

February 2012

Audubon Alaska eNews

Dear Friend,

Winter skies dumped more snow on Anchorage these last few weeks, but the days are rapidly growing longer. With the burst of energy from the increasing daylight, you'll have the chance to contribute to science from home with the upcoming Great Backyard Bird Count. Also in this issue, thousands of Audubon members spoke up to protect the Arctic Ocean, the Audubon Alaska website has a fresh new look, and Juneau Audubon members fight to protect nesting Bald Eagles.

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Great Backyard Bird Count Takes Wing February 17–20



Now that you've recovered from the Christmas Bird Count, kick back and enjoy participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). You don't even have to leave the comfort of home! Pick a place you want to count, which can be anywhere from your backyard feeder to your favorite local park. Count for as little as 15 minutes on one day—or you can make it a four-day extravaganza.

Why hold the GBBC? Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology joined forces to organize the GBBC because by involving birders across the United States and Canada, the count collects far more information than a single researcher or project could manage. Holding the count in February helps collect a snapshot of how birds fared over the winter, but before they start their spring migrations. Collecting these snapshots into a collage of the U.S. and Canada provides information on species population changes and shifts in winter ranges of bird species.

This is a fun way to introduce kids or beginning birders to the fascinating world of birds, and to help bird conservation. You can catch a real-time map of the birds people are reporting on the GBBC website. You can also submit photos and sneak a

peek at photos other participants send. For more information or to participate, visit <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>.

Juneau Audubon Helps Protect Bald Eagle Nests

Congratulations to Juneau Audubon members on their hard work that led to a local victory for Bald Eagles!

Since last fall, Juneau Audubon has been engaged in trying to protect Bald Eagle nests from a road-widening project involving blasting near nests. The state Department of Transportation fought to get a waiver from the Juneau Borough Planning Commission, so there would be no restriction on the dates the blasting could occur. Initially, borough staff proposed the usual recommendation of no blasting within 330 feet of active nests during active nesting. But weeks later, the borough staff withdrew the 330 foot recommended condition, and the Planning Commission granted the waiver without it. It was a frustrating outcome.



Photo by John Schoen

Then this winter, an even worse proposal reared up. The Juneau Borough staff sent a proposal to the Planning Commission to eliminate the 24-year-old ordinance protecting eagle nests. The Borough Assembly would have to vote. Juneau Audubon submitted written comments, and six members worked hard to prepare for presenting oral testimony before the Assembly to keep the eagle nest protections. The hard work paid off. The Borough Assembly did not eliminate the eagle

ordinance, instead sending it back to the Planning Commission, which was what Juneau Audubon had advocated.

Here's a brief statement from the Juneau Audubon newsletter: "Juneau Audubon feels that the eagle ordinance is beneficial, has worked in the past, and in some cases is the only control of development close to eagle nests.... Bald Eagles are a part of what makes Southeast Alaska a unique place to live and visit. We all should be vigilant to give reasonable protection to them."

For more details on the fight to keep Juneau Bald Eagle nests protected, read the article in the February issue of [Juneau Audubon's newsletter "The Raven"](#). Good work in Juneau!

Audubon Members Speak Up for the Arctic Ocean

In early February, Audubon members across the country showed some love for the Arctic Ocean. We submitted 10,876 comments asking the Department of Interior to remove lease sales in the Arctic Ocean from its five-year offshore oil and gas leasing program for 2012–2017. If you contributed comments, thank you for your time and energy to help protect such a magnificent place!

Audubon members joined a total of 400,000 people from Audubon's partner groups concerned with the "lease now, science later" push in the program. This number included 573 research scientists and 60 members of Congress.

Audubon Alaska's main concerns are simple. First, there is no proven technology to clean up a spill in Arctic Ocean conditions. Broken, shifting sea ice, along with gale-force winds and twenty-foot seas would make cleaning up a spill enormously challenging. Second, the Arctic Ocean is a complex, delicate ecosystem. There is still so much we don't know about the birds, wildlife, and ocean waters and the complex balance between them. It is impossible to assess the true risks of development without filling in these gaps in research.

Audubon Alaska and several partners submitted comments as well. Read [Audubon Alaska's full comments on the five-year plan](#) (please be patient when downloading, it's a large file). Check out the wonderful maps in the appendices from our outstanding mapping crew here at Audubon Alaska.

Audubon Alaska Website Makeover

Take a trip to the Audubon Alaska website, www.AudubonAlaska.org, and you'll see a whole new look! National Audubon organized the makeover for the state offices. This new format allows us to more easily include photos and video. We had the opportunity to reorganize a little, so you'll find some pages in different places. We hope this makes it easier for you to find the information you need. We're still

ironing out the kinks, so if you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Beth Peluso at bpeluso@audubon.org or (907) 276-7034.

Alaska WatchList Quiz

The quiz questions are pulled from information about species on the Alaska WatchList, which is available on the Audubon Alaska website.

What two subspecies on the [Alaska WatchList](#) have nicknames relating to royalty of the United Kingdom?

LAST MONTH'S ANSWER: The answer to last month's quiz question "The entire global population of which Alaska WatchList shorebird species breeds entirely in Alaska?" (with the hint "This bird likes to rock out") is Black Turnstone.

My apologies for a confusing hint (maybe I should have said "this bird's favorite band is the Rolling Stones"!). As several people pointed out, Rock Sandpipers also breed mainly in Alaska, but a small portion of the global population breeds in Russia. If you check the WatchList, you'll find a subspecies of Rock Sandpiper, but the whole species of Black Turnstone listed. Another candidate mentioned was the Bristle-thighed Curlew, which also breeds entirely in Alaska. I hope this month's question is more straightforward—and when in doubt, check the [Alaska WatchList](#) online!

Want to help preserve important habitat for Alaska's incredible wildlife? [Make a contribution to Audubon Alaska](#). Our conservation work depends on supporters like you!

Enjoy your winter birding,
Beth Peluso, Communications Manager

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