Texas suburbs in a big way. Scientists studying the birds both north and south of the border hope that by tapping into our affection for these colorful, intelligent birds — and appreciating them as wild birds, not prospective pets — that the Red-crowned Parrot can be saved, both in town and country.

Birds of the Burbs

In the subtropical climate of Texas's Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), suburban yards, shopping centers, and a city park now shelter a robust Red-crowned Parrot population based in four cities — Brownsville, Harlingen, McAllen, and Weslaco.

"It's clear that these parrots want what the people want," says Simon Kiacz, a Texas A&M Ph.D. graduate student who has been studying the South Texas birds since 2016 as part of the Tejano Parrot Project, working with volunteers to study the region's four roosts. Kiacz wrote his dissertation on these birds and coauthored the only definitive recent study of the population, published in the journal *Bird Conservation International* in 2020.

"Every single nest, roost, and feeding tree we have confirmed has either been planted or facilitated by a person," says Donald J. Brightsmith, a Texas A&M biology professor and coauthor of the paper. "That's completely the opposite of most every bird population we're trying to protect in remnant populations."

"I don't know of any evidence that we have flocks of them outside the urban interface, and I don't know of any anecdotes or complaints or studies from agricultural folks saying the parrots damage anything," adds Tony Henehan, another of the paper's coauthors, who is a wildlife biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Henehan coordinates quarterly parrot roost counts in the LRGV, most of which are carried out by local volunteers recruited by two groups, Arroyo Colorado Audubon and Texas Master Naturalists.

The current LRGV population is estimated at about 700 birds, remaining steady the last three to five years, after increasing for decades. Roughly 110 miles from the northern limit of the bird's Mexican range, this satellite population is considered by the paper's authors to be "an important reservoir for this endangered species." Redcrowns are now found in other parts of the U.S. as well, including Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, Florida, and especially southern California, home to approximately 3,700. All together, the total U.S. population, estimated at roughly 4,700 birds, may outnumber the estimated remaining wild Mexican population of 2,000 to 4,300 adults.

LEFT: Dexterous and surprisingly well camouflaged as they quietly forage in trees, Red-crowned Parrots have proven they can live alongside people, as long as people can "live and let live." Photo by Greg Homel, Natural Elements Productions

The four large South Texas roost sites are occupied much of the year, ebbing during nesting season. The Brownsville roost remains more or less static, but participants in the other three roosts switch locations from time to time. Each day, the birds gather at dusk in noisy congregations, then silently settle at roost perches by nightfall. Just before sunrise, they reverse the process. The birds' raucous calls are hard to ignore. "But once the birds are quiet and they're done settling in to roost, you wouldn't know they're in the trees right over your head," says Kiacz. "People will roll right up to these birds and park their cars, or the pizza guy stops by, and they have no idea there are 200 birds right above their heads."

What do local residents think of their green-feathered neighbors? "Overall, there's definitely a positive view of these birds," says Kiacz. "The people who have them nesting and roosting in their yards have a really strong connection with them. Although sometimes you see people obviously just woken by the birds, who come out clapping their hands."

Origins of the Species (in Texas)

Many have assumed the South Texas Redcrown population originated solely from escaped cagebirds, but due to the area's close proximity to the native range in northeastern Mexico, there's been decades of debate about whether or not natural pioneers form part of the LRGV birds' legacy. All the sources interviewed for this article believe the population has included at least some Mexican birds that flew there themselves. Jesús Franco, an ABC conservation biologist and Assistant Coordinator of a binational bird conservation partnership called the Rio Grande Joint Venture (RGJV), lives in South Texas. He has studied the species both there and in Mexico, in submontane forest on the eastern flanks of the Sierra Madre Oriental mountain range.

Franco explains why he believes not all Redcrowns originate from introduced birds: "In Mexico, the Sierra Madre Oriental forms a natural barrier that can channel birds like the parrots, if they have to move, northward and close to the U.S. border. This can help one safely assume that

Map showing the four Lower Rio Grande Valley cities with Red-crowned Parrot roosts and their proximity to the northern portion of the species' Mexican range (shaded in gray). Monterrey, Mexico also has a population.

when the right conditions came together, it could have been natural dispersal that occurred along this corridor," he says. "But there's currently no way to prove the origins one way or another. At least, no one has done it yet."

Although not considered migratory, Red-crowned Parrots sometimes disperse, particularly outside the breeding season. This usually happens in times of severe winter weather or drought, when the birds may wander relatively long distances seeking sustenance. For their paper, Kiacz and his colleagues collected past records, writing: "In 1885, the *Galveston Daily News* reported that travelers were seeing flocks of parrots as close as 34 km (21 miles) south of Brownsville, Texas. Also in 1885, a south Texas newspaper reported flocks of parrots north of Brownsville and noted this as the first instance of these birds being seen in Texas." The once-abundant Redcrown is the species most likely seen.

Occasional LRGV reports of parrots followed, but the first nesting-season sightings there came in 1976, followed by confirmed nesting in Harlingen in 1985. By the early 1990s, the parrots nested in all four roost-site cities. Why the sudden uptick in birds in the late 20th century? Most experts believe that this jump was fueled by the cross-border bird trade. According to sources cited in Kiacz and his colleagues' paper, through the 1970s and early 1980s, the flow of legally and illegally transported birds into the U.S. is estimated to have included more than 30,000 Red-crowns — more than six times the current total estimate for the Mexican population — most coming through South Texas. Subsequent legislation banning wild-parrot imports, tighter import controls in general, and reduced wild Mexican parrot populations mean that few if any illegal birds arrive now.

But in their paper, Kiacz, Brightsmith, and their colleagues posit that the winter of 1983-1984 might also have sparked natural changes. Then, an historic freeze in the region likely forced Mexican birds outside their normal range, with some heading north. Meanwhile, the same freeze killed large numbers of palms in South Texas, leaving legions of dead, standing nest trees for arriving, cavity-nesting colonizers.

Long assumed by many to be nonnative and sedentary, U.S. Red-crowned Parrots sit in legal limbo, lacking federal protections other small bird populations garner under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The species was passed up for ESA listing

PARROTS of the USA

The popularity of parrots as pets has helped spawn naturalized populations, particularly in warmer parts of the country. Long-lived social creatures, parrots often prove challenging pets, requiring more space and care than many owners anticipate. Many escape captivity or are released deliberately.

About two dozen parrot species have U.S. breeding populations. The Monk Parakeet is considered a pest by electric utilities because, unlike most other parrots, this species builds bulky, communal nests that, when stuffed into electrical gear, pose the threat of power outages and fire. So far, the mostly urban naturalized parrots do not seem to compete heavily with native cavity-nesting species.

Here, eight of the most populous species are listed, as are two native species that have vanished — one extinct, the other extirpated (gone from the region).

Bird art © David Allen Sibley

in 2019. Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes the South Texas population as native, it declared listing it was not justified because the U.S. population was not declining and because the rate of habitat loss in Mexico has not been as high as in prior decades.

The state of Texas, meanwhile, now classifies the parrot as native, after reviewers considered historical parrot records in the LRGV, as well as the likely pathway Mexican birds take north when dispersing. Texas is also in the process of modifying its threatened species list, and likely will soon declare the Redcrown "threatened."

A source of local pride, the Red-crowned Parrot is protected in the four roost cities. Brownsville has even designated it the city's official bird, its likeness appearing on a prominent underpass and elsewhere. The parrots help generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in local income, drawing visiting birders who descend upon the region each year to attend several annual birding festivals or to chase "border birds" on their own.

Eyeing the Future

Among the goals of the South Texas study and roost counts was to determine the Redcrown population's size and health, and to start to understand how to secure its future in a rapidly developing region. The results affirmed that even with urban parrots, nothing can be taken for granted.

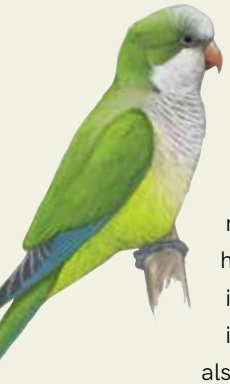
"The population really increased drastically for many years, but once we started doing really good counts on them, we see the population has leveled off the last three to four years," says Texas A&M's Brightsmith. "This begs the question: Why explode for so long and level off? Perhaps they are not necessarily in equilibrium with their habitat, but getting close? Is poaching enough of a problem in Texas to depress the population? Or are there nest-site limitations? We didn't think so, but if you throw out the other stuff, it's one thing that's left in the basket."

"I think the really big threat they face is the loss of nest sites," says Texas Parks and Wildlife's Henehan. "The parrots seem to prefer palm trees, but one of the things that happens to dead trees in urban areas is that they get cut down. They are considered ugly, or they might hurt someone or a building."

Conserving dead standing trees and making careful landscaping choices will be important components of any plan to help the parrots. "The plants that homeowners and municipal governments are putting on their lands — these are the future habitat for these birds," adds Brightsmith. Many Texas Redcrowns nest in cavities in introduced fan palms of the genus *Washingtonia*, a now-iconic regional tree accenting towns and farm-field borders. "If you don't provide these," says Brightsmith, "you're not providing future nest sites for the species."

Meanwhile, poachers target some of the remaining nest trees. During the study, Kiacz and others regularly noted telltale marks and cuttings in trees indicating the removal of young birds by people. Locally captured birds are sometimes seen being sold at local flea markets.

The parrots face other suburban threats as well. "I'm concerned about feral cats," Henehan says. "I've seen cats on rooftops trying to grab parrots. There are sponsored cat colonies in some communities, and feral cats are just



Monk Parakeet

Native to temperate southern South America, the Monk Parakeet is the country's most widely distributed, and likely most populous, naturalized parrot. More than half the U.S. population occurs in Florida, but the species and its bulky, communal nests are also found in several major Texas cities, New York City, Connecticut, California, Chicago, and elsewhere.

Nanday Parakeet

Populations of this South American species have steadily grown in Florida and California.

Red-crowned Parrot

Endemic to northeastern Mexico, this species now has urban breeding populations in South Texas, California, Florida, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, and Monterrey, Mexico. (Shown on p. 30.)

Green Parakeet

Native to Mexico and Central America, more than 1,000 birds also occur in a naturalized South Texas population that may include some natural stragglers.

ABC's Jesús Franco poses with a parrot petroglyph at the Uxmal ruins in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula. Photo by Salvador Narváez Torres

so widespread down here that I wouldn't be surprised if some part of their diet consists of parrots." In addition, the birds face competition for available nest sites from other birds, including the plentiful Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, the also-naturalized Green Parakeet, and, uncommonly, squirrels.

Although they face challenges, the South Texas Red-crowned Parrot population has many local fans and likely will persist, and hopefully grow once again, alongside the LRGV's expanding human population. But what about the core population in northeastern Mexico? Luckily, ABC and partners have been looking into that, studying how communities can embrace and protect these birds.

South of the Border

Concerned about the species' dwindling numbers and shrinking range in northeastern Mexico, researchers from ABC, the RGJV, and Mexican partner Terra Asesoría Ambiental studied the parrots in four municipalities in Tamaulipas state from 2017 to 2019. Their goals were to determine the species' status in a large portion of the Mexican range, to identify key parrot hotspots, and to provide a foundation for a recently drawn-up conservation plan, which has since been produced. During the study, researchers and local volunteers counted Red-crowned Parrots at 34 roost sites, tallying 1,789 birds in a four-county area.

"After two years of field monitoring, we now have a conservation plan and have identified the sites where we need to prioritize the work," says ABC's Franco. "But the thing you don't want to see is a conservation plan living on the bookshelf. Therefore, I'm super-excited to see ABC stepping up to the plate to provide the first round of funding to begin the implementation of the conservation action plan that we've made for the Red-crowned Parrot in Tamaulipas."

With an agreement recently signed with Mexican partner Pronatura Noreste, ABC plans to take action starting in 2021. The Tamaulipas State Commission for Parks and Biodiversity will also join in these efforts. Part of the plan is to work with residents in each community to train and certify them as environmental interpreters/guards. "The main objective is to strengthen local capacity to conduct ecotourism and birding activities, as well as to assist local enforcement agencies by conducting monitoring and surveillance activities around nesting areas," says Franco.

To help support this project, ABC and Pronatura Noreste are partnering with Defenders of Wildlife Mexico to produce educational posters and bird identification pamphlets promoting birdwatching as an alternative source of income and raising awareness of wildlife trafficking's negative impacts. The partners are also exploring other economic opportunities that will benefit

PARROTS of the USA

Rosy-faced Lovebird

Roughly the length of a Song Sparrow, this small southern African parrot has a firm foothold in Phoenix, Arizona, where a half-day census in 2010 tallied more than 900 birds.

White-winged Parakeet

This small, taper-tailed South American species nests in small populations in South Florida and California.

Rose-ringed Parakeet

Small populations of this Asian species breed in southern California and Florida; thousands nest in Hawai'i. The world's most widely distributed naturalized parrot, the Rose-ringed also breeds in at least ten European nations, among others.

Bird art © David Allen Sibley

Mostly a bird of natural habitats in northern Mexico, the Red-crowned Parrot is very much a bird of the burbs in the U.S. Photo by Simon Kiacz

residents, such as finding new ways to market local crafts and food to visitors.

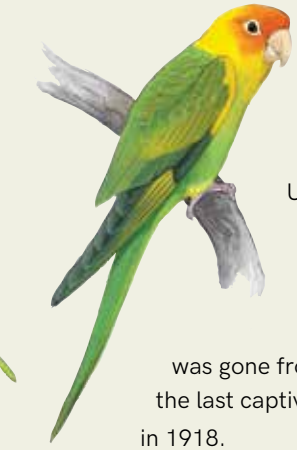
While most of Mexico's Redcrowns keep to wild areas, there are noteworthy exceptions. The large city of Monterrey has a significant population. And during their study in the heart of the bird's Mexican range, Franco and his colleagues tallied a stunning 72 Red-crowned Parrot nests in Hidalgo, a small community of 10,000 people not far from the large city of Ciudad Victoria. "These birds often live in native habitat close to urban areas," Franco says, "but in a square in a tiny, itty bitty town, we recorded the highest nesting density we know of."

Franco believes one reason the birds persist there is that the local people are watching out for them, discouraging poachers who might venture in from out of town. This raises the question: What if tomorrow, people stopped capturing or otherwise harassing wild, endangered parrots? "This is a really good example," says Franco, "of what these birds can do when they find what they need and are basically left alone."

Working together in two countries, conservationists hope this kind of parrot-friendly coexistence will become more commonplace. If successful, efforts to save the Red-crowned Parrot will not only ensure that these beloved birds remain — but also inspire other efforts to save many other declining parrots through a blend of careful study, planning, and local buy-in.

ABC would like to thank the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Kathleen Burger and Glen Gerada for their generous support.

Howard Youth is ABC's Senior Writer/Editor.



Carolina Parakeet

Once native to the southeastern United States, this large parakeet's extinction followed widespread habitat loss and shooting. The bird was gone from the wild by 1905; the last captive bird died in a zoo in 1918.

Yellow-chevroned Parakeet

Small populations of this South American bird nest in lushly landscaped South Florida urban areas, and also in California.

Thick-billed Parrot

This Endangered bird of mountainous pine forest in western Mexico used to occur in Arizona, but has not been seen there since 1938. A reintroduction program from 1986-1993 was unsuccessful.

MOSQUITO BIRTH CONTROL

and the Fight to Save Hawaiian Honeycreepers

In this Q&A, ABC's Hawai'i Program Director Chris Farmer explains why Hawaiian honeycreepers are in such dire straits, and how ABC and partners' urgent initiative aims to save them using Wolbachia *— a tested tool in the fight to protect human health.*

Why is Hawai'i sometimes called "the bird extinction capital of the world"?

CF: Because about 15 percent of the world's bird extinctions have occurred here over the last 700 years. We have lost about 67 percent of all Hawaiian birds since humans arrived. Of the remaining native bird species, 78 percent are federally listed — including 11 species that have not been detected in decades and are likely already extinct. The extinction threat in Hawai'i is orders of magnitude more severe than for imperiled mainland birds. To give you an idea, there are 11 endangered songbird species here that have a combined population of approximately 10,000 birds, far less than the estimated population of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker of the southeastern U.S.

How many Hawaiian honeycreepers remain and why are they unique?

CF: Hawai'i is one of the world's most isolated island chains. The distance, spectacular geography, and elevational range here provided an abundance of ecological niches into which newly arrived birds could expand. The

'I'iwi by USFWS, Pacific Region

endemic Hawaiian honeycreepers are world renowned for their incredible array of bill morphology and plumages. These unique birds arose from a Eurasian rosefinch species that arrived around 5.7 million years ago — before the formation of O'ahu or any of the younger islands. Detecting avian fossils and pre-fossils in highly active volcanic islands is difficult, but the current estimate is that there were at least 59 different honeycreeper species — of which only 17 survive today.

Why are mosquitoes and the diseases they carry so lethal to Hawaiian honeycreepers?

CF: Because Hawai'i is so distant from the continents, many creatures and pathogens never arrived here, including mosquitoes and avian malaria. Because the birds had millions of years without exposure to the disease, they lost whatever immunity they had by the time humans brought mosquitoes and malaria to the islands. Some honeycreepers, like 'I'iwi, are highly susceptible: One bite from an infected mosquito can cause death. The situation is similar for the Kiwikiu (Maui Parrotbill) that were translocated last year and, sadly, died from avian malaria.

How does climate change contribute to the rapid decline in remaining Hawaiian honeycreepers?

CF: Mosquitoes and the avian malaria parasite need warm temperatures to reproduce, so they were historically limited to the warmer, low elevations of Hawai'i. The remaining native bird species mostly survive above this "mosquito zone," in high-elevation forests. However, as temperatures warm, the mosquitoes are able to move up the mountain; the malaria parasite is also able to survive at these elevations, leading to increased disease transmission in previously safe habitats. Increased mosquito density is already being seen on Kaua'i and Maui, and endemic honeycreepers on both islands are rapidly declining.

What are ABC and its partners doing to save Hawaiian honeycreepers?

CF: The avian disease/mosquito/native bird relationship has been known since the late 1960s, but there were no landscape-scale solutions possible until recently.

Building upon tremendous research and applications aimed at protecting human health, ABC and our local partners have been working on a method to control mosquito populations across thousands of acres to save the birds from extinction. We are mobilizing to use *Wolbachia*, common bacteria already present in Hawai'i (and present in over 60 percent of all insects). Male mosquitoes raised in labs from eggs injected with a fertility-altering *Wolbachia* strain will be released into the wild. Using this strategy, it is possible to prevent the mosquitoes from reproducing: These males do not bite people, but they effectively find and mate with wild, fertile females. Resulting eggs do not hatch. This method is being used in 14 countries, including the United States, to control human diseases.

How is this mosquito-control effort different from those using genetically modified mosquitoes?

CF: There is an immense amount of research on mosquitoes and disease for human health, including many different types of modifications of the mosquito's genome. All of these methods modify the mosquitoes' actual DNA, and the changes can be passed on to their offspring, to varying degrees. The *Wolbachia* method does not alter the mosquito's genome. Using *Wolbachia* is not self-sustaining, and cannot be passed on to future generations. There will need to be continued releases into the habitat to protect Hawai'i's birds. Although this will increase the costs, it gives the scientists more control over the program, and if this method knocks back mosquito populations, it will save many species from extinction.

What's next?

CF: ABC and our partners are collecting data on mosquito abundance, distribution, and movement, and will be using this to construct a successful implementation strategy. We have also begun community engagement and outreach, because having local support is necessary for any success. The group is also working to develop and test the efficacy of the *Wolbachia* mosquitoes to prevent successful mosquito breeding. These results will inform the regulatory process, which includes securing all the required state and federal permits for the project.

Learn more: bit.ly/HawaiiMosquitoes

This project is generously supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Science Applications Program and Recovery Implementation Funds; The Dorrance Family Foundation; Weissman Family Foundation; Atherton Family Foundation; and Kōaniani Fund of the Hawai'i Community Foundation.

Chris Farmer is ABC's Hawai'i Program Director.

HOME EDITION

By Daniel J. Lebbin, ABC Vice President of Threatened Species

In our second "ABC Birding" installment, instead of taking readers to a birding site benefiting from ABC and partners' conservation efforts, we journey just out the door to highlight the experience of birding from home during a global pandemic, using my yard as an example.

Lay of the Land: Our home was built in the 1950s and sits on a third-of-an-acre of land in suburban Northern Virginia. My spouse and I moved here in 2009 and now have two young children. From our house, I can hear traffic from major commuting roads, including I-66. The front yard is dominated by a pesticide-free lawn, old maple trees, a Flowering Dogwood and an Eastern Redcedar. The back and side yards feature taller trees mainly along the property's edges, including Black Cherry, Black Walnut, and a Scarlet Oak. An emergent snag visible just outside the yard offers perches for woodpeckers and other birds. Undergrowth includes Sassafras, Eastern Redbud, Arrowwood Viburnum, Elderberry, and Spicebush. A bird bath and a seed feeder stocked with sunflower chips is visible from our inside dining area.

Focal birds: We have a typical assortment of backyard residents for eastern North America, including the Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Tufted Titmouse. All of these visit the feeding station. The American Goldfinch is another colorful yard star, present year-round, with males in bright canary-yellow plumage from roughly March to October. Summer breeders include the Gray Catbird, and winter brings White-throated Sparrows. We have a nice variety of woodpeckers year-round, including the Red-bellied, Downy, and, less frequently, the Hairy Woodpecker, as well as the Northern Flicker. The Pileated Woodpecker is largely absent, due to insufficient forest. The yard list really builds when migratory birds pass through in spring and fall. Although I might normally see 15 to 20 species in a single day, there were a couple of epic migration days this past spring when I observed more than 40 species. This year, I have heard or seen more than 100 species from our property, including eight new yard birds, such as the Bobolink and Olive-sided Flycatcher — two declining species that ABC works to save with partners across the Americas.

Other wildlife: A Red Fox or two patrols the neighborhood and our yard, keeping the Eastern Cottontails scarce. The Eastern Gray Squirrel is ubiquitous. Other mammals include the Eastern Chipmunk, White-tailed Deer, Common Raccoon, and Virginia Opossum. This year, I started using iNaturalist to identify insects, including large beautiful moths (such as the Imperial and Polyphemus), the Red-headed Bush Cricket, and black-and-orange insects like the Large Milkweed Bug that favor a small patch of milkweed we planted.

When to visit: Our yard provides year-round interest, and no day is the same as the next. Yard birding

ABOVE: The author's yard. RIGHT: An American Goldfinch feeds on Black-eyed Susan seeds by the driveway, and a Northern Cardinal samples the Winterberry fruit out the back window. Photos by Daniel J. Lebbin

regularly lets you learn the local birds and their habits, and provides more chances to find something unusual. Even just a few minutes can be productive. Morning and evening are the most active times. Evening sky-watching can reveal birds flying high overhead to roosting sites — including waterbirds like Great Blue Herons — that are not likely to land in or near our yard. Midday can be eventful during hawk migration, after the ground warms and thermals rise.

Conservation Activities: Indoors, the house now hosts our home office, where I coordinate various ABC bird conservation activities from Hawai'i to Brazil, and my spouse also works in conservation in Latin America, with both of us raising two wildlife-aware elementary school students. Outdoors, we have planted native plants that support wild birds and insects, and beautify our yard. Arrowwood Viburnum produces fruits gobbled up by the Gray Catbirds, cover for passage migrants like the Common Yellowthroat, and lacey white flowers attractive to bees. Trumpet (or Coral) Honeysuckle and Cardinal Flower (both native), and a (nonnative) Silktree attract Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in late summer. American Goldfinches feed on the seeds of Black-eyed Susans and Purple Coneflowers, which we leave up through the winter, even after the plants have died back. We also leave leaf-litter in the garden beds and in the dog pen; this provides substrate for foraging Brown Thrashers and occasionally Fox Sparrows that pass through on migration. We avoid using pesticides, and Northern Flickers love foraging for ants and other invertebrates on our lawn. We don't have cats (I am allergic), but our neighbors who do, keep theirs indoors. Neighborhood dogs and foxes keep other free-roaming cats away most of the time.

Directions: Whether you have your own yard or an apartment balcony, look out the window, and step outside if or when you can. I routinely upload my observations to eBird, so they can contribute to science and monitoring initiatives at larger scales, including breeding observations for the recent Breeding Bird Atlas project in Virginia. Modern tools available on your smart phone like eBird, Merlin, BirdCast, iNaturalist, and many others can help you get the most out of your nature observations or target key moments in the day or year to watch for birds. I use BirdCast to alert me to large nocturnal migration events in my region, and this helps decide when to focus on morning birding during migration (or maybe stay in bed). It is also helpful for deciding when to go out in the middle of the night to listen for thrushes and other nocturnal migrants flying overhead. Between midnight and 1 a.m. on May 25 this past spring, I heard more than 100 Swainson's Thrushes call overhead in an hour, plus five Veery, and one Gray-cheeked Thrush.

Monitoring local birding channels (GroupMe texts, birding listservs, eBird alerts) provides real-time tips. For example, this spring, Washington, D.C., birders were seeing Common Nighthawks overhead one evening, indicating a movement of this species. When I saw texts about this, I went outside and soon found my own nighthawk flying overhead after a few minutes. Usually, I may see only one or two each year from my yard. I got to see several flyover Common Loons one morning using this same method, and this species was new for the yard. It can also be helpful to join a group (like the DMV Yard/Patch Birders and Naturalists group on Facebook), start a friendly competition with neighbors or colleagues to list yard birds, and participate in a local Breeding Bird Atlas project. This might help motivate, inspire, and strengthen connections while being isolated at home during the pandemic.

For more information, see:

eBird: **ebird.org**

Merlin: **merlin.allaboutbirds.org**

BirdCast: **birdcast.info**

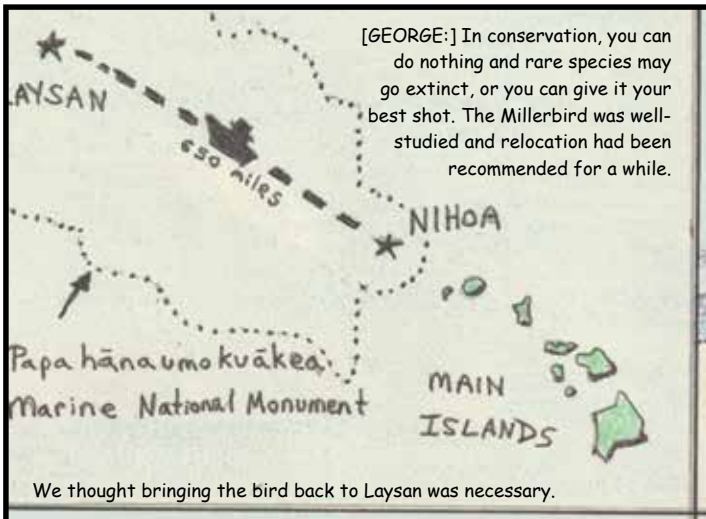
iNaturalist: **inaturalist.org**

DMV Yard/Patch Birders and Naturalists: **www.facebook.com/groups/852736271892264/**

BIRD HEROES: CHRIS FARMER GEORGE WALLACE

Known from just two far-flung Hawaiian islands, the Endangered Millerbird derived from a Pacific Island reed-warbler ancestor that arrived around 2.3 million years ago. Starting in the 1890s, however, human activities and introduced rabbits destroyed all the habitats on Laysan Island, resulting in extinction of the Laysan Millerbird subspecies and other species. Later, invasive plants further transformed the island. That left the island of Nihoa as the Millerbird's last stand.

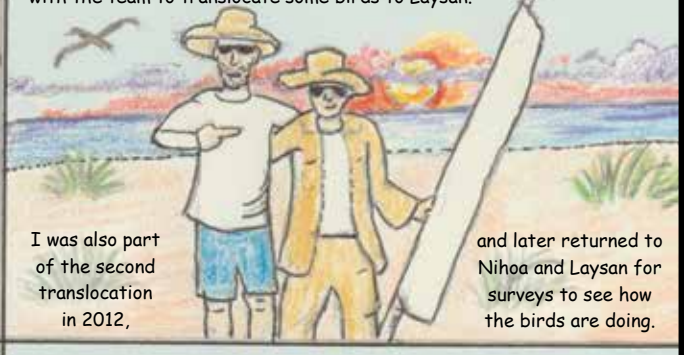
Following many years of habitat restoration by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, invasive species have been largely controlled on Laysan, which paved the way for the Millerbird's reintroduction there. Working with federal, state, and nonprofit colleagues, ABC biologists Chris Farmer and George Wallace helped capture, translocate, and release Millerbirds from the Nihoa population to Laysan. This is Chris and George's story, in their own words.



[GEORGE:] In conservation, you can do nothing and rare species may go extinct, or you can give it your best shot. The Millerbird was well-studied and relocation had been recommended for a while.

We thought bringing the bird back to Laysan was necessary.

[CHRIS:] ABC became involved in this project in 2010, building on the work of many others. Conducting a successful translocation required multiple trips over multiple years, including prep work, moving the birds, then doing post-release monitoring. In 2010, we captured Millerbirds in mistnets on Nihoa and tested holding cages and diet. In 2011, we worked with the team to translocate some birds to Laysan.



I was also part of the second translocation in 2012,

and later returned to Nihoa and Laysan for surveys to see how the birds are doing.

[GEORGE:] During the first translocation, we were really concerned about sea conditions between Nihoa and Laysan and how the birds would fare. To get to Laysan, it is nearly 650 miles on a slow boat from Nihoa.

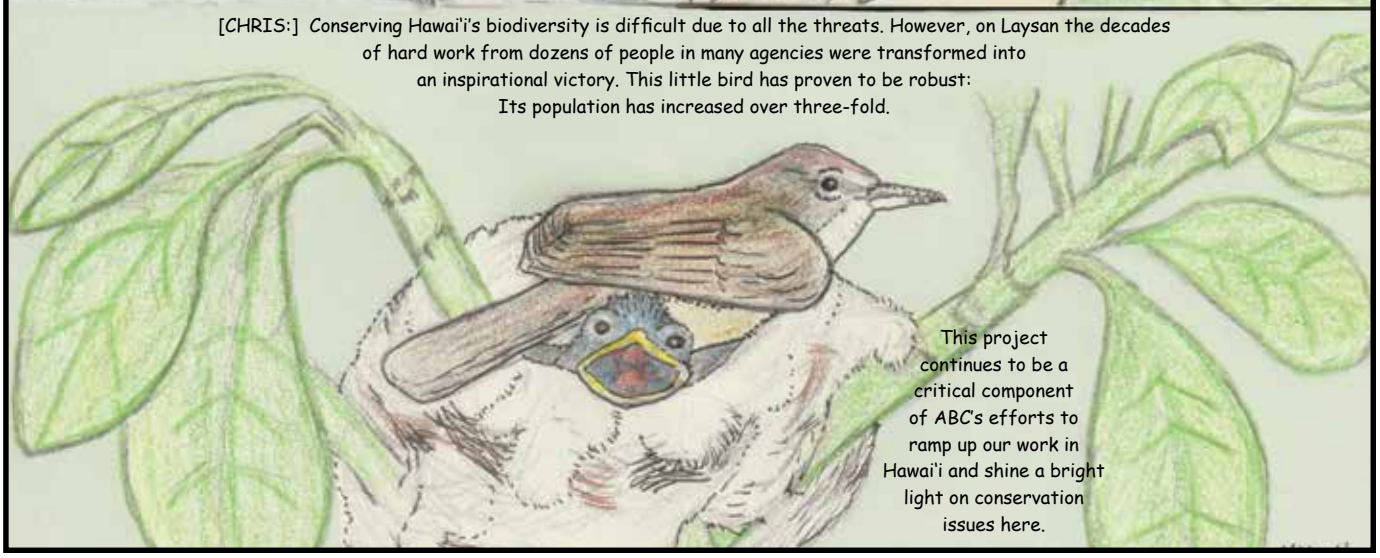
Our trip was mirror-calm the whole way. Truly amazing.

Then we landed on the island by Zodiac.

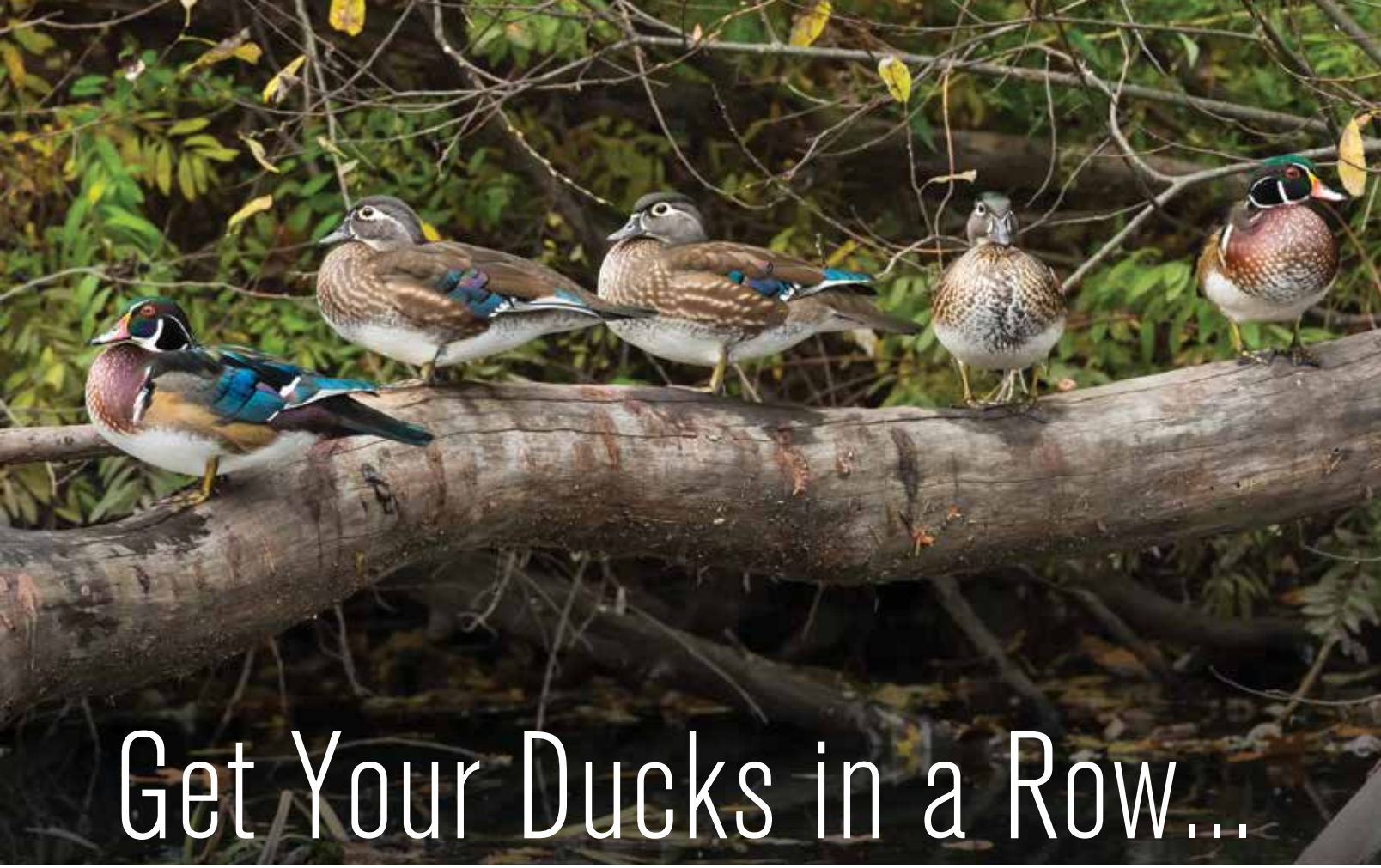
[CHRIS:] The two translocations couldn't have gone better. The 50 birds we released did great on Laysan in a massive thicket of naupaka, a thick-leafed, ground-hugging plant. They loved it — although it made it hard to find them later! We had constructed supplemental feeding stations, but the Millerbirds had no trouble finding food in their new homes.

They were even snapping flies off our hands as we held the birds, preparing them for release.

[CHRIS:] Conserving Hawai'i's biodiversity is difficult due to all the threats. However, on Laysan the decades of hard work from dozens of people in many agencies were transformed into an inspirational victory. This little bird has proven to be robust: Its population has increased over three-fold.



This project continues to be a critical component of ABC's efforts to ramp up our work in Hawai'i and shine a bright light on conservation issues here.



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We have hope for the future of birds in the Americas, thanks in part to ABC's Legacy Circle — a special group of our supporters who have made a bequest from their estate to ABC. Collectively, these individuals share a vision of a better future for birds, their habitats, and the environment as a whole, and have made a personal commitment to support ABC's bird conservation efforts for years to come.

Wood Duck drake by clarst5, Shutterstock

Will you please join with them by including ABC in your estate plans?

If you are interested in more information about how to leave a legacy of bird conservation, or if you have already remembered ABC in your will, or as a beneficiary of a trust, IRA, or insurance plan, please contact Jack Morrison, ABC Director of Major Gifts and Planned Giving, at **jmorrison@abcbirds.org** or **540–840–7893.**

TOP: Wood Ducks by Paul Reeves Photography, Shutterstock

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Although listed as globally Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Red-crowned Parrot is only weakly protected in its U.S. populations. Photo by Greg Homel, Natural Elements Productions