

News Release

(joint release from USFWS, Audubon, TNC, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, American Bird Conservancy)

Decline of Bird Species Signals a Warning

(WASHINGTON, D.C. – March 19, 2009) Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced the release of the first ever *U.S. State of the Birds* report. Based on a new analysis of 40 years of data, the report was developed by a partnership among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, state government wildlife agencies and non-governmental organizations. The report documents the decline of bird populations in many habitats due to habitat loss, invasive species and other factors. At the same time, it provides heartening examples of how sustained habitat conservation and other environmental efforts can reverse the decline of many bird species.

“Our collective ability to prevent extinction and reverse environmental degradation are reflected in this report, exemplified by the remarkable recovery of waterfowl populations across the continent and the comeback of species that were once endangered, including the bald eagle and peregrine falcon,” said Secretary Salazar. “This shows that we can meet these challenges and maintain the integrity of our nation’s natural resources.”

“The issue of declining bird populations is not just pressing for bird biologists and conservationists – nearly 50 million Americans are bird-watchers, and each year more than 45 billion dollars are expended on some form of wildlife watching,” Salazar added. “Americans love wild birds and are willing to spend their hard-earned dollars to see them in the field. This report provides actionable information that will help us secure a future for birds, and a future for the next generation of wild-bird lovers.”

The *U.S. State of the Birds* report synthesizes data from three long-running bird censuses conducted by thousands of citizen scientists and professional biologists. The report 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. In addition, 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, a testament to numerous cooperative conservation efforts 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. And 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 www.stateofthebirds.org.

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