



Audubon | ALASKA News

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Busy Like the Waxwing

By David Krause, Vice President-Alaska Program

It's an energizing time of year. Daylight is rapidly returning to our snow-covered landscape. Out my window, Bohemian Waxwings are busy gulping down crabapples. The tips of their electric yellow tails seem to spark as they flutter between branches. In many ways, their collective movement reminds me of our Audubon office.

Like the waxwing, our staff is humming with energy. In countless partnerships and communities, we're driving positive change through educational programming, scientific analysis, and sustainable economic development.

Our Shorebirds for Today and Tomorrow learning and outreach program has expanded to serve Anchorage's Yup'ik immersion public schools, and Lili Naves will be providing in-person programming in schools on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (see Page 6). Simultaneously, work is underway to understand the population dynamics of Yellow-billed Loon in the Western Arctic, and to analyze hours of bird calls from autonomous recording units deployed across a portion of the Bristol Bay watershed.

We continue to foster sustainable economic development across Alaska through birding trails and festivals. This spring, we'll launch the refurbished 35-site Anchorage Birding Trail (see Pages 4 and 5) on a new digital platform. With local partners and businesses, we seek to demonstrate the value of Alaska's habitats within the Municipality of Anchorage and across the state.

Our team is also engaging in efforts that will help ensure the region's ecological integrity. From the North Slope to the Alaska Peninsula and across the Tongass National Forest, we're contributing to defensive efforts to safeguard the region's irreplaceable public lands.

In no time, our resident waxwing will be joined by waves of migratory birds from across the world. No matter where you are, we hope that the arrival of spring and summer, and all its associated birdlife, brings you great joy and inspiration. ■



Bohemian Waxwing.

Photo: Christine Haines



Red-necked Grebe

Podiceps grisegena

This large grebe is colorful, noisy, and conspicuous in its nesting territory. In summer, its favorite habitat is a freshwater lake or large pond with some marsh vegetation, usually surrounded by prairie, northern forest, or sometimes tundra.

The Red-necked Grebe is not especially wary when not disturbed by humans, and even nests on park lakes in some cities, including Westchester Lagoon and Cheney Lake in Anchorage, Alaska (read more about these sites, found on the Anchorage Birding Trail, on Pages 4 and 5). Young can swim shortly after hatching, are fed by both parents, and will famously hitch a ride on their parents' backs to get around.

Photo: Kersti Meema/Audubon Photography Awards

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ALASKA

For nearly 50 years, Audubon Alaska has worked to conserve Alaska's birds, wildlife, and the habitat crucial to them. This work is largely enabled through your generous financial support. Thank you for your continued donations.

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Land Acknowledgment

Audubon Alaska recognizes that we work throughout the ancestral territory of the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska.

Our office is located within Dena'ina ekena, 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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Yellow Warbler.



Photo: Kristin Cooney

People of Audubon

The Audubon Alaska advisory board has a few new faces.

Scott Hauser



Scott's love of birds began in Wisconsin and led him to a B.S. in Wildlife Management from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. After diverse fieldwork across the U.S., he followed his passion for non-consumptive bird conservation to Alaska, where he earned a Master of Arts in Teaching and settled in Anchorage. Combining deep birding knowledge with backcountry skills, Scott has guided Wilderness Birding Adventures for over 20 years, sharing Alaska's extraordinary avian diversity and conservation stories with travelers—and his bird-named children, Quetzal and Trogon. ■

Acacia Johnson



Acacia is a photographer and writer from Anchorage, Alaska. Raised by conservationists, she began her career guiding in the Arctic and Antarctica, completing more than 55 trips. Now a full-time photographer and National Geographic contributor, her work explores conservation and the connections between people and place, especially in the Arctic. A TEDx speaker, former Fulbright grantee, and 2023 National Geographic Explorer, Acacia uses photography and storytelling to share global environmental stories with wide audiences. ■

Angela Matz



Angela was born in Colorado and found her connection to nature in the Pacific Northwest and Maine before moving to Fairbanks, Alaska 27 years ago. She served as an environmental toxicologist and oil spill response coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, working statewide to address pollution impacts on wildlife and train others. Dr. Matz holds a Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology, an M.S. in Environmental Toxicology, and a B.S. in Biology, and lives in Two Rivers with her husband, Dave. ■

What's Coming in 2026?

Here are some bite-sized—or, bill-sized—updates on what's happening in the bird space and what's to come this year from Audubon Alaska.

- **Alaska Bird Festivals:** The 2026 Alaska bird festival season is here! Many dates have been announced, including the Stikine River Birding Festival in Wrangell, the Spring Migration Celebration in Fairbanks, the Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival in Cordova, the Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival in Homer, the Yakutat Tern Festival in Yakutat, and more. As more dates and information are announced, we'll be adding them to this roundup and Alaska's best bird events. For more information, visit audubon.org/alaska/projects/alaska-bird-festivals.
- **Alaska Birding Trails:** In addition to the upcoming Anchorage Birding Trail kickoff this spring (see Pages 4 and 5), both the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail and the Utqiaġvik Birding Trail will soon be getting a new streamlined look. Much is still in the works, but stay tuned for information about a new online hub for Alaska Birding Trails to be launched this year.
- **Alaska Public Lands:** The Audubon Alaska team, with support from across the organization, continues to rigorously engage in public land matters spanning the state. From the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the Tongass National Forest, we are deploying the best available science and creative thinking to defend areas of high ecological and cultural value. Rooted in all of this work is our deep desire to find public policy solutions for nature and people. ■



Scoping the scene at the Yakutat Tern Festival.

Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon



Dunlin.

Photo: Tim Bowman

Explore Anchorage Through Birds

The Anchorage Birding Trail—Audubon Alaska’s newest online trail—connects 35 accessible sites, from Cook Inlet shorelines to Chugach alpine ridges.

Audubon Alaska has spent the past several years working with partners to create birding trails that make Alaska’s extraordinary birdlife more accessible to everyone. These virtual trails—curated guides to birding hotspots—already exist in Southeast Alaska and in the community of Utqiagvik. Now, that effort is coming to Southcentral Alaska with the launch of the Anchorage Birding Trail, a new resource designed to celebrate birds, habitats, and people across the Anchorage Bowl and beyond.

The Anchorage Birding Trail Takes Flight

The Anchorage Birding Trail features 35 birding sites, stretching from Whittier to Westchester Lagoon and eastward into the Chugach Mountains. The virtual trail will include practical information for each site, including fresh imagery, parking details, restroom availability, access notes, and any associated fees. It will also offer tips to help visitors plan safe, enjoyable birding outings. Together, these features aim to make birding more welcoming to people of all experience levels, from longtime Anchorage residents to visitors discovering Alaska birds for the first time.

Grace Miller, our summer 2026 intern, collecting imagery of the Anchorage Birding Trail.

And why the Anchorage Bowl? As of 2025, 285 bird species have been recorded in the Anchorage area, with 160 species occurring annually, including 112 breeders and 40 regular migrants. This remarkable diversity reflects Anchorage’s geographic position at the crossroads of multiple migration routes, where coastal, forest, freshwater, and alpine habitats intersect.

Just as importantly, the Anchorage area offers birding opportunities year-round. Spring migration begins in late March or early April, peaking in mid-May, with the return of raptors, gulls, and waterfowl. Songbirds and shorebirds follow by mid-April and continue in early June. Fall is the longest birding season, beginning as early as July for shorebirds and extending into late fall for gulls and swans. Even winter has its rewards: Since 1961, 96 species have been recorded during Anchorage Christmas Bird Counts, underscoring the city’s value as a four-season birding destination.



Photo: Jacqueline Burke/Audubon Photography Awards



| Sandhill Cranes.

Three Habitats, Four Seasons, Dozens of Ways to Bird

To help users navigate this diversity, birding sites on the Anchorage Birding Trail are organized into three broad habitat types: coastal, forest and freshwater, and alpine. Each habitat highlights different species and experiences, making it easier for birders to plan trips based on interest, season, or accessibility.

Coastal sites include nearshore waters and the intertidal zones of Cook Inlet, along with adjacent areas shaped by marine influences. Locations like Lower Ship Creek, Point Woronzof, and Carr-Gottstein Park offer opportunities to observe Arctic Tern, Trumpeter Swan, Sandhill Crane, Red-necked Grebe, Lesser Yellowlegs, and many more species that depend on their productive coastal systems.

Between Cook Inlet and the Chugach Mountains lie forest and freshwater habitats, home to sites like Kincaid Park, Jewel Lake, Eagle River Nature Center, and the moss-covered Winner Creek Trail near Girdwood. These areas support a different suite of birds, including Northern Goshawk, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Common Loon, and often offer quieter, more sheltered birding experiences.

Along the eastern edge of the region, alpine habitats rise into the Chugach Mountains. Trail sites such as Arctic Valley, Prospect Heights, and Glen Alps offer tundra, ridgelines, and mountain peaks that attract species like Willow Ptarmigan, Horned Lark, and Rough-legged Hawk. And bonus: These sites also offer breathtaking scenery.



Photo: Grace Miller

| Connors Bog.

Conservation, Community, and Connection

The Anchorage Birding Trail is part of Audubon Alaska's broader Alaska Birding Trails initiative, which is intentionally designed to create space for proactive, creative thinking about challenges facing both people and nature. Trails highlight Important Bird Areas and birding hotspots—many of which face pressure from development or other projects—helping build awareness and support for conservation across Alaska.

Birding trails also play an important economic role. By fostering sustainable tourism built around Alaska's bioregions, they help grow local economies while reinforcing the value of healthy public lands and waters. Birding is already a significant driver of tourism in Alaska, and trails strengthen the connection between conservation, recreation, and community well-being.

The online Anchorage Birding Trail—along with an updated Birds of Anchorage species checklist—will launch in spring 2026. Audubon Alaska will share details about launch-day activities, upcoming bird walks, and opportunities to connect with staff and partners during bird festival season. Special thanks go to the expertise of Andy Bankert, Pat Pourchot, Thede Tobish, and Mr. Whitekeys and the Anchorage Audubon Society. ■

Bringing Culture, Language, and Shorebird Stewardship into the Classroom



Photo: Gladys Jung

■ Ceñairet Maa-irpak Kingunemteñun-Illu.

Shorebirds are among Alaska's most remarkable avian travelers. Breeding by the millions on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and migrating across oceans and continents, these birds connect Alaska to the world. But their populations are declining, driven largely by habitat loss on wintering grounds and widespread environmental change. With this in mind, Audubon Alaska's Director of Conservation, Dr. Liliana Naves, has developed an educational initiative designed to inspire the next generation of bird stewards that folds in Indigenous culture and knowledge.

Ceñairet Maa-irpak Kingunemteñun-Illu—or Shorebirds for Today and Tomorrow—is a culture- and place-based learning program built around shorebird ecology, Yup'ik culture, and the landscapes of Western Alaska. The program supports four core goals: increasing awareness of shorebird ecology and conservation; transmitting Indigenous knowledge; fostering Yup'ik language use; and sparking youth interest in nature and learning.

At the heart of the program are free classroom kits that bring shorebirds to life through multidisciplinary lessons and activities. Each kit includes lesson plans, slides, short films, bird call recordings, coloring sheets, and stickers, all in both English and Yup'ik. Teachers can use these resources in science lessons about form and function, geography explorations of migration routes, math activities tied to population

data, art projects inspired by sandpipers and godwits, and language arts and social studies that connect cultures along shorebirds' flyways. To learn more or request a free shorebird classroom kit, contact liliana.naves@audubon.org or call 907-276-7034.

In 2025, Audubon Alaska welcomed the shorebird outreach program, which in previous years was coordinated by the Division of Subsistence of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Last year, nearly 60 classroom kits were distributed upon request to schools in 24 communities. For the next school year, 2026 to 2027, we'll stretch our wings again, roll up our sleeves, and offer classroom kits to schools in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Bristol Bay, and Yup'ik immersion programs in the Anchorage area.

Partnerships include the Cornell Lab of Ornithology—Conservation Media, local schools, and communities. Funding is provided by Audubon Alaska. This program reflects our commitment to community-led education and stewardship, combining scientific knowledge with cultural values to ignite curiosity and care for shorebirds—birds that are not only ecological wonders but also part of the cultural fabric of Alaska Native communities. We are thankful for the opportunity to support the continuation of this work. A big thank you to all schools, educators, and students who have joined the flock—*quyana cakneq!* ■

Alaska's Audubon Chapters

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

Anchorage Audubon Society anchorageaudubon.org

The Anchorage Audubon Society is proud to take credit for bringing longer days and warmer temperatures to Alaska, as we have for the last 50 years. The chapter recently donated a new freezer to the Bird Treatment and Learning Center to keep rodents fresh and tasty for the Center's rehabilitating raptors. The spring/summer season will kick off in April with our annual Gunsight Mountain Hawkwatch, and the chapter will leap into summer with bird walks, birding competitions, and good deeds to help make our natural world a better place. We were extremely honored to join Audubon Alaska's panel of birding experts to help in their creation of a new online Anchorage Birding Trail, which will be a detailed guide to Anchorage's best birding locations. We hope to see you on that trail later this year. ■

Arctic Audubon Society arcticaudubon.org

From frostbite cold to endless summer daylight, folks in Fairbanks love their birds! Hardy souls tromped out to Arctic Audubon's Christmas Bird Count on December 27, 2025, during the longest cold snap since 1970. Facing -32 degrees F high that day, 71 people got out by car, on foot, snow machine, snowshoes, and skis to count 4,616 birds of 20 species, and another 40 additional people

counted the birds coming into their feeders, reported CBC volunteer Laurel Devaney. We then held our first Great Backyard Bird Count, from February 13 to 16, focusing on the Audubon Reidel Nature Reserve and its surrounding neighbors. We provide volunteers with scopes and binoculars to make it easy for kids to zoom close to ducks, geese, and cranes at the Spring Migration Celebration at Creamer's Field State Waterfowl Refuge on Saturday, April 25, 2026, and during the weekend of the Tanana Valley Sandhill Crane Festival (August 16 to 23). Throughout the spring and summer, we host field trips to view a wide variety of birds from local wetlands to alpine habitats. ■

Juneau Audubon Society juneau-audubon-society.org

Juneau Audubon Society continues its tradition of bird- and nature-themed outings and educational events. We will begin spring with the last evening monthly program in March, a collaboration with the Marie Drake Planetarium. In April, we begin Saturday bird walks and wildlife cruises to the Berners Bay Important Bird Area. Bird outings for youth and a bird painting course are also in the works, as well as additional outdoor excursions in the summer and fall. We also plan to hire an Intern for the summer to help with Tree Swallow box monitoring and other research and education projects. ■

Kodiak Audubon Society kodiakaudubon.blogspot.com

Here in Kodiak, we're excited about International Migratory Bird Day. This year, we're offering even more kid-friendly events, including hands-on activities in an almost carnival atmosphere. This extravaganza was originally planned for last October's World Migratory Bird Day, but the party ground to a halt when our partners and their venue (the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge) were closed during the 2025 government shutdown. After all that preparation, we were probably more disappointed than the kids! Now we're hoping to try it again for IMBD on May 9th. In other news, we're continuing to teach birding to Kodiak's students both in the classrooms and with guided field trips. Then our summer hiking program will start, and we'll lead people past the ducks and up to the ptarmigan. We'll also keep up our chapter's strong conservation mission by monitoring restrictions on Kodiak's public lands and ongoing damage to our prime birding habitats. ■

Prince William Sound Audubon Society coppershorebird.com

The Prince William Sound Audubon Society will coordinate again this spring with Audubon Alaska to provide activities during the 2026 Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival in May. ■



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2026 Bird of the Year

After a close election, the Sandhill Crane has won Audubon Alaska's 2026 Bird of the Year! Here's a word from your appointed public servant:

"It's an honor to be elected as 2026's Bird of the Year. I'm a living symbol of wild Alaska, and my gatherings are some of the greatest spectacles in the bird world. But our wetlands and staging grounds are under pressure from shifting policies that place development above conservation. Without these safe spaces, even a bird with legs as long as mine can't outrun the threats to our future. Together we'll make sure wetlands remain a place where cranes can dance, chicks can thrive, and Alaskans can keep marveling at our sky-high performances for generations to come!"

Looking for 2026 Bird of the Year gear? Keep an eye on the web store at audubon-alaska.square.site. ■

