

The Klamath Bird

Newsletter of the Klamath Bird Observatory, Spring 2009



The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009

John Alexander, KBO Executive Director

The health of America's habitats can be measured by the "state of our birds." Our diverse habitats provide us with abundance - clean air, clean water, and fertile soils. These habitats are what support the natural resources on which birds depend; we also depend on these natural resources. As a broad scale index, the recently released report, *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009*, accounts for the health of America's habitats, and the ecological services provided by America's habitats. These ecosystem services provide us with the natural resources that fuel our economic development. Therefore, *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* serves as an indicator of the potential for continued economic development in the United States.

This comprehensive report documents an important and troubling message about the state of our environment. Fortunately, the report also finds cause for optimism if we take conservation action now. *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* is a product that resulted from a 40 year partnership among federal and state agencies, conservation organizations and volunteers. Through this partnership we have tracked the status of bird populations across our country for over four decades.

Efforts to monitor birds provide a scientific foundation for identifying conservation opportunities. Through monitoring we can explain why bird populations are in decline and identify ways to reverse declines. Bird monitoring provides a scientific means for identify problems, and solutions, and helps us to indentify where conservation investments are most likely to result in conservation success.

By acting on the conservation opportunities identified in *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* we can protect and re-build resilient landscapes, landscapes that will better provide society with the natural resources we need to thrive in the face of climate change and continued population growth.

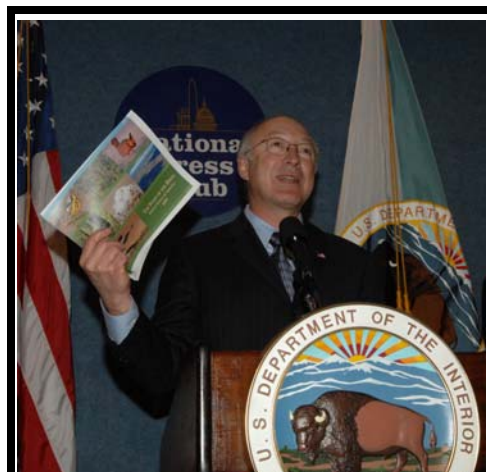
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The messages delivered in *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* are at the heart of KBO's efforts. We employ research and monitoring techniques and deliver education and outreach programs that advance bird and habitat conservation. We act locally in the Klamath-Siskiyou Bioregion of southern Oregon and northern California. We think globally as we help others throughout the Western Hemisphere apply our successful conservation model through training programs and leadership in conservation networks. Through our programs we actively inform conservation programs in order to reverse reported bird population declines by:

- Monitoring to identify the cause of population declines;
- Demonstrating the role birds play as indicators of environmental health;
- Implementing applied research that identifies conservation opportunities;
- Fostering partnerships to further our efforts; and,
- Educating and informing the decision makers of today and tomorrow.

Read on to learn more specifics about how KBO's dedicated staff, board, partners, and supporters work to understand and improve the state of our birds.

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Secretary Salazar. Photo: USFWS

This spring, *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009*, was released by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. This document presents birds and indices that describe bird population trends as bellwethers of our nation's natural, cultural, and economic well-being.

KBO was part of the prestigious group of federal and state government agencies and conservation organizations responsible for this unprecedented effort. Our Education and Outreach Director, Ashley Dayer, served on the State of the Birds Communications Team. John Alexander, our Executive Director, served as a reviewer and participated in the report's release and related congressional briefings.

President's Perch

Margaret Widdowson

Dear Friends,

As I take over from Dick Ashford as Klamath Bird Observatory's president, I would like to acknowledge Dick's outstanding and inspirational leadership over the past 2½ years. He has left some very big boots to fill, but we are all delighted that he has not gone far – he is still here to support and mentor us all. I have served on KBO's board since its beginning in 2000, and it has been a privilege and a joy to watch KBO take root, grow, and flourish, developing and maintaining strong roots in the community of the Klamath-Siskiyou Bioregion while gaining national and international recognition.

This newsletter focuses on the latest of KBO's achievements—our high-level involvement in *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009*, released on March 19, 2009. Our own Ashley Dayer was a leader in the nationwide Communications Team for this effort, catapulting KBO into the realm of greater leadership among nationally recognized bird conservation organizations. KBO's Executive Director, John Alexander, joined Ashley in Washington, DC to participate in the release of *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* that resulted in a strong media interest with over 200 newspaper articles published across the country and around the globe.

Unfortunately, it does not present a rosy picture - our birds that are bellwethers of our natural, cultural, and economic health as a nation are in decline. There are, however, success stories like the Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle that show birds can respond quickly to conservation action.

Here is a scene-setting quote from the report's introduction:

The birds we see in our backyards, fields, forests, deserts, and oceans have much to tell us about the health of the environment. Each year, thousands of citizen-science participants contribute data from across the United States, making it possible to identify birds in trouble. By understanding the message from birds and taking action, we can help them thrive and safeguard our own future.

Since 2000, KBO has been out in the backyards, fields, forests, and high deserts. KBO's strong, science-based long-term monitoring projects are tracking bird populations, providing the essential data to tell us what the "State of the Birds" really is. By analyzing the data, KBO reads the "messages from birds" and translates them into action: for example we have written conservation plans to guide land managers and habitat restoration projects. Each year KBO trains interns, local, national, and international alike, who learn the latest techniques then radiate home to continue the work. And by introducing children to birds and science, KBO is educating the next generation of conservationists and introducing them to a life-long interest in birds, their habitats, and how to care for them.

In this newsletter, you'll read examples of what KBO is doing about "The State of the Birds." Let's celebrate KBO's many contributions and national leadership!

Cheers,

MJ Widdowson

Margaret Widdowson

SAVE THE DATE

Wings and Wine Gala

Saturday, August 22nd, 2009

6pm—10pm

RoxyAnn Winery in Medford, Oregon

***Enjoy an evening celebrating bird conservation,
including a silent auction, music by One Horse Shy, complimentary wine and food!***

State of Forest Birds and the Klamath-Siskiyou Bioregion

Jaime Stephens, KBO Research & Monitoring Director

According to *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009*, approximately one-third of forest bird species are experiencing population declines. Western forest birds are faring quite well compared with their eastern counterparts. They are also doing better than birds that prefer other habitats, such as aridlands and grasslands; however, there is still reason for concern. In the west, of 38 forest obligate species, the report shows ten species in decline and eight species increasing, resulting in a slight downward trend for the western forest bird group as a whole.

An excerpt from *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* summarizes current threats in forests:
Although forest birds have fared better overall than birds in other habitats, many species have suffered steep declines and remain threatened by unplanned and sprawling urban development, unsustainable logging, increased severity of wildfires, and a barrage of exotic forest pests, and disease, which will likely be exacerbated by climate change.

Several birds which many of us would consider “common” in our bioregion are in trouble. Both year-round residents and Neotropical migrants indicate concern. Resident species include the Oak Titmouse, which is threatened by oak woodland habitat loss, and Lewis’s Woodpecker, which is dependent on oak woodlands and mature pine forest. Neotropical migrants including Western Wood-Pewee and Black-throated Gray Warbler have negative population trends. Their populations are dependent on



The Black-throated Gray Warbler relies on healthy breeding habitat in western United States and wintering habitat in Mexico.
Photo: James Livaudais

the well-being of multiple habitats - breeding habitat, stop-over habitat (the habitats they use during their migratory journey), and wintering habitat. Mature forest species suffering declines include the Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and Varied Thrush.

This national report serves to bring bird conservation issues to the forefront and highlight species and habitats of concern. However, there is reason for optimism. Through KBO’s research efforts we are identifying current forest practices that benefit birds. We are already undertaking positive actions within the Klamath-Siskiyou Bioregion to do



The Lewis’s Woodpecker depends on acorns as a food source. Their decline is associated with loss of oak woodlands and mature pine forest.
Photo: James Livaudais

our part in reversing forest bird population trends. Many birds benefit from some of the current land management practices, including certain restoration actions that treat forests that are compromised from a century of fire suppression. Some fuels reduction efforts directly address key threats that birds face, such as lack of mature trees, snags, and opened woodlands. For example, select species are benefiting from the restoration of aspen groves and oak woodlands that, without natural wildfire, have been replaced by encroaching conifers. While there is agreement that forest restoration practices in general are good for many bird species, we have much to learn about the effectiveness of varying forest treatment types—a focus of KBO research efforts.

It is important that land managers measure the results of forest treatments on the ecosystem, and one way to accomplish that is by looking at changes in bird abundance and bird community composition. Recent KBO publications demonstrate the use of bird monitoring as a tool for measuring the ability of forest management to reach desired ecological conditions. KBO’s Research and Monitoring Team is actively engaged in the process of adaptive management by monitoring birds to measure the effectiveness of forest treatments and their ability to increase the health of our forests and contribute to reversing the declines of forest-dwelling birds.

What Can We Learn From Aquatic Birds?

Jennifer Bruce, KBO Research & Monitoring Program Manager

Just as different species of songbirds are found in habitats that offer the food sources, shelter, and water they require, aquatic bird species such as herons, rails, and pelicans also rely on specific habitats. As their group name suggests, aquatic birds depend on habitats associated with bodies of water such as lakes and wetlands. Because wetlands respond quickly to management, informed conservation can result in successful conservation. *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* demonstrates how wetland bird conservation efforts have resulted in an increase of North American waterfowl populations, as well as wetland generalist species. However, some generalist wetland species, such as the Green Heron and Spotted Sandpiper, continue to decline. Likewise, specialist wetland species, such as the Black Tern, also show declines. For nesting, Black Terns depend on vegetation that emerges above still waters of biologically rich wetlands.



Black Tern populations have declined dramatically since the 1960s. KBO has monitored Black Terns in the Klamath Basin since 1996. Photo: James Livaudais

The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009 highlights that we lack adequate data for understanding the status of some species of aquatic birds. For example, recent data for marsh bird species show substantial population fluctuations, but many of the species are notoriously hard to detect and make it difficult to accurately assess their populations. To help fill these information gaps, KBO is leading the Oregon Coordinated Aquatic Bird Monitoring Program and working

with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and other partners to better understand the state of Oregon's aquatic birds. Last spring KBO conducted a pilot study on secretive marsh bird species as part of a nationwide marsh bird study to inform wetland ecosystem management by monitoring aquatic birds that serve as indicators of wetland health. Results of our research will be used to identify opportunities to implement conservation efforts for species that are slipping through the cracks.

Bird Bio: Rufous Hummingbird

Lauren Kemple, Education Specialist (AmeriCorps)

First you hear the high-pitched hum of his two inch wings, flapping 52 to 62 times per second. Then he zips past, a streak of bronze and green, *tzzew tzupity tzupity tzuping* at another bird in aggressive defense of his territory. During the breeding season, this male Rufous Hummingbird will perform elaborate J-shaped diving displays to attract females. Often times indistinguishable from Allen's Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbirds tend to have more rufous-colored backs, though up to five percent of them are mostly green. Females have greener backs than males with rufous at the base of their tails.



Rufous Hummingbird. Photo: James Livaudais

This "extremist" hummingbird migrates the farther north than any other hummingbirds in its family. Its journey is, relative to its body length, the longest known avian migration in the

world! They spend the winters as far south as southern Mexico and breed throughout the Pacific Northwest, into Alaska. Spring migration seems to be timed to follow the blooming of flowers, leading them through California in March and April, north to their breeding grounds by mid-spring.

Considered a valuable indicator species, the Rufous Hummingbird is viewed as a gauge of environmental health by researchers. Highly associated with western shrublands, they are also found in coniferous forests and riparian areas. Recent studies have shown a positive association with young broadleaf forests. Population trends for these birds are of high concern, with nearly a four percent reduction per year for the past 42 years.

Continued on next page

Birds and Youth: Indicators of the Future

Annie Kilby, KBO Youth Education Projects Lead

The *U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* encouragingly describes the resilience of species that have come back from the brink of extinction because of conservation measures, often implemented due to successful education and communications campaigns. It is this pairing of science and education that is essential to protecting one of the nation’s most beloved natural resources—birds.

KBO’s youth education programs reach out to the young minds in our region emphasizing the value of birds as indicators of environmental integrity. Education kits designed by KBO for birding trails and national parks, focus on the relationship between birds and habitats. These kits were designed through the support of forest-related education funds from Klamath County.

With KBO educators, seventh grade students from Tulelake High School investigated bird and habitat relationships in sagebrush steppe ecosystems along the Klamath Basin Birding Trail at Lava Beds National Monument. They compared habitat aspects of two sites—one recently burned in a wildfire and one without recent fire. Students assessed habitat quality by recording such data as the presence of sagebrush, herbaceous plants, and mature junipers. Based on their assessments, students discussed which focal bird species would most likely be living in the area and the overall health of the habitat for



Seventh grade students from Tulelake High School investigated a burned area at Lava Beds National Monument as part of a habitat assessment lesson.

birds and other species.

The “take-home message” from *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* and KBO’s education programs is that by understanding bird populations, we better understand the health of the environment we share with birds and other wildlife. By cultivating conservation knowledge, attitudes, and skills, we are nurturing a growing audience of youth who understand the connection between birds, the habitats we share with birds, and the impact of our own behavior.

Hummingbird (Continued)

According to *Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan*, the Rufous Hummingbird is of particular concern due to vulnerability from a limited non-breeding distribution as well as a limited breeding distribution. The continental objective calls for an emphasis to increase this population by 100%.

Along with *Partners in Flight*, the Western Hummingbird Project addresses hummingbird conservation issues in North America through habitat restoration and enhancement, monitoring, research, and education and outreach. KBO contributes to this project through collaboration with the US Forest Service Wings Across the Americas Program, the Hummingbird Monitoring Network, and many partners.



Rufous Hummingbird. Photo: James Livaudais

References: [Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan](#), 2004, by Terrill Rich et al.; [The Birds of North America](#), first edition 2005, edited by Dr. Alan Poole and Dr. Frank Gill.

Calendar—Join KBO for Spring and Summer Events

“Better at Birding by Ear Workshop” on June 12th-13th, 2009

It's time to sharpen your birding ear! With a focus on intermediate to advanced skills, we will practice identification of warbler, sparrow, finch, and flycatcher vocalizations and distinguish sound-alike species such as Western Tanager and Black-headed Grosbeak. Expert instruction in the classroom and field will be provided by Harry Fuller, KBO Bird Walk Volunteer, and John Alexander, KBO Executive Director. Classroom on Friday, June 12th from 7pm-9pm. Field trip on Saturday, June 13th from 7am-2pm. Advance registration required, limit: 35. Meet at Jefferson Nature Center (2931 South Pacific Hwy, Medford, Oregon). Call 541-201-0866 to register. Cost: \$35 nonmembers, \$25 KBO members.

May 2nd: KBO Bird Walk to Jacksonville Woodlands

Oak woodlands and riparian habitats of Jacksonville Woodlands and Jacksonville Cemetery provide numerous songbird species with breeding and nesting habitat. Try to spot breeding behavior and hear the songs of a variety of species. Meet at 8am at Northwest Nature Shop (Ashland). Leader: Harry Fuller, KBO Volunteer & Member. To register, call 541-482-3241.



May 9th: International Migratory Bird Day in Ashland, Oregon; Klamath Falls, Oregon; and Yreka, California

Celebrate this year's International Migratory Bird Day theme "Birds in Culture" with bird walks, bird banding demonstrations, and kids activities. Learn more about the amazing migrations of birds and their importance to human cultures.

May 16th: KBO Bird Walk to Roxy Ann Butte

Explore the chaparral along the road leading to and the trail up Roxy Ann Butte. Spot migratory songbirds returning to the Rogue Valley. Meet at 8am at Wild Birds Unlimited (Medford). Leader: Steve Runnels, KBO Volunteer & Member. To register, call 541-770-1104.

June 6th: KBO Bird Walk to Emigrant Lake and Beyond!

Look for local breeding birds at this Ashland lake and surrounding area. Bring your scope. Meet at 8am at Northwest Nature Shop (Ashland). Leader: Dick Ashford, KBO Board Member. To register, call 541-482-3241.

June 13th: KBO Bird Walk to Tou Velle and Denman

Enjoy breeding and nesting behavior of birds of the Rogue River riparian habitat. Meet at 8am at Wild Birds Unlimited (Medford). Leader: Steve Runnels, KBO Volunteer & Member. To register, call 541-770-1104.

No bird walk on July 4th. Happy 4th of July! Look for KBO "birds" and bird banders in Ashland, Oregon's parade.

July 11th: KBO Bird Walk to Willow Witt Ranch, Hyatt and Howard Prairie Lakes

Learn about birds and habitat restoration on private lands while visiting a hotspot for conifer forest birding below Grizzly Peak. Travel further into the Cascade Mountains to Hyatt and Howard Prairie Lakes. We expect to find White Pelican, Vesper Sparrow, Mountain Bluebird, nesting Osprey, swallow species and perhaps a few species of woodpeckers. Bring a lunch and water (**all day field trip**). Parking at Howard Prairie Resort is \$4. Meet at 8am at Wild Birds Unlimited (Medford). Leader: Harry Fuller, KBO Volunteer & Member. To register, call 541-770-1104.

August 1st: KBO Bird Walk to Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, Soda Mt. Road

Walk along the Pacific Crest Trail with the possibility of seeing Lazuli Buntings, Green-tailed Towhees, Dusky Flycatchers and Mountain Bluebirds. Meet at 8am at Northwest Nature Shop (Ashland). Leader: Frank Lospalluto, KBO Volunteer and Contract Biologist. To register, call 541-482-3241.

August 8th: KBO Bird Walk to Mt. Ashland

Bird the high country, Mt. Ashland and vicinity. We will look and listen for upper elevation birds, such as Green-tailed Towhee, Mountain Quail, Purple and Cassin's Finch, Band-tailed Pigeon, White-headed Woodpecker, Evening Grosbeak, and Cooper's Hawk, and keep our eyes peeled for the possibility of a Northern Goshawk. We might also have a glimpse of Hermit, Black-throated Gray, and Townsend's warblers. Bring a lunch if you'd like to eat in the picnic area. Meet at 8am at Wild Birds Unlimited (Medford). Leader: Vince Zauskey, KBO Volunteer and Member. To register, call 541-770-1104.

NOTE: School and community groups are invited to schedule a visit to a KBO Banding Station, a classroom visit, or a KBO presentation. Email KBO@KlamathBird.org or call 541-282-0866.

You and Birds—Contribute as a Citizen Scientist

Lauren Kemple, Education Specialist (AmeriCorps)

Are you inspired by *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* and looking for a way you can contribute to bird conservation? Become a citizen scientist! More and more research projects are tapping into the passion of conservation-minded people like you and the wealth of information you can provide. For some projects, volunteers just need to be interested in a certain aspect of ecology. For others, more in-depth training is involved.

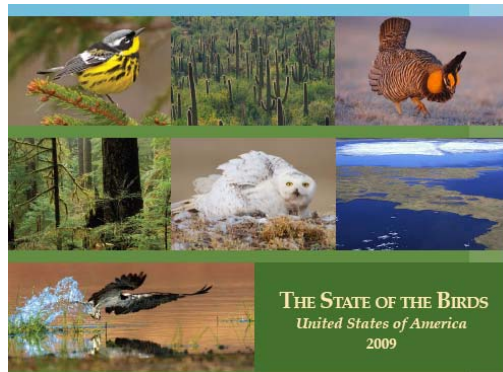
Citizen science projects are becoming essential in studies conducted about the effects of global climate change on plant and animal populations. *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009* utilized the long-term data from citizen science projects. The North American Breeding Bird Survey (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBS) is conducted by citizen volunteers and professional biologists on roadside routes across the continent. National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Count (www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc) is the oldest citizen science project out there—conducted since 1900!

As interest in citizen science projects grows, we are improving the capacity for citizen science to contribute to a variety of bird monitoring datasets. For future versions of *The U.S. State of the Birds*, these more comprehensive datasets will help us to build on our understanding of the health of our birds and habitats. One such data source is our local citizen science project, Klamath-Siskiyou eBird (www.ebird.org/klamath-siskiyou). K-S eBird is hosted by KBO, in partnership with Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the US Forest Service Redwood Sciences Laboratory. This citizen science tool was sponsored by Klamath-Siskiyou regional Audubon chapters. Birders from all over the bioregion have been entering their checklists. As more people enter checklists into eBird, KBO and our bird conservation partners will incorporate the data into our conservation research.

Contribute to bird conservation by becoming a citizen scientist!

State of the Birds Partners

KBO thanks our partners at the American Bird Conservancy, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, North American Bird Conservation Initiative, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey for the opportunity to collaborate on *The U.S. State of the Birds, 2009*. We were inspired by the dedication, creativity, and skills of those on the Science and Communications Teams. We look forward to continued collaboration to address conservation opportunities and further this approach of understanding bird and human well-being.



Read the report and learn more at www.stateofthebirds.org

Membership & Contributions

Your contributions help KBO advance bird and habitat conservation. Additionally, we are able to leverage dollars from matching grants and demonstrate public support when applying for new grants. Check out www.KlamathBird.org/donate to see how you can contribute through an in-kind donation, endowment donation, planned giving, or adopting a bird or day of banding.

Name _____ Address _____
Telephone _____ Email _____

Please select one and make your tax-deductible donation payable to: Klamath Bird Observatory or “KBO”.
Send to KBO, PO Box 758, Ashland, OR 97520.

- _____ Regular Annual Membership \$35 _____ Student Membership \$15
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- _____ Supporting Membership \$100 or more _____

Please contact me with more information regarding planned giving or endowment donations.

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Contribute to the conservation of birds and habitat.
Your tax-deductible contribution will support KBO's science and education programs. KBO is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. <http://www.KlamathBird.org/donate>

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