



The Redpoll

Newsletter of the Arctic Audubon Society, Fairbanks, Alaska

Vol. 29 Issue No. 1

October 2006

Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge: Haven for Waterfowl

presentation by Barry Whitehill

Monday, October 9, 7:00 PM

Noel Wien Library Auditorium

Mission of Arctic Audubon:

Earth has unparalleled natural diversity, productivity, and beauty, and provides for life. Recognizing the full value of nature, we work to protect Alaskan ecosystems by encouraging research, education, and management that will contribute to appreciation and good stewardship of this natural heritage. We also strive to conduct our own lives in harmony with nature.

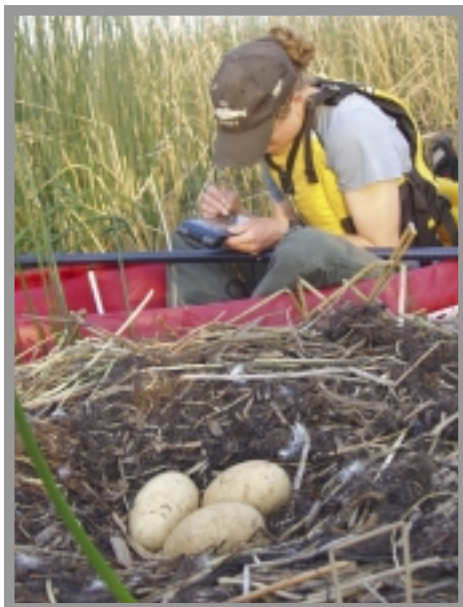
The Arctic Audubon Society publishes The Redpoll for its members monthly fall through spring. National Audubon Society (NAS) dues are \$35; new members are \$20. NAS membership includes local chapter dues. Chapter only membership is \$10 and includes the newsletter.

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Find out what millions of migrating birds from four continents already know—that the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge is a special place. The refuge, which encompasses more than 11 million acres of wetlands, river floodplains, and boreal forest along the Yukon River north of Fairbanks, is the third largest national wildlife refuge within the refuge system. The refuge supports the highest density of breeding ducks in Alaska and includes one of the greatest waterfowl breeding areas in North America. Most of Yukon Flats’ birds are seasonal residents, however some 13 species (including boreal chickadees, great gray owls, spruce grouse, three-toed woodpeckers and ravens) remain on the refuge year around.

The presentation by Deputy Manager Barry Whitehill will provide an overview of the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, as well as updates on current staff projects, challenges, and accomplishments including information about the proposed land exchange with Native regional corporation Doyon, Limited. Information about the refuge and the proposed land exchange is available at the website: yukonflats.fws.gov.



Above, regional archaeologist Debbie Corbett inspects an old trapping cabin during a cultural resource survey on the refuge. At left, UAF Graduate Student Kate Martin records nest data in 2004 at Long Lake in the refuge.

Photos by Barry Whitehill

Alaska Railroad Herbicide Permit Are you going to let it happen?

by Gail Mayo

During July, the Alaska Railroad initiated a series of public meetings to explain their intention to use herbicides to control vegetation on the railroad right-of-way pending the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) granting them a permit to do so. Initially, comments were accepted by DEC until August 14th. Fortunately, the comment period has now been extended to October 20th. Now is an excellent time to take a few minutes to send your comments to:

Department of Environmental Conservation
Pesticide Program
Sandra Woods
555 Cordova Street
Anchorage, AK 99501
sandra_woods@dec.state.ak.us
907-269-7802

In the 1990's, Alaska's citizens petitioned Governor Tony Knowles to cease all herbicide use by the Alaska Railroad. For over ten years, the railroad has maintained its roadbed and crossings using other than chemical means.

Using herbicides presents a plethora of risks. First are the risks in the chemicals themselves, even when used as prescribed by the companies that make, test, and sell them. Then there are many risks associated with applications—human error, mechanical error, and unforeseen weather events. Last are the unknown risks that occur when chemicals enter the environment, impacting the complex webs of natural systems.

We urge you to find out more. Visit the Alaska Railroad website at www.alaskarailroad.com and the Community Action on Toxics website at www.akaction.net for summary information about the herbicides that would be used. Please plan to send your comments promptly to oppose unnecessary use of chemicals in our wild lands.

New from the University of Alaska Press...

Last Great Wilderness

Fairbanksan Roger Kaye has written a new book on the history of the Arctic Refuge titled, *Last Great Wilderness, The Campaign to Establish the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*.

Three decades before the battle over oil development began, a group of visionary conservationists—including Olaus and Margaret Murie—launched a controversial campaign to preserve a remote corner of Alaska. Their goal to protect an entire ecosystem for future generations was unprecedented. *Last Great Wilderness* chronicles their fight, tracing the transformation of this little-known expanse of mountains, forest, and tundra into a symbolic landscape embodying the ideals and aspirations that led to passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964. Hardcover, \$29.95.

Audubon Magazine Announces Website Re-launch

September 2006 marks another milestone in Audubon magazine's proud 108-year history with the re-launching of its website.

The new site has everything readers have come to expect from Audubon—timely conservation stories that set the agenda, fun news you can use, and a breathtaking design that establishes a standard by which the competition will be measured.

Additionally, the new site has a host of web exclusives relating to Audubon's September-October issue, and also marks the launch of a new online feature called Crosscurrents, in which senior editor Keith Kloor provides prominent figures with a platform to conduct an online dialogue. Famed naturalist E.O. Wilson is joined by evangelical leader Richard Cizik and conservation biologist Stuart Pimm in a discussion of global warming, biodiversity, and other important issues.

View the new website at
<http://www.audubonmagazine.org>.

Judge Blocks Oil Lease Sale Near Teshekpuk Lake

On September 7th, U.S. District Judge James Singleton blocked the proposed sale of leases in the northeast area of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, saying the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had not adequately assessed the cumulative environmental impact of the sales, including those on about 400,000 acres north and east of Teshekpuk Lake. National Audubon Society is the lead plaintiff in the case, as part of a coalition that includes a number of other leading conservation organizations; Earthjustice is the lead counsel.

In response to the ruling, the government said it still strongly disagrees with Singleton's conclusion, but asked that the court decision be limited to the leases near Teshekpuk Lake so the rest of the sale scheduled for September 27th can proceed. In separate filings, lawyers for environmental groups said they are not opposed to narrowing the order as long as the Teshekpuk Lake area remains off limits. It is not known when Judge Singleton will act in response to the latest court filings, but on September 26th, the government announced it would go ahead with the sale of leases outside of the Teshekpuk Lake area.

The vast network of wetlands surrounding Teshekpuk Lake has been recognized since 1977 by Congress and three prior Interior Secretaries for its importance to wildlife and the Inupiat natives. This remote area has deep-water lakes that offer high quality forage and refuge for flightless geese to escape predators. These attributes attract up to 37,000 Pacific Black Brant and 35,000 Greater White-fronted Geese, as well as thousands of Canada and Snow Geese, for their annual molt. In addition, the 45,000 head Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd returns to this habitat each year to bear its calves. Inupiat Natives, who have lived in this region for thousands of years, depend on the caribou to support their subsistence culture.

To learn more about Teshekpuk Lake and take action, please visit www.audubon.org/campaign/teshekpuk/

Join the Arctic Audubon Board!

Work with a delightful group of people on a variety of bird and conservation related projects. Board meetings are the first Tuesday of the month, although we do not meet during the summer. Several positions are open, including vice president, secretary, treasurer, and publicity. For more information, contact Gail Mayo at 479-2954 or chat with us at one of our monthly public programs.

Third Annual...

Bioneers in Alaska

Creating Sustainable Communities
October 19–22, 2006

University of Alaska Anchorage
Bioneers is a forum for connecting the environment, health, social justice, and spirit within a broad progressive framework. Information is available at www.sustainak.org and 907-677-9087.

Creepy Critters

Saturday, October 28, 12–4:00 pm

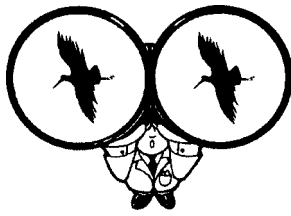
Join Friends of Creamer's Field for their annual Creepy Critters Halloween program at the Creamer's Field Farmhouse, 1300 College Road, back by the barns. Learn about animals that move under the cover of darkness and enjoy crafts and hands-on activities. Call 452-5162 for more information.

Far North Conservation Film Festival

November 10-11

Pioneer Park Theatre and Exhibit Hall

In celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week, this two-day festival features guest speakers and outstanding films about the conservation and sustainability of wildlife, wild places and cultures around the world. Local groups with an interest in conservation or filmmaking will staff booths and displays in the exhibit hall on Saturday. Admission is free! More information at www.farnorthfilms.com and 907-456-0528.



Farthest North Birdathon Nets Fun and Funds

Between 13 May and 11 June, 69 birders spread out across Alaska to take part in the Farthest North Birdathon. This annual event is the most important fundraiser for the Alaska Bird Observatory and the Arctic Audubon Society. This year folks counted birds in Nome, Barrow, Fairbanks, Anchorage, Seward, Adak, and at Eielson AFB. Pledges and sponsorships totaled \$18,394.54, substantially less than was raised last year but still an impressive amount for Alaska bird conservation.

Jim DeWitt took top honors by raising \$3062.50, followed by Nick Hajdukovich with \$2550. Nick and teammates Georgia Conti and Paul Ollig earned the Golden Binoculars award by finding an impressive 108 species in 24 hours on their Anchorage-Kenai Peninsula route. Jim and teammates Nancy DeWitt and Peter Bente won the award for Most Money Raised by a Team (\$4,483) after finding 85 species in Nome during 18 hours of counting. The Top Business Team honor was claimed by the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* (\$650), while the Top Family honors went to Sally and Joe Galbraith (\$300).

Congratulations to Ray Hander and Carol McIntyre, winners of the Alaska Airlines tickets and the Zeiss binoculars. Between them, Carol and Ray have raised almost \$15,000 during eight years of Birdathons, each one done without using gasoline! Way to go, Ray and Carol!

We owe a big thanks to all of the participants in this year's Birdathon and to all of the folks who made pledges. We are especially grateful to our event sponsors: Steve Neumuth Advertising, Yukon Title Company, Alaska Airlines, and Beaver Sports. Thank you to Ed Clark and Judy Dearborn for a \$300 sponsorship for the youth teams, and to Susan Sharbaugh, Gail Mayo, Sherry Lewis, Tricia Blake, Philip Martin, and Jim Gilbert for leading birders on counts. We are indebted to our many prize donors and to DeeDee Hammond for providing the artwork for the Birdathon print. Hope to see you all again next year!

Birdathon Prizes & Awards

Most Money Raised:

Individual: Jim DeWitt (\$3,063), Nicholas Hajdukovich (\$2,550), Nancy DeWitt (\$1,320), Carol McIntyre (\$1,194), Ray Hander (\$1,194), Steve Kendall (\$651), Chris Harwood (\$644), Sherry Lewis (\$630), Frank Keim (\$600), Laurel Devaney (\$570).

Team (based on average/person): Wet Wagtails (Jim & Nancy DeWitt and Peter Bente) \$1,386

Family: Sally & Joe Galbraith (\$300)

Youth: Nicholas Hajdukovich (\$2,500)

Business: *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* Team (DeeDee Hammond, Paula Kothe) - \$650

Most Species Seen in Alaska: 108 by the "Nameless Oddball Threesome" (Nicholas Hajdukovich, Georgia Conti, and Paul Ollig)

Most Species Seen by a Team Counting 12 Hours or Less: 64 - David Shaw

Most Species Seen in the Fairbanks North Star Borough: 77 by Pair-a-grins: Stooping For Fun

Most Environmentally Friendly Teams: Raven Walk and Rolls (Laurel Devaney, Ken Russell, and Ron Teel) - 76 species on bike and foot; Pilsner Powered Pedal Pushers (Carol McIntyre, Ray Hander, Chris Harwood, and Steve Kendall) - 75 species on bike and foot

Most Sponsors: Nicholas Hajdukovich (61)

Best Effort by a Rookie: Paulette Wille (\$204)

Most Improved Birdathoner: Chris Harwood

Youngest Participant: Ryan Brewer (7 years)

Best Team Name: Pair-a-grins: Stooping For Fun (Joyce Potter and Quinn Evenson)

Best Birdathon Story: Lucy & The Wagtails

Rarest Bird Seen for that Area: (tie) Red Knot in Fairbanks (seen by Raven Walk and Rolls) and Blacktailed Godwit in Nome (seen by Wet Wagtails).

Winner of Alaska Airlines tickets: Ray Hander

Winner of Zeiss Binoculars: Carol McIntyre

Other Valued Counters: Gail Mayo, Helen Sudkamp-Walker, Tricia Blake, Sue Guers, April Harding, Max Lewis, Jim Gilbert, Susan Sharbaugh, Ransdell-Green Family, Stan Justice, Cindy Bower, Deb & Connor Ryan, Ruth & Larry Knapman, Jack Rasmussen, Michael McCann, Tim Walker, Brook Gamble, Rich Ring, Diann Darnall, Carol Johnson, Fred Brantingham, Janet Taylor, Lou Carufel, Jeannette Moore & family, Kristi Bailey, Lucy Tyrrell & her dogs.

Thank you to our Birdathon prize donors: Alaska Airlines, American Birding Association, Apocalypse Design, The Artworks, Marty Baldrige, Beaver Sports, Birchside Studios, Brunton, Close to Infinity, Cold Spot Feeds, Common Ground Distributors, Critters n Things, Denali Raft Adventures, Inc., Jim & Nancy DeWitt, Ester Hatworks, Fountainhead Development, Richard Hansen, Hot Licks, Interior Yoga, Ivory Jack's, John Nelson Woodcarvings, Judie Gumm Designs, Kenai Fjords Tours, Sherry Lewis, New Horizons Gallery, The Painted Egg, Patagonia Pro Sales, Princess Tours, The Prospector, Riverboat Discovery Fairbanks, Sourdough Fuel, Stan Stephens Cruises, Tanana Valley State Fair, and The Turtle Club.

Soundscaping in the Arctic Refuge

by Frank Keim

A few months ago, Andy Keller asked me if I could help him guide a group of soundscape specialists in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge during the first two weeks of June. The purpose of their project was to record the sound at three different locations in the Refuge to establish a database for the soundscape, which could be compared to later soundscape recordings done at regular intervals at the same sites. The sites were to be on the Beaufort Sea coast, at an alpine location in the middle of the Brooks Range, and on the south side of the Brooks Range.

I was the guide for project leader Bernie Krause at Timber Lake, located 50 miles northwest of Arctic Village. Bernie is from Napa Valley, California and was accompanied for 11 days by Bob Moore, managing editor for *Manomet Magazine* in Maine, and Clara Jefferey, chief editor for *Mother Jones Magazine*. Two video journalists, Bob Hillman and Lawrence Campling, were also with us for five days to report on the project. The journalists then hopscotched over to the other soundscape locations at Beaufort Lagoon and Sunset Pass to report on the project there.

Dirk Nickisch picked us up in his DeHaviland Beaver at Arctic Village and flew us out to the small strip at Timber Lake. A big cold front was moving in from Siberia, and we hurried to get our tents set up before the snow started to fly. And fly it did. The temperature early in the morning on June 3rd dropped to 22 degrees, and snow was blowing horizontally through camp at about 30 mph. Luckily our

location at Timber Lake was below tree line, protected somewhat from the fierce winds that caromed in with the storm. We later heard that the site on the Beaufort Lagoon succumbed to the winds, and the two people there had to huddle for two days in their collapsed tent. By June 4th the wind had abated, but the early morning temperature at our camp was only 8 degrees.

Bernie and Bob took advantage of one break in the wind and slogged over to the lake to record some phalaropes frenetically feeding on the surface of the outflow creek, which was the only water that had not frozen solid over the past two days.

From June 4th on, the weather began to improve. The days grew warmer and birds became more vocal. A pair of Common Loons flew in and circled the lake again and again, yodeling in celebration of their return. For a couple of days we parked ourselves on an island in the middle of Timber Lake and recorded the sounds of a flock of about 200 phalaropes (Red and Red-necked), plus those of Long-tailed Ducks, Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns, among many others.

The days got even warmer, and I accompanied Bernie and Bob on walks across the tundra where we recorded Smith's Longspurs, up mountainsides where we digitally taped White-winged Crossbills and Merlins and Varied Thrushes, and along flat white tongues of overflow ice known as aufeis where we recorded Fox, White-crowned and Tree Sparrows. We also watched in awe as a pair of Golden eagles soared high above us next to the jagged sil-



White-crowned Sparrow
© Ken Whitten

houette of the limestone ridgeline.

And so it went, the sound of bird song getting “denser and denser,” in Bernie’s words. The two men were now totally immersed in their element and enjoying every minute of this wild and beautiful place. They didn’t restrict their recordings to birds. The aufeis was melting so quickly that caverns began to form underneath, and the dripping sound sometimes became the focus of their microphones. Every once in awhile we would hear a tremendous crashing thunder as huge cakes of aufeis broke off next to the rising river water.

The day before we were scheduled to fly out of Timber Lake the mosquitoes started to show up. Although we were sorry to bid farewell to this very special place in the Arctic Refuge, we knew that in just a few more days there would be hordes of kamikaze mosies everywhere. We kept those mosquitoes in mind the next morning when Dirk’s Beaver lumbered in for a landing.

Nevertheless, what a marvelous area—filled to overflowing with spring bird song.

Arctic Audubon Society
PO Box 82098
Fairbanks, AK 99708
www.arcticaudubon.org

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Upcoming Events--Mark Your Calendar

Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, Monday, October 9, 7:00 pm, Noel Wien Library.

Program by Deputy Refuge Manager Barry Whitehill.

Creepy Critters, Saturday, Oct. 28, Noon-4:00 pm

Friends of Creamer's Field hosts this annual event.

Arctic Audubon Board Meeting, Tuesday,

Nov. 7, 5:30 pm, UAF Natural Sciences Facility

Members are welcome at our business meeting.

November Audubon Program, Monday, November 13,

7:00 pm, Noel Wien Library

Topic to be announced.

Far North Conservation Film Festival, November 10 & 11, Pioneer Park Theatre and Exhibit Hall

Details on page 3.

Arctic Audubon Board of Directors

email address: arcticaudubon@netscape.net

President: Gail Mayo

Vice President: Open

Secretary: Open

Treasurer: Gail Mayo

Education: Megan Phillips

Conservation: Kristi Bailey

Hospitality: Brook Gamble

Programs: Lauren Attanas

Publicity: Open

Newsletter: Mary Zalar

Membership: Mary Zalar

Field Trips: Tom Green

Birdathon: Sherry Lewis

Web Site: Jim Logan

Alaska Audubon Board: Frank Keim



Birding Hotline (907) 451-9213

Updated by Laurel Devaney & Ken Russell

Report interesting bird sightings;
learn what others have spotted.

also at

www.virtualbirder.com/vbirder/realbirds/index.html

National Audubon Society New Member Form

- Introductory rate, \$20
- Two Year membership, \$30
- Student or Senior rate \$15

Membership includes both National Audubon and the local chapter, Arctic Audubon. You will receive National Audubon's magazine, *Audubon*, and Arctic Audubon's newsletter, *The Redpoll*.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

- I do not want the Audubon Society to share my name with other organizations.

Amount enclosed: \$_____ (Make check payable to National Audubon Society)

Send to: Arctic Audubon Society
PO Box 82098
Fairbanks, AK 99708

**A52
7XCH**

Chapter Only Membership, \$10

For membership in Arctic Audubon Society *only*, check box and make check payable to Arctic Audubon.