



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on June 7, 2011

Turbines Killing Birds, Bats

[According to](#) the *Times*, thousands of raptors are dying annually because of the turbines, which have been killing the avian beauties for three decades.

Yet the report is nothing new.

Environmentalists have known about the bird-chopping machines for years.

Altamont Pass Abbatoir

[According to](#) the *Times*, the death count for golden eagles alone is "67 a year for three decades." That's 2,000 dead eagles, which does not count the eaglets that were not hatched. Even worse, the *Times* reports, "about 2,000 raptors are killed in the Altamont Pass by wind turbines, according to on-site surveys conducted by field biologists. The toll, however, could be higher because bird carcasses are quickly removed by scavengers."



Nationwide, about 440,000 birds are killed at wind farms each year, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The American Wind Energy Assn., an industry lobbying group, points out that far more birds are killed each year by collisions with radio towers, tall buildings, airplanes, vehicles and in encounters with hungry household cats.

The *Times* report, however, merely echoes a long-time complaint. In 2005, [USA Today offered](#) the same story:

The size of the annual body count — conservatively put at 4,700 birds — is unique to this sprawling, 50-square-mile site in the Diablo Mountains between San Francisco and the agricultural Central Valley because it spans an international migratory bird route regulated by the federal government. The low mountains are home to the world's highest density of nesting golden eagles.

Scientists don't know whether the kills reduce overall bird populations but worry that turbines, added to other factors, could tip a species into decline. "They didn't realize it at the time, but it was just a really bad place to build a wind farm," says Grainger Hunt, an ecologist with the Peregrine Fund who has studied eagles at Altamont.

But back to 2011. Such is the bird body count that avian biologists worry whether the turbines might chop a species into extinction, [the Times reports](#).

"It would take 167 pairs of local nesting golden eagles to produce enough young to compensate for their mortality rate related to wind energy production," said field biologist Doug Bell, manager of East Bay Regional Park District's wildlife program. "We only have 60 pairs."



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Sadly, [the paper reports](#), [California condors](#), which were driven to the brink of extinction, are "[a successfully recovered](#) species that is expanding its range into existing and proposed wind farms in Kern and Fresno counties." One energy company's plan will erect 102 turbines on more than 12,000 acres east of the Piute Mountains. According to the *Times*:

A risk assessment of that project warned that condors spend considerable time soaring within the potential rotor-swept heights of modern wind turbines, which are more than 200 feet tall. It also pointed out that condor roosts are as close as 25 miles away.

That means the leftie Californians who mooned over the loss of the condor decades ago are willing to risk killing the beautiful birds to bring their vision of wind power to fruition. By 2030, [the state decreed](#) in April, 33 percent of the state's power must come from renewable resources. What will that mean for the condor?

"We taxpayers have spent millions of dollars saving the California condor from extinction," said Gary George, spokesman for Audubon California. "How's the public going to feel about wind energy if a condor hits the turbines?"

Turbines Kill Bats

Birds, of course, aren't the only victims of the remorselessly spinning metal blades. Bats fall prey to them as well. But they aren't chopped to pieces.

[According to *Scientific American*](#), the turbines create subtle but, to the bats, massive changes in air pressure that kill the flying mammals. Autopsies on 188 bats killed in Canada "showed that nearly half showed no external injuries — as would be expected if the giant blades had smashed the flying mammals to the ground."

Bursting pulmonary blood vessels killed the bats, the [magazine reported](#) in 2008, "suggesting that the air pressure difference created by the spinning windmills had terminated them, not contact with the blades."

As the wind moves through a wind turbine's blades, pressure drops behind them by five to 10 kilopascals (a pascal is a unit of pressure), and any bat unlucky enough to blunder into such an undetectable low pressure zone would find its lungs and blood vessels rapidly expanding and, quickly, bursting under the new conditions.



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