



November 17, 2023

Letter of Support for the Catalina Island Conservancy's Catalina Island Restoration Project

To Whom It May Concern,

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas. Over the past 50 years, North America has lost almost 3 billion birds¹, with habitat loss, including degradation caused by introduced species, being a leading cause. As bird populations continue to decline and habitats become more fragmented and degraded, it is critical that we take the opportunity where we can to restore habitats to benefit birds and people.

The negative impacts of artificially high deer populations on bird populations has been documented across North America. Using Breeding Bird Survey data for all of North America, a group of 73 widespread species including both neotropical migratory and non-migratory species showed declining numbers as deer (white-tailed deer, black-tailed deer, and moose) numbers increased. Bird species that are known to be sensitive to higher deer densities declined more strongly in states with more deer².

On islands off the coast of British Columbia, islands that had had introduced Sitka black-tailed deer populations for more than 50 years had bird populations only 30% to 45% as high as populations of deer-free islands. On islands with long-term deer populations the bird species with the highest dependence on understory vegetation were most affected, and their abundance was only 7% of those on deer-free islands. Deer overabundance decreased bird food resources and reduced nest site quality³. In the islands of Puget Sound, black-tailed deer regulated cover and structure of the understory, which, in turn affected bird populations, and deer-free islands supported the most abundant and diverse bird faunas⁴.

These anecdotes are from situations where deer are native but their numbers were artificially high. Deer are not native to Catalina Island, and this it can be expected that their impact on birds and their habitat would be even more significant as those habitats' natural condition is without large herbivores.

Surprisingly, deer can even have direct impacts on birds. White-tailed deer are also known to depredate songbird nests, eating both eggs and nestlings. Deer found and depredated both ground- and above-

¹ Rosenberg et al. 2019. Decline of the North American avifauna. *Science* vol. 366, pp 120-124.

² Chollet, S., and J.-L. Martin. 2012. Declining woodland birds in North America: should we blame Bambi? *Diversity and Distributions* DOI: 10.1111/ddi.12003 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ddi.12003/full>

³ Allombert, S., A. J. Gaston, and J.-L. Martin. 2005. A natural experiment on the impact of overabundant deer on songbird populations. *Biological Conservation* 126: 1-13.

⁴ Martin, T. G., P. Arcese, and N. Scheerder. 2011. Browsing down our natural heritage: deer impacts on vegetation structure and songbird assemblages across an island archipelago. *Biological Conservation*. 144:459-469.

P.O. Box 249, The Plains, VA 20198 (regular, registered, or certified mail)

8255 E. Main Street, Suites D & E, Marshall, VA 20115 (physical address; use for deliveries)

tel: **540-253-5780** | fax: **540-253-5782** | email: **info@abcbirds.org** | website: **abcbirds.org**



ground nests, and open bowl-type and covered-bowl nests^{5,6}. Although deer are herbivores and such behavior may be uncommon, direct deer effects on birds could be significant at high deer population densities, such as those found on Catalina Island.

Accordingly, American Bird Conservancy strongly supports the Catalina Island Conservancy's Catalina Island Restoration Project. Completely and permanently removing non-native deer from the island is the only way to allow the island's habitats and the species that rely on them to recover.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Keitt".

Brad Keitt
American Bird Conservancy
bkeitt@abcbirds.org

⁵ Pietz, P. J., and D. A. Granfors. 2000. White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) predation on grassland songbird nestlings. *American Midland Naturalist* 144(2):419-422. Jamestown, ND: Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center Online. <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/deerpred/index.htm> (Version 09MAR2001)

⁶ Ellis-Felege, S. N., J. S. Burnam, W. E. Palmer, D. C. Sisson, S. D. Wellendorf, R. P. Thornton, H. L. Stribling, and J. P. Carroll. 2008. Cameras identify white-tailed deer depredeating Northern Bobwhite nests. *Southeastern Naturalist* 7: 562-564. [See also many citations referenced in this article.]