



Audubon ALASKA News

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



INSIDE

A New Course for the Arctic Refuge

Something new is happening for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—for the first time in more than 20 years, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is revising its Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The current update to the 15-year management plan opens the door for a Wilderness recommendation for the Coastal Plain. This is an unprecedented opportunity for the FWS to take a critical step toward permanently protecting this ecological gem.

A Place of Beginnings

The Coastal Plain is the biological heart of what is now an intact, Arctic ecosystem from the Arctic coast to the south slope of the Brooks Range. This critical area provides the calving grounds for the Porcupine Caribou herd and post-calving habitat for the Porcupine and Central Arctic Caribou herds. The famous Porcupine herd is one of the largest migratory caribou herds in the world, numbering around 160,000 animals.

Other creatures besides caribou also have their beginnings on the Coastal Plain. Polar bears use this habitat for dens where they can safely give birth to cubs. In addition, 200 bird species from six continents depend on the Arctic Refuge. Hundreds of thousands of migratory birds nest on the Coastal Plain, including waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, and raptors.

continued on page 3

Your Voice Will Help!

"The most useful comments will be about specific content on the CCP."

—Richard Voss, Refuge Manager

You have until November 15 to submit your comments to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. You can do so electronically by visiting www.audubonaction.org/arctic. You can also submit written comments by fax (907-456-0428) or by mail:

US Fish and Wildlife Service
Arctic NWR—Sharon Seim
101 12th Ave, Rm 236
Fairbanks, AK 99701-6237

Remember, the more personal you make your comments the better!

A Ride through the Arctic Refuge 2

Bering Strait Marine IBA..... 4

Bringing Alaska Wildlife to the Next Generation 4

The Bering Strait—Gateway to the Northwest Passage..... 5

Tongass Update: Not All Old Growth is Created Equal..... 6

People of Audubon 7

ALASKA WATCHLIST SPECIES

Photograph on masthead by Doug Lloyd

Blackpoll Warbler

Dendroica striata

The Blackpoll has the longest migration of any warbler, with some Alaska birds wintering in Brazil. Their migration route includes 1,800 miles over the Atlantic Ocean. To tackle this nonstop flight, the warblers double their body weight before departure. Blackpolls breed in boreal forest. The males' rapid trilling is one of the highest frequency birdsongs known. Although widespread across northern North America during the breeding season, they are declining by roughly 2.5 percent per year, from unknown causes.

"The 50-year-old Arctic Refuge is the only National Wildlife Refuge established specifically to preserve wilderness values."

is published twice a year.

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DIRECTOR'S VIEWPOINT

A Ride through the Arctic Refuge

By Nils Warnock



Photograph by Nils Warnock

At the end of this past June, I was fortunate to be able to raft down the Kongakut River through the southeastern part of the Arctic Refuge with an amazing group of people organized by Audubon Alaska and Alaska Wilderness Birding. This is wild and stunning country; the river goes through some particularly beautiful areas. Our trip began with a flight from Fairbanks, Alaska out to Arctic Village, and then a smaller plane shuttled us to the river. As I wrote in my journal, "The flight out to the Kongakut was spectacular. The mountains are raw and wild, jutting out in sharp angles and black peaks. We flew over the Sheenjek River (beautiful) where the Muries did a lot of their work and then down on the Kongakut. Flew right over a sleeping white wolf."

The trip went splendidly. The weather ranged from a hot (for the Arctic) 75 degrees Fahrenheit to a chilly morning when we woke up to 30 degrees and about an inch of snow on the tent. A herd of about 1,000 caribou passed our camp high, high up on a peak, specks against the rocks. If they slipped, they would tumble a thousand feet. We found lots of signs of bears and wolves, and one night camped near a red fox den. The adults kept coming through camp with Arctic Ground Squirrels clamped in their jaws to feed pups.

We searched poplar groves along the river for the elusive Grey-headed Chickadee (the most difficult breeding bird in North America to see because it is only found in a narrow band of habitat through the Brooks Range), but we had no luck. However, we did get to enjoy sightings of Smith's Longspurs in breeding plumage, Wandering Tattlers with chicks, and Baird's Sandpipers doing aerial displays. The refuge is a wild, mind-altering place; a place where, as writer Stephen Trimble puts it, "...the ancestral richness of life survives." These are the kinds of ecosystems that Audubon Alaska strives to keep wild and protected, and I came home feeling even more inspired about Audubon's mission.

I want my kids and their kids to grow up in a world in which there are still wild places like the Kongakut River where wolves, bears, and caribou can roam largely undisturbed by humans, and there are still vistas without smoke billowing high into the sky from a flare pit where pumps suck oil from the earth. In the short-term, we can save the relatively small amount of oil that is thought to lie within the Refuge by a small increase in fuel efficiency of our vehicles. In the long-term, we have to reduce our overall dependence on oil by diversifying further into renewable energy sources.

Right now, an oil-free vision of the Arctic Refuge needs reinforcement. Please tell the US Fish and Wildlife Service your views on the future of oil development within the Arctic Refuge (see our website www.AudubonAlaska.org for information about the refuge and submitting comments).

The Arctic Refuge encompasses many special places. I hope that people with more vision than fueling the next corporate oil boom will prevail, and drilling will never be allowed in the Arctic Refuge. ♦

A New Course for the Arctic Refuge (continued from page 1)

Audubon Supports Wilderness

What does a Wilderness recommendation mean, exactly? Only Congress can actually grant Wilderness status. A Wilderness recommendation from the FWS would provide, for the first time in more than two decades, much-needed official support from wildlife experts on the importance of protecting the Coastal Plain.

Audubon endorses Alternative C of the draft management plan, because it adequately addresses the three issues of additional Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and the management of the Kongakut River. Audubon supports management of the Refuge's most biologically productive region, the Coastal Plain, in a manner that protects its high biological values and maintains its Wilderness character for future generations.

Alaskans Have Their Say

A line sprang up almost instantly when the FWS opened the registration for the Arctic Refuge public hearing in Anchorage on September 21. Several generations of Gwich'in people, from the towns of Arctic Village, Venetie, and others, traveled hours to testify at the hearing. From a former state legislator to a senior in high school to a young mother who insisted her kids think of caribou fat as candy, they all had a story of why the refuge is so important, personally and as part of their culture.

Joining the traditional users of the Arctic Refuge were representatives of various conservation organizations, including Audubon Alaska's Beth Peluso, and individuals who felt the need to testify. Audubon has been actively engaged in issues concerning the Arctic for more than three decades. The hearing was an important occasion to publicly state our support for a Wilderness recommendation for the Coastal Plain.

For the first hour of the hearing, all of the speakers supported Wilderness. Notably, when several Alaska state legislators and agency officials finally stepped up to the microphone, all of them were in favor of developing oil and gas drilling on the Coastal Plain.

Approximately 70 people spoke at the Anchorage hearing. Even though state officials were unanimously in support of industrial development, in the final tally the people supporting Wilderness outnumbered drilling supporters two to one!



The Coastal Plain is also an Important Bird Area: more than 325,000 Snow Geese may stop here to fatten up for the long journey south in the fall. *Photograph by Steve Emmons, US Fish & Wildlife Service*

Meanwhile back in Washington, DC...

On the same day as the Anchorage hearing, the US House Natural Resources Committee also held a hearing on the fate of the Arctic Refuge. The pro-drilling supporters, including Alaska's Governor and all three Congressional delegates, made a strong showing. Oddly, they decided they needed a touch of reality TV—one of the speakers was from the show *Ice Road Truckers*. Conservation advocates included Dave Jenkins, Vice President of Government & Political Affairs for Republicans for Environmental Protection, and Gene Karpinski, President of the League of Conservation Voters. Both voiced their bi-partisan support for permanently protecting the Coastal Plain as Wilderness.

While the Anchorage turnout was an encouraging showing of Alaskans that believe the Coastal Plain is too valuable to drill, the DC hearing makes clear many more voices are necessary at this crucial point. Please make sure to speak up for the Coastal Plain by the deadline of November 15! ♦

A Little Bird Tells You the News—Monthly

Want to keep on top of what Audubon Alaska is doing between print newsletters? Sign up for our monthly Audubon Alaska eNews. The eNews includes updates on our activities, information about Alaska birds, action alerts, and a chance to win prizes by answering the WatchList quiz question. You can peruse previous issues of the eNews on our website www.AudubonAlaska.org. Contact Beth Peluso at bpeluso@audubon.org or (907) 276-7034 to join the list.



Trumpeter Swan. *Photograph by Beth Peluso*

Audubon Alaska Makes the List!

In 2012, for the first time, Audubon Alaska will be eligible for the state of Alaska's "Pick. Click. Give." donation program. Each year, Alaska residents have from January 1 through March 31 to register for Permanent Fund Dividends. As part of the application process for online registration, there is a list of nonprofit organizations to which Alaskans can choose to donate some or all of their dividends. In 2012, look for Audubon Alaska on the list. (Good thing our name starts with "A"!)

Pick.
Click.
Give.

To learn more about the program, go to www.pickclickgive.org.

Important Bird Area Profile: The Bering Strait

The Bering Strait lies where Russia and Alaska pinch the ocean between them. Although the surface may not look like much, this shallow area is where three northward-bound ocean currents intertwine in an extraordinarily productive area for wildlife. The Alaska Coastal Current flows along the strait's eastern coast, Bering Shelf Water flows through the central Bering Strait, and the Anadyr Current flows along the Russian Chukotka coast. The currents bring nutrients from the ocean as they funnel into the strait. As the sea ice melts in the spring, it also releases nutrients. Combined with long daylight, the nutrient-rich waters cause plankton blooms that support zooplankton and fish, which attract enormous numbers of birds, such as auklets and puffins.

The Bering Strait Important Bird Area (IBA) extends from east of Little Diomed Island in US waters to the end of the Russian Chukotka Peninsula. Species that feed in the area most include Least and Crested auklets, murre, Glaucous Gulls, Tufted Puffins, and Short-tailed Shearwaters. Many of these birds breed on the Diomed Islands, a metropolis of more than 4 million birds during nesting season.

The airspace above the strait is also important, as a migration corridor. Geese, all four species of eiders, shorebirds, Sandhill Cranes, and other species that nest in Asia and winter in the US and Bering Sea, or that breed across the north coasts of the two continents from the Russian mainland to the Canadian Archipelago, pass through this region twice each year during summer and fall migration.



The distinct waters of the three currents entering the Bering Strait are visible in this satellite image. *Photograph by NASA*

Currently, ship traffic passes through the Bering Strait, carrying fuel and supplies for coastal villages and oil fields, or ore back from a mine northwest of Kotzebue. A small number of cruise vessels also pass through. As sea ice retreats due to climate change, however, shipping will most likely increase. With it, the threat of oil spills and disturbance from vessels will also rise. It is also unknown how climate change may affect food resources. It will be important to situate shipping routes to avoid or minimize impacts to this Important Bird Area. ♦

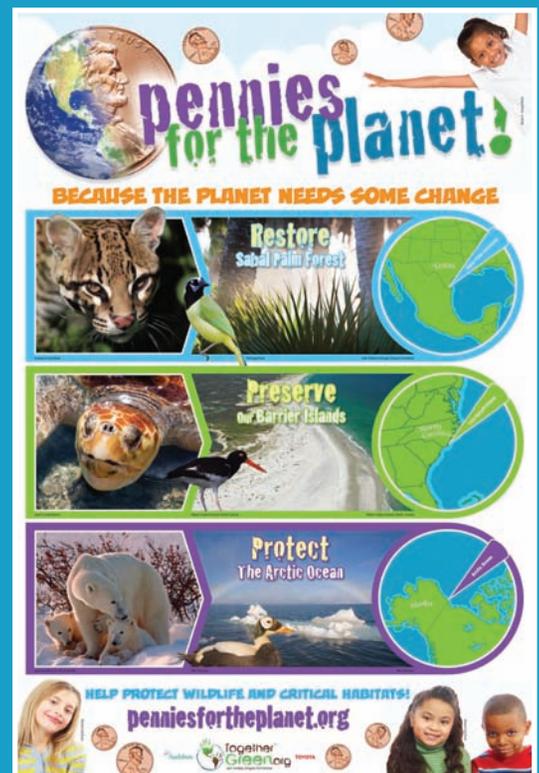
Bringing Alaska Wildlife to the Next Generation

We're excited to announce that two National Audubon education campaigns for kids will feature Alaska: Pennies for the Planet and Audubon Adventures. Audubon Alaska staff worked closely with National Audubon to create materials that will introduce kids across the country to Alaska birds and wildlife.

Pennies for the Planet is a powerful tool for motivating young people to learn about and become engaged in protecting biodiversity. Each school year, Pennies for the Planet selects three Audubon conservation projects to showcase. Students learn about the habitats and wildlife each project strives to protect, and come up with creative ways to raise funds to help. This year, Audubon Alaska's project to map wildlife uses of the Arctic Ocean won one of the three coveted slots. (The other two are Texas' Sabal Palm Forest and North Carolina's Barrier Islands.) Students have raised more than \$90,000 through Audubon's Pennies for the Planet in the past three years.

Audubon Adventures is Audubon's award-winning environmental education program for grades 3–5. One unit of this year's edition focuses on Alaska's wide range of ecosystems, from the temperate rainforest of Southeast Alaska to the treeless tundra of the Arctic coast. With engaging illustrations, fun facts, and a variety of activities, Audubon Adventures materials will reach approximately 150,000 schoolchildren. The Alaska resource kit includes an inviting and informative "newspaper" for kids, suggestions for student activities, and a teacher curriculum packet. To make the program more useful for teachers, the activities are designed to fulfill national education standards.

To learn more about Pennies for the Planet or Audubon Adventures, visit the education section of the National Audubon website <http://education.audubon.org/>. ♦



ON THE HORIZON

In addition to the issues we currently work on, Audubon Alaska looks ahead to see what might be on the horizon. We are continually trying innovative ways to apply science and mapping to serve as tools for conservation.

Captain Cook Take Note: The Bering Strait is the Gateway to the New Northwest Passage

For centuries, European explorers searched for a Northwest Passage that would allow a commercial shipping route from the Atlantic to Pacific oceans. In the early 1900s, the first ship did find a crossing through the Arctic Ocean; but because of sea ice, the Northwest Passage remained more the route of expeditions and icebreakers than ordinary commercial travel.

Shrinking summer sea ice due to climate change in recent years is reviving interest in commercial shipping through Arctic waters. Audubon Alaska has started taking a closer look at the Bering Strait and how more traffic could affect the amazing amount of wildlife there.

The narrow, 60-mile-wide Bering Strait is the only connection between the Pacific and Arctic oceans. The ecological significance of the Bering Strait region is tremendous. Three marine water masses flow from the northern Bering Sea into the Chukchi Sea, and eventually the Beaufort Sea, via Bering Strait. These currents carry relatively warm and nutrient-rich water that fuels the extremely high plankton and sea floor productivity for which the region is known.

Many marine and anadromous fishes, including species important for subsistence such as Pacific salmon, use Bering Strait. Hundreds of thousands of marine mammals of several species migrate through the strait in both spring and fall. These ice-dependent or ice-associated mammals include bowhead, beluga, and gray whales; Pacific walrus; ringed, ribbon, spotted, and bearded seals; and occasionally polar bears.

A phenomenal number of seabirds nest on the islands and coasts of the strait. According to US Fish and Wildlife Service data, the Diomed Islands are nesting areas for approximately 4.7 million colonial seabirds. St. Lawrence Island has nesting areas for an additional 3.4 million birds, and the Chukotka coast, King Island, and Capes Lisburne and Thompson have over 1.5 million more. An incredible estimated 10 million seabirds nest and forage in the Bering Strait region. Little Diomed, St. Lawrence Island, Cape Lisburne, King Island, the marine area near Capes Lisburne and Thomson, and the waters of the Bering Strait are all designated Important Bird Areas.

Because the strait is the only passage between the Pacific and Arctic Oceans, all wildlife that live in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas in the summer months funnel through the Bering Strait twice each year during spring and fall migration. Any environmental damage to the strait (such as a tanker spill) would have the potential to impact habitat used by all individuals of a population.

The Bering Strait region is covered with mostly continuous sea ice from December through April, and discontinuous ice in May, June, and



Crested and Least auklets near nesting cliffs. *Photograph by US Fish & Wildlife Service*

November. The ice greatly constricts the passageway of what is already a narrow strait subdivided by islands and other navigational hazards. Wildlife, like ships, travel through open leads in the ice, greatly increasing the likelihood that ship traffic will encounter wildlife.

Shipping is increasing in the strait, but the route is still in its infancy. So far, no major environmentally damaging incidents have occurred. On the US side of the strait, the majority of the ship traffic stays closer to the Seward Peninsula than to the Diomed Islands, largely avoiding wildlife areas of concern. An increase in the use of satellite tracking of marine mammals and birds allows us to better understand migration patterns and timing.

Audubon Alaska has started outlining recommendations of ways to manage the shipping routes that would limit problems for wildlife. This would include scientific surveys of the wildlife and physical ocean characteristics to establish baseline information for the Bering Strait. Seasonal shipping routes, as well as possibly establishing an air-traffic-controller-style ship communication system, are other ideas. We will continue to delve into how science and mapping tools can help shape a future for the Bering Strait that preserves routes for wildlife. ♦

In early September, Audubon Alaska submitted comments regarding shipping routes to the US Coast Guard. We focused on areas of concern for wildlife and ways to manage shipping routes to avoid harming wildlife. The full comments are available at www.AudubonAlaska.org.

Tongass Update: Not All Old Growth Is Created Equal

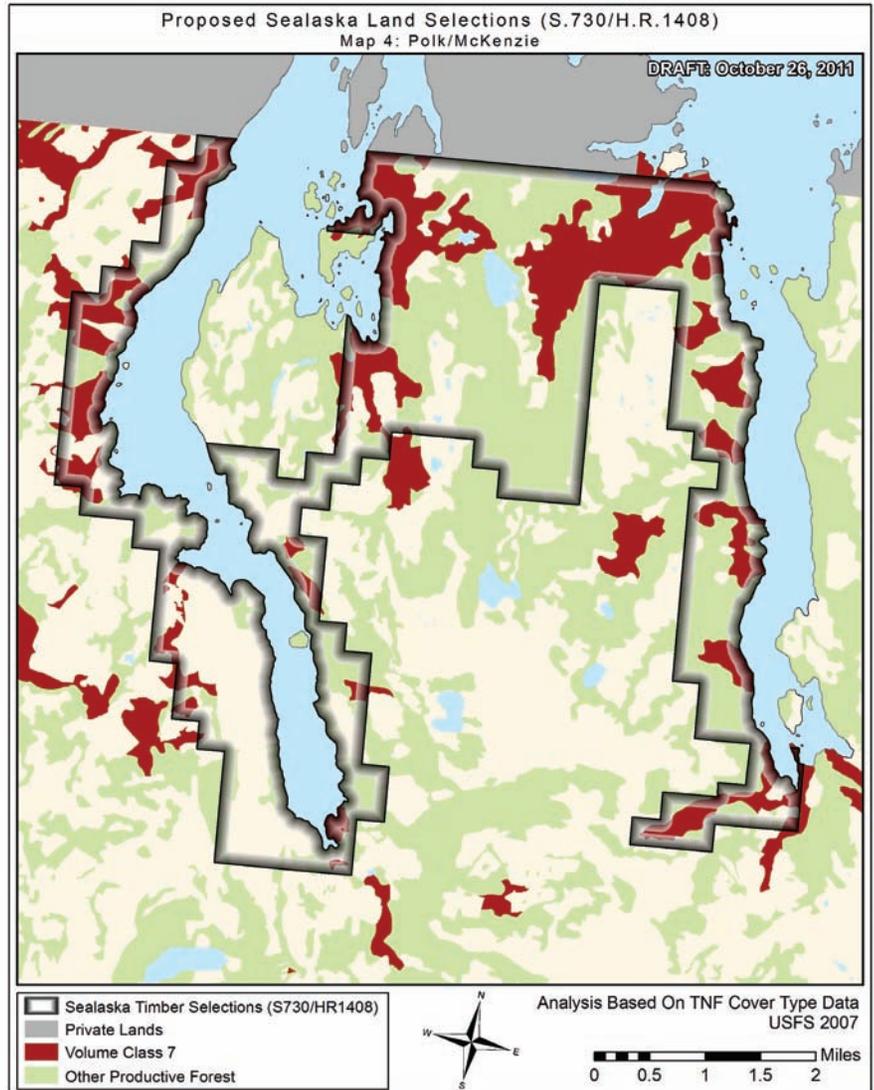
The Sealaska Native Corporation land selection bills are currently being considered in the US House of Representatives (H.R. 1408) and US Senate (S. 730). The legislation would amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and authorize Sealaska Corporation to obtain approximately 65,000 acres of public land for timber harvest, as well as hundreds of small in-holdings in new selection areas throughout the Tongass National Forest.

While Audubon supports Sealaska obtaining its legal land claims, no new legislation is needed to finalize Sealaska’s entitlement. The corporation has already filed its final land selections with the Bureau of Land Management, but has asked BLM to defer conveyance as the corporation seeks legislation to make more valuable selections.

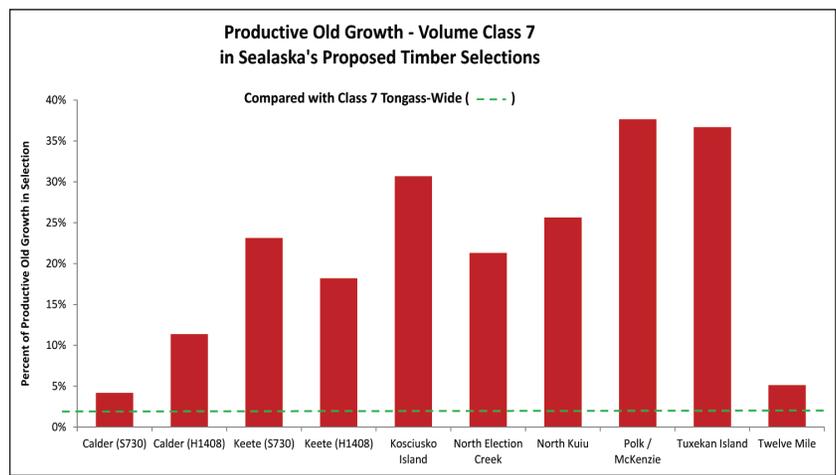
Audubon Alaska has been hard at work analyzing what Sealaska’s proposed selections would mean on the ground. Over the last century, intensive logging removed half or more of the large-tree old growth from the Tongass. The very biggest trees—some greater than ten feet in diameter—were largely eliminated. The rare stands of ancient “giants” that remain are more than just visually impressive, they provide vital habitat for fish and wildlife.

First, our science team mapped Sealaska’s proposed selections using a Forest Service forest cover database. This revealed that Sealaska’s new timber selections targeted a greatly disproportionate amount of large-tree old growth. Next, our policy team met with Congressional staff and Forest Service officials in Washington, DC to share Audubon’s findings. Congress has long recognized the problem of targeting the largest old-growth trees—a practice called “high-grading”—in the Tongass. In 1990, Congress took bi-partisan action to eliminate high-grading in the Tongass Timber Reform Act.

Audubon will continue to educate policy-makers about the high-grading proposed by S. 730/H.R.1408 as this legislation would contradict the congressionally endorsed policy to end high-grading of large-tree old growth on the Tongass. ♦



This map shows a sample of how much of Sealaska’s timber selections in the proposed legislation include very large-tree old growth. For more maps see the Tongass page at www.AudubonAlaska.org.



Very large-tree, old-growth stands (Class 7) make up 24–27 percent of Sealaska Corporation’s proposed timber selections. These stands make up just 2 percent of the productive old growth on the Tongass as a whole.

People of Audubon

BOARD



Audubon Alaska welcomes new board member **Mason Morfit**. Mason recently retired from The Nature Conservancy, where his 33-year career included vice president for development of the national organization and executive director of the state office in Maine. He is a recipient of the Conservancy's Lifetime Achievement Award. Mason holds a BA from Harvard and an MBA from Columbia. He has served on the boards of the Appalachian Mountain Club and the College of the Atlantic.

Mason enjoys fishing, bird hunting, canoeing, sea kayaking, sailing, skiing, and hiking. He is licensed as a Registered Maine Master Guide. He also enjoys traveling: to date, he has visited more than 80 countries. ♦



We would also like to welcome **Dave Secord** as a new board member. Dave has been Director of Strategic Programs at the Tides Canada Foundation since June 2010. Before moving to Vancouver, BC from his native Seattle, he oversaw conservation grantmaking in Alaska (especially the Tongass and Arctic) and parts of western Canada for the Wilburforce Foundation. Prior to joining Wilburforce, he

was a professor at the University of Washington from 1996–2007, where he played founding or leadership roles in two award-winning applied environmental programs.

An experimental marine ecologist by training, he has explored rocky shores and their invertebrate wonders in many parts of the world. He has had a lifelong love of Alaska and the north, with family members living in Nome, Kodiak, and Fairbanks for much of the twentieth century. He first visited Alaska at age 16 and has not missed a chance to go since. He is currently leading an assessment of how philanthropy might better advance conservation and social outcomes in the Canadian Arctic, and is particularly interested in transboundary conservation along the Alaska-Canada border. ♦

Answer to WatchList Quiz

Blackpoll Warbler, fall plumage

Photograph by Donna Dewhurst,
US Fish & Wildlife Service



Warblers can be tricky! Compare this photo, taken in September in Anchorage, to the breeding male on the front cover.

STAFF



We are in the midst of searching for a new Director of Development. Lorelei Costa has held this position since 2007, but has decided to give the world of freelance writing a whirl. She will work part-time until we fill the position.

The Director of Development is the economic engine for Audubon Alaska. Some of the responsibilities include maintaining contact with donors, planning donor events and wilderness excursions, and managing the spring Bird-a-Thon. This person also writes grant proposals, sometimes in tandem with other staff, and makes sure we stay up-to-date on any grant reporting. It's a dynamic position, with the opportunity to interact with people from Alaska and across the country.

If you would like more information about the position, or know of someone you want to pass the job posting along to, you can find the online application on the National Audubon website's career section (<https://careers-audubon.icims.com/jobs/1109/job>). You can also contact our office at (907) 276-7034. ♦



New Publication! What's So Great about the Arctic Ocean?

What draws wildlife to Hanna Shoal? Or the Barrow Canyon? The *Place-based Summary of the Arctic Marine Synthesis*, Audubon Alaska's newest publication, answers these questions.

The summary is a companion piece to the *Arctic Marine Synthesis* atlas, allowing you to explore 25 areas in the Arctic Ocean that are exceptional for wildlife. Find out where polar bears, walrus, ice seals, and seabirds congregate. Learn where openings in Arctic Ocean pack ice provide important habitat for migrating whales.

The atlas has become a useful tool for scientists and policymakers, and the *Place-based Summary* provides even more ways to access the information. For each location, the summary details outstanding biological features, physical ocean characteristics, current resource use, conservation status for wildlife species of concern, and current and future threats.

Take a tour of the *Place-based Summary of the Arctic Marine Synthesis* on our website www.AudubonAlaska.org. ♦

Audubon ALASKA

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Photograph by US Geological Survey

A Hot Piece of Real Estate—for Seabirds

In the Gulf of Alaska, seabirds flock to Middleton Island by the thousands. The former Air Force radar base now serves as nesting habitat for species such as Black-legged Kittiwakes and Pelagic Cormorants, with a twist. Researchers have redesigned some of the towers into bird condos: nest boxes with doors and windows at the back. The scientists can study birds and access nests from within the building, while limiting disturbance.

The up-close-and-personal research station allows scientists enormous flexibility to study the birds. Does seabird nesting success indicate changes in ocean temperature? What do seabirds' diets reveal about shifting fish populations?

Audubon Alaska strongly supports the need for scientific research to direct conservation. That's why we made a contribution in the name of Stan Senner, our former Executive Director, to the Institute for Seabird Research, an organization devoted to studying the puffins, kittiwakes, cormorants, and other birds of this natural laboratory.

Please contact us if you are interested in helping with these efforts!

WatchList Quiz Bird

Can you identify
this species from
the WatchList?

Answer on page 7.

