



# Audubon NORTH CAROLINA

[FALL 2013]



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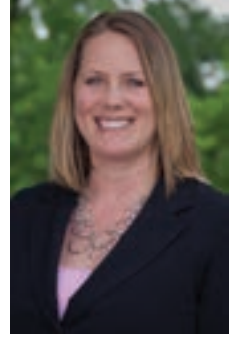
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**[FROM THE DIRECTOR]**

HEATHER STARCK  
*Executive Director*  
Audubon North Carolina



Summer may be high tide for visiting North Carolina's beautiful beaches, but Audubon works to protect beach habitats and the birds they support every day of the year.

Audubon North Carolina continually strives to make a difference for birds, wildlife and the people that share their habitats. As a feather in our cap, the father of the National Audubon Society, T. Gilbert Pearson, started his work to protect birds right here in North Carolina. Ultimately, his work and the work of early wardens saved plume-bearing birds like the Great Egret in North Carolina and along the entire coast. Royal Shoal and Legged Lump Two, tiny islands the Audubon Society purchased to protect nesting birds, were the first coastal sanctuary islands in North Carolina, ensuring that today we can enjoy the descendants of the birds they hosted.

One hundred years later, Audubon is still in North Carolina, still on islands, still protecting birds. The modern coastal sanctuary system was born in the 1970s thanks to a new generation of conservationists. Today it encompasses 19 islands and two beach sites that protect over a third of the waterbirds that nest in North Carolina.

As you read this newsletter dedicated to our coastal program, I hope you are inspired to take another step towards supporting the preservation of coastal areas for birds and people. You can get involved by:

- contributing to support the management of our sanctuaries and bird science research
- signing the pledge to Share our Seas and Shores
- adopting an American Oystercatcher
- following the American Oystercatcher satellite tracking project

It means so much to all of us at Audubon when people pledge, donate, or volunteer on behalf of bird protection. Your generosity will mean so much more to future generations of people and birds.

P.S. Carl the Cardinal is back! Please consider making an automatic monthly gift through our Cardinal Club. If you sign up before December 31, we'll send you a plushy cardinal along with our heartfelt thanks.



**A**udubon organizes its conservation strategies within flyways, and North Carolina sits in the middle of the Atlantic Flyway. Stretching from the North Atlantic coast down to South America, the Flyway is a bird superhighway: the path that millions of birds take on their annual migrations to and from breeding grounds. Of those thousands, 32 species have been identified as priority species—those in trouble.

There are many reasons why coastal birds are affected by changing coastal habitat including increased development, chronic disturbance, predators, overfishing, and sea level rise.

Protection of shore-dependent birds requires direct, on-the-ground conservation action led by professional staff and supported by a strong network of local volunteers. One of Audubon's greatest strengths is the network of Audubon chapters that span the entire Atlantic coast of the U.S. Forty-two professional staff members are working on the conservation of coastal birds, along with 61 Audubon chapters and eight Audubon centers in coastal counties of the Atlantic Flyway.

Audubon's International Alliances Program reaches beyond the borders of the U.S. to the Bahamas, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Canada. This enables Audubon to work throughout the hemisphere, at the scale necessary to close the circle on full life cycle conservation.

The Audubon Atlantic Flyway Coastal Plan is as ambitious as it is necessary. It aims to halt or reverse bird population declines and stabilize priority species populations by 2030. At the same time, we are committed to engaging people who enjoy the coast, based on our belief that information and education help people see the value of undisturbed nature and thriving wildlife.



### **Coastal birds are in trouble**

Pressures of human uses of coastline have caused serious declines in populations of birds that use the coast. For example, the decline in Red Knots along the Atlantic coast is one of the most precipitous of any bird species. The Red Knot once numbered over 100,000, but fewer than 30,000 remain today. Populations of Sanderlings, the little bird that skitters in the waves, have declined by up to 80% since the 1970s. Roseate Terns and Piping Plovers are listed under the Endangered Species Act. Other species of terns, American Oystercatchers, and Black Skimmers have special conservation status in most Atlantic coast states, and more coastal bird species are experiencing population declines.

# How is Audubon Implementing Sharing our Seas and Shores in North Carolina?

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**A**udubon North Carolina manages 19 sanctuary islands and contributes to research, monitoring, and policy efforts up and down the coast. The sanctuaries support over a third of the state's nesting waterbirds and shorebirds and serve as scientific laboratories to advance our knowledge of birds and bird conservation. Our sanctuary system is used as a model for research and protection along the entire Atlantic Flyway.

## **Why are sanctuaries important?**

Our 19 sanctuaries give Audubon a head start in on-the-ground conservation of coastal birds and their habitats. Audubon sanctuaries are models for protection and management of coastal birds and their habitats, where we apply the best available science. They are places for scientific research where we advance knowledge of coastal health, climate change impacts, and how breeding, migration, and wintering locations are connected for our coastal birds.

Audubon uses science to collect information and measure the progress of our on-the-ground conservation work. There is still much that is unknown about birds. Our science allows us to create effective protection plans for each priority species and other birds that share the coastal habitat with them. The research also measures our impact. Bird census data, bird surveys, and daily monitoring of the birds, their nests, and birds that survive to fledge (leave the nest) all add up to how we measure success. All of this data collection is by individuals working for or with Audubon. Our first priority is to perform the science that tells us where the birds are and how best to protect them.

Armed with our list of sites, we focus our efforts on those that are most significant for coastal birds and where Audubon has the greatest opportunity to protect birds and their habitats. We work in partnership with state and federal agencies, local municipalities, other non-profits, private landowners, and on Audubon-managed sanctuaries to reduce threats and protect or improve high quality habitats.

Audubon North Carolina is building a corps of beach bird stewards and at the same time, training people in a broad range of activities that include monitoring bird populations,

managing and protecting habitats, reducing human disturbances, research, and increasing public awareness. A NC survey of coastal residents showed that only 44% of people know that some birds build their nests directly on the sand! We conduct educational programs and field trips to help citizens better understand beach-nesting birds.



### Piping Plover



**Audubon North Carolina Deputy Director Walker Golder, along with other National Audubon staff, led a team of 31 researchers to the Bahamas where they discovered the largest known concentration of wintering Piping Plovers—more than 1,000 birds in all, an eighth of the species’ population. They identified two new Important Bird Areas that are eligible for protection through a partnership with the Bahamas National Trust, the NGO charged with building and managing the country’s national park system. Audubon’s work with the Piping Plover is an example of life cycle management—working to protect the Piping Plover, where it winters, nests and on its travels.**





## ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

With the longevity of our very successful coastal program, we have chosen just a few accomplishments to highlight! For more information on how Audubon is protecting our coastal birds, please visit our website.

### RESEARCH

- We were awarded a prestigious National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant for a four year study to increase knowledge about oystercatchers. The work will guide formulation of management plans to protect this umbrella species, benefiting other coastal birds that share their habitat. During the study period, oystercatcher populations in North Carolina grew 8.8%. The success of the NFWF grant led to the award of another NFWF grant to scale up the management findings across several states for flyway level protection of the oystercatcher.
- Thanks to a generous grant from Toyota TogetherGreen, we are one of the few organizations to use satellite transmitters to track oystercatchers, thereby providing data that will improve management plans at Flyway level. You can follow our real time tracking of these birds on [oystercatchertracking.org](http://oystercatchertracking.org) or on Twitter, where the birds are tweeting their experiences to both educate and entertain the public.

### PUTTING SCIENCE INTO ACTION

- With the collaboration of the Town of Wrightsville Beach, we are managing a large colony of Least Terns, Black Skimmers, and other birds at Masonboro Inlet. In 2013, this colony contained about 20% of the state's nesting Black Skimmers and almost 10% of the state's nesting Least Terns.
- Audubon and partners continue to fight to ensure that Senate Bill 486 regulating vehicle access to Cape Hatteras National Seashore represents the interests of birds, sea turtles, and pedestrians. Our testimony ensured that the legislation requires the National Park Service to use science to manage wildlife at the seashore. The public submitted more than 21,000 written comments, with the majority favoring the National Park Service management plan.
- For the past five years, our weekly surveys have provided the only quantified data on shorebird use at four southeastern North Carolina inlets. Data presented to US Fish and Wildlife Service Piping Plover and Red Knot biologists, is being used to protect Rich Inlet from building a terminal groin, a man-made rock structure that is known to increase beach erosion.

## American Oystercatcher banding



## Least Tern



### RAISING AWARENESS

- 54 volunteer Beach Bird Stewards contributed 1,155 hours of time to share their message of appreciation and care for beach-nesting birds with thousands of beachgoers.
- We partner annually with fifth graders at Wrightsville Beach Elementary School in our efforts to educate the public about beach nesting birds. The kids create art that we use for signs to put around the enclosures protecting birds while they nest. Students also help remove vegetation and perform other tasks to make sure birds can use the habitats they need.

### WORKING WITH STRATEGIC PARTNERS

- We partnered with the American Oystercatcher Working Group to create the American Oystercatcher Band Database, which serves both wildlife professionals and the public. At the site, anyone can report a sighting of a banded oystercatcher, and receive information about the bird they saw. The collected data allows scientists to plan more effectively for protection. ([amoywg.org/banding-re-sighting](http://amoywg.org/banding-re-sighting))
- In partnership with Audubon, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will deposit dredged sand on Wainwright Island to rebuild this important nesting island. Dredged sand provides sandy nesting habitat for species that need bare sand without vegetation. With funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation, this winter we will also remove vegetation from Ferry Slip and South Pelican Island to create habitat for Royal and Sandwich Terns.
- We frequently partner with the Coastal Federation, most recently on the protection of Beacon Island, home of one of the state's largest Brown Pelican colonies. Other collaborations include the use of oyster shell placement, and the protection of Rich Inlet, one of the state's finest examples of a natural inlet system, and the southern end of Lea-Hutaff Island, an Important Bird Area.

## Cape Fear Garden Club

“**T**he Battery Island  
Committee began as  
one in Cape Fear Garden

Club's conservation department 17  
years ago because we were interested  
in helping to preserve and conserve

the natural habitat for nesting colonial water birds on Battery Island and the  
several other islands near the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Our focus has not  
changed much over the years. We enjoy the hands-on experience of visiting Battery  
Island twice a year for a clean-up of debris – some years bringing home  
as much as 600 gallons of plastic bottles, fishing line, light bulbs, and old shoes!  
On our trip in the fall, we usually plant 6-8 Yaupon hollies that provide nesting sites  
and nesting material for the White Ibis when they are large enough.”

– Melinda Stewart, *Battery Island Committee Member and Cruise Director*

As the oldest and largest garden club in North Carolina, the Cape Fear Garden  
Club is a key coastal conservation partner, having supported our programs for  
many years and generating thousands of dollars in donations through their annual  
Bird Islands Cruise. With roots in both conservation and beautification, the club  
joined forces with Audubon to conserve habitat on Battery Island, where club  
members plant native hollies and cedars to provide nesting habitat for the island's  
White Ibis. The Club is an outstanding volunteer resource and is approaching  
\$2 million in donations to the community, mainly for maintaining and enhancing  
the natural beauty of the Cape Fear region.

<http://www.capefeargardenclub.org/>



White Ibis



## N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission

“**E**very three years, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission leads a coast-wide survey of colonial-nesting waterbirds, and Audubon North Carolina's participation is crucial to the success of these surveys.

From the late 1970s until now, Audubon has been a leader in getting these surveys accomplished with us. The long-term data these surveys provide are unique and better

than any other Atlantic Flyway state.

The long-term data help us follow population and distribution trends of species, and thereby direct our management efforts to species with greatest needs and habitats that need improvements and protection.”

– Sara H. Schweitzer, Ph.D.,  
*Coastal Waterbird Biologist,  
NC Wildlife Resources Commission*

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) is the state government agency tasked to conserve and sustain the state's fish and wildlife resources through research, scientific management, wise use, and public participation. Audubon and the WRC go way back. Audubon's work to protect birds in the early 1900s also led to the establishment of the South's first

statewide game commission, which is now the modern-day WRC, and to the recognition of the importance of the Lower Cape Fear River to nesting birds. These successes helped spur the WRC to include nongame wildlife. The two organizations remain staunch partners today, and Audubon manages over half of its sanctuary islands through an agreement with the WRC and North Carolina State Parks.

<http://www.ncwildlife.org/>



## Wrightsville Beach Elementary School

“**A**s the School Counselor and Marine Science Coordinator at Wrightsville Beach Elementary school, my overall goal is to continuously expose my students to the wondrous coastal area in which we live, work, and play. I believe that the more they know about this environment, the more they will appreciate it, and the more they will want to take care of it. The Fifth Grade Shorebird Project is one of my favorite projects at Wrightsville Beach Elementary School. I have always been amazed by the birds on our coast and so the idea for the project originated out of my own selfish motives. I wanted to know more about shorebirds, so I decided that it would be a great research project for my students. With the help of Audubon, the project blossomed into more than I imagined.”

– Cissie Brooks, *School Counselor and Marine Science Educator*

By working with schools, Audubon aims to inspire the next generation of



conservationists. Our partnership with Wrightsville Beach Elementary School shows how this can be accomplished. Marine Educator Cissie Brooks has successfully galvanized her fifth-grade students to participate in a variety of beach bird projects. During a school visit several years ago, our staff was so impressed with the students' enthusiasm and knowledge that we just had to help out. Working with

school administrators and Cissie, we have helped focus the curriculum on birds and marine habitats. Students complete a unit of shorebird study, culminating in a visit to the Wrightsville Beach nesting colony. As part of their hands-on learning, students have removed invasive plants and vegetation, created informative signs, and posted the signs at off-limits nesting areas.

<http://www.nhcs.net/wbeach/>

**Walker Golder, Deputy State Director and Director of Coasts and Marshes**

Sand and salt are in Walker Golder's DNA. A lifelong resident of the coast, the beaches and oceans of North Carolina are his natural habitat. "I grew up on the coast," says Walker. "That's what really got me started; having the coast of North Carolina as my playground."



After 25 years working for the National Audubon Society, Walker's signature legacy is the Coastal Sanctuaries program, besides many other accomplishments. Winner of the 2013 Charles H. Callison Award for his dedicated service and stellar science, Walker is one of Audubon's most passionate advocates for birds.

"As a child growing up on the coast of North Carolina, birds were always present. I laughed at Sanderlings running with the waves, probing feverishly at the wet sand in search of food, and marveled at the delicate Least Tern that laid its eggs on the sand

that would burn my bare feet. It was a treat to see the stoic oystercatchers and skimmers, and the shorebirds come and went with the seasons. Each added a special sparkle to life on the coast. Today, many species of coastal birds are in trouble. Their populations are declining and they have been pushed away from the habitat they need to survive. I can't imagine a coast without birds, and I work each and every day so that the kids of today can share these same experiences."

**Lindsay Addison, Coastal Biologist**

"Working for Audubon is a great adventure. In being on the water and at the sanctuaries, field staff are fantastically lucky observers of the birds' lives. Every year we go on a journey with the



birds through migration, nesting, and migration again. What makes the job even more gratifying is knowing that the work we do on our sanctuary islands and with our partners and volunteers has a direct impact on bird conservation. For example, we manage 40% of the state's Brown Pelicans, and we have similar proportions of many other coastal species. That has population-level significance for the state. We tend to call them 'our' islands and 'our' birds because protecting and studying them is our responsibility, but they really belong to the flyway."

Lindsay is responsible for the management and monitoring of the North Carolina sanctuary system. She carries out her work on assigned islands, assists with other islands, trains and oversees field staff, and conducts research projects, as well as implementing all GIS projects.

### **How can I help share the seas and shores in North Carolina?**

Audubon North Carolina faces many challenges to achieving our goals for protecting coastal birds that need protection to survive and thrive. Walker, Lindsay, our seasonal staff, interns and many partners work from sun up to sun down on a wide variety of activities that make a significant impact. The only limitation to scaling up our work is funding.

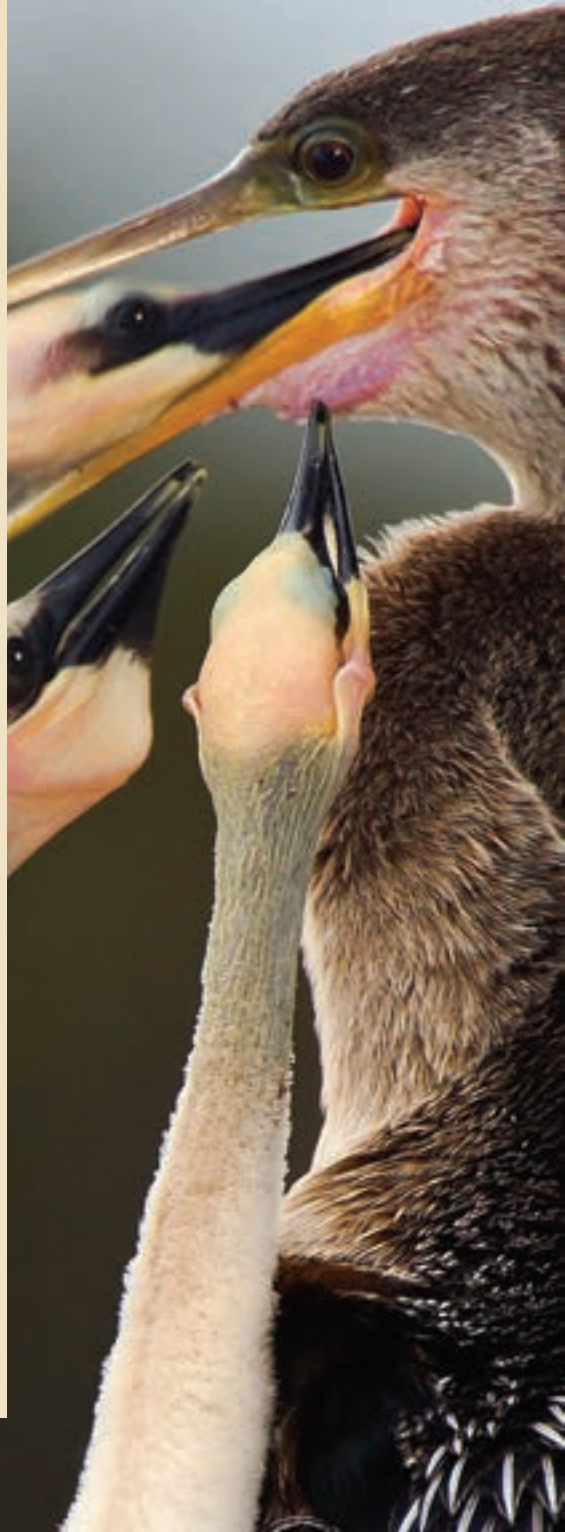
You can help us meet the challenge of protecting coastal habitats for birds and people by contributing toward a \$25,000 goal before December 31st. These funds will be used to further our work of protecting and saving priority bird species on the coast.

You can make a contribution with the enclosed envelope or by donating online at [www.nc.audubon.org](http://www.nc.audubon.org). Please consider supporting Audubon this year, even if you have never sent a gift before. Together we can, and do, make a difference.

### **How can I help coastal birds?**

Please pledge to Share our Seas and Shores by visiting [www.oystercatchertracking.org](http://www.oystercatchertracking.org) and clicking on Ways to Help. You will join 1,000 other North Carolinians who have promised to take just a few small actions that add up to a big impact on coastal bird protection. By signing, you pledge to:

- Stay back from nesting areas. Getting too close to nesting birds causes the parents to fly away, thus exposing their eggs and chicks to many dangers.
- Keep my dog on a leash at the beach and avoid nesting areas.
- Share the beach with birds year round! Many birds migrate and winter on our coast — walking around flocks allows them to feed and rest.





## [VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT MARLENE EADER]



In 2012, Audubon began recruiting volunteers to educate beachgoers about beach-nesting birds. These bird stewards showed visitors fuzzy chicks in spotting scopes and explained how even brief disturbances cause parent birds to flush, exposing eggs and young to heat stress and predators. This year, Marlene Eader joined the staff as Volunteer Coordinator, and the bird steward program took off. She recruited and trained over 50 volunteers to be knowledgeable ambassadors for the Least Terns, Black Skimmers, and other species nesting on Wrightsville Beach. Her enthusiasm and dedication were infectious, and the stewards donated 1,155 hours to the birds. Marlene has volunteered with Audubon since 2010 and finds inspiration in the birds' tenacious protection of their young. Marlene says, "I find inspiration from the Least Terns and Black Skimmers specifically because I think they are great role models on selecting a mate and sharing parenting responsibilities. These parents are confident their young will learn the skills they need to make a successful journey south and work hard to get them ready to be on their own!" Watch a video about our Beach Bird Steward program on YouTube – [youtube.com/user/audubonnc](https://www.youtube.com/user/audubonnc)

## What is full life cycle management?

It's common sense that birds need safe nesting areas in which to raise their young, but many species of shorebirds spend up to three-quarters of the year away from their nesting grounds. Knowing where migratory birds go during other times of their annual cycle is critically important to their survival, but it is even more vital to protect that bird wherever it is spending time. Millions of birds depend on migratory stopover sites for rest and food during their long journeys, and they need safe wintering grounds once they arrive. Audubon's work encompasses the full life cycle of birds, from breeding to wintering and on their travels in between, and addresses the threats they face. Just protecting birds when they are in North Carolina is not enough.





## Adopt an American Oystercatcher

Make your support official and adopt an oystercatcher! When you donate \$50 for yourself, or in honor of someone else, you will support on-the-ground fieldwork that protects and monitors oystercatchers in North Carolina and beyond! As special thanks, you will receive an adoption certificate and a glossy 8"x10" photo of your oystercatcher suitable for framing or gifting!

Go to [www.oystercatchertracking.org](http://www.oystercatchertracking.org) to Adopt Your Oystercatcher today!



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.

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### Audubon North Carolina Chapters

#### Audubon Society of Forsyth County

[www.forsythaudubon.org](http://www.forsythaudubon.org)

#### Cape Fear Audubon Society

[www.capefearaudubon.org](http://www.capefearaudubon.org)

#### Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society

<http://emasnc.org/>

#### Great Smoky Mountains Audubon Society

<http://gsmas.com>

#### High Country Audubon Society

[www.highcountryaudubon.org](http://www.highcountryaudubon.org)

#### Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

[www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org](http://www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org)

#### Mecklenburg Audubon Society

[www.meckbirds.org](http://www.meckbirds.org)

#### New Hope Audubon Society

[www.newhopeaudubon.org](http://www.newhopeaudubon.org)

#### T. Gilbert Pearson Audubon Society

[www.tgpearsonaudubon.org](http://www.tgpearsonaudubon.org)

#### Wake Audubon Society

[www.wakeaudubon.org](http://www.wakeaudubon.org)



# JOIN the CLUB!

Join the Cardinal Club, our monthly giving program, and put your contribution to work for birds every day of the year. Your tax-deductible monthly gift will support all of Audubon's programs in North Carolina.

This singing cardinal plushy bird can be yours! Just sign up for the Cardinal Club before December 31, 2013 and this little bird will wing your way.



**Monthly giving is simple. Your credit card will be charged once per month. Each January we will send you a tax receipt – and a big thank you – for your giving over the previous year. You may change or cancel your gift or skip a month whenever you like. To sign up, go to [www.ncaudubon.org](http://www.ncaudubon.org) and click the link under the cardinal on the home page. Remember to select North Carolina from the drop down menu to put your dollars to work in our state. Watch for more fun incentives on our website and our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter.**



#### PHOTO CREDITS

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