



# Audubon ALASKA News

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## Reprieve for Teshekpuk Lake

By Pat Pourchot, Senior Policy Representative

Audubon is celebrating a big victory in the Western Arctic. In July, the Secretary of the Interior officially signed the federal government's decision to defer oil and gas leasing around Teshekpuk Lake for at least 10 years. This decision follows more than 150,000 comments from scientists, Alaska Natives and other Alaskans, conservationists, hunters, and Audubon members across the country supporting protection of the outstanding wildlife resources of the Teshekpuk Lake area in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA) on Alaska's North Slope.

It has been a long, tense journey from January 2006, when the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposed that all of the Teshekpuk Lake area be opened for oil and gas leasing. Audubon and its partners filed suit, and in the eleventh hour, a federal district court blocked the lease sale and required BLM to do a better job of addressing cumulative impacts of oil and gas leasing and development. The BLM submitted a new draft environmental statement and revised plan last summer, which continued to call for leasing in the Teshekpuk Lake area, prompting a blizzard of public comments appealing for protection of the Teshekpuk wetlands.

Although we had for some months anticipated BLM's final decision to defer additional leasing in the Teshekpuk wetlands, in this time of high gas prices and proposals to drill just about everywhere for oil and gas, we could not take anything for granted. We were—to say the least—relieved when the agency released the final Record of Decision confirming the deferral of about 430,000 acres north and east of the lake.

The new revised leasing plan still has flaws, but it represents a reasonable balance between conservation and energy development. Under the new plan, approximately 86 percent of the Northeast Area of NPRA will be available for oil and gas leasing. A lease sale in both the Northeast and Northwest planning areas—where over three million acres have already been leased—is scheduled for September 24 of this year.

*continued on page 3*



The Teshekpuk Lake area is the primary annual calving ground for the Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd, an estimated 45,000 animals. Thousands of caribou converge near Teshekpuk each May and June, seeking insect relief and calving grounds with few predators, low levels of disturbance, and abundant, high-quality forage.

Photograph by Gerrit Vyn, the Macaulay Library of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology



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## ALASKA WATCHLIST SPECIES

Photograph on masthead by Milo Burcham

### American Golden-Plover

*Pluvialis dominica*

The American Golden-Plover is a striking shorebird that breeds in coastal and alpine tundra regions of Alaska, such as the Teshekpuk Lake area of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. This species has one of the longest known migrations, from the Arctic to Patagonia, much of which it flies without stopping to eat or drink. The small global population has shown declines, a likely result of habitat loss in its staging and wintering grounds in grassland regions of South America.

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## DIRECTOR'S VIEWPOINT



### Panic at the Pump

By Stan Senner, Executive Director

Election seasons typically are times for soaring rhetoric, big promises, endless political ads, and maneuvering for the popular side of hot-button issues. The 2008 election is no exception. Once the price of gasoline at the pump broke the \$4 per gallon threshold, energy—what it costs and how and where we get it—became the hot-button issue *du jour*. Candidates and political parties are now working harder than Olympic wrestlers to pin the blame for high gas prices on their opponents, and they are ducking and feigning to avoid taking any responsibility themselves. Unfortunately, the primary “solution” being advanced by some members of both leading political parties—more drilling here and now—is a prescription for disaster with long-term consequences for Alaska and the planet.

To be sure, the nation and the world face an energy crisis. The high prices of gasoline and fuel oil are burdens for many people, especially in rural Alaska. But panic never produces good solutions, especially when the stakes are so high.

Even top leaders in the petroleum industry acknowledge that the nation cannot drill its way to energy independence. But this has not stopped the government from rushing headlong into leasing huge tracts of public lands and waters for oil and gas—from millions of acres in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR) and the Arctic Ocean, to virtually blanketing western states like Wyoming with natural gas leases. But developing new supplies in frontier regions like Alaska takes years of lead time and will do nothing to bring down the price of a barrel of oil, which is largely determined on world markets.

Politicians who claim that drilling offshore in places like the Chukchi Sea will mean cheaper U.S. energy prices are either engaged in wishful thinking or shameless deception. Even if development in the harsh and remote Chukchi environment proceeds smoothly for the industry, it could easily take 15-20 years for any production, and the cost of those products will make today's prices look like bargains.

And then there is the cost to the environment. Feeding dependence on fossil fuels does nothing to slow, much less reverse, global warming, and the price of that dependence in terms of oil spills, despoiled wilderness, reduced wildlife populations, and inevitable social, economic, cultural, and subsistence impacts on local residents are too high.

Audubon will continue to work for positive, balanced solutions to the nation's and world's energy problems. We support aggressive energy conservation and the development of efficient alternatives to fossil fuels. We also can support some additional oil and gas development, provided that special places and critical wildlife habitats (like the Teshekpuk wetlands in NPR) are protected, and so long as there is good science, the best available technologies, high environmental standards, and sensitivity to the needs and cultures of local residents. Opening the Arctic Refuge coastal plain and invading the outer continental shelf in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas and in Bristol Bay fail these tests.

Panic at the pump ought to lead to a new energy future, not a repeat of past mistakes. ♦



Photograph by Taldi Walter

## Mapping America's Arctic Ocean

By Melanie Smith, Staff Biologist & GIS Analyst

Audubon is currently working toward a conservation plan for one of the most remote and dynamic areas of our country—the Chukchi and Beaufort seas off northern Alaska. These two seas make up America's part of the Arctic Ocean and are very important habitat for birds, fish, marine mammals, and Alaska Native subsistence hunting.

With the acquisition of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software and hardware earlier this year, we now have the ability in-house to analyze spatial biological information and create maps to inform the public of our projects and findings. GIS allows us to better understand relationships between ecosystem components. With GIS we are able to overlay the location of multiple variables and study their relationship to one another over space and time, allowing us, for example, to examine marine mammal distribution in relation to changing sea ice conditions.

During 2008 Audubon will collect a variety of biological and oceanographic information, including seabird densities in molting and breeding areas, walrus and ice-seal haulouts, beluga and bowhead whale migration routes, and climate change scenarios. Similar to our past work in the Arctic terrestrial environment, our purpose is to identify essential biological "hotspots" for conservation. We will focus on Important Bird Areas, wildlife listed under the Endangered Species Act, birds on our Alaska WatchList, ice-dependent marine mammals, and essential ecosystem elements that support these species, such as sea ice.

Audubon Alaska has partnered with Oceana and The Nature Conservancy on this effort, sharing GIS data and ideas. We will publish our conservation plan for the Chukchi and Beaufort seas in late 2009. ♦

*Teshkepuk Lake Reprive... continued from page 1*



King Eider Photograph by Milo Burcham

Deferred leasing in the Teshkepuk wetlands represents a tremendous win for Audubon and its partners, for local residents who rely on the wildlife resources of the area, for hunters and birdwatchers throughout North America and beyond, and, most of all,

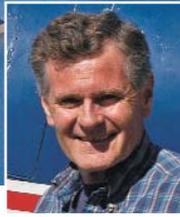
for the unique wildlife populations and habitat of Teshkepuk Lake. The Teshkepuk wetlands provide critical habitat for tens of thousands of shorebirds, waterfowl, and other birds, including up to 30 percent of all Brant in the Pacific Flyway. These lands also provide calving and insect-relief areas and migration corridors for the Teshkepuk Lake Caribou Herd, a significant subsistence resource for local residents.

With the deferral of additional leasing in the Teshkepuk wetlands, Audubon will not litigate the September 2008 lease sale, even though we are less than satisfied with other aspects of BLM's plan, including the opening of outstanding raptor nesting and foraging habitat along the Colville River that should have remained in a deferred status. Our ultimate goal remains permanent protection of the NPRA's special places and wildlife habitats, including the Teshkepuk wetlands, and we will pursue this course of action with the next Administration and Congress. ♦

## Trek at Teshkepuk, Paddle the Colville

Join us for a trip of a lifetime. We invite you to accompany Audubon Alaska's own Pat Pourchot and Matt Kirchhoff on an Alaska Discovery trip to the remote Western Arctic. Pat and Matt will each escort a small, Alaska Discovery-led group to the Teshkepuk Lake wetlands and the Colville River. If you've already traveled through much of Alaska and want to go where few other have tread, or if you want to witness first hand one of Audubon's top areas of concern in the Arctic, this is the trip for you. We'll hope to see nesting shorebirds and waterfowl galore near Teshkepuk, the calving caribou of the Teshkepuk Lake Herd, and incredible densities of nesting raptors along the cliffs of the Colville. For more information, call Lorelei at 907-276-7034.

## FOCUS ON THE FIELD



## Tongass Science Expedition

By John Schoen, Senior Scientist

In May, Audubon Alaska and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) sponsored a science expedition to the Tongass National Forest. The purpose was to familiarize a group of eminent conservation biologists and forest ecologists with the Tongass and to conduct a field-based peer-review of the recent Audubon-TNC *Conservation Assessment and Resource Synthesis for Southeast Alaska and the Tongass National Forest*. I was joined by Dave Albert from TNC and Matt Kirchhoff from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (at that point) in hosting this group of scientists for a week in the northern Tongass.

Following a day of briefings from agency scientists in Juneau, we flew to Tenakee Springs on Chichagof Island (which provided an aerial overview of forest management in the region) and boarded our expedition vessel for a six-day cruise from Tenakee Inlet to Port Frederick and back to Juneau. During this excursion, we talked with citizens from Tenakee Springs, spent half a day with Forest Service staff looking at forest management on Chichagof, and explored pristine watersheds and timber harvest areas. Each day we spent four to eight hours in intense scientific discussions regarding conservation and management of the Tongass. Following this expedition, the visiting scientists compiled a consensus summary of their findings. Key excerpts follow.

### **Distinctiveness of the Tongass and Recent Historic Change in Tongass Land Use**

*The Tongass is one of the largest coastal temperate rainforest ecosystems in the world, certainly the largest when considered in combination with British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest immediately to the south. It is unique among U.S. national forests in being by far the largest in area, but also in that it spreads across a large island archipelago, with the endemism and genetic distinctiveness typical of island ecosystems worldwide.*

*Despite undeveloped watersheds and roadless places, substantial change on the Tongass in the last century may limit future management options. Rates of human-related change, especially since World War II, have been many times greater than rates of natural disturbance, and thus the basic ecological character of the forest has been modified. Age-class distribution has changed, and there has been disproportionate harvest of old growth, especially non-random removal of the biggest trees in highly productive high-volume stands.*

*continued on page 5*



Photograph by John Schoen

Scientists on our May Tongass field trip sit below the largest known Sitka spruce in Alaska, measuring 9.5 feet in diameter. First row, left to right: David Secord, Wilburforce Foundation and University of Washington; Barry Noon, Colorado State University; John Schoen, Audubon Alaska; Dave Albert, The Nature Conservancy. Second row: Andy MacKinnon, British Columbia Ministry of Forests; Martin Nie, University of Montana; Paul Alaback, University of Montana; \*Gordon Orians, University of Washington; Joe Cook, University of New Mexico; \*\*Matt Kirchhoff, Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

\*Gordon Orians joined the Audubon Alaska Board in April 2008 but participated in this field trip in his capacity as Professor Emeritus with the University of Washington.

\*\* Since the Tongass field trip in May, Matt has retired from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and is now Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Alaska. He participated on this field trip in his capacity with the State.

*Tongass Science Expedition... continued from page 4*

### **Scientific Issues Raised, Key Findings and Preliminary Recommendations**

We support the basic concept, methods, and analytical approach of the TNC-Audubon Conservation Assessment, Resource Synthesis, and Conservation Area Design. We find the document to be excellent overall. It is by far the best available integrated planning tool for Southeast Alaska. We especially appreciate these particular features of the approach:

- It examines all Southeast Alaska land ownerships.
- It examines historical conditions quantitatively, explicitly considering changes in management approaches over time.
- It includes extensive, thorough, and comprehensive data in the analysis.
- It cites and incorporates the best, most relevant science available.
- Its watershed-level evaluation clearly illustrates patterns and consequences of land-use decisions.
- It is an excellent foundation for incorporating future improvements, including our recommendations below, which can build on this analysis.

### **Natural Disturbance and Alternatives to Clearcutting**

Because clearcutting fundamentally and durably alters the structure and composition of forest stands, we would like to see a greater emphasis on alternatives to clearcutting in the conservation plan. Timber harvest plans should be designed to mimic natural disturbance patterns in terms of frequency, intensity, spatial scale and location.

### **Island Biogeography**

It is critical to recognize that the Tongass is unique among the country's national forests in that it is spread across a very large island archipelago. Planning should take into account this natural island structure, doing analyses at different scales including island units and connectivity among islands. It should consider endemism and genetic distinctiveness of island populations.

### **Restoration**

The plan should incorporate riparian and upland restoration work that helps restore the composition, structure, and function of the original old-growth habitat. Riparian and in-stream restoration should receive particular priority.

The Tongass Conservation Assessment and Resource Synthesis can be reviewed through Audubon Alaska's home page ([www.audubonalaska.org](http://www.audubonalaska.org)). In cooperation with TNC, we are planning a Tongass Science Workshop and Conference in Juneau on February 17-19, 2009. Audubon Alaska continues to work with conservation organizations, resource agencies, and others to maintain the ecological values of Southeast Alaska while also providing for sustainable economic opportunities for local communities. ♦



Audubon ALASKA

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

## CHAPTER NEWS

### Anchorage Audubon Society

By Anchorage Audubon Society Board

Anchorage Audubon field trip leaders were busy this year. In addition to our regular songbird walks at the Campbell Creek Science Center and shorebird walks on the Coastal Trail, we offered two special field trips. In June, birders ventured north to observe the breeding birds of Barrow. The group birded the road system and hiked the tundra where they saw 47 species of birds. We also organized a sold-out trip aboard Mariah Charters out of Seward in Resurrection Bay. Everybody got great looks at 10 Alcids species.

On the conservation front, we worked with the Business Park Wetlands Coalition, the Army Corps of Engineers, and development representatives on potential mitigation projects at the Business Park Wetlands in Anchorage. We submitted formal comments on the wetland permit application and monitored bird use of the wetlands. This data will be compared with future bird use to understand wetland health as runoff water from the development is discharged into the area.

The Connors Lake Loon Cam had another great year. We welcomed the return of the same female Pacific Loon we've had since the inception of the Loon Cam in 2003, and two chicks were born at the nest site. Next year we hope to have updated software capable of streaming live video on our website. ♦

### Arctic Audubon Society

By Gail Mayo, Arctic Audubon President

Arctic Audubon's year began in August of 2007 with our involvement in the annual Sandhill Crane Festival at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge. In March, we cosponsored Scott Weidensaul's address at the Alaska Bird Conference. We had a successful year of presentations and field trips, including four spring bird walks and the Christmas Bird Count.

Our most satisfying presentation of the year was in April, when we heard from three of the eleven Arctic Audubon small grants recipients. We are pleased with the interest our small grants program has received over the last five years and the results it has encouraged. We awarded two grants this year to students studying Gray-headed Chickadees and Arctic breeding Dunlin.

The big conservation issue for Interior Alaska this year has been the proposed Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange. We submitted chapter testimony in favor of the "no trade" alternative. We also submitted comments on the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Conservation Plan, Teshekpuk Lake, Eastern Interior Planning for BLM Lands, and the Tanana Lakes Recreation Plan.

We rejoiced at the final publication of the *Fairbanks Area Hiking and Birding Guide*. The guide was supported in part by a Collaborative Funding grant from National Audubon; we continue to work on increasing area sales and distribution. ♦

### Juneau Audubon Society

By Jeff Sauer, Juneau Audubon President

Juneau Audubon stayed busy this year with a number of educational activities, including spring bird walks, monthly evening programs focused on natural history and ecology, "Saturday Wild" walks oriented on wildflowers and edible wild berries, Berners Bay educational cruises, Wednesday downtown bird walks, and the Christmas Bird Count.

Over the last year we significantly increased the turnout for our bird and nature walks. We accommodated the increase of attendees by having multiple leaders and several scopes. With combined financial support from Eagle Optics and the State, we were able to purchase six pairs of binoculars for use during bird walks.

Steve Zimmerman and Matt Kirchoff, two long-time Juneau Audubon Board members, have recently left our Board. Both Steve and Matt have been invaluable contributors to our chapter, and we thank them for their many years of hard work and all they have done for Juneau Audubon. We wish Matt all the best with his move to Anchorage and new job at Audubon Alaska. ♦

### Kodiak Audubon Society

By Claudia Anderson, Kodiak Audubon President

Kodiak Audubon hosted a variety of monthly presentations throughout the winter on topics ranging from the Faeroe Islands to the winter birds of Kodiak. As the ice melted on Potato Patch Lake, a swan frequented the area for two weeks, drawing a lot of traffic to the newly completed observation platform. This summer, we worked with the newly formed Friends of Kodiak Refuge to lead biweekly hikes on the island's trails. We continue to publish our annual newsletter with the ever popular "Birds about Town" column.

The fifth-grade curriculum at Kodiak public schools has an incredible outdoor education component. One of our board members travels regularly to our six village schools to lead bird walks for this program, using Audubon Adventures as a fun ice-breaking activity. Our fabulous Hiking Guide generated enough revenue to enable us to purchase a set of binoculars to use during bird walks.

On the conservation front, we submitted comments to the Department of the Interior on the Navy's training exercises in the Gulf of Alaska, the road through Izembek, a local proposal to fill part of Potato Patch Lake, and the Kodiak Island Borough Comprehensive Plan. ♦

### Prince William Sound Audubon Society

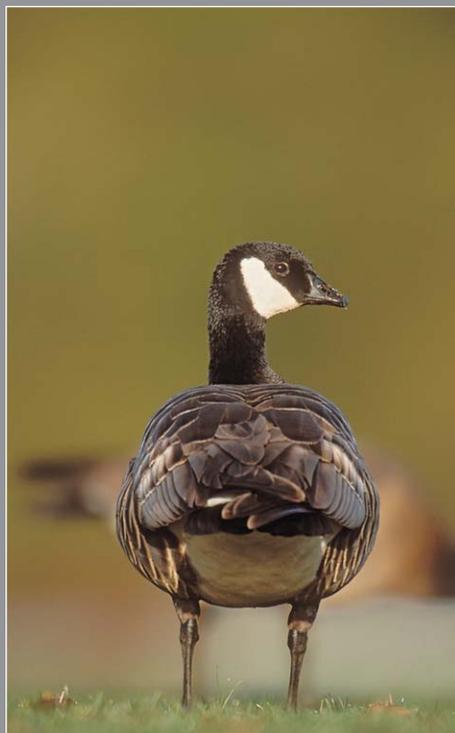
By Milo Burcham, PWS Audubon President

Prince William Sound (PWS) Audubon had excellent attendance at our monthly meetings in October through April. Speakers covered a variety of natural history topics ranging from birding in Nome to underwater photography in Alaska and Hawaii.

We continue to play a leadership role in the annual Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival. Several members of the Board participate in annual festival planning, and the chapter sets up the auditorium for the Friday night speaker every year. This past spring the chapter co-sponsored the Festival Speaker, Kevin Karlson, and two of our Board members, Milo Burcham and Paul Meyers, gave presentations at the festival.

Our Christmas Bird Count was held on December 15, 2007 and had 27 participants, including five conducting feeder watches. We recorded 55 species during the 24-hour count.

The chapter is currently working with the Copper River Watershed Project to develop an interpretive display on the harbor breakwater trail, which is under construction. This display is being paid for by a Collaborative Funding grant from National Audubon and matching funds from PWS Audubon. ♦



Cackling Canada Goose Photograph by Milo Burcham

## People of Audubon

### BOARD



We are thrilled to welcome **Sirena Brownlee** to the Audubon Alaska Board. Sirena has many years of experience as an Audubon volunteer, as past president and current field trip leader for Anchorage Audubon, and as a former Board member of Maricopa Audubon in Arizona. Sirena earned her BS in Biology from Arizona State University. In her current job as a wildlife biologist for HDR, Sirena travels throughout the state doing field work and wildlife surveys. She is an avid birder, backpacker, kayaker, and cyclist, organizing a team for the Multiple Sclerosis Ride from Hope to Seward and back each year. We look forward to having Sirena's considerable energy and enthusiasm on the Audubon Alaska Board. ♦



As her term on the Audubon Alaska Board comes to an end, it is with great appreciation that we say thank you to **Margery Nicolson**. Margery is a former faculty member of the University of Southern California Medical School and is a retired Senior Scientist of Amgen, Inc. Margery, a founding member of the Audubon Alaska Board, has contributed significantly to its development and continued successes. As an active Board member of both Audubon California and the National Audubon Society, Margery will continue to play an important role in the Audubon family. Inspired by cranes, Margery is also an energetic volunteer for the International Crane Foundation and the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at the Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, Nebraska. We wish her the best in the future and thank her for all her support. ♦

### STAFF



We are delighted to have **Matt Kirchhoff** join the Audubon Alaska staff as Director of Bird Conservation. Matt is a veritable Audubon volunteer veteran, with tenures on the Juneau Chapter Board and as Chair of the State Board from 2001 to 2006. An Alaska resident for over 30 years, Matt is also former Board Chair of the Alaska Conservation Foundation. Professionally, Matt has worked as a Wildlife Biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, focusing on Marbled Murrelet ecology in Southeast Alaska. In 2005 he received the Olaus Murie Award for outstanding professional contributions to conservation in Alaska. Matt and his wife Patty are relocating to Anchorage, where Matt will begin at Audubon on October 1. ♦



**Taldi Walter** joined the Audubon Alaska staff in June as our Communications & Education Specialist. Taldi was born in Alaska and raised in the Flathead Valley of Northwest Montana. Taldi joins us from the National Audubon Society's Public Policy Office in Washington, D.C., where she worked as the Alaska Outreach Coordinator. In this capacity, she delivered 110 lectures in 39 states throughout the U.S., highlighting priority Alaska lands issues. Taldi received her Master's in Biology from the University of Central Arkansas. Her thesis work took her to the Atlantic rainforest of Brazil, where she studied rainforest and invasive species ecology. Taldi enjoys climbing, cycling, skiing, and paddling. She looks forward to exploring more of Alaska, and we are excited to have her on staff. ♦

**Would you like to contribute to science, help decision makers, and find birding hotspots in Alaska?**

You can do all this and more on Alaska eBird. Each checklist you submit provides scientists with increasingly valuable data on the distribution, abundance, and health of bird populations and their habitats. Alaska eBird also allows you to share and maintain your life list, map and graph your observations, find birding hotspots, look for species trends, and locate your "life" birds. Go to [www.ebird.com/ak](http://www.ebird.com/ak) to begin your birding adventure!

## Alaska eBird

Willow Ptarmigan Photograph by Milo Burcham

[www.ebird.com/ak](http://www.ebird.com/ak)

# Summer at Sea in Southeast Alaska

They camped at Chichagof Island, counted seabirds on Icy Strait, listened attentively to Professor Matt Kirchhoff's lectures, and passed their "Midterms in Murrelets" with flying colors. Here are Audubon's Studebaker Scholars in the field with the Marine Ornithology class through the University of Alaska Southeast this summer. Congratulations, scholars! We're looking forward to your continued contributions to science as future biologists and conservationists.

**Christina Mounce:** "The class provided me with more field experience and a realistic view of what I would be doing as a biologist. It reaffirmed my desire to become a marine biologist."

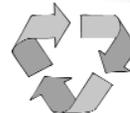
**Kaili Jackson:** "I never thought much of the birds I saw on the water previously, but this class made me take a step back and think, 'Wow, there is really something to these guys.'"

**Jeremy Brown:** "I had the time of my life. Wow. This course taught me that I love doing field work!"



*Photograph by Dr. Erica Hill*

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