



## AUDUBON IN ACTION

# D-CON BEGONE

California bans rat poisons that are killing the state's birds, but the fight isn't over.

By Jane Braxton Little

**R**ATS ACCOMPLISHED WHAT COMMON SENSE COULD not. Raptors Are The Solution, a San Francisco Bay Area-based network of nonprofit groups organized by Lisa Viani and including Audubon, scientists, and state and local governments, persuaded the California Department of Pesticide Regulation to ban over-the-counter sales of powerful anticoagulant rat poisons like d-CON. Every year the poisons, which deplete the body of vitamin K, a nutrient necessary for blood clotting, kill thousands of birds of prey that devour tainted rodents; kit foxes, wild pigs, and Pacific fishers have fallen to the poisons, too. It can take several days for victims to bleed to death.

The statewide restrictions will slash the number of poisons available over the counter to homeowners and provide a

process for government agencies to respond more effectively to incidents of wildlife exposure, helping the very animals that naturally help curb rodent populations, says Stella McMillin, a wildlife investigator with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. "This is huge," she says. "It addresses the biggest wildlife problem we have in relation to pesticides."

To achieve these groundbreaking limits, RATS pressured state agencies by papering subways with posters of dying Red-shouldered Hawks and Barn Owls and by promoting videos of stricken wildlife on social media. "If people know about the impacts, they will choose an alternative for rodent control," says Nancy Wenninger, Mt. Diablo Audubon conservation chair. Her Audubon chapter, along with 16 others and Audubon's California state office, helped with the statewide grassroots effort, from Facebook posts to letter-writing.

The restrictions, which take effect July 1, are a crucial first step. Still, legal challenges await. In fact, Reckitt Benckiser, the maker of d-CON and other rat poisons, has filed suit against the Department of Pesticide Regulation. For now, at least, the anticoagulants will stay off the shelves—and out of the food chain.