Birds and Climate Change

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Theodore Roosevelt National Park

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 Theodore Roosevelt National Park (hereafter, the Park) 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 Park based on both NPS Inventory & Monitoring Program data and eBird observation data (2016), plus those species for which climate at the Park 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 Park, 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 Park today, climate suitability in summer under the high-emissions pathway is projected to improve for 35 (e.g., Figure 2), remain stable for 23, and worsen for 25 species. Suitable climate ceases to occur for 36 species in summer, potentially resulting in extirpation of those species from the Park. Climate is projected to become suitable in summer for 7 species not found at the Park today, potentially resulting in local colonization. Climate suitability in winter under the high-emissions pathway is projected to improve for 19, remain stable for 4, and worsen for 7 species. Suitable climate ceases to occur for 6 species in winter, potentially resulting in extirpation from the Park. Climate is projected to become suitable in winter for 40 species not found at the Park today, potentially resulting in local colonization.

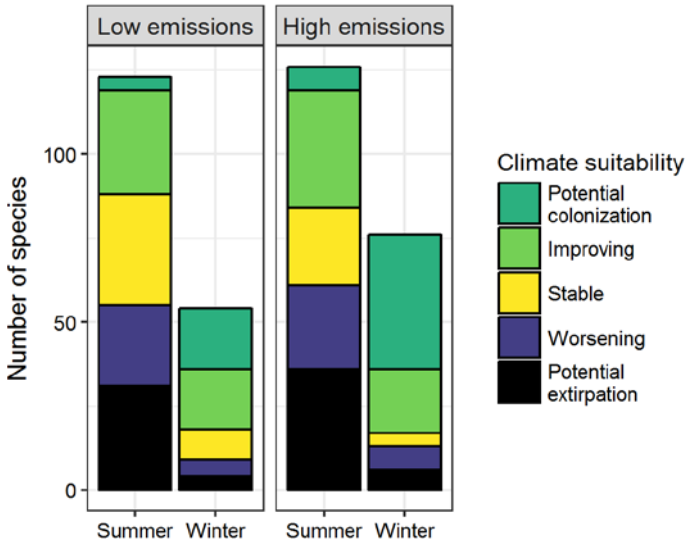

Figure 1. Projected changes in climate suitability for birds at the Park, by emissions pathway and season.

Results (continued)

Potential Turnover Index

Potential bird species turnover for the Park between the present and 2050 is 0.24 in summer (39th percentile across all national parks) and 0.35 in winter (56th percentile) under the high-emissions pathway. Potential species turnover declines to 0.14 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 Park is or may become home to 23 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 Park may serve as an important refuge for 21 of these climate-sensitive species, 2 might be extirpated from the Park in at least one season by 2050.

Figure 2. Climate at the Park in summer is projected to remain suitable for the Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) through 2050. 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, Theodore Roosevelt National Park 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 21 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.

Contacts

Gregor Schuurman, Ph.D.
Ecologist, NPS Climate Change Response Program
970-267-7211, gregor_schuurman@nps.gov

Joanna Wu
Biologist, National Audubon Society
415-644-4610, science@audubon.org

Species Projections

Table 1. Climate suitability projections by 2050 under the high-emissions pathway for all birds currently present at the Park based on both NPS Inventory & Monitoring Program data and eBird observation data, plus those species for which climate at the Park 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
Cackling/Canada Goose	x	Improving
Wood Duck	x	Potential colonization
Gadwall	Worsening^	Potential colonization
American Wigeon	Worsening*^	Potential colonization
Mallard	Worsening^	Improving
Blue-winged Teal	Worsening	-
Northern Shoveler	Worsening^	Potential colonization
Northern Pintail	Stable	-
Green-winged Teal	x	Potential colonization
Canvasback	x	Potential colonization
Redhead	Worsening^	-
Lesser Scaup	x	Potential colonization
Ruddy Duck	Stable	-
Northern Bobwhite	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Gray Partridge	Potential extirpation	Potential extirpation
Ring-necked Pheasant	Improving	Improving
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Worsening*^	Worsening*
Wild Turkey	x	Stable
Western Grebe	-	Potential colonization
American White Pelican	x	Potential colonization
Great Blue Heron	Improving	Potential colonization
Great Egret	Improving	-
White-faced Ibis	-	Potential colonization^
Golden Eagle	x	Stable
Northern Harrier	Worsening^	Potential colonization
Sharp-shinned Hawk	x	Potential colonization
Northern Goshawk	-	Worsening*

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Bald Eagle	x	Improving
Swainson's Hawk	Worsening*^	-
Red-tailed Hawk	Improving	-
Ferruginous Hawk	Stable^	-
Rough-legged Hawk	-	Improving
Virginia Rail	-	Potential colonization
American Coot	x	Potential colonization
Killdeer	Improving	-
Greater Yellowlegs	Potential extirpation	-
Willet	Potential extirpation^	-
Upland Sandpiper	Stable	-
Long-billed Curlew	Worsening^	-
Marbled Godwit	Worsening*^	-
Wilson's Snipe	Potential extirpation	Potential colonization
Wilson's Phalarope	Worsening^	-
Red-necked Phalarope	Stable	-
Franklin's Gull	Worsening	-
Ring-billed Gull	Worsening^	Potential colonization
Herring Gull	-	Potential colonization^
Black Tern	Stable	-
Rock Pigeon	Potential extirpation	Improving
Eurasian Collared-Dove	x	Potential colonization
Mourning Dove	Improving	-
Black-billed Cuckoo	Improving	-
Western Screech-Owl	-	Potential colonization
Eastern Screech-Owl	x	Potential colonization
Great Horned Owl	x	Improving
Burrowing Owl	Improving*^	-

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Common Nighthawk	Improving*	-
Chimney Swift	Improving	-
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Stable	-
Belted Kingfisher	Potential extirpation	Potential colonization
Red-headed Woodpecker	Improving*	-
Red-bellied Woodpecker	-	Potential colonization
Downy Woodpecker	Improving	Stable
Hairy Woodpecker	Potential extirpation	Worsening
Northern Flicker	Potential extirpation	Improving
American Kestrel	x	Potential colonization
Merlin	x	Improving^
Prairie Falcon	x	Improving
Western Wood-Pewee	Potential extirpation^	-
Willow Flycatcher	Potential extirpation	-
Least Flycatcher	Potential extirpation	-
Eastern Phoebe	Improving	-
Say's Phoebe	Worsening	-
Western Kingbird	Improving	-
Eastern Kingbird	Stable	-
Loggerhead Shrike	Worsening	Potential colonization
Northern Shrike	-	Worsening*
Bell's Vireo	Potential colonization	-
Yellow-throated Vireo	Potential extirpation	-
Warbling Vireo	Improving	-
Red-eyed Vireo	Potential extirpation	-
Blue Jay	Improving*	Improving
Black-billed Magpie	Worsening^	Worsening

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
American Crow	Stable	-
Common Raven	Potential extirpation	-
Horned Lark	Worsening	Improving
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Improving*	-
Purple Martin	Improving	-
Tree Swallow	Potential extirpation	-
Violet-green Swallow	Stable	-
Barn Swallow	Improving	-
Cliff Swallow	Worsening	-
Black-capped Chickadee	Stable	Worsening
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Potential extirpation	Potential extirpation
White-breasted Nuthatch	Stable	Improving
Brown Creeper	-	Improving
Rock Wren	Stable	-
House Wren	Stable	-
Marsh Wren	x	Potential colonization
Eastern Bluebird	Improving	Potential colonization
Mountain Bluebird	Potential extirpation	Potential colonization
Veery	Potential extirpation	-
Swainson's Thrush	Potential extirpation	-
American Robin	Potential extirpation	-
Gray Catbird	Stable	-
Brown Thrasher	Improving*	-
Northern Mockingbird	Potential colonization	-
European Starling	Improving	Potential colonization
Sprague's Pipit	Worsening^	-
Bohemian Waxwing	-	Worsening*

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Cedar Waxwing	Potential extirpation	Improving
Chestnut-collared Longspur	Worsening*^	Potential colonization
Smith's Longspur	-	Potential colonization
Snow Bunting	-	Potential extirpation
Ovenbird	Potential extirpation	-
Black-and-white Warbler	Potential extirpation	-
Tennessee Warbler	Potential extirpation	-
Common Yellowthroat	Stable	-
American Redstart	Potential extirpation	-
Yellow Warbler	Potential extirpation	-
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Potential extirpation	-
Yellow-breasted Chat	Potential extirpation	-
Spotted Towhee	Potential extirpation	-
Eastern Towhee	Improving	-
Rufous-winged Sparrow	Potential colonization	-
Cassin's Sparrow	Potential colonization	-
American Tree Sparrow	-	Improving
Chipping Sparrow	Stable	-
Clay-colored Sparrow	Potential extirpation	-
Brewer's Sparrow	Potential extirpation	-
Field Sparrow	Improving	-
Vesper Sparrow	Potential extirpation	-
Lark Sparrow	Stable	-
Lark Bunting	Worsening	-

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Savannah Sparrow	Potential extirpation	-
Grasshopper Sparrow	Improving	-
Baird's Sparrow	Worsening*^	-
Song Sparrow	Stable	Potential colonization
White-crowned Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Dark-eyed Junco	-	Improving
Western Tanager	Potential extirpation	-
Northern Cardinal	Improving*	Potential colonization
Black-headed Grosbeak	Stable	-
Blue Grosbeak	Potential colonization	-
Lazuli Bunting	Worsening	-
Indigo Bunting	Improving	-
Dickcissel	Improving*	-
Bobolink	Worsening*	-
Red-winged Blackbird	Improving	Improving
Western Meadowlark	Improving	-
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Stable	-

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Brewer's Blackbird	Potential extirpation	-
Common Grackle	Improving	-
Great-tailed Grackle	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Brown-headed Cowbird	Improving	Potential colonization
Orchard Oriole	Improving*	-
Bullock's Oriole	Stable	-
Baltimore Oriole	Improving*	-
Pine Grosbeak	-	Potential extirpation
House Finch	Improving	Potential colonization
Common Redpoll	-	Potential extirpation
Pine Siskin	Potential extirpation	Stable
American Goldfinch	Stable	Potential colonization
Evening Grosbeak	-	Potential extirpation
House Sparrow	x	Improving
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	-	Potential colonization