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Association of Field Ornithologists

Birds Caribbean

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Neotropical Ornithological Society

North American Crane Working Group

Pacific Seabird Group

Raptor Research Foundation

Waterbird Society

Wilson Ornithological Society

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13 March 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum  
Secretary of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of the Interior. The Ornithological Council looks forward to working with you as the Department of the Interior moves forward with sustainably developing our natural resources while providing clean air and water, protecting our natural resources and public lands, and expanding outdoor recreation.

The Ornithological Council is a consortium of scientific societies of ornithologists. The research conducted by their members spans the globe and their cumulative expertise comprises the knowledge that is fundamental and essential to science-based bird conservation and management. The members of these scientific societies are researchers working for academic institutions, museums, agencies or non-profit organizations. Their work runs the gamut from field research, to teaching, to curating museum collections. Collectively, the ornithological research they conduct and facilitate enables ornithological conservation around the globe.

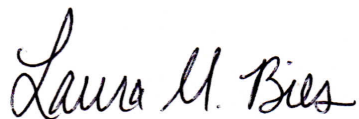
The Ornithological Council is writing to express its support for the U.S. Geological Survey's Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL), housed at the Eastern Ecological Science Center, which plays a crucial role in bird conservation and management in the U.S. and throughout North America. Long-standing USGS Species Management Research Program initiatives such as the Bird Banding Laboratory (and the Breeding Bird Survey) provide the primary long-term data on the abundance and distribution of avian species in North America. The Ornithological Council has become increasingly concerned about the BBL's ability to deliver its vital services, given the financial challenges it currently faces.

The Bird Banding Laboratory, in collaboration with the Canadian Wildlife Service Bird Banding Office, administers the North American Bird Banding Program. It supports the collection, curation, archiving, and dissemination of data from banded and marked birds, allowing for the development of effective bird science, management, and conservation. For example, data from the BBL is used to calculate waterfowl harvest rates. The banding data from bird banders and encounter data from hunters help to improve scientific understanding of waterfowl populations and allow sustainable harvest of migratory game birds. Bird banding also provides scientists and policy makers with valuable information about birds and bird populations, such as habitat needs and preferences, trends in health and life span, and population declines.

We are concerned that the BBL's funding in recent years has not been sufficient for it to continue to achieve its mission. Flat or decreasing budgets over several years have not kept pace with rising program costs or unsupported salary increases. Potential effects may include reduced band availability, delayed services and data delivery, and slower response time by BBL staff. The BBL works closely with government partners, so its current financial challenges also have the potential to affect the delivery of other federal migratory bird science, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Program and the USGS Breeding Bird Survey. While the BBL has continued to deliver on its partners needs during the past several years of declining budgets, the flexibility that the Eastern Ecological Science Center has used to maintain its operations has reached its limit. For the BBL to continue to provide the myriad benefits that it currently provides to researchers, hunters, and the public at large, sustainable future funding is needed.

The Ornithological Council has a long history of working closely with the Bird Banding Laboratory over many years, and we value that partnership and the important work of the BBL. We remain committed to ensuring that their work can persist into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura M. Bies". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Laura M. Bies  
Executive Director