

P R E F A C E

When this book was just a dream beginning to take shape in my mind, oil was washing up on the shores of Louisiana, covering Brown Pelicans, their nests, and their eggs. Whooping Cranes had recently suffered a dramatic die-off due to lack of food at their wintering spots in coastal Texas. It was spring, and migrating shorebirds were once again facing a reduction in their breeding habitats as they returned to the United States from the south.

So many bird species (as well as other animals and many plants) are declining in numbers, year by year. Many bird species are at, or are nearing, such low numbers that their ultimate fate is uncertain at best. Serious, thoughtful books have been written about this problem, many people are working to make a difference, and ways to stop or reverse the trends in the different species have been suggested. But many of the problems persist and worsen.

Although environmental problems, like many other major, long-standing problems around the world, are not likely to be solved by any one of us or by any group of us or to be solved quickly, it is worthwhile to try to work toward solutions. There are things we can do that can make a difference. This book is aimed at encouraging each of us to do something, to take action, to be part of improving the plight of birds, both those that are endangered and those that are around our homes and parks every day. I hope that each of you will try to learn about birds, about the problems, and about what can be done, so that we all will be on the side of the environment, rather than giving up without trying or, even worse, unashamedly being part of the problem.

There are four main sections in this book. The first section, "The Importance of Bird Habitat," provides general information on some of the main habitats that are important for birds, as well as examples of how birds have been and are being affected by changes in these habitats. The next section, "What Can Be Done to Help Birds," gives examples of general actions that people can take to help birds, including actions that can benefit endangered birds. The "Species Accounts of Birds in Trouble" section aims to make you, the reader, aware of selected examples of birds in the United States that are in trouble and the likely reasons for the trouble, and it presents ways for all of

us, as individuals and as groups, to figure out what we might do (or refrain from doing) to improve the situation. Most of the birds included in this section of the book are listed by one or more federal or state agencies or organizations as being "endangered," "threatened" or otherwise in dire straits, or headed in that direction. The final section of this book provides information and ideas on how each of us can help the everyday birds in our yards and in our communities, particularly in view of the habitat stresses and problems that birds face.

Birds that are extinct (Passenger Pigeon) or very likely extinct (Ivory-billed Woodpecker) or hanging on by a thread (California Condor) are not discussed in detail here, nor are most bird species that only infrequently appear in the United States (such as wandering Asian or Mexican species) or have only a small portion of their worldwide population in the United States (such as most of the parrots and parakeets that have small established US populations derived from escaped cage birds).

For readers who may not have as much prior knowledge of birds as amateur experts with long life lists, each bird account in this book presents a brief background of what the species looks like, how it behaves, and what its habitat preferences are. The historical abundance and current status of each of the selected species are discussed, as well as the reasons to be concerned about each species, the likely causes for low numbers and/or decline in their numbers, and the problems that each species faces or appears to face.

I hope that the accounts of birds in trouble will serve as a beginning for you and that you will move beyond these brief accounts to learn even more about the birds discussed here and their environments, as well as about the hundreds of other bird species that are of concern. I also hope that your caring about birds in trouble will help you try to make, and actually make, a difference in their, and our, world.

THE DREAD OF EXTINCTION

Among people who pay attention to birds are many birders whose love of the chase, as well as the amount of time spent on it and their bird tally list, leaves them little time or energy for conservation. In contrast are the bird lovers for whom conservation is an integral and all-consuming part of making sure that there are birds to watch now and in the future. In between these extremes are those who try to be both active birders and active

conservationists, who perhaps would rather be listing and chasing birds but who have come to the realization that unless something is done now and in the future to improve bird habitats and change our society's and our own individual habits, we will be caught in the downward spiral of a "Silent Spring" from which there will be no return for many species. The Passenger Pigeon is symbolic of what we dread: birds that once were so numerous they blackened the skies, and then were gone before anyone was able to take measures to keep them from extinction.

WHY CARE?

Most people who believe that it is critical to keep bird species from extinction wrestle with how to persuade others of the importance of this mission. How can we place a monetary value on a species that our progress- and bottom-line-oriented commercial society will recognize? For those who are part of a religious tradition that includes a Creator or values life and living beings, animals and plants are to be treasured and used wisely, without destroying or harming the creation if at all possible. We must be concerned about the "least of these" in the creation.

Even apart from religion, those who are knowledgeable about the environment and its plant and animal components know that destruction or harm of any part of the environment affects the whole, often in a way that is at best unpredictable and at worst devastating. While we humans often feel removed and apart from that whole, we are not. Casting our pollution into the waters or the air or onto the land clearly can cause severe problems for us, affecting our health, our crops, our recreational activities, and the world we smell and taste and hear and see when we look around us.

Part of the problem of course is that, if we have changed the environment so much that a single species is endangered, there is a sort of "slippery slope" effect. Once we have endangered or lost that species, later events occur that cause further changes that cannot be stopped or are extremely expensive or difficult to stop or reverse. This is often thought of as a "butterfly effect," which is a term coined by Edward Lorenz to indicate a sensitive dependence on initial conditions, where one tiny change to an initial condition (e.g., a butterfly's wings moving) can later result in a huge change (e.g., a hurricane).

As caretakers of the world, we should take an oath analogous to the physician's Hippocratic Oath: "First, do no harm." It is a great challenge to all of us

who are concerned about the environment to help others see that allowing a species to slide or plunge into extinction not only does harm to the species and its environment but also does harm to our world as a whole, as well as to our bodies and our souls.

HOW MANY BIRDS ARE LEFT?

It is very difficult, for many reasons, to know exactly how many bird species there are now, and it is even more difficult to know how many there were a few years ago and, even more so, when early naturalists lived. The numbers presented herein at the beginning of the discussions of the individual species and in appendix 1 are estimates of how many birds there are of each species. These estimates come from the National Audubon Society's 2007 Watchlist, as well as from various references that discuss the particular species. Where there seemed to be significant differences between estimates, I have included a range of numbers.

WHAT IS AN "IN-TROUBLE" BIRD?

In this book, I have generally used the phrase "in trouble," rather than such terms as "endangered," "threatened," "vulnerable," and the like, when discussing a species. Various organizations and governmental agencies use those and other terms and give them particular definitions that do not always agree or may overlap.

Appendix 2 provides the criteria for classifying birds as "in trouble" according to various agencies: the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the American Bird Conservancy, and the National Audubon Society (NAS). The NAS periodically issues its Watchlist, as do various state chapters of the National Audubon Society. As shown in appendix 2, the NAS Watchlist categorizes species that are in trouble as "red" (declining rapidly and/or having very small populations or limited ranges and facing major conservation threats; such species are typically of global conservation concern) and "yellow" (species that are either declining or rare; these species are typically of national conservation concern).

For the birds in trouble described in this book, appendix 3 provides the current status under the Endangered Species Act. Comparing appendices 2 and 3 makes it clear that there are many species "in trouble" that are not yet protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Although federal and state definitions of the status of birds may vary, it is useful to know those of the US Fish and Wildlife Service:

E = Endangered: in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range

T = Threatened: likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range

C = Candidate: under consideration for official listing when there is sufficient information to support listing

SC = Species of concern: no petitions for listing have been filed; have not been given E, T, or C status but have been identified as important to monitor

For more information see <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/glossary/index.html>.

Whether a particular species is placed in one or more of these categories by an organization or a governmental entity varies over time and from place to place across the United States and Canada. Therefore, I use the term "in trouble" to indicate that a species is not doing well, whatever its official or unofficial categorization. It may be a species that has always been too low in numbers to be safe from the possibility of extinction, a species that is decreasing or has decreased precipitously or gradually, or a species that is having difficulty reaching a sustainable level.

BIRDS SELECTED FOR INCLUSION IN THIS BOOK

The birds discussed in this book as being "in trouble" are either included in *Birder's Conservation Handbook: 100 North American Birds at Risk*, have a global population of less than twenty-five thousand, have a substantially decreasing continental US population, have recently been or are now close to extinction, and/or are listed by one or more governmental agencies or conservation organizations as being endangered, threatened, or otherwise in trouble. While there are birds that fit into one or more of these categories and are not included in this book, an increased understanding of the issues that are raised in the accounts presented here will show the reader how to take actions that can be of benefit to other birds that are also in trouble.

In any case, each species described in this book has been selected because of concerns that its status must be carefully watched to be sure that it does

not begin to decline or increase its rate of decline due to the various pressures that threaten it. For most of the species selected for this book, threats are real and ever present, and there is a need to DO SOMETHING NOW. What that something is varies from species to species. In some cases, the threat seems almost impossible to handle and the situation is dire, while in others there are concrete, realistic things that can and should be done to improve the situation incrementally or dramatically.

In a couple of cases, I have included species that currently have a relatively high population but are still deemed "in trouble" for some reason. For the Snowy Plover, for example, there are discrete populations in the United States that are on the brink of extinction, and for the Cerulean Warbler, the necessary forest nesting habitat is rapidly decreasing.

Some of the birds that are in trouble but not included in this book are certain subspecies or races that may be in trouble only in a particular geographic area where they were historically found in much greater numbers (e.g., the western Bell's Vireo is an endangered subspecies of a species that as a whole is not in danger). Though the Red Knot species as a whole is not in danger, it is included in this book because the particular population that migrates through the eastern United States has decreased dramatically. Also, some species that are in trouble in North America but are doing well elsewhere, such as in Latin America or Europe, are not included here, primarily to keep this book of a more reader-friendly size. To learn more about these other in-trouble birds, you might peruse some of the works in the Suggested Reading section of this book or search the Internet, particularly at sites mentioned in the main text and in the appendixes.

While not all of the birds covered in this book are listed as federally endangered, there are concerns, sometimes official concerns, about each of these species' future. Of course, whether or not a particular species is considered endangered or threatened, most of these species are still protected under the law during all or most of each year.

Upon reading the species accounts presented here, you may notice that many of those chosen for inclusion are not the "cute," colorful birds that tend to attract or be noticed by most people, and many of them are found in areas that are remote from most of us. While it was tempting to include more of the attractive, familiar birds, most of these species are not in danger. It is still very important that the habitat these common birds need for breeding, wintering, and migrating not be destroyed. Admittedly, however, while the Ivory

Gull was included primarily because the portion of the world population that is found in the Arctic region of the United States is in trouble, it is likely that its attractiveness played a part in the selection process. Some of the birds included in this book, such as the shorebirds, are plain, being brown and white or black and white, and thus are not particularly distinctive or noteworthy in appearance to a nonbirder. I have included them in the hope that they and their plight will become known to more people and that these birds will be valued and conserved in spite of their seeming drabness.

Readers should also note that birds found only or primarily in Hawaii are not included in this book. Of course, many of these Hawaiian birds are endangered or threatened, and some are close to or at extinction. These birds also urgently need to be protected. We can support organizations and efforts dedicated to protecting and conserving Hawaiian birds that are in trouble and the habitat where these birds are found. Examples include the American Bird Conservancy (<http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/oceansandislands/hawaii.html>) and the Hawaii Audubon Society (<http://www.hawaiiaudubon.org/>). More information about these birds and their status can also be found in bird field guides devoted to Hawaiian birds.

LAWS, TREATIES, RULINGS, AND AGREEMENTS RELATED TO BIRDS IN TROUBLE

While there is an almost unlimited number of enactments and documents related to birds, the environment, and protection of endangered birds, there are a few that deserve special mention.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) between the United States and Canada went into effect in July 1918. This treaty makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, or sell any of more than eight hundred species of migratory birds in the United States and Canada. In addition, the MBTA protects dead birds and bird parts, such as feathers, as well as eggs and nests. There are similar treaties between the United States and Mexico, Japan, and Russia. A "migratory bird" under the terms of the MBTA is any species or family of birds that lives, reproduces, or migrates within or across international borders at some point during its annual life cycle and includes many species that are currently legally hunted as game birds. Most birds are deemed "migratory" under this act. There can be criminal penalties under this act even for the accidental killing of a migratory bird.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) has been in place since 1973. It is

administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service, which is overseen by the Commerce Department. Its main provisions are designed to conserve threatened and endangered plants and animals and the habitats where they are found. Animals and plants that are listed under the ESA are either “endangered” (in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range) or “threatened” (likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future). In order to be listed under the ESA, animals or plants must be nominated by one of the enforcing agencies or by petition by anyone. If the particular agency deems that the listing is warranted, it undertakes a status review, after which it must decide within one year whether the species is to be listed or rejected for listing or if the agency is to be given more time to decide. After time allowed for proposal of a rule and a decision whether or not to actually list the species, the agency must also designate the critical habitat for each species. Listing decisions are subject to judicial review and can be overturned. The official FWS list for the United States is at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/species/us-species.html>. A worldwide list of endangered species is also kept by the FWS.

The ESA makes it illegal to “take” a listed animal, and a “take” includes significantly modifying the habitat of that animal. The ESA also requires federal agencies to ensure that their actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or modification of a critical habitat. The ESA is to be implemented by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service.

Because the ESA has great potential to affect private property, there has been much debate about it, as well as a number of lawsuits. Two of the most famous legal cases involve the snail darter (a fish whose habitat is affected by the Tellico Dam on the Tennessee River) and the Spotted Owl (listed as endangered in 1990, resulting in millions of acres of Pacific Northwest forest becoming protected areas).

More recently, in September 2011, a federal judge in Tucson, Arizona, seeking to speed ESA protection, approved a legal agreement between the Center for Biological Diversity and the Fish and Wildlife Service that requires the FWS to make initial or final decisions on adding 757 different organisms (animals and plants) to the endangered species list by 2018.

Other laws of importance to the conservation of birds include

international treaties such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Fauna and Flora (CITES), which was signed by 118 countries, including the United States (<http://www.cites.org/>). Species listed under CITES appendix I cannot be bought or sold for profit, while those listed under CITES appendix II can be bought or sold only if such trade does not harm the survival of the species. The Wild Bird Conservation Act (WBCA) of 1992 (<https://www.fws.gov/international/laws-treaties-agreements/us-conservation-laws/wild-bird-conservation-act.html>) relates to birds mentioned in the appendixes of CITES and lists the requirements that must be met to obtain a permit to import a bird that legally may be imported.