



Audubon California Impact Report

WINTER 2022



American Kestrel.

Thank You!

Thank you for your support this year!

We are pleased to share with you this report highlighting the important work that you helped make possible!

You helped Audubon California:

- Save nesting Tricolored Blackbirds, and complete the first statewide survey of this vulnerable species in three years—you helped us protect 155,000 birds!
- Ensure that birds continue to be in the budget for the state of California, driving millions of dollars toward migratory bird habitats and to protection of the Tricolored Blackbird.
- Enshrine access to nature for Californians in our state's laws, ensuring that the benefits of nature and of birds are shared by all—wherever they may live.
- Grow our coastal program in partnership with chapters, embarking on projects to restore southern California lagoons and to protect eelgrass beds in Richardson Bay and beyond;
- Expand youth conservation leadership programs to new places, and create new ways to share the joy of birds through *The Bird Story Hour*—helping to build a lasting movement of people committed, as you are, to protecting birds and the places they need now and into the future.

Thank you.



Allen's Hummingbird.

2022 Highlights from the Network

Birds face an unprecedented number of threats—none more acute than climate change, which imperils nearly two-thirds of North American species. Audubon knows that protecting birds today and tomorrow requires substantial investments in the places they need most. Through a powerful mix of policy, partnerships, and effective conservation strategies, along with a strong commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging, Audubon is expanding our impact throughout the nation and the hemisphere.

- In September, we launched the *Migratory Bird Explorer*, a first-of-its-kind digital platform that brings the phenomenon of bird migration to life, provides the most complete and up-to-date picture of their full annual cycle, and reveals migratory birds' epic journeys and the many conservation challenges they encounter throughout the year.
- We certified all 21 family ranches in the Panorama Organic Grass-Fed Meats® network—spanning nearly 700,000 acres of grassland habitat—as bird-friendly.
- Working with partners, Audubon launched *For the Birds: The Birdsong Project*, a historic outpouring of creativity by hundreds of musicians, actors, literary figures, and visual artists. Available on major streaming platforms, including Spotify and Apple Music, and as a limited edition 20-LP boxed set.
- Audubon helped advance the Recovering America's Wildlife Act through the U.S. House of Representatives. This legislation provides \$2 billion for conservation projects, will create 3,000 jobs, and will generate \$93 billion in economic activity.
- Partnering with BirdLife International and many other organizations, Audubon's Conserva Aves secured \$12 million from the Bezos Earth Fund to protect and strengthen bird habitats across 1.48 million acres in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Perú.
- We helped secure a \$340 million investment from Canadian government in Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous Guardians programs.

As a valued member of our Audubon flock and a supporter of our California programs, you make our work possible. We are pleased to provide you with this impact report, highlighting our shared accomplishments.



Burrowing Owl.

Yellow Warbler.



Central Valley

The Central Valley of California runs on water. This year, Audubon California ensured that 55,000 acres of wetland habitat were present where and when birds needed it. Migrating shorebirds and ducks have traveled the Central Valley for millennia, and the past two centuries have changed their habitats in this vast landscape. We, our partners, and you together ensure that the wildlife refuges and the surrogate habitat on agricultural fields are ready for these annual visitors. This is just one facet of our ongoing work to protect water for birds and people in the Central Valley.

Our residents are important too. Tricolored Blackbirds form large nesting colonies, creating a distinctive

rambunctious clatter. They are found almost exclusively in California, and a single breeding colony can teem with over 35,000 birds settled into a single field or small wetland to raise their young. Audubon, with agricultural and state agency partners, locates and protects Tricolored Blackbird colonies on agricultural fields at risk of harvest during the nesting cycle. We helped to protect eight colonies for a total of 155,000 birds protected. It works: the bi-annual statewide survey this year revealed encouraging numbers. While final results are still pending, the data are suggesting positive signs of stable or increasing populations.

Grassland birds are some of the most imperiled bird species in North America, and our Conservation Ranching program protects and improves rangelands for the benefit of birds like the Western Meadowlark. Nearly 400,000 acres have been certified to date in California,

and there are 20 more ranches in the certification process and pipeline. This would more than double the number of certified operations. We've begun bringing on additional partners to meet the demand we're seeing from ranchers. Our staff provided training in habitat management planning to 16 Resource Conservation Districts this year, giving them tools for the needed monitoring and support for ranchers in implementing new practices—expanding our impact even further.

And, it's working! We are already starting to see bird numbers and diversity increase on certified ranches. These ranches are more abundant and diverse in bird life than 70% of adjacent areas, per our Bird Friendliness Index. We will continue to monitor these operations, quantifying our impact over time.

Coasts and Estuaries

Audubon is partnering with our chapters on coastal resilience projects, protecting habitat, and championing policies that enable people and birds to thrive along coastlines. Our coastal areas, tidal marshes, eelgrass beds, and open water form a critical network of refueling, resting, and wintering grounds for local and migratory birds.

Climate-smart restoration and community engagement projects at Buena Vista Lagoon and Mission Bay, in San Diego County, have been a highlight of our coast work this year, in

partnership with the Buena Vista and San Diego Audubon chapters. These projects will help to protect threatened and endangered birds including Ridgway's Rail, Belding's Savannah Sparrow and California Least Tern, while helping these vital coastal habitats adapt to climate change. The chapters are engaging indigenous partners from the Kumeyaay and Payómkawichum Tribes, along with the Rincon Indian Education Center, ensuring the ancestral stewards of the land are leading the way.

Audubon California has set an important goal to protect millions of migrating and wintering waterbirds that rely on a relatively rare ecosystem in California—underwater eelgrass beds

in our coastal estuaries. We need to increase the acreage and resilience of these eelgrass beds and help increase populations of Pacific herring that spawn there, because they are a major energy source for waterbirds.

This year we finalized new science that identifies and prioritizes eelgrass sites for protection and restoration in California, while continuing to manage our 900-acre marine sanctuary at the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary in San Francisco Bay. Center biologists completed the third annual aerial survey of eelgrass beds, and over the next year with partners we will begin testing new methods for eelgrass growing and restoration in the Bay.



Western Sandpipers.

Science

Our science team works on the ground to study, measure, and map birds and habitats and these results feed directly into our conservation and policy work.

This year, we:

- Developed new tools to map eelgrass beds in San Francisco Bay and identified the best future sites for eelgrass restoration.
- Surveyed Salton Sea shoreline for birds, water quality, and food resources to assess the current state of health of the Salton Sea ecosystem.
- Captured and tagged shorebirds to measure their health and movements in response to the impact of California's historic drought on birds in the Central Valley.
- Hired college interns to gain field experience while studying the success of coastal sage scrub restoration at Audubon's Starr Ranch.



Bald Eagle.

Water in Drought

This year, Audubon California prioritized four water policy strategies to bolster birds' resilience through the drought.

- Ensuring agencies deliver the water in the Central Valley needed to create habitat on our last remaining wildlife refuges and in post-harvest rice fields that are providing surrogate habitat, while identifying opportunities to reconnect floodplains and improve ecosystem function to benefit fish, birds, and people.
- Protecting managed wetlands that depend on groundwater during the implementation of California's groundwater protection law, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).
- Restoring habitat at the Salton Sea, advocating for protections for the Sea and local communities and advocating for sustainability on the Colorado River, of the primary source of water for the Salton Sea.
- Increasing water supplies and financial resources for the Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, the staging and molting ground for millions of migratory waterfowl every year.



Black-necked Stilt.



Greater Roadrunner.

Deserts

Audubon continues to engage in state, federal, and regional policy efforts to ensure implementation of the Salton Sea Management Plan and to secure the long-term governance structure needed for a sustainable Sea. The communities around the Sea have high rates of health impacts from poor air quality, a situation poised to get worse without intervention in this birding hotspot. Audubon is taking advantage of an emerging wetland at Bombay Beach, having completed the design for an 800-acre habitat stabilization and enhancement project with public amenities. Groundbreaking is anticipated in 2023.

Our staff are launching Audubon Youth Leaders (AYL) at the Salton Sea, complementing AYL programs in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles. These young people will learn about water and wildlife monitoring, support community engagement efforts, and build their advocacy skills to ensure the long-term protection of this place.



Green-winged Teal.

Urban Environments

The Audubon Center at Debs Park and the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary shared two key programs this year, building the future of the conservation workforce while completing restoration, volunteer, and advocacy projects. Each center this year for the first time hosted one Community Conservation Fellow, a recent college graduate interested in conservation careers. These Fellows worked closely with high school-age Audubon Youth Leaders. The Fellows and Leaders completed in June our inaugural Youth Advocacy Day, sharing their concerns with local and state policymakers. The Fellows departed their time at Audubon with new networks and experience at a large conservation organization. Debs Park will be launching a school-year Youth Leaders program this winter, offering youth a stipend as well as the opportunity to become certified UC California Naturalists through our partnership with the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Looking Ahead

Audubon California made tremendous progress over the past year and we are poised for even greater impact in the year ahead. With policy victories, new partnerships, and information conservation science in place, we will:

- Grow the highly successful Audubon Conservation Ranching Program, protecting grassland ecosystems.
- Continue to advocate for the water and habitat birds and communities need in the Central Valley, through the ongoing challenges of drought and other climate change impacts.
- Test new methods for eelgrass growing and restoration at Richardson Bay, protecting habitat for our waterbirds and testing practices that benefit eelgrass beds along the entire Pacific flyway.
- Expand opportunities for the next generation to make the conservation movement their own—because the future of birds and our planet depend on them.

We remain truly grateful for your support of Audubon California. Our work would not be possible without your commitment to protecting birds and the places they need today and tomorrow. We are stronger together, and with your partnership, we are shaping a brighter future for birds and communities across California. Thank you.

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Greater Sage-Grouse.