

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, 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 2022 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 the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act to provide additional direction for migratory bird conservation:
 - Identify and report to Congress on lands and waters needed to conserve migratory birds
 - Support national, regional, and flyway conservation planning and implementation
 - Revitalize the Migratory Bird Data Center to support assessments of bird populations by federal, state, and private partners

- Evaluate 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 basestaffing and support are ample and equitable for all Joint Ventures

- ◆ Support the Urban Bird Treaty Program and authorize increased 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 by increasing funding for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Addressing Threats

- ◆ Reaffirm that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects against incidental taking, and establish a permit program to apply available best management practices that reduce bird mortality:
 - Pass the Migratory Bird Protection Act that calls for a MBTA 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 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:
- ◆ Establish a new "Songbird 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

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Eastern Meadowlark by Christopher Becerra, Shutterstock

Organizational Endorsers:

Aiken Audubon
Alberta Wilderness Association
Altacal Audubon Society
American Bird Conservatory
Art Odyssey
Asociacion Ecosistemas Andinos - ECOAN
Association of Massachusetts Bird Clubs (22 clubs)
Audubon Naturalist Society
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Audubon Society
Audubon Society of Northern Virginia
Baird Creek Preservation Foundation
Bergen County Audubon Society
Bexar Audubon Society
Birds Caribbean
Black Hills Audubon Society
Blue Mountain Audubon Society
Blue Ridge Audubon Chapter
Bozeman Birders
Brevard Zoo
Brookline Bird Club
Buffalo Audubon Society
Burroughs Audubon Nature Club
Cape Fear Audubon Society
Chautauqua-Conewango Consortium
Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
Columbus Audubon Society
Conservation Northwest



Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Cottage Codgers
Cumberland-Harpeth Audubon Society
Dakubetede Environmental Education Programs
Delaware Audubon
Delaware Valley Ornithological Club
Denver Audubon
Environmental Protection Information Center
Erie Shores Birding Association
FLAP Canada
Friends of MidColumbia National Wildlife Refuges
Friends of the Atlantic Flyway
Friends of the San Pedro River Inc.
Gallatin Wildlife Association

Genesee Valley Audubon Society	Northwest Arkansas Audubon Society
Georgia Audubon	Nova Purple Martin Initiative
Grand Valley Audubon Society	Peoria Audubon Society
Great Old Broads for Wilderness	Prairie Hills Audubon Society of Western South Dakota
Greater Akron Audubon Society	Presque Isle Audubon Society
Hampshire Bird Club	Prince George's Audubon Society
Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association	Quittapahilla Audubon Society
Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester	Rachel Carson Council
Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon Society	Retired Backyard Birders Club
International Bird Rescue	Robeson Township Environmental Advisory Council
Juniata Valley Audubon Society	Rockbridge Bird Club
Kauai Albatross Network	Rutland County Audubon Society
Kirkland Bird Club	Safe Skies Maryland
Kitsap Audubon Society	San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
Klamath Forest Alliance	San Diego Audubon Society
Lane County Audubon Society	Save the Dells
Los Angeles Audubon Society	Saw Mill River Audubon
Los Padres ForestWatch	Sea and Sage Audubon Society
Louisiana Wildlife Federation	Seminole Audubon Society
Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society	South Shore Audubon Society
Madison Audubon Society	South Shore Bird Club
Maryland Ornithological Society	Southern Maryland Audubon Society
Mattawoman Watershed Society	Stanislaus Audubon Society
Menunkatuck Audubon Society	Tennessee Native Plant Society
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter	Tennessee Naturalist Program
Missouri River Bird Observatory	The Institute for Bird Populations
Monterey TN garden club	The Jijuktu'kwejk Watershed Alliance
Mountaineer Audubon Chapter	The Tareen Filgas Foundation
Mt. Diablo Audubon Society	The Urban Wildlands Group
Natural Resources Club at Central Lakes College	Valley Forge Audubon Society
Nebraska Wildlife Federation	Vancouver Audubon Society
New York City Audubon	Wake Audubon Society
New Jersey Audubon	Weminuche Audubon Society
North Shore Audubon Society	West Pasco Audubon Society
Northeast PA Audubon Society	Wild Farm Alliance
Northeastern Wisconsin Audubon Society	Wildcare Eastern Sierra
Northern Arizona Audubon Society	WildCare of Western New York
Northern Catskills Audubon Society	Wisconsin Society for Ornithology
Northern New York Audubon Society	Wyncote Audubon Society