

Important Bird Areas in Southeastern Alaska

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As the U.S. Partner for BirdLife International, a global coalition of more than 100 organizations, the National Audubon Society is working to identify a network of sites that provide critical habitat for birds. This effort, known as the Important Bird Areas (or IBA) Program, recognizes that habitat loss and fragmentation are the most serious threats facing populations of birds across North America and around the world. By working through partnerships, principally the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), to identify those places that are critical to birds during some part of their life cycle, we hope to minimize the effects that habitat degradation and loss have on bird populations. The IBA program is a global effort to identify areas that are most important for maintaining bird populations and focus conservation efforts at protecting these sites.

The IBA program was initiated by BirdLife International in Europe in the 1980's. Since then, more than 3,600 sites have been identified as IBAs in 51 European countries, with a total acreage covering 7% of Europe. Hundreds of these sites and millions of acres have received greater visibility and conservation as a result of the IBA Program. Today, IBAs are being identified in 156 countries around the world.

The National Audubon Society launched the IBA initiative in the U.S. in 1995, establishing program's state by state. State-based IBA programs provide conservation leaders with the flexibility to tailor the program to their State's needs, and they also give Audubon members and local volunteers the greatest opportunities to identify and conserve important

sites in their communities. To date, 46 states have initiated IBA programs and more than 1,800 IBAs have already been identified in the U.S.

QUALIFICATION AS AN IBA

IBAs are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more bird species. They include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating, and range from sites of a few hundred acres to hundreds of thousands of acres. They are usually discrete sites that stand out from the surrounding landscape, they may include public or private lands, or both, and they may be protected or unprotected.

To qualify as an IBA, a site must satisfy at least one of the following criteria. The site must support:

- species of conservation concern (species already considered threatened or endangered);
- species with restricted-ranges (vulnerable because they are not widely distributed);
- species with restricted habitat requirements (vulnerable because they are concentrated in 1 general habitat type); and
- species or groups of similar species that congregate (vulnerable because they occur at high densities).

Identification of a site as an IBA indicates its unique importance for birds. Nonetheless, some IBAs are of greater significance than others. A site may be recognized as significant at the global, continental or state level. The IBA identification process provides a data-driven means for cataloging the most important sites for birds throughout the country and the world.

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN ALASKA

The State of Alaska has a land mass of more than 365 million acres (148 million hectares), 47,000 m (76,000 km) of marine shoreline, 100,000 glaciers, more than 3 million lakes and rivers, and a diversity of habitats that range from temperate rainforest to Arctic tundra. Alaska also has more than 50 million seabirds, 10 million waterfowl, and many species of breeding birds that breed nowhere else in the United States. Identifying IBAs in Alaska is a monumental undertaking, but a statewide IBA program is well underway.

The process is relatively straightforward: Audubon Alaska encourages knowledgeable individuals to nominate potential sites as IBAs. An Alaska IBA Technical Committee, comprised of

scientists and local bird experts, assess these site nominations at the state level. Where necessary, the Alaska committee forwards nominations to a National IBA Technical Committee, which assesses sites for their importance at the global and continental level. To be identified as an IBA, sites must pass a rigorous scientific review of current information (i.e. population counts and survey results gathered within the last 15 years).

An extensive list of sites that have the potential to meet IBA criteria has been established for Southeastern Alaska (Table 1). Approximately 30% of these sites are expected to be recognized as top tier (i.e. significant at the global level). Nominations for many of these sites are currently in progress.

TABLE 1. List of Potential IBA Sites in Southeastern Alaska.

Site name	General location	Group(s) of interest	Expected global significance ¹
Yakutat Bay	Northern Mainland	shorebirds	√
Yakutat Forelands & Dry Bay	Northern Mainland	shorebirds, waterfowl	√
Situk River Mouth	Northern Mainland	seabirds	√
Glacier Bay & Icy Strait, marine	Northern Mainland	seabirds, shorebirds	√
Gustavus Flats	Northern Mainland	cranes	√
Chilkat River	Northern Mainland	land birds	√
Berners Bay	Northern Mainland	shorebirds, waterfowl	√
Mendenhall Wetlands	Northern Mainland	shorebirds, waterfowl	√
Tracy & Endicott Arms	Central Mainland	seabirds	
Cape Fanshaw	Central Mainland	seabirds	
Stikine River Delta/Flats	Central Mainland	shorebirds, waterfowl	√
Faragut Bay	Central Mainland	shorebirds	
Thomas Bay	Central Mainland	waterfowl	
Ernest Sound/Bradfield Canal	Southern Mainland	waterfowl	
Revillagigedo Channel	Southern Mainland	seabirds	
Boca De Quadra	Southern Mainland	seabirds	
Port Althorp	Chichagof Island	waterfowl, seabirds	
Port Frederick	Chichagof Island	waterfowl	
Tenakee Inlet	Chichagof Island	waterfowl	
Hoonah Sound	Chichagof Island	waterfowl	
Mud Bay	Chichagof Island	waterfowl	
Sealion Islands	Off Kruzof Island	seabirds	
St. Lazaria Island	Off Kruzof Island	seabirds	√
Shelikof Bay	Kruzof Island	waterfowl	
Krestof & Sitka Sounds	Kruzof Is-Baranof Is	waterfowl	
Seymour Canal	Admiralty Island	land birds, waterfowl	√
Gambier Bay	Admiralty Island	waterfowl	
Pybus Bay	Admiralty Island	waterfowl	
Hood Bay	Admiralty Island	waterfowl, shorebirds	
Mitchell Bay	Admiralty Island	shorebirds	
Saginaw Bay	Kuiu Island	waterfowl	
Security Bay	Kuiu Island	waterfowl	
Bay of Pillars	Kuiu Island	waterfowl	
Duncan Canal, marine	Kupreanof Island	seabirds, waterfowl	√
Keku Strait-Rocky Pass	Kuiu Is-Kupreanof Is	seabirds	√
Tebenkof Bay	Kuiu Island	waterfowl	
Blind Slough	Mitkof Island	waterfowl, seabirds	
Timbered Island	Off NW Prince of Wales Is	seabirds	√
Forrester, Lowrie & Petrel Islands	Off SW Prince of Wales Is	seabirds	√
Lake Bay	Prince of Wales Island	waterfowl	
Red Bay	Prince of Wales Island	shorebirds	
Shinaku Inlet-Big Salt Lake	Prince of Wales Island	waterfowl, shorebirds	
Soda Bay	Prince of Wales Island	waterfowl	
Kaigani Strait	Prince of Wales Island	waterfowl	
Barrier Islands	Off S Prince of Wales Is	waterfowl	
Stephens Passage, marine	Mainland-Admiralty Is	seabirds	
Iphigenia Bay, marine	Noyes Is-Warren Is	seabirds	

¹Sites marked (√) are expected to meet criteria as globally significant. Unmarked sites have the potential to meet IBA criteria at either the continental or state level.