

OVERVIEW

UPDATE

THE CALIFORNIA GNATCATCHER: TO BE OR NOT TO BE ENDANGERED

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service believes the California Gnatcatcher, a diminutive songbird, should be designated as an endangered species. Large developers (including the Irvine, Baldwin and Santa Margarita companies), and their political allies however, are lobbying against this effort.

The birds' habitat along the California coast, sagebrush and low scrub, is continuously being decimated for housing tracts. If this continues, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the coastal California Gnatcatcher faces possible extinction. The federal proposal to list the bird as endangered begins a one-year review period after which, conservationists believe, the bird will indeed be listed as endangered and require drastic measures to save it.

Developers have reportedly spent over \$1

million dollars on studies which they claim refute the federal and state's scientific evidence that the bird is in danger. They contend that by granting the bird endangered species status, construction will be stalled, jobs will be lost and economic disaster will follow.

If the species, with a total population estimated at fewer than 2000 pairs, is listed as endangered the action will protect over 200,000 acres of sage scrubland in Southern California.



California Gnatcatcher

REVISED HABITAT PLAN FOR THE SPOTTED OWL

A revised federal proposal from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service designates 8.2 million acres as critical habitat for the protection of the Spotted Owl. Initially the service had proposed that 11.6 million acres be protected. Eliminated were all private and tribal lands, as well as some state property. A final proposal, which may include still more acreage adjustments, is due before the end of 1991.

In addition to the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service's involvement, a panel of experts designated by the House Committees on Agriculture and Merchant Marine and Fisheries has developed a plan with 14 different levels of protection. All the levels concentrate on preserving old-growth and late-successional forests in the Northwest, the habitat of the Spotted Owls and other species.

NEW JERSEY, WILD BIRDS AND YOU

New Jersey has become the second state in the nation to ban the sale of wild birds for pets. The Assembly passed the new law in March (66-2) and the Senate approved it in August. "The unanimous Senate vote shows that politicians are increasingly willing to put the conservation of scarce natural resources ahead of commercial exploitation," commented James K. Wyerman, director of Defenders' wildlife trade program.

New Jersey's law is more stringent than New York's which was passed in 1986, by barring imports—other than for research, zoos and breeding—and possession, as well as sales. Like New York's law, the New Jersey statute requires the marking of captive-bred birds in order to help distinguish

them from wild ones.

The proposed federal Wild Bird Protection Act now has 44 sponsors in the House and six in the Senate. Write to your representatives and support the protection of wild birds.



Cooper's Hawk (immature)

RETURN OF THE COOPER'S HAWK

The future of the formerly declining Cooper's Hawk looks bright. Robert N. Rosenfield, a biologist at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point who has been studying the species for over ten years reports, "It's doing splendidly." Rosenfield notes that in Wisconsin alone there are probably thousands of Cooper's Hawks; the bird is no longer on the state's endangered species list.

In 1974 National Geographic asked, "Can the Cooper's Hawk survive?" At that time, female hawks, devouring their prey to survive, were also devouring the pesticide DDT. Unhealthy eggs, paper-thin

BIRDER OF NOTE

Jane Alexander

Age: 52

Home: Carmel, New York

Profession:
Actress/Producer

How long birding?
Sixteen years.

Favorite field guide:
All of Roger Tory Peterson's guides.

Why do I bird? Because birds are so spectacular, and I've always wanted to fly!

Binoculars: Zeiss 7x42 and Minolta 10x25.

Life List? Yes, with approximately 550 species.

Latest life bird: Rufous-necked Hornbill in north-west Thailand.

Favorite North American bird? The Wood Thrush

because, to me, its song is liquid silver.

My favorite birding habitat is in deciduous woodlands.

My favorite birding companion is my golden retriever, Cody.

My biggest birding thrill was being a part of the "Gone Birding" team for the World Series of Birding in New Jersey in 1990.

The most interesting place I've ever birded is Australia where parrots, macaws and cockatoos are in your backyard.

I'd next like to bird the Maritime Provinces in Canada.

Quote: Because my work takes me many places, birding has become an extremely satisfying hobby. I can walk outdoors and suddenly be transported into a new avian world! One of my most spectacular sightings was of 3 White-faced Ibises that had stopped on their migration to Texas at a lake 11,000 feet high in the Colorado Rockies.



shells and a minimal reproduction rate resulted. The bird's ability to survive was dubious.

Rosenfield credits the ban on DDT and enforcement of illegal hunting laws for this increase in population. Because these birds nest close together, the authorities can easily locate and protect the chosen area.

SCREENS SAVE AVIAN LIFE IN TEXAS

After years of lobbying, the National Audubon Society and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service have succeeded in getting the state of Texas to require oil operators to screen their open tanks. These tanks have been the cause of hundreds of thousands of migratory bird deaths each year.

The Texas Railroad Commission passed a rule mandating netting or covers on any tank eight feet or larger in diameter, effective on the first of November.

Oil tanks may seem obvious to the human eye, but birds often mistake them for small water ponds, landing and eventually drowning or dying of starvation, exposure or poisoning. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimates that 500,000 ducks die each year from these hazards within the states of Texas, Kansas, New Mexico and Colorado—that's more ducks than are killed by hunters in the region.

AUDUBON REPORT

BIRDS ARE FERTILIZING FLORIDA BAY

Scientists have found that colonies of wading birds concentrate nutrients in Florida Bay by defecating into the waters below their roosts. Roseate Spoonbills, Great White Herons, and

egrets, for example, roost and nest on mangrove-covered islands that dot the subtropical estuary. They feed away from their colonies and return with food to rest or feed their young.

George Powell, an Audubon scientist based in



Roseate Spoonbill

South Florida, and colleagues from the University of Virginia and the National Marine Fisheries Service conducted studies to determine just what effect this source of nutrients has on the ecosystem. They found that the mix of seagrasses around these islands was markedly different and more dense than around similar islands that do not host colonies of birds. As a result, fish and invertebrates become concentrated in these enriched aquatic jungles. One seagrass that grows almost exclusively below bird colony roosts is critical habitat for larval pink shrimp which are a major food source for the fish and wading birds of Florida Bay.

Powell's study shows that a single bird can influence the distribution and health of seagrass, fish, and benthic communities below its roost. Historically, there were hundreds of thousands of birds fertilizing the waters as they nested and roosted in scattered locations throughout Florida Bay.

WORLD BRIEFS

AGRICULTURE AND SILVICULTURE

Aububon's Silver Bluff Sanctuary in Aiken, South Carolina is managed as a demonstration area to show how forestry and farming can be compatible with wildlife. "Every decision we make," says sanctuary manager Dan Connelly, "takes wildlife into consideration."

The 3100-acre sanctuary includes agricultural land, grassland, and a diversity of wetland types including coastal plain streams, vernal ponds, hardwood bottomland, and a freshwater marsh. All this in the midst of income-producing timber stands.

With sales of about 300,000 board-feet per year, the timber is harvested as a way of thinning stands and opening up areas for wildlife. Prescribed burning is done to imitate nature's method of promoting diversity. Roadways are mowed in the grass state to perpetuate invertebrates such as grasshoppers, on which songbirds and quail feed. Nest boxes have been put up for Wood Ducks and bluebirds, and four ponds are managed for a population of some 250 endangered Wood Storks.

DIRECTIONS

HONORED

John A. Wiens, of Colorado State University, was presented with the Elliot Coues Award for his studies of grassland bird communities.

HONORED

Lewis W. Oring, of the University of Nevada, received the William Brewster Memorial Award at the American Ornithologists' Union meeting in August. The award was presented to him for his extensive studies



Lewis W. Oring

on avian sex role reversal including polyandry in the Spotted Sandpiper and phalaropes.

ELECTED

Elections were held at the August meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. Retiring secretary, Stephen M. Russell, was elected vice-president, Mary Victoria McDonald was elected secretary, and Marion A. Jenkinson was re-elected treasurer.

RETIRED

David Peakall retired from his position as Chief of Wildlife Toxicology for the Canadian Wildlife Service. Peakall retired to his native England, where he intends to remain involved in wildlife issues and research.

DEATHS

Thomas D. Nicholson, director emeritus of the American Museum of Natural History, died of cancer at his New Jersey home. For 20 years until his retirement in 1989, Nicholson was the director of the American



Thomas D. Nicholson

Museum. Previously he had been deputy director of the Museum and director of the American Museum-Hayden Planetarium.

Fredric Sutherland, president of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, died July 14 in an auto accident in Nevada. He was 53 years old. After seven years in commercial law, he and three colleagues started the Center for Law in the Public Interest, a non-profit firm which represents citizen groups, including environmental organizations. He also served on the boards of the Open Space Institute, Southern Environmental Law Center, and was a founder of the Environmental Federation of California and the Environmental Federation of America/Earth Share.



Fredric Sutherland

Charles Elton died in Britain on May 1 at age 91. He was an animal ecologist and one of the first scientists to make conservation his specialty. He was a member of the Wildlife Special Committee whose 1947 report of the Wildlife Special Committee laid the foundation for Britain's conservation policies. He was also the founding Editor of the Journal of Animal Ecology for almost 20 years.

Dennis G. Raveling died of cancer on August 12. He had just been elected a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union.

AUSTRALIA

The 80-acre Sherbrooke Forest near Melbourne, Victoria is one of the few areas where you can still see the Superb Lyrebird (*Menura superba*). However, there are only 60 birds left from the over 130 birds in the forest ten years ago.

Interestingly, it seems that the main culprit responsible for this population



Superb Lyrebird (male in display)

dwindling is the household cat. A recent survey showed that Victoria's 500,000 pet cats kill 13,000,000 animals each year. The cats' victims include 76 bird species, 67 of which are native. So, in an effort to save these birds from extinction, the Sherbrooke Shire Council now requires residents to keep their cats at home, indoors from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m.. There is a \$100 fine for violating the curfew.

GREAT BRITAIN

Shetland Island's Arctic Tern population grew tremendously this past sum-



Arctic Tern

QUOTES

“He who cuts down woods beyond a certain limit exterminates birds.”

Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, May 17, 1853—
just a little ahead of his time.

“Protecting wetlands by redefining them out of existence is like ending homelessness by redefining a home as a cardboard box.”

Jay Hair, *President of the National Wildlife Federation on President George Bush’s wetlands “no net loss” decision which will deregulate 30 million acres of remaining wetlands.*

“Although I have seen Bald Eagles in many places, including dozens at a time in parts of Alaska, the sighting of one still makes any day memorable.”

Greg Laycock, *writer in Wildlife Conservation, on the rise and fall of the eagle.*

mer. The birds had experienced seven disastrous breeding seasons in a row, prior to this productive one. British conservation officials announced that in 1991 approximately 24,000 pairs bred, producing at least 30,000 young. In 1990, 8000 pairs attempted to breed but produced only two young. Great Cormorants, Great Skuas, Parasitic Jaegers, Common Murres, Razorbills and Atlantic Puffins also saw more young this year.

MALTA

In a country where successive governments have supported hunting, the formation of a three-person Environmental Unit in the police force is seen by conservationists as a positive step.

More than 17,000 of the

nation’s 35,000 residents own licenses for guns. Up to 3,000,000 birds are shot in Malta each year and many millions more are trapped. Clearly, the laws passed in 1980 to protect birds from this sort of massacre have failed.

With hostile relations between hunters and conservationists and a government known for its support of hunting, this new police unit has a tough job ahead.

NEW ZEALAND

There is a new initiative for reintroducing the North Island Weka (*Gallirallus australis greyi*) to specific areas of North Island, where it’s population has continually declined during this century. Only in Poverty Bay does the Weka occur naturally,

although introduced populations exist in Rawhiti, Kawaii Island, Mokoia Island and Arid Island.

This year, a captive-breeding program was started to produce a pool of young adults for future release. The program will avoid using a large numbers of wild birds from a stressed population. Young non-territorial birds which will be more suitable to release in a new habitat will be released. Surveys will be conducted to determine population levels before capturing Weka pairs and distributing them to the approved breeders.



Weka

THAILAND

Although Thailand’s Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act has actually existed for 30 years, it has not been effective in saving birds from illegal trade. In fact, according to The Bangkok Bird Club, the lack of enforcement makes Thailand one of the world’s worst offenders.

In a recent survey, 75% of all the birds offered for sale at a market just 3km from the Wildlife Conservation Division headquarters were in violation of the law. The law which states that animals can’t be captured from the

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wild or traded, also says that anyone can own two animals of any species other than the nine “nationally reserved animals.” The Wildlife Division has even suggested that people can keep many wildlife species in captivity and breed them, later selling their offspring. However, in recent months the government has come under verbal attack by both outsiders and residents of Thailand.

The Thai government has responded to the international outrage by promising to amend existing legislation and seriously enforce the new laws. In the meantime, many nations are banning trade with Thailand on wildlife products.

ARGENTINA

A 4050-acre rainforest in Misiones Province in north-east Argentina has been saved from destruction. The forest was on the verge of being bought by a logging company, when Fundacion Vida Silvestre Argentina, the leading conservation body in the country was alerted. Within this forest live at least three threatened bird species: Solitary Tinamou, Black-fronted Piping-Guan, and Azure Jay.

The reserve will now be managed by the newly-formed Mission Rainforest Foundation which includes experts from the FVSA, International Council for Bird Preservation and The Earth.

American Birds extends an invitation to all of its readers to contribute items to our new Overview department. Tell us about something of particular interest to birders: new products, relevant legislation, exhibits, grants, awards, honors, career transitions, or interesting quotes about birds and ecology taken from articles and speeches. Use this issue as a model for items we’d be likely to publish. Send items to: Overview, *American Birds*, 950 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022