



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

## Audubon’s New Strategic Plan Is Ready to Soar in Alaska

By David Krause, Interim Executive Director

Over the past year, Audubon has crafted an exciting new five-year strategic plan. The aptly named Flight Plan focuses on three core strategic drivers: (1) a hemispheric approach to bird conservation, (2) finding climate crisis solutions, and (3) ensuring all people feel included and empowered in the movement to protect birds. Audubon Alaska is well-positioned to advance these efforts. Here’s how.

As I write this, our teammate River Gates is on the ground in the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, a globally unique wetlands complex and one of the most important places in the world for birds. River and our partners will outfit eight American Golden-Plovers with GPS devices to track their awe-inspiring migration to South America. The information gathered will not only contribute to a greater scientific understanding of their migration, but will also allow us to tell stories connecting people, cultures, and places to the fragile and endangered Western Arctic (see Page 2).

Our efforts will also increasingly look at how we might change systems across the hemisphere for a bird-friendly and climate-smart future. Tory Elmore’s creation of the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail app (see Page 3) exemplifies this. Birding trails offer a new model for how economic systems can build around the ecological health and functionality of bioregions. We hope Tory’s app will help drive regenerative tourism and inspire others to think about how nature can be the foundation of sustainable development practices.

Over the coming months, we’ll be working with partners and Audubon colleagues from across the hemisphere to further operationalize the Flight Plan. With the compounding challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, it’s never been more important to deliver for nature and people. ■



### Aleutian Tern

*Onychoprion aleuticus*

The Aleutian Tern is an uncommon bird, nesting around the Bering Sea and nearby waters, including much of the southern Alaskan coast and (of course) the Aleutian Islands. It may associate with the Arctic Tern, but it is far less numerous. Its habits have not been thoroughly studied and its winter range was completely unknown until the late 1980s. Now we know that many Aleutian Terns spend the winter near the Equator in the western Pacific.

The Aleutian Tern was just celebrated in summer 2023 during the 12th annual Yakutat Tern Festival, during which Audubon Alaska launched the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail as a mobile app! (More on Page 3.)

Photo: Patty McGann/Flickr (CC BY-NC 2.0)

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Birding in Southeast Alaska. Photo: Lauren Cusimano



## ALASKA

For more than 45 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.

### Audubon Alaska Staff

**David Krause**

*Interim Executive Director*

**Lauren Cusimano**

*Communications Manager*

**Tory Elmore**

*GIS Analyst*

**Kassandra Smith**

*Finance and Operations Associate*

### Audubon Alaska Board Members

**Heather Hardcastle**

**Karen Hardigg**

**Cindi Jacobson**

**Aaron Lang**

**Scott Rupp**

**Dave Secord**

**Evie Witten**

### Audubon Alaska

431 West Seventh Ave., Suite 205  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
907-276-7034

Website:

[ak.audubon.org](http://ak.audubon.org)

Newsletter design and layout by  
Eric Cline of TerraGraphica

### Land Acknowledgment

Audubon Alaska recognizes that we work throughout the ancestral and unceded territory of the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska. Our office is located within Dena'ina e'ne'na, the traditional land of the Dena'ina Athabascan, but our work spans the entire state of Alaska. We owe deep gratitude to the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska for their continued care and stewardship of the land on which we work.



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# American Golden-Plover Southbound Migration Project

By Lauren Cusimano

The American Golden-Plover—a medium-sized, black-bellied wading bird—makes one of the longest migration journeys of any bird. The species completes an elliptical migration pattern, with a post-breeding (southbound) transoceanic route over the western Atlantic, and a pre-breeding (northbound) mid-continental route through the Americas. Its journey starts in the Alaskan Arctic, courses through northern Canada to the northeastern United States, darts across the Atlantic Ocean, and winds up in Argentina. To return—no big deal—it cuts through northern South America, across the Gulf of Mexico, through the middle contiguous U.S., then Canada, and returns to the Arctic tundra.



Photo: Mick Thompson

And how do we know all this? Through science-driven, data-collecting efforts like the upcoming American Golden-Plover Southbound Migration Project.

Audubon Alaska, in collaboration with Audubon Boreal and Audubon Americas, and in partnership with Manomet, Inc., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Alaska region, and other organizations, will equip eight American Golden-Plovers with 3.5-gram PinPoint GPS Argos tags (the world's smallest GPS Argos tags). Tags will be fitted while on the nest during early incubation at Teshekpuk Lake Special Use Area in the National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska in June.

The project will highlight the importance of migratory bird habitat by following the migration journey. Think post-breeding locations, staging areas, and stopover sites, and how the conservation of those places is vital to complete transoceanic migrations. This summer, during the post-breeding period, we'll possibly detect the marked birds in the foothills of the Brooks Range or the Foxe Basin Peninsula in Canada. In late summer, focus may shift to Hudson Bay and spots in New England. And from August through December, we'll be following along through the upper Amazon in Brazil and coastal grasslands in Uruguay.

By tracking these eight individuals, we hope to underscore important work, like the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring (PRISM), an international collaborative science and bird population estimate and trend monitoring program, and its current implementation in the Americas. On the conservation side, we'll spotlight threats like oil and gas development, human disturbance, and climate change to the Arctic tundra—an essential region for breeding and migration.

Finally, we'll tell the story of accelerating declines of North America's shorebirds, and how urgent conservation solutions are needed. The American Golden-Plover is a focal species for Atlantic and Midcontinent shorebird initiatives, and we'll share what programs, actions, and volunteer opportunities may be available. Stay tuned to Audubon Alaska's communications for more. ■

# The Southeast Alaska Birding Trail App Is Here!

By Tory Elmore

As the plane touched down on the runway in Yakutat, the captain's voice came over the loudspeaker, announcing that it was 9:48 a.m. local time, that the sun was shining, and, at long last, that it was safe to use our cell phones. I scrolled to the settings on my iPhone and flicked off airplane mode, anticipating the familiar buzz as work emails and text messages from my mother trickled in. Instead, "SOS" appeared in tiny letters at the top right corner of the illuminated screen. *That's right*, I thought, *no service*.

No service or cellular data are common themes across Southeast Alaska. Even in Juneau, the region's biggest city and the state capital, tourists experience unreliable coverage. In the rural towns across the region and Prince of Wales, Revillagigedo, and other remote islands, coverage can be practically nonexistent. This is one of the major issues Audubon Alaska sought to address in creating the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail mobile application.

The trail itself—not a physical trail but rather a virtual guide to birding sites across Southeast—represents five years of visioning, research, outreach, and compilation, but without a working internet connection, there was no way for Southeast visitors to access it.

Enter the mobile app, which contains all the information visitors need to bird their way through Southeast sans internet. The app features an offline basemap and information about

the 18 communities and nearly 200 sites comprising the trail. This includes written directions to each site, community-level species lists detailing seasonal abundance for more than 300 species, and information about amenities like parking, restrooms, trails, accessibility, and fees. All this information is downloaded to your phone the first time you open the app (yes, you do need to be connected to cellular data or wifi for the initial download), so you can access it offline—anytime, anywhere.

Other offline perks include feature searches, community bookmarks, and access to your current location. Of course, there are some additional features that work best while connected to the internet. These include navigation to trail sites via Google Maps, access to birding hotspots and data via the eBird website and eBird app, and links to local resources—like national, state, and local parks offices, chambers of commerce, local medical centers, and more—via the Audubon Alaska website.

There are more features in the works for the mobile application, currently in version 1.1. Updates this summer will include a more robust offline search widget and detailed basemaps for individual communities, providing high-resolution aerial imagery while keeping download sizes small. For next season, expect to see expanded trip planning features, such as species and site wish lists, recommendations, and discounts for local businesses—like guides and outfitters—and a birding trail passport for keeping track of the sites and communities you have visited.

The Southeast Alaska Birding Trail mobile application is currently available on phones and tablets in the App Store for iOS and Google Play for Android. ■



## People of Audubon

### BOARD

#### Heather Hardcastle



Born and raised in Juneau, Alaska, Heather Hardcastle grew up commercial salmon fishing with her family at the mouth of the Taku River. She guided tour boat trips and studied whale behavior in Alaska, Mexico, and Hawai'i before earning a Master of Environmental Management degree at Duke University and then operating the sustainable fish company Taku River Reds with family and friends for 15 years.

Heather helped to found the Salmon Beyond Borders campaign at SalmonState in 2013, and now advises the campaign. In 2020, Heather received the Conservation Leadership Award from the Wilburforce Foundation, and in 2021 she and fellow project leads were awarded the U.S. Water Prize from the U.S. Water Alliance for the *When the Salmon Spoke* digital production. In addition to serving on the Audubon Alaska advisory board, Heather serves on the Alaska Mining Impacts Network Council.

Heather's nickname has long been "Auntie Feather" because of her love of birds, and she also enjoys open-water swims, skiff rides, and alpine hikes. Heather and her husband, young daughter, and two border collies migrate each year between a home on Southern Pomo lands (Sonoma County, California) and a cabin in Lingít Aaní (Taku Harbor, Southeast Alaska). ■

#### Karen Hardigg



Karen Hardigg is an independent consultant offering facilitation and workshop design, policy analysis, and strategic advice with an emphasis on community-based conservation and rural economic development. Clients have included the U.S. Department of Agriculture, The Nature Conservancy, Aspen Institute, Foundation for America's Public Lands, Western Forestry Leadership Coalition, and American Forests among others.

Prior to starting her own consulting business, Karen led the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition for five years, where she grew the coalition from a part-time staff person to a team of five and an organization with national recognition. Previously she worked in Southeast Alaska for nearly a decade for The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service, and The Wilderness Society focusing on sustainable forest management and community wellbeing.

Karen's interest in conservation began as a kid exploring parks around her hometown of Portland, which led her to specialize in environmental studies and policy in college and graduate school. She lives in Portland with her husband Nick and her two kids and is addicted to all things soccer. ■



### Save the Date for the Alaska Bird Conference 2023

The Alaska Bird Conference is back! The theme? "Bring Birds Back," too—designed to highlight the peril many migratory bird species face today as they transit between their breeding, migratory stopover, and wintering areas.

The 21st annual ABC will be held from December 11 to 14, 2023, at Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage. The four-day event will feature keynote speakers, short lectures, award ceremonies, and an evening of "Conservation and Arts" at the Anchorage Museum.

ABC dates to 1985 when it was first held in Anchorage. The event organizers would like to acknowledge the gathering will be held on the traditional lands of the Dena'ina Athabascans. ■

# People of Audubon

## STAFF

### David Krause—Interim Executive Director



David has extensive experience living and working throughout Alaska. Much of his professional experience has focused on developing solutions that simultaneously achieve public health, community development, and conservation objectives. Prior to joining Audubon, he worked on federal land management and

energy policy for The Wilderness Society. David has also worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on remote Yukon River tributaries and for the Wild Salmon Center in Oregon and Alaska. From 2017 to 2020, he served as an appointed member of the BLM Alaska Resource Advisory Council. David earned his undergraduate degree at Cornell University and holds a Master of Environmental Management and a Master of Public Health from Yale University. When not working to protect birds and their habitats, David enjoys angling and gardening. ■

### Tory Elmore—GIS Analyst



Tory is a GIS Developer and Cartographer with a conservation background and a passion for storytelling through maps. She began her GIS career in 2012 with an internship at the Environmental Protection Agency's Atlantic Coastal Environmental Sciences Division Laboratory, analyzing the relationship

between residential vegetation patterns and breeding bird presence in the Woonasquatucket River basin. Tory received her bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Brown University in 2013, during which time her thesis research on using mobile GIS applications to promote community-based management of urban greenspaces was published in Applied GIS. After graduation, she began working for The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC), California's largest nonprofit preserve system, as an environmental educator. She went on to found TWC's GIS program, ultimately moving into the role of GIS Manager in 2016. She is excited to once again be using GIS to better understand and advocate for birds and their habitats. ■

### Lauren Cusimano—Communications Manager



Lauren manages Audubon Alaska's communication strategy including the website, electronic and print communications, social media, and other outreach initiatives. As an editor and journalist from Phoenix, Lauren has covered culture, music, and food, as well as food waste and sustainability. She graduated

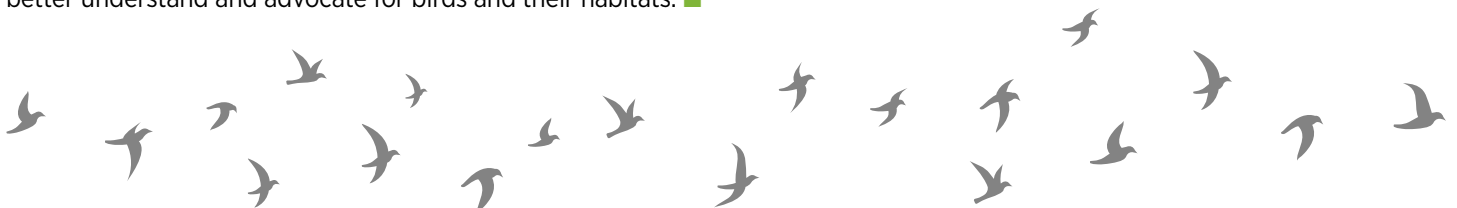
from the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication (where she later became an instructor). But though her background is in journalism, her personal interests are in conservation and birds. Lauren first moved to Juneau, Alaska/Áak'w Kwáan Territory in the summer of 2021 to do communications for Southeast Alaska Conservation Council and the Juneau Audubon Society. She now resides in Anchorage. Besides birding or working to protect birds, catch her cycling, reselling, or singing to her cat Fred Meyer. ■

### Kassandra Smith—Finance and Operations Associate



Kassandra joined Audubon Alaska in May 2018 with a varied background in corporate legal support, office administration, customer service, and tech support. As a longtime resident of Anchorage, Alaska, the traditional lands of the Dena'ina Athabaskan people, Kassandra has a deep love for her community and an under-

standing of the unique challenges facing the state. Outside of the office, Kassandra is passionate about civic engagement and has worked as a poll worker in every election since she became eligible to do so. She dreams of being selected to serve on a jury so she can spread the word about jury nullification. She has a deep love of reading and is trying her hand at binding books (with mixed success). She shares her home with a charcuterie board of animals: two cats, Sauvignon Blanc (wine) and Havarti (cheese), and her dog Bresaola (cured Italian beef). ■





Answer to Q3. Photo: Tania Simpson/Audubon Photography Awards

## Bird Trivia

By Lauren Cusimano

**Q1: Which species is one of the few that winters in Asia and breeds in North America?**

- A. Brown Pelican
- B. Bluethroat
- C. Canada Goose
- D. Long-tailed Shrike

**Q2: Which species often winters in Africa?**

- A. African Winter Bird
- B. Northern Pygmy-Owl
- C. Northern Wheatear
- D. Red-breasted Nuthatch

**Q3: Which species has the longest migration of any hummingbird?**

- A. Rufous Hummingbird
- B. Anna's Hummingbird
- C. Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- D. Road King Hummingbird

**Q4: Which of these species is the fastest-flying shorebird?**

- A. Red Knot
- B. Maverick's Sandpiper
- C. Wilson's Snipe
- D. American Golden-Plover

Flip to the back for answers!

## Alaska's Audubon Chapters

Alaska hosts five National Audubon Society chapters where Audubon members and their families can enjoy and protect local birds and nature.

### Anchorage Audubon Society

[anchorageaudubon.org](http://anchorageaudubon.org)

The Anchorage Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization offering bird-watching field trips, monthly meetings, natural history programs, newsletters, and special events to highlight birds, wildlife, and conservation issues in Southcentral Alaska. ■

### Arctic Audubon Society

[arcticaudubon.org](http://arcticaudubon.org)

The Arctic Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization working to protect Alaskan ecosystems by encouraging research, education, and management that contributes to appreciation and good stewardship of our natural heritage. Located in Fairbanks, AAS owns the 320-acre Audubon Riedel Nature Reserve; trail mapping with signs is underway. It holds spring and summer bird walks, viewings at Tanana Valley Sandhill Crane Festival, and monthly public presentations from fall through spring. In the 1980s, AAS "adopted" the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to build an active constituency for wise management and has engaged its members, educating Alaskans on Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain permanent protections, ever since. ■



Great Blue Heron. Photo: Matt Knutson/Audubon Photography Awards

### Juneau Audubon Society

[juneau-audubon-society.org](http://juneau-audubon-society.org)

The Juneau Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization covering Southeast Alaska with a focus on birding, education, and conservation. Activities include fall-to-spring monthly programs highlighting bird science to natural history, spring-to-summer bird walks and field trips, community science gatherings like the Christmas Bird Count and Backyard Bird Count, summer internship programs, and special events like wetland cleanups and the twice-annual Berners Bay Cruise. ■

### Kodiak Audubon Society

[kodiakaudubon.blogspot.com](http://kodiakaudubon.blogspot.com)

The Kodiak Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization located on Kodiak offering bird-watching field trips, monthly meetings, educational programs, newsletters, summer guided trail hiking, Christmas Bird Count events, songbird surveys, Bald Eagle counts, college birding workshops, and more special events to highlight birds, wildlife, and conservation issues on Kodiak Island. ■

### Prince William Sound Audubon Society

[coppershorebird.com](http://coppershorebird.com)

The Prince William Sound Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization located in Cordova providing monthly educational programs about birds and nature. They are involved with the annual Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival and the annual Christmas Bird Count and work with the Prince William Sound Science Center for the Tuesday Night Talk winter lecture series. ■

# What the Roadless Rule Reinstatement Means for Birds

By Lauren Cusimano

On January 25, the National Roadless Rule was officially restored to the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska by the Biden administration. There are a couple reasons why this is important.



Red-breasted Sapsucker. Photo: Dave Shaw

The Tongass's 17 million acres—the ancestral homeland of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples—is the country's largest forest carbon sink, holding approximately 20% of all carbon stored in the United States National Forest system according to National Audubon Society's 2021 *Natural Climate Solutions Report*.

But it's also home to hundreds of species of birds thanks to 11,000 miles of shoreline, old-growth and mature forest, and multiple wetland areas. Those species include Audubon priority birds like the Marbled Murrelet, Northern Goshawk, and Spruce Grouse. Others range from Common Ravens, American Crows, and Bald Eagles to Greater Yellowlegs, multiple gull species, and songbirds like the Red-breasted Sapsucker, Swainson's Thrush, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee—all found on the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail (see Page 2).

Zooming out of Southeast, the Tongass also “hosts about 70% of the species known to occur in Alaska, or about 40% of the bird species found in North America,” according to Audubon Alaska's *Ecological Atlas of Southeast Alaska*.

So, what does the Roadless Rule reinstatement mean for birds? It fully restores Roadless Rule protections for more than 9.3 million acres of the Tongass.

The 2001-established Roadless Rule is one of the most significant conservation measures adopted to protect the United States's national forests. Applicable nationwide, it prohibits industrial logging and most road-building in intact areas of the forest system, with a few exceptions. The Tongass was protected under this national rule from the start with the Clinton administration but was exempted first under the Bush administration and later under the Trump administration. In October 2020, the Trump administration canceled the application of the nationwide Roadless Rule to more than 9 million previously protected acres in the Tongass.

But in summer 2021 following some inspiring outcry (members of the public submitted nearly half a million comments—more than 60,000 coming from Audubon members), the Biden administration announced it would “repeal or replace” the Alaska-specific Roadless Rule. And it did just that, reinstating protections on those 9 million acres of roadless areas from logging and road-building in Southeast Alaska.

Celebrate for now, but there's work to be done to make the Roadless Rule more of a Roadless Law. One solution is the Roadless Area Conservation Act (RACA) or any legislation that would permanently protect the national Roadless Rule, keeping safeguards in place for close to 60 million acres of national forest lands—and a lot of vital bird habitat. ■



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## 2023 Bird of the Year Candidates

It's that time again! Voting is open till July 31 for our 2023 Bird of the Year and we're highlighting three special candidates: the Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, and Rufous Hummingbird. Cast your vote and graphic artist Eric Cline will illustrate the winner, to be viewed at [ak.audubon.org/birds/bird-of-the-year](https://ak.audubon.org/birds/bird-of-the-year). Meet your candidates!

### Bluethroat



*Photo: William Pohley/Audubon Photography Awards*

I, a Bluethroat, am honored to be a Bird of the Year candidate. The past few years have been difficult for birds. Climate change, habitat loss, and human encroachment threaten species populations across the Arctic—and we must act now to protect our feathered friends. As Bird of the Year, I pledge to be a strong voice for conservation efforts that protect our natural habitats. ■

### Northern Wheatear



*Photo: Radovan Václav/Flickr (CC BY-NC 2.0)*

It's time for a change, and I, a female Northern Wheatear, am here to shake things up. We all know Alaska has some of the most breathtaking landscapes on Earth. As your future Bird of the Year, I will prioritize conservation efforts that not only protect our natural habitats but also address unique challenges faced by migratory birds, like me, who rely on Alaska as a crucial stopover. ■

### Rufous Hummingbird



*Photo: Walter Nussbaumer/Audubon Photography Awards*

I, the Rufous Hummingbird, am running for Bird of the Year. If you want a knack for precision, vote for me. My tiny stature is my secret weapon. Alaska is like the grand buffet of bird habitats, and I've got the perfect conservation plan: hummingbird crews constructing resorts for passing migratory birds. I would enlist Audubon Alaska to help make these small actions have massive impact. ■