

ENDANGERED

EARTH

CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY • FALL 2016





Saving Life on Earth

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Rethinking the Future of Our Coral Reefs

Coral reefs are among the most important and diverse ecosystems in the ocean, playing a critical role for marine and terrestrial life, including people. But they're being seriously degraded, both directly and indirectly, by human activity — mostly overfishing, pollution and the burning of fossil fuels — which is transforming our climate and will have far-reaching consequences.

Recently I coauthored two research papers on coral reefs that appeared in major scientific journals this summer. They each generated substantial media coverage, largely because they challenge our assumptions about how these sensitive and fragile reef ecosystems function, as well as how humanity has profoundly altered them — and also because they cry out for immediate policy solutions.

In the first study, we found that coral reefs near populated areas were being degraded at roughly the same rate as remote and isolated reefs with no human influence. We measured reef degradation as the relative amount of live coral and seaweed on a reef, a simple but effective index of coral reef health. Our study suggests that localized stressors such as pollution and overfishing are far less significant than the large-scale global stressors that corals around the world are facing: ocean warming and acidification due to carbon dioxide pollution.

In the second study, we looked at how overfishing of large predatory fish such as sharks, snappers and groupers affected key ecological processes driven by fish, such as nutrient cycling. We found that big fishes play a vital role in coral reefs by feeding important nutrients into the ecosystem through their waste. And it turns out there's a deficit of fish pee in coral reefs due to targeted fishing. Previous studies have shown nutrients released by fish are really important for healthy and fast-growing corals, and the biggest fish provide most of them.

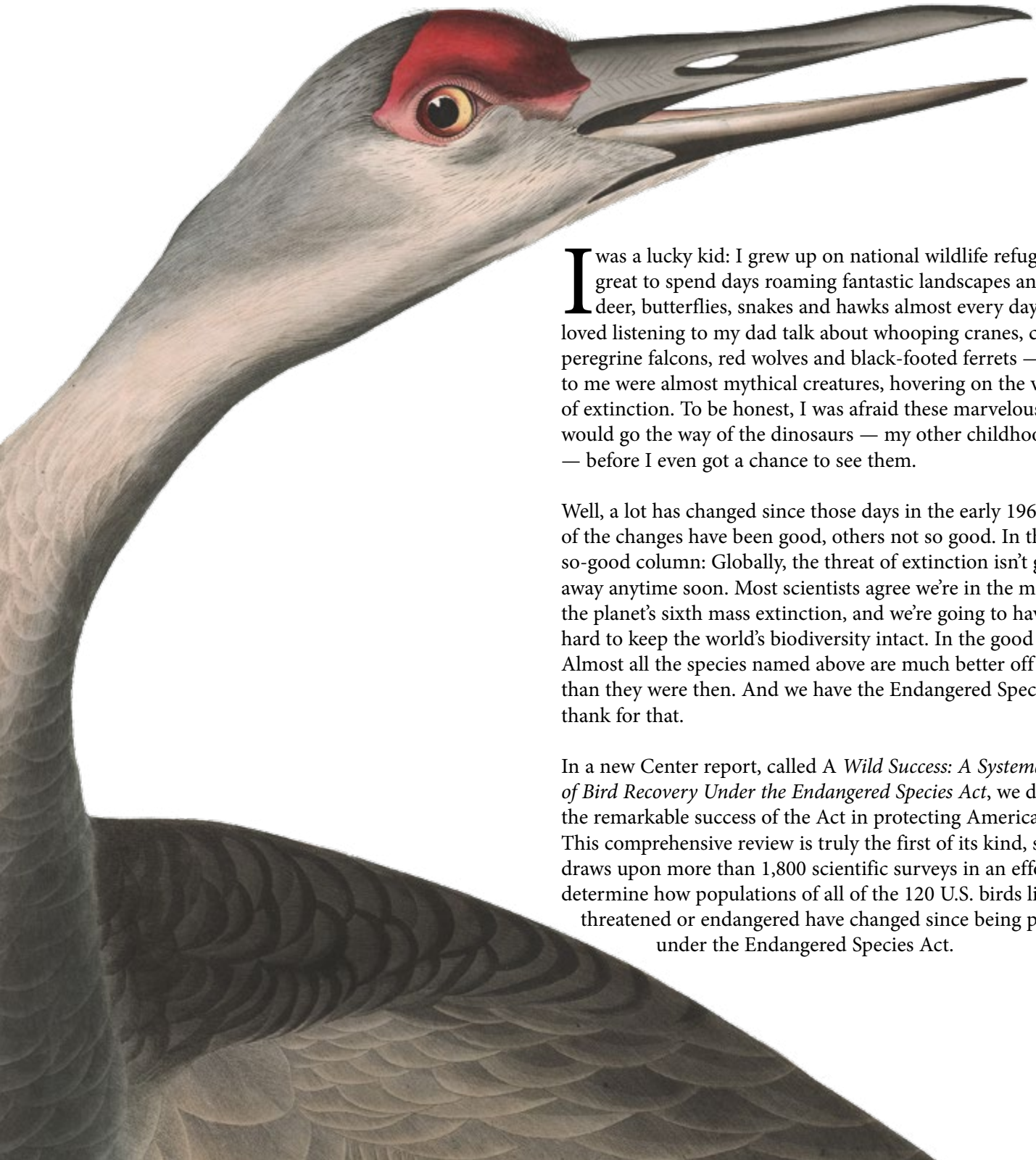
These two studies have clear management and policy implications for the conservation and future of coral reefs. We must tackle the growing problem of excessive carbon emissions that has led to unprecedented global warming and that's currently causing massive coral mortalities throughout the world's coral reefs, from Hawaii to the Great Barrier Reef. Local management and policies that reduce overfishing are important, but climate change will swamp our local and regional efforts if we don't address it head on.

Abel Valdivia is an ocean scientist at the Center. He works on endangered species listing, agency actions, and ocean acidification data analysis and advocacy.



A Wild Success

Landmark Report Shows How the Endangered Species Act Has Saved America's Birds



I was a lucky kid: I grew up on national wildlife refuges. It was great to spend days roaming fantastic landscapes and seeing deer, butterflies, snakes and hawks almost every day. And I loved listening to my dad talk about whooping cranes, condors, peregrine falcons, red wolves and black-footed ferrets — which to me were almost mythical creatures, hovering on the very brink of extinction. To be honest, I was afraid these marvelous animals would go the way of the dinosaurs — my other childhood passion — before I even got a chance to see them.

Well, a lot has changed since those days in the early 1960s. Some of the changes have been good, others not so good. In the not-so-good column: Globally, the threat of extinction isn't going away anytime soon. Most scientists agree we're in the midst of the planet's sixth mass extinction, and we're going to have to fight hard to keep the world's biodiversity intact. In the good column: Almost all the species named above are much better off today than they were then. And we have the Endangered Species Act to thank for that.

In a new Center report, called *A Wild Success: A Systematic Review of Bird Recovery Under the Endangered Species Act*, we document the remarkable success of the Act in protecting America's birds. This comprehensive review is truly the first of its kind, since it draws upon more than 1,800 scientific surveys in an effort to determine how populations of all of the 120 U.S. birds listed as threatened or endangered have changed since being protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The report's key findings include:

- A remarkable 85 percent of listed bird populations in the continental United States have increased or remained stable since listing.
- On average, populations of protected birds have increased by an amazing 624 percent since listing. In contrast, a sample of unlisted mainland birds declined by 24 percent during the same time period.
- Twelve species (10 percent of the 120 listed birds) have increased to the point that they have been delisted due to recovery; this level of recovery is consistent with estimates of expected recovery rates.
- Birds in Hawaii and other Pacific Islands have not done as well as continental birds, with only 61 percent of these island birds either increasing or stable since listing.
- These strong measures of the Act's success in recovering species offer a striking rebuttal to the erroneous claim being pushed by some anti-conservation politicians that the Act does a poor job of recovering species and needs to be scrapped.

The facts are clear: The Endangered Species Act has been successfully protecting and recovering America's most imperiled species for more than 40 years. Thousands of dedicated federal, state and local government employees; conservation organizations; corporations; landowners, and concerned citizens have worked to protect species, restore ecosystems and improve our environment. This hard work has paid off. The Endangered Species Act has helped prevent the extinction of more than 90 percent of the species it protects and is doing a very good job of moving species — especially birds — closer to recovery.



Loyal Mehrhoff is the endangered species recovery director at the Center. Before joining the Center, he was a scientist with the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey.





Photo courtesy Yellowstone National Park

Grizzlies in Wonderland

Yellowstone's Great Bears Are in Peril

It was July 2007 when I saw my first grizzly bear in Yellowstone National Park. I was living in Colorado at the time, visiting the park with my husband-to-be and his family. We saw the bear in the distance and watched it forage in a field for more than an hour, until it came out to the road and crossed right in front of our car. It may have been at that moment that I fell in love with Yellowstone and the surrounding area, and in 2011 I moved to Victor, Idaho, so I could experience the area's wildlife on a more regular basis. Since that day I've seen lots of grizzlies, including, most recently, practically stumbling onto one while doing a quick hike in the forest right behind my house. My heart still leaps into my throat when I recall that time. But I wouldn't change it for the world.

Since receiving federal protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1975, grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem have rebounded from a population estimated at fewer than 150 bears to an estimated population of more than 700 bears. But bears across the American West are still struggling. A population once estimated at 50,000 grizzlies totals only about 1,800 bears today, and they occupy less than 5 percent of their historic range.

Moreover, bears in Yellowstone face emerging and ongoing threats. Climate change, loss of key food sources, genetic isolation and increasing conflicts all threaten this recovering population. Last year more than 60 bears were killed in the Yellowstone ecosystem, the highest death toll in more than two decades, and most of those deaths were

human-caused. In 2015 the population dropped from an estimated 757 bears to 717 bears.

Despite these ongoing threats and uncertainty about the grizzly bear's future, the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho are pressuring the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove federal protections, and it appears the Service is acquiescing to state demands. In March of this year, the Service issued a proposed rule to remove the protections of the Endangered Species Act for Yellowstone grizzly bears. This proposal has fundamental legal and scientific flaws; it ignores the current data on grizzly bear recovery. These states have vowed that, as soon as the feds strip away Yellowstone grizzlies' protected status, they will permit trophy hunting of the iconic bears.

We're going to keep fighting for the highest possible level of protection for grizzly bears in Yellowstone and beyond — until the species is truly recovered. And we'll keep you posted on how you can help us in this fight.



Andrea Santarsiere is a senior attorney at the Center. She works in the Endangered Species program, with a focus on carnivore protection.



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EPA Finally Acknowledges Airplane Pollution Harms Climate, Still Delays Regulations

At last we're seeing baby steps toward curbing the harm airplanes do to the planet: After nine years of denial and delay, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in July finally officially acknowledged the fact that airplane pollution disrupts the climate and endangers human welfare.

This so-called "endangerment finding" came three months after the Center and other groups sued the EPA for the second time over its unreasonable delay in confronting this increasingly urgent problem.

But even as the EPA acknowledged airplane pollution's threat to the climate, officials failed to move forward on rules to actually reduce planes' dangerous emissions, as the agency has previously done for cars, trucks and power plants.

Airplane pollution is already an enormous threat. If commercial aviation were considered a country, it would rank seventh after Germany in carbon emissions.

And without ambitious rules, global aviation emissions will likely triple by midcentury. Airplanes could generate a whopping 43 gigatons of planet-warming pollution through 2050, consuming more than 4 percent of the world's remaining carbon budget, according to a recent Center report.

Airlines can do much better. A recent International Council on Clean Transportation report found that some of the top 20 transatlantic air carriers are emitting as much as 51 percent less carbon by using existing technology and operational

improvements.

We've been pushing the EPA to act on aircraft for almost a decade. The Center and other groups first petitioned the agency in 2007 to regulate carbon emissions from aircraft under the federal Clean Air Act. Yet despite finalizing the endangerment finding, the EPA is delaying final rules while international negotiations on aviation emissions are floundering.

The first international standards for carbon pollution from airplanes, recommended earlier this year by the International Civil Aviation Organization — which is dominated by the airline industry — were woefully inadequate. The ICAO's draft rules would reduce emissions from new planes far less than airlines will already achieve on their own — and they wouldn't even apply to in-service aircraft.

Decisive EPA action on U.S. airplane pollution is critical to catalyzing change on a global scale. Now it's up to the Obama administration to devise ambitious aircraft pollution rules that dramatically reduce this high-flying hazard to our climate.



Vera Pardee is senior counsel and supervising attorney with the Center's Climate Law Institute.

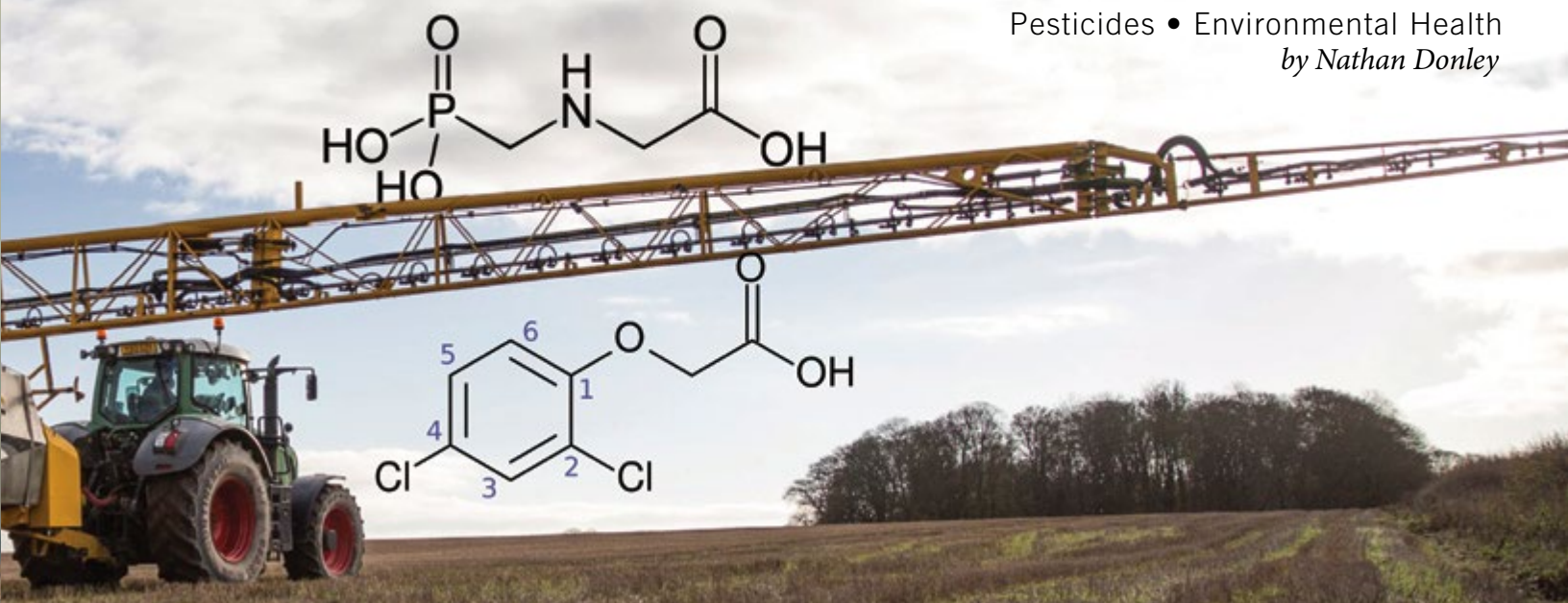


Photo courtesy Chafer Machinery / Flickr

Pesticides Behaving Badly

When you head into a drugstore to pick up a prescription, you'll often be given advice by the pharmacist: Don't drink alcohol or consume other drugs while you're taking the prescribed medication. That advice isn't typically a moral judgment or a veiled attempt to get you to lead a more abstemious life — it's a straight-up warning that some chemicals can interact in a way that puts your health in danger. These interactions, called "synergy," are complex and can have unexpected and disturbing impacts.

And here's the thing: Synergy doesn't just happen when medications combine in the body. It also happens when some of the most common chemicals, such as pesticides, combine in the environment.

A groundbreaking new report from the Center found that more than two-thirds of all pesticide products from four large agrichemical companies that contained multiple active ingredients recently approved by the Environmental Protection Agency have evidence of synergy among the pesticides that are mixed in the bottle. That's nearly 100 pesticide products available right now on store shelves.

Interestingly, all this information on synergy came from patent applications. As it turns out, for a chemical company to patent a pesticide mixture, it generally has to demonstrate that the mixture works synergistically to kill its target, be it a bug or a weed. So synergism is essentially a prerequisite for patenting a pesticide product that has multiple ingredients.

That's a big problem, because pesticide companies have apparently not been providing this synergy information to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This means the agency has been approving products used in homes, gardens and on our food without taking into account their heightened toxicity to plants and wildlife. Worse yet, we found that the EPA used to require companies to submit data on synergy, but it bizarrely removed this requirement in 2007.

In response the Center has petitioned the EPA to reinstate the requirement and strengthen its language so that pesticide companies can't weasel their way out of submitting studies to the EPA showing the enhanced toxicity of their products. If granted, this petition may result in increased protections against the harms of pesticide mixtures — important protections for the wild places, creatures and people we love.

Nathan Donley is a Center scientist who works with our Environmental Health program on issues surrounding the increasing exposure of both people and wildlife to toxins.



At the 11th Hour

The Fight to Save America's Red Wolves



Photo courtesy B. Crawford / USFWS

As the Obama administration winds down, we're still left with a question that urgently needs answering, when it comes to our country's wildlife crisis: What's to become of the world's last remaining red wolves? There are currently fewer than 45 of them living wild on Earth, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — the very agency tasked with protecting and conserving endangered species — is actively pushing them to extinction.

The red wolf (*Canis rufus*) is a medium-sized canid, usually weighing from 50 to 60 pounds, and marked by reddish fur around its legs. It was once found in forested regions from southern New England through the Southeast. Today it only occupies a tiny fraction of its historical range. Extirpated by hunting and habitat loss in the early 20th century, the last 17 remaining red wolves were captured by biologists in 1980, who went on to establish an immensely successful captive-breeding program for the wolves. The four breeding pairs that were released into Alligator National Wildlife Refuge in 1987 would become the first successful reintroduction of a predator in the United States, which would later expand onto the federal, state and private lands that make up the current five-county Red Wolf Recovery Area in North Carolina. Thanks to conservation efforts, red wolf populations peaked in the early 2000s with a wild population of more than 130.

Tragically, red wolf populations began drastically declining due to gunshot mortality because of these wolves' similarity in appearance to coyotes. They've remained under human threat throughout recent years, since the Service began caving to political pressure from a small minority of landowners and hunting interests who refused to coexist with the animal.

Since then the Service has virtually abandoned all aspects of the recovery program — in violation of the Endangered Species Act's conservation mandate. The agency eliminated the program's recovery coordinator in 2014 and suspended the introduction of captive-bred red wolves into the wild in July 2015. It ended its coyote sterilization program to prevent coyote-red wolf hybrids and curtailed law-enforcement efforts related to poaching. It suspended its public-education and outreach program. It even issued permits to private landowners to kill red wolves. As a result, wild red wolf populations have dropped by more than 50 percent in the past two years, and at least seven wolves were either confirmed or suspected to have been illegally shot in 2015. To add insult to injury, the Service proposed this September, to curtail their range from five counties, to one county in North Carolina.

This is as heartbreaking as it is infuriating. The red wolf recovery program — once one of our nation's most successful conservation programs — has been reduced to almost nothing due to one agency's lack of political

will. It still boasts broad national and local support, as shown by the 100 private landowners and more than half a million names on petitions the Center organized. Perhaps more importantly, the Service has ignored its own path forward in red wolf recovery. The agency's own scientists have already concluded that the species can still survive if additional recovery sites are utilized, mortality is reduced, and new wolves are released into the wild.

It's clear that we're in the 11th hour in fighting the extinction of red wolves. In addition to the grassroots pressure we're applying on the Service, the Center filed an emergency petition under the Administrative Procedure Act to reclassify all reintroduced populations of red wolves as "essential" experimental populations in May 2016. By doing so, we hope to show the Service that the red wolf is indeed recoverable, if the agency establishes additional wild populations and places stricter requirements on the use of lethal "take" (the killing of wolves). We also recently settled a lawsuit under the Freedom of Information Act demanding that the Service release documents on its decision(s) to curtail recovery activity, and filed a lawsuit back in March to challenge their dismantling of the program. No matter what happens with the new administration coming in next year, one thing is clear: The Center will continue fighting to keep this majestic species from disappearing.



Jamie Pang is the Center's Endangered Species Act campaigner. She works in our Washington, D.C., office.

Photo courtesy B. Bartel / USFWS



Historical range of the red wolf.

A Whale of a Win

Each year across the world's oceans, 650,000 dolphins, whales and other marine mammals are caught and killed in fishing gear. Ensnared in nets, wrapped in fishing lines, or snagged on fishing hooks, these intelligent animals are "bycatch" of the world's tuna, swordfish, shrimp, lobster and other fisheries. Fishing gear entanglement is the single greatest risk faced by marine mammals and threatens the very existence of some of the world's most charismatic animals, including the giant North Atlantic right whale, Mexico's tiny and critically imperiled vaquita, dolphins off South America and in the Indian Ocean, and false killer whales off Hawaii.

For decades the Center has fought to reduce bycatch in U.S. fisheries, but on many parts of the planet, fishing is entirely unregulated — resulting in heartbreaking levels of marine mammal entanglement and death. So the Center's International program decided it was time to apply both U.S. law and U.S. purchasing power to force the rest of the world to step up.

Since 1972 the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act — at least, on paper — has prohibited seafood from entering the country unless it meets strict U.S. whale and dolphin protection standards. But for the past 40 years, the federal government has largely ignored that ban, freely allowing more than 5 billion pounds of seafood to be imported each year. In 2014 the Center and our partners filed suit, and in August 2016, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries

Service issued a new regulation to actually enforce the longstanding import ban.

As a result, over the next five years, the 125-plus nations that export fish, shrimp and other seafood to the United States must begin tracking, monitoring and limiting their bycatch — or lose access to the lucrative U.S. seafood market, valued at around \$16 billion annually. Many nations will, for the first time, determine which species of dolphins, whales and seals ply their waters and will ultimately require deployment of more dolphin- and whale-safe fishing gear or closure of high-risk fishing areas.

The new rule is a major victory for vulnerable whales and dolphins the world over, providing safer waters for these charismatic, intelligent and exceptional animals. But our job isn't done: The Center will continue to track and monitor the world's fisheries, to ensure that the United States and other nations truly comply with these essential new protections.



Sarah Uhlemann is the International program director and a senior attorney at the Center. She leads the Center's international work including litigation, advocacy and international diplomacy to protect imperiled species outside U.S. borders.



Photo courtesy Department of Defense

Amid Historic Floods, the Battle to Keep It in the Ground Heats Up

The movement to stop the federal government from issuing new fossil fuel leases in the Gulf of Mexico continues to grab national attention. Most recently, media focused on protests against the latest lease sale in New Orleans on Aug. 24, as Louisiana was recovering from extreme flooding tied to climate change.

Twice a year like clockwork, the Obama administration has offered up massive swaths of federally managed, publicly owned waters in the Gulf — tens of millions of acres — as offshore leases for oil and gas drilling and fracking. The growing movement to interrupt this process and end all new offshore drilling leases in the Gulf showed its teeth in March, when several hundred Gulf Coast residents and activists stormed the Superdome in an attempt to shut down a lease sale.

Traditionally these oil and gas auctions have been quiet affairs, with a few dozen executives quietly listening to the future of the Gulf and the climate casually being sold off piecemeal to one of the most profitable industries on the planet. The bold action at the Superdome rattled the Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management, the federal agency that holds the lease sales. And in a move to silence the voices of dissenting Gulf Coast communities, officials moved the subsequent auction online, behind closed doors.

Those communities' voices matter now more than ever. On Aug. 23, the day before the online auction, President Obama visited Louisiana to witness the chaos left in the wake of a "1,000-year storm" that killed 13 people and drove tens of thousands from their flooded homes — exactly the kind of

extreme weather projected to become more severe and frequent as climate change intensifies.

In coordination with the president's visit, the Center released a report quantifying the carbon bomb buried beneath unleashed waters in the Gulf of Mexico — as much greenhouse gas pollution as 9,500 coal-fired power plants operating for a year. The historic floods and new data highlighted the urgency of addressing the unfolding climate crisis and the need to halt all new offshore fossil fuel leases in the Gulf.

The very same day as we released our report, a dozen of us showed up at the oil agency's regional headquarters in New Orleans with more than 180,000 petitions demanding President Obama cancel the lease sale, and refused to leave until he did so. Four of us were arrested.

As the outgoing administration scrambles to avoid scrutiny of its antiquated offshore fossil fuel leasing program, the Center and our allies in the fight to keep fossil fuels in the ground have sent a clear message to the White House: Until the presidency aligns its climate and energy policies — starting with no new leases in the Gulf — we're not going away.



Blake Kopcho is the Center's oceans campaigner. He works to protect the oceans from offshore drilling, plastic pollution and acidification.



Image courtesy Nature's Pics Online

Wildlife Services Killed 3.2 Million Animals in 2015

The highly secretive arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture known as Wildlife Services killed more than 3.2 million animals during fiscal year 2015, according to data released by the agency in June. That means *half a million* more wolves, coyotes, bears, mountain lions, beavers, foxes, eagles and other animals were killed by the program — largely at the behest of the livestock industry and other agribusinesses — than in 2014.

Despite increasing calls for reform a century after this federal wildlife-killing program began in 1915, the latest kill report indicates that the program's reckless slaughter continues. In 2015 it obliterated 385 gray wolves, 68,905 coyotes (plus an unknown number of pups in 492 destroyed dens), 480 black bears, 284 mountain lions, 731 bobcats, 492 river otters (all but 83 killed "unintentionally"), 3,437 foxes, two bald eagles and 21,559 beavers. The program also killed 20,777 prairie dogs outright, plus an unknown number that were killed in more than 59,000 burrows destroyed or fumigated by the agency.

Monarch Butterflies Move Closer to Protection

Thanks to a settlement with the Center and our allies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must now decide whether to protect imperiled monarch butterflies under the Endangered Species Act by June 2019. We petitioned for the federal protection of monarchs in 2014 after the population plunged precipitously: Over the past two decades, these once-common backyard beauties have declined by *80 percent*.

During that time, it's estimated, monarchs may have lost more than 165 million acres of summer habitat as the milkweed their caterpillars depend on has been wiped out by widespread planting of genetically engineered crops in the Midwest, along with the use of the pesticide Roundup — a potent killer of milkweed, the monarch caterpillar's only food source. Monarchs' overwintering habitat in Mexico is also threatened — by logging and a mine proposal. The butterflies' already low population was hit hard by a winter storm in March, which killed millions.

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Making Birds Great Again

From the Director
Kierán Suckling

The Center first took flight on the wings of a bird: We formed in 1989 to fight for Mexican spotted owls in the forests of the Southwest, and birds have been at the forefront of our advocacy ever since.

This summer we released a groundbreaking study on how our country's main wildlife protection law has fared in protecting birds — the first ever comprehensive assessment of the year-to-year population size of all 120 bird species protected under the Endangered Species Act. It's called *A Wild Success* and you can find it on our website.

The study's conclusions are powerful. It found that 85 percent of continental U.S. birds that are listed under the Act have increased or stabilized their population size since they were protected; the average population increase was 624 percent. From California condors to whooping cranes, Kirtland's warblers to Puerto Rican parrots, populations have rebounded at pretty much the rate predicted by their recovery plans. They also tend to be doing far better than common birds that don't have protection (and on average, have declined 24 percent since 1974).

That's an amazing record of success for America's endangered birds. And it clearly debunks the Act's foes in Congress — who repeatedly try to dismantle or weaken the law, mostly to placate allies in industry, by making false and cynical claims that it's a failure.

I was delighted to learn just how many of the native birds that were threatening to vanish off the face of the Earth not so long ago can now be seen crossing the sky in healthy, intact flocks, spotted perched high in a snag or diving for prey over a river. We're proud of our role in keeping the Endangered Species Act strong and effective for birds and other wildlife — and proud to have your support in that work.



ENDANGERED EARTH

is the membership newsletter of the Center for Biological Diversity. With the support of more than 1.1 million members and supporters, the Center works through science, law and creative media to secure a future for all species, great or small, hovering on the brink of extinction. *Endangered Earth* is published three times yearly in January, July and October and printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper with solvent-free vegetable-based inks.

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EIDER ON THE COVER:
Image courtesy
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