



# Audubon ALASKA News

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

## The Southeast Alaska Birding Trail: A Guide to the Southeast's Natural Wonders

Southeast Alaska boasts more than 350 bird species, including the highest densities of Marbled Murrelets and Bald Eagles in the world. In spring, hundreds of thousands of shorebirds stop to feed in the Southeast on their way to their breeding grounds in the Arctic. Tens of thousands of colonial seabirds dot the coast in the summer. Endemics such as Queen Charlotte Goshawks and Prince of Wales Spruce Grouse thrive in the region's ancient forests.

In addition to the vibrant and prolific birdlife, Southeast Alaska is home to rugged mountains, thousands of maritime islands, spectacular glacial fjords, highly productive estuaries, and towering old-growth trees. Throughout the Tongass National Forest, Glacier Bay National Park, and other stellar public lands, visitors find abundant fish and wildlife including five salmon species, black and brown bears, and endemic mammals such as Sitka black-tailed deer and Alexander Archipelago wolves.

This region is an ideal backdrop for Alaska's first birding trail. Like birding trails in other states, the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail will be virtual, taking the form of a guide to birding and wildlife hotspots across the archipelago with routes and options for finding numerous species. Maps will highlight key places for birdwatching and wildlife-watching to guide both Alaskans and out-of-state travelers. The virtual trail will also provide a wealth of information about local outfitters, gear, and other amenities available at various sites.

Audubon Alaska is proud to be collaborating with Juneau Audubon Society, the US Forest Service, and other knowledgeable partners on this project. We are currently in the development stage, which entails designing the trail concept, working with local experts to identify the best birding sites, and assessing access and services for those sites. A major component of the next phase is gathering input from Southeast Alaska communities about the extent to which they would like to be involved in the trail.

*continued on page 3*



### ALASKA WATCHLIST SPECIES

#### Kittlitz's Murrelet

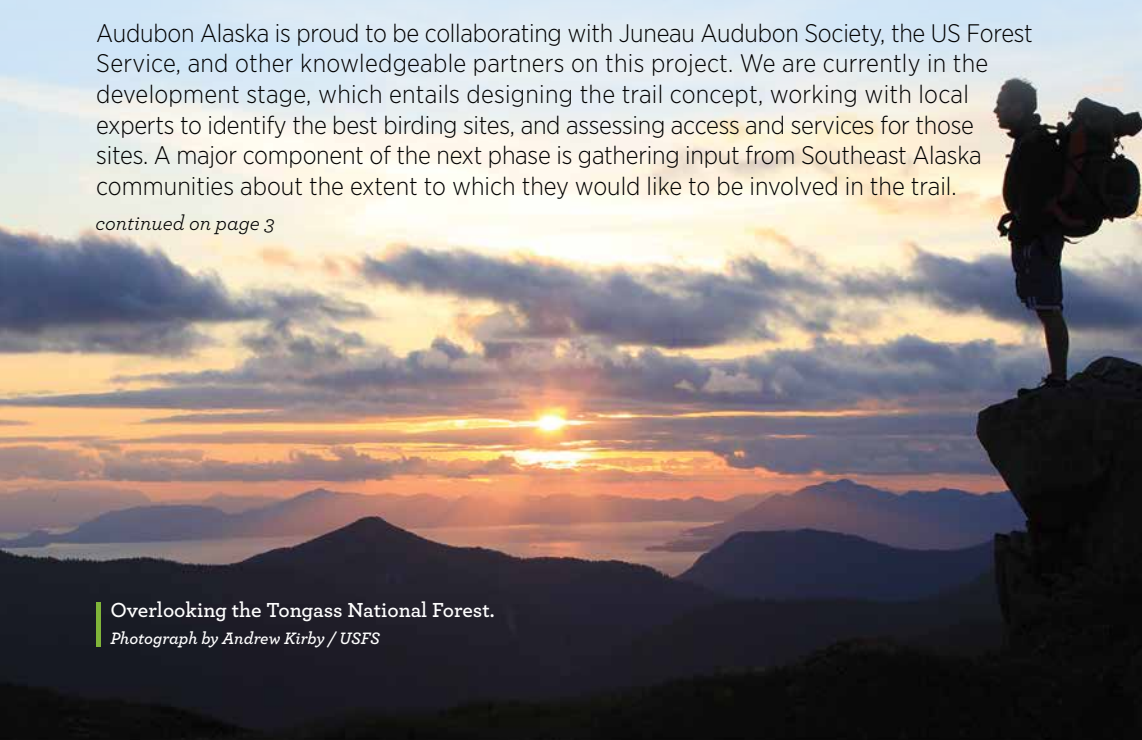
*Brachyramphus brevirostris*

These small alcids are often found in fjords with glacial influence including Glacier Bay, Icy Bay, and Prince William Sound. Kittlitz's Murrelet populations declined until about 2000, but they appear to have stabilized. The species remains on the Alaska WatchList Red List of vulnerable and declining species. Principal threats to this bird include oil spills, habitat change (such as melting glaciers), and mortality from avian predators.

*Photograph on masthead by Milo Burcham*

## INSIDE

- Another Migration ..... 2
- Chapter Happenings..... 4
- Teshkepkuk Lake: A Wildlife Safe Haven ..... 5
- Audubon Is Flying to Court for Izembek ..... 5
- People of Audubon ..... 6
- 2018 Bird of the Year ..... 6
- Our New Ecological Atlas Takes Flight ..... 7
- Join Us in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge ..... 8



Overlooking the Tongass National Forest.

*Photograph by Andrew Kirby / USFS*



For more than 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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*Policy Director*

**Heidi DeCoeur**

*Office and Finance Manager*

**Max Goldman**

*Arctic Marine Ecologist*

**Elisabeth Gustafson**

*Communications Manager*

**Erika Knight**

*GIS/Data Analyst*

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*Deputy Director*

**Melanie Smith**

*Conservation Science Director*

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*GIS Biologist*

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**John Schoen**

**LaVerne Smith**

**Anne Wilkas**

**Evie Witten**

### **Audubon Alaska**

431 West Seventh Ave., Suite 101

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

907-276-7034 (tel)

907-276-5069 (fax)

Website:

[www.AudubonAlaska.org](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org)

Newsletter design and layout by

Eric Cline of TerraGraphica



## DIRECTOR'S VIEWPOINT

# Another Migration

*By Nils Warnock*

It astounds me to think that I have had the fortune of being the executive director of Audubon Alaska for eight years (come June). Equally astounding is the thought of leaving this profoundly important conservation organization, but after discussing with my family, my staff, and my board, I have decided that it is time for me to step aside. Audubon Alaska is embarking on a new five-year plan in a markedly different political environment from when I began, and the time is right for us to implement a bold vision moving forward with new leadership.

Having just returned from an Audubon Alaska sponsored trip to the Galápagos Islands and contemplating the conservation of the islands versus Alaska, the long-term vision the Ecuadorians have had in conserving the Galápagos is impressive. The waters surrounding the islands, as well as the islands themselves, are clean, well-managed, and wildlife is plentiful. You can walk up to within a few feet of breeding seabirds, lounging iguanas, basking penguins, and other amazing creatures. Ecuador has invested in its wildlife and wildlands and it pays them back many times as hundreds of thousands of visitors come each year to explore, guided by residents of the Galápagos. Here in Alaska, an area equally impressive in terms of wildlife and wildlands, we could and should do the same - invest in tourism and our renewable natural resources on the same scale as we do in oil development.

Reflecting on my tenure, I have had the fortune of working with passionate Audubon staff, an engaged state board of directors, and five vibrant state chapters, all in a profoundly wild and beautiful state. As a team, we have made significant accomplishments, in large part by using science to create sound and effective policy. Our conservation mapping efforts have led to many millions of acres of the most ecologically sensitive areas of waters and land of Alaska being protected from unrelenting resource extraction efforts. Our ecological atlases of the Tongass and the Arctic Ocean, our WatchList of threatened and vulnerable birds, and our growing list of Important Bird Areas are influencing management policies at the state and federal level. Further, we have considerably grown our reach and donor base. We have helped lead conservation efforts in the state and we will continue to do so into the future.

Looking forward, I plan to stay on at Audubon through the fiscal year (the end of June). I remain brimming with gratitude for the passionate supporters like you who understand the importance of Alaska's incredible wildlife and wildlands. Alaska is a cornerstone of avian flyways of the world and the health of our birds depends on the protection of Alaska's wild places. As we stand strong in the defense of birds and their habitats, Audubon needs your support. I trust that long after I am gone, you will continue to donate to Audubon Alaska's conservation efforts. Your actions and contributions make a huge impact. Thank you for all you do.

Before I leave, I will be in contact with many of you. However, please feel free to contact me at [nwarnock@audubon.org](mailto:nwarnock@audubon.org) or 907-276-7034 with any questions/comments you have in the meantime. Otherwise, Michelle LeBeau, our deputy director, and Melanie Smith, our director of conservation science (who recently celebrated her 10-year anniversary at Audubon Alaska) will help lead Audubon Alaska through the transition. ■



Nils and Sarah Warnock in the Galápagos Islands.

*The Southeast Alaska Birding Trail: A Guide to the Southeast's Natural Wonders (continued from page 1)*

“Juneau Audubon Society is excited to be a partner on the birding trail project,” said Gwen Baluss, President of the Juneau Audubon Society. “Our chapter has always been active in compiling information about Southeast Alaska birds, and the trail will expand on those efforts. It will be a great way to highlight and promote the many birding opportunities here in the Southeast.”

We hope that the birding trail will be beneficial for the birds, the forest, and the people who call Southeast Alaska home. First, an increase in birdwatching will foster a greater awareness and appreciation for birds, their habitats, and our public lands. Second, identifying the best sites will contribute to the protection of these habitats. And third, an increase in bird-related ecotourism will contribute to the local economy.

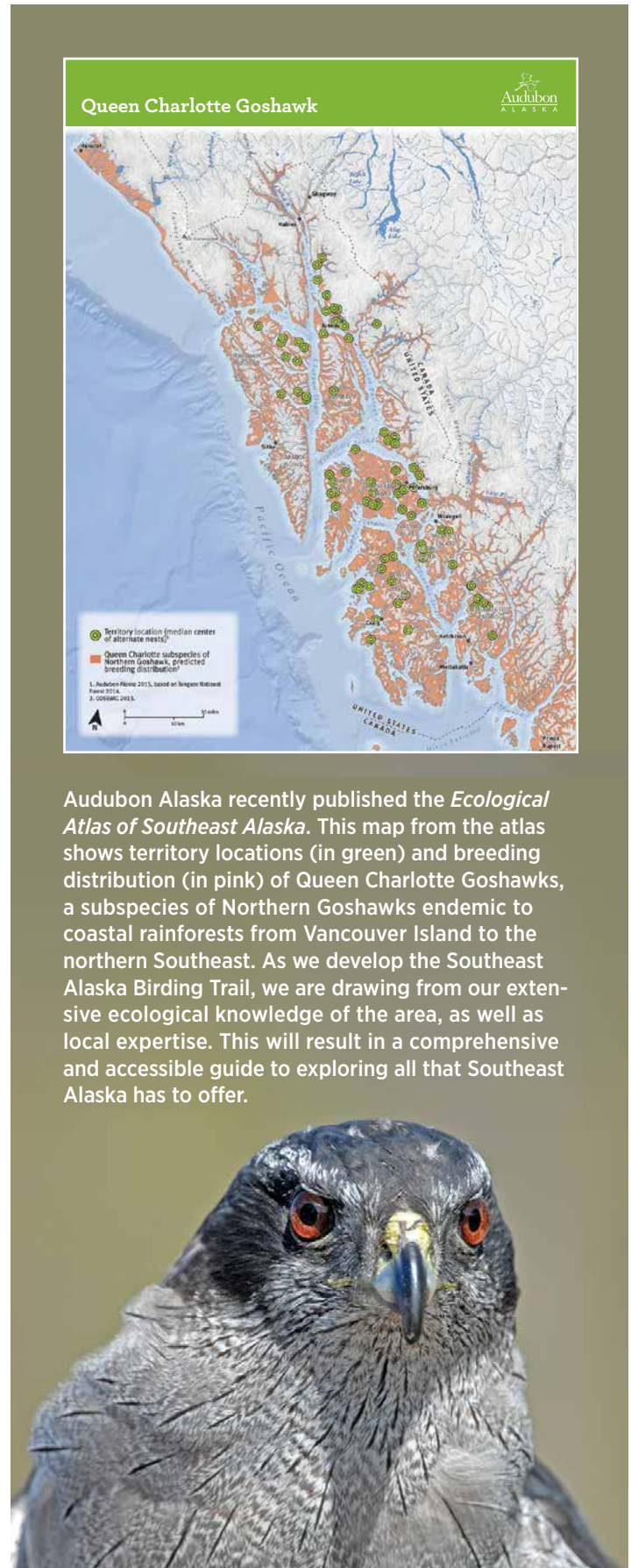


**Bald Eagle.**  
Photograph by Milo Burcham

“This effort has great potential for increasing tourism and associated jobs in our rural communities,” said Cheryl Carrothers, Wildlife Program Leader, US Forest Service – Alaska Region. “The birding trail will be a resource for Alaskans who want to expand their local birding experiences, and it will provide valuable information about potential ‘bucket list’ species for visitors from outside our area.”

Many local entities share the goal of increasing the number of independent travelers who visit the region, interact with small communities, use local vendors, and contribute dollars to the economy. Nationwide, birdwatching is a multi-million dollar industry. In 2016, 86 million Americans reported participating in wildlife-watching activities, with more than 45 million specifically watching birds. These wildlife-watchers spent about \$11.5 million on travel-related expenses and about \$64 million in equipment-related expenses for watching wildlife. Our goal is to use the birding trail to help Southeast Alaska communities tap into this interest, which will hopefully provide a boost to the region’s successful and growing tourism industry.

Birders can look out for the launch of the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail in 2020! If you would like to get involved in the development phase of this project, contact Melanie Smith, Audubon Alaska’s director of conservation science, at [masmith@audubon.org](mailto:masmith@audubon.org) or 907-276-7034. ■



Audubon Alaska recently published the *Ecological Atlas of Southeast Alaska*. This map from the atlas shows territory locations (in green) and breeding distribution (in pink) of Queen Charlotte Goshawks, a subspecies of Northern Goshawks endemic to coastal rainforests from Vancouver Island to the northern Southeast. As we develop the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail, we are drawing from our extensive ecological knowledge of the area, as well as local expertise. This will result in a comprehensive and accessible guide to exploring all that Southeast Alaska has to offer.

**Northern Goshawk.** Photograph by John Schoen

# Chapter Happenings

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

Anchorage Audubon welcomes the first day of spring with the Big Anchorage Birding Day, a team marathon that starts at 5 pm Friday, March 23rd and ends 24 hours later with a wrap-up event to compare results and award the team with the highest total species count. The annual Hawk Watch at Gunsight Mountain (Glenn Highway, Milepost 118.8) is on again, with the Anchorage Audubon weekend event scheduled for April 21-22. Just in time for spring migration, we will host a Beginning Birding class at our monthly meeting on April 19th. Anchorage Audubon meetings are held at 7 pm on the third Thursday of the month at the BP Energy Center.

Once again, Anchorage Audubon had one of the highest numbers of participants in the country for the Christmas Bird Count, with 179 people noting a record 48 species. Seventeen intrepid folks headed to Seward on February 24th for the annual winter field trip and tallied 35 species for the day. In addition to Loon Cam viewing, a summer of field trips and walks are planned, including the Potter Marsh-A-Thon Birding Smackdown. Visit the Anchorage Audubon website for specifics. ■

## Arctic Audubon Society [www.ArcticAudubon.org](http://www.ArcticAudubon.org)

The winter season is our sociable together time. We have monthly presentations or gatherings. In December, we hosted Dr. Ed Murphy for an in-depth look at how birds that overwinter in Interior Alaska manage to cope with the elements. The bird observed merrily dipping in and out of moving water, the dipper, was the most awesome and enigmatic of all.

December ended with our Christmas Bird Count, which brought out about 100 participants who found 3,179 birds. This year's highlight: the grand total number of redpolls was 35, down from last year's 3,729! This was a record low for 50 years of counting.

In January, our board developed a resolution on the proposed Ambler Road, which would cut across more than 200 miles of public and private land in the southern foothills of the Brooks Range. Contact us if you would like a copy. We also perfected the wording for the signs we will post on the Audubon-Riedel Nature Reserve later this spring. The committee crafted signs that should inform, but not antagonize, visitors to our rural reserve. Our February public presentation was Dr. Nils Warnock's "Birds in Decline: Findings from the 2017 Alaska WatchList." In March, Dr. Philip Martin presented on the birds of Madagascar. ■

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

**Programs and Field Trips.** The Juneau chapter enjoys monthly public presentations from October through April. This year, we had a strong focus on learning more about our resident and migratory birds in Southeast Alaska. Topics included the Juneau Audubon Society Tree Swallow nest project, Juneau local bird photography, Alaska WatchList species, and birds of the nearby Yukon Territory. Our last program in April will be a potluck and a review of local shorebird photos to help us get ready for spring migration. For spring, we are preparing for bird walks every Saturday from mid-April to early June.



Mary Lou King in the midst of berry making. She makes 15-20 dozen jars of jam/jelly for the Juneau Audubon Society fundraiser every year.

## Juneau Audubon Society Founder Honored.

We are proud to announce that Mary Lou King is being inducted into the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame this May. Mary Lou recently retired from the Juneau Audubon Society board after a remarkable and successful continuous run of over 40 years. Beyond her work with Audubon, she has been an advocate for conservation and natural history learning in Alaska for more than 50 years. She has published numerous books on topics ranging from hiking to birding field guides, created student outdoor curricula, and promoted cultural learning. Thanks and congratulations Mary Lou! ■

## Sign up for Our Monthly E-Newsletter

Today's news cycle can make your head spin. The Trump administration began its assault on our public lands on day one, and the barrage has continued. So much happens on a daily basis that it can be hard to keep it all straight. Sign up for Audubon Alaska's e-newsletters to receive concise monthly recaps, as well as information about actions you can take to stand up for birds and the wild places they need. We also announce upcoming events and birding opportunities. Visit [www.AudubonAlaska.org](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org) to sign up!



American Dipper.  
Photograph by Milo Bircham

## Teshkepuk Lake: A Wildlife Safe Haven

The Western Arctic's National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA) might seem like the last place on earth you'd expect to find wilderness values. However, the wetlands in the NPRA (like the Teshkepuk Lake wetlands complex) are critical breeding and nesting grounds for millions of birds that migrate here from all corners of the globe. A cohort of iconic Arctic mammals gathers in this biologically rich area, including caribou, muskoxen, and polar bears.

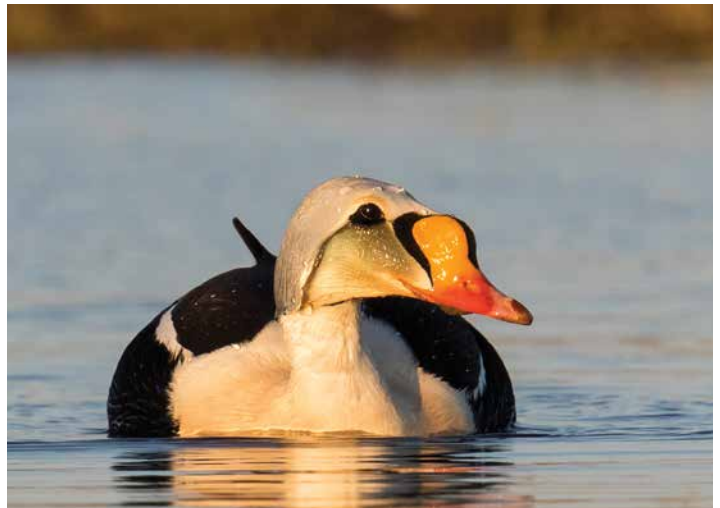
A new Audubon Alaska report, the *2017 Assessment of Wildlife Values in the Teshkepuk Lake Wetlands Complex within the NPRA*, explores the immense ecological value of the Teshkepuk Lake wetlands complex. Here are some highlights from the report:

- ❑ Up to 100,000 geese flock to the Teshkepuk Lake wetlands complex every summer.
- ❑ About 40,000 Greater White-fronted Geese, 37,000 Pacific Brant, and thousands of Cackling Geese and Snow Geese use the area for breeding and molting.
- ❑ Millions of shorebirds breed in the NPRA, with 600,000 breeding in the Teshkepuk Lake area alone.
- ❑ All four species of eiders nest in the wetlands complex, including Steller's and Spectacled eiders, which are threatened under the Endangered Species Act.
- ❑ Many polar bears den and forage in areas surrounding Teshkepuk Lake.
- ❑ The area provides calving areas, insect relief, and seasonal movement corridors for the Teshkepuk Caribou Herd (current population estimate: 39,000).
- ❑ The Teshkepuk Caribou Herd provides approximately 95 percent of the caribou harvested by the communities of Utqiagvik and Atkasuk and approximately 85 percent of the caribou harvested by Nuiqsut.

Read the full report at [www.bit.ly/TLake-Report](http://www.bit.ly/TLake-Report). ■



■ Caribou. Photograph by Bob Wick / BLM



■ King Eider. Photograph by Mick Thompson

■ Brant.  
Photograph by  
Enrique Patino / NOAA



### Audubon Is Flying to Court for Izembek

National Audubon Society is one of nine conservation groups suing the Department of the Interior (DOI) over its actions in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. The lawsuit challenges the legality of a land transfer agreement between DOI and King Cove Corporation, which is being used to facilitate the building of a road through vital bird habitat in Izembek.

"It's hard to overstate how important Izembek is to migrating waterfowl. Its location along key avian migration routes, as well as the presence of world-class eelgrass beds, makes Izembek one of the most significant bird habitats in the world," said Nils Warnock, Executive Director of Audubon Alaska. "A road through Izembek is a bad bet for Alaska's birds and our public lands."

Stay posted on the status of the lawsuit by signing up for our e-newsletter at [www.AudubonAlaska.org](http://www.AudubonAlaska.org). ■

# People of Audubon

## BOARD



Audubon Alaska welcomes **Jenna Hamm** to the board. Jenna and her husband, Simon, are the owner-operators of Camp Denali and North Face Lodge, her family's natural history vacation lodge inside Denali National Park. Wintering just outside the Park, she stays busy with summer preparations, local school board membership, and keeping up with two wonderful children, Danika (11) and Silas (8).

Jenna spent 12 years in New Hampshire and Vermont from middle school through college, and later on went to graduate school at Antioch University New England where she earned an MS in Environmental Studies, Conservation Biology. Inspired by historic photographs and observations in Denali National Park, she studied the rate of upslope movement of white spruce treeline during recent climate warming for her thesis project. These days, she channels her scientific interests toward making Camp Denali and North Face Lodge effective platforms for educating and inspiring Park visitors. ■



Audubon Alaska welcomes **Anne Wilkas** to the board. Since Anne arrived in the 49th state almost 30 years ago, she has been involved in Alaska conservation. She has served on the boards of Alaska Center for the Environment (now Alaska Center), Alaska Conservation Foundation, Alaska Geographic, and Trustees for Alaska. Her career as a public interest lawyer and high school teacher has solidified

her desire to inspire the next generation of leaders to prioritize action on climate change, socioeconomic justice, and education funding. Currently, she serves as a pro bono attorney and speaker in high school and college classes. Anne and her husband are raising two teenage boys in Anchorage, and together they play outdoors and travel as much as possible. ■



We thank **Nancy DeWitt** (left), **Mason Morfit** (center), and **Dave Secord** (right) for their service on our board. All three termed off this past year. Throughout their tenure as board members, they brought valuable expertise and strong leadership to Audubon Alaska. We look forward to staying connected with them! ■



## Audubon Alaska's 2018 Bird of the Year

Our new Bird of the Year is the striking Pacific Golden-Plover. These impressive little shorebirds breed in western Alaska and eastern Russia and make incredibly long nonstop flights across the Pacific to winter in warmer climes. As our 'spokesbird' this year, the Pacific Golden-Plover highlights our work to protect Bristol Bay, a vital habitat for this species and so many others.

Help protect the wild places that Pacific Golden-Plovers and other birds need by making a donation to Audubon Alaska. **Donate today to get your Pacific Golden-Plover sticker!**

## Answer to WatchList Quiz

Orange-crowned Warbler

*Oreothlypis celata*



Despite its name, the orange feathers on the Orange-crowned Warbler's head are almost never visible. These songbirds are usually solitary, but sometimes they will loosely associate with flocks of other birds. In all seasons, they tend to stay fairly low in bushes or small trees, flicking their tails frequently as they search among the foliage for insects. This species has declined in North America in recent decades. *Photograph by Milo Burcham*

## Our New Ecological Atlas Takes Flight

The completion of our two-year long process to produce the *Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas* was really just the beginning. The atlas fledged in August 2017, and since then, it has taken flight into many different arenas. The atlas is now being utilized by numerous land managers, researchers, policymakers, and community members.

**Outreach.** The atlas is a compilation of hard-earned data collected over decades by Arctic researchers, delivered in a visually compelling and accessible way similar to a coffee-table book of Arctic science. This compendium of carefully crafted maps, striking photos, and thorough natural history has attracted a lot of attention—earning kudos from National Geographic, Esri (a leading GIS software company), the Secretary of the Interior, and many others. In order to share this tool with as wide an audience as possible, Audubon Alaska distributed over 1,000 digital and hard copies of the atlas, presented at numerous conferences and government agency meetings, and hosted multiple public events showcasing the publication. The atlas is available free for download on our website: [www.bitly.com/eco-atlas](http://www.bitly.com/eco-atlas).

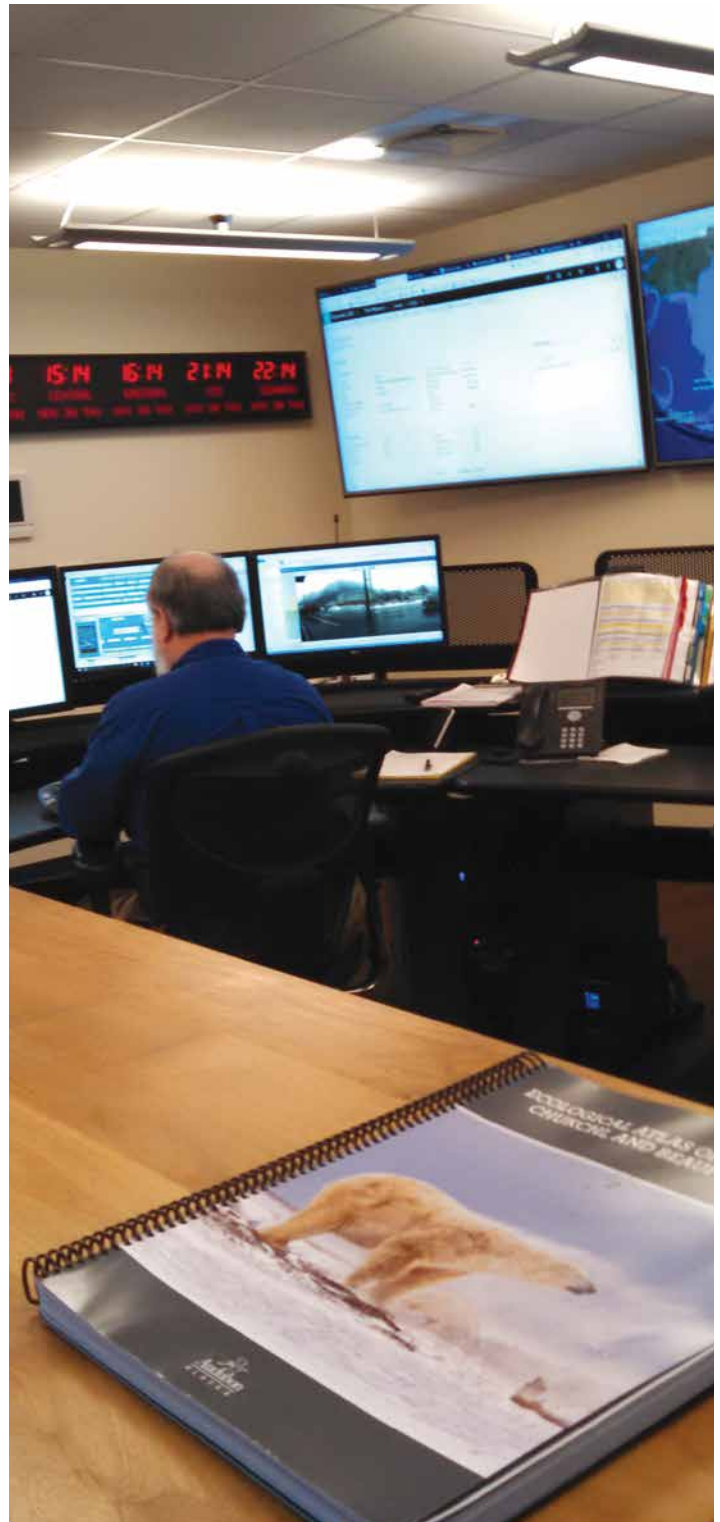
**Data.** The atlas itself is but one view into the large geodatabase behind this project. In the coming months, Axiom Data Science will create an interactive data-viewing platform hosted by the Alaska Ocean Observing System within their Arctic Data Portal. Users will be able to view and download data, as well as review attributes and metadata. We are also working with NOAA to add our data into their Arctic oil spill response tool, the Environmental Response Management Application (ERMA).

**Conservation.** These spatial data provide detailed information about physical and biological functions and patterns. In collaboration with Oceana, we are harnessing the richness of these data to identify ecological hotspots of the three seas. We are also assessing vulnerability to stressors such as vessel traffic and offshore energy. Stay tuned for this publication later in 2018.

Having the solid foundation of spatial data and ecological knowledge captured in the *Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas* sets us up well for responding to resource issues in Alaska's Arctic seas. The adventures of our newly fledged atlas are only beginning and we look forward to watching its impact on Arctic science and policy grow over the coming years. ■

### By the Numbers

- 1.7 million square miles of ocean analyzed
- 50 Arctic species highlighted
- 131 maps produced
- 350+ map data sources from 50+ data providers
- 185 composite GIS layers in the final maps
- 1,800+ references cited
- 20+ public presentations delivered
- 1,000+ copies distributed



The atlas is always close at hand for Captain Ed Page and Information Specialist Leo DeMeo (pictured) of the Marine Exchange of Alaska, a real-time vessel GPS system that keeps track of the position of all vessels in Alaska's waters. They keep an atlas on the main table so that if an offshore emergency comes up, they can immediately flip through it to quickly find what ecological values might be at risk.

**Audubon** ALASKA

431 West Seventh Ave., Suite 101  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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## Join Us in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

**Rafting the Marsh Fork and Canning Rivers**  
June 25 - July 2, 2018

Take the wilderness trip of a lifetime! This exclusive, small group adventure is set in a spectacular expanse of towering mountains drained by pristine rivers. Enjoy excellent hiking and phenomenal bird and wildlife watching against one of the most stunning backdrops on the planet. Led by two experienced river guides from Wilderness Birding Adventures and escorted by Michelle LeBeau, Deputy Director of Audubon Alaska, experience a place and time untouched by modern life. Email Michelle at [mlebeau@audubon.org](mailto:mlebeau@audubon.org) to register. Spots are going fast, register soon! ■

### WatchList Quiz Bird

Can you identify  
this species from  
the WatchList?

Answer on page 6.

