

by Jamie Rappaport Clark

Sharing the Rewards of Endangered Species Recovery



The peregrine falcon, which Director Clark worked with early in her career, is no longer in danger of extinction. The recovery of this magnificent bird made it possible for the Fish and Wildlife Service to remove the peregrine from the endangered species list in 1999.
USFWS photo

The Endangered Species Act ranked as one of the most popular laws ever when it was enacted in 1973. It passed with almost unanimous support in Congress, following the ground-breaking research by the Fish and Wildlife Service that linked DDT, a commonly used pesticide, to the thinning of egg shells in a number of bird species.

One of these was the peregrine falcon. During the early days of the Endangered Species Act, I cared for five of these then-endangered falcons at Maryland's Aberdeen Proving Ground. As a young biology student, I felt fortunate to hold newborn chicks in my hands and to have grown peregrines perch on my forearm. I knew the species was on the verge of disappearing, but I was confident that America's support for the Endangered Species Act would ultimately save the world's fastest bird from extinction.

My faith in the public's resolve was strengthened by my first professional experiences. In the 1980's, as a biologist for the U.S. Army, I saw the care our Armed Forces took to conserve endangered species on our military bases worldwide. Then in 1985 there came some truly inspiring news; for the first time ever, an endangered species—the brown pelican—had recovered to the extent that it warranted delisting, albeit only in part of its range. Two years later, the American alligator became the first species on our continent to fully recover and be removed rangewide from the endangered species list.

It was in 1988, during this period of public support and celebration, that I joined the Fish and Wildlife Service. In that year, the endangered species program operated on a budget of about \$30 million to care for the more than 500 U.S. species listed as threatened or endangered. I began as a staff biologist in Washington, D.C., and went on to become Chief for Endangered Species, first in the Albuquerque Regional Office and then back in Washington. Eventually I became the Assistant Director for Ecological Services and finally the Director. Over that time, I saw the endangered species program expand dramatically. Today, with nearly 1,200 U.S. species listed, the program receives appropriations of roughly \$130 million.

To a large extent, this growth came in response to the increase in the number and the complexity of endangered species issues. These factors in turn transformed the Endangered Species Act for some people into a lightning rod for discontent about wildlife management. I witnessed the transformation myself when the spotted owl controversy hit the agency. I'll never forget Congressional hearings at

which lawmakers accused the Act of putting people out of work. Of course, it wasn't the Endangered Species Act that cost people their livelihood, but the perceived conflict between endangered species and jobs was sensationalized by many in the media.

What we have done since the spotted owl controversy is nothing short of amazing. Through Habitat Conservation Plans, the "No Surprises" Rule, Safe Harbor and Candidate Conservation Agreements, and many of our other conservation programs, we have fostered successful partnerships with groups that have not always seen eye to eye with us. In Texas, for instance, ranchers are inviting us onto their lands to release aplomado falcons. In South Carolina, private landowners are signing up to host red-cockaded woodpeckers on their property. And in fast-growing San Diego, a county-wide urban development plan is taking into account the needs of more than 80 threatened and endangered species, including the Riverside fairy shrimp, arroyo toad, and western snowy plover.

Industry is getting into the act as well. A utility company in Florida, for example, is looking out for endangered sea turtles by reducing artificial lighting that confuses hatchlings in beach nesting areas. In Texas, through a Safe Harbor Agreement, a petroleum company is restoring habitat for the Attwater's greater prairie-chicken, one of the rarest birds in the U.S.

From coast to coast, we now have examples of State and local governments, industry, and private individuals demonstrating that endangered species conservation is compatible with a strong economy. As we enter the new millennium, with anticipated population growth and increasing urban sprawl, these types of partnerships—involving government, industry, and individuals—will become increasingly crucial.

We cannot recover species on our National Wildlife Refuges and other Federal lands alone. For endangered species to survive in the future, fish and

wildlife management must be practiced not only in America's public wild places but also in its family farms, industrial areas, community parks, and backyard garden plots. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's challenge to encourage everyone to participate. I intend to continue to pursue the funding and develop the policies, programs, and tools to help us do just that.

Those of us who have worked with endangered species have shared the special feeling that comes from releasing Mexican gray wolves into the wild, rescuing the California condor from extinction, or holding a peregrine chick in our hands. It is a powerful emotion. It makes people proud to point to an endangered species and say, "That is an endangered creature and I'm on the team to rescue it from extinction." Most people do want to help. We need to make their involvement easier by providing sound science to guide their land uses and by listening to their point of view. With their support, we can all share the optimism I've had, from my work with peregrine chicks at Aberdeen to the day we recognized the recovery of this magnificent bird, that endangered species can be saved.

Jamie Rappaport Clark is Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



The southeastern brown pelican and American alligator were the first two animals to fully recover and be removed from the endangered species list. Many other animals and plants are on the road to recovery.

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