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DISAPPEARING COMMON BIRDS SEND ENVIRONMENTAL WAKE-UP CALL

Birdsongs that filled the childhoods of countless baby-boomers are rarely heard wafting on today's spring breezes....

Once-familiar avian spectacles now elude young birdwatchers...

It's not your imagination...

New York, NY, June 14, 2007 - A new analysis by the National Audubon Society reveals that populations of some of America's most familiar and beloved birds have taken a nosedive over the past forty years, with some down as much as 80 percent. The dramatic declines are attributed to the loss of grasslands, healthy forests and wetlands, and other critical habitats from multiple environmental threats such as sprawl, energy development, and the spread of industrialized agriculture. The study notes that these threats are now compounded by new and broader problems including the escalating effects of global warming. In concert, they paint a challenging picture for the future of many common species and send a serious warning about our increasing toll on *local* habitats and the environment itself.

"These are not rare or exotic birds we're talking about—these are the birds that visit our feeders and congregate at nearby lakes and seashores and yet they are disappearing day by day," said Audubon Chairperson and former EPA Administrator, Carol Browner. "Their decline tells us we have serious work to do, from protecting local habitats to addressing the huge threats from global warming."

Species on Audubon's list of 20 *Common Birds in Decline* have seen their populations plummet at least 54 percent since 1967. The following are among those hardest hit:

-- *Northern Bobwhite* populations are down 82 percent and have largely vanished from northern parts of their range in Wisconsin, Michigan, New York and New England mainly due to loss of suitable habitat to development, agricultural expansion and plantation-style forestry practices.

-- *Evening Grosbeaks* that range from mountains of the west to northern portions of the east coast show population declines of nearly 78 percent amid increasing habitat damage and loss from logging, mining, drilling

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and development.

-- *Northern Pintail* populations in the continental U.S. are down nearly 78 percent due to expanding agricultural activity in their prairie pothole breeding grounds.

-- *Greater Scaup* populations that breed in Alaska, but winter in the Great Lakes and along Atlantic to Pacific Coasts are being hard hit by global warming induced melting of permafrost and invasion of formerly-southern species; populations are down approximately 75 percent.

-- *Eastern Meadowlarks*, down 71 percent, are declining as grasslands are lost to industrialized agricultural practices. Increased demand for biofuel crops threatens increased agricultural use of lands that are currently protected, making both Eastern and Western Meadowlarks even more vulnerable.

-- *Common Terns*, which nest on islands and forage for fish near ocean coasts, lakes and rivers, are vulnerable to development, pollution and sea level rise from global warming. Populations in unmanaged colonies have dropped as much as 70 percent, making the species' outlook increasingly dependent on targeted conservation efforts.

-- *Snow Buntings*, which breed in Alaska and northern Canada, are suffering from the loss of fragile tundra habitat as global warming alters and disrupts the Arctic's delicate ecological balance; populations are down 64 percent.

-- *Rufous Hummingbird* populations have declined 58 percent as a result of the loss of forest habitat to logging and development, in both their breeding range in the Pacific Northwest and their wintering sites in Mexico.

-- *Whip-poor-wills*, down 57 percent, are vulnerable to fragmentation and alteration of their forest habitat from development and poor forest management practices.

-- *Little Blue Herons* now number 150,000 in the U.S. and 110,000 in Mexico, down 54 percent in the U.S. Their decline is driven by wetland loss from development and degradation of water quality, which limits their food supply.

Overall, agricultural and development pressures have driven grassland birds to some of the worst declines, followed closely by shrub, wetland and forest-dependent species. "Direct habitat loss continues to be a leading cause for concern," said Audubon Bird Conservation Director and analysis author, Greg Butcher, PhD. "But now we're seeing the added impact of large-scale environmental problems and policies." Butcher notes that global warming is damaging some key habitats and speeding the spread of invasive species that spur further declines. Mounting demand for corn-based fuels is expected to result in increased use of marginal farmland that currently serves as important habitat. The fate of species such as Eastern Meadowlarks and Loggerhead Shrikes could hinge on efforts to conserve these areas. "People who care about the birds and about human quality of life need to get involved in habitat protection at home, in pushing for better state and national protections and in making changes in their daily routines," Butcher adds.

Public response will shape the long-term outlook for the listed species. Unlike WatchList birds, these *Common Birds in Decline* are not in immediate danger of extinction, despite global populations as low as 500,000 for some species - the threshold for a "common bird" designation. But even birds with significantly higher overall populations are experiencing sharp declines, and with their populations down sharply, their ecological roles are going unfilled and their ultimate fate is

uncertain. Audubon leaders hope the multiple threats to the birds people know will prompt individuals to take multiple actions, both locally and directed toward state and national policies.

Audubon's *Common Birds in Decline* list stems from the first-ever analysis combining annual sighting data from Audubon's century-old Christmas Bird Count program with results of the annual Breeding Bird Survey conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey. "This is a powerful example of how tens of thousands of volunteer birders, pooling their observations, can make an enormous difference for the creatures they care the most about," said noted natural history writer Scott Weidensaul. "Thanks to their efforts, we have the information. Now all of us – from birders to policy makers – need to take action to keep these species from declining even further."

"Fortunately, people's actions can still make a difference," Audubon's Greg Butcher adds. "Average citizens can change the fate of these birds just as average citizens helped us confirm the trouble they face." Concerned individuals can visit www.audubon.org for important information on how to help keep common birds common and our shared environment healthy—suggested actions are also attached.

State-specific lists of the common birds in serious decline are available in select areas. Journalists may visit Audubon's online press room at <http://www.audubon.org/news/pressroom/CBID> for local contact information.

Keeping Common Birds Common: What Individuals Can Do to Help

Protect Local Habitat

Join local Audubon Chapters and other groups to protect and restore habitats close to home. Audubon's Important Bird Areas program offers opportunities to save critical bird habitat, from small land parcels to broad ecosystems. Learn more at www.audubon.org/bird/iba/index.html.

Promote Sound Agricultural Policy

This has enormous impact on grassland birds and habitat, including Northern Bobwhites and Eastern Meadowlarks. Promoting strong conservation provisions in the federal Farm Bill and Conservation Reserve Program can help to protect millions of acres of vital habitat.

Support Sustainable Forests

The Boreal Forest in the Northern U.S. and Canada is essential breeding territory for many species of birds, including Evening Grosbeaks. Federal and state legislations promoting sustainable forest management will help fight habitat loss from inappropriate logging, mining, and drilling.

Protect Wetlands

Support for local, state and federal wetlands conservation programs is essential to protect a wide array of species. Learn more at <http://www.audubon.org/campaign/cleanWater2.html>.

Fight Global Warming

The decline of common birds is just one impact of global warming's mounting threat to people and wildlife around the world. Individual energy conservation along with strong federal, state, and local legislation to cap greenhouse emissions can help to curb its worst consequences. Learn more at <http://www.audubon.org/globalWarming/>.

Combat Invasive Species

Invasive non-native species disrupt the delicate ecological balance that sustains birds and other wildlife. Federal, regional, state, and local regulations are needed to combat this growing environmental threat. Learn more at <http://www.audubon.org/campaign/invasives/index.shtm>. The Audubon At Home program offers tips for supporting birds with native plants at http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/index.html.

Now in its second century, Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation.

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