

## NATIONAL AUDUBON RELEASES "STATE OF THE BIRDS"

On Tuesday, October 19, The National Audubon Society released the "The State of the Birds", a report documenting the health and abundance of North America's birds. Appearing in the October issue of Audubon Magazine, "The State of the Birds" paints a disturbing picture. Almost 30% of America's bird species are in "significant decline," a situation that signals seriously degraded environmental conditions in the habitats these birds call home.

The bottom line: the state of the birds in 2004 is not sound. In particular, a disturbing 70 percent of grassland species; 36 percent of shrub-land bird species; 25 percent of forest bird species; 13 percent of wetland species; and 23 percent of bird species in urban areas are showing "statistically significant declines."

According to "State of the Birds," these declines are abnormal. Not part of the natural, cyclical rise and fall of bird populations, "statistically significant declines" are due to outside factors such as loss of native grasslands, overgrazing, development of wetlands, bad forest management, invasive species, pollution, and poor land use decisions.

Audubon's President John Flicker sees a clear message in this report. "Like the canary in the coal mine warning the miner of danger ahead, our birds are an indicator of environmental and human health," he said. "Birds signal that we are at risk next."

But, Flicker also sees a clear path out of trouble. "People may have created these problems, but people can solve them, if we act now," he stated. To that end, Audubon is now addressing the findings of "State of the Birds" in its conservation agenda at the legislative and policy making level, and in the states where the greatest conservation challenges exist.

Compiled by Audubon Scientist Greg Butcher, "State of the Birds" analysis makes the case for private and public action. Based on the report's findings, Audubon is advocating for improved grassland, forest, and wetland protection, stronger pollution controls, partnerships with private landowners, and backyard habitat programs for homeowners.

"State of the Birds" summarizes the status of nearly 700 birds species native to the continental United States, focusing on the condition of species in each of five habitat types: grasslands, shrublands, forests, wetlands, and urban areas (the fastest growing habitat type in the U.S.). Written using USGS Breeding Bird Survey and Audubon's WatchList - cross-referenced with Audubon's Christmas Bird Count data, the report will be issued on a yearly basis, and will inform Audubon's conservation agenda, identifying key areas requiring immediate action.

Birds not only serve as reliable indicators of environmental conditions, they also contribute greatly to the U.S. economy. Keeping birds - and their home habitats - in good condition is not only a good conservation policy, it is also good business. The worth of birds beyond their aesthetic and conservation value is something that is beginning to be more fully appreciated, a situation that has created allies for bird conservation in small and large business, and local governments - entities that have been historically unlikely conservation partners.

“According to the U.S. Forest Service, 70 million Americans - one-third of all adults in this country - call themselves birdwatchers. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service notes that they contribute at least \$32 billion in retail sales, \$85 billion in overall economic output, and \$13 billion in state and federal taxes, creating 863,406 jobs,” continued Flicker. “Birds also contribute to the bottom line in more subtle ways, providing free pest and weed control, distributing seeds, and pollinating flowers and crops. American businesses and communities simply cannot afford to ignore the state of the birds.”

A digest of the report was published in the October issue of Audubon magazine and a further analysis is available on the Audubon website, [www.audubon.org/bird/stateofthebirds](http://www.audubon.org/bird/stateofthebirds) <<http://www.audubon.org/bird/stateofthebirds>> .