



# US public lands essential for hundreds of species

Title The United States Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has released the 2011 *State of the Birds Report*, the nation's first assessment of birds on lands and waters owned by the American people. The findings indicate tremendous potential for bird conservation: publicly owned habitats support at least half of the entire U.S. distributions of more than 300 bird species. The report concludes that America's public lands and waters, ranging from national wildlife refuges to national parks to national forests, offer significant opportunities to halt or reverse the decline of many species. More than 1,000 bird species inhabit the U.S., 251 of which are federally threatened, endangered, or of conservation concern. The report provides a scientific tool to help public agencies identify the most significant conservation opportunities in each habitat. "The State of the Birds report is a measurable indicator of how well we are fulfilling our shared role as stewards of our nation's public lands and waters", Salazar said. "Although we have made enormous progress in conserving habitat on public lands, we clearly have much more work to do. The good news is that because birds so extensively use public lands and waters as habitat, effective management and conservation efforts can make a significant difference in whether these species recover or slide towards extinction." "This report is telling us that we must take action to protect the public lands our nation's birds depend on", said David Yarnold, President & CEO, Audubon. "That means environmentally-sound siting for green energy and the discipline to wean ourselves off fossil fuel. That means adequate funding for the public agencies that preserve, restore and manage these lands for wildlife and the millions of Americans that visit them. And that means investing in the kind of public-private partnerships that have shaped conservation since Teddy Roosevelt established Florida's Pelican Island as the first federal bird reservation in 1903, with support from the Florida Audubon Society." Audubon scientists contributed to the report, which assessed the distribution of birds on nearly 344 million hectares of public land and 10 million square kilometres of ocean. It relied on high-performance computing techniques to generate detailed bird distribution maps based on citizen-science data reported to eBird and information from the U.S. Geological Survey's Protected Areas Database of the United States. The report also relied on decades of data from Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, begun in 1900. The report highlighted the wide variety of bird habitats on public lands. These include:

- **Aridlands:** More than half of U.S. aridlands are publicly owned. Thirty-nine per cent of aridland bird species are of conservation concern and more than 75% of species are declining.
- **Oceans and Coasts:** All U.S. marine waters are publicly owned and are home to 86 ocean bird species and 173 coastal species. At least 39% of U.S. bird species restricted to ocean habitats are declining and almost half are of conservation concern, indicating

- severe stress in these ecosystems.
- **Forests:** Public lands include some of the largest un-fragmented blocks of forest, which are crucial for the long-term health of many bird species, including the endangered Kirtland's warbler, which has 97% of its U.S. distribution on public lands.
- **Arctic and Alpine:** Ninety percent of boreal forest, alpine, and arctic breeding bird species in Alaska rely on public lands for habitat, including 34 breeding shorebird species of high conservation concern. There are more public lands in Alaska than in the rest of the U.S. combined, offering huge potential to manage lands for conservation.
- **Islands:** More birds are in danger of extinction in Hawaii than anywhere else in the U.S. Public lands in Hawaii support 73% of the distribution of declining forest birds. Among declining Hawaiian forest birds on Kauai, about 78% rely on state land. Four endangered species in the North-west Hawaiian Islands are entirely dependent on federal lands.
- **Wetlands:** Wetlands protection has provided the 'gold standard' for bird conservation. On the whole, 39 species of hunted waterfowl have increased by more than 100 percent during the past 40 years as nearly 12 million hectares of wetlands have been acquired and management practices have restored bird populations.
- **Grasslands:** Grassland birds are among our nation's fastest declining species, yet only a small amount ? 13%-- of grassland is publicly owned and managed primarily for conservation. Forty-eight per cent of grassland-breeding bird species are of conservation concern, including four with endangered populations.

The 2011 State of the Birds report is a collaborative effort as part of the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative, involving federal and state wildlife agencies, and scientific and conservation organisations. These include the American Bird Conservancy, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Bureau of Land Management, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Department of Defense, the [National Audubon Society](#), The Nature Conservancy, the National Park Service, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. The full report is available at [www.stateofthebirds.org](http://www.stateofthebirds.org)