



ON THE WING

OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS
FISCAL YEAR 2010-2011

Great Places to See Birds in California

You don't have to travel far in California to see our terrific birds up close. Here are a few of our favorite spots.





MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

The past few years have been difficult ones for conservation organizations. The economic slowdown has made fundraising a challenge, and forced conservation to compete with other important priorities facing dwindling resources. And yet, against this background, Audubon California remains steady in its strong work protecting birds and nature. This report details these accomplishments over the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

The temptation is to assume that the heart of the organization lies somewhere in these numbers—birds protected, laws passed, acres restored, the amount of money raised, etc. But while this information is impressive—particularly against the backdrop of a struggling economy—the numbers don't truly illustrate the strength of the organization. Audubon California is not its accomplishments; it is its staff and the people who support our work with their money and their time.

Audubon California is the four people profiled in the stories that immediately follow this section: Keiller Kyle, Kathi Borgmann, Jeff Chapman, and Garry George. It is also Rodd Kelsey, our director of migratory bird conservation, whose knowledge of agriculture and passion for finding new solutions to old problems is driving our groundbreaking work promoting conservation on private lands. It is Andrea Jones, our director of Important Bird Areas, whose love of birds has prompted her to launch projects protecting vital habitat in the farthest corners of the state. It is also Scott Gibson, Meghan Hertel, Martin Scherstuhl, Gretchen Grani, Pat Collmer, Rosa Delgado, and dozens of others whose names don't appear here, but whose daily efforts produce the accomplishments on these pages.

We are also the friends at public agencies and other nonprofit organizations that have chosen to partner with us—a long list that includes the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, The Nature Conservancy, PRBO Conservation Science, California Rice Commission, and many others. We are the legislators who work with us every year to promote the interests of birds and nature. And we are the members of the 48 Audubon chapters that represent the movement in local communities in local neighborhoods.

Lastly, we are our donors—whose names appear later in this report—who invest in our work because they believe in our ability to not only support birds, but to make a better California for future generations.

When you read this list of accomplishments, it is important to remember that we couldn't have done it without all of these people. They make it happen here at Audubon California. Put together, they are all Audubon California.

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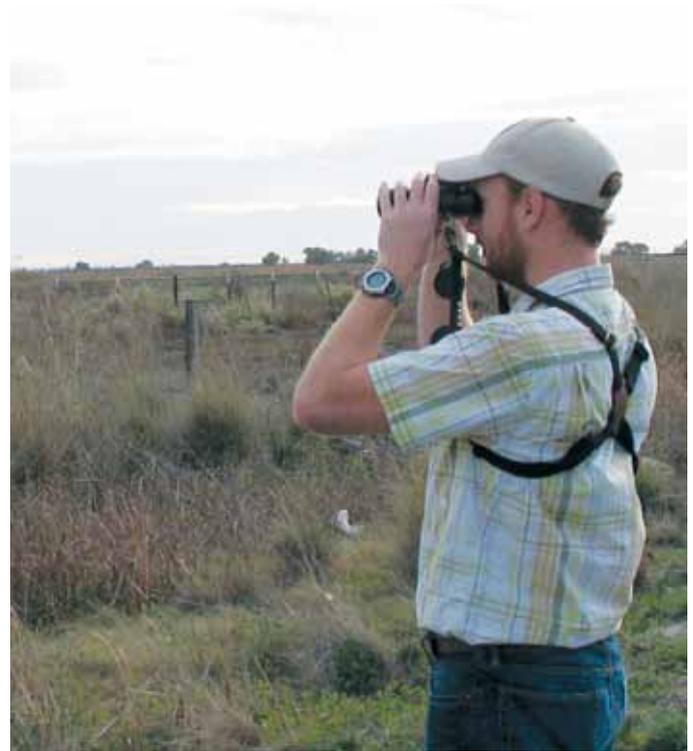
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TELLING THE STORY OF THE TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD

In the spring, Keiller Kyle drives the back roads of the Central Valley with his cell phone, range maps, and a pair of binoculars on the passenger seat. Bumping over potholes and cracks, sometimes he'll round a corner and find a small wheat field exploding with Tricolored Blackbirds.

Kyle then has the awkward task of finding the nearest farmhouse, walking up the steps, and knocking on the door. On porches throughout the valley, he has told the story of how Tricolored Blackbirds once filled the sky, but are now increasingly rare because of lost habitat. Now the Tricolored Blackbirds tend to nest in just a few huge colonies, often in grain fields, which puts them at grave risk if the farmer harvests the field before the young can fly away.

"I used to be really nervous about these meetings," says Kyle. "But I've found that most of the farmers I meet really want to help out. In many ways, they're pleasantly surprised to hear that their farm is special."



Keiller Kyle scans a field for Tricolored Blackbirds.

Kyle sometimes offers to pay the farmer to delay harvesting until after the young birds have fledged. Last spring, Audubon California struck four such deals with farmers and saved more than 60,000 birds.

There's new urgency to this work. In April, Audubon California and more than 100 volunteers completed a statewide survey of Tricolored Blackbirds. The latest estimate was 259,000 birds, a thirty-five percent decrease from the 2008 census. Funding for the survey was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Paying farmers to delay their harvest is an imperfect solution, and that's why Audubon California is working with partners at both government agencies and nonprofits to create safe habitat away from the farms. Until then, Kyle will be standing on more porches telling farmers the story of the Tricolored Blackbird.

MAKING A NEW HOME FOR BIRDS

The history of San Francisco Bay tells us that when backhoes show up near the water's edge, it's a bad deal for the environment. So the big smile on Kathi Borgmann's face this summer when she first saw the heavy equipment on Aramburu Island might have surprised some. But these tractors were different. They were here as part of a rare opportunity to create new habitat in the Bay.

Aramburu Island is a seventeen-acre county property adjacent to the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary. It was created in the 1960s out of dredge spoils and fill from hillside development. Over the years, this county property covered with rocks and non-native plants offered only marginal habitat for wildlife.

This summer, Audubon California finished the first phase of a \$2.4 million restoration project that reshaped the shoreline to reduce erosion and provide more natural conditions for shorebirds. The community helped out—more than sixty volunteers logged 289 hours last year. Soon, Borgmann and her colleagues will come back and tear out the weeds and plant native grasses and shrubs that are growing back at the Center.



Kathi Borgmann studies the San Francisco Bay habitat up close.

“In many ways, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do something special for birds in San Francisco Bay,” says Borgmann, a restoration ecologist with the Richardson Bay Audubon Center. “Our goal is to provide improved mudflat and shoreline habitat for shorebirds and then let the natural processes perfect it.”

For an island in San Francisco Bay, Aramburu has never been a great place for birds. Borgmann says she now expects to see a wide assortment of resident and migratory birds, such as Black-necked Stilt, Least Sandpiper, and terns.

“It’s not a big island, but come back here in a year or two, and you’ll see that what we’ve done here has made a tremendous difference for the birds,” says Borgmann.

GETTING ALTERNATIVE ENERGY RIGHT

To the untrained eye, California's Mojave and Colorado deserts might appear like barren, lifeless places. It would seem like an ideal location for hundreds of square miles of solar arrays and transmission lines – power plants for alternative energy that will reduce the impacts of climate change on our planet.

“The reality is that these deserts host a remarkable diversity of birds and other wildlife,” says Garry George, Audubon California's chapter network director. “It would be a tragedy if we lost this beauty in a poorly considered effort to save it.”

George is a veteran of the early legal battles between Audubon chapters and wind and solar companies over energy development in sensitive habitat areas. This makes him the perfect person to represent Audubon California on a special panel created by the state of California to complete a long-term plan for the deserts that will help site alternative energy development in ways that avoid sensitive bird and wildlife habitat.

The group is comprised of industry, agencies, and conservation partners. Audubon California is the only voice for birds.



Garry George believes birds have a place in California's energy future.

“There's this misconception that we have to choose between alternative energy and protections for birds,” says George. “If we take the time to do alternative energy right – something we never did with oil and coal – we can have both.”

If the planning effort is successful, the solar industry will have to abide by long-term endangered species protections in exchange for approval of its projects.

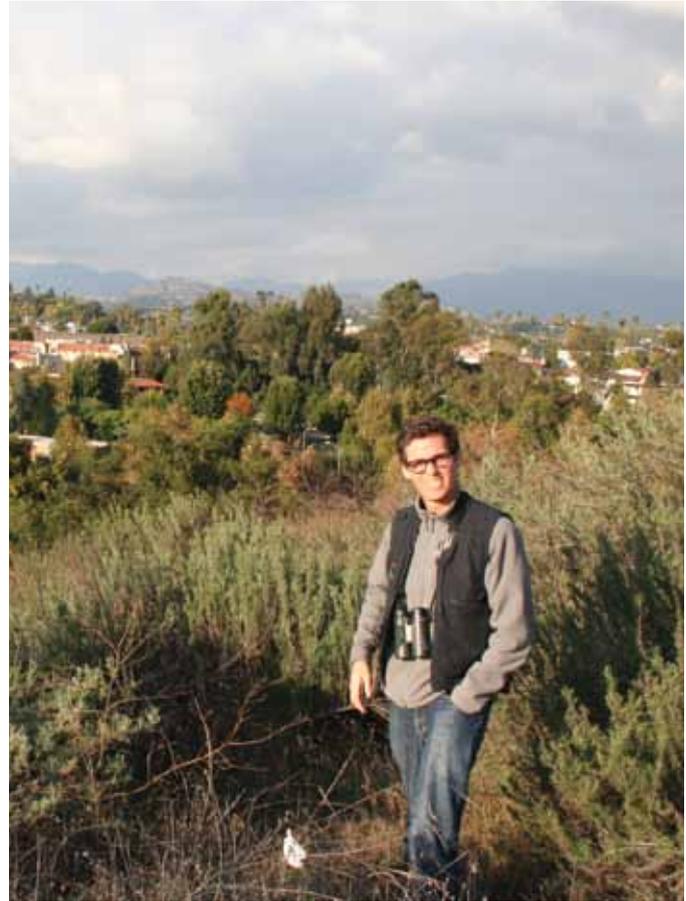
“The goal is to have our cake and eat it too – to get the clean energy and the protections for wildlife,” says George.

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSERVATIONISTS

Jeff Chapman worked at the Audubon Center at Debs Park in northeast Los Angeles before it ever existed. In fact, he was an Audubon teacher naturalist helping run nature education programs for kids out of a storefront roughly a year before the current center was built about a mile away.

“Up to that time, Audubon would put kids from urban communities on buses and take them to the beach or some other far flung location to teach them about nature,” recalls Chapman, who is now the center director. “They were great programs, but I always felt we were inadvertently teaching them that nature is something far away and disconnected from where they live.”

Chapman remembers visiting the site of the Audubon Center before construction. There was trash everywhere, graffiti, lots of illegal activity going on. Now it’s totally different. On this day, he’s standing in front of a habitat restoration project being led by the Arroyo Green Team, a group of young people from the nearby community putting what they’re learning about conservation into action.



Jeff Chapman walks through a restoration site in Debs Park in the middle of urban Los Angeles.

“Not only are we improving this rare bit of habitat in this urban area, but it’s coming from the people who live here, from young people who are learning about nature in their own backyard and taking responsibility for it,” Chapman says.

As Chapman and his team continue to refine the programs at the center—the summer camp, the field trips, nature walks, the Film Fridays—the running theme is to remind the community that nature is all around them—and not some distant notion.

“It’s not just about educating,” says Chapman, “it’s about connecting.”

BIRDS MATTER

All of our work in California springs from our love of birds.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

More than eighty percent of the wetland habitat for millions of migratory birds in the Central Valley is on flooded agricultural fields, primarily rice. If we want to make a difference for those birds, we're going to have to work with rice farmers. This past year, Audubon California, our other partners in the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership (PRBO Conservation Science and The Nature Conservancy), and the California Rice Commission were successful in launching a new pilot program through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for rice farmers interested in increasing the value of rice farms to migratory birds. The NRCS committed more than \$2 million in federal funds to this three-year pilot program that is built on our work over the last three years to identify and test rice farm management practices to benefit shorebirds. A total of seventy-four farmers signed up with nearly 10,000 acres enrolled, an unprecedented degree of participation by the rice farming community in these programs.



Black Oystercatcher on the Mendocino Coast. Photo by Ron LeValley.

MOUNTAIN PLOVER

The Mountain Plover is something of a mysterious icon of the American landscape as it was 200 years ago. Unfortunately, as that landscape has changed, the prospects for this species have worsened. This year, 150 volunteers joined us to complete a statewide census of Mountain Plovers, a rare and declining shorebird. This was the first survey for this species since 2002 and, unfortunately, survey results confirmed that this species is still declining, with an over fifty percent drop in numbers. Funding was provided by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



BLACK OYSTERCATCHER

Audubon California in June sponsored a survey of Black Oystercatchers along the coast. One of the most distinctive species in all of North America, the Black Oystercatcher had still been something of a mystery. Thought to be in decline, the survey results actually indicated a larger population than the last survey more than twenty years earlier. The survey was conducted by volunteer birders and agency biologists. The data will be used to increase understanding of the status of the bird in California and create strategies for its conservation.



Ashy Storm-Petrel. Photo by Ron LeValley

ASHY STORM-PETREL

The Ashy Storm-Petrel—a smoky gray seabird about the size of a swallow—is struggling for existence off the coast of California. This past year, we convened the first-ever workshop for government agency and conservation experts on the species, whose global range is restricted to Baja California, and portions of the California coast. Its total population is less than 10,000. This workshop identified a number of strategies for conservation, and we are pursuing funding for specific projects.

ON THE GROUND

Protecting California's best habitats is one of our main strategies to preserving California's natural legacy.



Tricolored Blackbirds. Photo by Linda Pittman

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

Audubon California continued to make great strides increasing the conservation work at Important Birds Areas throughout the state. Elements of this work are described throughout this report, but other highlights include:

- Before its waters were diverted in 1913, Owens Lake was a spectacular place for birds. But with the water, so too went the birds. In recent years, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has agreed to rewater the lakebed to reduce dust pollution, and birds have been returning. Audubon California and Eastern Sierra Audubon are working closely with government agencies and others to arrive at a Master Plan that will provide long-term habitat protection at the lakebed.
- In a move that ensures the lasting protection of some of California's most ecologically important landscapes, the state of California in November 2010 approved a grant to fund the purchase of conservation easements on 62,000 acres of the Tejon Ranch. The \$15.8 million grant will establish one of the largest conservation easements in California history, and is a key step in the implementation of the 2008 Tejon Ranch Conservation Agreement, in which Audubon California and four other conservation organizations worked with the Tejon Ranch Company to protect up to 240,000 acres of spectacular California wildlands.
- In our efforts to ensure the conservation of seabirds along the California coast, we organized a mini-campaign to protect the interests of sensitive species such as Sooty Shearwater, California Least Tern, and Ashy Storm-Petrel within the state process for creating marine protected areas in the south coast. This area encompasses ten Important Bird Areas. Many of our suggested protections were included in the final draft of marine protected areas, which were ultimately approved by California Fish and Game Commission in December 2010.



We're working with farmers like Thomas Leacox in the San Joaquin Valley to improve bird habitat. Photo by Miles DaPrato.

CONSERVATION ON WORKING LANDS

More than half of California's Important Bird Areas are on private lands—mostly farms and ranches. Increasingly, we're taking advantage of the opportunities to enhance the habitat value of these working properties. This marked our third year in the Migratory Bird Conservation Partnership, our continuing collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, and PRBO Conservation Science.

Within this partnership we completed a five-acre riparian restoration project along Sycamore Slough on the Davis Home Ranch, hosted two forage grower workshops to identify bird-friendly forage crop management strategies, and completed our third year of experiments with partner growers to test alternative field management practices to benefit migratory shorebirds. We have extended our reach to private landowners and farmers in the San Joaquin River Valley, where we are pursuing several habitat projects.

Our Landowner Stewardship Program launched habitat restoration projects on private lands in Colusa, Solano, Yolo, and Napa Counties. Working with more than thirty landowners, we planted twenty acres of riparian habitat, seeded fifty acres of native grasslands, created one pond, and installed four native hedgerows. We also continued to partner with the Center for Land-Based Learning to bring students from underserved high schools in the Sacramento Valley to local restoration project sites. In the past year, more than 180 students engaged in hands-on conservation work, guided by Audubon restoration staff during twenty-three field days.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE

*Conservation, education, and research
come together at a number of our sites*

RICHARDSON BAY AUDUBON CENTER & SANCTUARY

Having reached the Center's goals for the number of people served, this past year we turned to improving the quality of our programs and increasing the number of returning visitors. Working with partners in San Francisco and Marin counties, we are expanding our programs aimed at underserved students and families. In January, we conducted our first joint program — a Youth Christmas Bird Count at the Pickleweed Marsh in the Latino neighborhood of San Rafael. The number of eleven- to eighteen-year-olds involved in our Audubon Youth Leaders this year rose almost forty percent to 139. In October, the Center became the newest AmeriCorps host site for the Bay Area. We were also able to make considerable progress on our upland restoration work. Nearly three of our ten acres had non-native vegetation replaced with natives this year.



Junior Biologists at the Audubon Starr Ranch Sanctuary take a break in the stream. Photo by Scott Gibson.

AUDUBON CENTER AT DEBS PARK

We continue to develop the center as a hub of community activity. In total, the Audubon Center delivered 128 educational fieldtrips, 39 family-friendly community programs, four seasonal community events, four sessions of summer day camp, and thirtysix youth programs, as well as many walk-in visits, totaling approximately 16,500 visits. We're particularly proud of the work of the Arroyo Green Team, our program for local teens. This year, the members of the Green Team expanded our coastal sage scrub restoration area and learned about invasive plant control and how to grow the native plants needed for restoration.



Kerry Wilcox, sanctuary manager at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center, examines a hillside with some young volunteers.

AUDUBON KERN RIVER PRESERVE

Our Audubon Kern River Preserve continued its work protecting and managing one of California's most important areas for birds. We transferred 600 acres that Audubon acquired in the Kelso Valley to the Bureau of Land Management for protection. Audubon staff also continued upland restoration on the Sprague Ranch lands, and added another four acres of native shrubs and cacti to the 2.5 acres planted last year. On the Kelso Creek Sanctuary, we planted more than 300 cottonwood trees on approximately 1.5 acres. Volunteers are integral to the work we do at the Preserve—at festivals, monthly outreach events, and stewardship workdays on the third Saturday of each month. Nature festivals at the Preserve continue to be a great way to introduce the public to Audubon California's work in the Kern River Valley.

AUDUBON STARR RANCH SANCTUARY

The big challenge for the Sanctuary this past year was heavy December flooding which damaged roads and dangerously eroded stream banks adjacent to historic buildings. Our non-chemical restoration work received statewide recognition last fall when Starr Ranch's research director, Sandy DeSimone, was given the California Invasive Plant Council's Land Manager of the Year Award. We now have 485 upland acres of Starr Ranch on exotic control, 172 of those total acres on coastal sage scrub restoration and about 300 acres on native grassland enhancement. A total of 6,132 visitors came to Starr Ranch last year: 5,746 for education programs, such as Starr Ranch Junior Biologists and Adult Research Classes; and 386 volunteers who worked on stream surveys, songbird banding, and weed control.



Common Murre on the Farallon Islands. Photo by Ron LeValley.

SUPPORTING LOCAL LEADERS

One of the great strengths of Audubon is the network of local chapters promoting conservation in communities throughout the state. Examples of our work with chapters are mentioned throughout this report, but here are some other highlights:

- Four Audubon chapters completed their Share the Shore projects with funding from TogetherGreen’s Pennies for the Planet program and an Audubon California private donor (TogetherGreen is a partnership between Audubon and Toyota). The programs used children’s art as signs on the beach to make people aware of sensitive Western Snowy Plover nesting sites. To date, Audubon California has worked with seven chapters and covered more than thirty miles of beach with children’s signs. School programs and art exhibits reached more than 5,000 people, plus thousands of others that walk by and observe the signs.
- We supported nineteen chapters in their efforts to minimize impacts on birds from proposed wind or solar projects.
- Chapter leaders from Marin Audubon, San Fernando Valley Audubon and Mendocino Coast Audubon sat on commissions and panels of the Marine Life Protection Act process in Southern, Bay Area, and Northern California areas to identify estuaries and ocean areas that deserve increased protection status.
- Chapter citizen science volunteers partnered with Audubon California in collecting data on species at risk in California including Black Oystercatcher, Mountain Plover, Yellow-billed Magpie, Long-billed Curlew, and in a partnership effort in northern California on Western and Clark’s grebes.
- Audubon California helped secure \$15,000 in funding for acquisition of lands to protect habitat by Pasadena Audubon and San Diego Audubon.



Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Andrea Jones



San Luis National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Magill Weber

ADVOCATING FOR BIRDS AND NATURE

Audubon California continues to advocate for policy changes that benefit birds and nature:

- Continued problems finding adequate funding for California State Parks—an important part of the state’s natural legacy—compelled Audubon California to join forces with a broad coalition of organizations to support Proposition 21, which would have secured a long-term funding stream for the parks. Although the coalition was successful in putting the measure on the ballot, we were not able to get the voter support necessary. But, rest assured, finding a long-term funding solution for California State Parks is still a priority for us.
- Our effort to pass Assembly Bill 2223, which would have banned the use of lead ammunition in state wildlife areas, stemmed from both the scientific evidence about the dangers that lead in the environment poses to birds and our

success in 2007 with AB 821, which banned the use of lead ammunition in the range of the California Condor. While we were successful in moving AB 2223 through the State Assembly, we were eventually defeated in State Senate. This will be a tough battle. We’re taking the long view and will continue to pursue these important protections.

- Through our proactive efforts, 19,000 acre-feet of water were delivered to the wetlands in the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge to help migratory birds during a particularly dry fall season. We took this action in response to reports that birds were simply bypassing Lower Klamath Refuge due to the lack of available wetland habitat. Ensuring long-term, reliable water supplies for the Klamath refuges remains a critically important policy goal for Audubon California.
- As part of a larger coalition of conservation groups, we successfully argued for full allotments for water for migratory birds in the Central Valley. This was the first time since 1992 that these refuges received full water allotments.
- We helped pass Senate Bill 51, which created a dedicated Salton Sea Restoration Council to guide conservation of the Salton Sea. This bill went into law on January 1, 2011.

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Phainopepla. Photo by Walter Kitundu.

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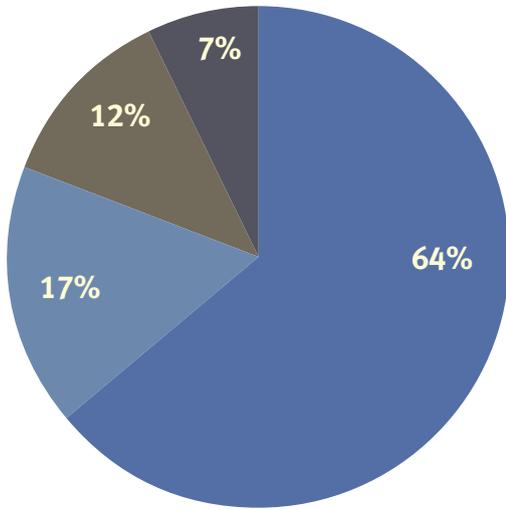
Mute Swan and Anna's Hummingbird.
Photos by Steve DeMello



AUDUBON CALIFORNIA

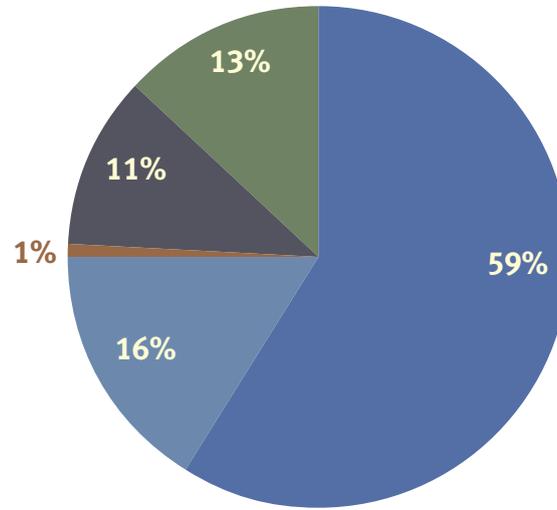
In Thousands

	Fiscal Year '10	Fiscal Year '11
REVENUE	ACTUAL	ACTUAL
Contributions.....	\$3,819	\$4,633
Government Grants	\$1,014	\$1,245
Investment Income.....	\$745	\$864
Earned Income	\$585	\$477
Total Revenue.....	\$6,163	\$7,218
EXPENSES		
Salary and Fringe	\$3,768	\$4,241
Consultant/Legal/Travel.....	\$813	\$1,167
Promotional/Events	\$70	\$89
Facilities, Operations and Mgt.....	\$743	\$792
Support Services Allocation	\$769	\$929
Expenses Total	\$6,163	\$7,218
ENDOWMENT AND OTHER FUNDS RAISED	ACTUAL	ACTUAL
Endowment and Reserve Funds Raised	\$86	\$-
Purchase of Conservation Lands and Easement.....		
Public dollars raised	\$-	\$-
Private dollars raised	\$-	\$-
Funds for Future Use.....	\$518	\$1,007



FISCAL YEAR 2011 REVENUE

- Contributions \$4,633,000—64%
- Government Grants \$1,245,000—17%
- Investment Income \$864,000—12%
- Earned Income \$477,000—7%



FISCAL YEAR 2011 EXPENSES

- Salary and Fringe \$4,241,000—59%
- Consultant/Legal/Travel \$1,167,000—16%
- Promotion/Events \$89,000—1%
- Facilities/Operations/Management \$792,000—11%
- Support Services to National Audubon Society \$929,000—13%



Birds on Richardson Bay. Photo by Robert Hinz

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Bald Eagle. Photo by Randy Finley (www.wildlifist.com)

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We asked people visiting our website to share why birds matter to them.

I love to look at birds. Birds help me deal with boring life in small town. I am deaf. I love to see birds.

With all the chaos in the world, birds just do their thing day after day, night after night. They sing, fly, look for food, nest, call, and bring order and consistency to our world.

Living in an urban environment I don't see a lot of wildlife, but I see birds every day. Even the unpopular pigeons outside my window have brightened my days as I've seen them raise two pairs of chicks.

Birds are as important a part of our world as we are. When I'm watching or listening to them, there is a spiritual aspect that can't be replicated.

Birds have always been calming and relaxing, I listen to them to distress, I love them.

Birds also are a sign of freedom and strength for me. How can a bird so small in this big world of ours make it? If the bird can, then so can I.

I love to watch their behavior. They lighten my day. They're also very beautiful.

Each encounter with forest owl, busy woodpecker, feisty hummingbird, home-bound osprey with fish in hands, are assurances of the wholeness and continuation of existence, at once meaningful and glorious.

My backyard is where I can find peace and tranquility. That is due to the many birds that visit here each day. Their chatter is music to my ears.

I enjoy the beauty of birds every day. Their antics, songs, nesting habits and beauty make life worth living every day. I don't know what I would do if I couldn't enjoy them on a daily basis.

Birds exemplify beauty, resilience and the urge to travel. They remind me of what is sacred in life in an intimate, often whimsical, daily way.

They are the cats of the air. That is, clever, funny, and endearing.

When I go for a walk in the morning, the symphony of bird songs I hear makes me happy to be alive.

I love them all and usually have a sore neck from looking up for any bird I can see.

Birds around us let us know how well we are doing as a whole. They are my best source of joy. Their health signifies the health of all.

I envy them. A "condor" is a hole in one on a par 5.

Birds are like rock and roll stars. They dress up and sing.

Of all living organisms, they have successfully mastered all three strata of our planet: air (peregrine falcon), sea (chinstrap penguin) and land (ostrich)

There is nothing in the world that can make a more beautiful sound than a singing bird. No instrument, no computer, nothing can come close to creating such beautiful music as a bird. Without birds, a forest sounds like death.

A little canary used to trade its life to save coal miners. "A canary in the coal mine" isn't just an expression. How many lives do you suppose those little canaries saved?

I have found photographing birds challenging and rewarding. They have an immense intelligence which can surprise us.

Front Cover: Pileated Woodpecker.
Photo by Jose Echevarria



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Audubon California is a field program of the National Audubon Society.