

Secretary Salazar Releases New “State of the Birds” Report Showing Climate Change Threatens Hundreds of Species

AUSTIN, TX – Climate change threatens to further imperil hundreds of species of migratory birds, already under stress from habitat loss, invasive species and other environmental threats, a new report released today by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar concludes. The State of the Birds: 2010 Report on Climate Change, follows a comprehensive report issue released a year ago showing that that nearly a third of the nation's 800 bird species are endangered, threatened or in significant decline.

“For well over a century, migratory birds have faced stresses such as commercial hunting, loss of forests, the use of DDT and other pesticides, a loss of wetlands and other key habitat, the introduction of invasive species, and other impacts of human development,” Salazar said. “Now they are facing a new threat – climate change – that could dramatically alter their habitat and food supply and push many species towards extinction.”

The report, a collaboration of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and experts from the nation's leading conservation organizations, shows that climate changes will have an increasingly disruptive effect on bird species in all habitats, with oceanic and Hawaiian birds in greatest peril. In releasing the report, Salazar cited the unprecedented efforts by the Obama Administration and the Department of the Interior to address climate change.

Last week in Anchorage, Alaska, for example, the Interior Department opened the first of eight new climate regional Climate Science Centers that will engage scientists from all of Interior's Bureaus and our partners to research climate change impacts, work with land, natural, and cultural resource managers to design adaptation strategies, and engage the public through education initiatives. The Climate Science Centers will help support a network of new “Landscape Conservation Cooperatives” that will engage federal agencies, tribal, state, and local governmental and non-governmental partners, and the public in crafting practical, landscape-level strategies for managing climate change impacts on land, natural, and cultural resources within the eight regions.

“Just as they did in 1962 when Rachel Carson published ‘Silent Spring,’ our migratory birds are sending us a message about the health of our planet,” Salazar said. “That is why –for the first time ever- the Department of the Interior has deployed a coordinated strategy to plan for and respond to the impacts of climate change on the resources we manage.”

Key findings from the “State of the Birds” climate change report include:

- Oceanic birds are among the most vulnerable species because they don't raise many young each year; they face challenges from a rapidly changing marine ecosystem; and they nest on islands that may be flooded as sea levels rise. All 67 oceanic bird species, such as petrels and albatrosses, are among the most vulnerable birds on Earth to climate change
- Hawaiian birds such as endangered species Puaiohi and 'Akiapōlā'au already face multiple threats and are increasingly challenged by mosquito-borne diseases and invasive species as climate change alters their native habitats.

- Birds in coastal, arctic/alpine, and grassland habitats, as well as those on Caribbean and other Pacific Islands show intermediate levels of vulnerability; most birds in aridlands, wetlands, and forests show relatively low vulnerability to climate change.
- For bird species that are already of conservation concern such as the golden-cheeked warbler, whooping crane, and spectacled eider, the added vulnerability to climate change may hasten declines or prevent recovery.
- The report identified common bird species such as the American oystercatcher, common nighthawk, and northern pintail, that are likely to become species of conservation concern as a result of climate change.

“Birds are excellent indicators of the health of our environment, and right now they are telling us an important story about climate change,” said Dr. Kenneth Rosenberg, director of Conservation Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “Many species of conservation concern will face heightened threats, giving us an increased sense of urgency to protect and conserve vital bird habitat.”

“All of the effective bird conservation efforts already taking place to protect rare species, conserve habitats, and remove threats need to be continued.” said David Mehlman of The Nature Conservancy. “Additionally, they need to be greatly expanded to meet the threat climate change poses to bird populations.”

“The dangers to these birds reflect risks to everything we value: our health, our finances, our quality of life and the stability of our natural world,” said Audubon’s Glenn Olson. “But if we can help the birds weather a changing climate, we can help ourselves.”

“While there is much to be concerned about in this report, we can reduce the impact of climate change by taking immediate action to reduce carbon emissions and find creative conservation solutions to help birds adapt to the changes that are already in process.” said David Pashley, vice president American Bird Conservancy.

The report offers solutions that illustrate how, by working together, organizations and individuals can have a demonstrable positive impact on birds in the U. S. Specifically, the report indicates that the way lands are managed can mitigate climate change and help birds adapt to changing conditions. For example, conserving carbon-rich forests and wetlands, and creating incentives to avoid deforestation can reduce emissions and provide invaluable wildlife habitat.

The report is the product of a collaborative effort as part of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative, between federal and state wildlife agencies, and scientific and conservation organizations including partners from American Bird Conservancy, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Klamath Bird Observatory, National Audubon Society, The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. For more information visit www.stateofthebirds.org.