

BRING BIRDS BACK



Bird Conservation Policy Options for
Congress and the Administration



The landmark study, “Decline of the North American Avifauna,” published in 2019 in the journal *Science*, found that bird populations have declined by close to 3 billion birds since 1970, representing a 29% overall decline in 50 years (Rosenberg et al. 2019). There are many historical and current causes of declining bird populations, including unregulated market hunting, habitat loss, direct mortality due to industrial hazards, predation by cats, by-catch in long-line and gillnet fisheries, building collisions, and invasive species (e.g., Trail 2006, Loss et al. 2013). In addition to these on-going threats, the harmful effects of climate change are increasingly manifest (e.g., Moller et al. 2010), and a recent Audubon report found that two-thirds of North America’s birds are gravely threatened by climate change (Wilsey et al. 2019).

There is urgent need to address these and other threats so as to “avert continued biodiversity loss and potential collapse of the continental avifauna” (Rosenberg et al. 2019). Fortunately, the remarkable recovery of waterfowl populations, sustained now for decades, to say nothing of the endangered bird species returned from the brink of extinction, demonstrate that coordinated, sustained conservation action works.

Just as there is no single cause of declining migratory bird populations, there is no single policy solution, program or approach that will suffice. Instead we need a suite of actions that foster on-the-ground protection, mitigation, and restoration of bird populations and the habitats they need to thrive. These efforts must rest on a strong foundation of legal authority, research and monitoring, planning, cooperation and coordination, and funding. In the end, success requires that state, regional, national and international bird conservation interests work together as partners, with adequate resources, to advance a shared vision and priorities for migratory bird conservation (NABCI 2018).

Accordingly, Audubon and ABC have identified the following policy options to be considered by Congress and the Administration in 2021 and beyond. We welcome comments and suggestions on these ideas and we invite other organizations to endorse these concepts in principle, recognizing that these are not detailed proposals. Note that the options are grouped under functional headings, but the categories overlap and some options fit more than one category. These ideas are not presented in order of priority.



Planning, Research and Evaluation

- ◆ Reauthorize and amend the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act to provide additional direction for migratory bird conservation:
 - Support national, regional, and flyway bird conservation planning and implementation
 - Revitalize and enhance the Migratory Bird Data Center to support integrated assessments of bird populations by federal, state, and private partners
 - Identify and report to Congress on lands and waters needed to conserve migratory birds, including in the Western Hemisphere and the East Asian-Australasian and Oceania flyways

- Evaluate implementation of international authorities and programs and develop a federal strategy and recommendations for international migratory bird conservation

Engagement and Partnerships

- ◆ Support Migratory Bird Joint Ventures and enhance project delivery and the ability to address the needs of all birds and all habitats:
 - Increase annual funding to assure base staffing and support are ample and equitable for all Joint Ventures

- ◆ Support the Urban Bird Treaty Program and authorize increased funding:
 - Increase staff capacity and funding for partner grants
- ◆ Support voluntary, community-based conservation on private working lands across the country in cooperation with Joint Ventures and other partners:
 - Increase funding for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Addressing Threats

- ◆ Reaffirm that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act covers incidental taking, and establish a permit program to apply available best management practices that reduce bird mortality:
 - Pass the Migratory Bird Protection Act and develop a permitting rule through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- ◆ Facilitate and demonstrate bird-friendly practices in the construction of federal buildings:
 - Pass the Bird-Safe Buildings Act

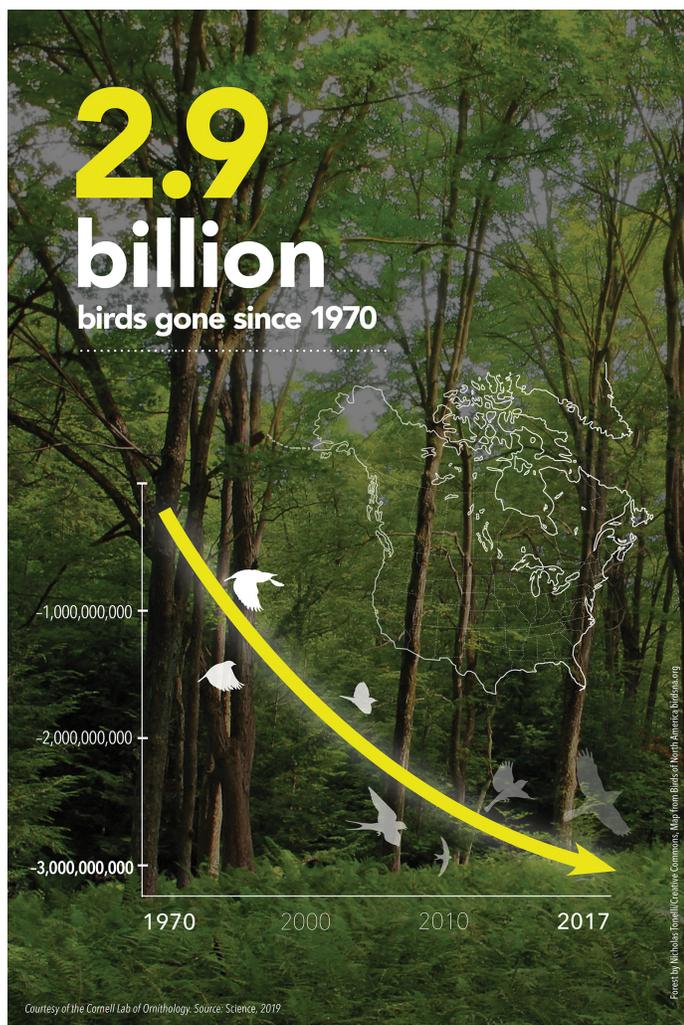
- ◆ Enhance and demonstrate U.S. leadership in reducing fisheries bycatch of marine birds:
 - Ratify and enact implementing legislation for the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels
- ◆ Ensure there are coordinated and consistent approaches toward federal planning and actions that impact migratory birds:
 - Revitalize Executive Order 13186 on the Responsibilities to Protect Migratory Birds
 - Require consideration of climate change in federal planning related to birds

Policy and Funding

- ◆ Elevate the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) so that it can help address the needs of these declining species :
 - Increase funding for grants
 - Change the federal to private matching ratio from 1:3 to 1:1 to facilitate greater participation, particularly among Central and South American and Caribbean conservation groups
- ◆ Pass the Recovering America's Wildlife Act to boost conservation of migratory birds and other wildlife by state wildlife agencies:
 - Include mandatory spending outside of the annual appropriations cycle
- ◆ Establish a new "Songbird Stamp" as a sister program for the federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (aka Duck Stamp) to raise funds for bird conservation:
 - Use net revenue to support conservation efforts such as NMBCA grants or other relevant programs

Land and Water Conservation

- ◆ Develop new landscape-scale habitat initiatives on par with NAWCA:
 - Conserving North American grasslands is a current priority, and other initiatives could include a focus on ecosystems such as the sage-steppe, saline lakes, and old-growth forests in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest



There is an urgent need to address threats to avert continued biodiversity loss and potential collapse of the continental avifauna.

Literature Cited

- Loss SR, Will T, Marra PP. 2013a. Estimates of bird collision mortality at wind farms in the contiguous United States. *Biol. Cons.* 168:201–9.
- Moller, A.P., W. Fieldler and P. Berthold (eds.). (2010) *The Effects of Climate Change on Birds*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). (2018) *National Bird Conservation Priorities*. Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Washington, DC. (<https://nabci-us.org/>)
- Rosenberg, K. V., A. M. Dokter, P. J. Blancher, J. R. Sauer, A. C. Smith, P. A. Smith, J. C. Stanton, A. Panjabi, L. Helft, M. Parr, and P. P. Marra. 2019. Decline of the North American avifauna. *Science* 366:120-124.
- Trail, P.W. 2006. Avian mortality at oil pits in the United States: a review of the problem and efforts for its solution. *Environ. Manage.* 38:532-44.
- Wilsey, C, B Bateman, L Taylor, JX Wu, G LeBaron, R Shepherd, C Koseff, S Friedman, R Stone. 2019. *Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink*. National Audubon Society: New York. <https://www.audubon.org/sites/default/files/climatereport-2019-english-lowres.pdf>

