



## Aztec Ruins National Monument

### 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 Aztec Ruins National Monument (hereafter, the Monument) 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.

### Results

**Climate change is expected to alter the bird community at the Monument, 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 Monument today, climate suitability in summer under the high-emissions pathway is projected to improve for 9, remain stable for 19 (e.g., Figure 2), and worsen for 5 species. Suitable climate ceases to occur for 15 species in summer, potentially resulting in extirpation of those species from the Monument. Climate is projected to become suitable in summer for 23 species not found at the Monument today, potentially resulting in local colonization. Climate suitability in winter under the high-emissions pathway is projected to improve for 10, remain stable for 14, and worsen for 5 species. Suitable climate ceases to occur for 3 species in winter, potentially resulting in extirpation from the Monument. Climate is projected to become suitable in winter for 40 species not found at the Monument today, potentially resulting in local colonization.

### 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 Monument based on both NPS Inventory & Monitoring Program data and eBird observation data (2016), plus those species for which climate at the Monument 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.

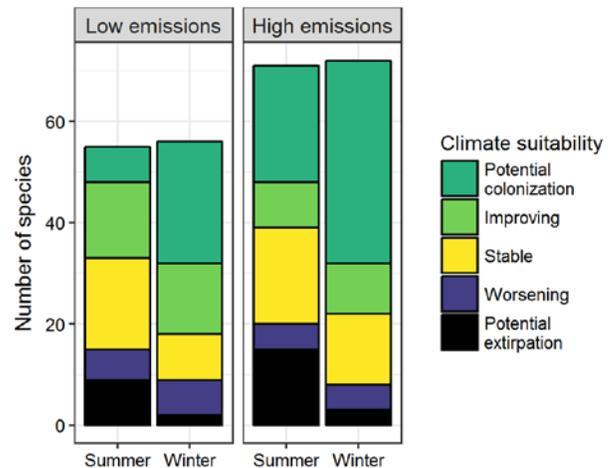


Figure 1. Projected changes in climate suitability for birds at the Monument, by emissions pathway and season.

## Results (continued)

---

### Potential Turnover Index

**Potential bird species turnover for the Monument between the present and 2050 is 0.23 in summer (38<sup>th</sup> percentile across all national parks) and 0.21 in winter (29<sup>th</sup> percentile) under the high-emissions pathway. Potential species turnover declines to 0.10 in summer and 0.13 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 Monument is or may become home to 4 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).

### Management Implications

---

Parks differ in potential colonization and extirpation rates, and therefore different climate change adaptation strategies may apply. **Under the high-emissions pathway, Aztec Ruins National Monument falls within the intermediate change group.** Parks anticipating intermediate change can best support landscape-scale bird conservation by emphasizing habitat restoration, maintaining natural disturbance regimes, and

### 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

While the Monument may serve as an important refuge for 2 of these climate-sensitive species, 2 might be extirpated from the Monument in at least one season by 2050.



**Figure 2.** Climate at the Monument in summer is projected to remain suitable for the Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) through 2050. Photo by Becky Matsubara/Flickr (CC BY 2.0).

reducing other stressors. Furthermore, park managers have an opportunity to focus on supporting the 2 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.

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](mailto:gregor_schuurman@nps.gov)

Joanna Wu  
Biologist, National Audubon Society  
415-644-4610, [science@audubon.org](mailto:science@audubon.org)

## Species Projections

**Table 1. Climate suitability projections by 2050 under the high-emissions pathway for all birds currently present at the Monument based on both NPS Inventory & Monitoring Program data and eBird observation data, plus those species for which climate at the Monument 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	-	Worsening*
Mallard	Potential extirpation <sup>^</sup>	Stable
Bufflehead	-	Potential colonization
Hooded Merganser	-	Potential colonization <sup>^</sup>
Gambel's Quail	Improving*	Improving*
Northern Bobwhite	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Ring-necked Pheasant	Worsening	Worsening*
Wild Turkey	-	Potential colonization
American Bittern	-	Potential colonization <sup>^</sup>
Great Blue Heron	Potential extirpation	-
Cattle Egret	Potential colonization	-
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	Potential colonization	-

Common Name	Summer Trend	Winter Trend
Golden Eagle	-	Stable
Mississippi Kite	Potential colonization	-
Bald Eagle	-	Worsening*
Harris's Hawk	Potential colonization	-
Red-tailed Hawk	Stable	Improving
Sora	-	Potential colonization
Common Gallinule	-	Potential colonization
Killdeer	Stable	Stable
Spotted Sandpiper	-	Potential colonization
Greater Yellowlegs	-	Potential colonization
Least Sandpiper	-	Potential colonization
Long-billed Dowitcher	-	Potential colonization

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Summer Trend</b>	<b>Winter Trend</b>
Rock Pigeon	Potential extirpation	Potential extirpation
White-winged Dove	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Mourning Dove	Stable	Improving
Inca Dove	-	Potential colonization
Greater Roadrunner	Potential colonization	-
Burrowing Owl	-	Potential colonization
Lesser Nighthawk	Potential colonization	-
Black-chinned Hummingbird	Improving*	-
Gila Woodpecker	Potential colonization	-
Ladder-backed Woodpecker	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Northern Flicker	Worsening*	Stable
Gilded Flicker	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
American Kestrel	x	Improving
Western Wood-Pewee	Potential extirpation <sup>^</sup>	-
Black Phoebe	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Say's Phoebe	Improving	-
Ash-throated Flycatcher	Improving*	-
Brown-crested Flycatcher	Potential colonization	-
Cassin's Kingbird	Improving*	-
Western Kingbird	Stable	-
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	Potential colonization	-
Loggerhead Shrike	Improving	Improving
Pinyon Jay	Worsening	Stable
California/Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (Western Scrub-Jay)	Potential extirpation	Stable
Black-billed Magpie	-	Worsening*

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Summer Trend</b>	<b>Winter Trend</b>
American Crow	Potential extirpation	Potential extirpation
Common Raven	Potential extirpation	-
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Stable	-
Violet-green Swallow	Stable	Potential colonization
Barn Swallow	Improving	-
Cliff Swallow	Improving	-
Black-capped Chickadee	Potential extirpation	Potential extirpation
Bridled Titmouse	-	Potential colonization
Verdin	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
White-breasted Nuthatch	Stable	-
Bewick's Wren	Stable	Improving
Cactus Wren	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	-	Potential colonization
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Stable	Improving
Western Bluebird	Stable	Improving*
Mountain Bluebird	Potential extirpation	Stable
Hermit Thrush	-	Potential colonization
American Robin	Potential extirpation	Stable
Bendire's Thrasher	-	Potential colonization
Crissal Thrasher	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Northern Mockingbird	Stable	Improving*
European Starling	Potential extirpation	Stable
Cedar Waxwing	Potential extirpation	-

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Summer Trend</b>	<b>Winter Trend</b>
Phainopepla	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Lucy's Warbler	Potential colonization	-
Yellow Warbler	Potential extirpation	-
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Stable	-
Spotted Towhee	Worsening*	-
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Abert's Towhee	-	Potential colonization
Rufous-winged Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Cassin's Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Chipping Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Brewer's Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Vesper Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
Lark Sparrow	Stable	-
Lark Bunting	-	Potential colonization
Savannah Sparrow	-	Potential colonization

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Summer Trend</b>	<b>Winter Trend</b>
Song Sparrow	Potential extirpation	Stable
Lincoln's Sparrow	-	Potential colonization
White-crowned Sparrow	Stable	Improving
Dark-eyed Junco	x	Stable
Western Tanager	Potential extirpation	-
Pyrrhuloxia	-	Potential colonization
Black-headed Grosbeak	Stable	-
Blue Grosbeak	Potential colonization	-
Red-winged Blackbird	Stable	Stable
Eastern Meadowlark	Potential colonization	Potential colonization
Western Meadowlark	Worsening*	Worsening
Brown-headed Cowbird	Stable	Potential colonization
Hooded Oriole	Potential colonization	-
Bullock's Oriole	Stable	-
House Finch	Improving	Stable
Lesser Goldfinch	Stable	-
House Sparrow	x	Stable