

OVERVIEW

Clinton Administration: Act I

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker will receive critical protection through an agreement between the Clinton Administration and the Georgia Pacific Corporation, which owns large tracts of forest in the southeastern United States. The Endangered woodpecker is declining throughout its range, in part because of habitat loss. Under the pact, Georgia Pacific will voluntarily keep at least 10 acres of trees and brush around each Red-cockaded Woodpecker colony that occurs on 50,000 acres of its property. The corporation has also promised to protect any future colonies. In return, the government will not invoke the Endangered Species act to curtail logging on the firm's other 4.2 million acres of forest in the South. Most of the estimated 10,000 to 14,000 birds are found on federal lands.

Shrike Two!

Shrike species throughout the world are on the decline, and scientists are looking for explanations. At the International Shrike Symposium at Archbold Biological Station in Florida, reports from the United

States, Canada, Russia, Africa, and elsewhere told of shrinking populations.

Some of the suspected culprits? Changes in the use of agricultural lands, which limit insect diversity, reduce natural prey, and destroy nesting sites. Shrikes are also top-of-the-food-chain species, and may suffer from ingestion of poisons found in their prey. Some scientists at the symposium suggest that the loss of grassland habitat, and resulting



Northern Shrike

dense populations in overwintering areas, may have an adverse effect on shrike species.

gnatural Habitat

In a significant environmental action by the Clinton Admin-

istration, Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt declared the northern subspecies of the California Gnatcatcher a Threatened, rather than Endangered, species. The ruling was part of a collaboration between the State of California, developers, and conservationists to avoid the pitched battles that have characterized other Endangered Species Act decisions.

The bird is found in a coveted 250,000 acre coastal area. Under the proposal, developers can damage some of the gnatcatcher's coastal sage habitat if they agree to a state plan to preserve enough land to ensure its survival. This "whole ecosystem" approach could help protect other local plants and animals, averting legal actions over their status. The ruling is contingent on adoption of five-year interim land-use guidelines while the habitat is fully studied.

Do Not Disturb

Kirtland's Warbler nesting areas in northern Michigan will be closed to the general public during the 1993 breeding season, to reduce stress on the federally listed Endangered bird. The entire population of

the warbler and nesting areas on scheduled trips guided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service from May 15 to the Fourth of July.



Snowy Plover

On the Beach

The Pacific Coast population of the Snowy Plover has been declared Threatened by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under the Endangered Species Act. Fewer than 1500 birds remain at 28 sites along the coast, where they are threatened by human development, encroachment of beach grass, and predation by pets, crows, ravens, and foxes. Planned conservation measures will include seasonal protection of nesting sites and signs advising beachgoers not to disturb the plovers.

Lend a Hand

Birders can make a difference in the work of preserving and protecting avifauna. Volunteers are needed for some 285 projects around the United States and Canada, including species surveys, interpretive display development, and nest box replacement. A wide range of skills—from photography to construction to bird identification—are needed. Sponsoring agencies include the National Park Service and the United States and Canadian Fish and Wildlife Services. The American Birding Association has compiled a directory of volunteer projects. It is avail-

able for \$2 by writing: Volunteer Directory, American Birding Association, PO Box 6599, Colorado Springs, CO, 80934. Roll up your sleeves, and get some valuable field experience in exchange for your work.

'X' Marks the Spots

A three-year project by the International Council for Bird Preservation, which mapped the breeding distribution of the world birds, found that more than one-quarter of the world's 9600-plus bird species have a range of just five percent of the Earth's land.

Researchers then compared 221 bird-rich areas with areas rich in other native flora and fauna. The not-so-surprising result: Many of the areas overlap. Saving these biodiverse hot spots, many located in the tropics, would be beneficial to a wide variety of wildlife.

UPDATES

Parrots in Training

Contraband parrots found at the United States—Mexican border are getting a second chance, thanks to a bilateral effort by the Center for the Study of Tropical Birds in San Antonio, Texas, and the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas, Mexico. At least one out of three smuggled birds die in transit before being found by customs agents. Most that survive have been stolen from nests before learning to survive on their own.

A large flight cage has been constructed, simulating the parrots' natural habitat. The birds are fed native fruits and seeds so that they will recognize them in the wild. Human contact is kept at a minimum. The cage is near a forest where predators such as hawks and falcons reside; the project staff hopes that young birds will observe how more experienced

birds react to danger. A handful of birds has been released. More parrots are in training.

Bombs Away

The United States Navy has agreed to stop practice bombing missions over a wildlife refuge off the Washington State coastline, home to seabirds and other wildlife. The Navy had been using Sea Lion Rock in the Copalis National Wildlife Refuge for target practice since World War II. In recent years, Navy attack bombers were flying at 400 mph on runs as low as 200 feet above the sea.

Environmentalists argued that the activities were harmful to wildlife. In January, Interior Department land management agencies and the Federal Aviation Administration agreed to curtail noisy, low-flying flights over wildlife areas.

Rivers Undamned

Two rivers were granted a reprieve in the last days of the 102nd Congress. Proposed funding for the Auburn Dam near Sacramento, California, was nixed. This dam, on the American River, would have caused large-scale environmental damage to the waterway, while opening the door to widescale development.

Congress did authorize a \$427 million project to help restore the Kissimmee River in Florida. The project would fill in portions of man-made canals constructed 30 years ago by the Army Corps of Engineers to reduce flooding. The project will restore wetlands that will provide valuable habitat for wading birds, waterfowl, and Snail Kites.

The Damage Done

Effects from the Exxon Valdez oil spill still linger along the Alaska coast, four years after the environmental disaster,

according to studies conducted by state and federal government. Eleven bird species suffered significant declines in the aftermath of the spill. And research indicates that birds, shellfish, otters, and other sea-life are yet being poisoned by pools of oil found buried in coves where wildlife and seabirds feed. The information was made public at a symposium in Anchorage in February.

While some birds, such as the Bald Eagle, are showing signs of recovery, others remain in trouble. Common Murre colonies were badly damaged after the spill. Many adult birds were killed, and

young, inexperienced murrens have had low breeding success. Harlequin Duck populations have not rebounded, due to nearly complete reproductive failure in west Prince William Sound. Scientists suspect that oil has seeped into mussel beds, causing continued contamination of the duck's diet.

Another Logjam?

A Federal appeals court has ordered a probe into whether the Bush administration pressured the Endangered Species Committee to approve timber sales in Oregon, despite the threat to the Endangered



Common Murre

BIRDER OF NOTE

Karen Shepherd

Age: 52

Home: Salt Lake City, Utah

Profession: Member of the United States Congress

How long birding? One year. I am a novice.

What field guides do you use? I have several field guides, my most recent purchase covering the Eastern United States.

Do you keep a life list? Yes.

What was your most recent life bird? A Wood Duck I saw at Huntley Park Meadows, Arlington, Va. It was wonderful!

Favorite birding spot? Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Utah.

Do you have a favorite place and method of birding? My favorite place is wherever I am at the time, and I like to bird on foot.

Who is your favorite birding companion? My husband, Vincent Shepherd.

Why do you bird? To see the unseen, to enter another world entirely unlike the one we live in.

What has been your biggest thrill in birding? Discovering the infinite variety!

What area in the United States would you like to bird next? The Eastern shore of Maryland.

What is the importance of birding to you? The value of birding is to remind us of nature's unseen beauty and variety.

Such awareness is necessary if we are to take the steps needed to preserve this planet. Quiet walks in nature with a good pair of binoculars allow us to "eavesdrop" on the inner world of an environment largely unknown to most people.

Learning to see the birds makes us *pay attention* to what we have to lose should we invade nature too deeply. John Keats described despair as a world in which "no birds sing." I agree.



Northern Spotted Owl. The federal court ruled that any off-the-record communication between the White House and the Committee on proceedings in progress is illegal. Timber sales have been stalled by a separate lawsuit over whether the government properly examined environmental impacts.

AUDUBON REPORT

White Ibis in Jeopardy

The White Ibis, denizen of the Florida Everglades and an indicator of that ecosystem's health, is in serious jeopardy and should be listed as threatened in that state, says the National Audubon Society's Everglades Campaign chief scientist G. Thomas Bancroft. Serious declines in breeding populations in the Everglades in the last half century—and statewide in the past two decades—suggest that the birds' population may have dropped below the critical threshold needed to stimulate nesting.

Audubon science staff have been surveying and comparing bird populations since the 1930s. The Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission is expected to reach a decision on the White Ibis's listing status in the coming months.

Snake River Raptors

Congress is considering legislation to make the Snake River Birds of Prey Area the nation's seventh Bureau of Land Management National Conservation Area, paving the way for a management plan compatible with the survival of raptor and other wildlife populations. Among the 500-foot high towering basalt cliffs and expansive plateaus shadowing the Snake River in Idaho, more than 700 pairs of raptors representing 14 different species nest and raise young.

The nearly half-million acres in southwestern Idaho is

famous for its concentrations of falcons, hawks, eagles, and owls. Peregrine Falcons, for example, migrate through and overwinter. The proposed legislation, supported by National Audubon and the International Council for Bird Preservation, would lead to an assessment of whether current uses—including recreation, National Guard activities, grazing, and off-road vehicle traffic,—are putting the raptors and some 250 other wildlife species in jeopardy.

Making the Snake River Birds of Prey Area a National Conservation Area would not only ensure its protection over the long-term, says Audubon's Stan Senner, director of



Peregrine Falcon

Migratory Bird Conservation, "it also would enable the raptors and their habitat to be the central purpose of the area, and for management to be tailored for their protection."

Sanctuary Islands

Colonial waterbirds were guaranteed two secure nesting sites when the National Audubon Society recently expanded its North Carolina Coastal Island sanctuary system by two islands.

Wainwright and Shell islands are nestled inside a chain of barrier islands in Core Sound, and encompass 18 acres. Wainwright hosts the state's largest colony of Royal and Sandwich terns, topping more than 5000 pairs in a typ-



Royal Terns with young

ical season. Together, the islands provide a safe nesting site for Brown Pelicans, Forster's Terns, and five species of wading birds.

Walker Golder, manager of Audubon's North Carolina Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, says that "given the overall trends of bird populations all along the East Coast, protecting the existing sites is important. Last year, 900 pairs of pelicans nested on Wainwright. That was one-quarter of the state's total nesting pelicans on this one small island."

The waterbirds face threats throughout their range, including loss of nesting and feeding habitats and disturbances from human recreational activities.

WORLD BRIEFS

Greece

A river diversion plan in Greece threatens one of the most important wetlands in the Mediterranean, and conservationists around the world are pressing to halt the project. More than 100,000 waterfowl winter 80 miles west of Athens in the Messolonghi wetlands, fed by the Akheloos River, including endangered species such as the Dalmatian Pelican. The wetlands also provides a migratory stopover for the Slender-billed Curlew.

The Greek government says it intends to build four dams on the 136-mile

Akheloos River, creating irrigation projects and hydroelectric power plants.

Panama

It was going to be a friendly display of United States military prowess. On a bright November morning last fall, throngs of Panama City residents turned out to see the flying Thunderbirds from the U.S. Air Force as they performed aerial acrobatics in streaking warplanes. The jets made one pass low overhead, but the aerobatics stopped suddenly when one plane struck something in mid-air.

"I tried to warn them," says Neal G. Smith, an ornithologist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. At that time of year, the air above Panama City is a river of migrating Turkey Vultures, Swainson's and Broad-winged hawks. Local pilots know to watch for raptors, says Smith, but the visiting flyboys had no idea they were heading into the middle of one of the world's most spectacular hawk migrations. As the raptors funnel down the isthmus of Central America, they are concentrated into a dense stream over the narrow waist of Panama. Smith estimates that during the peak flight, there are more than a million Turkey Vultures soaring over Panama.

The annual migration spectacle begins in mid-September

with kites and continues through November with hawks and vultures.

Scotland

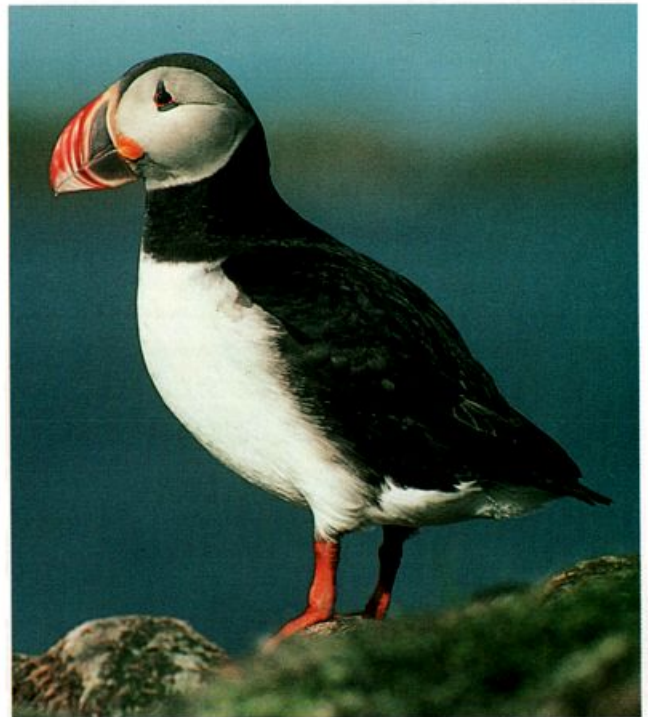
Atlantic Puffins appear to be on the verge of a comeback after a 100-year absence from a tiny Scottish island, according to *New Scientist*.

In the 1860s, Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde supported a colony of 250,000 puffins. Rats reached the island in 1889 after a shipwreck, and the rodents devastated the puffin colony. In a concerted effort to rid the island of the rats, conservation groups brought in a pest extermination firm. The estimated 10,000 rats appear to have been successfully eliminated—puffins have been seen looking for nest sites on Ailsa Craig for the first time in years.

cides fall, the levels found in birds has also decreased, reducing deaths by poisoning and reproduction failure. The Sparrowhawk, one of the hardest hit raptors, has begun recolonization in recent years, according to the *New Scientist*. Also recovering are Eurasian Kestrels and other predators such as herons.

Argentina

Economic growth appears to be edging out environmental concerns as this Latin American nation moves to privatize the oil industry on its shores. At Cabo Virgenes, one of the world's largest Magellanic Penguin colonies, is in danger as a planned oil complex nears



Atlantic Puffin

England

Birds of prey are finding a foothold in parts of eastern England again, as laws enacted since the 1960s—restricting use of DDT and other pesticides—continue to have a positive effect on the ecosystem. As concentrations of the pesti-

construction. An estimated 200,000 Magellanic Penguins nest at a site which could soon be surrounded by pipelines. Effluent from the oil refinery would be pumped back into the sea near the colony, jeopardizing sealife, including the penguins' rich food source.

QUOTES

"What [Red-cockaded Woodpeckers] need is old-growth trees for nesting cavities and enough foraging territory. They need a modest suburban home and a nearby supermarket."

Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt, announcing an agreement with Georgia Pacific Corporation to protect the Endangered woodpecker

"Many other kinds of birds peck and pry wood to expose insects, but none do it with the élan and precision of a picid."

Edward O. Wilson in *The Diversity of Life*

Zimbabwe

The Red-billed Oxpecker is being used by biologists in Zimbabwe to help curb ticks infesting impalas and other mammals in game parks in the country's highlands. The oxpecker was once common in the highlands, but was wiped out because of chemicals used by ranchers, who "dipped" cattle in the rinse to rid them of pests. A safer dip is now used, so the oxpeckers are being reintroduced from the lowlands to help the tick-infested wildlife of the highlands.

Costa Rica

The Tropical Science Center, a private, non-profit organization, has arranged to purchase the Alexander Skutch farm in Costa Rica to preserve the mostly primary tropical forest. Much of the forest near the farm has been cut for wood or converted to agricultural use. For information, or to make a donation, contact: Pamela Lehmann, Director of Development, Tropical Science Center, P.O. Box 8-3870, San José, 1000, Costa Rica. (See related story, page 24.)

DIRECTIONS

Awards

Bruce Peterjohn, coordinator of the North American Breeding Bird Survey, was recognized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with the Secretary's Stewardship Award. Peterjohn coordinates more than 2000 volunteers in the United States and Canada. He is *American Birds'* former Regional Report Editor for the Middlewestern Prairie Region.

Jaime Jahncke of the Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina and the Peruvian Association for the Conservation of Nature is the recipient of the 1993 Kathleen S. Anderson Award from Manomet Bird Observatory. Jahncke was honored for his study of the Markham's Storm-Petrel in Peru.

C. Stuart Houston has been honored with three prestigious awards. He was invested as an Officer of the Order of Canada in April. He also received the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. Houston and his wife Mary received the Distinguished Canadian Award from the University of Regina.

Transitions

Jocelyn Hudson has been named Curator of Ornithology at the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton.

Obituary

Charles H. Callison, former executive vice-president of the National Audubon Society, died February 23 in Columbia, Missouri. He was 79. Callison was at the forefront of conservation issues for more than 50 years. He championed causes ranging from wildlife protection to better management of public lands.

Lawrence H. Walkinshaw, a well-known amateur ornithologist, died January 16 in Lubbock, Texas, at the age of 88. He lived in Michigan and Lake Wales, Florida. A dentist, Walkinshaw was a "prodigious gatherer of facts" who published works on Sandhill Cranes, Kirtland's Warblers, and birds of his native Michigan. A scholarship for graduate students in ornithology has been established at Cornell University in his memory.

Maurice Brooks, retired professor of wildlife biology at West Virginia University, died January 10 in Morgan, West Virginia. He was 92. Brooks was called "Dr. Appalachia" by those who knew his work as a ornithologist and naturalist.



Red-billed Oxpeckers

American Birds extends an invitation to all of its readers to contribute items to our 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*, 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003

BEHAVIOR WATCH

Murrelet Mobs

Past observations suggested that Marbled Murrelets only infrequently take part in mixed-species feeding flocks, and rarely are responsible for initiating such gatherings. However, this may vary from place to place. Studies by Todd Mahon, Gary Kaiser, and Alan Burger found that in the narrow inlets east of Vancouver Island, Marbled Murrelets commonly took part in feeding flocks (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 104, No. 4). In fact, the murrelets usually initiated these flocks, by driving schools of small fish (sand lance) to the surface, where they attracted gulls and other surface feeders. The flock-feeding behavior of the murrelets may have been owing to the absence of larger diving birds.

Sparrow Family Life

Raising a family can be a tough challenge for a small songbird. A dramatic illustration comes from a long-term study of mountain White-crowned Sparrows near Tioga Pass in California (*Condor* Vol. 95, No. 1). Martin L. Morton, Keith Sockman, and Linda Peterson analyzed 19 years' worth of data, involving over 1100 White-crowned nests, and found that nearly 30% of these nesting attempts were foiled by predators. The main predators apparently were Belding's ground squirrels, abundant on the study site.

Cooper's Hawk Diet

The Accipiters are usually thought of as bird-eating hawks. Some studies of the diets of nesting Cooper's Hawks, based on collection of prey remains near the nest, have seemed to confirm this specialization. But research in Wisconsin suggests that this

survey method may exaggerate the importance of birds in the diet. When John Bielefeldt, Robert Rosenfield, and Joseph Papp searched near Cooper's Hawk nests, birds accounted for 92% of the prey remains they found. But when they



Cooper's Hawk

actually observed prey being brought to the nest, birds made up only a little more than 50%, and many of these were young birds or even nestlings. The supposed great aerial agility of Cooper's Hawks did not seem to be an important factor, since they were capturing many chipmunks and inexperienced young songbirds (*Condor* Vol. 94, No. 2).

A Tail of Two Scissors

In most North American flycatcher species, the sexes are identical. But in the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, the male's spectacular tail is more than 30% longer than that of the female. Observing Scissor-tails in Texas, Kevin Teather found significant sex differences in feeding behavior during the nesting season (*J. Field Ornithol.* Vol. 63, No. 3).

Females tended to perch lower than males, and to drop to the ground for prey more often; they were more likely to adjust their foraging behavior with changing conditions (especially strong winds). Females were significantly more successful in capturing prey. The males' higher perches were probably related to their role in defend-

ing the territory, while their excessively long tails probably put them at a disadvantage in foraging efficiency.

Bitterns and Grackles

We tend to think of bitterns as

solitary nesters. But William Post and Carol Seals, studying a marsh in South Carolina, found that Least Bitterns there often joined colonies of Boat-tailed Grackles. Of some 160 bittern nests located, 70% were within grackle colonies. One aggregation included 32 nests of grackles and 13 of bitterns. Bitterns started their nests after the grackle colonies were established, so they appeared to be choosing such areas intentionally. Grackles are sometimes nest predators, but they apparently did not plunder the bitterns' nests in this study, and the diminutive bitterns (which are smaller than Boat-tailed Grackles) may have gained protection from other predators by this nesting association (*Condor* Vol. 95, No. 1).

Building Better Houses

In nest-building, male House Wrens lay the foundation, filling a cavity with sticks; females construct the soft nest lining. Informal observations in the past have suggested that the male wrens would have an easier task if birdhouses were designed with wide slot entrances, not small round holes, making it simpler to carry long

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sticks inside. Dale Kennedy and Douglas White tested this in a study in New Jersey (*J. Field Ornithol.* Vol. 63, No. 1), and found that the boxes with wide slots were used far more often than those with small round entrances. In addition, male wrens filled the nestboxes with sticks up to near the level of the entrance, regardless of how deep the boxes were; shallow boxes required less work on the part of the male wrens.

Hummingbird Social Surprises

Among North American hummingbirds, females incubate the eggs and care for the young; males do nothing. This pattern is also thought to apply to tropical hummingbirds, but some surprises may lurk among the hermits, a group of dull-colored forest hummers. In Costa Rica, Kyle Harms and Jorge Ahumada watched the nest of one hermit species, the Band-tailed Barbthroat (*Wilson Bull.* Vol. 104, No. 2). While one adult barbthroat incubated the eggs in this nest, a second adult was



Band-tailed Barbthroat

often nearby; this second adult appeared to be feeding the in-cubating bird on many occasions. While the sexes of these birds could not be determined, the observation implies that nesting behavior in tropical hummers may not be so simple after all.