

IMPACT REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2019



Thank you for supporting the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology.**

During fiscal year 2019, your commitment was vital to our efforts to protect birds and the natural world. Unrestricted gifts like yours, along with contributions from our Golden-wing Society and Chairman's Council members, form a strong foundation of support that fuels everything we do at the Cornell Lab. The Lab works on behalf of birds and the environment through a range of research, conservation, education, media, and citizen

science initiatives, and unrestricted giving becomes part of each and every one of our endeavors.

In the following pages, we are pleased to share some success stories from the past year. We send our deep appreciation for your support of our mission to understand and protect the planet's biological diversity. Together we are preserving wild bird populations, and the wonders of nature, for future generations.



FISCAL YEAR 2019 BY THE NUMBERS

13.7 MILLION DIGITAL SPECIMENS

archived, in total, in the Macaulay Library that are available for use in scientific research, education, conservation, and the arts

76 PAPERS

published in scientific journals that used eBird data to expand the understanding of bird populations around the world

29,000 PEOPLE

reached through the Celebrate Urban Birds Program that works with underserved communities globally to support science education and bird conservation

230 STUDENTS

hosted at Sapsucker Woods who gained experience and skills while contributing to research and Lab programs

260 EMPLOYEES

worked to advance the understanding and protection of the natural world

125,000+ MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

made it all possible



TOP TO BOTTOM: SNOW GEESE BY REANNA THOMAS/MACAULAY LIBRARY, ULTRAMARINE FLYCATCHER BY NATTHAPHAT CHOTJUCKDIKUL/MACAULAY LIBRARY, CELEBRATE URBAN BIRDS YOUTH WORKSHOP BY TANYA ZWALD, AND BIRDERS BY RUBEN MARCHENA/GBBC



PROTECTING THE RAREST BIRD OF PREY ON EARTH

CONSERVATION MEDIA

The Cornell Lab produced the documentary *Bird of Prey* to bolster conservation efforts to protect the critically endangered Philippine Eagle. Deforestation and habitat loss have decimated the Philippine Eagle population, and it is now one of the rarest birds of prey in the world. It is estimated that only 200-800 individuals remain in the wild. In 1977, world-renowned cinematographer Neil Rettig filmed the first images of the Philippine Eagle in the wild, helping transform the bird into a national symbol. *Bird of Prey*—which is a collaboration among the Cornell Lab’s Conservation Media unit, the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF), and Neil Rettig Productions—focuses on Rettig’s attempt to capture new footage of the bird, as well as on the efforts of PEF workers to preserve the future of the species.

After playing at film festivals around the world, the award-winning documentary was released for online streaming through Amazon, iTunes, and Vimeo in June 2019, introducing audiences to the story of the Philippine Eagle and the people working to save it. The film has garnered acclaim, especially in the Philippines, where it has already led to positive conservation-related outcomes. A promotional video for PEF is now featured on their website’s home page, as well as a community outreach

video that conveys the value of eagle conservation, which PEF uses as part of its outreach and education activities in rural communities. The Cornell Lab Publishing Group also published *An Eagle’s Feather*, a beautifully illustrated children’s book, in collaboration with PEF. The story introduces children to the Philippine Eagle and conservation. Partial proceeds from the sale of the book go directly to PEF to support its efforts to save the Philippine Eagle from extinction.

Neil Rettig expressed his belief in the important role science-based media can play in conservation efforts: “I’m hopeful that we will make a difference, because I’ve seen how images have the power to change the way people look at nature.”





MAKING A FUTURE FOR THE TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD AVIAN POPULATION STUDIES

The Cornell Lab's eBird project, the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen-science initiative, helps provide crucial data needed to support meaningful conservation action. Birders from around the world contribute more than 100 million sightings a year through eBird. These sightings document distribution, abundance, habitat use, and population trends, and provide ornithologists with an important source of data on wild bird populations. These data are especially useful when it comes to bird species that have previously been considered difficult to track.

The Tricolored Blackbird of California's Central Valley has been in sharp decline as a result of farming practices and the loss of wetland habitat. However, this decline was challenging to assess, due to the transitory nature of breeding colonies formed by this highly social species. But thanks to eBird data contributed by citizen-science participants, Cornell Lab researcher Orin Robinson and colleagues were able to mod-

el population trends for the Tricolored Blackbird. In a study published in the scientific journal *Biological Conservation* in November 2018, Robinson and his co-authors, including Cornell Lab researchers Viviana Ruiz-Gutierrez and Daniel Fink, showed that Tricolored Blackbirds have declined by 34% in the 10 years since 2007. These statistics, demonstrating the grave threat to the species, prompted the California Fish and Game Commission to list the Tricolored Blackbird as threatened under the

state Endangered Species Act. This decision boosts existing efforts to preserve the species, implementing protections such as penalties for landowners who mow down nesting colonies.

The success of the Tricolored Blackbird listing is an example of what the Cornell Lab aims to achieve on a larger scale as we continue to develop eBird—a cycle in which data support science that leads to conservation action, which in turn provides more data that we can use on behalf of the birds.

