

OVERVIEW

ARTHUR KILL OIL SPILLS

Like clockwork, oil spills occurred in New Jersey's Arthur Kill nearly every month in 1990. Manomet Bird Observatory studied the effects on the area's high number of wading birds, including herons, egrets, and Glossy Ibises. According to the Manomet report, only four percent of the birds had nested by April, as compared to the 21 percent in previous years. Bird mortality reached 71 percent, up from 40 percent in previous years. Manomet ornithologists



Glossy Ibis

suspect that the increased mortality is owing to starvation. Studies are still being conducted on the spill's long-term effects.

FISH FARMERS KILL WADING BIRDS

Fish farmers nationwide are being issued permits by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to kill thousands of fish-eating birds. Black-crowned Night-Herons are often the offenders. Paradoxically, some of those herons, egrets, cormorants, and pelicans are afforded protection in U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service sanctuaries. The permits are supposed to

provide short-term solution to farmers, during which time they are expected to find other means of excluding the birds. Audubon is calling on the service to phase out bird depredation permits within five years, as well as to enforce the deterrence policy already in place. Audubon has also asked Congress to authorize a study evaluating



Black-crowned Night-Heron

technology for keeping birds away from the farms. States in the Midwest and Southeast, particularly Arkansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi and Wisconsin, are responsible for nearly 90% of the killings.

OIL SPILL OFF OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

A Japanese fish-processing vessel collided with a Chinese freighter off the coast of the Olympic National Park in Washington State in late July, resulting in a formidable oil spill. It continues to threaten one of the richest and most diverse ecological regions in the country. It took the Coast Guard more than a month to contain the spill. About 100,000 gallons of oil leaked into the waters off Olympic beaches. Biologists regard the spill as particularly damaging because it occurred just as young birds had fledged and gone to sea. Early estimates of the kill stood at nearly 1000 birds including Tufted Puffins, Double-crested and Pelagic cormorants, Common Murres, and Marbled Murrelets. Tim Cullinan, wildlife biologist in Audubon's Washington State office, said "These young birds are much less



Tufted Puffin colony

able to cope with an oil spill than adults. It's still too soon to predict a final death toll. Right now, we're worried that hydrocarbons are seeping into the food chain. There's not much we can do about that. One oil spill may not be enough to upset the ecological balance, but a series of them could result in severe long-term damage."

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 1990 Bird Depredation Permits Issued Number of birds killed by species*

FWS REGION	HERONS	EGRETS	CORMORANTS	GULLS	OTHER	TOTAL
1 WEST	90	50	295	245	120	800
2 S.W.	55	50	250			355
3 MIDWEST	297	10	2175	304	232	3018
4 S.E.	3681	2332	6383	215	993	13604
5 N.E.	11			20	39	70
6 ROCKIES ¹	209	20	185	158	226	798
	4343	2462	9288	942	1610	18645

*Data was provided by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service pursuant to a Freedom of Information Act request by National Audubon Society's Wildlife Department.

¹ State Fish & Game Divisions in Region 6 are issued permits to kill unlimited numbers of birds on fish hatcheries.

BIRDER OF NOTE

Jane E. Brody

Age: 50

Profession:
Health and Science Writer,
The New York Times.

How long birding?
About 30 years, on and off since college.

Favorite field guide:
Guide to Field Identification: Birds of North America by Chandler S. Robbins, Bertel Bruun, and Herbert S. Zim because of its sonograms and the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.

Binoculars?
8 X 23 Nikons, because they travel light!

Why do I bird?
It is relaxing, exciting and it enables me to see beautiful places.

Latest life bird:
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl in Costa Rica. It was a

gorgeous early morning. I was out birding and jogging pre-dawn. There was still moonlight when I found the owl. It was thrilling.

Favorite North American bird?

One of them is the Common Nighthawk which greets me both in the morning near 5 a.m., and when I get home from my office near 8 p.m.

My favorite birding habitat is the shore, by the sea or lake. The surroundings and birds are beautiful by the water.

Favorite birding place: Prospect Park, Brooklyn and Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, New York.

My favorite birding companions are my sons. They have sharp eyes, good memories and don't stand in one spot very long!

My biggest birding thrill was watching an African Pygmy Kingfisher feed in Kenya.

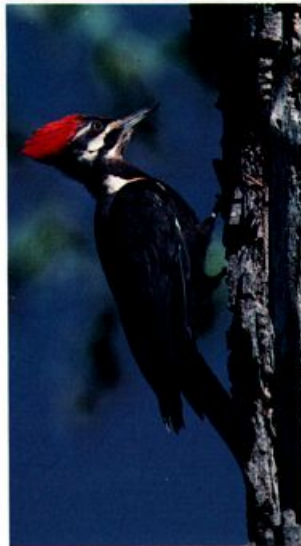
The most interesting place I've ever birded is Kenya, Africa.

I'd next like to bird Assateague, Virginia.



WOOD CHIP MILLS IMPERIL BIRDLIFE

Wood chip mills in Tennessee are posing a serious threat to birds and other wildlife, according to an Environmental Assessment Report conducted jointly by the U.S. Army Corps of



Pileated Woodpecker

Engineers and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Estimates indicate that, at the current rate of clearcutting, more than 50 percent of all forests in the valley will be logged over the next 20 years. Pileated Woodpeckers, Wood Thrushes, and Cerulean Warblers are only a few of the species that would be adversely affected by the clearcutting. The report concluded that the "habitats within the projected sourcing area support populations of several species either currently listed or proposed for future listing as endangered or threatened, by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service."

CATTLE ORDERED OFF MATAGORDA

For years, environmentalists have argued that the cattle roaming Matagorda Island, Texas, were posing a threat to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge by disturbing flight and roosting patterns of endangered Whooping Cranes, trampling vegetation, drinking and polluting the water vital to refuge wildlife, and spreading disease. Finally, Texas authorities have passed a court order banning cattle from the island. This is just in time for the flocks of wintering Whooping Cranes due to arrive at the refuge shortly.

MISSISSIPPI BIRD KILL REMAINS A MYSTERY

An investigation is still being conducted in Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge, Mississippi, following the killing of 1500 birds. On June 15, a refuge biologist checked the heronry and found the birds alive and well. When he returned on July 5, over 1500 herons and egrets were dead, apparently killed with an aerial-sprayed pesticide. Robert Oliveri, a special agent with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service says investigators have been unable to determine a motive for the crime. Last summer, an identical incident occurred at another colony within the park. No one was caught, and investigators now believe that the same culprits may have been involved in both crimes. This time, Oliveri is more confident. "We may not figure out who did it next week," he says, "but, I'm optimistic we'll find whoever did this and bring them to justice." The

Service, along with several environmental groups including Audubon, is offering a \$4500 reward to anyone with information leading to an arrest and conviction.

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**TENNESSEE MONITORING
MIGRATORY SONGBIRDS**

In the wake of a federal inter-agency committee to protect migratory songbirds, Tennessee has become the first state to set up an intensive monitoring system of its own.

Environmentalists are creating a database designed to track the incidence of migratory songbirds in unprotected areas. An educational plan is also being established across the state. According to Bob Ford, ornithologist heading up the Tennessee Bird Project, other states have expressed an interest in the project. "If it can work in Tennessee, it can work anywhere," he says, referring to the state's rich variety of habitats. Tennessee hosts many species of migratory songbirds both as breeding species, such as Kentucky Warbler, and in transit, like Cape May Warbler. "Part of the real interest in a project like this, is to catch a species' decline before it becomes federally endangered," says Ford.



Kentucky Warbler

UPDATE

**ALBATROSS ATROCITIES
CONTINUE**

According to a report from J. A. Bartle, head of the International Council for Bird Preservation Seabird By-catch Working Group, more than 3400 White-capped Albatrosses die unnecessarily during the breeding season annually. The culprit: outmoded electrical wires on Soviet factory vessels trawling for squid in subantarctic waters. The wires run from the trawlers to a monitoring device at the head of the trawl net. Albatrosses scavenging for squid on the ocean's surface, criss-cross over the boat's wake, collide with the wires, break wings, bills, or legs, and subsequently drown.

"If breeding adult mortality occurs during nesting," reports Bartle, "then it will also involve the loss of an egg or chick, thus exacerbating the impact on population size." The population is presently estimated at 60,000 pairs. The species breeds only on a few South Pacific islands.

Replacing the obsolete electronic equipment on the Soviet ships would cost approximately \$20,000 per vessel.

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**SCORE ONE FOR
EXOTIC BIRDS**

Eight million wild birds are illegally exported from the wild annually. But the illegal wild bird trade suffered a blow when 18 airlines, including American, Delta, Federal Express, Lufthansa, Northwest, and Swissair, agreed to stop accepting birds as cargo. These airlines transported over 80 percent of the wild bird shipments into the United States in 1989. At least 41 species have been threatened by this

trade, including the African Gray Parrot and the Blue-fronted Amazon. The United States remains a major importer of both birds, having received over 15,000 of each species in 1989.

Although it's too soon to say what exactly what kind



African Gray Parrot

of an effect the moratorium will have on the wild bird trade, environmentalists are heartened by a recent drop in the number of birds entering the United States. Several airlines continue to ship wild birds, including Alitalia, Iberia, and Varig. All of them have offices in New York City. Write to the CEOs of these companies, asking them to join the moratorium. Additionally, the Wild Bird Protection Act, sponsored by Gerry Studds (D-MA) calls for an immediate ban on all wild bird trade imports. Urge your Congressman to support it.

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**EVERGLADES DUE
FOR CLEAN-UP**

A bitter two-and-a-half-year lawsuit ended in July, when the state of Florida finally agreed to clean up the Everglades. For decades, water laced with phosphorous and other chemical agents has seeped into the wetlands. "As a result," says Tom Bancroft, a Florida-based Audubon

scientist, "the Everglades have shifted from a sawgrass into a cattail community. Cattails are less productive than sawgrass communities, which means less food for wading birds."

Sixty years ago, nearly 300,000 wading birds nested in the area. Today, fewer than 30,000 remain. In addition to two endangered species, Wood Storks and Snail Kites, birds like Limpkins have been particularly damaged by the shift.

Farmers, already angry about the recently-passed Marjorie Stillman Act requiring landowners to help pay clean up costs, are worried that they will lose state-leased agricultural land to the wetlands. Increased human development is sucking water out of the Everglades at an alarming rate. "Society wants to restore the park, but at the same time expects to take more water out of it," says Bancroft. Environmentalists



Limpkin

are worried about proposed legislation loosening wetlands regulations. Still, Bancroft is optimistic. "If the marshes are built up in an environmentally sensitive way," he says, "good feeding habitat for birds will be restored."



"Whew! I dreamed we'd been released into the wild!"

CONDORS SCHEDULED FOR RELEASE

Officials have announced plans to release two California Condor chicks into their natural habitat this Autumn. The decision reflects the species' growing captive population, from 13 in 1987 to 54 presently. The chicks will be transported to an enclosed pen in the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, located in Ventura County, California. Once they are able to fly, the fence will be removed. The birds aren't expected to fly immediately, but will be trained to take short hop flights from feeding towers. As they grow older and more confident, the condors will fly longer distances, but it is hoped that they will return to feed on poison-free carcasses stocked for them. Audubon recently acquired 200 acres of condor habitat in Kern County, California and environmentalists are optimistic that the species eventually will repopulate its historic range.

AUDUBON REPORT

MORE THAN JUST BIRDWATCHING

Audubon sanctuary wardens along the Texas Coast have added a new line to their resumes, making it official: *birdwatcher*. But this is not ordinary birdwatching. Rex Wahl, manager of Audubon's six Texas Coastal sanctuaries, has established a flightline monitoring protocol for wardens to determine where the area's wading birds go to feed. Audubon's protection efforts which now extend to nesting habitat for 23 species can, in this way, be expanded to include the birds' foraging areas.

The compass direction in which birds go when they leave their nests is recorded along with other variables, such as wind direction and weather. The big waders disperse to nearby wetlands to feed on invertebrates and fish, "but, we really don't know exactly where the birds forage," says Wahl.

Audubon has been protecting breeding bird

islands in the region since 1922. "It's never too late to start to build a formal historic record of cycles and changes," declares Wahl. "It's not enough any more to just protect birds' breeding grounds." With these data the wardens will track shifts in total habitat use, enabling them to identify threats early on. "It's the more *proactive* approach," says Wahl.

OIL, SPOIL, TOIL, AND TROUBLE

Corpus Christi Bay along the Texas coast could be the site for a deep-water oil-transfer facility landward of the barrier island. The facility would enable hundreds of quarter-mile-long tankers, some of which come from Africa and Asia, to off-load their oil closer to port. At only 1.5 miles from Audubon's Texas coastal island sanctuaries.

In order to economically justify the project, the Port Authority will have to triple the amount of oil brought in. This is beyond the local refinery capacity so the surplus would have to be piped



Northern Pintail

to Houston. The facility would be cited on habitat that is used by hundreds of thousands of birds, including Northern Pintails, Piping and Snowy plovers, and Peregrine Falcons.

While the project is still in the planning stages, with an Environmental Impact Statement yet to be done, the Port Authority is seeking to fund it entirely with private money to speed up the process.

SPECTACLE AT A COST

Those who saw the Spring migration of Sandhill Cranes at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary along the Platte River in Nebraska witnessed quite a spectacle this year. Ken Strom, manager of the sanctuary, reports that more



Platte River

cranes and waterfowl staged on the refuge this Spring than ever before recorded. Numbers of Sandhill Cranes peaked at 80,000 on the sanctuary; 60,000 is the highest estimated in the past.

Strom attributes the record numbers to the fact that "the birds didn't have much of a choice." Because of habitat loss from upstream diversions and a dry winter, limiting other habitat available, the birds took refuge on the refuge.

Rowe Sanctuary, encompassing 2000 acres, is managed specifically for wildlife, offering a mix of open channel and a band of wet meadows fringing the river, prime habitat for Sandhill Cranes and endangered Whooping Cranes.

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

WORLD BRIEFS

TURKEY

The only stiff-tailed duck occurring in Europe and Asia—the White-headed Duck—has been mercilessly hunted down for years. Most of the duck's world population of 15,000 winters on Burdur Golu Lake in Turkey, where hunting by speedboat is a popular pastime. But responding to pressure from environmental groups, the Governor of the Burdur Region declared a hunting ban on Burdur Golu as well as on Yarisli Golu, another wintering site for the birds. As a result, more White-headed Ducks—nearly 11,000—were counted on the lake this year than ever before.

ANTARCTICA

Two main penguin species, Adelies and Chinstraps, are suffering serious declines in Antarctica. Ornithologists



Krill (*Euphausia superba*)

Wayne and Susan Trivelpiece, of Virginia's Old Dominion University, are blaming the decline on warmer winters. The change in temperature has caused a depletion of the penguins' main source of food: krill, the small crustaceans essential to the birds' survival.

CYPRUS

For years, Cyprus has been responsible for killing more birds per capita than any other Mediterranean country—until now. President George Vassilou recently announced his plans to enforce a ban on the shooting of all migratory birds. Laws banning the killing of birds have been ignored by authorities. In fact, in recent years, over 25 million birds were killed in Cyprus every year. Most of them were jarred and pickled, a delicacy known as "ambelpoulia." Many environmentalists believe Vassilou's announcement was made because the killings have caused tourism—essential to the Cypriot economy—to plummet.

OVERVIEW

VENEZUELA

Venezuelan officials are finding that protecting one bird species may actually save the government thousands of dollars. Zoologist Roberto Roca, with the Nature Conservancy's Latin American program, discovered that one colony of 10,000 Guacharos, or Oilbirds, regurgitates ten tons of seeds a month in



Oilbird

deforested Venezuelan hillsides. The government has discontinued its reforestation program and expanded Guacharo National Park to four times its original size in order to protect the valuable birds.

EAST ASIA

During a recent routine survey, ornithologists were shocked to discover that the Black-faced Spoonbill is nearly extinct. Once a fairly common wading bird in North Korea, Taiwan, China, and Vietnam, today there are only 300 left. Conservationists have long concentrated on other endangered birds, including the Siberian Crane and the Chinese Egret—both species now existing in much greater numbers than the spoonbill. Most of the spoonbill's remaining habitat is being rapidly destroyed by development and pollution.

QUOTES

"Talk about a black hole of regulation—this wetlands program is just nuts."

John R. Clark, lawyer, on the administration's proposed wetlands program.

For years California has looked at water like a thirsty vampire, and the vampire is out of control again with this project."

Robert Hattoy, Southern California-Nevada director of the Sierra Club about the proposal for an Arctic Aqueduct.

"They are the avian equivalent of an elephant or Bengal tiger. No one can be indifferent to a condor soaring. It is very moving."

Lloyd Kiff, an ornithologist leading the California Condor Recovery Team.