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The Power of Collective Action

by Natalie Dawson, former Executive Director

Collective action is our key to success. In this newsletter, we celebrate our collaborative campaigns, where each of us plays a significant role in taking action that creates the change we want to see for birds and people across Alaska. From writing public comments, providing testimony at public meetings, exercising our right to vote, and volunteering in our communities, we become the light that filters into our shared future. Audubon supporters and advocates have submitted thousands of comments on the issues discussed in our newsletter, and we look forward to doing much more together. Now that we have spoken about protections for roadless areas on the Tongass, it's time to advocate for community development that promotes stewardship and restoration in our nation's largest forest. We highlighted the need to continue our advocacy to prevent the development of the Ambler Road, a slice through the roadless communities in the Western Arctic and the critical wintering grounds of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. We also reached out to you for your help to protect the globally significant Teshekpuk Lake wetlands complex on the North Slope, a circumpolar wetland breeding ground for millions of our world's birds. We know each action takes time and attention from everyone. Thank you for recognizing that we are stronger together, as a community, and for showing up for the places and people of Alaska. ■



Marbled Murrelet

Brachyramphus marmoratus

The Marbled Murrelet is a mysterious seabird whose behavior was relatively unknown until the 1970s. We now know it nests in the upper canopy of old-growth trees and lays one egg in a shallow depression in lichens or moss on the ground or tree branch. It's federally listed as threatened in the lower 48 states, where loss of old-growth nesting habitat from logging is a suspected cause for declines. Threats in Alaska also include logging old-growth habitat, changes in food supply, and bycatch in gillnet fisheries.

Together over 170,000 people supported restoring protections to this vital habitat during the public comment period. Our united effort gives the Marbled Murrelet and other vulnerable species a chance to have a home today and for generations to come.

Photograph on masthead by Rich MacIntosh



Industrial logging in the Tongass. Photo: Colin Arisman

INSIDE

- Teshekpuk Under Threat..... 2
- Willow Project Proposal 3
- Farewell to Natalie Dawson 3
- People of Audubon..... 4
- Alaska's Audubon Chapters.....6
- Bird Trivia 6
- Climate Stories..... 7
- Bird of the Year Candidates..... 8



ALASKA

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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Teshekpuk Under Threat

By David Krause

The Teshekpuk Lake Special Area is under threat from a massive new oil field proposed by ConocoPhillips Alaska Incorporated. Known as the Willow project, this development would have detrimental impacts on the region's ecological and cultural values, and the world's climate.

Located in the northeast corner of the poorly-named National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area is a wetlands complex of profound global importance. Millions of migratory birds travel to the region each year to nest, stage, and molt before dispersing throughout the world to overwinter. For decades, the lands and waters of this region have been safe from oil development. Willow, however, would be the first incursion into this designated area. Roads, for example, would inhibit the movement of wildlife, impact hydrologic functionality and permafrost integrity, and spread dust and invasive species, among a host of other impacts.

The Willow project was initially approved under the Trump Administration but two lawsuits challenged the project's environmental analysis. In August 2021 the court found the approval to be illegal. Now, the government is gearing up to reanalyze the project's design.

In addition to avian species of conservation concern, like the Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*), the project also presents significant risks to the Teshekpuk Caribou Herd. The smallest of the North Slope's four herds, these animals calve, forage, and find necessary insect relief on the lands around Teshekpuk Lake. For the communities who live within and around the Reserve, these animals are vital to the region's food security and culturally irreplaceable. It is likely that the Willow project will impact the herd's seasonal movements and the energetics of individual animals.

Since the Trans-Alaska Pipeline was completed in 1977, oil pipelines and roads have metastasized across a vast area of Alaska's North Slope. As proposed, the Willow project would be the latest westward expansion of this infrastructure. The project would involve up to five new drill pads, a massive new central processing facility, and a network of 40 miles of new roads and pipelines. While the true cumulative environmental effects of these types of developments are extremely hard to quantify, impacts will most certainly be significant and far-reaching. The effects of a rapidly changing climate will further compound this harmful industrial development.



■ Snow Goose. Photo: Duane Angles

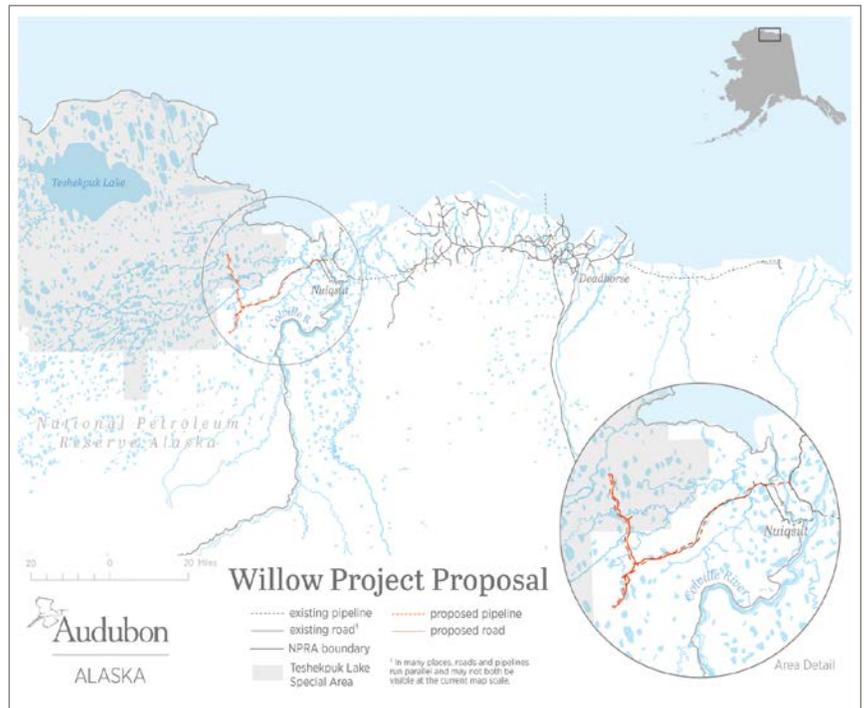
Audubon has been committed to the protection and stewardship of the Teshekpuk Lake ecosystem for decades. Over the coming months, we plan to fully engage in all public processes and your support is incredibly important. Stay tuned for more. ■

Willow Project Proposal

In a major victory, last August a federal court rejected permits for ConocoPhillips’ proposed Willow project, an ecologically devastating oil development on Alaska’s North Slope, because the government did not properly consider its climate and environmental impacts. Among many troubling aspects, considerable portions of this project would occur within the irreplaceable Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, an area of cultural importance that has been protected for decades due to its significance for nesting Yellow-billed Loons, molting geese, polar bears, and caribou.

This month, over 20,000 supporters across the Audubon network submitted comments through a National Audubon Society action alert asking the Department of the Interior to go back and conduct a thorough environmental review before making a new decision.

We encourage decision-makers to consider the law, follow the science and consider the concerns of Indigenous communities in their analysis. ■



■ A map of the proposed Willow project.

A Farewell to Natalie Dawson, former Executive Director

Natalie came to Audubon Alaska with over 15 years of experience in science, education, public policy, communication, and outreach within Alaska and across the western United States. Her research, teaching, and advocacy work has followed her passion for public lands and wildlife, as well as bringing stories of these natural resources to people across the globe. During her three years at Audubon Alaska, Natalie helped us join a number of partnerships across the state to uplift the voices of Alaskans and support Indigenous-led conservation efforts such as the Imago Initiative, an effort to reimagine conservation in the Arctic under an Indigenous lens. As she steps into her next chapter of conservation with a focus on Southeast Alaska, she asks that we remember the responsibility each of us has, in the words of poet Mary Oliver: “the responsibility to live thoughtfully and intelligently, to question—never to assume, or trample, to observe with passion, to think with patience, to live always caringly.” ■



People of Audubon

BOARD

Dr. Scott Rupp



Dr. Scott Rupp brings valuable experience to the Audubon Alaska Board through his extensive work centered around climate change and climate solutions. Scott has spent the past 15 years developing two programs: the Scenarios Network for Alaska and Arctic Planning and the Alaska Climate Adaptation Science Center.

A major part of those efforts has been to develop capacity to understand, evaluate, and downscale global climate scenarios.

“Climate change is impacting almost every aspect of Alaska’s ecosystems as well as Alaskan’s lives,” said Scott. “The most important thing we can do is to continue to evolve our understanding of how the climate system is changing, the feedbacks and interactions, and how those changes will impact our flora and fauna. That knowledge base will be key to our ability to develop robust and sustainable conservation and adaptation strategies.”

Scott’s extensive knowledge about Alaska stems from living in the state for 28 ½ years with his wife, Kerry Walsh, and their daughters, Evelyn and Julianna. They live off grid on a 320 acre homestead outside of Fairbanks where they grow most of their own food, raise dairy goats and laying hens, and rescue sled dogs. They love the Alaskan outdoors and spend most of their free time exploring our great state. His favorite bird is the Pine Grosbeak because they provide vibrant color to a mostly white winter landscape in interior Alaska. ■

Evie Witten



Evie joined the Audubon Board six years ago and was elected to the role of Board Chair in November 2020.

She is currently the principal of Regeneration North LLC, a consulting firm providing expertise in natural climate solutions, fostering food security, and building ecological, community and organizational

resilience in the North. She previously served as Deputy Director for Canada for The Nature Conservancy, as Director of World Wildlife Fund’s Alaska Field Office, and as a founding member and first Executive Director of Great Land Trust. Her conservation experience and interests run strong, from establishing and growing innovative and collaborative approaches to resource conflicts to developing community based conservation practices that address landscapes as a social, economic, and environmental whole.

Evie graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Vermont and a Master of Forest Science from Yale University. She spent the summers of 1986 and ’87 in Alaska as a student and then as a teaching assistant on a field ecology course, before making the move in 1988.

“I was a commercial salmon fisherman in Cook Inlet during the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, and while we navigated fisheries closures my tiny cabin filled up with friends and family working on response and clean-up,” said Evie. “That experience really shaped my early years in Alaska.”

She lives in Anchorage where she enjoys her garden, goats, and chickens, and all sorts of skiing and boating with her husband, Rand Hagenstein, and their 13-year-old daughter, Neve. Something birds have taught her is to be quiet, listen, and observe to be rewarded with beauty and a heightened sense of place. Her favorite bird is the Water Ouzel (also known as the American Dipper), a stocky little aquatic songbird that bobs on ice shelves and dives in fast-flowing streams all winter long in the north.

Evie lives by these inspiring words from author Albert Camus: “Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present.” ■



■ Violet-green Swallow. Photo: James Smith / Audubon Photography Awards

People of Audubon

STAFF

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. ■

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 Alaska as the Director of Conservation, 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 2017–2020, he served as an appointed member of the Bureau of Land Management 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. ■

Katrina Peavey—Communications Manager



Hailing from Prince of Wales Island in Southeast Alaska, Katrina Peavey joined Audubon Alaska with an immense amount of love for Alyeska, our great land. With over 10 years of experience across communication, marketing, and film production, Katrina's primary focus is to harness the power of storytelling activism to connect with audiences and amplify

our united voices to conserve Alaska's birds and vital habitat. Before joining Audubon, Katrina gained international experience on the marketing team at HBO and as a Global Marketing Manager and Original Programming Manager at DAZN in London. She received her master's degree in the Cultural, Media and Creative Industries program at King's College London and her bachelor's degree in Mass Communication from Linfield College. During the summers, she works on marine debris projects to gather nets, lines and plastics off remote coastal shores in Alaska. Her experiences with marine debris reaffirmed her dedication to finding solutions to protect birds and wildlife from ingesting plastic. When not picking up litter, you can find her teaching yoga, experimenting with watercolors, cross-country skiing, or completing a hiking challenge. ■

Kassandra Smith—Finance and Operations Associate



Kassandra joined Audubon Alaska in May 2018 and is a longtime resident of Anchorage, Alaska who hails from a military family. She has a varied background in corporate legal support, office administration, customer service, and tech support. Outside of the office, Kassandra has worked as a poll worker in every election since she became eligible to do so. She

spends much of her free time reading an unhealthy amount of romance novels, herding two cats and a dog (who thinks she's a cat), as well as working to perfect her disc golf putting game in the summer. ■

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

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

The Arctic Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization that works to protect Alaskan ecosystems by encouraging research, education, and management that contributes to appreciation and good stewardship of our natural heritage. Located in Fairbanks, Arctic Audubon Society holds monthly public presentations fall through spring, Christmas Bird Count, and spring bird walks. ■

Juneau Audubon Society juneau-audubon-society.org

The Juneau Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization

located in Southeast Alaska focusing on birding, education, and conservation. Local activities include bird watching field trips, Christmas Bird Count, educational presentations, scholarship and internship programs, newsletter, beach cleanups, and other restoration activities. ■

Kodiak Audubon Society 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, and special events to highlight birds, wildlife, and conservation issues on Kodiak Island. ■

Prince William Sound Audubon Society 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. ■



Answer to Q1. Photo: Steve Maslowski / USFWS

Bird Trivia

by *Kassandra Smith*

Q1: What bird species breeds in the Arctic and then makes a non-stop migration over 7,000 miles to winter along the coast of Australia and New Zealand?

- a) Pacific Golden-Plover
- b) Red Knot
- c) Bar-tailed Godwit
- d) Curlew Sandpiper

Q2: What is the name for a gathering of ravens?

- a) Revelry
- b) Murder
- c) Unkindness
- d) Stealth

Q3: What is the most abundant shorebird species in Alaska?

- a) Western Sandpiper
- b) Least Sandpiper
- c) Semipalmated Sandpiper
- d) Spotted Sandpiper

Q4: What Arctic bird species holds the record for longest migration (29,000 miles)?

- a) Bonaparte's Gull
- b) Eurasian Wigeon
- c) Short-tailed Shearwater
- d) Arctic Tern

Flip to the back for answers!



Western Sandpipers. Photo: Michael Quinton

Climate Stories

By Victoria Elmore

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing today's birds. Research from National Audubon found that 389 North American bird species are vulnerable to extinction from global temperature rise, with more than half of these species' current ranges forecasted to become inhospitable within a century. However, the prognosis is not all bad; the same study found that by stabilizing carbon emissions and holding warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, nearly 150 of the 389 vulnerable species would no longer risk extinction.

None of us can ignore the effects of climate change. We see them all around us, every day, everywhere. Wildfires rage across the American West each summer, while increasingly severe storms ravage the Gulf Coast and cold-water marine species disappear from the Bering Sea. Last autumn,

Audubon Alaska began collecting climate change stories from around the world as part of the Arctic Refuge Virtual Bird Festival, asking the public to share experiences of climate impacts in daily life.

The result is a growing catalog of climate stories documenting invasive species, mild winters, dangerous air quality, landslides, unusual wildlife behavior, and other events, and is a testament to the perils we all face if we do not take swift and decisive action on behalf of our warming planet.

You can find an interactive map featuring these stories on the Audubon Alaska website (ak.audubon.org/conservation/climate-stories). We also encourage you to submit a story of your own (tinyurl.com/audubonclimatestories).

Here are a few of the stories we have collected from around Alaska:

"During a long-term study, we found that Arctic-breeding shorebirds have experienced increased phenological mismatch (i.e., chicks hatching after peak insect emergence) under earlier snowmelt conditions, resulting in reduced growth and survival of chicks."

— Sarah (Utqiagvik)

"Spruce beetles are infesting our forests and killing spruce trees in droves due to warmer winters. Normally, the cold would manage populations to ensure a healthy balance. Now, we're facing the use of pesticides to manage the boom in beetle populations."

— Katrina (Craig)

"While hiking a new-to-me trail, I discovered the invasive vetch plant species quite a distance from the road corridor. This is a plant that is becoming more invasive and is not native to Alaska. It was spreading and taking over native plants. So sad."

— Ryan (Anchorage)

"In early 2016, thousands of Common Murres were so starved that they began showing up in interior Alaska lakes and rivers in search of food. This very unusual behavior was caused by a major warming of the Gulf of Alaska known as The Blob."

— Melanie (Anchorage)



Dead Common Murres were found washed up on a beach in Prince William Sound during a large mortality event in 2016. Tamara Zeller / USFWS

"In early December 2020, a series of large Pacific Gulf storms created three separate storm events. This caused a severe rain on snow event that resulted in over 50 landslides across the area and claimed two lives."

— Natalie (Haines)

"An increasing number of Brant are now overwintering in Alaska (Izembek Lagoon and surrounding areas); up from <5% of the overall winter brant population in the 1980-1990's (~7,500 birds), to over 38% (56,000) in 2021 (USFWS 2021), likely due to warming."

— Heather (Izembek NWR) ■



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Bird of the Year Candidates

It's that time of year! Voting is now open until April 8th for our 2022 Bird of the Year and we're highlighting three special candidates: the Yellow-billed Loon, Violet-green Swallow, and Rufous Hummingbird. Cast your vote and graphic artist Eric Cline will illustrate the bird that receives the most votes, ak.audubon.org/birds/bird-of-the-year.

Yellow-billed Loon



Photo: Ryan Askren

The largest of the loons, this Arctic beauty is known as “Tuullik” by Iñupiat people in the Arctic. Its rubious eyes and onyx plumage dotted with white makes this regal bird a special presence in the north, which is currently under threat by the proposed Willow oil development project as it encroaches upon the loon’s home in and around Teshekpuk Lake. ■

Violet-green Swallow



Photo: Charlene Burge

John James Audubon described the iridescent Violet-green Swallow as “the most beautiful of all the genus hitherto discovered.” As the light catches this aerial mastermind, you’ll see why its cape of violet and green is one of central Alaska’s most captivating birds. ■

Rufous Hummingbird



Photo: Milo Burcham

Hummingbirds are symbolic across cultures with a myriad of meanings including representing joy and signifying good luck. The Rufous Hummingbird is particularly special as it flies the longest migratory route of all hummingbirds and has the northernmost breeding range. Found in Southeast Alaska, it relies on the old-growth trees in the Tongass for shelter and food. ■