



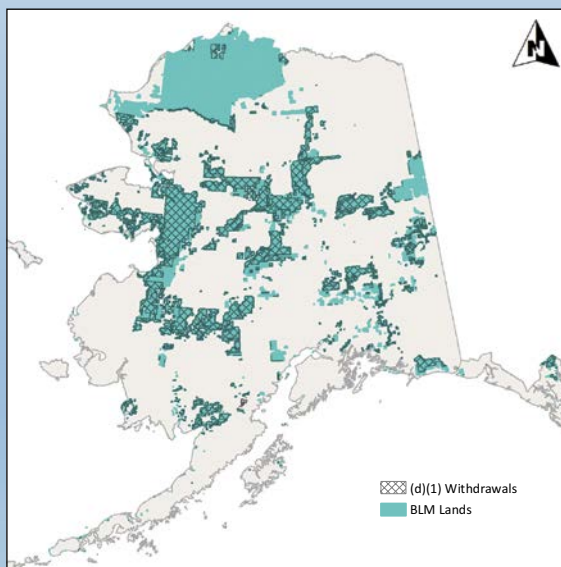
Audubon | ALASKA News

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The Biggest Federal Land Giveaway You Don't Know About

In 2019, the Bureau of Land Management prioritized a process to continue the biggest the biggest federal land transfer in recent history. Nearly 2 million acres of land were opened to mining by the Department of Interior with no public notice. According to the BLM, the remaining 48 million acres of what are collectively known as “D1” lands will be systematically conveyed to the state, private and Alaska Native corporations. These land conveyances will likely open 99% of the lands to mineral entry (exploration and mining) and remove community-supported “Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.” Without any opportunity for public involvement, we will lose important and broadly diverse wildlife habitat corridors, hunting and fishing grounds, food security for over 100 Alaska Native communities, public land access, and wilderness-quality lands that border rivers, national parks, wildlife refuges, and forests.

Audubon Alaska is working with partners to identify the areas that will be released and the communities that will be impacted so we can build an effective strategy to protect these regions from mining and other development, and maintain their status as “Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.” Sign up for our action alerts to stay informed at ak.audubon.org. ■



■ BLM lands in Alaska.



Horned Puffin

Fratercula corniculata

The Horned Puffin gets its name from the horny projections that extend about its eyes. Sadly, these cute little seabirds' population is in decline. In recent years, Horned Puffins have been a victim of die-offs in the Bering Sea, washing ashore extremely emaciated. It is likely climate change is driving food scarcity, resulting in mass starvation. All large breeding colonies of Horned Puffins in North America are located within national wildlife refuges in Alaska.

Photograph on masthead by Marion Owen

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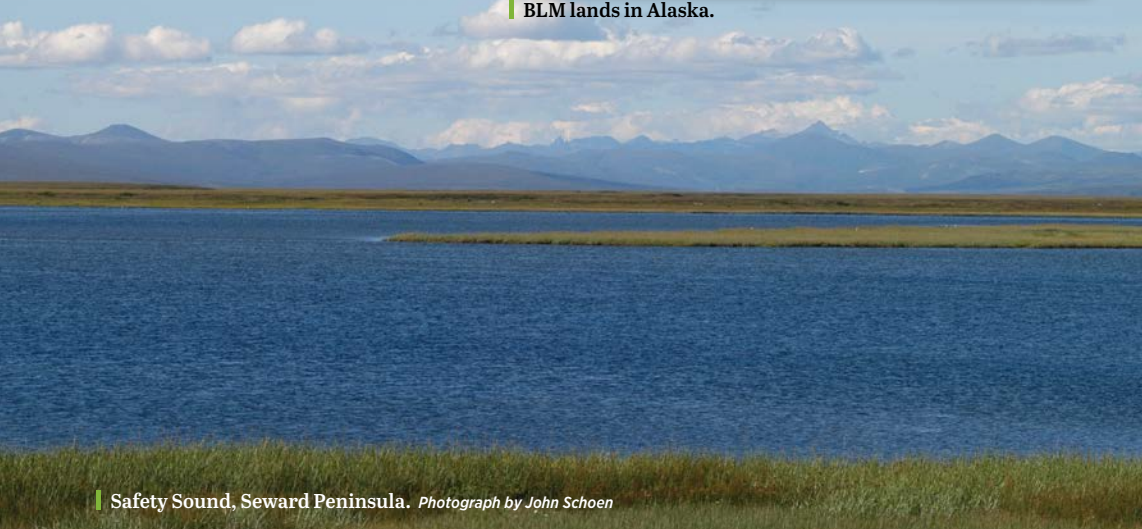
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ALASKA

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.

Audubon Alaska Staff**Natalie Dawson***Executive Director***Susan Culliney***Policy Director***Max Goldman***Conservation Biologist***Rebecca Sentner***Communications Manager***Kassandra Smith***Finance and Operations Associate***Ben Sullender***Spatial Ecologist***Audubon Alaska
Board Members****John Schoen (Chair)****John Alexander****Jenna Hamm****Aaron Lang****Julianne Lamsek****Jerome McCluskey****Richard Monkman****Eric Myers****Gordon Orians****Scott Rupp****Dave Secord****Anne Wilkas****Evie Witten****Audubon Alaska**

431 West Seventh Ave., Suite 101

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

907-276-7034

Website:

AK.Audubon.orgNewsletter design and layout by
Eric Cline of TerraGraphica

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DIRECTOR'S VIEWPOINT

When Everything is Not OK*By Natalie Dawson*

In early September, I pulled into the boat harbor in Point Baker, a small fishing community on the north end of Prince of Wales (Tlingit: Taan) Island in southeast Alaska. The western hemlock trees looked brown, their needles damaged by a native insect, the hemlock sawfly. Research shows that the second summer of extreme drought in southeast Alaska may be playing a role in the sudden appearance of these insects. Point Baker Audubon members spoke of warm water, slow fishing, caterpillars, and uncertainty. We still caught silver salmon and walked among towering Sitka spruce trees. But we could feel change everywhere.



Last month, Washington Post reporter Dan Zak wrote an op-ed in which he talked about human tendency to say “everything will be okay” even when we know it will not be OK. Climate change is happening. We see and feel it every year in Alaska. A two-page spread in this fall’s newsletter discusses the changes we saw in just one summer in Alaska. What do we do with this knowledge? Zak writes:

“Hold the problem in your mind. Freak out, but don’t put it down. Give it a quarter-turn. See it like a scientist, and as a poet. As a descendant. As an ancestor.”

A recent scientific study reports a cumulative loss of *three billion birds* in the past 50 years. This number does make me want to freak out, but instead, I need to turn it around in my hand, with the eyes of someone who creates a life out of watching the world change. I have to explain to others that even as it is changing, the world is still worth studying, protecting, and our future is still worth the investment even if we do not know the outcome. We are ancestors of a future time and descendants of those who have lived through changes we will never comprehend.

This is where we all must live and work together, in the shifting boundaries of our dynamic planet, at a time when courage may outlive hope. What do we do when we know everything is not okay? We work together to lessen the impact. We speak up and strike to hold our leaders accountable for their indecision. We work hard to understand the science behind what is happening and use those answers to change our behaviors, then change policy.

“Welcome to the Anthropocene,” writes poet Alice Major. “*Dear child of fortune, born today in the middle of things. There is no ending, happy or otherwise. Just play your part.*” One reason I left academic teaching to become part of the Audubon family is because I saw young students playing their part in our uncertain future. They are the movement mobilizers and climate strikers who participate in making sure the Anthropocene is not an era only shaped by humans, but one that shapes how humans will interact with their world. We all must play our part in creating this new story. Please join us in shaping our hopeful narrative into courageous action, soaring with wings buoyed by unknown winds. ■

Climate Resilience Means Protecting Our Nation's Largest National Forest, The Tongass

The Inventoried Roadless Areas on the Tongass National Forest contain great ecological value and incredible potential for climate change resilience through carbon sequestration. The network of roadless areas and other protected places work together as interconnected habitats that support healthy populations of wildlife species. Flying squirrels hunt for mushrooms and truffles and curl up in the small holes found in the big trees. Northern Goshawks nest in the large limbs of old-growth trees, and young goshawks hop around the branches and tree trunks as they learn to fly. Wolves, Pacific marten, and bears all find denning habitat among the big trees. Roadless areas with large-tree old-growth further act as climate refugia for wildlife, shading salmon streams and keeping forests cool. Forested roadless areas also play an important role in carbon sequestration.

A new report is in progress to describe the ecological values contained within Tongass roadless areas. As we work with spatial ecologists and conservation partners, we are mapping, quantifying, and describing how roadless areas benefit Tongass wildlife populations and help the forest remain ecologically resilient. We expect this report will provide a strong response to the upcoming administrative efforts to rollback the Roadless Rule. The report will document what is at risk, and why it is so important to continue protecting roadless areas.

The Trump administration and state of Alaska are working quickly to rollback all protections for the 9 million acres of roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest. We are preparing for the upcoming Roadless Rule rollback by creating a series of maps and place-based data to counter the Forest Service's actions on the Tongass. As part of a larger coalition we are using this information to drive a new narrative for the future of these ecological centers of climate resilience.

Economic realities on the Tongass also support the shift away from old-growth logging and fortify our actions to protect the Tongass. The wildlife, salmon, and forests are the basis of the region's tourism and fishing economies. Audubon also has a stake in this transition as we launch our Southeast Alaska Birding Trail in early 2020 as a new tool for regional eco-tourism.

Stay tuned and prepare to comment on the Roadless Rule Draft Environmental Impact Statement and tell the agency to take "no action" on this misguided rulemaking process and support us in our fight for a just transition on the Tongass. ■

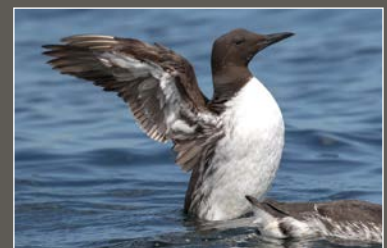


Old-growth trees on Admiralty Island. Photograph by John Schoen

Answer to Alaska Bird Quiz

Common Murre

Uria aalge



This large auk is penguin-like in appearance, frequently found perching upright on sea cliffs. The Common Murre has the most densely packed nesting colonies of any bird species; nesting pairs may be touching adults on either side. There is a strong relationship between fish density in an area and Common Murre colony attendance during chick-rearing, which makes protecting marine ecosystems like Bristol Bay critical to their continued survival. Photograph by Eric Ellingson, Flickr Creative Commons

Uncharted Territory in the Last Frontier

On the 4th of July, many communities across Alaska banned fireworks and faced the hottest temperatures in recent history. Ted Stevens International Airport in Anchorage hit 90 degrees. USGS scientists measured 70-degree water temperatures in Prince William Sound. Anchorage was battling heat waves and smoke-filled skies from the Swan Lake fire on the Kenai Peninsula and across interior Alaska. The amount of sea ice in the Chukchi Sea was lower than any time in recorded history.

It can be difficult to digest so many changes at once and try to understand patterns and processes associated with these phenomena. At Audubon Alaska, we utilize maps as a way to understand the natural (or unnatural) world around us and prioritize our work. In this section, we give you a first glance at our new map on climate change impacts. Each icon represents a climate change-related event this summer. Here is a summary.

In Anchorage, visibility was less than a mile with the thick smoke from the Swan Lake **fire** on the Kenai Peninsula. Warmer temperatures and drier conditions in recent summers have lengthened the fire season across the state. The number of thunderstorms in Alaska is expected to continue to increase with climate change, and this year over half the fires in Alaska were started by lightning.

The new normal is there is no normal when it comes to weather in the north. Some regions experienced **record rainfall**, while Alaska’s rainforest in Southeast Alaska experienced **record drought** and **high temperatures**. Communities relying on hydropower were on water shortage alerts. Drought also impacted water availability for commercial fish processing, an economic driver for many communities across the state.

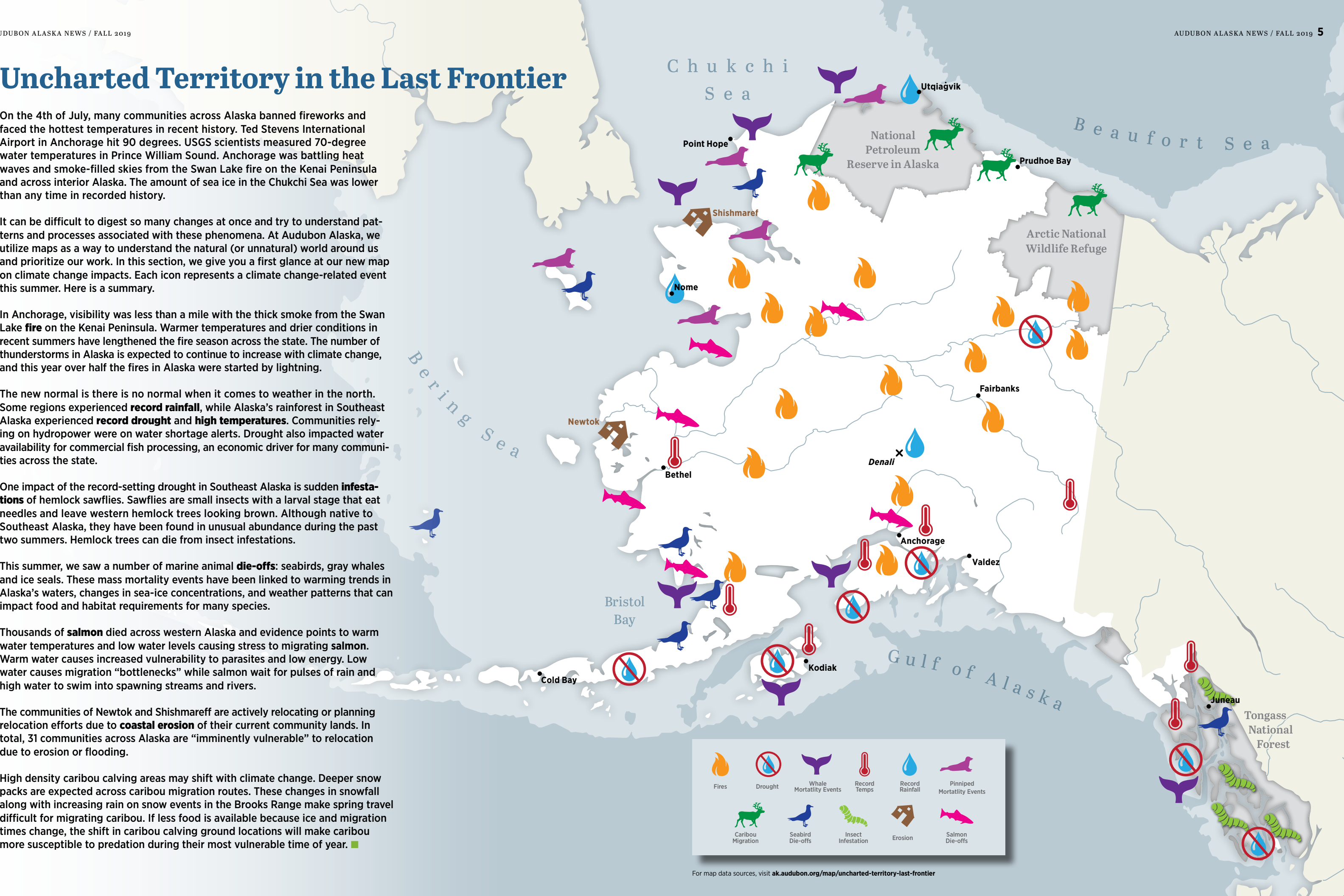
One impact of the record-setting drought in Southeast Alaska is sudden **infestations** of hemlock sawflies. Sawflies are small insects with a larval stage that eat needles and leave western hemlock trees looking brown. Although native to Southeast Alaska, they have been found in unusual abundance during the past two summers. Hemlock trees can die from insect infestations.

This summer, we saw a number of marine animal **die-offs**: seabirds, gray whales and ice seals. These mass mortality events have been linked to warming trends in Alaska’s waters, changes in sea-ice concentrations, and weather patterns that can impact food and habitat requirements for many species.

Thousands of **salmon** died across western Alaska and evidence points to warm water temperatures and low water levels causing stress to migrating **salmon**. Warm water causes increased vulnerability to parasites and low energy. Low water causes migration “bottlenecks” while salmon wait for pulses of rain and high water to swim into spawning streams and rivers.

The communities of Newtok and Shishmareff are actively relocating or planning relocation efforts due to **coastal erosion** of their current community lands. In total, 31 communities across Alaska are “imminently vulnerable” to relocation due to erosion or flooding.

High density caribou calving areas may shift with climate change. Deeper snow packs are expected across caribou migration routes. These changes in snowfall along with increasing rain on snow events in the Brooks Range make spring travel difficult for migrating caribou. If less food is available because ice and migration times change, the shift in caribou calving ground locations will make caribou more susceptible to predation during their most vulnerable time of year. ■



Chapter Happenings



Sandhill Crane at Creamer's Field in Fairbanks.
Photograph by Ken Whitten

Anchorage Audubon Society www.anchorageaudubon.org

Anchorage Audubon kept busy this summer despite the heat. *Outdoor Week* in May drew a large group of kids for hands-on learning, in addition to guided bird walks Thursdays in May. In June, Anchorage Audubon submitted comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Pebble Mine.

The Anchorage birding community suffered a tragic loss when Jean Tam and husband Michael Scott Christy were killed in a plane crash. Jean was the longest serving member of the Anchorage Board of Directors. Jean and Scott will be very missed by their Anchorage friends.

For the Arctic Refuge Virtual Bird Fest in September, Anchorage Audubon hosted a *Beaks, Geeks, and Treats* event featuring bird trivia, stories, and artist Michael Boardman. Monthly meetings commenced in September and will be at 7pm on the third Thursday of each month. ■

Arctic Audubon Society www.arcticaudubon.org

The ancient cries of Sandhill Cranes herald two festivals held at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge and frame Arctic Audubon's field outreach. At *Spring Migration Celebration* in April, families had fun writing postcards to friends and relatives about Arctic Refuge birds connected to their state. The *22nd Annual Sandhill Crane Festival* was held in August, and Arctic Audubon volunteers had a lively afternoon with young families learning to use the scopes.

Arctic Audubon hosted *Beaks, Geeks, and Treats* for the Arctic Refuge Virtual Bird Fest on September 25 featuring bird trivia, great stories, and artist Michael Boardman to talk about his experiences at the Canning River Bird Camp. ■

Juneau Audubon Society www.Juneau-Audubon-Society.org

Juneau Audubon Society had another busy year. Summer was about the driest anyone can remember in Southeast Alaska. We balance our concern with climate change against the need to venture outside enjoy the sunshine.

Brenda Wright and community volunteers completed the fifth year of the Tree Swallow nest box monitoring project. Two high-school students, Jessica and Cody Millsaps, were instrumental in data collection. Education Chair Alexia Kiefer packed spring and summer with activities such as beach cleanups with a focus on the effects of plastic pollution on seabirds.

We begin monthly free public lectures this October. Bird walks and wildlife sailings featuring Important Bird Areas will start in the spring. ■



Juneau kids learn about threats to birds on coastal cleanup day. Photograph courtesy of Juneau Audubon Society

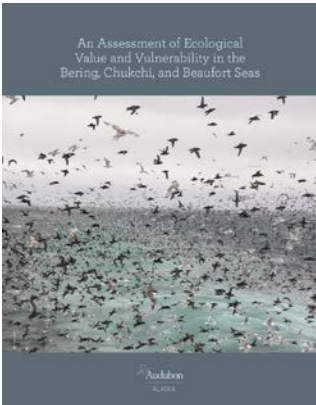
Kodiak Audubon Society www.kodiakaudubon.blogspot.com

Kodiak Audubon had another busy summer. Our hiking program attracted 408 people, including 62 visitors to the island. Our conservation team continued to track the expansion of Alaska Aerospace's rocket launch complex, situated on state land and impacting some of Kodiak's best public recreation areas and birding habitats. Upcoming events for our group include "Birding and Breakfast" (Nov. 2nd), which invites the public to try out different spotting scopes from our duck deck on Potatopatch Lake. This year's Christmas Bird Count will start out with a Winter Birds presentation (Dec. 6th) followed by counts of two different Kodiak birding areas (Dec. 14th and Dec. 28th). Winter or summer, come visit us in Kodiak! ■

Prince William Sound Audubon Society

In September, Kate McLaughlin of The Alaska Hummingbird Project (and secretary of Prince William Sound Audubon) discussed how citizen science and bird banding are working together to understand hummingbird life history and population dynamics. In October, Cordova resident Kris Ranney will give a talk on his recent trip to Easter Island. In November, Cordova's Aaron Bowman will present the results of a Black Brant study conducted by his Japanese colleague Tetsuo Shimada that investigated the impacts to wintering geese along the coastline hit hardest by the March 2011 tsunami. Aaron will include a recap of the earthquake, the tsunami, and what the current situation is in the tsunami zone. The Christmas Bird Count will occur in December. Stay tuned! ■

An Assessment of Ecological Value and Vulnerability of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas



Throughout the years, Audubon Alaska has maintained a commitment to understanding the incredible diversity and complexity of the Arctic Ocean. Recently, we worked with the data from our 2017 *Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas* to map the distribution of ecological value in the region. By combining the results of these ecological value maps with data representing vessel traffic, oil spill probability,

commercial fishing removals, and climate change, we are able to visually describe the interface of ecological value and the human uses that may impact them. The results are found in *An Assessment of Ecological Value and Vulnerability of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas*.

Throughout the report, the incredible diversity and abundance of life in the Arctic Seas is pronounced. Unsurprisingly, however, the future is tenuous—due largely to the impacts of climate change. As we face the consequences of rising sea water temperatures, and reduced sea-ice concentrations, climate change is the ominous thread that connects the many crises Alaskans know all too well. The direct effects these changes are having on irreplaceable events like the Bering Sea spring algal bloom—the base of a food web so abundant it incentivizes the longest avian (Arctic Tern) and marine mammal (gray whale) migrations on the planet—are already devastating. Indirect impacts like those that accompany increased vessel traffic—such as more frequent collisions with large whales, sound disturbance, and the ever-escalating danger of another catastrophic tanker spill—are poised to increase exponentially.

Many of the places that have the most to lose are also in the crosshairs of pronounced climate-related impacts, known and unknown. According to our analyses, revered places like the Pribilof Islands and Unimak Pass in the Bering Sea, Smith and Harrison Bay and Barrow Canyon in the Beaufort, and Hanna Shoal and the Bering Strait in the Chukchi are at especially high risk. The goal of this report is to help prioritize our conservation efforts in a rapidly changing environment that is clearly feeling the effects of climate change, ensuring that Alaskans are part of the solution.

Check for the report at: ak.audubon.org/special-reports-and-publications. ■

Birds of Bristol Bay: The Short-tailed Shearwater




Photograph by Ed Duners

Alaska's Bristol Bay is one of the most important regions for protecting birds in the face of climate change. Two of the world's largest salmon-producing rivers feed the rich waters of Bristol Bay. These waters give reprieve to millions of marine birds that arrive here from around the world to breed, forage, or rest. Some travel great distances to reach Bristol Bay. They migrate from nesting sites in the Southern Hemisphere to spend their winters (our summers) foraging in the region.

One such traveler is the Short-tailed Shearwater. This long-distance migrator spends the southern hemisphere summer nesting in burrows along the coasts of Australia or on nearby offshore islands, like Tasmania. After breeding season is over, and the days grow shorter, this seabird takes flight and heads north, across the equator, to the Bering Sea of Alaska. The shearwater then spends the next few months enjoying the milder weather in and around Bristol Bay during the northern hemisphere's summer.

These fascinating small seabirds are part of the "tubenose" family, named for the structured nostrils atop their bill that allows them to drink saltwater and then slowly "sneeze" out the salt. Considering the amount of time they spend at sea, this adaptation comes in particularly handy. "Tubenose" birds also have a good sense of smell, which allows them to find their way back to their own family burrow at night. They do this by following their individual scent which acts as a sort of home address among an otherwise big neighborhood of their nesting colony. Their good sense of smell also helps them identify the best spots in the ocean to forage for food. Unfortunately, some research shows that plastic marine debris may mimic the smell of the marine food that the birds need to eat, fooling them into eating harmful plastics.

Bristol Bay is already under stress from warming ocean temperatures, and now it is being threatened by resource extraction and development. The world's largest open pit mine (Pebble Mine) is slated for development in the middle of this rich ecosystem. Its development would mean an untenable risk to the region's food web, which supports millions of salmon and birds, including Short-tailed Shearwaters. Given Bristol Bay's global significance for birds, protecting this remarkable resource is a priority for Audubon Alaska. ■

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Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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Greetings from the Belted Kingfisher!

I am so thrilled to be Alaska's Bird of the Year. It's a big responsibility, but I am happy to do it. As part of my duties, I am committed to sharing information on the state of birds in Alaska. And, in some parts of the state, there are serious risks facing important bird habitats—from the Arctic to Bristol Bay to the Tongass National Forest. Please help protect the places birds call home by making a donation to Audubon Alaska today. Your support makes a difference for birds and other wildlife now and for generations to come. ■

Thank you!

Alaska Bird Quiz Bird

Can you identify this
species from the
WatchList?

Answer on page 3.

