



Audubon NORTH CAROLINA

2009 – 2010 ANNUAL REPORT



Audubon North Carolina is the state office of the National Audubon Society representing 10,000 grassroots members and nine 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)  
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 **Audubon** NORTH CAROLINA

For many people, birds are the most accessible wild creatures in nature. You can observe and appreciate birds with little cost or effort, whether you spy a hawk flying overhead on your morning commute, or watch birds flitting around a backyard feeder. In essence, a reliable pair of binoculars is all you really need to bring birdlife into focus.

When it comes to bird conservation, Audubon must weigh variables such as threat, opportunity, and risk when we determine which species (and their associated habitats) on which to focus. In some instances we strive to protect a species like the Golden-winged Warbler not only because it is globally imperiled, but because protecting this “umbrella” species’ dwindling scrubland habitat helps associated species such as Chestnut-sided Warbler and Alder Flycatcher. Our work is also driven by the fact that North Carolina is a stronghold for certain species. For example,

the state is home to an estimated 18% and 15%, respectively, of the global populations of the Prothonotary Warbler and White Ibis.

The human community is the one constant variable in all our endeavors. Our supporters’ passion for birds and wild places inspires and enables our work whether we are teaming up with concerned landowners in Highlands, schoolchildren on the southeastern coast, or budding ornithologists in Nicaragua.

We hope this 2009-2010 annual report brings a successful year into focus, not only by providing updates on our projects from around the state, but also through the compelling images that range from a nest full of Golden-winged Warbler hatchlings to an adult Least Tern protecting its chick. We can all savor these sights because of your support. Thank you for keeping Audubon North Carolina in your field of vision.



## PROTECTING OUR GREAT NATURAL HERITAGE

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

In early 2010, Audubon North Carolina began a new chapter of conservation outreach in the state when it assumed full management responsibility for the Donal C. O'Brien, Jr. Audubon Sanctuary and Center at Pine Island. The sanctuary protects one of the last remaining examples of what was once a dramatic landscape along Currituck Sound, famous for waterfowl hunting and bass fishing. Over the past 30 years the National Audubon Society has, through the generosity of the Slick family, received ownership of parcels of land on the northern Outer Banks that now comprise more than 2,600 acres of marshes and uplands.



The Sound is best-known as one of the country's premier wintering areas for ducks, geese, and swans, but it offers much more. The waters, marshes, and surrounding woodlands abound with a diversity of birds from Brown Pelicans to Prairie Warblers, depending on the season. Along with 159 bird species, the sanctuary is home to 7 amphibian species, 17 reptile species, and 9 mammal species. More than 350 species of plants have been recorded here, including at least three rare and threatened species.

Pine Island is poised to become a major conservation hub that serves the residents of this region and all of North Carolina in many ways:

- > Audubon staff and local community leaders are developing plans for the center that will include environmental education programs, scientific research, conservation of important upland and marsh habitat, and opportunities for public access.
- > Almost 90% of the sanctuary is comprised of marshland, one of the focus areas of the Atlantic Flyway Initiative (see next section), which supports secretive birdlife and other wildlife that has yet to be fully

documented. Much of the initial work at Pine Island will involve conducting research and natural resource inventories of the area.

- > Universities and other institutions in the state have expressed an interest in working with Audubon to utilize Pine Island as a living laboratory for their students.

### **Atlantic Flyway Initiative**

Protecting bird species that migrate between states and in the case of neotropical migrants, between continents, requires working across political boundaries. Audubon North Carolina is helping lead the Atlantic Flyway Initiative, a collaboration between Audubon state programs, international partners, and local chapters to conserve birds and their habitats along the Eastern Seaboard and within key wintering sites in Latin America. Centered on one of the four principal migratory routes for North American birds, the Initiative is aimed at conserving the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) along the flyway by focusing on forests, salt marshes, and coastal habitats – systems that support both priority birds and human communities.



### **Important Bird Areas**

Throughout the year, all over the state, devoted citizen scientists and Audubon chapter members donate their time and talents to the network of 97 IBAs in North Carolina that comprise more than 4.9 million acres of private and public land.

> The Adopt-an-IBA program has grown into a network of volunteers, chapter members, and agency partners that monitors more than 90% of the state's IBAs. Partners and volunteers collect data for these sites through citizen science projects such as the Christmas Bird Count, Great Backyard Bird Count, Breeding Bird Survey, and eBird, an online bird sighting database.

> Thanks to funding from TogetherGreen, an Audubon/Toyota partnership, Audubon North Carolina is working with local communities in the Highlands Plateau IBA to design an innovative project to help local landowners manage their property in ways that benefit native birds and wildlife. An intern with UNC's Institute for the Environment analyzed more than 130 years of bird records to document bird hotspots in the area and how they have changed over

time. A group of volunteers and partner agencies is developing a website called "Treasure Highlands" that will match area residents with environmentally-focused volunteer opportunities throughout the region and provide detailed information on wildlife-friendly land management practices.

> Audubon North Carolina launched a blog ([www.ncaudubonblog.org](http://www.ncaudubonblog.org)) that offers virtual field trips and in-depth information about the state's IBAs. A volunteer webmaster designed and manages the site, which features engaging reports, photos, and video from Audubon naturalists in the field.

### **Waccamaw and Lumber River Important Bird Areas**

From early 2008 to 2010 Audubon biologists paddled, hiked, and waded through remote bottomland hardwood swamp forest in the Waccamaw and Lumber River floodplains in southeastern North Carolina to study birdlife. These extensive forests are home to a wealth of neotropical migratory birds and wildlife such as American alligator, river otter, and bobcat. Individuals and timber companies own most of the land in the study areas although part of the region

is protected in state parks and game lands. Funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the project focused on conservation priority species such as Swainson's and Prothonotary warblers and Red-headed Woodpecker, all Audubon WatchList species.

Local community members and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation participated in the project by providing river access, logistical support, and anecdotal information about the area's wildlife. Volunteers from Wake Audubon Society adopted the Lumber River IBA and conducted inventories that contributed to the overall findings. Thanks to their efforts, Audubon North Carolina has records for more than 120 species of birds in the IBA, including more than 70 species from the breeding season.





## Coastal Sanctuaries

Audubon North Carolina manages a network of 19 coastal sanctuaries that provides refuge for more than a third of the state's nesting waterbirds. Managing waterbirds requires flexibility as species such as Least Terns and Black Skimmers that nest in colonies periodically shift their nesting sites in response to weather, human disturbance, and other conditions.

> Audubon biologists monitor Lea-Hutaff Island, an IBA, during the spring and summer. This undeveloped four-mile-long barrier island is an important site for birds throughout the year and nesting sea turtles from the spring through early fall. In 2009 125 pairs of Least Terns nested on the northern end of the island at Topsail Inlet. The island is the southernmost nesting site for the federally threatened Piping Plover and is also home to nesting Black Skimmers, Common Terns, American Oystercatchers, and Wilson's Plovers. The island and Rich and Topsail Inlets are vital for migrating and wintering shorebirds, especially high-priority species such as Piping Plover and Red Knot.

> During the 2009 season, Audubon biologists recorded 151 Least Tern nests, 88 Black Skimmer nests, and 18 Wilson's Plover nests at Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area at Wrightsville Beach, which Audubon manages in cooperation with New Hanover County. For the first time ever documented, terns and skimmers nested on the south end of Wrightsville Beach. In cooperation with the Town of Wrightsville Beach Audubon biologists protected the colony, which numbered about 100 breeding pairs each of Least Tern and Black Skimmer. Many chicks fledged (reached flying age) and the colony was likely one of the most successful in the state.

> Audubon North Carolina protects and monitors many islands on the Cape Fear River that provide nesting habitat for American Oystercatchers, Brown Pelicans, several wading bird species, and three tern species. Battery Island typically supports approximately 14,000 breeding pairs of White Ibis (81% of the state population) during the nesting season. In 2009 few White Ibis nested on the island, possibly because of the presence of a Great Horned Owl, but biologists documented a thousand White Ibis upriver on North Pelican Island, a state-owned marsh island managed by Audubon.









## Mountain Program

> This year Grandfather Mountain State Park, an IBA and one of Audubon North Carolina's key partners in the mountains, reached several milestones. The park now has a superintendent and ranger staff and the non-profit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Association was created to manage the attraction side of the mountain. Audubon's close partnership with the state park will likely result in a permanent home for the mountain program in the near future.

> The mountain program completed a three year study on the population and nesting habits of Golden-winged Warblers across the eastern region with funding from Cornell University. This Audubon WatchList species has been declining precipitously since the 1980s as its scrubland habitats, often found on abandoned and overgrown farmland, have converted into forest. Cowbird parasitism and competition with the Blue-winged Warbler are also contributing to

the species' decline. In the spring and summer biologists stalk Golden-winged Warblers in the Amphibolite Mountains IBA to map territories, locate nests, and collect blood samples for a rangewide genetic project. This research, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and private donors, is part of the Golden-winged Warbler Working Group. The field team had a successful season, finding nests and completing vegetation surveys of territories that will be used to create management guidelines for land owners.

> Under the umbrella of the Atlantic Flyway Initiative, the mountain program is developing a pilot program to advise private landowners on management practices to enhance and restore bird habitat. Early successes came in the summer of 2010 with the discovery of a new Bobolink nesting colony in Watauga County and a new partnership with the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources Stewardship Program.

## DEFENDING IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

The 2010 nesting season at Cape Hatteras National Seashore broke several records for rare sea turtles and waterbirds that nest on the Seashore's beaches, according to data from the National Park Service. The National Seashore reported that as of September 8, 2010, 153 sea turtle nests had been recorded at the Seashore (with some nests remaining), surpassing the previous record of 111 nests in 2008.

Additionally, a record 15 Piping Plover chicks survived to fledge, the highest number ever documented since record-keeping began in 1992. Before current off-road vehicle (ORV) management practices were implemented in April 2008, Piping Plover numbers within the Seashore declined to an all-time low of no chicks surviving to fledging in 2002 and 2004.

Twenty-six American Oystercatcher chicks fledged from the Seashore's beaches in 2010. This is the highest number of fledged

chicks for that sensitive species reported at the Seashore since records have been kept.

Under an April 2008 consent decree, ORV use is restricted in designated bird and turtle nesting areas on the Seashore during nesting season. The consent decree employs science-based protection measures that provide the minimum buffer distances needed to protect nesting birds and chicks from vehicles and human disturbance, as well as restrictions on night driving that are vital for nesting sea turtles.

The National Park Service is developing a final ORV management plan for Cape Hatteras National Seashore that must be implemented by April 2011. When the Park Service released a draft management plan in early 2010, Southern Environmental Law Center, Defenders of Wildlife, and Audubon North Carolina responded by submitting comments that outlined measures



necessary for the Park Service to meet its legal mandate to conserve and protect the natural resources of the Seashore, leave them unimpaired for future generations, and provide an appropriate balance between continued ORV use and other public uses, including pedestrian and family use and wildlife conservation.

Audubon North Carolina coordinated a citizen response to the draft plan that initiated thousands of additional comments from concerned conservationists around the country. Working with partner groups, Audubon launched a website, [www.preservehatteras.org](http://www.preservehatteras.org), that features scientific information and news about management and recreation at the Seashore.

### Wind Energy

As part of Audubon's goal of promoting cleaner energy solutions that are balanced with protecting wildlife and wild places, staff biologists are engaged in discussions about wind energy in North Carolina. Statewide environmental review is critical for any wind

project in the state because many of the sites with the highest potential for wind energy are located within IBA boundaries. Audubon staff provided input to the Environmental Management Commission when it crafted legislation to establish a statewide review and permitting process, but the bill did not pass during the 2010 legislative session.

In 2009 the N.C. Legislature approved a pilot wind project in Pamlico Sound but Duke Energy cancelled the project in the summer of 2010 citing cost overruns. Fortunately Duke Energy committed to finishing the annual cycle of bird monitoring that originated with this project near the Clam Shoal Important Bird Area. This undeveloped island in Pamlico Sound provides critical habitat for waterbirds, waterfowl, and shorebirds throughout the year and the proposed project might have altered foraging or migration patterns in the area, or possibly caused bird mortality in some instances.



## BRINGING CONSERVATION HOME

### Local Chapters

North Carolina's nine local chapters continue to expand their reach by testing new models for fundraising and education, and diving into important policy issues from the local to the national level. Some highlights from their many accomplishments this year are detailed below. Many thanks to all chapter members for their enthusiasm and support of bird and wildlife conservation. To get involved with your local chapter, visit [www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org).

> Chapter members form an impressive volunteer workforce, donating more than 13,000 hours of volunteer time annually to projects including leading field trips, organizing climate change workshops, cleaning up natural areas, and monitoring bird species at adopted IBAs.

> Birders from the Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society are deeply involved in bird research. These citizen scientists organize spring bird counts at Mount Mitchell and the Plott and Great Balsam Mountains and map territories and record songs of Cerulean Warblers in the Bull Creek IBA, one of the most important sites in the state for this Audubon WatchList species.

> Members of New Hope Audubon Society built a new wildlife observation platform on Jordan Lake, an IBA that is home to one of the largest populations of Bald Eagles in North Carolina. The project was a cooperative effort between the local chapter, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

## Recognizing Partners and Volunteers

> At the 2009 Pearson Society weekend, Alex Ewing received the T. Gilbert Pearson Society Award in recognition of the many and diverse ways that he contributes to Audubon North Carolina's wellbeing. A longtime supporter, Alex is a member of the board of trustees and an active member of Forsyth Audubon.

At the 2010 annual meeting in May in the Highlands-Cashiers area, Audubon North Carolina recognized three longtime partners with special awards.

> The Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, the oldest land trust in North Carolina, was named an Audubon Honorary Warden. This award is given to an organization or individual that epitomizes the spirit of the Audubon wardens who once patrolled and enforced game laws. The land trust now protects well over a thousand acres on and around the Highlands Plateau.

> Audubon presented the Bird Lore Conservation Education Award to the Highlands Biological Station in recognition of its work to provide information and inspiration to the public about birds. Through newly renovated displays (with a bird focus), summer camps, teacher trainings, public programming, and outreach, the Station and its education wing, the Highlands Nature Center, encourage stewardship of the rich flora and fauna of the region.

> Brock Hutchins received the Volunteer of the Year Award for his personal commitment and long-standing dedication to conservation. Brock served as president of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society chapter for six years and has played a key role in guiding the chapter as it expanded its membership base, adopted several IBAs, organized special events, and hosted an extremely successful annual meeting.



## CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE

### Education and Outreach

> Audubon North Carolina is deeply committed to reaching out to people of all ages, with diverse backgrounds, to educate them about wildlife, with a special focus on birds. Audubon North Carolina's Education Director conducts programs for a variety of groups and individuals, including local Audubon chapters, civic and garden clubs, church groups, and college and university classes. In 2009-2010, these programs, many of them focused on climate and energy topics, reached more than 2,300 adults. The Education Director led or participated in guided bird and habitat hikes for more than 400 adults and children. Participants in these outdoor experiences explored rare habitats such as Holly Shelter Game Land and Sandy Run Savanna State Natural Area and learned about barrier island ecology and beach-nesting birds on free weekly field trips at Mason Inlet.

> Thanks to funding from TogetherGreen, several Audubon North Carolina staff members are designing a new approach to bird conservation on the southeast coast to help beachgoers learn about the native birds and wildlife that rely on the same sandy beaches that attract so many human visitors.

> As part of a TogetherGreen fellowship, an Audubon North Carolina coastal biologist worked with a local school to connect students to their coastal environment. In February 2010 fifth graders from Wrightsville Beach Elementary School traveled to Mason Inlet to help restore nesting habitat for Least Terns and Black Skimmers. These species nest on bare sand and when too much vegetation overtakes a site the birds may abandon the area. The team removed plants and relocated sea oats, which aid in supporting dune ridges. In the spring, the students designed colorful signs to post at nesting areas as a final show of support for their "adopted" charges.



> As conservation partners, Audubon North Carolina and the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation collaborate in many ways, including promoting citizen science efforts such as seasonal bird counts, sharing information on bird populations in parks, and championing park expansion efforts. In 2010 staff from the two organizations banded together to celebrate “Year of the Birds” at North Carolina state parks by organizing and leading events and field trips that focused on birds and bird-watching. By September 2010, North Carolina’s state parks had hosted more than 500 events.



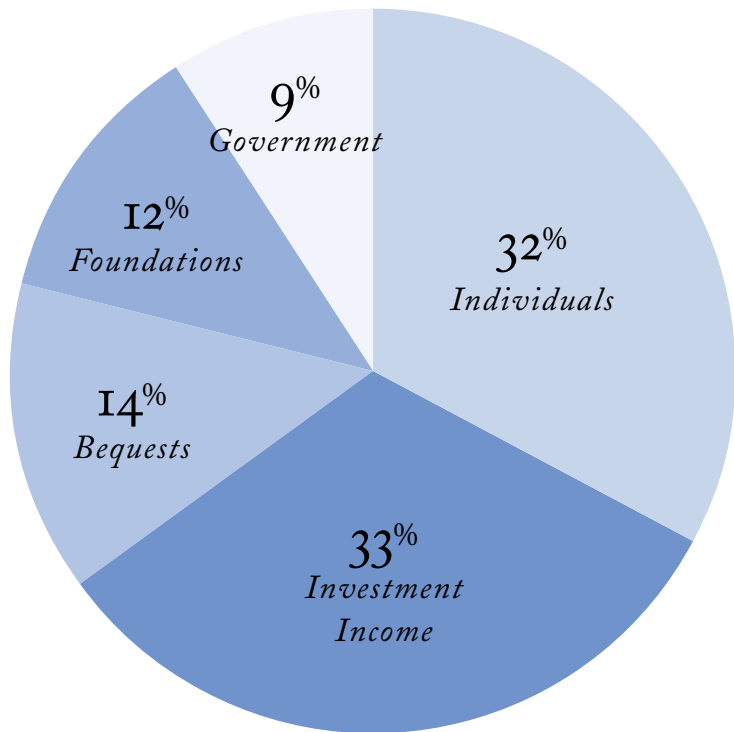
## YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### **Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2010 (July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010)**

Audubon North Carolina continues to collaborate with partners and develop innovative conservation models to further the urgent work of conservation in North Carolina. This year our key projects have included opening 2,600 acres of pristine marsh and uplands at the Donal C. O'Brien, Jr. Audubon Sanctuary and Center at Pine Island to the public; completing a two-year inventory of the Lumber and Waccamaw River Important Bird Areas; developing a social marketing project in communities interacting with threatened beach-nesting birds; updating the Important Bird Area document used by dozens of local, state and federal agencies for conservation planning and management; and so much more.

We are proud to report that thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we finished another year in a stable position. Individuals remain the greatest contributors to our work, donating \$443,092 in this fiscal year. We also benefitted from an additional \$190,000 in bequests. We thank you for your support of Audubon's mission in North Carolina.





REVENUE



EXPENSES





## WINGS OF SUPPORT

Audubon North Carolina is very appreciative of the tremendous support we received from individuals, agencies, organizations, and foundations this fiscal year, from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010. We could not advance our mission without your contributions. We thank you for helping Audubon in its many successes benefitting birds and wildlife across North Carolina.

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Note: Audubon North Carolina  
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donor names correctly. If you  
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be made to this list, please  
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