



# Audubon ALASKA News

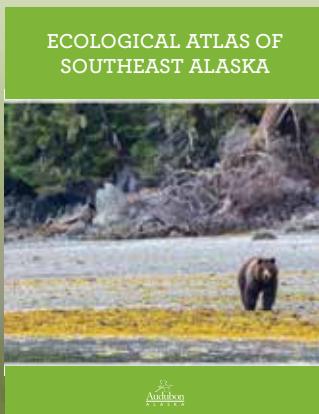
Published twice a year by the Alaska State Office of the National Audubon Society

## From Salmon to Seabirds: A New Ecological Atlas of Southeast Alaska

Where can you find the highest number of breeding birds in Southeast Alaska? What streams are important for king salmon? Audubon Alaska's newest publication, the *Ecological Atlas of Southeast Alaska*, answers these questions and more through maps and written descriptions. The atlas ends with a conservation summary and management recommendations.

For many years, Audubon Alaska has studied Southeast Alaska, including the Tongass National Forest, applying science to understand regional patterns of its flora and fauna and identify key conservation areas. "Audubon's approach was to bring together scientific data from different sources into a user-friendly set of maps that provide a holistic look at the region," said Melanie Smith, Director of Conservation Science. "The atlas presents a cumulative picture of what's going on across Southeast Alaska to understand ecological patterns and provides better insight into management recommendations." We compiled and synthesized data from researchers and agencies to examine every aspect of Southeast's landscape, from human uses such as airports and ferry routes to wildlife uses such as bird and salmon habitat.

In mid-October Melanie Smith, Director of Conservation Science; Susan Culliney, Policy Associate; and Ben Sullender, GIS Biologist, took the atlas traveling, giving presentations in Sitka and Juneau. People had a chance to flip through hard copies of the atlas, hear about the stories the atlas reveals, and ask questions in person. "We really want the atlas to serve as a resource for a wide range of users: making information accessible and useful to anyone interested in this marvelous place," Smith said.



### What's New in the Atlas

In the *Ecological Atlas*, we have built upon information in the 2007 Audubon-The Nature Conservancy *Conservation Assessment and Resource Synthesis for the Coastal Forests and Mountains Ecoregion* and other publications. We improved datasets such as forest vegetation, anadromous fish distribution, salt marsh estuaries, and Important Bird Areas. We included new information, such as projected climate change, mammal and bird viewing hotspots, active and historical mining activities, and infrastructure.

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The Prince of Wales Spruce Grouse subspecies is on the Yellow List WatchList because of limited geographic range. *Photograph by Milo Burcham*



### ALASKA WATCHLIST SPECIES

#### Bar-tailed Godwit

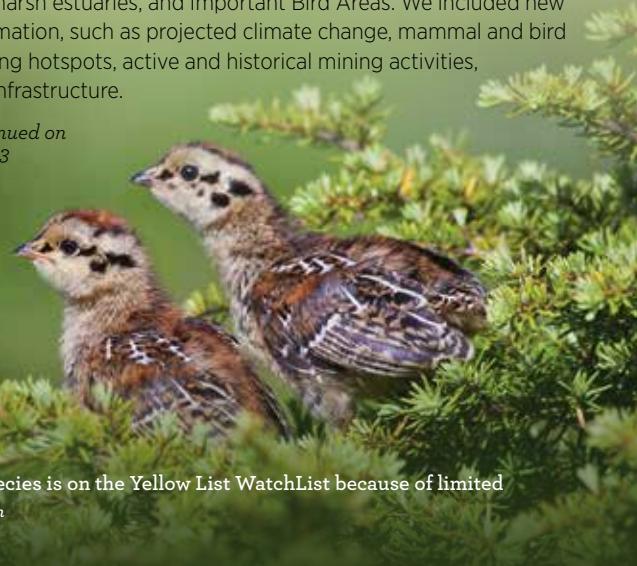
*Limosa lapponica baueri*

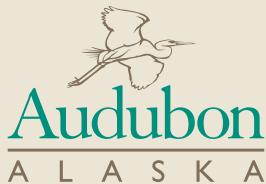
The Bar-tailed Godwit is a Red List WatchList species. This subspecies nests only in Alaska, along the western and Arctic coastal tundra, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. These godwits boast the longest nonstop migration of any bird: 7,000 miles from Alaska to wintering grounds in New Zealand or Australia in about eight days, losing half their bodyweight on the journey. Threats include habitat degradation and hunting at northward migration stopover sites along eastern Asia's Yellow Sea.

*Photograph on masthead by Milo Burcham*

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For almost 40 years Audubon Alaska has worked to conserve Alaska's birds, wildlife, and the habitat crucial to them. Audubon Alaska is financially independent, raising all our own funding—this means your support is critical to protecting the birds and wildlife you care about.

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## DIRECTOR'S VIEWPOINT

# What do Public Lands Mean to You?

By **Nils Warnock**

On the first day of summer, I peered out of my tent onto a white Arctic landscape, the result of a solstice snowstorm. There were seven of us in two boats, floating the wild and spectacular Marsh Fork of the Canning River in one of America's premier and most remote public lands, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. One of our goals was to see the Grey-headed Chickadee, one of North America's most elusive and least understood bird species, found mainly along the Brooks Range of Alaska.

Not all of our group were avid birders, but we all shared an intense awe for the starkly beautiful and richly patterned wilderness surrounding us. Every day we hiked, looked at birds and wildlife, and rested on soft tundra dotted with Arctic flowers. Covering an area the size of West Virginia (about 18 million acres), the Arctic Refuge hosts a scant thousand or so human visitors a year. During our eight-day trip, we saw caribou, Dall sheep, wolves, and a handful of people. When not looking for chickadees (which still elude me), the landscape allowed me to ponder what the Arctic Refuge, Wilderness, and ultimately public lands, mean to me, especially in light of a disturbing political climate in which it is popular to talk about selling our public lands and opening them up to potentially harmful, deregulated development.

This question stayed with me, a month later and thousands of miles south, as Sarah and I dropped off our youngest for her first year at my undergraduate alma mater, the University of Colorado-Boulder. With our daughter happily settled in the dorms, Sarah and I embarked on an exploration of Colorado's public lands in a retro VW camper van. We chased Mountain Plovers and longspurs in the subtle and underappreciated Pawnee National Grasslands, and camped along the lazy Green River in Dinosaur National Monument, watching Rock Wrens and Golden Eagles on the 100th anniversary of our National Parks.

Halfway through our travels, we drove to Estes Park, the entrance to the majestic Rocky Mountain National Park. When I began school in Boulder in the late '70s, Estes Park was a sleepy little town. This August it was unrecognizable: a Disneyland of tourist shops, long lines, and traffic jams. However, once we crossed into the park, my remembered landscapes reappeared, even though, according to park data, an additional 1-2 million people visit the park now vs. 40 years ago. While the roads are full, nature remains grand. We hiked in the alpine tundra at 11,000 feet, finding the White-tailed Ptarmigan, a bird I have long tried to see. Back alongside the more crowded road, I talked with a man equipped with high-end Swarovski binoculars. We admired a cow elk in the distance and discussed the quantity of meat from Colorado elk vs. Alaskan moose. Another day, we hiked up to Lulu City, an abandoned gold mine town with just the scars and ghosts of its mining past left, spotting Dusky Grouse and American Three-toed Woodpecker as we walked along the diminutive, trout-filled Colorado River headwaters.

Returning to Alaska brought me back to the question I began my summer with—what do the Arctic Refuge and our public lands mean to me? The Refuge is one of the last places where the Earth can still breathe relatively unencumbered by the weight of 7.5 billion people. The Refuge is a place of replenishment in a world where things are mostly being taken away. It belongs to all of us. Be it the precious water of the mighty Colorado River that irrigates the farmlands that feed us, the herds of caribou or elk that fill larders, or the diminutive Grey-headed Chickadee that soothes and renews our souls (at least birders), resources that come from our public lands rejuvenate the earth and benefit all of us. Public lands buffer us from a crowded world. They deserve our protection, not desecration. That is why Audubon has worked for so many decades to keep the heritage of our public lands intact. ■

**Summer is brief in the Arctic Refuge.**

*Photograph by Nils Warnock*

## A New Ecological Atlas of Southeast Alaska (continued from page 1)

"Each map is a composite of a lot of different data, and each layer may consist of several different data sources," Smith said. The map of infrastructure, for example, required research to compile a variety of information: cruise ship ports, electrical power interties among communities, Alaska Marine Highway ferry routes, airports, and more. Data quality is also important, which involves assessing the best available datasets. For example, the mine location databases weren't consistent with each other, so we had to talk to researchers to identify the most accurate records.

A new map shows marine bird colonies that have more than 100,000 birds at one location. The largest seabird colony in Southeast is on the Forester Islands, hosting more than 700,000 birds—the size of the entire human population of Alaska! Knowing where these concentration areas are will help managers assess risks to birds.

Several other new maps examine climate change in Southeast Alaska, focusing out through 2049. Our projections show an average precipitation increase of up to 5 percent, reaching 20 extra inches in the high mountains. The average expected temperature change is 2 degrees Fahrenheit across Southeast Alaska, meaning more snow falling as rain. Examining these patterns may help decision makers decipher what ecological challenges the region faces.

### What Did We Learn?

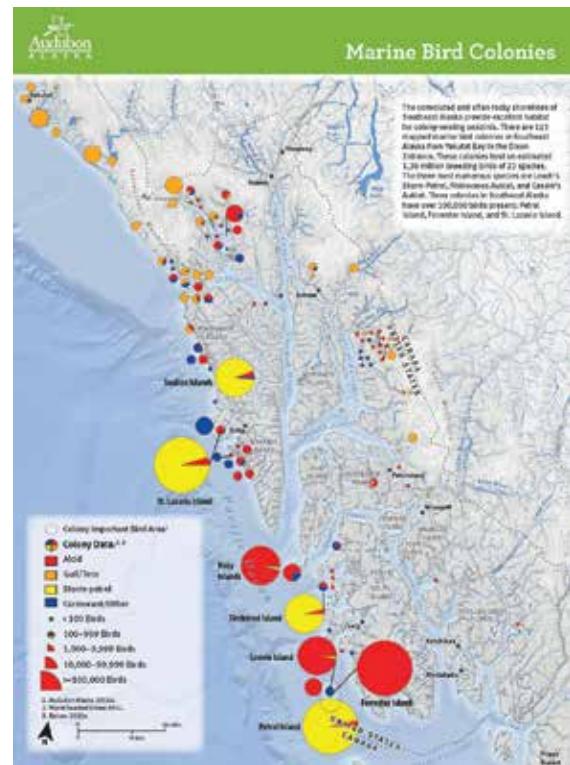
Creating the atlas revealed several important ecological themes, including:

- The region's diverse habitats support a great richness of species. Including casual and accidental occurrences, 70 percent of Alaska's bird species have been documented in Southeast. About 20 percent of the known mammal taxa are endemic.
- Timber has the greatest ecological impact of any of the current resource-based industries, yet the smallest economic value (a net loss of more than \$20 million per year). The fishing and tourism industries have the greatest resource-based economic impact on Southeast, together generating about \$2 billion per year.
- Transboundary mines are one of the biggest potential future impacts; even though many of these mines are not operating yet, this is an issue that needs attention.

Audubon Alaska hopes this publication will serve as a guide to the physical, ecological, and human use patterns of the region and foster long-term ecological planning for Southeast Alaska. ■

"[This is] a formidable example of contemporary Atlas design."

~ Jaynya Richards, cartographer/content developer at Esri (mapping software)



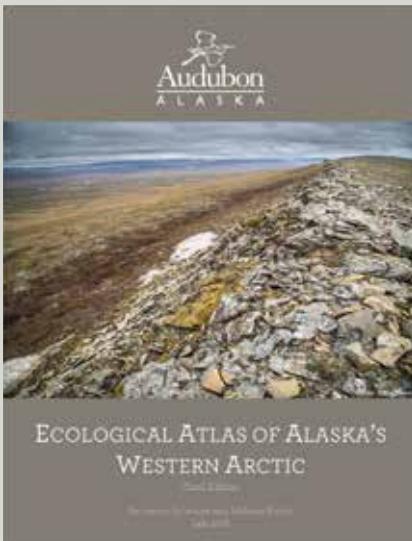
Marine bird colonies by size in Southeast Alaska.

You can download a free digital version of the atlas online at <http://adobe.ly/2bGqZK1>. Print copies will be available for purchase at \$125 from Audubon Alaska. To order a copy, contact Heidi DeCoeur at 907-276-7034 or [hdecoeur@audubon.org](mailto:hdecoeur@audubon.org).

## New Ecological Atlas of Alaska's Western Arctic

In July 2016, Audubon Alaska completed a long-term effort to integrate the best available science into a series of maps highlighting key resources within Alaska's Western Arctic, creating the new *Ecological Atlas of Alaska's Western Arctic*. We updated datasets such as Important Bird Areas, caribou habitat selection, seal and walrus distribution, and estimated oil resources. We included new information, such as climate change projections, vegetation mapping, and future development scenarios. Some of the areas highlighted include Teshekpuk Lake, the Colville River and Delta, and the Utukok River Uplands.

A downloadable digital version of the atlas is available on our website at <http://bit.ly/2dIOA16>. Additional print copies are available upon request by contacting Heidi at (907) 276-7034 or [hdecoeur@audubon.org](mailto:hdecoeur@audubon.org). ■



# Chapter Happenings

## Anchorage Audubon Society [www.anchorageaudubon.org](http://www.anchorageaudubon.org)

The Anchorage Audubon Society once again proved we are "The Best local Audubon chapter in Anchorage, Alaska." Volunteers and Board Members presented our annual "Beginning Birding Class" and Pro-Am Birding Tournament. Our annual Potter Marsh-a-thon Birding Smackdown was again the anti-social birding event of the season. Live streaming of the Connor's Lake Pacific Loon nest was a nationwide success. The only improvement would be for the Loons to actually hatch an egg.

Chapter members put in countless volunteer hours at the Gunsight Mountain HawkWatch, which this spring hosted a team of professionals from HawkWatch International for ten weeks. This is the most extensive monitoring of the migration site ever. Our Educational Volunteers spread the birding word at the BLM's Outdoor Week for sixth graders in Anchorage, at Public Lands Day, and volunteers re-furbished the viewing platform at the Business Park Wetlands in Anchorage. ■

## Arctic Audubon <http://arcticaudubon.org>

As the birds head south, Arctic Audubon is gearing up for our monthly programs at the public library. Last year's presentations included diverse topics: soundscapes in Denali National Park; travel to warm, bird rich countries; wood bison reintroduction; and ending with Bob Armstrong sharing his amazing videos. Our greatest success was sponsoring the movie *The Messenger*, with more than 125 people attending.

In spring, we offer three weekend field trips to enjoy and learn about Alaska's avian arrivals. Arctic Audubon also runs the "crane watch" station at the Tanana Valley Sandhill Crane Festival at the end of August. With the possibility of finally getting legal access to a parcel of wooded land donated to us a number of years ago, we are focusing our energy on trying to achieve this goal. ■

## Juneau Audubon Society [www.juneau-audubon-society.org](http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org)

In 2016, Juneau Audubon learned from a few mistakes in 2015 for our Tree Swallow nest box project. Our experts let us know that the Tree Swallows show up in Juneau in early April, so we made a good effort to get the nest boxes around Juneau up between April 11 and 24.

This year, with volunteers from the Juneau Youth Services school and the help of many local volunteers, we were able to get 40 Tree Swallow nest boxes in place at six locations around Juneau. We had better success in 2016 than 2015. Of the 40 nest boxes we put out, 15 had nests. Luckily for us, Bob Armstrong was doing some video work at Kingfisher Pond this summer and let us have this link to a nest box in use there: <http://naturebob.com/tree-swallows>. ■

## Kodiak Audubon

Visit Kodiak Audubon on Facebook

Kodiak Audubon continued our regular activities, with great success. In May we partnered with the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge for International Migratory Bird Day. Bird TLC from Anchorage did a Snowy Owl presentation and attendance was overflowing. Our hiking program had the most participants ever: 467 people hiked with us, 26 were kids and 441 adults; 137 were tourists and 330 local. Cindy Bower, program organizer, started the Facebook page Kodiak Audubon Hikers, which helped increase numbers.

Conservation-wise we've been excited by progress in a project working with Great Land Trust and Lesnoi Native Corporation to develop a conservation easement agreement for Termination Point. The partners are now trying to figure out who will manage the easement. Kodiak Audubon has written letters and supported this for years because of the area's conservation potential. ■

## Prince William Sound Audubon Society

Prince William Sound Audubon Society started up its 2016–2017 year in September with its monthly meeting that included a presentation on Sage Grouse. Over the summer we donated \$1,000 to the Pinchot Institute towards the purchase of the Bering coal fields—an inholding on the Chugach National Forest's Copper River Delta. The Copper River Delta is a globally-significant Important Bird Area because it is a spring migration stopover for millions of shorebirds. Our Christmas bird count is scheduled for December 17 and we welcome all Alaskans to come and join us! Contact [milosphotos@yahoo.com](mailto:milosphotos@yahoo.com) for more information. ■



## New Bird of the Year

As this year's spokesbird, the small but mighty Boreal Chickadee showcases our efforts to identify and protect important habitat of Interior Alaska. The Boreal Chickadee is a hardy permanent resident of Alaska, surviving tough winters in the vast boreal forests that stretch across the state. Make a donation to Audubon Alaska and receive your hot-off-the-presses Bird of the Year sticker today! Visit our Ways to Help page at [www.AudubonAlaska.org](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org) to learn how you can support Alaska's conservation efforts.



Release of a newly banded Golden Eagle by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at the Gunsight Mountain HawkWatch site. Photograph by W. Keys



# Creating a Community for Important Bird Areas

By Cole Talbot

As the Important Bird Area (IBA) Assistant this summer, I had the pleasure of leading the weekly IBA walks at Potter Marsh and Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage. We held 27 Anchorage Coastal IBA Walks this summer. We saw more than 70 species and had more than 200 people attend. During our walks, we discussed the Anchorage Coastal IBA and its statewide and continental importance to birds. While many people enjoy recreating and exploring this area, few know that it's an important stopover and breeding area for thousands of birds.

Every time we walk out on the Potter Marsh Boardwalk, we see something new and exciting. A male Lesser Yellowlegs lands on the railing, vocalizing his disapproval of our presence as his chicks run beneath the boardwalk on their way to feed in the inlet. A Tree Swallow fledgling jumps from inside its nest box as it awkwardly takes its first flight. The lone Common Yellowthroat male seems not to care that he is the only Yellowthroat seen in Southcentral Alaska this year, and he sings his heart out with his "wichety-wichety-wichety" phrase.

As we watched spring turn to summer and summer into fall, we observed migration, breeding, and every aspect of bird life history in between. In May, we watched spring migrants arrive and pass through to their breeding grounds throughout Alaska. In June, we watched the resident birds nest and then fledge their young. In July, we watched as thousands of Short-billed Dowitchers flew south to wintering grounds. In August, we watched juvenile Bald Eagles—which were just tiny white fuzzballs when we started the walks—fledge and learn to feed themselves.

The Anchorage Coastal IBA includes the entire coastal wetlands between Ship Creek and Potter Marsh, including Westchester Lagoon. This area contains extensive tidal flats, marsh communities, and alder-bog forests. These wetlands support some of the greatest numbers and diversity of birds in the Anchorage area. Ten thousand or more Snow Geese use the site during spring and fall migration. Approximately 220 bird species have been recorded, of which about 160 occur annually as migrants or breeders. During the winter, some 85 species have been found. Species of conservation concern include: Peregrine Falcon, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Trumpeter Swan, and Surfbird.

Almost as exciting as watching the birds was seeing which human beings would show up each week. We had a strong community of weekly attendees who were willing to share their great knowledge and stories of birds with those who were newer to birding. Frank Clemens, Mike and Linda Purviance, Bill and Carolyn Wuttke, and Sonja Lynn attended nearly every walk and shared their expertise and love of birds with all who came. We had visitors from all over the country and world attend, including from Australia, New Zealand, Germany, England, and Canada.

As we finish these summer walks, I leave with a much deeper understanding of the ecology and bird life right here in our backyard. Just as importantly, I have a greater appreciation for the birding community in Anchorage and the wonderful individuals who create it. ■



A walk at Potter Marsh in the Anchorage Coastal IBA.

Photograph by Cole Talbot

## Charitable Giving Made Easy!

Making a qualified charitable distribution from a qualified IRA enables individuals 70 ½ and older to give up to \$100,000 total to charities, without claiming the distribution as income. This rule was made a permanent part of the tax code in 2015.

All donations must be completed before December 31 to be eligible in the current tax year. Gifts must be made directly from your IRA administrator to the charity.

Important points to consider:

- You must be at least age 70 ½.
- The gift must come directly from your IRA account administrator, in the form of a check.
- The gift may come from a ROTH or a Traditional IRA (special exclusions may apply to other types of IRA accounts).
- There is NO income tax on the distribution; there is also no charitable deduction for your gift.

What are the advantages?

- Benefit Audubon Alaska's work in a meaningful way.
- Meet your Minimum Required Distribution (MRD).
- Pay no income tax on the amount withdrawn for your gift.
- Give above your deductible limit of 50 percent of adjusted gross income.

If you are interested, please contact Michelle LeBeau, Deputy Director, Audubon Alaska, (907) 276-7034 or [mlebeau@audubon.org](mailto:mlebeau@audubon.org).

Please have your IRA plan administrator send a check to:  
Audubon Alaska  
431 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 101  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
(907) 276-7034



Red-breasted Merganser family.

Photograph by Milo Burcham

## Remembering George West

The birding world lost a dedicated friend when George West passed away in late August 2016. Stan Senner, a longtime Audubon leader, was a graduate student when he first met West, then director of the University of Alaska's Institute of Arctic Biology. "George was a renaissance man who was accomplished in science, music, and art. He was self-effacing and even shy, but he quietly shared his talents for the greater good. And he did so right up to the end."

West was a prolific writer with publications ranging from *A Birder's Guide to Alaska* to scientific papers on birds, marine mammals, and plants. He was also a talented artist. Senner said West often supported Audubon by providing access to his artwork.

"George always had an interest in conservation, but that interest blossomed when he retired from UAF and moved with Ellen, his wife, to Homer," Senner recalls. West started monitoring shorebird migration in Homer in the 1980s and '90s. Those data are valuable now, documenting the status of our shorebird populations. George Matz, who now organizes the monitoring project, says current shorebird numbers are about 40 percent of what West counted. West's observations spurred him to lead the charge against turning Mud Bay into a parking lot in the 1990s, which resulted in designation of Mud Bay and other Kachemak Bay areas as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site.

The effort to protect Mud Bay spawned the Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival, which celebrates its twenty-fifth year in 2017, a symbol of George West's efforts. Dave Erikson, long-time compiler for the Homer Christmas Bird Count and active in the festival since it began, remembers West as "a consummate scientist and an avid bird bander." West served on the original festival committee and created the Western Sandpiper art for the first festival's t-shirt.

Thank you George West for many years of artistic and scientific inspiration. ■



**Western Sandpiper.**  
Artwork by George West

## Belize Is Calling You: February 19-28

Join Audubon Alaska for a trip to Belize and explore habitats that include wetlands, pine forest, tropical moist forest, and a mangrove island on this unforgettable adventure. In addition to its rich Mayan history, Belize offers birders a huge diversity of migrant and resident species in lush and varied ecosystems. Go birding at Crooked Tree Sanctuary, a vital habitat for migratory and resident wetland species; hike through the towering jungle of Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, aka Jaguar Preserve; and visit Mayan ruins at Lamanai. Support sustainable, bird-based tourism and hemispheric conservation in Belize, as well as Audubon Alaska's conservation work in Alaska. *Only a few spots remain*, so register soon! For trip highlights and to book your trip visit: <http://bit.ly/2dB20hy>. ■



**Northern Jacana.**  
Photograph by Francesco Veronesi

## People of Audubon

### BOARD



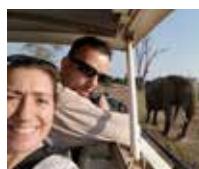
Audubon Alaska thanks board member **Ken Leghorn** for his enthusiastic participation on the board for two terms. Ken started on the board in the spring of 2011, and served on the executive and development committees. He graciously hosted a donor reception at his home in Juneau in April 2016. Through the business he manages, Pack Creek Bear Tours, he has helped Audubon Alaska share the magic of Southeast Alaska by guiding several donor and staff trips for bear viewing at Pack Creek on Admiralty Island.

Ken wants part of the legacy he leaves to his family to be the gift of a wild Alaska, through a planned gift to Audubon Alaska. Ken owned Alaska Discovery for 25 years, running wilderness expeditions by raft, kayak, and canoe throughout Southeast Alaska and the Brooks Range. Ken served on the Alaska Conservation Foundation board for 17 years and was a co-founder of the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association. ■

### STAFF



Audubon Alaska thanks **Cole Talbot** for being our Important Bird Area (IBA) Assistant this past May through August. Cole led the weekly Anchorage Coastal IBA Walks at Potter Marsh and Westchester Lagoon (rain or shine!), facilitated other Audubon events such as Bike and Bird Day and eBird workshops, and represented Audubon Alaska at events such as Potter Marsh Day. He was innovative in using eBird to communicate with people from the bird walks, and his infectious enthusiasm for birding made connections with people of all ages. He also led our breeding bird surveys for the Anchorage Coastal and Jim Creek Basin IBAs in June. ■



**Beth Grassi (Peluso)**, Audubon Alaska's Communications Manager, got married on a sunny June day in Fairbanks this summer. She and her husband Gary enjoyed a fantastic honeymoon safari in Kenya—apparently, she's the only person he knows who could be distracted from elephants by a bird, but it was a Black-shouldered Kite for her life list! ■



**Michelle LeBeau** has stepped up as our Deputy Director. In this role, she oversees Audubon Alaska's fundraising, communications, finance, and office management. ■

### Answer to WatchList Quiz

**Marbled Murrelet**  
*Brachyramphus marmoratus*



Marbled Murrelets are a Red List WatchList species because of declining populations. This seabird mainly nests in the upper canopy of old-growth trees. Threats in Alaska include changes in marine food supply, avian predators, incidental bycatch in gillnet fisheries, and logging of old-growth habitat. *Photograph by Milo Burcham*

# Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Where the Birds Know Their Names

By Susan Culliney



The Gwich'in Gathering brings people together to celebrate their culture. *Photograph by Susan Culliney*

As the Policy Associate for Audubon Alaska, I recently spent five days at the Gwich'in Gathering in remote Arctic Village. The Gwich'in are a First Nation people from the Yukon River flats of northwestern Alaska and Canada's Yukon and Northwest territories. They gather every other year to maintain ties with family and friends; keep traditional food, dance, and language thriving; and tend to the governance of their Native nation.

In 1988, the Gwich'in Nation resolved to stand strong against drilling in the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The coastal plain is the calving grounds for the Porcupine caribou herd, which the Gwich'in rely on for their food security and cultural identity. Drilling activities in the coastal plain would interrupt caribou migration patterns, as well as impact denning polar bears and thousands of migratory birds. I attended this year's gathering initially to represent Audubon's support in this important campaign, but I came away with an enriched understanding of the ties that bind these people so intimately to their birds, wildlife, and landscape.

Arctic Village, called Vashraii Koo by its residents, nestles in the foothills of the Brooks Range. The village is hugged on three sides by the Arctic Refuge, which spreads to the north, west, and east in huge swaths of dramatic terrain and lakes and streams dotted with waterbirds. A few houses and buildings congregate on high ground, surrounded by tundra and the East Fork of the Chandalar River.

As a birder working for Audubon, I immediately keyed into the local birds. Young White-crowned Sparrows with brown heads tumbled around the

low tundra brush. Boreal Chickadees bubbled among the short spruce trees. A Pacific Loon hauntingly called in the twilight that is an Arctic summer night.

One morning I ventured out to find some early birds. It turned out mosquitoes are also early risers in the Arctic. I felt a bite on my hand, but resisted lowering my binoculars. I had encountered some upset redpolls, and, looking for a predator, I noticed a larger bird, reminiscent of a Gray Jay. The species identification wasn't clicking for me. As I stared, this enigmatic bird showed his profile, revealing a hooked passerine's beak. A fluffy, brownish young Northern Shrike, a lifer for me! I could understand the redpolls' concern, given the presence of this honorary raptor.

With my obvious interest in the local birds, I quickly struck up conversations with the people who live with these birds all summer. I learned the Gwich'in have recently compiled a Gwich'in language bird book, complete with descriptions of bird songs. English speakers know that Barred Owls ask "who cooks for whom," and Song Sparrows make requests of maids and teakettles, but the Arctic Refuge birds around the village speak Gwich'in. The Fox Sparrow soothes troubled hearts by singing "don't worry my friend, it will be okay" and the White-crowned Sparrow appeals to the local Gwich'in to come pray in church on Sundays.

We are all connected by the birds we often think of as "ours." Next time you see a White-crowned Sparrow, think of a person in the high Arctic singing out a Gwich'in phrase that, while you may not understand the language, you would instantly identify as the sparrow's melody. If a Northern Shrike appears in your neighborhood, think about how it may have come from Arctic Village, at the edge of the Arctic Refuge.

Realize too that the people who care for "your" birds all summer rely on wild places such as the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge for their food security and cultural identity. Arctic bird songs, translated into any language, collectively tell us that now is the time to set aside, permanently, the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge from oil and gas development, once and for all, forever protected. ■

## Speak Up for the Arctic Refuge

The coastal plain of the refuge hosts more than 200 species of birds, as well as polar bears, musk oxen, wolves, and the 197,000-animal Porcupine caribou herd during the calving season. Send a letter to your members of Congress telling them you support permanent protection for the incredible Arctic Refuge coastal plain today:

<http://bit.ly/2ddvXSD>. ■



The Arctic Refuge holds the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd. *Photograph by David Shaw*

## 17<sup>th</sup> Alaska Bird Conference

December 6–8, 2016

Registration for the 2016 Alaska Bird Conference is open. Every two years, researchers and managers convene to report on all aspects of bird biology, management, and conservation in Alaska. The Prince William Sound Science Center is pleased to host the 17<sup>th</sup> Alaska Bird Conference at the Cordova Center in Cordova, Alaska. For more information or to register visit [www.alaskabirdconference.org](http://www.alaskabirdconference.org). ■



Trumpeter Swans. *Photograph by Milo Burcham*

# Audubon ALASKA

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## Make a Birder Happy: Audubon Hats and Plush Birds

Is there a birder in your life? Audubon Alaska has some great gifts! Our new hats feature our 2016 Bird of the Year: the charismatic Boreal Chickadee, which lives in Alaska year-round. New this year are Audubon plush birds that sing, a fun way to encourage young birders. A portion of the proceeds support Audubon Alaska's conservation efforts, so your favorite birder will know they are helping birds with your gift. Visit [www.AudubonAlaska.org](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org) or contact Heidi at 907-276-7034 or [hdecoeur@audubon.org](mailto:hdecoeur@audubon.org).



Hats are available in  
five different colors.



We have Black-capped  
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### WatchList Quiz Bird

Can you identify  
this species from  
the WatchList?

Answer on page 6.

