

# Conservation objectives for bird species at risk in California's Central Valley

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Populations of many bird species are declining from habitat loss and degradation and the effects of contaminants, disease, and alien species. The loss of 90% of the historical wetland and riparian habitats in the Central Valley has severely affected its bird populations.

Conservation initiatives at various scales range from protecting and restoring habitats or ecosystems for broad suites of species to ones identifying individual declining and vulnerable taxa and spurring actions to halt or reverse these declines.

The Central Valley Joint Venture's initial focus on restoring habitats and populations of waterfowl has since broadened to include the conservation of all birds in this region. Through its periodically updated implementation plan, the joint venture is setting population and habitat objectives for seven taxonomic or habitat bird groups, but to date little attention has been

paid to species of particular conservation concern.

To meet this need, we identified 38 species, subspecies, or distinct populations of birds that warrant heightened conservation efforts in the Central Valley. At-risk birds are unevenly distributed among subregions and habitat types, but the greatest threat to most is habitat loss and degradation. Overall, conservation objectives are not addressed specifically for 50% of the region's at-risk taxa, though some surely benefit from objectives set for other groups.

To adequately treat at-risk species, we recommend a framework for setting conservation objectives that (1) evaluates assumptions about limiting factors, (2) considers objectives already set for threatened and endangered species, (3) assesses whether objectives for other groups or focal species meet the needs of at-risk species lacking such objectives, (4) establishes

objectives for habitats or seasons not currently considered, and (5) highlights information gaps that hinder improvements to objectives.

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## Main Points

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The Central Valley Joint Venture has focused on conserving native and agricultural ecosystems for broad suites of species. But to date limited attention has been paid to declining and vulnerable species.

To meet this need, we identified 38 at-risk taxa that warrant heightened conservation efforts in the Central Valley.

At-risk birds may not respond well to restoration of general habitat types unless their more specific requirements are met.

We recommend a five-point framework to enhance future conservation efforts for at-risk species in the Central Valley.

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