

This is my first cover I get to select as editor, and I chose my favorite topic—birds! On the cover is a piping plover nest, and here on this page is the adult version. These little shorebirds are entertaining to watch as they run along the beach, often eating worms they pull out of the sand that are longer than they are. I get to see them in Texas when they come down to spend the winter along the Gulf coast. Unfortunately regional populations of this bird are listed under the Endangered Species Act as Threatened or Endangered (ecos.fws.gov/ecp0/profile/speciesProfile?spcode=B079).

For over 100 years conservation of wildlife has been a focus of the federal government. In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt signed an executive order that allowed the Department of Agriculture to use Pelican Island in Florida (www.fws.gov/refuge/pelican_island/) as a breeding ground and preserve for native birds. This preservation movement led to the National Wildlife Refuge System that is now managed under the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In 1918 the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was enacted, making it illegal for anyone to possess, transport, sell, or purchase any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of these birds except for holders of a valid permit (www.fws.gov/birds/policies-and-regulations/laws-legislations/migratory-bird-treaty-act.php). Later, the USFWS became the principal federal agency charged with protecting and enhancing the populations and habitats of more than eight hundred species of migratory birds that spend all or part of their lives in the United States. Part of this management is done with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 that provides states with assistance to develop and maintain conservation programs for wildlife species that are at risk of becoming extinct (www.fws.gov/international/laws-treaties-agreements/us-conservation-laws/endangered-species-act.html). Successful species benefiting from the ESA include delistings of the Peregrine Falcon 1999 and the Bald Eagle in 2007 (www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/BaldEagleDelisting.htm).

Fun fact, part of the delisting process includes going through the *Federal Register* process (www.fws.gov/pacific/ecoservices/endangered/classification/pdf/delisting.pdf). Federal regulations are one of the basic tools the government uses to carry out public policy. The public can play an extremely

important role by commenting on proposed rules and other documents that solicit public input. These comments can help shape the agency's decisions. This year, proposed revisions to the ESA will make it harder for threatened species to get protections in timely manner (www.regulations.gov/document?D=FWS-HQ-ES-2018-0006-0001). Fortunately we now have www.regulations.gov that makes it easy to provide comments on the ESA changes. The ESA comment period will be closed by the time this issue goes to press, but hopefully USFWS will craft rules to keep current endangered species protections in place.

Laws and regulations are not the only way the government interacts with birds. The federal government has been collecting various data about birds for decades. In 1966, the US Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (now partnering with the Canadian Wildlife Service) began running the Breeding Bird Survey, a longitudinal study that continues today. This survey requires citizen volunteers to run the routes to count the birds. I got to do this for a couple of years in the Texas Panhandle. Data can be found at (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/RawData/). Banded bird data can be found as well (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/start.cfm). Other data on birds (and other critters) can be found in the USGS Gap Analysis Program (GAP). GAP works to ensure that common species—those that are not officially endangered—remain common by identifying those species and plant communities that are not adequately represented in existing conservation lands (gapanalysis.usgs.gov/). Endangered species usually have their own data as well—Rhode



Adult Piping Plover. Credit: Susan Haig, U.S. Geological Survey. Public domain. www.usgs.gov/media/images/piping-plover-0.

Island Piping Plover Restoration Project (catalog.data.gov/dataset/rhode-island-piping-plover-restoration-project-2002).

Unfortunately, the Federal Aviation Administration has also collected a lot of data on birds when they strike aircraft, and their data goes back to 1990 (wildlife.faa.gov/database/Search.aspx).

To finish on a happier note here is one last database—the USFWS Feather Atlas—a database of flight feather photos (www.fws.gov/lab/featheratlas/index.php).

On a different note, this is our Student Paper issue. Thanks to all the students who participated and for all the library and information science faculty for nominating papers.