

Audubon Onward!

AUDUBON'S IMPACT IN CALIFORNIA

2024



Audubon Onward!

DEAR FRIENDS,

This report invites you to look more closely at our collective impact over the past year to protect birds and the places they need in California. *Audubon Onward!* provides important updates and conservation gains through our forward-looking plan to address the mounting threats of climate change and biodiversity loss—threats that not only impact birds, but people and the planet, too. The following pages underscore an urgency of now, and Audubon's bold response.

Over the past half-century, we have lost 3 billion birds in North America—an alarming trend skewed heavily toward migratory species. This precipitous loss is a powerful statement about the condition of our planet and a harbinger of things to come if we don't act strategically and decisively.

Across our state, birds like Allen's Hummingbird face a dire future if the current pace of climate change and habitat loss continues. This iconic species has seen nearly an 80 percent population loss in the past fifty years, an unambiguous reality that serves as a call to action to scale our work to meet the scope and severity of these threats.

It is this urgency that led us to launch our *Flight Plan*, Audubon's bold five-year strategic plan, which codifies our evolution into a truly hemispheric organization.

***Flight Plan* is about protecting birds, and at the same time, protecting people and our planet by advancing a generation-shaping agenda to the forefront of conservation.**

Beyond boundaries and across vast distances, most migratory birds only spend a fraction of their annual cycle in our state. To protect them, we need to literally meet them where they are. By studying their vast migrations and extensive breeding ranges, we can zero in with precision to address the dizzying array of conservation challenges they face on the wing.

It is your investment and our shared impact in California that will allow us to achieve hemispheric outcomes—this is how we will bend the bird curve.

Thank you and onward!

Andrea Jones

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION & INTERIM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AUDUBON CALIFORNIA

BIRDS TELL US. THIS IS HOW WE LISTEN.

Thanks to game-changing science and new digital technologies, we are narrowing knowledge gaps that have long plagued the world of bird conservation. Lesser Yellowlegs, for example, make an annual migration from the Boreal Forest in Canada to Chile—a round trip of nearly 20,000 miles. Last year, four Lesser Yellowlegs originally tagged in

Colombia's Cauca Valley with transmitters (with help from Audubon California's Working Lands team member Ian Souza-Cole) flew past Audubon-installed Motus towers in Michigan and Pennsylvania. We are expanding this valuable network of Motus towers across the state, with one located at our Richardson Bay Audubon Center and Sanctuary in

San Francisco Bay, and new ones installed this year in Volta Wildlife Area and Calhoun Cut Ecological Reserve. These towers capture critical data revealing secrets of the birds' migratory adventures, giving new revelations and insight into where, when, and how long they sought habitats needed to provide safe rest and food.



Allen's Hummingbird.
Photo: Rick Derevan/Audubon Photography Awards

Audubon's *Flight Plan*:

A Powerful and Dynamic Story of Migratory Science, Climate Action, and Community Building

THE SCIENCE IS CLEAR. We have a unique opportunity to make a positive impact for birds, people, and the planet. While challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss are significant, we can bend the bird curve together. The window of opportunity remains open—if we seize this moment and act now.

The most ambitious strategic effort in our history, Audubon's *Flight Plan* establishes our vision for shaping a world where birds and people thrive, elevating Audubon as a global conservation leader. *Flight Plan* sets five-year milestones in key areas to track progress towards our long-term vision to 'bend the bird curve,' in other words, to halt and reverse the alarming decline of birds. Our recognition of the interconnectedness of people, place, and climate led to the development of four milestones we intend to reach over the next five years: Habitat Conservation, Climate, Policy, and Community Building.

MILESTONES:

Flight Plan harnesses the full power of Audubon—including on-the-ground staff across the Western Hemisphere, centers and sanctuaries, and local chapter partners—by focusing on a set of shared outcomes for greater collective impact towards our vision.



HABITAT CONSERVATION

Using science to identify, protect, and conserve 300 million acres of bird habitat across the Americas



CLIMATE ACTION

Deploying 100 gigawatts of renewable energy and storing 30 billion tons of carbon through natural climate solutions



POLICY LEADERSHIP

Pairing diplomacy with advocacy to develop and implement bird-friendly solutions



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Creating a diverse network of bird lovers working together to advance our shared vision

AUDUBON'S HEMISPHERIC APPROACH TO CONSERVATION directs our efforts to the places where birds need us most and to all the places they call home; their seasonal migration across the Western Hemisphere means Audubon also works from boreal Canada to California to Chile and beyond.



Whimbrel Migratory Journey

- Winter Range
- Summer
- Year-Round
- Journey of a Tracked Bird



Audubon's Bird Migration Explorer provides a clearer-than-ever look at bird migration and the incredible journey of individual species. Here we see how the iconic Whimbrel requires us to work beyond our borders to ensure it remains safe and healthy throughout its annual cycle.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID ALLEN SIBLEY

In the past year, we have made progress towards our milestones—much of which has touched down in our state—and developed operational plans to continue driving this work forward.

Guided by our *Flight Plan*, we are engaging in conservation on 116,650,000 acres across the Americas and influencing 50 renewable energy generation and transmission projects totaling 34 gigawatts—enough energy to power roughly 25 million homes.

HIGHLIGHTS OVER THE PAST YEAR INCLUDE EFFORTS TO:

- **Expand Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program in California;** the program had a very successful season, working to enroll 6 new ranches, that will add an additional 18,000 acres under bird-friendly management, for a total of almost 350,000 acres across the State.
- **Fund seven new projects for protected areas in Perú and six in Bolivia** through *Conserva Aves*, totaling over 1.9 million acres.
- **Break ground on the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion, the single-largest ecosystem restoration project in U.S. history;** this project will restore and strengthen up to 28,000 acres of wetlands in Louisiana, providing climate resiliency benefits to local communities.
- **Begin new engagement on a \$10 billion transmission project** spanning seven Midwestern states representing up to 20 gigawatts.
- **Deliver 10,000 acre-feet of water to benefit Great Salt Lake and Jordan River** through local partnerships and co-management of the Great Salt Lake Watershed Enhancement Trust.
- **Supported the Northern Chumash Tribal Council and other local tribal nations to call for the establishment of the [Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary](#),** which will protect over 4,500 square miles of California's central coast. Once established, the Sanctuary will be the first Tribally-nominated National Marine Sanctuary in the US and the first new sanctuary to be designated in California in more than 25 years.

Through innovative habitat restoration strategies, Audubon California is ahead of the game and leading Audubon's *Flight Plan* by amplifying our voice and implementing conservation efforts aligned with our hemispheric vision to identify connected, climate-resilient places across the hemisphere where we are focusing our efforts for the greatest impact.

Audubon's Work in California. Unified by the Power of Birds.

Through our *Flight Plan*, we commit to achieving significant milestones that will demonstrate measurable impact on the climate and biodiversity crises. We are pleased to report back to you that your investments supported the following impact over the past year:



HABITAT CONSERVATION

Conserving quality, connected, and climate-resilient bird habitat

→ **The Bird Returns Program**, run by our Working Lands Team in the Central Valley, [creating more than 60,000 acres of flooded habitat](#) in a region that has lost over 90 percent of its natural wetlands. The five-year program, with support from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, incentivizes land stewards to flood their lands in critical migration, breeding, and molting periods for shorebirds and waterfowl.

Buena Vista Lagoon in Oceanside, California. Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

→ Our team has been co-leading the effort to designate 627,000 acres of public lands as the [Chuckwalla National Monument](#), located east of the Salton Sea in the Coachella Valley. Over the past two years, we have built significant momentum in community support, collecting more than 50,000 signatures.

→ In Los Angeles, the team at the [Audubon Center at Debs Park](#) have planted 1,800 plants on three acres at **Rio de Los Angeles State Park** and two acres inside **Debs Park** at the Monarch Alley and Hummingbird sites.

The team's work has been instrumental in bringing back the endangered Least Bell's Vireo to the area, which was covered by the [Los Angeles Times](#), with three fledglings spotted at our Rio site.

→ Our Coastal team is supporting two conservation projects in the **San Francisco Bay Area**—a 900-acre subtidal marsh enhancement project along San Pablo Bay and a beach nourishment project along the shoreline of Richardson Bay. We'll provide project management expertise, biological and monitoring support, fieldwork support, and community engagement.

→ [In partnership with Buena Vista Audubon and San Diego Bird Alliance](#), a 3.8-acre restoration plan was completed of the **Buena Vista Lagoon**, and the City of San Diego approved a plan to restore 226 acres of wetland habitat in **Mission Bay**.

→ Our work recharging the shallow groundwater aquifer on the South Fork Kern River (through our lands at the [Kern River Preserve](#)), was featured as an example of successful groundwater ecosystems on the front page of the [LA Times](#). It also had the co-benefit of creating wetland habitat for a breeding colony of 500 Tricolored Blackbirds.



California Quail. Photo: Joshua Pelta/
Audubon Photography Awards



CLIMATE ACTION

Accelerating renewable energy and restoring forests, grasslands, and wetlands

→ In June, Audubon California testified in support of the **Assembly Bill 525 Strategic Plan** before the California Energy Commission. The plan includes ambitious goals for offshore wind, while emphasizing the need for science, mitigation, and adaptive management, as well as community engagement and oversight.

→ Audubon California has been leading the design and community engagement on the **Bombay Beach Wetland project** at the Salton Sea, which will stabilize and restore 564 acres of wetland habitat, establishing vegetation and protecting crucial habitat, while contributing to dust suppression and expanding public access to the Sea. As the Sea continues to shrink, wetlands may play a crucial role in carbon storage in the region.

→ We launched an **eelgrass habitat suitability model** to inform climate-smart restoration and conservation in San Francisco Bay, with predictive data about existing eelgrass habitat and the impact of future climate scenarios. The model is used by NGOs and regional agencies for climate adaptation planning and by practitioners for siting restoration efforts.



POLICY LEADERSHIP

Advancing our *Healthy Birds, Healthy Planet* policy agenda

→ **Prop 4, the Climate Bond:** Audubon California joined more than 180 environmental justice and conservation organizations to get the \$10 billion bond passed in November. A historic investment in climate resilience, the bond will fund a variety of climate and natural resource projects.

→ **AB 2875:** Co-sponsored by Audubon California, this legislation codifies a state policy that there be no net loss

of wetlands and that there be efforts to increase the quality and quantity of wetland habitats. With broad bipartisan support, the bill has been signed by the governor.

→ **SB 583:** Strongly supported by Audubon CA, SB 583 creates the Salton Sea Conservancy, marking a significant milestone in long-term efforts to manage the Salton Sea and safeguard a vital ecosystem for millions of birds.

A **Snowy Plover** stands at the shoreline of the Salton Sea.
Photo: Alecia Smith/Audubon California





COMMUNITY BUILDING

Working together across the hemisphere to advance our shared vision



Debs Park Audubon Youth Leaders graduation. Photo: He Sung Im/Audubon California

→ The **Coastal Leadership Program**, a nine-month environmental stewardship program for diverse early-career individuals in the Los Angeles Basin, launched this spring with a 10-person cohort. The program covers a wide range of topics from birding and storytelling to advocacy and environmental art.



Black Oystercatcher.
Roger van Gelder/
Audubon Photography
Awards

→ **Debs Park Audubon Youth Leaders** (AYL) program engages youth through classroom visits, internships, and advocacy opportunities, to build the next generation of environmental stewards and leaders. This past cohort received the Climate Stewards certification from the UCANR program, only the second cohort of 16- to 18-year-olds in all of California to receive the certification!

→ At Richardson Bay Audubon Center and Sanctuary, the **California Steward/Certified Naturalist Program** certification was offered to the first cohort of AYLs. We are also incorporating curriculum created by Good Grief Network, designed for teens feeling overwhelmed by the climate crisis, to help them build resilience and be re-inspired by joy and creativity.

We are deeply grateful for your continued commitment to Audubon and our mission to protect birds and the places they need—in California and beyond. In the first year of *Flight Plan*, we have made significant progress towards our habitat and climate milestones. We could not have gained such momentum without you. The challenge before us is clear. Act now or risk a future with skies silenced with loss. With your help, we will bend the bird curve and make a sustainable impact for birds across the hemisphere. **This is our moment.**

CONTACT

Andrea Jones

INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AND SENIOR DIRECTOR OF
CONSERVATION
andrea.jones@audubon.org

OUR OFFICE

Audubon California Oakland Headquarters

1901 Harrison Street, Suite 1450
Oakland, CA 94612

ca.audubon.org
(415) 644-4600

Working Lands, Conservation
Ranching, and Richardson-
Bay Audubon teams, with the
help of California Department
of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
staff, successfully installed
a new Motus station in
the Central Valley. Photo:
Xerónimo Castañeda/Audubon
California

Cover: **Whimbrel.**

Photo: Cameron Darnell/
Audubon Photography Awards

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