



# Audubon ALASKA News

Published twice a year by the Alaska State Office of the National Audubon Society

## Audubon Research Investigates Murrelet Decline

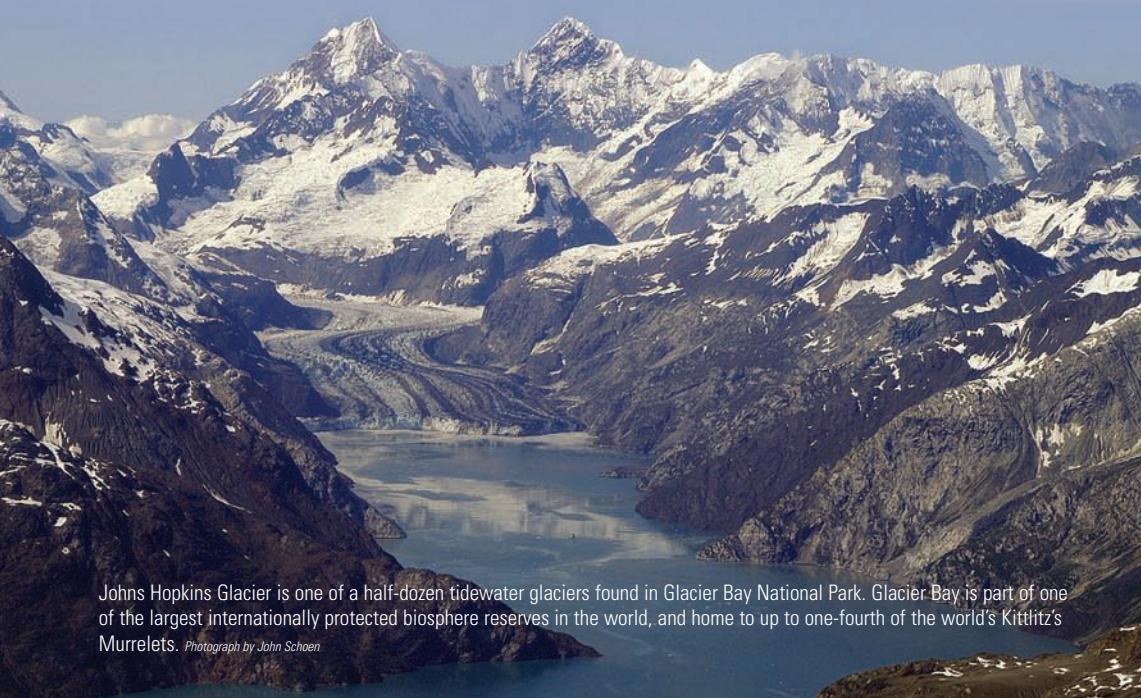
Two of North America's least understood seabirds were the focus of field work this summer by Audubon Alaska. For ten days in early July, six crews of volunteers and scientists counted and monitored Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets in Glacier Bay.

Populations of both species appear to have crashed in Glacier Bay—perhaps by more than 80 percent, compared to a survey done in 1991. But scientists don't know why. The Audubon Alaska project replicated surveys done in 1993 in hopes of shedding light on current populations and behavior. The research will help guide management decisions, recovery plans, future research and funding, and effective conservation action.

The Audubon project began in the summer of 2008, when Matt Kirchhoff, who was then a wildlife biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), led a field team of college students and other volunteers to survey the numbers and distribution of Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets in Icy Strait, just outside the mouth of Glacier Bay. With Matt now serving as Audubon Alaska's Director of Bird Conservation, the research this past summer included several additional components and shifted into Glacier Bay itself.

The Audubon field crews—comprising 15 volunteers along with ADF&G and Audubon scientists—surveyed and observed Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets to determine current populations, identify trends, and better understand specific mechanisms that may have contributed to the species' decline.

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Johns Hopkins Glacier is one of a half-dozen tidewater glaciers found in Glacier Bay National Park. Glacier Bay is part of one of the largest internationally protected biosphere reserves in the world, and home to up to one-fourth of the world's Kittlitz Murrelets. Photograph by John Schoen



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## ALASKA WATCHLIST SPECIES

Photograph on masthead by Jeannie Bespoyasny

### McKay's Bunting

*Plectrophenax hyperboreus*

This small, white, sparrow-like bird is known to breed only on a few islands in the Bering Sea region and winters along the coast of western Alaska. It faces no immediate threats to survival, but given its relatively small population, limited range, and ground-nesting habits, it may be extremely vulnerable to introduced predators, such as rats.


**Audubon ALASKA News**  
 is published twice a year.
**Audubon Alaska Staff**

**John W. Schoen**  
*Interim Executive Director*

**Lorelei Costa**  
*Interim Associate Director*

**Gretchen Hazen**  
*Office Manager*

**Matt Kirchhoff**  
*Director of Bird Conservation*

**Eric Myers**  
*Senior Policy Representative*

**Melanie Smith**  
*Staff Biologist & GIS Analyst*

**Taldi Walter**  
*Communications  
& Policy Associate*

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**Katherine Pope**

**David Shaw**

**Dave Sonneborn**

**David Wigglesworth**

**Audubon Alaska**

441 West Fifth Avenue, Suite 300

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

907-276-7034 (tel)

907-276-5069 (fax)

Web site:  
[www.audubonalaska.org](http://www.audubonalaska.org)

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 Eric Cline of TerraGraphica



**Audubon ALASKA**



## Home Is Where the Heart Is

By Stan Senner

If it is true that "home is where the heart is," Alaska will always be home to me.

My wife, Pat, and I first came to Alaska in 1974, when we moved to Fairbanks and both worked at what is now the Northern Alaska Environmental Center. Celia Hunter and Ginny Wood, then on the Center board, chipped in to help pay for our move to Alaska. We paid \$25 a month to rent a cabin at 9-Mile Chena Hot Springs Road and earned an annual salary of \$5,400 for the two of us. That is not a typo. Our first night in the cabin, October 1, there was snow on the ground and a moose stomping around outside, and we were serenaded by wolves and Boreal Owls. What could be better than that?

We could not help but fall in love with Alaska. It has tugged and pulled at us ever since, even as we moved around a good bit, twice leaving the state to pursue attractive jobs and Pat's education in nursing. Now, after spending much of our adult lives and rearing three wonderful boys here, it is time for a new chapter. I have accepted a job as Director of Conservation Science for the Ocean Conservancy, working for Denny Kelso, our long-time friend from Fairbanks days, and we will relocate to Portland, Oregon.

My years in Alaska have coincided with two of its most important milestones—passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and the *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill. I am proud to have played roles in passage of ANILCA and in the restoration and science programs that followed EVOS. I also am proud of our work and my time at Audubon Alaska.

Building on Dave Cline's legacy as the first Audubon director in Alaska, my colleague John Schoen and I have been able to greatly expand this organization's capacity, credibility, and effectiveness. Over the last decade, we set up a successful state board and increased funding and staff four-fold, while delivering a balanced annual budget. More importantly, Audubon has had a huge impact on conservation in Alaska, especially at Teshekpuk Lake in the Western Arctic and in the Tongass National Forest. In both landscapes, Audubon's science and policy expertise have successfully focused public debate on conservation of high-priority habitats for birds and other wildlife and achieved results on the ground.

Engaging in conservation work in Alaska is fulfilling because the stakes are very high, the issues we address are covered daily in the news media, and we actually can have an impact on decisions that matter. Life in Alaska has changed since the days one could have a street-corner chat with Governor Jay Hammond about the "d-2" lands bill without drawing a crowd of celebrity gawkers and autograph seekers. But Alaska is still a place where committed people can make a difference, and that is exactly what Audubon will continue to do in Alaska. ♦

Audubon Alaska has a terrific staff and board, a track record of marshalling the best science in support of conservation, and great members, chapters, and donors. And people all across the nation care about Alaska, because it is still a place where moose, wolves, owls, and other wildlife are just outside your cabin door. I look forward to continuing my work for marine conservation in Alaska from a new home in Oregon. You know where my heart will always be. ♦



Stan and Pat Senner at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage, a place the Senners have spent countless hours over the years.

Photograph by Taldi Walter

## Research on Murrelet Decline (continued from page 1)

The crews counted swimming and flying birds along a set of transects last surveyed in 1993. They mapped the birds' distribution on these transects, while land-based crews observed feeding behavior, focusing on dive duration and prey capture success in various locations and at different times during the day. Another team focused on taking close-up photographs of birds holding fish to identify prey species.

Audubon Alaska doesn't often conduct field research, but the combination of available funding and timeliness made for an irresistible opportunity. The project was funded in part by a grant from ADF&G's State Wildlife Grant program, with matching funds provided by the Helen Clay Frick Foundation, the Leighty Foundation, the Juneau Audubon Society, and several generous individual donors.



Photograph by John Schoen

Marbled Murrelet dives for food. Feeding was just one of the behaviors studied by the Audubon field crews in an effort to learn more about the extent and possible reasons for the population declines in Glacier Bay.

Unlike the vast majority of seabirds, which nest in colonies, Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets are solitary, secretive nesters. Marbled Murrelets typically nest in moss beds high in old-growth trees. Kittlitz's Murrelets nest on the ground, on rocky talus above tree line. About 90 percent of Kittlitz's Murrelets live in Alaska waters, and their affinity for glaciated landscapes has earned them the nickname Glacier Murrelet. The single largest concentration of this species—an estimated 25 percent of its worldwide population—is found in Glacier Bay.

But Glacier Bay is also a harbinger of climate change. Over the past two centuries, its tidewater glaciers have retreated more rapidly than any other place in the world. Meanwhile, the Kittlitz's Murrelet is on the National Audubon Society's list of the ten most endangered birds in America. The Kittlitz's Murrelet is just one of many bird species that is potentially affected by global warming. The unusually rapid rate of change occurring in Glacier Bay provides an ideal field laboratory for studying how animal populations will likely respond.

Audubon's research seeks to uncover some of the mystery surrounding both Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets. How much have these species declined? Why did they decline? Was there a tipping point, and if so, what was it? Why do Kittlitz's Murrelets favor glaciated landscapes? Is their distribution driven by nesting habitat or foraging habitat? Are they likely to survive if deglaciation continues?

The answers could affect land use and management decisions for years to come—as well as the fate of two secretive seabirds. ♦

## Audubon ALASKA Donation Form

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protect the birds, wildlife,  
& habitats of Alaska**

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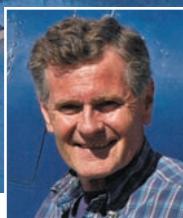
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You can also donate securely online at [www.audubonalaska.org](http://www.audubonalaska.org)

**If you're already a member, please pass this on to a friend.**

## FOCUS ON THE FIELD



# Another Logjam in the Tongass

*By John Schoen, Interim Executive Director*

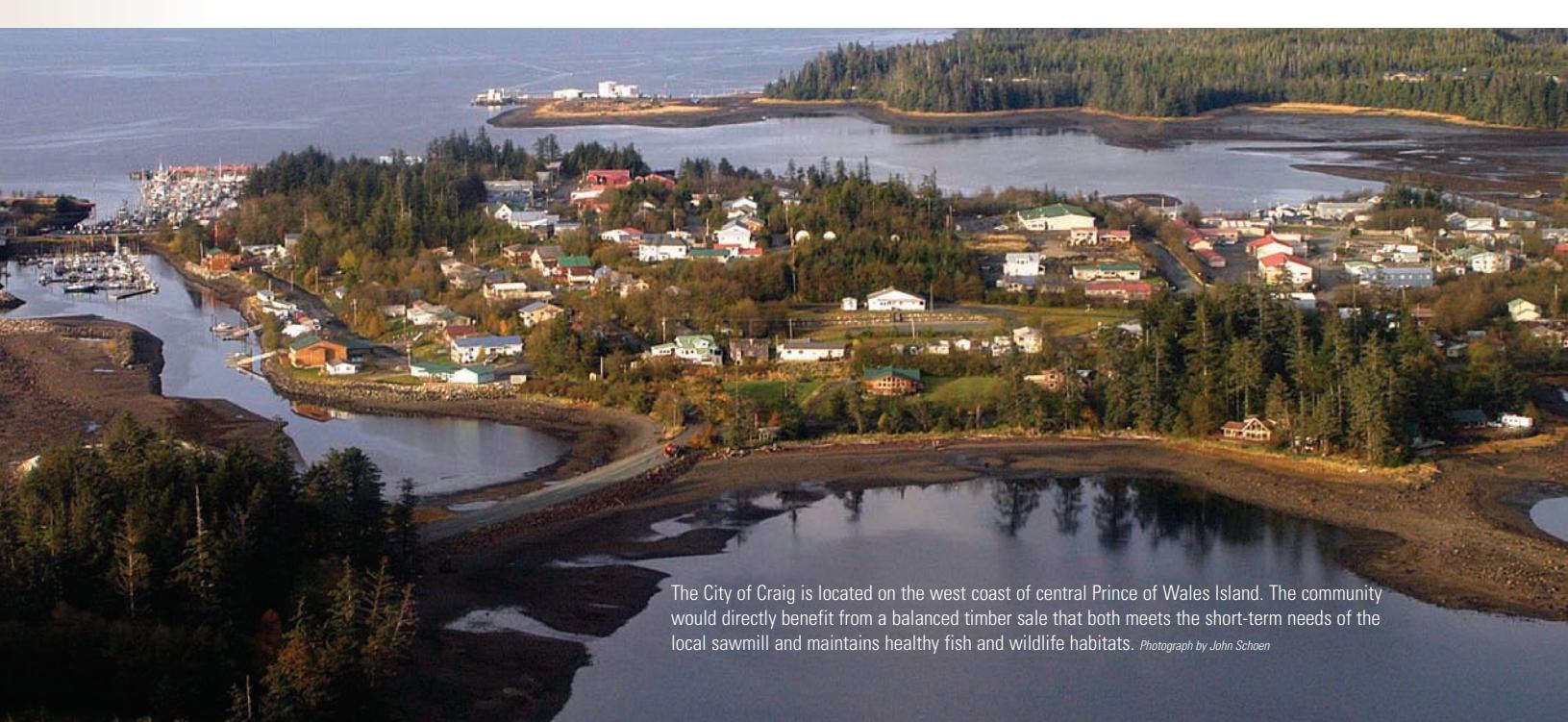
In August 2008 Audubon began serious discussions with the US Forest Service and other conservation partners about planning for the Logjam Timber Sale on central Prince of Wales Island. The sale area encompasses both ecologically important watersheds and the most significant logging and road network in the Tongass National Forest.

Although the Logjam watershed has had extensive logging, our conservation assessment identified it as a priority for restoration because it still ranks as the second and ninth highest value watershed for black bear and deer habitat, respectively, out of 117 watersheds in the North Prince of Wales Province. Sweetwater Lake, a conservation priority watershed that is also in the sale area, has had less logging, and it ranks as the second, fourth, and sixth most valuable watershed for salmon, deer, and black bear habitat, respectively.

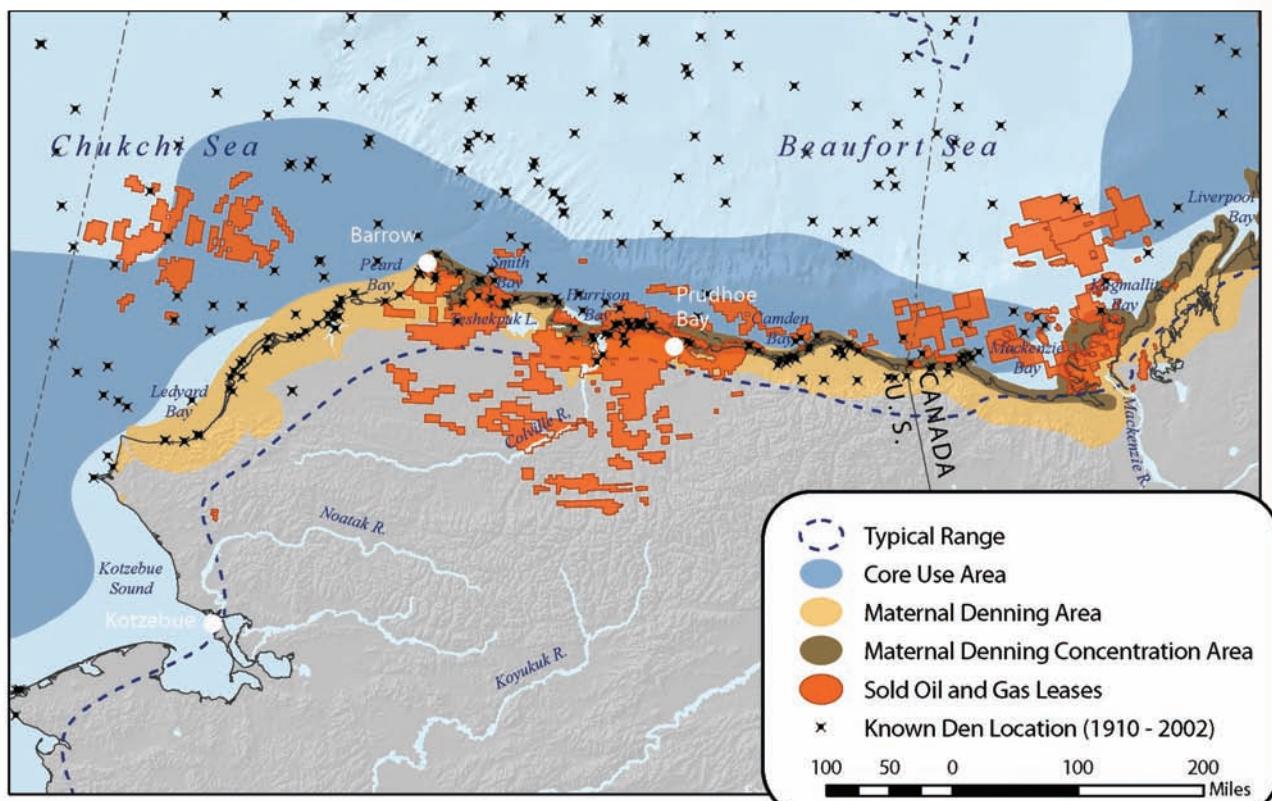
Needless to say, Audubon had strong concerns about significant new logging in this ecologically important region. We joined other conservation groups to work collaboratively with the Forest Service, State of Alaska Divisions of Forestry and Habitat, and local timber operators to find a reasonable solution to this problem. We developed a conservation alternative that could meet the short-term needs of the local sawmill by balancing economics with maintenance of healthy fish and wildlife habitat. Our proposal would mean fewer roads crossing salmon streams, some economic timber for local mills, and protected old-growth corridors, particularly related to movement of wolves north and south across the island.

When the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision came out in June, we were greatly disappointed that it largely ignored the collaborative conservation alternative. The Record of Decision directed the cutting of 73 million board feet from about 3,400 acres and construction of five miles of permanent road and 22 miles of temporary road, all within an already heavily developed 56,000-acre project area.

In August Audubon joined the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council and the Alaska Wilderness League to appeal this decision. After all the work we put into our conservation assessment and our lengthy collaboration with the Forest Service and State of Alaska to develop a compromise solution, we had no choice but to appeal. Over the last two weeks of August, we continued to work with the Forest Service in search of a solution. Although we identified over 37 million board feet of timber, agreed to selective logging by helicopter in the Sweetwater Lake watershed, and agreed to look for additional timber outside the sale area, the Tongass Forest Supervisor and Regional Forester again rejected our alternative in favor of the Forest Service decision to log 73 million board feet from these important watersheds. This action clearly demonstrates that the Tongass Land Management Plan provides inadequate conservation measures and why we need a congressional resolution for balancing conservation and resource development on the Tongass. ♦



The City of Craig is located on the west coast of central Prince of Wales Island. The community would directly benefit from a balanced timber sale that both meets the short-term needs of the local sawmill and maintains healthy fish and wildlife habitats. *Photograph by John Schoen*



Polar bear denning and oil and gas leases in the Arctic Ocean. This map is from the draft *Atlas of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas*, compiled by Audubon Alaska in cooperation with Oceana. The draft atlas is under public review on our website ([www.audubonalaska.org](http://www.audubonalaska.org)) until November. For more information contact Melanie Smith at (907) 276-7034.

## Critical Decisions in a Changing Arctic

The Arctic Ocean is one of the least understood regions on Earth. Yet large portions of the Chukchi and Beaufort seas have already been made available for oil and gas leasing, and additional lease sales are under consideration, subject to a complex array of administrative, legal, and policy proceedings.

Audubon is working several fronts to draw attention to the need for a sound scientific understanding of Arctic marine ecosystems before more decisions about oil and gas activity are made. Toward that end, Audubon, in cooperation with Oceana, has compiled a draft *Atlas of the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas* (see map) to highlight the physical features and ecological resources at risk in the region. While Audubon rarely participates in litigation, it has been necessary to slow the reckless rush toward massive industrialization. Audubon joined with several other groups to file an amicus brief in the court challenge of the Bush Administration's 5-Year Offshore Lease Plan 2007-2012. Audubon also joined as a plaintiff to challenge Lease Sale 193 in the Chukchi Sea, in which nearly three million acres were sold for over \$2.6 billion in February 2008.

Even without offshore oil and gas development, the Arctic Ocean is undergoing profound change. Summer sea ice is decreasing rapidly, a serious threat to ice-dependent species, such as polar bear and ice seals.

Changes in the marine food web are already apparent, a significant concern for bottom-feeding mammals and sea birds, including walrus and the endangered Spectacled Eider. Audubon has identified nearly 30 Important Bird Areas in the Arctic Ocean, which provide vital habitat for millions of shorebirds, seabirds, and waterfowl, all of which may be affected by these changes.

In February 2009 Interior Secretary Ken Salazar described the Bush Administration's push for offshore oil and gas development as "a headlong rush of the worst kind" and promised to restore what he described as a "broken process." The Interior Department's willingness to take a new look at offshore oil and gas development is welcome and overdue. But critical decisions about offshore development are still pending, and the pressures to move forward with development are enormous.

The technology does not exist to clean up oil spills in broken ice. Government scientists have predicted a 33 to 51 percent chance of one or more large oil spills in the Chukchi Sea alone. Audubon will continue to advocate for a better understanding of the Arctic marine ecosystem, adequate consultation with Arctic residents about their needs, and the necessity of meaningful and effective mitigation measures. ♦

## CHAPTER NEWS

### Prince William Sound Audubon Society

By Milo Burcham, PWS Audubon President

Prince William Sound (PWS) Audubon had eight monthly meetings from September through April, with attendance ranging from 20 to 30. Natural history presentations covered a range of topics, including seabirds of the Bering Sea, birds of Alaska's Arctic, wildlife of Saint Paul Island, and Little Auks in Norway.

Our Christmas Bird Count was held on December 20, 2008. We had 30 participants and observed 57 species. Most notable, perhaps, was that not a single Pine Siskin was observed. High counts were recorded for Great Blue Heron, Brown Creeper, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Red-throated Loon, and Bonaparte's Gull.

Chapter members assisted with the Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival by participating in festival planning, setting up for various events, and leading field trips. Milo Burcham gave a presentation on Prince William Sound and the Copper River Delta before the keynote speaker. We are also continuing work on sign development for the breakwater trail, using funds provided from the Collaborative Funding grant from National Audubon.

### Kodiak Audubon Society

By Claudia Anderson, Kodiak Audubon President

Collaboration and volunteerism played major roles in last year's activities. Kodiak Audubon worked with four other organizations to sponsor - the two-day event, "20 Years Later: Exxon Valdez Oil Spill." Our members volunteered at Kodiak's National Wildlife Refuge, and we collaborated with the refuge by supplying and manning a bird feeder building station at the Migratory Bird Day extravaganza. Once again the summer hiking program was extensive, with hikes of varying levels of difficulty offered every weekend. Our kick-off hike climbed a bluff to overlook Narrow Cape to spot migrating humpbacks during Whale Fest.

This year chapter members led bird identification hikes for fifth graders at Camp Woody. We also developed, laminated, and donated "The Birds of Woody Island" identification guide for all of the elementary schools. Conservation concerns for us included the Kodiak Airport runway expansion proposal, cruise ship mixing zones, and the continued degradation of habitat from off-road vehicles.

### Juneau Audubon Society

By Mark Schwan, Juneau Audubon President

The Juneau Chapter continued its tradition of monthly programs for members and the general public. Attendance was strong, ranging from 25 to 45 people. Participation was also up at our Saturday morning spring bird walks, Wednesday noon walks, and summer field trips. One of our members gave a presentation on local birds at the Juneau Pioneers' Home, which was very well received.

Our chapter obtained a permit to salvage eagle parts, and more than 400 eagle feathers were collected and sent to the national repository in Colorado for distribution to Native American groups for cultural purposes. Our two fundraising activities, the Public Market and the three cruises to Berners Bay, were successful, and the Berners Bay trips sold out again this year. We gave several donations, ranging from \$100 to \$500, for projects consistent with our mission.

We submitted comments on several conservation issues during the past year, including the proposed upland airstrip near the village of Angoon on Admiralty Island, proposed cell phone towers in Juneau, proposed changes to the waterfowl hunting seasons in Southeast, and a proposed gull egg harvest in Glacier Bay.

### Anchorage Audubon Society

By Mr. Whitekeys, Anchorage Audubon President

In the first half of 2009, the Anchorage Audubon Society was proud to present appearances by many visiting celebrities, including the Cassin's Finch (Seward), the Ruff (Westchester Lagoon), the Sabine's Gull (Ship Creek and Chester Creek flats), the Willow Flycatcher (Moose River), the Eared Grebe (Kenny Lake), and the Slaty-backed Gull (Ship Creek). Although the Anchorage Audubon Board arranged the dates, airfare, and lodging, we wish to thank everyone who helped publicize these performances, including Carol Griswold, Buz Scher, David Sonneborn, Todd Eskelin, Ed Clark, and James Levison.

Anchorage Audubon continues to promote conservation of local habitat and present informative and entertaining monthly programs. The chapter also organized field trips throughout the Anchorage Bowl Area, the Palmer Hayflats, the Gunsight Mountain Hawkwatch, Seward by land and by sea, and two Birding Smackdowns, which pitted birders head-to-head in a display of vicious competition that proved just how ugly the sport of birding can get. Winning honors were awarded to "All For Knot," "The Twisted Listers," and "The Shore Babes." Anchorage Audubon hopes to continue this tradition of anti-social ornithology in the future.

### Arctic Audubon Society

By Gail Mayo, Arctic Audubon President

Arctic Audubon continued to offer evening programs, publish newsletters, and conduct field trips. We initiated work on an Important Bird Area application for Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge and awarded two small grants to help expand the scope of existing bird studies.

Approximately 25 people contributed roughly 250 volunteer hours to Arctic Audubon activities. We held seven monthly evening programs and conducted six field trips, plus another ten for school classes. Approximately 150 people participated in various chapter programs and trips last year. We published six electronic newsletters, contributed letters to the editor on policy issues, and met with elected officials on policy issues.

Our chapter's highest priority state policy issues are the Yukon Flats Land Exchange, BLM Eastern Interior planning, and Arctic Refuge awareness for Alaskans. We also offered birding/bird identification classes.



Chocolate Lily *Photograph by Taldi Walter*

# People of Audubon

## BOARD

We are delighted to welcome four new members to the Audubon Alaska Board: John Alexander, Alexis Maybank, Margery Nicolson, and David Shaw.



**John Alexander** of Sheffield, Massachusetts is a retired Vice President of Chicago's Harris Trust & Savings Bank and Cofounder and President of the Stewart Foundation. He chairs the Lemur Conservation Foundation Board and is Chairman-elect of the Lincoln Park Zoo Board. He is also a member of the American Museum of Natural History's Advisory Committee for Biodiversity and Conservation. An accomplished wildlife photographer and mountain climber, John is a graduate of Purdue University, attended the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, and is currently a master's degree candidate in Environmental Science. ♦



**David Shaw** of Fairbanks is a research biologist with the Alaska Bird Observatory and owner and head guide of Wild Imagination Tours. David earned his BS at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington and his MS in Wildlife Biology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. His master's thesis was Migrant Stopover and Resident Species Loss in the Sierra de Los Tuxtlas, Mexico. David is an expert birder and naturalist and certified Wilderness First Responder. His hobbies include birding, wilderness trips, photography, writing, international travel, natural history, and reading. ♦



Entrepreneur and business executive **Alexis Maybank** of New York City founded and served as the first CEO of Gilt Groupe, Inc., an invitation-only shopping website that offers fashion and luxury-branded goods at deep discounts to its members. Alexis previously served in executive positions at AOL and eBay. She earned her BA in Environmental Science and Public Policy from Harvard University and her MBA from Harvard Business School. Her interests include skiing, hiking, and travel (especially in Alaska). ♦



We are pleased to welcome **Margery Nicolson** back to the Board. Margery was a founding Audubon Alaska Board member and has been reappointed to a new term. Margery has served on the boards of both Audubon California and the National Audubon Society, and she is a passionate volunteer for the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at the Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, Nebraska. ♦

## STAFF



We are sorry but proud to say goodbye to **Pat Pourchot**, who resigned in June as Audubon Alaska's Senior Policy Representative to accept a position with Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar as Special Assistant for Alaska. Pat has worked in Alaska most of his adult life, dating back to 1972 when he worked as a Natural Resources Specialist for the Department of the Interior. Pat served in both houses of the Alaska State Legislature and in the cabinet of former Governor Tony Knowles, including as Commissioner of Natural Resources. Good luck, Pat! ♦



**Eric Myers** has taken a leave of absence from the Audubon Alaska Board to serve as part-time Senior Policy Representative while we recruit a full-time Policy Director. As an employee and as a volunteer, Eric has been involved with Alaska-based non-profit conservation organizations for the past 30 years. A graduate of Dartmouth College with a BA in Environmental Studies, Eric has worked for the Alaska State Legislature and the Alaska Center for the Environment and served as Director of Operations at the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. Over the past several years, Eric has focused his efforts on public health policy and Alaska conservation issues. ♦

# Audubon ALASKA

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Photograph by Talié Walter

## Rubber Chicken Finds New Roost

Each spring, Audubon Alaska sponsors an annual Birdathon, in which teams compete to identify as many different bird species as possible in 24 hours. In addition to a long day of birding, the Birdathon is an opportunity for the teams to raise funds for Audubon's important conservation work in Alaska. Thanks to many generous sponsors, the Birdathon has raised nearly \$200,000 over the past nine years.

In the past few years, the Birdathon has become increasingly competitive, especially since the introduction of the Rubber Chicken Trophy for the second-place team. This year, the Rubber Chicken Trophy found a new roost with the Juneau-based "Team Kingbird," led by Audubon staff member Matt Kirchhoff.

He may be smiling, but Matt Kirchhoff (left) is just putting a good face on, as he takes over the second-place Rubber Chicken Trophy from last year's recipient, Eric Myers.



Third place winners, "Team Swift," in action.

Photograph by Brad Bentler