Birds and Climate Change

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument

Background

Birds are useful indicators of ecological change because they are highly mobile and generally conspicuous. As climate in a particular place changes, suitability may worsen for some species and improve for others. These changes in climate may create the potential for local extirpation or new colonization. **This brief summarizes projected changes in climate suitability by mid-century for birds at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument (hereafter, the Monument) under two climate change scenarios (see Wu et al. 2018 for full results, and Langham et al. 2015 for more information regarding how climate suitability is characterized).** The high-emissions pathway (RCP8.5) represents a future in which little action is taken to reduce global emissions of greenhouse gases. The low-emissions pathway (RCP2.6) is a best-case scenario of aggressive efforts to reduce emissions. These emissions pathways are globally standardized and established by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for projecting future climate change. The findings below are model-based projections of how species distributions may change in response to climate change. A 10-km buffer was applied to each park to match the spatial resolution of the species distribution models (10 x 10 km), and climate suitability was taken as the average of all cells encompassed by the park and buffer.

IMPORTANT

This study focuses exclusively on changing climatic conditions for birds over time. But projected changes in climate suitability are not definitive predictions of future species ranges or abundances. Numerous other factors affect where species occur, including habitat quality, food abundance, species adaptability, and the availability of microclimates (see Caveats). Therefore, managers should consider changes in climate suitability alongside these other important influences.

We report trends in climate suitability for all species identified as currently present at the Monument based on both NPS Inventory & Monitoring Program data and eBird observation data (2016), plus those species for which climate at the Monument is projected to become suitable in the future (Figure 1 & Table 1). This brief provides park-specific projections whereas Wu et al. (2018), which did not incorporate park-specific species data and thus may differ from this brief, provides system-wide comparison and conclusions.

Results

Climate change is expected to alter the bird community at the Monument, with greater impacts under the high-emissions pathway than under the low-emissions pathway (Figure 1). Among the species likely to be found at the Monument today, climate suitability in summer under the high-emissions pathway is projected to improve for 16, remain stable for 6, and worsen for 16 species. Suitable climate ceases to occur for 15 species in summer, potentially resulting in extirpation of those species from the Monument (e.g., Figure 2). Climate is projected to become suitable in summer for 12 species not found at the Monument today, potentially resulting in local colonization. Climate suitability in winter under the high-emissions pathway is projected to improve for 14, remain stable for 3, and worsen for 2 species. Suitable climate does not cease to occur for any species in winter. Climate is projected to become suitable in winter for 45 species not found at the Monument today, potentially resulting in local colonization.

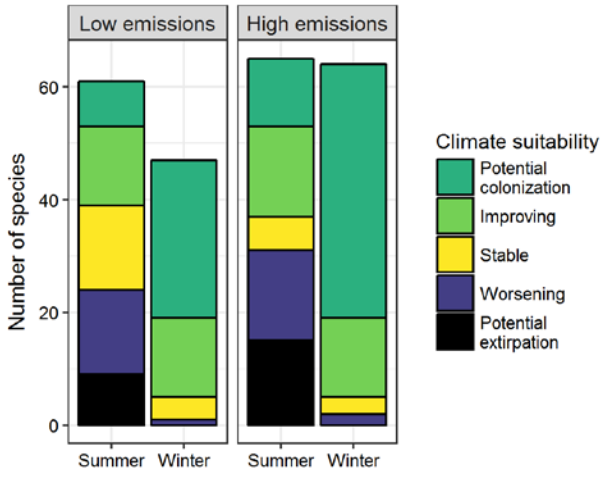

Figure 1. Projected changes in climate suitability for birds at the Monument, by emissions pathway and season.

Results (continued)

Potential Turnover Index

Potential bird species turnover for the Monument between the present and 2050 is 0.30 in summer (51st percentile across all national parks) and 0.30 in winter (46th percentile) under the high-emissions pathway. Potential species turnover declines to 0.21 in summer and 0.21 in winter under the low-emissions pathway. Turnover index was calculated based on the theoretical proportions of potential extirpations and potential colonizations by 2050 relative to today (as reported in Wu et al. 2018), and therefore assumes that all potential extirpations and colonizations are realized. According to this index, no change would be represented as 0, whereas a complete change in the bird community would be represented as 1.

Climate Sensitive Species

The Monument is or may become home to 6 species that are highly sensitive to climate change across their range (i.e., they are projected to lose climate suitability in over 50% of their current range in North America in summer and/or winter by 2050; Table 1; Langham et al. 2015). While the Monument may serve as an important refuge for 5 of these climate-sensitive species, one, the Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), might be extirpated from the Monument in summer by 2050.

Figure 2. Although currently found at the Monument, suitable climate for the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) may cease to occur here in summer by 2050, potentially resulting in local seasonal extirpation. Photo by Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren/Flickr (CC BY 2.0).

Management Implications

Parks differ in potential colonization and extirpation rates, and therefore different climate change adaptation strategies may apply. **Under the high-emissions pathway, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument falls within the high potential extirpation group.** Parks anticipating high potential extirpation can focus on actions that increase species' ability to respond to environmental change, such as increasing the amount of potential habitat, working with cooperating agencies and landowners to improve habitat connectivity for birds across boundaries, managing the disturbance regime, and possibly more intensive management actions. Furthermore, park managers have an opportunity to focus on supporting the 5 species that are highly sensitive to climate change across their range (Table 1; Langham et al. 2015) but for which the park is a potential refuge. Monitoring to identify changes in bird communities will inform the selection of appropriate management responses.

Caveats

The species distribution models included in this study are based solely on climate variables (i.e., a combination of annual and seasonal measures of temperature and precipitation), which means there are limits on their interpretation. Significant changes in climate suitability, as measured here, will not always result in a species response, and all projections should be interpreted as potential trends. Multiple other factors mediate responses to climate change, including habitat availability, ecological processes that affect demography, biotic interactions that inhibit and facilitate species' colonization or extirpation, dispersal capacity, species' evolutionary adaptive capacity, and phenotypic plasticity (e.g., behavioral adjustments). Ultimately, models can tell us where to focus our concern and which species are most likely to be affected, but monitoring is the only way to validate these projections and should inform any on-the-ground conservation action.

More Information

For more information, including details on the methods, please see the scientific publication (Wu et al. 2018) and the project overview brief, and visit the NPS Climate Change Response Program website.

References

eBird Basic Dataset (2016) Version: ebd_relAug-2016. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York.

Langham et al. (2015) Conservation Status of North American Birds in the Face of Future Climate Change. PLOS ONE.

Wu et al. (2018) Projected avifaunal responses to climate change across the U.S. National Park System. PLOS ONE.

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Species Projections

Table 1. Climate suitability projections by 2050 under the high-emissions pathway for all birds currently present at the Monument based on both NPS Inventory & Monitoring Program data and eBird observation data, plus those species for which climate at the Monument is projected to become suitable in the future. "Potential colonization" indicates that climate is projected to become suitable for the species, whereas "potential extirpation" indicates that climate is suitable today but projected to become unsuitable. Omitted species were either not modeled due to data deficiency or were absent from the I&M and eBird datasets. Observations of late-season migrants may result in these species appearing as present in the park when they may only migrate through. Species are ordered according to taxonomic groups, denoted by alternating background shading.

*** Species in top and bottom 10th percentile of absolute change**

^ Species that are highly climate sensitive

- Species not found or found only occasionally, and not projected to colonize by 2050

x Species not modeled in this season

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Gadwall	-	Potential colonization
Mallard	Worsening^	Improving
Blue-winged Teal	Worsening	-
Northern Shoveler	Potential extirpation^	Potential colonization
Canvasback	-	Potential colonization
Ring-necked Duck	-	Potential colonization
Lesser Scaup	-	Potential colonization
Bufflehead	-	Potential colonization
Hooded Merganser	-	Potential colonization^
Scaled Quail	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Northern Bobwhite	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Chukar	-	Potential colonization
Ring-necked Pheasant	Improving	-
Wild Turkey	x	Stable
Pied-billed Grebe	-	Potential colonization
Eared Grebe	-	Potential colonization
American White Pelican	-	Potential colonization
Great Blue Heron	Potential extirpation	Potential colonization
Black-crowned Night-Heron	-	Potential colonization
Northern Harrier	Stable^	Improving
Cooper's Hawk	-	Potential colonization
Swainson's Hawk	Improving^	-
Red-tailed Hawk	Worsening	Improving
Rough-legged Hawk	-	Worsening*
Virginia Rail	x	Potential colonization

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
American Coot	-	Potential colonization
Killdeer	Improving	Potential colonization
Upland Sandpiper	Worsening*	-
Wilson's Snipe	Potential extirpation	-
Iceland Gull (Thayer's)	-	Potential colonization
Black Tern	Potential extirpation	-
Rock Pigeon	Improving	Worsening*
White-winged Dove	-	Potential colonization
Mourning Dove	Improving	Improving
Greater Roadrunner	-	Potential colonization
Barn Owl	x	Improving
Common Nighthawk	Stable	-
Belted Kingfisher	Stable	-
Red-headed Woodpecker	Potential colonization	-
Red-bellied Woodpecker	-	Potential colonization
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Downy Woodpecker	Improving	Stable
Northern Flicker	Worsening*	Improving
American Kestrel	x	Improving
Western Wood-Pewee	Worsening*^	-
Say's Phoebe	Worsening	Potential colonization
Cassin's Kingbird	Potential colonization	-
Western Kingbird	Stable	-
Eastern Kingbird	Worsening*	-
Loggerhead Shrike	Stable	Potential colonization
Bell's Vireo	Potential colonization	-
Blue Jay	Improving*	-

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Chihuahuan Raven	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Horned Lark	Improving*	Improving
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Worsening	-
Barn Swallow	Improving	-
Cliff Swallow	Worsening	-
Brown Creeper	-	Potential colonization
Rock Wren	Worsening	Potential colonization
Canyon Wren	-	Potential colonization
House Wren	Potential extirpation	-
Marsh Wren	x	Potential colonization
Bewick's Wren	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	-	Potential colonization
Eastern Bluebird	-	Potential colonization
Mountain Bluebird	Potential extirpation	-
American Robin	Potential extirpation	Improving
Curve-billed Thrasher	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Brown Thrasher	Improving	-
Northern Mockingbird	Potential colonization	-
European Starling	Potential extirpation	-
Chestnut-collared Longspur	-	Potential colonization
Common Yellowthroat	Potential extirpation	-
Yellow Warbler	Potential extirpation	-
Yellow-rumped Warbler	-	Potential colonization

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Canyon Towhee	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Rufous-winged Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
American Tree Sparrow	-	Stable
Chipping Sparrow	Potential extirpation	-
Field Sparrow	Improving	-
Vesper Sparrow	Potential extirpation	-
Lark Sparrow	Improving	-
Lark Bunting	Worsening	Potential colonization
Grasshopper Sparrow	Stable	-
Song Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Lincoln's Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
White-crowned Sparrow	-	Improving*

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Dark-eyed Junco	-	Improving
Blue Grosbeak	Improving*	-
Dickcissel	Improving*	-
Bobolink	Potential extirpation	-
Red-winged Blackbird	Worsening	Improving
Western Meadowlark	Worsening	Improving
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Worsening	-
Common Grackle	Improving	-
Great-tailed Grackle	-	Potential colonization
Brown-headed Cowbird	Potential extirpation	Potential colonization
Orchard Oriole	Improving*	-
Bullock's Oriole	Worsening	-
Lesser Goldfinch	Potential colonization	-
American Goldfinch	Potential extirpation	Improving