Cornell Lab of Ornithology News & Notes

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IS KEY

By Cornell Lab of Ornitholgy Staff

Canada, Mexico, and the United States share 882 native landbird species, almost one-third of which depend substantially for their survival on at least two of the countries each year, according to a new assessment by a collaboration of conservation scientists in all three countries. The assessment also identified 148 bird species in need of immediate conservation attention because of their highly threatened and declining populations.

Saving Our Shared Birds: Partners in Flight Tri-National Vision for Landbird Conservation is the first comprehensive conservation assessment of birds at the tri-national level. Partners in Flight is a cooperative effort involving government agencies, non-profit conservation organizations, academic institutions, professional associations, industry, and private individuals.

Key findings of the report include:

- The most imperiled birds include 44 species with very limited distributions, mostly in Mexico, including the Thick-billed Parrot and Horned Guan.
- Also of high tri-national concern are 80 tropical residents with ranges in Mexico, such as the Red-breasted Chat and Resplendent Quetzal.
- Additionally, 24 species that breed in the United States and Canada continue to warrant immediate action to prevent further declines, including Cerulean Warbler, Black Swift, and Canada Warbler.
- Forty-two common bird species have steeply declined by 50 percent or more in the past 40 years, including Common Nighthawk, Eastern Meadowlark and Loggerhead Shrike.

Government officials, on behalf of international bird conservation leaders from the United States, Canada, and Mexico, released the report on May 11, at the XV Annual Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The release of the report also brought attention to International Migratory Bird Day 2010.

Virginia Poter, Canadian Wildlife Services' director general at Environment Canada, said in a news release, "The release of this report illustrates our three countries' commitment to the long-term conservation of biological biodiversity and to working with each other to protect our natural heritage through forums like the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, and the International Year of Biodiversity. "

"The winter ranges of shared migrants show a striking geographic overlap with the ranges of species at greatest risk of extinction," said Dr. José Sarukhán Kermez, national coordinator of Mexico's National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity.

"More than 100 of the migrants shared substantially among our three countries depend on the same tropical and pine-oak forests in Mexico that support highly threatened tropical residents," he said in the news release.

This report is the latest effort by Partners in Flight to help species at risk and keep common birds common—its mission since 1990. Partners in Flight achieves success in conserving bird populations in the Western Hemisphere through combining resources of public and private organizations in North and South America.

To view *Saving Our Shared Birds: Partners in Flight Tri-National Vision for Landbird Conservation* and see a complete list of contributors to the report, visit www.savingourshared-birds.org.

To learn more about Partners in Flight, visit www.partners inflight.org.

THINK BEFORE YOU DRINK THAT LATTE

By Pat Leonard

A simple lifestyle choice can have a positive impact on bird conservation around the world. Scientists have established that the traditional method of growing coffee—beneath the canopy of a forest, rather than chopping down the trees for sun-grown coffees—provides vital habitat for birds.

"It's a simple formula: keep the trees, keep the birds," said Dr. Kenneth Rosenberg, director of Conservation Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, in a news release. "When trees are retained, this has tremendous value to birds, especially migratory birds that winter in Central and South America and breed in North America during the summer."

Research has shown that traditional shade-grown coffee plantations in Mexico can support more than 100 bird species, compared with six to 12 species in sun-grown monocultures.

Support of the shade-grown coffee movement has led to a new partnership between the Cornell Lab and Birds & Beans, a Massachusetts-based retailer that specializes in shade-grown coffee products certified "bird friendly®" by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. This certification means that Birds & Beans coffee is 100 percent organic and shade-grown.

"We started this project to make it easier for bird and nature lovers to do the right thing and enjoy great-tasting coffee at the same time," said Bill Wilson, co-founder of Birds & Beans, in the release. "By partnering with the Cornell Lab, we're sure we can all make a big difference for tanagers, thrushes, orioles, warblers, and other beautiful songbirds."

People who buy the coffee also help protect birds a second way: A portion of all online sales and sales of the coffee from some Wild Birds Unlimited stores goes to the Cornell Lab to help support its ongoing bird research, education, and conservation programs.

"Simply drinking the right coffee is an easy way for people to make a real difference for birds," Rosenberg said.

eBIRDING, NEST-WATCHING IN GULF

By Cornell Lab of Ornithology Staff

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill's sheer size, the difficulty of containing it and the toxicity of the oil leave many people feeling helpless—desperately wanting to do something but unable or unsure of what to do. Inventive ways to gather together small efforts by many people are beginning to pop up. A group called Grassroots Mapping is generating high-resolution photos of the coastline using cheap cameras and balloons made of helium-filled trash bags. At least two other groups are developing ways for people to report oil spill effects using their cell phones, according to CNN.

eBird takes a similar approach, tapping into the specialized knowledge of bird watchers to compile information about the birds that are on the front lines of the looming oil threat. Those of us who live far away may not be able to help with surveying, but with the gadget we can at least monitor how our fellow birders are doing—and learn how many species are faring, regardless of whether they make it onto the evening news.

By visiting Gulf Coast beaches and entering what they see into eBird, bird watchers can help scientists gauge the oil spill's effects as they develop. Surveys can help track problem areas, identify places where birds are numerous, or highlight areas that still need to be surveyed.

The eBird Gulf Coast Oil Spill Bird Tracker links to an interactive map that shows all reports for a species in the five-state region since April 1, 2010. Viewers can enlarge the map to see individual islands, beaches and marshes. Clicking on a sighting pin brings up the date of the sighting and number of individuals seen. Controls at the top of the page allow users to change the date range that's displayed, or look at results for a different species.

Additionally, eBird programmers recently retooled their database to expand eBird's recording capabilities. Users now have the option to record the number of oiled and sick birds that they see. With hurricane season officially under way, it's just in time. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting up to 23 named storms and three to seven major hurricanes this season. Though a fortuitously placed hurricane could actually disperse oil and drive it offshore (according to a NOAA

factsheet), a poorly placed storm pushing some 250,000 barrels of slicked oil ashore represents a monumental threat to the low-lying Mississippi Delta.

Nest-Watching

A Tree Swallow is not exactly the face of the Gulf oil spill at present—and we hope it never will be. But many backyard-nesting birds, including swallows, do migrate through the Gulf Coast twice a year. We're encouraging people to participate in our NestWatch project as one way to keep an eye on their populations.

Land birds aren't likely to get fouled in oil. But they do fuel up on coastal fruits and insects as they pass through, so they could either be exposed to toxins contained in their food or made vulnerable to reduced food supplies if oil has an effect.

NestWatch project leader Laura Burkholder said the effects could be subtle but widespread. "We need bird watchers across the country to help us find out if birds that pass through or winter in the Gulf region carry contamination with them, possibly creating an 'oil shadow' of declines in bird reproduction hundreds of miles from the coast," she said in a news release.

Nesting success is notoriously variable, so any such effect would be hard to pin down to a single cause like oil. The best way to look for it is to amass large amounts of data from a wide area and many observers. And that's pretty much the definition of a citizen-science project.

NestWatch is one such project that's open to anyone with an interest in birds. It involves visiting a nest for a few minutes, twice per week, and recording information such as how many eggs it contains, how many chicks hatch and how many leave the nest. NestWatch will focus on five species when looking for effects: Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Barn Swallow, Purple Martin and Tree Swallow. Learn more about how to help at www.nestwatch.org/NetCommunity.

Citizen-science participants have helped the Cornell Lab monitor the success rates of nesting birds for 45 years. Now, Burkholder said, it's especially critical to capture data on nesting birds to reveal the health of birds before they encounter the oil spill—as well as in the years ahead, to detect possible long-term effects.

To help the effort, visit our NestWatch site at http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest. In addition to accepting observations from the general public, NestWatch is available as a data repository for wildlife agencies and scientific organizations to support their research on the impacts of the oil spill.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a membership institution dedicated to interpreting and conserving the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds. Visit the lab's website at www.birds.cornell.edu.

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