

 Audubon | ALASKA News

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Goose Music

By David Krause, Vice President-Alaska Program



Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

Canada Geese.

As the seasons progress from summer to fall, night arrives earlier each day. In the evening, as twilight fades and the air cools, a chorus of geese often fills the air over our home. The sound is a moment of pause, beauty, and inspiration. It’s one of my favorite parts of autumn. The honking and swishing of wings reminds me of Aldo Leopold’s essay, “Goose Music.”

In this piece, Leopold writes:

“Some have attempted to justify wildlife conservation in terms of meat, others in terms of personal pleasure, others in terms of cash, still others in the interest of science, education, agriculture, art, public health, and even military preparedness. But few have so far clearly realized and expressed the whole truth, namely, that all these things are but factors in a broad social value, and that wildlife...is a social asset.”

As you will read in the following pages, our program is actively working to position Alaska’s birds, wildlife, and irreplaceable habitats as true social assets. Through fostering birding trails, migratory bird festivals, and guide training, we’re working to build the economic systems and constituencies of advocates who will help ensure that Alaska’s habitats remain protected and stewarded into the future.

As we look forward to 2027, we’re preparing to celebrate Audubon Alaska’s 50th anniversary. Over the coming year, we plan to look back and commemorate the people, work, and impact of our office. We’ll also be looking forward with a thoughtful new strategic plan and efforts to grow and diversify our membership.

Like a flock of calling geese in formation, we hope you’ll join us as we fly into our next half-century. ■



Lesser Yellowlegs

Tringa flavipes

This slender shorebird uses a remarkable range of habitats, from coastal estuaries and mudflats to freshwater marshes, ponds, and lakes. In Alaska, these productive wetlands provide essential places to rest and refuel during its long journeys.

As fall migration begins, keep an eye—and ear—out for these golden-legged travelers. Their presence is a reminder that Alaska’s wetlands are important not only here at home, but along the flyways connecting Alaska to the rest of the Americas. For proof of this, check out the fourth and final episode of Audubon’s Birds on the Move (watch on YouTube at bit.ly/botm-4), which focuses on the Lesser Yellowlegs in Andean Valleys and stars former Shorebird Conservation Manager River Gates (see Page 3).

Photo: Francisco Castro Carmona/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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People of Audubon

Comings and goings at Audubon Alaska.



Steve Cohn

Steve has dedicated more than 30 years to conserving Alaska and the North through public service, research, and advocacy. His career spans the Sierra Club, the Bureau of Land Management, and the National Park Service, with expertise in wilderness conservation and Indigenous land stewardship. He earned graduate degrees in Wildland Resource Science from the University of California, Berkeley, and continues to find inspiration outdoors with his family, especially on annual canoe trips through Alaska's Tangle Lakes. ■



Donna D.W. Hauser, Ph.D

Donna is a Research Associate Professor at the International Arctic Research Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. An Anchorage native raised on Dena'ina lands, she conducts interdisciplinary research exploring how rapid Arctic change affects marine wildlife and the Indigenous communities that depend on them. Through partnerships with Tribal organizations, she advances community-driven science and leads the Alaska Arctic Observatory & Knowledge Hub, which bridges Indigenous Knowledge and western science to inform Arctic stewardship. ■



Cearah Egwuonwu

Cearah spent the summer as Audubon Alaska's Outreach and Communications Advocate before returning to Middlebury College as a senior majoring in geography with a biology minor. She played a key role in launching the Anchorage Birding Trail, promoting community bird walks and bike rides, and supporting projects on ptarmigan subsistence research, Indigenous place names in Southeast Alaska, and activities for the 2026 BARC Science and Culture Fair in Utqiagvik. We'll miss you, Cearah! ■

Northern Shovelers.



Celebrating Audubon's River Gates and a Career Dedicated to Shorebirds

After nearly a decade with Audubon, we are saying goodbye—and thank you—to Shorebird Conservation Manager River Gates.

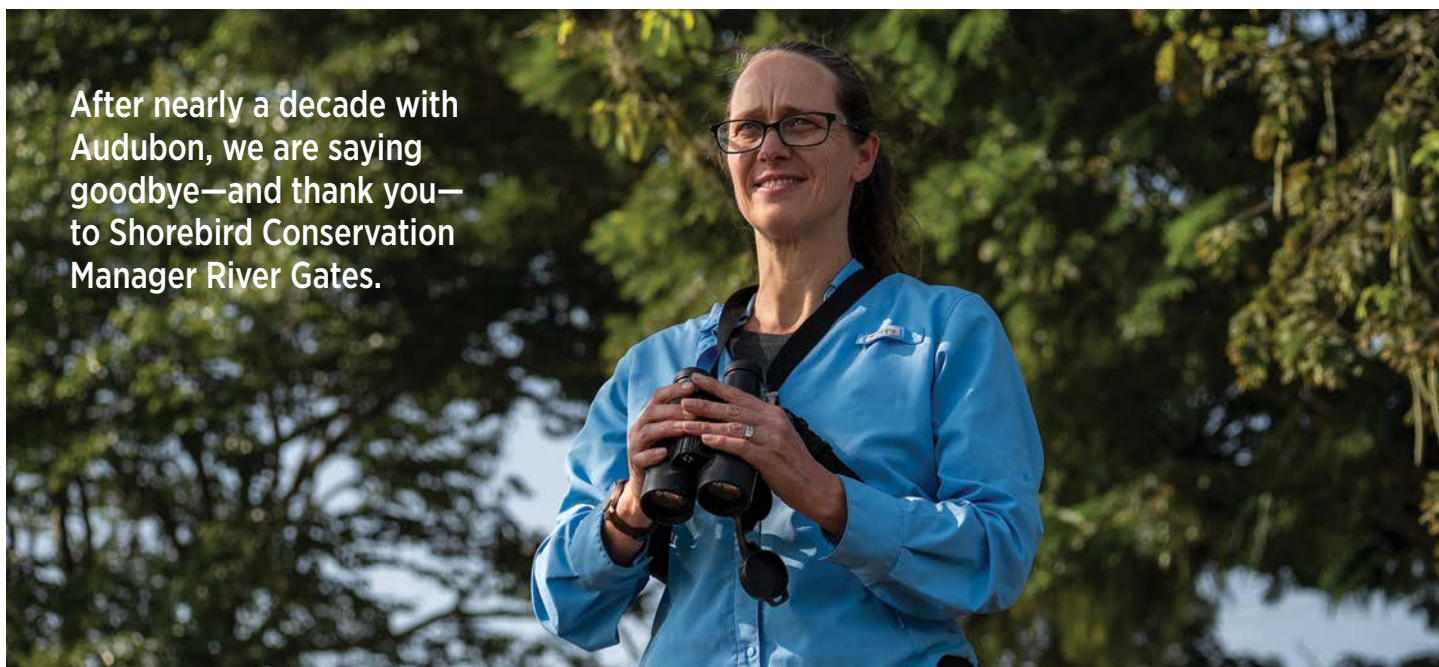


Photo: Jair F. Coll

The one and only River Gates.

Since joining Audubon in 2017, River has been a driving force for shorebird conservation across the Pacific Americas Flyway, connecting science, communities, and partners from Alaska to South America. She brought more than 20 years of experience studying migratory birds, with fieldwork spanning Alaska's Arctic tundra, the Copper River Delta, Taiwan, and Central and South America. Throughout her career, she has championed the idea that protecting migratory birds requires conserving habitats across their entire annual cycle.

At Audubon, River coordinated the Pacific Shorebird Conservation Initiative, bringing together scientists, Indigenous leaders, land managers, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations to advance shared conservation goals. She also helped develop the Pacific Americas Shorebird Conservation Strategy, strengthening international collaboration to address growing threats from habitat loss and climate change. She served on the board of the Alaska Shorebird Group and held leadership roles with the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Partnership and the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

River's work extended far beyond meetings and planning. She spent countless seasons in Alaska's remote landscapes—including Cape Krusenstern, Utqiagvik, and the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area—conducting long-term population studies, deploying GPS transmitters on American Golden-Plovers and other species, and helping uncover the migration routes that guide conservation across the hemisphere.



Photo: Jair F. Coll

River with Lesser Yellowlegs.

She also had a remarkable gift for connecting people with birds. Whether leading festival bird walks, judging elementary science fairs, or speaking with community members, River inspired others to appreciate shorebirds as both extraordinary travelers and indicators of healthy ecosystems.

Perhaps her greatest legacy is the community she helped build. River's generosity and collaborative leadership strengthened partnerships across cultures, organizations, and borders, creating lasting connections that will continue to benefit birds long into the future.

While we will miss seeing River in Audubon Alaska's Anchorage office, on the tundra, and at shorebird festivals, her impact will endure through the science she advanced, the partnerships she fostered, and the many people she mentored.

Thank you, River, for your dedication to Alaska's birds and the places. ■

Audubon Alaska in the Community

Highlights from a Busy Summer

BIRD NERDING WITH THE BERD NIRD

Our team was lucky enough to score a morning bird outing with Angela, aka @the_berd_nird! We walked from Westchester Lagoon to Fish Creek—both sites on the Anchorage Birding Trail—and saw everything from Trumpeter Swan, American Wigeon, and Steller's Jay to Bonaparte's Gulls and Hudsonian Whimbrel. Angela also saw a few "lifer" Red-necked Grebes. ■

BRISTOL BAY FLY FISHING & GUIDE ACADEMY

In June, Audubon Alaska participated in the Bristol Bay Fly Fishing and Guide Academy in King Salmon, Alaska. We were excited to contribute a birding dimension to the curriculum as a way to enhance and enrich fishing trips. The Academy trains local youth from across the region for participation within the fly fishing and nature-based tourism economy. Supporting local stewardship of lands, waters, and wildlife is a main goal of the Academy. We are grateful to the Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, and Nancy Morris Lyon (Bear Trail Lodge) for their long-term commitment to the Academy and for the opportunity to participate! ■

■ Cutting the ribbon to officially launch the Anchorage Birding Trail in May 2026.

ANCHORAGE BIRDING TRAIL LAUNCH

We're still reeling from our Anchorage Birding Trail ribbon-cutting ceremony in May. From longtime to first-time birders, thank you to everyone who joined us to celebrate the launch. At one point, we counted more than 75 people! We're especially grateful to our partners, supporters, and volunteers who helped make this project possible, especially Jessica Ross, Vice President of the Native Village of Eklutna, and Anchorage Mayor Suzanne LaFrance. It was inspiring to see our community come together in support of birds, habitat, and outdoor Anchorage. ■

UTQIAĠVIK MIGRATORY BIRD FESTIVAL

The fourth Utqiaġvik Migratory Bird Festival took place at the Fred Ipalook Elementary School and birding sites throughout the community. The festival convened local people and visitors from Alaska and afar to celebrate birds and culture. Birding was outstanding in diversity and abundance! People painted a colorful flock of birds and honed their drawing skills by focusing on a King Eider. Public presentations highlighted the amazing journeys of many migratory birds and connections with people and cultures. Trivia, local vendors, live music, and a raffle were also lots of fun and well attended. All events were free and open to the public. A big thank you to festival co-sponsors, donors, and supporters! ■





Birding during the Utqiagvik Migratory Bird Festival.

Photo: Liliana Naves/Audubon

LET'S GO BIRDING TOGETHER, ALASKA!

Each June, Audubon Alaska hosts an annual Let's Go Birding Together (LGBT) bird walk at Chanshtnu/Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage for Pride Month. Led by Melanie A. Smith, Audubon's Director of Digital Science & Data Products, the walk follows the paved trail along Westchester Lagoon and continues onto the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail. This year brought plenty of sun, new friends, and tons of baby birds to spot in the scope. ■

AUDUBON ALASKA BIRD RIDE

A big thank you to everyone who joined Audubon Alaska's Bird Ride this July in Anchorage! We had riders and birders of all ages—and weather of all kinds. Whether you came to ride bikes, ask questions, connect with fellow bird lovers, or simply enjoy time outdoors, your enthusiasm made the gathering a success. We're grateful for your support and look forward to seeing you again at future events as we continue working together to protect Alaska's birds and the places they need. ■

2026 BARC SCIENCE & CULTURE FAIR

Audubon Alaska was thrilled to join the 2026 BARC Science Fair in Utqiagvik, where the theme was Aviktuaqatigiigñiq, or "sharing." We led bird walks across the tundra with students and shared how migratory birds connect Utqiagvik to communities and ecosystems thousands of miles away—and why protecting these birds requires shared stewardship throughout their entire annual cycle. Quyanaq to the BARC Science Fair organizers, students, educators, families, and community members who make this gathering so special every year! ■

TANANA VALLEY SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL

We had a wonderful time celebrating the gathering of thousands of Sandhill Cranes and other migratory birds during the Tanana Valley Sandhill Crane Festival at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge. Thank you to Friends of Creamer's Field, festival partners, volunteers, and everyone who came to learn, explore, and enjoy Alaska's birds! ■



A morning bird outing with Angela the Berd Nird!

Photo: Lauren Cusimano/Audubon



Let's Go Birding Together (LGBT) bird walk at Chanshtnu/Westchester Lagoon!

Photo: Lauren Cusimano/Audubon



Audubon Alaska's Bird Ride was a big hit.

Photo: Lauren Cusimano/Audubon

What's Coming in 2027

Here are some bite-sized—or, bill-sized—updates on what's happening in the bird space and what's to come from Audubon Alaska for the remainder of 2026 and into the New Year.

- As Audubon Alaska looks ahead to 2027, we're excited to celebrate an incredible milestone: our 50th anniversary! Throughout the year, we'll share stories from our history, spotlight the people and partnerships that have shaped our work, and reflect on five decades of bird conservation in Alaska. Stay tuned for special features, new content, and a celebratory event as we honor our past and look toward the future.
- Alaska Birding Trails: In addition to the recent launch of the Anchorage Birding Trail, both the Southeast Alaska Birding Trail and the Utqiagvik Birding Trail will soon be getting a new streamlined look. Much is still in the works, but stay tuned for more accessible virtual versions of these Alaska Birding Trails to launch soon. For more information, see audubon.org/alaska-birding-trails.
- If you're visiting the Anchorage Museum, be sure to stop by the new "Arctic Marine Science: Sikuliaq to Shore" exhibit. Among its highlights is a stunning map created by Audubon Alaska's Director of Geospatial Science, Ben Sullender, illustrating the major ocean currents of Alaska's Arctic. Adapted from Audubon Alaska's "Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas," the map showcases how science and storytelling can deepen our understanding of Alaska's marine ecosystems. The exhibit is on view through next spring. Find more information at anchagemuseum.org.



Photo: Courtesy of Ben Sullender

Audubon Alaska's Director of Geospatial Science, Ben Sullender, with family at Anchorage Museum.

- 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 Western Arctic and its Special Areas 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. ■

Audubon Alaska remains committed to Alaska public lands like the Tongass National Forest.

Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

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.



Willow Ptarmigan.

Photo: Kate Persons/Audubon Photography Awards

Anchorage Audubon Society anchorageaudubon.org

Spring and summer are peak birding season for Anchorage Audubon! In May, we hosted three popular annual events: the Pro-Am Bird-a-thon at Westchester Lagoon, Potter Marsh Smackdown, and Thursday morning walks with the Bureau of Land Management at Campbell Tract. July brought several high-tide gatherings at the Audubon Wayside along the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail. In August, we hosted evening walks at Kincaid Park and gatherings at Ship Creek to explore shorebirds and learn eBird. Throughout the year, volunteer guides also lead visiting birders to local hotspots, with summer bringing the busiest season for this service. ■

Arctic Audubon Society arcticaudubon.org

Arctic Audubon tabled at the Tanana Valley State Fair for Arctic Day, featuring a Birds That Connect Us booth with Audubon Alaska maps showing geo-tagged birds traveling from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to six states. Featured species included Golden Eagles, Greater White-fronted Geese, and Tundra Swans. Arctic Audubon is also raising funds to expand the Audubon Riedel Nature Reserve, which has grown from the Riedels' original 160-acre gift in 1984 to 320 acres. A pending purchase of a 40-acre Fairbanks North Star Borough parcel would connect two sections of the Reserve, expanding opportunities for wildlife habitat, recreation, education, and research. The Reserve hosts two University of Alaska Fairbanks research projects and offers winter field trips and snowshoe trails, with a second Great Backyard Bird Count planned for February. ■

Juneau Audubon Society juneau-audubon-society.org

Juneau Audubon Society (JAS) is an independent non-profit organization in Southeast Alaska. Since 1977, JAS has been focused on birding, education, and conservation in Southeast Alaska with an all-volunteer board. This chapter offers seasonal field trips, lectures, and educational services ■

Kodiak Audubon Society kodiakaudubon.blogspot.com

Kodiak Audubon has had another busy year! In spring, we installed educational signs about local birds, including one alerting jet skis to nesting loons. We partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Kodiak Refuge for a Wildflower Celebration, sharing information about hiking, trail etiquette, and local birds. Alaska Aerospace Corporation also invited us to tour its spaceport and discuss important birds documented there. This summer, board members were creating handmade local-bird ornaments for the annual Christmas bazaar, a major fundraiser. This fall, we hope to expand educational programming to Kodiak villages, Girl Scouts, and children throughout the community. ■

Prince William Sound Audubon Society coppershorebird.com

The Prince William Sound Audubon Society is a volunteer, nonprofit organization located in Cordova that provides monthly educational programs about birds and nature. Monthly meetings in conjunction with the Prince William Sound Tuesday Night Talks will begin in October. We are involved with the annual Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival and the annual Christmas Bird Count. ■



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2027 Bird of the Year Candidates

It's already time again! Voting is open till January 31, 2027, for Bird of the Year, and we're highlighting three special candidates: the Brant, the Gyrfalcon, and the Blackpoll Warbler. Cast your vote, and graphic artist Eric Cline will illustrate the winner. See more information at audubon.org/alaska/projects/audubon-alaskas-bird-of-year. Meet your candidates!

Pacific Black Brant



Photo: Milo Burcham

Vote Brant for Bird of the Year! I may be a small goose, but I tackle epic migrations. I fuel up on Alaska's eelgrass meadows before soaring across the Pacific. I'll keep us honking for healthy habitats by pushing for protections for our coasts, wetlands, and Arctic landscapes. Vote Brant—because every great migration starts in Alaska! ■

Gyrfalcon



Photo: Florian Shultz

Vote for me, the Gyrfalcon—the Arctic's fiercest feathered hunter. I nest along the towering bluffs of the Colville River Special Area in the National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska, where intact landscapes keep my family thriving. I'll continue standing guard over Alaska's Arctic—but I need your vote to protect habitats that make it possible. ■

Blackpoll Warbler



Photo: Kevin Sim/Audubon Photography Awards

Vote for me, the Blackpoll Warbler—the tiny traveler with a passport full of stamps. I raise my family on Alaska's public lands before embarking on one of the world's most incredible migrations, crossing oceans to South America. Together, we can help protect Alaska's public lands that connect our state to the rest of the world! ■