



California Partners in Flight
Working Together for the Conservation of California's Landbird Habitats

EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

November 2, 2005

Location: Cosumnes River Preserve, Galt, CA

ATTENDEES:

Tim Burr (DOD), Roy Churchwell (SFBBO), Alan Forkey (NRCS), Geoff Geupel (PRBO Conservation Science), Kim Kreitinger (PRBO Conservation Science), Tom Moore (NRCS), Mark Reynolds (TNC), Adam Rich (U.S. Forest Service), Karen Ritchie (BSOL/Ventana Wilderness Society), Paul Roush (Bureau of Land Management), Tiffany Shephard (DOD), Rodney Siegel (Institute for Bird Populations), Dale Steele (CDFG), Jaime Stephens (Klamath Bird Observatory), Jaime Stephens (Klamath Bird Observatory), Becky Stewart (Audubon California), Jane VanGunst (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation),

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Announced the new Steering Committee representatives: Roy Churchwell of San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory has replaced Sherri Hudson. Alan Forkey and Tom Moore of NRCS will be sharing the NRCS role. Tim Burr of Department of Defense will be retiring in January 2006. Tiffany Shephard and Tammy Conckle of Naval Base Coronado will be sharing the DOD role.
- Preliminary results from the statewide, volunteer Tricolored Blackbird Survey were submitted by Mike Green, USFWS. The conservative population estimate for the April survey is 265,000, which is higher by approximately 100,000 birds from the 2000 survey. A more detailed summary will be made available via the various list serves.
- There will likely be no coordinated effort for a volunteer-based TRBL survey again until 2008.
- The Desert Bird Conservation Plan draft is scheduled for release in January 2006. We will be looking for reviewers for both the draft plan and focal species accounts. Please contact Kim if you are interested.
- The Sagebrush Bird Conservation Plan Version 1.0 has just been released. It will soon be available on the California Partners in Flight web site. There will also be a limited number of hardcopies available for distribution.

YELLOW-BILLED MAGPIE/WEST NILE VIRUS CONCERNS

The Yellow-billed Magpie is both a PIF Watch List species and a CalPIF Oak Woodland focal species. There are concerns regarding the population viability of Yellow-billed Magpies in the face of West Nile virus. Anecdotal reports by area birders and landowners have been posted to numerous list serves claiming the absence of YBMA from their



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regular locales. Additionally, the California Department of Health Services released the following report:

In 2004, 2,000 YBMA were reported dead; 371 dead birds were tested for the presence of West Nile Virus and 304 tested positive; i.e., 82% of the sample tested positive.

In 2005, 6,600 YBMA were reported dead; 290 dead birds were tested for the presence of West Nile Virus and 223 tested positive, i.e., 77% of the sample tested positive.

Thus, YBMA appear to have a very high mortality rate when infected by WNV. This is alarming for several reasons.

- 1) YBMA are endemic to California, primarily to the Central Valley and adjacent foothills. Thus, they have a very limited distribution.
- 2) YBMA inhabits an area that harbors mosquitoes carrying WNV. Thus, they will come into regular contact with WNV.
- 3) YBMA are both sedentary and colonial. Their sedentary nature will ensure that they remain in the WNV-prone areas and their colonial nature will facilitate the spread of the disease amongst sub-populations.
- 4) YBMA have a relatively small global population size – an estimated 180,000. The accuracy rating for this PIF estimate is poor, meaning that the number could be much higher, or worse, much lower.

Unknowns

We do not know the total number of dead YBMA. In other words, the 6,600 reported for 2005 represents an unknown proportion of the total dead for the year. We do not know whether WNV contributes to a large proportion of the deaths. We do not know the WNV exposure rates for most bird species. We know that corvids are highly susceptible to WNV, but we do not know how it affects most passerines. Paul Roush informed us that Sage Grouse do contract the disease and that the introduced Chukar might be a carrier.

The serious nature of this threat and the lack of data on this species requires a statewide collaborative effort. UC Davis has created a web site to submit YBMA sightings (www.magpiemonitoring.org). California Partners in Flight through its participants could help facilitate a volunteer monitoring effort and assist with data storage/access through the CalPIF online database. Also, partners that maintain banding stations, and thus directly handle birds, could help collect needed samples (blood, saliva, or fecal).

There will be a meeting in Davis on December 15 to discuss research questions, ongoing monitoring efforts, and relevant existing data. **Kim will report the results of this meeting to the Executive Steering Committee.**

CALIFORNIA PARTNERS IN FLIGHT FUNDING

PRBO Conservation Science has been fundraising through NFWF and private foundations to fund the CalPIF coordinator position for several years. The foundation



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money did not come through for 2006, thus there is currently a large funding gap for this position. The group strategized on other funding opportunities. Suggestions included US Forest Service funds to revise the conifer plan, NRCS contribution agreement to produce private landowner outreach materials, Resources Law Group grant, NFWF grant for private landowner outreach. **Geoff and Kim will pursue some of these leads.** In the meantime, we are looking for other ideas. If you know of any funding opportunities, please send ideas to Kim.

PIF UPDATES

California Bird Species of Special Concern (BSSC) Project

The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and PRBO are partnering to determine and set conservation priorities for native birds by revising the initial California Bird Species of Special Concern (BSSC) document (Remsen 1978), which subjectively described declining or vulnerable species. Revision was needed to evaluate over twenty years of research and monitoring data to enable identification of currently declining or vulnerable taxa that may warrant listing as state threatened or endangered if present trends continue. The revision process, coupled with other recent efforts to develop and implement conservation strategies, led to expansion of the Bird Species of Special Concern concept to include ranking of special concern taxa for conservation priority using objective criteria. Also, the original BSSC list included only full species but the current draft list includes full species, subspecies, and identified populations.

This is not a regulatory document, but CDFG does use the list to help focus their conservation efforts. It is a scientifically rigorous document and more comprehensive than the US Fish and Wildlife Service list. Geoff sees this as a valuable conservation tool and would like to see it adopted as a CalPIF sponsored-project. Geoff feels that this document needs to be updateable and interactive, much like the habitat-based bird conservation plans. The timeline for release is soon.

National PIF Implementation Committee Meeting – September 2005, Nashville, TN

John Alexander attended and provided meeting minutes to the Executive Steering Committee (via Jaime Stephens). John briefed the IC committee on the April PIF meeting in Ashland, OR and described some of the desired outcomes from that meeting. Those include the adaptive management success story publication, the need to develop Forest and District level partnerships as management decisions are being made at that level, and the importance of integrating PIF priorities in the scoping phase of RMP revisions. Other discussions of note, Jina Mariani of the USFS felt that the information presented at the ORWACA meeting regarding the USFS planning regulations may have been misguided. Jina will be providing John with comments. **Please contact Kim if you would like to receive the IC committee minutes which contain other updates.**



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AGENCY UPDATES

Bureau of Land Management – Paul Roush

Paul R., Geoff G, Kim K., and Dan Strait met with BLM staff from the Folsom Field Office to discuss ways to incorporate CalPIF objectives into their RMP revision. From that meeting, Kim developed a guiding document to help BLM prioritize parcel acquisition based on CalPIF BCP data and recommendations.

The Hollister and Ukiah RMPs are currently available for review. Paul and Kim will be reviewing both and perhaps soliciting input on certain sections from other ESC representatives. Three new land use plans are being developed for the Eagle Lake, Surprise, and Alturas field offices. First drafts of these plans are expected in December 2005.

California Department of Fish and Game – Dale Steele

Legislature requires DFG to give an update on endangered species status. This document will be out soon.

DFG submitted the Wildlife Comprehensive Strategy Report. Expect the review process to begin this fall. USFWS has not yet reviewed the document. This report will provide the initial guidance for spending State Wildlife Grants (SWG) funds and will also help to fund Sage-Grouse, Tricolored Blackbird, and Burrowing Owl conservation planning efforts.

DFG is going through another round of budget cuts.

San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory – Roy Churchwell

SFBBO is conducting a powerline impact study with PG&E in the South Bay. They are examining nighttime movements of birds and are not seeing huge migrant pushes, at least in South Bay.

US Forest Service – Adam Rich

Region 5 has not yet replaced John Robinson. Adam is serving as our interim ESC representative.

Klamath Bird Observatory – Jaime Stephens

KBO is developing two draft manuscripts: “Association of grazing utilization and bird communities in the Cascade Siskiyou National Monument and “Restoring fire in Lava Beds National Monument, California: Short term effects of prescribed fire on bird diversity and abundance”

PRBO Conservation Science – Kim Kreitinger

Kim is helping to develop a regional bird conservation plan for the North Bay area. Funded through an anonymous foundation, this plan will be a scaled down version of the



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riparian and oak woodland plans. The target audiences are private landowners and county agencies. Kim has garnered support from several of the local Resource Conservation Districts (RCD) and hopes to have a draft for review by the end of December.

Complementing the regional BCP, Kim is also working on a photographic pocket guide to common riparian birds. This project has a statewide focus and has strong partner support with NRCS, USFWS, CA Wildlife Foundation, CA Oak Foundation, San Francisco Bay Joint Venture, Central Valley Joint Venture, Riparian Habitat Joint Venture, and the CA Waterfowl Association. This product is also targeting private landowners and will include species-specific “habitat improvement tips” based on Riparian BCP recommendations.

PRBO Conservation Science – Geoff Geupel

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Alan Forkey

Alan summarized the work of NRCS, which includes working with private landowners to incorporate wildlife issues into their farming activities. NRCS also administers programs through the Farm Bill and other habitat-based programs such as the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). The WRP program is very popular in California and strives to restore wetlands where they used to be and undo damage done to environmentally sensitive lands. These wetlands can be season, semi-permanent, or permanent. NRCS is also involved with native grassland restoration and facilitated more than 1,000 acres of native grassland restoration just in the last month alone.

The WHIP program (Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program) is drastically underfunded, but is starting to earmark funds for different types of wildlife, particularly salmonid and sagegrouse projects. Five million dollars is available for sagegrouse projects nationally; \$1.1 million in CA.

Ventana Wilderness Society/Big Sur Ornithology Lab – Karen Ritchie

VWS continues their work with the California Condor recovery effort. BSOL is using their bird monitoring data to develop a riparian conservation plan for the California Central Coast. Additionally, they are involved with avian monitoring at Camp Roberts, a power line study at San Luis NWR complex, and starting a new project with USFS regarding the impacts of Sudden Oak Death Syndrome on bird populations.

Institute for Bird Populations – Rodney Siegel

The Institute for Bird Populations initiated the Monitoring Avian Winter Survival (MAWS) program in 2003. The overall goal of MAWS is to provide location- and habitat- specific estimates of overwintering survival and indices of body condition for landbirds that overwinter in temperate North America (i.e., short-distance migrant and temperate resident species). The first 24 MAWS stations were established and operated in 2003-04 on four military installations in the Southeast U.S. and are now in their third winter of operation. This year (winter 2005/2006) we are extending the program to



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include independent banders. Interested parties should contact Jim Saracco (jsaracco@birdpop.org) for details.

Audubon California – Becky Stewart

Becky reported that the Kern River Preserve has doubled its size with a recent purchase of 1600 acres of cottonwood-willow forest. This new parcel provides habitat for both the YBCU and WIFL. Southern California news: Mission Viejo wanted to build on the last major stand of coastal scrub habitat. This was challenged in court and a settlement agreement was reached. The development is still going in, but they have agreed to maintain a large stand of coastal scrub.

Department of Defense– Tim Burr and Tiffany Shephard

Tim has been providing technical assistance to navy installations that lack wildlife biologist. Tim will review projects and assist with environmental planning. Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans are the key conservation planning documents for bases.

The DOD developed a map of the military bases within bird conservation regions. This will be published in Birding, accompanied by an article written by Chris Eberly, national coordinator of PIF DOD program.

The Legacy Program invited DOD to submit a full proposal in partnership with PRBO to look at Nexrad and on-the-ground data.