



# Audubon NORTH CAROLINA

2010 – 2011 ANNUAL REPORT



Audubon North Carolina is the state office of the National Audubon Society representing 14,000 grassroots members and ten local chapters across the state. With a century of conservation history in North Carolina, Audubon strives to conserve and restore the habitats we share with all wildlife, focusing on the needs of birds. Audubon North Carolina achieves its mission through a blend of science-based research and conservation, education and outreach, and advocacy.

[www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org)  
[www.ncaudubonblog.org](http://www.ncaudubonblog.org)





With the guidance of Heather Starck, who became Executive Director of Audubon North Carolina in March 2011, our staff has been developing a new strategic vision that integrates our conservation goals with National Audubon Society's expanded vision of bird conservation. Every year, more than 10 billion birds use the four major flyways in North America (Pacific, Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic) to travel up and down the continent and points beyond. Audubon is now aligning its conservation work along these migratory corridors.

To dovetail its work with the broader goals of the Atlantic Flyway, Audubon North Carolina will continue existing initiatives such as managing our coastal sanctuary system, researching migratory species like the Piping Plover and Golden-winged Warbler on both ends of their migratory pathways, and defending Important Bird Areas from threats such as mismanagement.

At the same time, we are deepening our commitment to engage diverse communities and individuals in our conservation efforts. In the summer of 2011 we launched a pilot social marketing campaign at Wrightsville Beach that engaged hundreds of beachgoers who

signed a pledge to "Be a Good Egg" and share the beach with nesting birds. Many of these people, tourists and residents alike, were unaware that some birds nest on the beach, but showed immediate interest in protecting these vulnerable creatures. On the opposite end of the state, "Treasure Highlands" is providing tools and resources to Highlands Plateau residents who want to maintain havens for birds and wildlife in their communities. And our ten local chapters continue to advocate for conservation while introducing hundreds of people to the joys of birding.


Audubon North Carolina's efforts to protect North Carolina's birds and wildlife are not designed to benefit only birders and wildlife watchers. Thriving populations of birds and wildlife indicate a healthy environment. A healthy environment attracts people to live, work, and raise families in the state. Audubon North Carolina's small staff of 12 makes a difference for birdlife, and our quality of life, every day. As you'll see in this report, our conservation work is only possible because of the support of a robust network of chapters, members, and partners who provide the strength that comes from a collective vision. Thank you for your continued support.

# [PROFILES IN CONSERVATION]

## **Audubon wardens safeguard coastal birds**

A statewide organization, Audubon North Carolina grew out of a program focused on protecting the state's coastal and salt marsh birds. Walker Golder, Audubon's first full-time employee in the state, began his tenure with National Audubon Society in 1989 when he was hired to manage the organization's network of 19 coastal sanctuaries in North Carolina ranging from Currituck Sound in the northeastern corner of the state to Battery Island south of Wilmington. The Wrightsville Beach native has devoted his career to protecting coastal birds such as the graceful Black Skimmer and the feisty, fist-sized Least Tern. In the longstanding tradition of Audubon wardens, Walker and his team of dedicated biologists, Lindsay Addison and Katie Bullard, rise before the sun and work long hours to steward North Carolina's precious birdlife. Audubon's North Carolina coastal sanctuaries are critical to birds, supporting an average of 37% of North Carolina's coastal waterbird population every year.





## Protecting the past and preparing for the future

Under the soft green canopy of live oaks, in the rustling grasses of Currituck Sound, and in freshwater pools teeming with birdlife, change is underway at the Donal C. O'Brien, Jr. Sanctuary and Audubon Center at Pine Island. Tenacious birders wade and boat through marshes under the night sky, listening for the rattling calls of secretive marsh birds like the Black Rail. Center Director Mark Buckler leads a group of visitors on a hike through a maritime forest, stirring up migratory warblers. And Chandler Sawyer, an eighth generation Currituck County native, watches thousands of ducks feeding in impoundments he carefully manages to attract waterfowl. During Audubon's second year of management at Pine Island, Audubon staff, community leaders, and partners are creating a plan for the sanctuary that embraces the heritage of northeastern North Carolina, while preparing for the changes the rising sea level will bring to this low-lying region.

“SO I WENT, AND IN THOSE MAGICAL MOMENTS OF THAT MARCH  
SUNRISE, I KNEW THAT THIS WAS A PROPERTY THAT HAD TO BE  
SAVED FOR THE AGES.” – DONAL C. O'BRIEN, JR., FORMER  
BOARD CHAIR OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY



### Building bridges to benefit birdlife

Leading a group of birders on a walk during fall migration, Curtis Smalling hears a distinctive sound overhead. He tells the group that it's the call note of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, which sounds like "tennis shoes on a gym floor." He explains how most songbirds migrate at night and use call notes to stay together. The trip participants listen raptly, while keeping their binoculars poised for fly-by warblers. Curtis's passion for birds and bird conservation is contagious. A natural collaborator, he has developed partnerships from the statewide to the international level to research and protect imperiled species like the Golden-winged and Cerulean Warbler. He works with a veritable army of devoted chapter volunteers and student interns who help Audubon North Carolina in countless ways. "When people get outside and monitor birds they start to have a real sense of responsibility for the birds they encounter," says Curtis. "Nothing provides a stronger connection for people than knowing how their local bird communities are doing."



## Bettering the world through birding

*Posted on the Audubon NC blog ([www.ncaudubonblog.org](http://www.ncaudubonblog.org)) on May 9, 2011*

Big news from this year's second Friday bird walk at Mason Inlet at Wrightsville Beach: Least Terns have arrived. This fact was made evident when a pair of Fish Crows flew across the Waterbird Management Area and was set upon by no less than seven adult terns, who escorted the crows out of their chosen nesting site. Following the commotion, one tern landed in an open sandy spot between the dunes. After a brief look around, the tern sidled over to a small depression in the sand and promptly sat down in a very dutiful nesting manner. I couldn't see eggs, but the posture had all the hallmarks of "family in progress."-- Andy Wood, Education Director, Audubon North Carolina

For more than two decades, Andy Wood has been offering his unique and entertaining perspective on the natural world to thousands of people who join him for field trips and outreach programs, or listen to his radio program on public radio WHQR in Wilmington. With humor and enthusiasm, Andy connects people to the natural world every day.



## SAVING SIGNATURE SPECIES



### Coastal waterbirds

Audubon North Carolina's coastal sanctuaries, under the watchful eyes of Audubon wardens, link 19 islands that provide a refuge for more than a third of the state's nesting waterbirds and shorebirds, some 25,000 pairs of breeding birds representing 24 species. The sanctuaries are home to 104 pairs of American Oystercatchers (28% of North Carolina's breeding population), more than 700 pairs of Least Terns, 5,678 pairs of Royal Terns, and more than 1,000 pairs of Sandwich Terns. 2011 was a banner nesting season for Audubon's coastal sanctuaries.

> Approximately 75 pairs of American Oystercatchers nested on islands in the Lower Cape Fear River, one of the greatest concentrations of this species in North Carolina. Audubon manages

these islands in cooperation with the State of North Carolina and the Army Corps of Engineers.

> Brown Pelican numbers on Audubon Sanctuaries increased 14% to 2,071 pairs since the last state population survey in 2007.

> With the support of the Town of Wrightsville Beach, Audubon biologists managed a nesting area at Masonboro Inlet that provided excellent habitat for 118 Black Skimmer and 305 Least Tern nests, an increase of 45% and 280%, respectively, from last year. At least 55 Least Terns nested at Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area, a site on the north end of Wrightsville that Audubon manages in partnership with New Hanover County and the Town of Wrightsville Beach. These Least Tern colonies represented over 10% of the state nesting population.





## American Oystercatcher

“This fine bird is most striking in appearance and exceedingly conspicuous. Broadly marked in solid brown-blacks and whites, with a large, brilliant vermillion-colored bill, red eyelids, and a large yellow eye, there is no possibility of ever mistaking it for anything but what it is—the feathered king of the shell-strewn sand-beaches.” (*Birds of North Carolina*, T. Gilbert Pearson, C. S. Brimley, and H. H. Brimley, 1919)

Found on North Carolina’s beaches and islands throughout the year, the American Oystercatcher is listed as a “Species of High Concern” in the United States. The main threats to this shy shorebird include its low population (11,000 birds on the East Coast), widespread loss of beach habitat, recreational disturbance, beach stabilization, and predators that thrive in the presence of people. In partnership with N.C. State University, U.S. Geological Survey, N.C. Wildlife Resources

Commission, and other partners, Audubon North Carolina launched the American Oystercatcher Conservation Initiative, the largest study ever conducted for a shorebird species in the state.

The three-year study will assess the productivity of oystercatchers nesting on beaches, natural islands, and dredged-sand islands, and will identify the factors that contribute to nest and chick loss. Studies of migration and winter habitats will document the distribution, abundance, and potential threats at these areas. The research will shed light on the importance of the North Carolina coast to oystercatchers that breed in other states and determine where North Carolina’s breeding oystercatchers spend the off-season. Understanding the factors that contribute to nest and chick loss will allow biologists help increase survivorship and nesting success.



## SAVING SIGNATURE SPECIES

### **Golden-winged Warbler**

Following completion of a four year cooperative research project on the Golden-winged Warbler, Audubon North Carolina staff worked with partners to analyze the data and develop habitat management guidance that is being used by federal and state land managers, and private land owners to benefit Golden-winged Warblers and many other early successional species. Audubon North Carolina is playing a key role in the Golden-winged Working Group, a partnership that has developed plans for impacting up to 250,000 acres per decade within defined areas until the species' population is restored to pre-1970 levels (about a 50% increase over today's population estimate).

### **Researching North Carolina birdlife**

> Audubon North Carolina staff produced a new edition of *Important Bird Areas of North Carolina*, a full-color publication (available online at [ncaudubonblog.org](http://ncaudubonblog.org)) with detailed descriptions of 96 sites comprising nearly 4.9 million acres that are critical to birdlife. Hundreds of dedicated volunteer birders and Audubon chapter members helped gather data for the new edition.

> Audubon North Carolina biologists have contributed to nearly 50 scientific research studies and publications over the years. Their research is used by other conservation agencies and is applied in the field to benefit birds and their habitats. Please visit [ncaudubon.org](http://ncaudubon.org) for more information about these studies.

# PROTECTING IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

## **Lea-Hutaff Island**

Thanks to a generous donation from Fred and Alice Stanback, in 2010 Audubon North Carolina purchased a 35.7-acre tract on Lea-Hutaff Island, one of the state's last undeveloped barrier islands. The Lea-Hutaff Important Bird Area is a haven for birds such as Wilson's Plover, American Oystercatcher, and Black Skimmer and represents the southernmost regular breeding site for Piping Plover, a federally threatened bird named for its melodic call. The marshes are home to Clapper Rails, rare Saltmarsh Sparrows, wading birds, and waterfowl. Located in Pender County between Topsail and Figure Eight Islands, migrating and wintering shorebirds numbering in the thousands flock here during migration. The island is a popular destination for beachgoers who enjoy walking, swimming, and fishing. Audubon North Carolina, the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust, and the State of North Carolina have worked together to protect the island for close to a decade. Audubon manages the new tract as part of its coastal sanctuary system.

## **Donal C. O'Brien, Jr. Sanctuary and Audubon Center at Pine Island**

Upon joining the Pine Island staff as Habitat and Resource Manager in the fall of 2010, Chandler Sawyer immediately began restoring targeted areas of the 2,650-acre sanctuary to enhance habitats for waterfowl and other wildlife. He prepared four freshwater impoundments for migratory waterfowl by installing pumps to control water levels. Thousands of ducks, mostly Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, and Mallard, wintered in the ponds, and in the spring, migratory shorebirds stopped over during their travels. Chandler successfully burned one-third of the marsh areas in the sanctuary to increase plant production and prevent the invasion of woody species.



## ADVOCATING FOR BIRDS & IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS



### **Cape Hatteras National Seashore**

Decades of unregulated beach driving have pushed the birds at Cape Hatteras National Seashore — a globally significant IBA — to the brink. Populations of waterbirds that nest on the Seashore's beaches, like Least Terns and Black Skimmers, plummeted 84% from 1997 to 2007. Rare sea turtles were also suffering alarming declines. In the fall of 2007 Audubon and other conservation groups successfully pushed for a temporary science-based management plan, which, in just four years, has enabled these birds and turtles to make a comeback.

In 2011 nesting birds and sea turtles continued their recovery under science-based protection guidelines developed by Audubon and partners. With the sea turtle nesting season still underway in early September, 147 nests had been counted, approaching the all-time record of 153 nests set in 2010. Nesting terns, skimmers, plovers and oystercatchers have also continued their success.

In July 2011 the National Park Service proposed new, permanent regulations for off-road vehicle use on the Seashore's beaches that jeopardize much-needed wildlife protections and put the future for birds like the Piping Plover, Least Tern, Black Skimmer, and many other shorebird species in doubt. The proposed regulation will control what happens at Cape Hatteras for decades and set a precedent for other national parks. As written, the regulation does not mandate specific, science-based protections for the wildlife that depends on the Seashore and it provides only a few areas for families to safely enjoy vehicle-free beaches.

Audubon and its partner organizations coordinated a citizen response to the proposed regulation and also submitted detailed comments to the National Park Service. Audubon is working to insure that the Park Service will revise the plan so that it guarantees adequate space and

protections for wildlife, while still allowing responsible beach driving in some areas so that all visitors can fully enjoy this national treasure.

### **Coastal engineering**

Despite a hard fight by conservation groups, Senate Bill 110 passed the N.C. General Assembly during the 2011 legislative session, toppling a 26-year-old ban on hardened structures on North Carolina beaches. The bill will allow up to four terminal groins to be built at inlets along the coast “under certain conditions.” Audubon North Carolina signed onto a letter with 32 other environmental groups urging Governor Beverly Perdue to veto the jetty bill, but the governor did not veto the bill. Terminal groins cause increased erosion, harm birds and other wildlife, and will permanently scar North Carolina’s beautiful coastline. Audubon North Carolina will continue to work with communities to monitor this issue.



“AUDUBON NORTH CAROLINA IS LEADING THE WAY IN ADDRESSING THE CONSERVATION NEEDS OF BIRDS, NOT ONLY IN THE BREEDING GROUNDS BUT THROUGHOUT THEIR ANNUAL LIFE CYCLE.” – MATT JEFFREY, SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER, INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES PROGRAM, NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY





## PROTECTING CORRIDORS FOR MIGRATORY BIRDS



> Piping Plovers spend over half of their annual cycle away from their breeding sites. The habitats they depend on during migration and winter are just as important as breeding habitats and adult survival away from the breeding grounds is essential to the stability and recovery of the Piping Plover population. For years, the whereabouts of the Atlantic Coast Piping Plover population during winter was poorly understood. During the 2006 International Piping Plover Census, biologists found 417 Piping Plovers wintering in The Bahamas. In 2011, an international team of shorebird biologists, including Walker Golder, traveled to The Bahamas in search of wintering Piping Plovers and found more than 1,000 birds. Audubon North Carolina and Audubon's International Alliances Program are working with the Bahamas National Trust to protect the species' key wintering areas.

> Seven percent of the North American Wood Thrush population breeds in the forests of North Carolina. Audubon North Carolina is working to protect this species on both ends of its migratory pathway by helping biologists in the wintering grounds in Nicaragua gain the experience and tools needed for bird conservation. In 2011, Audubon North Carolina provided equipment and support to initiate Wood Thrush conservation at a privately owned IBA (El Jaguar) in Nicaragua. The organization also sponsored a meeting for managers of 32 of the 33 IBAs in Nicaragua that provided a forum for the national government to recognize these important places and assess their current status. "This meeting was the first of its kind in the Western Hemisphere," says Matt Jeffrey. "Bringing together the resource managers from across the country is an impressive first step in addressing the conservation needs of the Important Bird Area system in Nicaragua."



## BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION



> Audubon North Carolina and a variety of partners launched the Treasure Highlands initiative in 2011. The project is helping residents of the Highlands Plateau manage their property in conservation-friendly ways and connecting people with citizen science and volunteer opportunities in the region. A website ([treasurehighlands.org](http://treasurehighlands.org)) serves as a clearinghouse for environmental activities and volunteer opportunities.

> Audubon North Carolina staff is assisting private landowners who want to manage their property to benefit birds and wildlife. Thanks to support from the Grace Jones Richardson Trust, Audubon staff developed management plans for more than 2,000 acres of land in 2010 and expects to complete plans and agreements for 20,000 acres by the end of 2012.

> With guidance from Cissie Brooks, Marine Science Coordinator at Wrightsville Beach Elementary School, a group of fifth graders became deeply involved in Audubon's conservation work. As part of a unit on coastal birds, more than 50 students designed creative signs for bird-nesting areas and posted them at Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area in March 2011. Many thanks to all the students, parents, and Cissie Brooks for their commitment to North Carolina's birdlife.

> In spring 2011 volunteer birders assisted Pine Island Center Director Mark Buckler with the challenging task of scouring the sanctuary's marshes for rails and other marsh birds. This baseline study will help staff evaluate the future success of habitat restoration work.





> To improve Audubon North Carolina’s ability to engage people in conservation, staff will update and add to facilities at Pine Island. Frank Harmon, architect, and his team completed a conceptual site plan for the sanctuary with input from a variety of stakeholders. The plan is designed to protect the integrity of the historic structures at Pine Island, including the 1913 hunting lodge, while adding low impact “green” infrastructure that will provide greater opportunities and access for the public.

### **Working together for birds**

> In 2010-2011 Audubon North Carolina expanded its conservation education programs by offering kayaking and birding trips at the Pine Island Sanctuary in addition to outreach programs and field trips in southeastern North Carolina. 2,700 people

participated in these activities. Audubon North Carolina’s outreach programs are reaching more new audiences than ever before.

> In June 2011, Audubon North Carolina kicked off the Good Egg/Share the Beach initiative, an effort to help people learn more about species like Least Terns and Black Skimmers that nest on North Carolina’s beaches every spring and summer. Twenty volunteers helped Audubon staff talk to people at Wrightsville Beach, asking them to sign a pledge to “Be a good egg” and share the beach with birds. A new website ([goodeggnc.org](http://goodeggnc.org)) allows anyone to take the pledge online. Close to 900 people had signed the pledge by September 2011. The Good Egg campaign, funded by TogetherGreen, International Paper Foundation, and Cape Fear Audubon Society, is raising awareness about the simple steps we can all take to protect the birds that travel long distances to raise their young on North Carolina beaches.



## BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION

> Intern Julia Roberts made great strides for Audubon North Carolina in 2010-2011. A student at Watauga High School in Boone, Julia built a filter list for an eBird.org portal for Nicaragua and helped with an analysis of Watchlist and other priority species in North Carolina. She helped make the new LEED-certified Watauga High School more bird-friendly by reducing window strikes (birds colliding with windows). And she worked with preschoolers and teachers to develop a program to counteract Nature Deficit Disorder at Valle Crucis Elementary School.

> In 2010, Audubon North Carolina staff organized the Holly Shelter-Lea Hutaff Circle, a new count circle for the Christmas Bird Count, the longest-running citizen science program in the world. The circle includes Holly Shelter-Angola Bay and



Lea-Hutaff Island Important Bird Areas and comprises a variety of habitats including beach, salt marsh, bottomland swamp, and longleaf pine savanna. Twenty-five volunteers contributed their time and expertise to locate over 140 species of birds, including Pacific Loon and Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

> In 2010-2011, Audubon North Carolina continued to expand and engage a virtual community of more than 5,000 supporters through a variety of online outlets, including an online action center that circulates policy alerts and a monthly e-newsletter, and social media sites Facebook and Twitter. This year the number of Audubon North Carolina's Facebook fans reached 1,150, an increase of almost 50% in one year. These online venues are becoming increasingly important communities where Audubon and its supporters share stories about conservation successes and challenges.

### **Making connections**

> In June 2010 the T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society dedicated a bird watching observation platform at Southwest Park in Guilford County that resulted from a great partnership. The Piedmont Triad Regional Water Authority provided the land for the overlook, the Audubon Society provided the material, the Southern Guilford High School carpentry class provided the labor, and Southwest Park managed the project. The Audubon Overlook offers visitors a chance to see the more than 100 bird species living in the area.

> In early 2011, the Great Smoky Mountains Audubon Society became the tenth chapter of National Audubon Society in North Carolina. The chapter's mission is to promote an awareness and appreciation of nature and to encourage responsible environmental stewardship through education, protection, conservation and



## BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION

restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Based in Maggie Valley, the chapter has already been active in the N.C. Birding Trail, hawk watching, and other projects.

> High Country Audubon Society hosted a successful Audubon North Carolina annual meeting in May 2011 in Blowing Rock. The 105 attendees enjoyed field trips to Important Bird Areas including Grandfather Mountain and Elk Knob, symposia about local and statewide conservation efforts, and great local entertainment and dining. Many thanks to High Country for a memorable meeting.

### **Heroes in Conservation**

> At the 2010 Pearson Society weekend in Blowing Rock, Len Pardue received the T. Gilbert Pearson Society Award. A former Audubon North Carolina board member, Len is an active member of the Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society. His many contributions to bird conservation include helping manage the Beaver Lake Sanctuary, a birding hotspot in Asheville managed by the society, and working to build a sustainable future for this vibrant local chapter.



At the 2011 Annual Meeting in Blowing Rock, Audubon North Carolina recognized several key partners with awards.

> Bob Cherry was named Honorary Warden in recognition of his tireless efforts to protect the birds and other natural resources of the Blue Ridge Parkway. He has worked with Audubon and other partners on Yellow-bellied Sapsucker research and a host of monitoring projects.

> Volunteer of the Year Doris Ratchford has made incredible contributions to Audubon's work. She has been instrumental in developing the Treasure Highlands website, updating the national IBA database for [ncaudubonblog.org](http://ncaudubonblog.org), and assisting High Country Audubon Society in a variety of capacities, including web design.

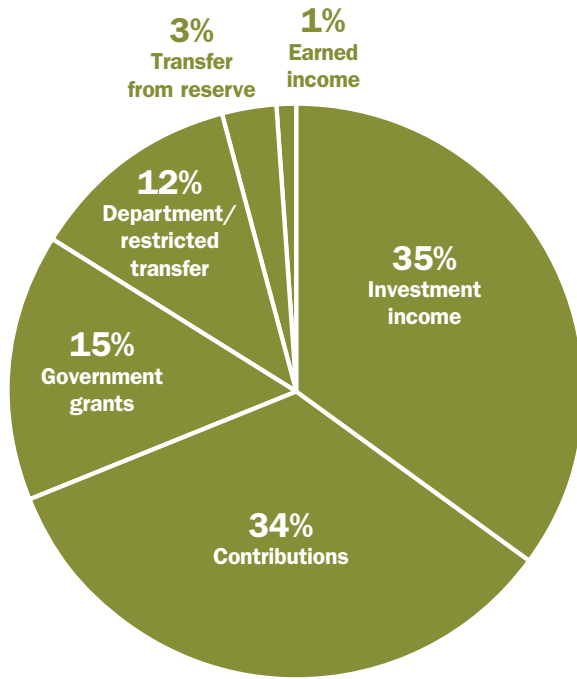
> Audubon awarded the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation with the Bird Lore Bird Education Award. For many decades the Stewardship Foundation (formerly known as Grandfather Mountain, Inc.) has shared the wonders of Grandfather Mountain with hundreds of thousands of visitors. The staff demonstrates great professionalism and enthusiasm whether they are conducting programs for school children or conducting research on the flora and fauna of this IBA.



## YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

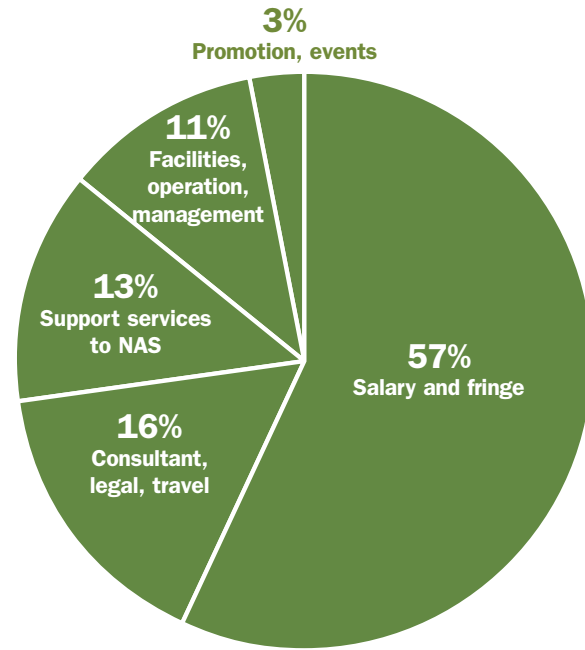
### **Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2011 (July 1, 2010 - June 30, 2011)**

With a small staff spread across the state, Audubon North Carolina knows how critical partnerships and collaboration are to our mission of protecting habitats for birds and other wildlife. We are pleased to report that thanks to the generosity of our many supporters and important relationships with our conservation partners, we finished the year with a balanced budget. Individuals and foundations contributed \$426,877 in this fiscal year. We thank all of the donors, foundations, government agencies, and organizations who support Audubon's mission in North Carolina.



### FISCAL YEAR 2011 REVENUE

Investment income	\$431,331	35%
Contributions	\$426,877	34%
Government grants	\$192,709	15%
Department/restricted transfer	\$150,700	12%
Transfer from reserve	\$ 32,724	3%
Earned income	\$ 15,992	1%



### FISCAL YEAR 2011 EXPENSES

Salary and fringe	\$715,593	57%
Consultant, legal, travel	\$195,713	16%
Support services to NAS	\$162,827	13%
Facilities, operation, management	\$141,801	11%
Promotion, events	\$42,192	3%



# WINGS OF SUPPORT

Audubon North Carolina is deeply grateful to all the individuals, agencies, organizations, and foundations that supported our work this fiscal year, from July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011. Thank you for your commitment to protecting birds and their habitats in North Carolina.

## Gifts up to \$999

Emily Ahrens  
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