

Audubon Onward!

AUDUBON'S IMPACT IN NORTH CAROLINA
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 North Carolina. *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.

Here in North Carolina, birds like the Wood Thrush face a dire future if the current pace of climate change and habitat loss continues. This is just one species likely to disappear in most of our lifetimes if we do not scale our work to meet the size 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 and off the wing.

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

With gratitude,

Curtis Smalling

VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AUDUBON NORTH CAROLINA

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. The Short-billed Dowitcher, for example, migrates from remote boreal wetlands in Canada to North Carolina's coast each year—a

2,000-mile journey over just a few days. In 2022, three Short-billed Dowitchers originally tagged in Canada's Hudson Bay Lowlands—three single birds spread against the mammoth skies of the Western Hemisphere—flew past a Motus tower at Audubon's Lea Island Sanctuary just north

of Wilmington. This and other towers captured 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.



Royal Terns.
Photo: Walker Golder

Audubon's *Flight Plan*:

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

OUR SCIENCE IS CLEAR. We are in a critical moment for birds, people, and the planet. Climate change and biodiversity loss are near full crisis, and the window of opportunity remains open—if we 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.



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



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



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



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

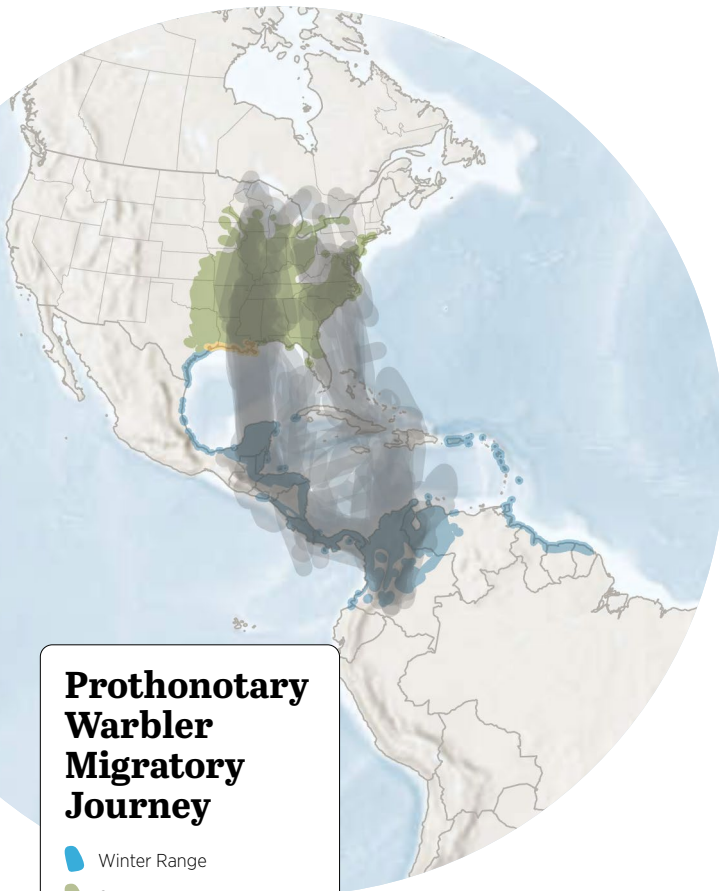
AUDUBON'S HEMISPHERIC APPROACH TO CONSERVATION directs our efforts to the places where birds need us most and to all the places they call home; their seasonal migration across the Western Hemisphere means Audubon also works from boreal Canada to the Carolinas to Chile and beyond.

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*, Audubon is engaging in conservation on 116,650,000 acres 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:

- **Launch Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program in Wisconsin**, building on our success in fourteen other states where more than 100 ranches covering nearly 3 million acres have earned status as Audubon Certified bird-friendly land.
- **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.
- **Convene 11 Indigenous Guardians and leaders from five First Nations**, key partners on our work in Canada, at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine for knowledge exchange and training opportunities.



Prothonotary Warbler 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 Prothonotary Warbler requires us to work beyond our borders to ensure it remains safe and healthy throughout its annual cycle.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID ALLEN SIBLEY

Through innovative strategies to build resiliency along the coast and advocate for urban forests, North Carolina is ahead of the game and leading Audubon's *Flight Plan* by amplifying our voice and implementing innovative 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 North Carolina. 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:



→ Audubon launched new research this summer, using GPS devices to track the movements of Royal Terns on the Cape Fear River and collecting poop samples from several species to analyze their diets, among other projects. This research is aimed at helping us better manage and protect habitat for coastal waterbirds.



HABITAT CONSERVATION

Conserving quality, connected, and climate-resilient bird habitat

→ Our coastal team spent the spring and summer months patrolling remote islands and busy beaches in North Carolina, protecting habitat for 40 percent of the state's coastal nesting waterbirds, including skimmers, terns, and oystercatchers. These species depend on undisturbed habitat to breed and nest, and wouldn't be able to raise their chicks without the protection of Audubon.

A highlight from the nesting season came from Lea-Hutaff Island, where a pair of highly threatened Piping Plovers successfully fledged chicks for the first time in 15 years.



(Left) Dr. Kate Goodenough holding a tagged Royal Tern. Photo: Brittany Salmons/Audubon

Blaze, a banded Piping Plover, in Waukegan, Illinois. Photo: Lake County Audubon Society

→ Our coastal team continued to develop plans for four pilot marsh resiliency projects at our **Donal C. O'Brien, Jr. Sanctuary at Pine Island**, located in a community with the highest rate of sea level rise on the east coast.



CLIMATE ACTION

Accelerating renewable energy and restoring forests, grasslands, and wetlands

→ Audubon spoke up for responsibly sited offshore wind energy, as the industry continues to seek a foothold in North Carolina. Notably, the state's second-ever land-based wind farm will soon start spinning after years of engagement and advocacy by Audubon to ensure it would be responsibly sited and operated.

Brown Pelican.

Photo: Judy Kroeger/Audubon Photography Awards



POLICY LEADERSHIP

Advancing our *Healthy Birds, Healthy Planet* policy agenda



Senator Paul Lowe with Forsyth Audubon members. Photo: Caitlin O'Hara

→ Audubon chapters kicked off the New Year with a pair of significant bird-friendly policy wins in Greensboro and Winston-Salem, thanks to advocacy from T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society and Forsyth Audubon. Both cities passed policies that ban invasive plantings and will bring more native plants to city parks and yards.

→ The campaigns to ban invasive plantings came on the heels of a major state-wide native plants win, including a sweeping conservation Executive Order issued by Governor

Roy Cooper in early 2024 that includes a strong native plants requirement for future state-funded conservation projects.

→ Later in the spring, we had a record turnout from Audubon chapters at our annual advocacy day, where members lobbied their local lawmakers on behalf of birds. We are hopeful that the momentum built this year will lead to major advocacy wins for birds in 2025.



COMMUNITY BUILDING

Working together across the hemisphere to advance our shared vision



→ We launched an [Urban Forestry Program](#) to address tree canopy loss where we're losing it the fastest—in our cities and towns—all while engaging new members and helping our chapters grow. North Carolina has nearly 4 million acres of urban forest. Unfortunately, we are losing this forest faster than any other forest type, and most of these losses are due to development. In response, Audubon is engaging members and our chapters in this new program. Together, we will protect, manage, and grow urban and suburban forests for birds.



→ Audubon's local advocacy of the [Urban Forestry Program](#) has already begun to pay off. In Raleigh, [local tree advocates, including Wake Audubon members, successfully campaigned](#) for stronger tree ordinances and a new urban tree master plan. We are working with other Audubon chapters to pursue similar campaigns in cities across the state.

→ Our team introduced Audubon's Urban Forestry Program to chapters and members at a special Urban Forestry & Advocacy training during our 2024 Summit this fall to continue building momentum for this important initiative.

Wood Thrush. Linette Tse/
Audubon Photography
Awards

White-breasted Nuthatch.
Doug Dearing/Audubon
Photography Awards

We are deeply grateful for your continued commitment to Audubon and our mission to protect birds and the places they need—in North Carolina 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.**

Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

Photo: Joseph Przybyla/
Audubon Photography Awards

Cover: **Prothonotary Warbler.**

Photo: Peter Brannon/Audubon
Photography Awards

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