

# 5 Reasons to Celebrate the Wilderness Act

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, here are several birds that have benefited from the legislation, and some that still need its help.

By Chelsea Harvey and Elizabeth Newbern

Michael Fitzsimmons

Happy birthday to the Wilderness Act, which turns 50 years old today. Signed into effect on Sept. 3, 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson (after eight years of work and more than 60 drafts), the Act created a system for protecting the natural areas we love. It was also the first piece of legislation to present a legal definition for wilderness—as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

When it was signed, the Act designated about 9 million acres of wilderness area; today, it protects nearly 110 million acres in 44 states and Puerto Rico. While the Wilderness Act protects habitat for everything from moose to mountain lions, it’s an especial boon to the birds. Many designated wilderness sites overlap with globally recognized Important Bird Areas (IBA), making sure birds have safe, protected places to breed, nest, and stop over during their migrations.

Here are a few birds who live in these overlapped areas and are doing great thanks to the Wilderness Act:



**Bald Eagle**

Act-Protected IBAs: Monomoy Wilderness, Massachusetts; Gaylord Nelson Wilderness Area, Wisconsin .

#### *Preferred Habitat*

Bald Eagles prefer to hang out close to large bodies of water, like rivers, marshes, and lakes.

#### *A Little Bit of History*

The Bald Eagle had a close call when pesticides and other environmental contaminants caused widespread population declines throughout the 20th century. The eagle spent decades on the endangered species list before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finally proposed delisting in 1999 after a series of rigorous recovery programs. Today, the eagle enjoys a much-recovered population and the benefit of numerous protected wilderness areas throughout the United States.

#### *Fun Fact*

Bald Eagles aren’t born bald—their iconic white feathers typically don’t finish growing in until the eagles are about 5 years old.



**Brown Pelican**

Act-Protected IBAs: Everglades National Park, Florida; Cape Romain Wilderness, South Carolina

***Preferred Habitat***

Brown Pelicans like to live on southern and western coastlines, preferably on isolated islands without any land predators.

***A Little Bit of History***

Brown Pelicans almost completely disappeared from North America between 1950s and early 1970s, and they were quickly but on the endangered species list. Most of the population was killed outright by the pesticide endrin, and their nests were at risk from DDT contamination. Thanks to bans on certain pesticides and areas protected by the Wilderness Act, the Brown Pelicans made a comeback and were delisted in 1985. Today, they are regulars to all the beaches, and their numbers continue to increase.

***Fun Fact***

Pelicans incubate their eggs with the skin of their feet, essentially standing on the eggs to keep them warm. When the pesticide DDT caused pelicans to lay thinner eggs, they cracked under the weight of incubating parents.



**Tufted Puffin**

Act-Protected IBAs: Oregon Island Wilderness, Oregon

***Preferred Habitat***

Tufted Puffins are seabirds, found along the coast of the Pacific Northwest. They make their homes on rocky, offshore islands and spend much of their time foraging for food at sea.

***A Little Bit of History***

The Tufted Puffin has had its share of trouble in the past century. Foxes, rats, and other scavengers threaten the island-dwelling birds, and oil spills have killed thousands over the past few decades. In February, the National Resources Defense Council petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the puffin as an endangered species, a request that is still being considered.

***Fun Fact***

After fledging, juvenile puffins migrate south to the Central Pacific, and often do not return to their breeding grounds for several years. Nobody knows exactly what they do during these free juvenile years.



**Piping Plover**

Act-Protected IBAs: Monomoy Wilderness, Massachusetts; Cape Romain Wilderness, South Carolina

***Preferred Habitat***

The Piping Plover is a shorebird and makes its home right on the beach.

***A Little Bit of History***

There may be fewer than 8,000 Piping Plovers left in the world, making its protection imperative. Development has been a big problem for the plovers, whose habitat is disturbed and even destroyed by human activities on the beach. Populations along the Atlantic Coast of North America are listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

***Fun Fact***

While nesting, plover parents will sometimes defend their young from predators by faking a broken wing, which lures hungry foxes and raccoons away from the nest.



**Roseate Spoonbill**

Act-Protected IBAs: Everglades National Park, Florida

***Preferred Habitat***

These birds prefer marsh and wetland habitat, where they can wade around searching for small fish and crustaceans to gobble up.

***A Little Bit of History***

Globally, the Roseate Spoonbill is a great success story—it fought its way back from near extinction in the late 19th century, thanks to unchecked hunting, and now enjoys significantly increased populations (although numbers still aren't back to their historic highs). Unfortunately, populations are still suffering in Florida and Louisiana, mostly because of habitat loss.

***Fun Fact***

The Roseate Spoonbill gets its pink coloring from pigments in the crustaceans it snacks on.



There are plenty of healthy, environmentally friendly items in a normal grocery store—you just have to know how to shop.

# Cuisine and Climate Change

*The author reveals how to cut calories and carbon emissions—and you won't even have to make a trip to the farmer's market.*

By Rene Ebersole

Between one-fifth and one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions result from our food system. In a recent interview with Audubon Magazine, Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and more recently *Cooked, A Natural History of Transformation*, spoke with Rene Ebersole about how the fork can be a powerful weapon against climate change. A widespread shift toward smarter consumer choices can reduce air, water, and soil pollution, which in turn can produce healthier food and a cleaner planet, the author says. While shopping at farmers' markets, growing vegetables, and carrying cloth grocery bags are great ways to help thwart climate change, he offers some other very simple, often-overlooked practices that can provide some similar benefits.

## 1. Buy frozen.

There's a notion that because it's expensive to buy groceries at the farmers' market, eating sustainably is unaffordable for people who don't have a Prius or a house covered with solar panels. Not true, Pollan says—just look in the freezer aisle:

“Processed foods are not necessarily so cheap. If you're willing to cook from raw ingredients you can often cook more cheaply. So I'm not always sure it's a financial question as much as a time question. I would also say that the cult of fresh gets a little bit overdone in that there's nothing wrong with frozen vegetables, and they're really cheap. Even if you can't afford farmer's market organic spinach, you can afford a box of frozen spinach, which is a great product. And it's washed, by the way, so it's really

convenient and much faster to cook. I think that there's this tendency to assume that it's a choice between eating fast food crap and farmer's market food—and that's not the first choice. The first choice is between eating real food and processed food. Real food is cheaper than processed food. It doesn't have to be organic; it doesn't have to come from the farmer's market. You can eat well and improve your diet dramatically simply by making that change.”

## 2. Don't try to cook like you're on a cooking show.

Making fresh, healthy meals at home and buying fewer processed items is the way to go, but many people have trouble making that leap Pollan says, offering some insight:

“Either they don't know how to cook because their parents didn't cook, or they're intimidated by cooking because they see experts do it on television and it looks really hard (I mean they make it look like brain surgery on cooking shows); or they just don't have time, or they don't think they have time because the kind of cooking they see on television takes a really long time. But every night home cooking is not making a gourmet meal, and it need not take more than a half hour. Look how much time you can spend microwaving frozen food. You could easily spend a half hour just doing that for a family of four because you can't do it all at once. We have to look at where we spend our time. What do we value? Some people value watching cooking shows more than they value cooking. Or they value being online more than cooking for their family. So that's why I wrote my book *Cooked*, to hopefully inspire people to get into the kitchen and show them that it's really a very interesting and pleasurable way to spend a little bit of your leisure time.”

“Processed foods are not necessarily so cheap. If you're willing to cook from raw ingredients you can often cook more cheaply.”

## 3. Raid the refrigerator.

Instead of trying to replicate those meals on cooking shows, with umpteen ingredients and hours of prep time, mix up quick and easy dishes from what's already stocked in the kitchen. Pollan's go-to meal:

“I always have frozen spinach in the fridge, and I always have canned wild salmon and pasta in the pantry. With those three ingredients and a little bit of olive oil and maybe some garlic, maybe some basil (if it's in the garden at the time), I can make a really great meal—one of my favorite meals, in like 20 minutes. I defrost the spinach, cook the pasta, saute the spinach over the pasta, open the can of salmon and I put that on top of the spinach, then I put a little basil on that and maybe pour a little extra olive oil on it. It's delicious. If you're in the

habit of cooking, you'll have the right things in your pantry, and if you're just strategic about it, and it becomes a habit, it doesn't have to consume your life.”

## 4. Divide and conquer.

Spread the work around. Pollan says:

“One of the problems with cooking was it was assumed to be the woman's responsibility, and her exclusive responsibility. That makes it really hard, especially if the woman is also working. So I think we have to get men and children involved in the kitchen. You know, if you share the work, it's not that much work. There's also a social dimension. The problem with cooking was we isolated it; it was one person in the nuclear household doing it. But if you do it with your kids it's often very pleasurable time. Kids really love to cook.”

# It's Pandemonium!

Win a copy of "The Birds of Pandemonium" by Michele Raffin.

Read an excerpt from Michele Raffin's new book about running a home for abandoned birds. We're giving away 10 copies of *Birds of Pandemonium*, by Michele Raffin.

For contest rules and to enter, go to: <http://www.audubonmagazine.org/articles/birds/win-copy-birds-pandemonium>. The contest ends at midnight, Tuesday, October 7, 2014.

In the meantime, here's chapter 7 from the book, "Wing and Coffee: Crowned Glories."

**“Birds of Pandemonium**  
Michele, I've got an offer you can't refuse.”

Aviculturists who breed for profit can't afford to be too sentimental, so when Louis Brown called to offer me a female Victoria crowned pigeon – almost for free – I assumed that he had no use for her, even though he loves the species. At the time, these oversize blue pigeons from New Guinea were selling for about \$1,500, if they were healthy and able to breed. But Louis admitted that this one was damaged merchandise.

She had a broken wing. He felt it wasn't economically viable to have it repaired. Handicapped birds are usually a liability to a breeder because they are more difficult to mate. Worse, Victoria crowneds are fairly pricey to keep. They require a lot of space and a specialized diet of fruit, vegetables, seed, and a protein source to replace the fallen fruit and invertebrates that they gather from the forest floors of New Guinea. I would also find out later that they don't tolerate cold weather well. If they are not given supplemental heat in Northern California winters, there can be expensive vet bills to pay.

Michele will take her! That was fast becoming the off-loading strategy of the breeding community. Some breeders regularly killed birds that were no longer paying their way. Very few of them liked doing this, but they felt they had no other option. So when word got around that a lady was willing to take unwanted birds as long as you told her a sob story about what would happen if she didn't take them – and that she was also crazy enough to find and buy mates for lonely adopted birds – well, start punching her number into your phone before that lorikeet breeder beats you to it. Some days these “gift” offers were so numerous and insistent, I couldn't even listen to my messages.

Of course I said yes to Louis's crippled Victoria crowned. I made arrangements to drive up and get the bird the following day. When Louis brought her out, I felt concern rather than excitement. She was beautiful, with her vivid, red-rimmed eyes and rippling crown of white-tipped feathers. The bird had been dropped from a feeding table when she was three weeks old, and the injured wing had never healed properly. As a full-grown adult, she looked as if she was tilting to one side because she dragged the damaged wing on the floor. Maybe that's why she was named Wing.

She was a sorry sight, and so withdrawn and affectless I didn't warm to her. Wing did not care for the company of humans, nor did she enjoy being petted like most of her docile, sociable species. Once I brought her home, I discussed her depressed state with a new vet who had come by for a visit. Anne Calloway was a young doctor who had just joined a dog and cat practice and had a long-standing love of birds. Since veterinary care is often assigned by voucher from shelters and rescue

Michael Kern

Coffee, a Victoria Crowned Pigeon

groups, our birds have been cared for by a number of different, excellent practitioners.

Anne was on her way to becoming a certified avian specialist. Meeting her had been another bit of random luck. Like Dr. Varner, Anne would become a dear friend and gentle healer to many Pandemonium birds. “Wing has the personality of a pheasant – aloof and wary,” I told her. “I suppose she's afraid of being hurt again.”

Anne disagreed. “I don't think her personality has a psychological basis. I think that Wing's behavior might be due to her being in physical pain. Mind if I take her in and do an X-ray?”

The results were disturbing. The broken wing looked like swiss cheese inside. “The tissue is a mess,” Anne said. “If you want to prevent further damage, we need to take off all or at least part of the wing.” I felt bad that I hadn't taken Wing in for an exam sooner. Who knew how long she'd been in pain? I agreed to the surgery on the wing. We decided to do an amputation with the minimum possible tissue removed, but this turned out to be a mistake. Wing had to have a second operation several months later to remove what remained of her wing. Once she had healed and was no longer in pain, she became much more social, just as Anne

had predicted.

Still, the bird needed something more than good medicine, and in my heart I knew exactly what it should be. When Louis called again and offered me Wing's brother Coffee at a steep discount, I jumped at the chance to get her a close companion. Unlike his sister, Coffee was Mr. Personality around the Browns' rambling spread. In fact, he was almost a lap bird, too tame to breed and therefore of no use to Louis in expanding his flock. I brought Coffee home and opened his carrier in the living room. When he stepped out into his new life, he had a proprietary air about him. Soon I found out why: Coffee considered himself a house pet, with full family privileges.

Calmly the bird inspected the living room as I watched, seated on the floor. As he walked, he wagged his tail from side to side like a happy puppy, and then he stopped and called out with a loud "boom, booom." Louis had told me the bird was named Coffee because he liked to sit on Louis's lap and sip out of his coffee mug. I was puzzled, since I'd just been reading about foods poisonous to birds, and coffee was listed as dangerous to the point of causing cardiac arrest. Louis must have been having a little fun with me; as I'd find out, sometimes his tales were as colorful as his birds. Coffee kept his name, though.

When he was finished exploring the living room, Coffee walked up and nibbled at my big toe. Realizing that the toe was not edible, he looked up at me and opened and closed his beak several times. I recognized that as bird talk for hunger. I raced to the kitchen for some grapes and put them on the floor. He eyed them, looked at me, and did the beak thing again. Was this big baby used to being hand-fed?

I picked up a grape and put it on my open palm in front of his beak. He pecked at my hand

a few times but didn't connect with the grape. After each attempt he'd look up and stare, all the while opening and closing his beak. Something about this bird's gaze, the soft but insistent way he continued to look at me, was captivating. I picked up the grape with my left hand, held his beak open with my right, and shoved in the grape. Coffee swallowed the grape, made a satisfied purring sound, and did his beak flap again: Please, may I have some more? I stayed there feeding him, staring at the amazing white-tipped crown of feathers that vibrated when he swallowed. I was smitten. Unlike his big sister, this guy had me at "boom."

Left to his own devices, Coffee would have slept in the house like the dogs and cat and spent his

days in the fenced yard outside.

But for his own safety – and given the remarkable stench of exotic pigeon poop – Coffee would have to live in an aviary. He did not agree; he hung out at the gate disconsolately, waiting for me to bring him his breakfast and scratch his neck. Once I stopped the scratching, he'd look at me sadly and then try to snuggle under my arm. The depression was understandable for a bird

that lives in flocks of up to twenty in the wild. Since, like all new residents, Coffee was still under quarantine until I was sure he was healthy, I had to keep him in an aviary alone for a while. But I had plans. Once again, I cajoled Tom.

"Do you mind if I build an enclosure that abuts the house?"

"You're actually asking?" he answered.

At least he was smiling. I had the enclosure built near the side door so that Coffee could see us coming and going. I'd left part of his pen unroofed so that he could enjoy direct sunlight. This was terrific when the sun was shining. But one night, during a fierce rainstorm, I ran outside barefoot

"Left to his own devices, Coffee would have slept in the house like the dogs and cat and spent his days in the fenced yard outside."

to check on Coffee. He was sitting in front of the gate, huddled in a soaking heap. He didn't even look at me when I picked him up, put him inside my raincoat, and brought him inside.

I dried him off as best I could with a kitchen towel and put him on the floor of the laundry room with a bowl of drinking water and went back to bed. The next morning I found that Coffee had made himself comfortable on top of a pile of formerly clean clothes stacked on the dryer. I walked over and scratched his head. He made that odd purring sound. Finally he was where he belonged, inside the house. A case of sniffles kept him there for a while.

In a way, the Victoria crowned's "gregarious nature," as the scant field literature describes it, has helped seal its fate in the wild. At one time the birds were safe in New Guinea forests too dense to penetrate, but now that palm oil companies are forging roads through the forests, the birds are becoming more and more accessible to hunters. The Victoria crowned pigeons' heavy bodies make them awkward and slow fliers. Add to that their innate friendliness – they seem to have little fear of humans, even in the wild – and the species is no match for a hunter.

Though the birds are officially protected in New Guinea, poaching is still a huge problem and there is little or no enforcement of the hunting prohibition. Their splendid feathers are used in headdresses, their skins are sold to tourists, and their meat is consumed. Because they tame easily and quickly, hunters also collect live young Victoria crowneds to keep in pens in much the way Americans keep backyard chickens. They raise them as food, but the birds are not valued as egg producers, since they lay only a single egg at a time and generally no more than three a year. If they are allowed to hatch an egg, both parents

incubate it for a month and then nurture the chick for three to five more months. At first the parents feed the babies crop milk, a protein-and fat-rich secretion of the crop, a pouch near the bird's throat that is part of its digestive system. Both male and female Victoria crowneds produce crop milk. The only other birds able to produce this nourishment besides pigeon species are flamingos.

This is excellent nutrition for wild babies but problematic should a breeder have to hand-raise a Victoria crowned chick with some alternative nutrient source. But I'm getting ahead of myself. When we welcomed our first Victoria crowneds, Coffee and Wing, I was sure I would never be breeding them, even by accident. Because they were siblings, I made sure that they had no nesting

box or materials to support breeding. If they did manage to produce an egg, I intended to remove it.

The moment I was able to reunite Wing and Coffee in the Blue Butterfly Aviary, a bright, airy space big enough for both of them, they stared at each other and broke into a run. They began grooming each other immediately, pulling solicitously at neck feathers in an avian form of embrace. Cue

the violins: I sat there sniffing at the sight of such pure joy.

How Louis would have laughed at the messy sight of me there. I was surely savoring the moment, but the big picture for this breed is not so rosy. Continued reports are still so dire about Victoria crowneds in the wild that it seems their best chance of survival on their native island is on an official Papua New Guinea postage stamp, finely etched, gummed, and perforated. I have some; they're gorgeous.

But why settle for such a sad, one-inch-square epitaph if the birds could still boom across the earth . . . somewhere? ”

For contest rules and to enter, go to: <http://www.audubonmagazine.org/articles/birds/win-copy-birds-pandemonium>

# About Us



Most of Izembek Lagoon is dedicated wilderness, per the Act, and is home to Brants seen here.

Kristine Sowl

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