

OVERVIEW

Some 1400 acres of wetlands and open water lie within the boundaries of the proposed airport. "I can't

December 1991 at their winter habitat on Salton Sea, and many more are seriously ill. "They're dying faster



Black-crowned Night-Herons

imagine a more terrible location for an airport than Lake Calumet," said William Beecher, ornithologist and director emeritus of the Chicago Academy of Sciences. While developers believe the birds will relocate, Beecher explains, "You simply can't teach birds another migration route. They will fly where they've always flown."

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DEATHS ON THE SALTON SEA

At least 10,000 Eared Grebes have died since

threatened. The Salton Sea, crucial habitat for two million birds annually, is home to such endangered species as the Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Brown



Eared Grebe

Pelican and Yuma Clapper Rail.

Already some cormorants, herons and egrets have ceased nesting in the area, raising concern that contamination may have interfered with breeding.

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BIGGER MAY BE BETTER

Research on the Lesser Black-backed Gull, conducted by Mark Bolton of the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, found that a large egg often gives a chick a better start in life and also guarantees it has good parents.

In a series of experiments, Bolton transferred clutches of big eggs to birds who laid small eggs, and small eggs to birds who lay big eggs. He found that fledgling chicks from small eggs and chicks that were raised by birds

who laid small eggs had the least chance of surviving. He also found that chicks hatched from small eggs but nurtured by birds who laid big eggs, were as likely to survive as those whom had truly hatched from large eggs.

Bolton concluded that the quality of parental care is more important to the survival of a chick than the size of the egg from which it hatched. However, in the face of small-egg parents, chicks hatched from the larger eggs had an advantage. For Lesser Black-backed Gulls at least, it seems bigger is better.

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GETTING TOUGH

For birds, surviving along the Great Lakes is harder than ever. Last year, eight of 12 eaglets hatched along the Ohio shores died within weeks from a syndrome linked to toxic chemicals in their food. And on Lake Erie, a 2,000-nest colony of Ring-billed Gulls failed to hatch a single chick. Researchers believe the birds were poisoned by PCBs. The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and an affiliate, the League of Ohio Sportsmen, have asked the region's governors to endorse tough new pollution standards for the Great Lakes.



Lesser Black-backed Gull

than we can pick them up," said William R. Redke, a wildlife biologist at the Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge.

Researchers are examining tissue and other evidence to determine the cause. So far scientists have been unable to pinpoint the problem; while it could be a bacteria, virus or parasite peculiar to the grebes, they are now considering the environment and its contaminants.

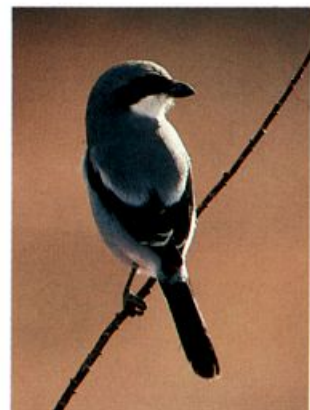
If the cause is traced to a pesticide or contaminant, biologists fear that many more species could be

EFFECTS OF OZONE HOLE

Scientists from the University of California at Santa Barbara have found what they say is the first direct evidence that ultraviolet rays shining through the Antarctic ozone hole are damaging life in the region.

They found a startling decrease in phytoplankton during the Austral spring, when the ozone hole typically appears, the same time that many bird species, including penguins come ashore to breed. The entire ecosystem is dependent on those microscopic marine plants at the bottom of the food chain. The decrease in phytoplankton can result in a diminished krill supply in the ocean; this in turn may have an enormous impact on avian life.

Scientists estimate that, overall, the decline amounts to a two to four percent drop in phytoplankton in the entire Antarctic.



Loggerhead Shrike

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKES DECLINING

Loggerhead Shrikes are declining in most of their range and have virtually disappeared from some of their historic breeding spots, reports *Bird Watchers Digest*. The actual causes are under debate and currently being examined, but some researchers attribute the decline to collisions with cars, loss of hedgerows, loss of insect

prey, and the use of insecticides.

A study in southeastern Alberta indicates that in that area loss of tall-grass prairie habitats may be the cause. Shrikes were found breeding in all surveyed areas where the grass reached at least eight inches tall; the species was absent from areas where the grass was shorter.

UPDATE

NO NETS

Responding to the United Nations resolution calling for an end to all drift-netting before 1993, Japan and Taiwan agreed to comply by the end of 1992. According to a study by the National Marine Fisheries Service, 10 percent of Japan's fleet killed 30,464 seabirds, 1758 whales and dolphins, and 81,956 blue sharks in 1990. South Korea, the third leading drift-netting nation is expected to follow Japan and Taiwan.

WHOOING CRANE PLAN ABANDONED

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has given up its effort to establish a second wild flock of endangered Whooping Cranes. Since 1975, biologists have transferred 280 Whooper eggs to the nests of Sandhill Cranes, trying to enlist them as foster parents.

More than 200 eggs hatched, but the number of grown Whooping Cranes in the flock never exceeded 33



Whooping Cranes

according to James Lewis, the government's Whooping Crane program coordinator. Approximately 130 Whooping Cranes are left in the wild, migrating between Texas and Canada; another 70 birds are in captivity.

SNOWY PLOVERS DECLINE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed listing the West Coast population of the Snowy Plover—which nests on beaches in California,



Piping Plover

Washington, and Oregon—as threatened.

Twenty-nine breeding sites have been identified in those states by the agency, but they estimate fewer than 1500 birds survive. The species' decline is due primarily to habitat destruction caused by development, recreational use of beaches, and the spread of an introduced European beach grass which reduces nesting habitat.

A final decision is expected early in 1993.

MAPS

The long-term banding project MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) has grown tremendously in its first three years. The project, which attempts to determine the success rate of local breeding birds and how long

they survive, has grown from 17 stations in 1989, to 38 in 1990 and 67 in 1991. According to The Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes, California which manages the program, the goal for 1992 is to add another 60 stations, concentrating in the Northeast and Northwest.

MAPS' long-term purpose is to test theories on the decline of some nesting species, including neotropical migrants.

STORMS CREATE NESTING HABITAT

The storms along the New England coast in 1991 brought much improved nesting habitat for Piping Plovers and Least Terns. The Massachusetts Audubon Society believes there is more nesting habitat now than in the last 12 years.

Hurricane Bob and the Halloween storm created broad expanses of gravel and sand on the South Shore, Cape Cod, and the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. On Duxbury Beach alone the potential Piping Plover habitat increased from less than one mile to nearly four.

ACCESS TO ALALA

In mid-March, 1992, Federal scientists began a 5-month study of the Alala, a



Alala

nearly-extinct crow native to Hawaii, on the grounds of the McCandless Ranch on The Big Island. The study is the result of an interim agreement between the National Audubon Society, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the ranch management. Last year the Audubon Society sued both the government agency and the ranch, claiming that ranch management had blocked access to the birds, which were not being adequately protected.

Through July, researchers will determine if the Alalas are breeding, and identify predators. Based on the study's findings, future strategies for saving the species will be determined.

It is estimated that less than 12 Alala remain in the wild, most in Koa forests on the ranch. Another ten are in a captive breeding flock on Maui, but they have not reproduced.

AUDUBON REPORT

PARLEZ-VOUS JAMES BAY?

Since New York State withdrew its intent to sign a new energy contract with Hydro-Quebec in late March, the provincial energy utility now wants to lock New York into an 800-megawatt commitment within its existing contract.

Although this would not be as great a commitment as a new contract, it could provide justification for the Great Whale River project, and the diversion of this massive river now emptying into Hudson Bay.

Audubon has expanded

the people of Quebec.”

The next stages of the James Bay campaign will involve reviewing and commenting upon the draft guidelines for Hydro-Quebec and then, when it is available, reviewing the Environmental Impact Statement for Great Whale.

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GREEN-RUMPED PARROTLET AND PET TRADE

The breeding patterns of a small green parrot may offer new hope for conservation in wild bird pet trade. Recent research on the Green-rumped Parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*) by Audubon ornithologist Jim Waltman has unearthed at least two astounding phenomena in this species'



Green-rumped Parrotlet

its efforts into Canada in order to battle the ill-conceived James Bay hydroelectric projects from both sides of the border. The James Bay area is a very important breeding and staging area for water-fowl and seabirds. The intended project would ruin their habitat. The Society intervened in Montreal in April where Audubon policy analyst, Mercedes Lee, gave testimony at a Great Whale public hearing. She was commended by the official panel for making her presentation in French, “the language of

breeding biology that could help preserve the species while also providing birds for the pet trade.

Studying these colorful parrots in the Llanos of Venezuela, Waltman discovered that the parrotlet had unusually large clutches. He found that for large broods of young, the last egg never fledged and the next-to-last egg rarely ever fledged. Knowing that the last egg will not hatch under wild conditions offers the possibility that they may be removed from the nest and raised in captivity without impacting the natural

survival rate of this species. Although the Green-rumped Parrotlet, native to Venezuela, the Guianas, Amazonian Brazil, and Trinidad, is not rare, its breeding ecology may have implications in similar parrots.

Non-detrimental egg removal offers a new opportunity for responsible wild bird “ranching.” As a result, income produced from safe harvesting could provide an economic base to encourage preserving the habitat. As Waltman says, his research with the Green-rumped Parrotlet suggests that there “may be ways to satisfy the demand from the pet trade without negatively impacting wild populations and simultaneously provide incentive to preserve their wild habitat.”

DIRECTIONS

DEATHS

William Drury, ecologist and former research director of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, died of cancer on March 26, 1992 at his home in Bar Harbor, Maine. He was 71 years old.

Drury contributed to the reintroduction of the Peregrine Falcon in the Northeast and served on several panels of the President's Science Advisory Committee during the Kennedy and Nixon Administrations. He lectured at Harvard University for almost 25 years and joined the faculty of the College of the Atlantic at Bar Harbour in 1976.

Louise de Kiriline Lawrence died on April 27, 1992 at the age of 98. She lived in the city of North Bay,

QUOTES

"I think the Legislature is misreading the public's attitude. They were not elected to rape the environment of this state."

Joan Denzer, lobbyist for Sierra Club of New Jersey after the Legislature approved a bill to automatically extend expired building permits for commercial and residential projects.

"Fall is my favorite season in Los Angeles. That's when birds change color and fall out of the trees."

David Letterman

"The term endangered species has a certain glamour to it, bringing to mind thoughts of noble eagles, stalking panthers or beautiful birds. Not every endangered species is majestic, however. Some are plain, some (to human eyes) quite grotesque and some...are simply cute."

Scott Weidensaul, author of *Seasonal Guide to The Natural Years*.

"Delicacy of form, beauty of plumage, liveliness of disposition, elegance of motion."

The late John Cassin, describing what attracted him to birds.

Ontario, Canada, and was a highly honored nature observer and writer.

Lawrence was the first Canadian woman to be voted an elective member of the American Ornithologists' Union and received many awards over the years. Her nature work was first published in the 1940s.

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HONORED

Kenn Kaufman received the Ludlow Griscom Award on April 23, 1992 in Mobile, Alabama. The award, given by the American Birding Association in conjunction with the Sports Optic Division of Bausch and Lomb, honors a person who has had a profound, positive impact on the birding community. Kaufman is the author of *Advanced Birding in the Peterson field guide*



Kenn Kaufman (center)

series. He also writes "The Changing Seasons," "The Practiced Eye," and edits the Regional Reports for *American Birds*.

On May 13, in Washington, D.C., the Chevron Conservation Awards for 1992 were announced. The program recognizes environmental achievers for their efforts in protecting and enhancing the nation's natural resources. Below are some of the winners:

Amos S. Eno, executive director of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in Washington, D.C., has worked for nearly 20 years to ensure Congressional funding for federal wildlife management agencies. He has pioneered a conservation program for neotropical migratory birds, worked for the U.S. Department of the Interior, the National Audubon Society and was director of Conservation



Amos S. Eno

Programs for the Foundation before becoming executive director.

Ilene Marckx of Washington, has opened her family's estate to the public, preserving a 100-acre wooded wetland in the process. The

OVERVIEW

wetland is home to more than 200 wildlife species and is protected and maintained by Marckx's group "Wetlands of West Hylebos, Inc." which has more than 200 members.



Ilene Marckx

Stanley A. Temple, professor at the University of Wisconsin, travels extensively working on the restoration of endangered bird species. He also serves as president of the Society of Conservation Biology, was the founder and editor of *Bird Conservation* and chairs the Wisconsin chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

WORLD BRIEFS

GERMANY

Zoologists in Germany believe that the learning powers of the Nightingale may, in some ways, surpass those of people. Dietmar Todt and Henrike Hultsch, from the Free University at Berlin, have isolated captive Nightingales (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) at birth, played tapes of birdsong for them and found that Nightingales can repeat complex strings of up to 60 phrases after hearing them once a day for two or three weeks.

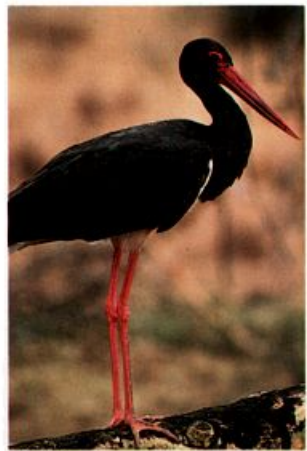
The Nightingales learn by combining short-term memory with "submemories." Todt says, "The Nightingale can store seven



Nightingale

songs— of about 50 seconds each—in its short-term memory.” He believes they subdivide the songs into smaller groups of “acoustic” memory, each of which contains three-to-four phrases. Then, to recall a song, the Nightingale reassembles the required phrases from its acoustic memory.

Todt and Hutsch believe their work will help in understanding the biological mechanisms of human memory.



Black Crane

GERMANY

Local naturalists have taken steps to defend Doeberitz Heath, taking inventory of its vast animal and plant life in hopes of converting the heath into a nature preserve. The heath, west of Berlin, is a haven for endangered cranes, geese and other birds including the Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), a bird more

at home in Africa and southern Europe than northern Germany, and the Black Crane (*Ciconia nigra*). Both species are on the endangered species list in northern Europe.

In recent years, the heath was used as a Soviet tank range. Today, the biologically-diverse heath is threatened by developers and tourists.

GREECE

An estimated 700,000 birds which are supposedly protected, are killed or wounded annually in Greece, including perhaps 4000 Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*). The Greek Centre for the Care of Wild Animals and Birds on the island of Aegina alone annually receives 150-200 Buzzards wounded by hunters in the winter months. Although hunting is against the law in cold or snowy weather the law is rarely enforced.

BRAZIL

The Brazilian Kaempfer’s Tody-Tyrant (*Idioptilon kaempferi*), described in 1929 and known only from a single specimen, has been rediscovered. The bird was sighted in December 1991 in humid, lowland forest in Santa Catarina, southern Brazil. This is less than one kilometer from where the original specimen was taken.

Owned by the regional electrical company, the forest has a reasonable degree of protection and scientists hope to relocate the bird in order to study it.

BRITISH WEST INDIES

The first nature reserve on Cayman Brac island was created late last year. One hundred acres in the heart of

the nesting grounds of the Cayman Brac Parrot (*Amazona leucocephala hesternae*) were formally set aside to protect the rare bird.

The Cayman Brac Parrot seemed to be headed for extinction in 1985, due to pet trade and hurricane-induced habitat loss. Public education and restoration efforts by the National Trust for the Cayman Islands and the RARE Center for Tropical Conservation have helped change the attitudes of local residents and the birds’ numbers have increased. An estimated 50 birds now exist, and scientists believe the species has a chance for survival.

CAMBODIA

The Eastern Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) has become the object of intense preservation efforts in Cambodia. This spring, the Department of Forestry signed an agreement with the International Crane Foundation and the Royal Forestry Department of Thailand allowing more detailed surveys and research on Cambodia’s wetlands where several hundred surviving cranes breed.

Results from the conducted studies will be used to form strategic preservation efforts in the region, which could then be used as a model for Vietnam and Thailand. The birds vanished from southern China, Thailand, and the Philippines due to war, hunting, and development.

George Archibald, director of the International

Crane Foundation hopes to take researchers to Cambodia next winter to do a thorough study of the regions as a basis for further preservation efforts.

FINLAND

In 1991 almost 20 pairs of Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) were poisoned, shot or trapped in Padasjarvi, their primary nesting area in northern Finland. Of 40 fledglings, only one is expected to survive according to scientists from Oulu University, which has been managing a conservation project for the eagle for 15 years.



Golden Eagle

Local reindeer owners, who believe the eagle kills newborn reindeer, are suspected of killing the birds. The Finnish Government has already compensated reindeer owners for their loss, but the Reindeer Owners’ Association wants the government to replace the case-by-case payments with a fixed annual amount. In turn, the Association will protect the eagles.

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