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News Release



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Study Shows Widespread Declines in Bird Populations, Highlights Role of Partnerships in Conservation

The State of Birds Report: A Preamble for the Pacific Northwest and the Pacific Islands

The United States is blessed with diverse landscapes, a wealth of natural resources, and spectacular wildlife, including more than 800 bird species. Wildlife watching generates \$122 billion in economic output annually, and one in every three American adults is a bird watcher.

Birds are bellwethers of our natural and cultural health as a nation— they are indicators of the integrity of the environments that provide us with clean air and water, fertile soils, abundant wildlife, and the natural resources on which our economy depends.

The State of the Birds is an unprecedented report based on 40 years of data analyzed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, state government wildlife agencies and nongovernmental organizations. It contains both troubling messages about our environment, but also shares hope that through strategic land management and conservation action, declines of birds can be reversed.

Highlighted in the report are conservation issues and concerns for several key species and habitats in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Region, especially birds in Hawaii and the northwestern Hawaiian Island chain, birds of Pacific Northwest forests, shrub-steppe (aridlands) and grassland birds, and birds along our coasts.

Threatened by habitat destruction, invasive species and disease, nearly all native Hawaiian bird species are in danger of extinction if urgent conservation measures are not implemented. At least 39 percent of U.S. bird species restricted to ocean habitats are declining and almost half are of conservation concern, indicating deteriorating ocean conditions. Half of all coastally migrating shorebirds have declined, indicating stress in coastal habitats besieged by development, disturbance and dwindling food supplies. In arid lands across the West, birds show a 30 percent decline over the past 40 years. Regionally, in the Pacific Northwest, birds dependent on sagebrush face serious habitat degradation from development, invasive species and uncertain effects from climate change. Birds in western forests show a slight declining trend, but good monitoring data are lacking for 40% of the species, and Pacific Northwest forest birds requiring mature or old forests continue to show declines.

In nearly every habitat, however, there is some good news. In Hawaii, we know that fencing – correctly built and systematically monitored – will exclude ungulates from native forests, result in habitat restoration and can stabilize or reverse population declines of native forest birds, as has occurred at Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge. Predator removal from islands yields quick positive results for nesting seabirds, as at Midway Atoll. In Pacific Northwest forests, managers are working to restore natural fire regimes, protect riparian areas and manage grazing to benefit many forest birds. Shrub-steppe habitats are increasingly the focus of landscape planning among agencies and partners concerned with the long-term health of birds that depend on it. In our oceans, management policies and sustainable fishing regulations are essential to insure ocean health. Regulations and voluntary measures to minimize by-catch have resulted in significant decreases in seabird mortality, and the four newly created Marine National Monuments should improve the health of our oceans and seabirds.

See National News Release Below

For Release on March 19, 2009

Secretary Salazar Releases Study Showing Widespread Declines *In Bird Populations, Highlights Role of Partnerships in Conservation*

Washington, D.C. – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today released the first ever comprehensive report on bird populations in the United States, showing that nearly a third of the nation’s 800 bird species are endangered, threatened or in significant decline due to habitat loss, invasive species, and other threats.

At the same time, the report highlights examples, including many species of waterfowl, where habitat restoration and conservation have reversed previous declines, offering hope that it is not too late to take action to save declining populations.

“Just as they were when Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* nearly 50 years ago, birds today are a bellwether of the health of land, water and ecosystems,” Salazar said. “From shorebirds in New England to warblers in Michigan to songbirds in Hawaii, we are seeing disturbing downward population trends that should set off environmental alarm bells. We must work together now to ensure we never hear the deafening silence in our forests, fields and backyards that Rachel Carson warned us about.”

The report, *The U.S. State of the Birds*, synthesizes data from three long-running bird censuses conducted by thousands of citizen scientists and professional biologists.

In particular, it calls attention to the crisis in Hawaii, where more birds are in danger of extinction than anywhere else in the United States. In addition, the report documents a 40 percent decline in grassland birds over the past 40 years, a 30 percent decline in birds of arid-lands, and high concern for many coastal shorebirds. Furthermore, 39 percent of species

dependent on U.S. oceans have declined.

However, the report also reveals convincing evidence that birds can respond quickly and positively to conservation action. The data shows dramatic increases in many wetland birds such as pelicans, herons, egrets, osprey, and ducks, a testament to numerous cooperative conservation partnerships that have resulted in protection, enhancement and management of more than 30 million wetland acres.

“These results emphasize that investment in wetlands conservation has paid huge dividends,” said Kenneth Rosenberg, director of Conservation Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “Now we need to invest similarly in other neglected habitats where birds are undergoing the steepest declines.”

“Habitats such as those in Hawaii are on the verge of losing entire suites of unique bird species,” said Dr. David Pashley, American Bird Conservancy’s Vice President for Conservation Programs. “In addition to habitat loss, birds also face many other man-made threats such as pesticides, predation by cats, and collisions with windows, towers and buildings. By solving these challenges we can preserve a growing economic engine – the popular pastime of birdwatching that involves millions of Americans – and improve our quality of life.”

“While some bird species are holding their own, many once common species are declining sharply in population. Habitat availability and quality is the key to healthy, thriving bird populations,” said Dave Mehlman of The Nature Conservancy.

Surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey, including the annual Breeding Bird Survey, combined with data gathered through volunteer citizen science program such as the National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Count, show once abundant birds such as the northern bobwhite and marbled murrelet are declining significantly. The possibility of extinction also remains a cold reality for many endangered birds.

“Citizen science plays a critical role in monitoring and understanding the threats to these birds and their habitats, and only citizen involvement can help address them,” said National Audubon Society’s Bird Conservation Director, Greg Butcher. “Conservation action can only make a real difference when concerned people support the kind of vital habitat restoration and protection measures this report explores.”

Birds are beautiful, as well as economically important and a priceless part of America's natural heritage. Birds are also highly sensitive to environmental pollution and climate change, making them critical indicators of the health of the environment on which we all depend.

The United States is home to a tremendous diversity of native birds, with more than 800 species inhabiting terrestrial, coastal, and ocean habitats, including Hawaii. Among these species, 67 are Federally-listed as endangered or threatened. In addition, more than 184 species are designated as species of conservation concern due to a small distribution, high-level of threat threats, or declining populations.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service coordinated creation of the new report as part of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative, which includes partners from American Bird Conservancy, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Klamath Bird Observatory, National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy and the U.S.

Geological Survey.

The report is available at <http://www.stateofthebirds.org>.

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