



The Alaskan Wildlifer

Newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Wildlife Society

Summer Issue - August 2013



Message from President Jerry Hupp

Like many of you, much of my summer has been devoted to field work. Few of us got in this profession so we could work in an office. So, time in the field is especially valued, even if it means long days in waders, ingesting mosquitoes along with dinner, and using a bathroom with a view. As other aging wildlifers can appreciate, field work now comes a little less easy. Knees are a little more cranky, outboard motors are little heavier and it takes a little longer in the morning for the stiffness to ease. Fortunately there's a crop of younger professionals to do the heavy lifting, and one of the more enjoyable aspects of field work is the chance to work with young biologists (and to let them carry the outboards). Often they're newly arrived in the state, are enthusiastic, and have a sense of wonder about their surroundings. It's a chance to see Alaska through their eyes and to be reminded of what an amazing land this is.

Working with young biologists is also a reminder of the progression of one generation to the next, and how much of our profession is built on the work of those that came before us. It's a history worth knowing – especially in Alaska. As a young state, the early days of modern wildlife conservation in Alaska are not so distant. We have chapter members who lived some of that history, and their stories are compelling. Fortunately TWS has a program to preserve those stories.

Conserving our Wildlife Conservation Heritage (COWCH) is TWS' effort to record the personal histories of senior biologists that made important contributions to conservation. Videos of many of these interviews are available on the COWCH web site (<http://wildlife.org/who-we-are/cowch/interviews>). The interviews include some Alaskan biologists, and they're real gems. Cal Lensink tells about drawing the current boundaries of the

state's national wildlife refuges (and describes how to keep a pine marten mollified with candy while attaching an ear tag). Jim Rearden tells how his experience as a sonar operator in WWII contributed to the introduction of sonar to count salmon in Alaska's rivers. Jim King describes how informal spring aerial surveys led to the formation of Cape Newenham NWR, which after ANILCA became part of Togiak Refuge, and preserved nesting habitat for a million seabirds. John Morrison describes his career that spanned Idaho, Africa, Puerto Rico, Oklahoma, and Alaska. There are others, both of Alaskans and colleagues elsewhere, that tell engaging tales. These interviews describe wildlife conservation prior to and in the early days of statehood, and give insights on the current state of wildlife management in Alaska.

We have a number of chapter members who are good candidates for COWCH interviews. I and others on the Executive Board would like to encourage participation of Alaskans in the COWCH program. After all, the history of wildlife conservation in the state is unique compared to other areas of North America, and there are many stories worth hearing. If you know someone that would be a good candidate for a COWCH interview, are available to conduct an interview, or are willing to be the subject of one, please contact me through the Chapter email (twsalaska@gmail.com). The Chapter is willing to help with these interviews.

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In other news, there are multiple opportunities to serve the Alaska Chapter of TWS. We are currently seeking someone to take over duties as our web guru. This person would keep our web page updated and assist with online registration during our annual meeting. This is a great opportunity for someone with web-page skills to put those skills to use and to play a positive role in Chapter outreach. Also, our next annual meeting will be held in April 2014 and as always we need willing hands to make this event happen. Finally, we will elect a new Executive Board in early 2014. Speaking from experience, service on the Executive Board is rewarding. It provides opportunities to learn about a variety of wildlife issues in Alaska, work with some very cool people, and to expand your professional horizons. I highly encourage members to put their names forward for consideration as candidates for the next Executive Board. Again, contact me through the Chapter email if you're interested in these various opportunities, or want to hear more reasons why you should serve. For those of you who spent your summer in the field, I hope the transition back to office life goes easily. I also hope each of you finds time to enjoy Alaska's autumn.

-Jerry Hupp, President, TWS-AK Chapter

Volunteer Opportunities with the Alaska Chapter of TWS-Get Involved!

- Webmaster – Update the Chapter's web site and help with annual meeting registration.
- Annual Meeting Organizing Committee – Help with planning and logistics for our 2014 meeting in Anchorage.
- Serve on the next Executive Board – Consider running for office in our upcoming 2014 election.
- Newsletter Assistant – Help with production of our quarterly newsletter.

The Alaska Chapter cannot function without the work of volunteers. It's a great way to add diversity to your professional life and serve a good organization.

If you're interested in these or other opportunities to serve, contact Jerry Hupp at: twsalaska@gmail.com.

New memberships and renewals are available online at The Wildlife Society (www.wildlife.org/alaska/). Click on membership to obtain membership forms.



Regional News

Southcentral

Cara Staab, Southcentral Representative

Dr. Daniel Esler joined the U.S. Geological Survey, Alaska Science Center (ASC), as leader of the Sea Otter/Nearshore Ecosystems Research Program in mid-August 2013. Dan has conducted research on recovery of sea ducks in Prince William Sound following the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Since 2001, he has been a Research Associate and Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Wildlife Ecology at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in British Columbia. While at SFU, he led research on nearshore marine animals and ecosystems along the Pacific coast of North America, including Alaska. He has addressed a variety of conservation issues, including wind farms, shellfish aquaculture, and population status of sea ducks in collaboration with USGS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, and others.

Todd Rinaldi has moved from research into a management biologist position at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. After 11 years working in the wildlife research, **Todd Rinaldi** became ADF&G's Palmer Area Wildlife Biologist in August. Todd will be greatly missed in the research program but is a welcomed addition in his new capacity. Congratulations, Todd!

Tom Lohuis continues to wrangle sheep for ADF&G, but in a new capacity. He is continuing his sheep research but recently accepted a leadership position as the Southcentral Region's Research Coordinator. For a glimpse into Tom's exciting world, watch the capture video at <http://vimeo.com/57495393>. Hold on to your helicopter, Tom, and keep up the great work!

Sarah Bullock of the BLM's Glennallen Field Office was chosen to attend the 2013 TWS Leadership Institute. Sarah is one of 10 applicants admitted into the program, which

was established in 2006 to provide promising early-career wildlife professionals with basic leadership training. A committee of TWS members and staff selected Sarah and the other participants by evaluating their academic record, demonstrated leadership capability, and proven excellence. For the program, Sarah has been participating in a variety of distance learning projects that will culminate in October with intensive hands-on mentoring activities and leadership workshops during the 2013 TWS Annual Conference in Milwaukee. Sarah will receive free registration and a travel grant for the conference, a welcomed assist during these times of budget hardships. Regarding her selection, Sarah stated, "I am super excited about this opportunity with my choice professional society, and am looking forward to participating." Sarah is the first Alaskan wildlife professional recruited into the program. For a list of the other participants or more details on the program, see <http://wildlife.org/professional-development/leadership-institute/2013>.



TWS-Alaska Chapter Regions
(Northern, Southcentral, Southeast)



Regional News-Continued

Southeast

Karen Blejwas, Southeast Representative

No news from Southeast.

Northern

Kaiti Ott, Northern Representative

Torsten Bentzen will soon join the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as a caribou research biologist in Fairbanks. Torsten has a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Wildlife Biology from UAF. For the past five years he has served as the assistant area biologist for ADF&G in Tok.

Erin Julianus is the new wildlife biologist for the BLM's Central Yukon Field Office. Erin was previously employed by the Kanuti NWR, and her work there relating wildfire dynamics to moose habitat will lead to a Master's degree from UAF in the next year or so. Erin already holds a Master of Environmental Science degree from Miami University and a B.S. from Hillsdale College. The BLM is thrilled to have Erin on board as she brings a great mix of skills to the agency.

You can contribute! We need your story ideas! Help keep AK-TWS members connected.

Are you working on an interesting project you'd like to share with other AK-TWS members? Do you have news to share with colleagues? Please make note of upcoming events, projects, personnel changes, issues, or anything else of interest to other AK-TWS members, and pass them on to your regional representative for inclusion in our next quarterly newsletter. If you know of something that would make an interesting newsletter article and can't write it up yourself, please contact newsletter editor Elizabeth Manning at elizabeth.manning@alaska.gov or 907-267-2168. Help us make this an interesting and informative newsletter!



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Contact: Todd Rinaldi
at tarraldi@yahoo.com



Chapter News

Alaska Chapter Adopts Position Statement on Intensive Management

In June, the Alaska Chapter of TWS adopted a revised position statement on intensive management of ungulates. The statement was adopted by a vote of 33 in favor and two opposed. This exceeds the 2/3 majority vote needed to adopt a position statement under Chapter bylaws. A copy of the position statement can be found on the Chapter's web site at: http://wildlife.org/Alaska/sites/wildlife.org.Alaska/files/images/IM_Big_Game_in_Alaska_Adopted.pdf.

The Alaska Chapter is on Facebook

The Alaska Chapter of TWS has recently made the leap into social media. You can now "like" us on Facebook. Almost 50 percent of people in the United States now have Facebook accounts. The percentage is much higher among those under 30 years old. Love it or hate it, social media is part of everyday life for many people. And it offers a means for TWS and its chapters to spread the word on science-based management of wildlife. It's also a means for the professional community to keep abreast of news. We are posting information on recent scientific publications that are relevant to Alaska's wildlife, announcements of upcoming meetings, and job openings. So, if you're a Facebook user, check it out. If you have ideas on how we can most effectively use our Facebook page, contact the Executive Board through the Chapter email (twsalaska@gmail.com).

Look for our new website

The old website for the TWS Alaska Chapter is being phased out. Check out our new website: www.wildlife.org/alaska/.

Chapter Comments on EPA's Bristol Bay Assessment

The Environmental Protection Agency released its draft Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment earlier this year (<http://www2.epa.gov/bristolbay>). EPA conducted this assessment to evaluate how large scale mining associated with the Pebble deposit could affect the Kvichak and Nushagak drainages, as well as other regions of the Bristol Bay watershed. The Alaska Chapter has not yet taken a formal position on development of the Pebble deposit. However, we did submit comments to the EPA regarding its watershed assessment. In our comments we acknowledged the importance of salmon to the region's terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, supported objective assessments of the impacts of resource development on fisheries and wildlife, and recommended that the assessment be revised to better address the uncertainties associated with effects of large scale mine operations on wildlife resources. A copy of our comments is on file on the Chapter web site: http://wildlife.org/Alaska/sites/wildlife.org.Alaska/files/images/EPA_Bristol_Bay_Assessment_June_2013.pdf.

Planning Underway for TWS-Alaska Chapter Spring Meeting

Grant Hilderbrand, TWS AK-Chapter President-Elect, is starting to organize the Spring 2014 annual meeting in Anchorage. Our April 2014 meeting will be held in conjunction with the North American Moose Conference and Workshop. Please contact Grant if you have ideas for sessions or themes or if you would like to volunteer to serve on the program and planning committees. Contact Grant at Grant_Hilderbrand@nps.gov or (907) 644-3578.



Recent Publications by TWS-AK Chapter Members

We would like to highlight the contributions of Chapter members to wildlife science. If you or your colleagues have recently published articles in peer-reviewed journals, please send the citation to Jerry Hupp (jhupp@usgs.gov). The following are some papers that were recently published by Chapter members.

Colson, K., T. Brinkman, D. Person, and K. Hundertmark. 2013. Fine-scale social and spatial genetic structure in Sitka black-tailed deer. *Conservation Genetics* 14:439-450. DOI: 10.1007/s10592-012-0388-0

Coltrane, J. A. and R. Sinnott. 2013. Winter home range and habitat use by porcupines in Alaska. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 77:505-513.

Ely, C. R., J. S. Hall, J. A. Schmutz, J. M. Pearce, J. Terenzi, J. S. Sedinger, and H. S. Ip. 2013. Evidence that life history characteristics of wild birds influence infection and exposure to influenza A viruses. *PLoS ONE* 8(3):e57614. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone0057614

Ely, C. R., D. J. Nieman, R. T. Alisauskas, J. A. Schmutz, and J. E. Hines. 2013. Geographic variation in migration chronology and winter distribution of midcontinent greater white-fronted geese. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 77:1182-1191.

Fondell, T. F., P. L. Flint, J. A. Schmutz, J. L. Schamber, C. A. Nicolai, and M. Bolton. 2013. Variation in body mass dynamics among sites in black brant *Branta bernicla nigricans* supports adaptivity of mass loss during moult. *Ibis* 155:593-605. DOI: 10.1111/ibi.12056

Haynes, T.B., A. E. Rosenberger, M. S. Lindberg, M. Whitman, J. A. Schmutz, and J. M. Jech. 2013. Method- and species-specific detection probabilities of fish occupancy in Arctic lakes: implications for design and management. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries & Aquatic Sciences* 70:10551063. DOI: 10.1139/cjfas-2012-0527

Hupp, J. W., D. E. Safine, and R. M. Nielson. 2013. Response of cackling geese (*Branta hutchinsii taverneri*) to spatial and temporal variation in the production of crowberries on the Alaska Peninsula. *Polar Biology* 36:1243-1255. DOI:10.1007/s00300-013-1343-3

Meixell, B. W., M. S. Lindberg, P. B. Conn, C. P. Dau, J. E. Sarvis. 2013. Age-specific survival of tundra swans on the lower Alaska Peninsula. *Condor* 115:280-290. DOI: 10.1525/cond.2013.110213

Reeves, A. B., J. M. Pearce, A. M. Ramey, C. R. Ely, J. A. Schmutz, P. L. Flint, D. V. Derksen, H. S. Ip, and K. A. Trust. 2013. Genomic analysis of avian influenza viruses from waterfowl in western Alaska, USA. *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 49:600-611. DOI: 10.7589/2012-04-108

Roach, J. K., B. Griffith, and D. Verbyla. 2013. Landscape influences on climate-related lake shrinkage at high latitudes. *Global Change Biology* 19:2276-2285. DOI: 10.1111/gcb.12196

Schmidt, J. H., K. L. Rattenbury. 2013. Reducing effort while improving inference: Estimating Dall's sheep abundance and composition in small areas. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 77:1048-1059. DOI: 10.1002/jwmg.557

Van Hemert, C., A. G. Armien, J. E. Blake, C. M. Handel, T. M. O'Hara. 2013. Macroscopic, histologic, and ultrastructural lesions associated with avian keratin disorder in black-capped chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*). *Veterinary Pathology* 50:500-514. DOI: 10.1177/0300985812469637



Field Notes: Research Cruise Included Several Walrus Projects

The R/V Norseman II left St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea on June 4th for a four-week research cruise with scientists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Marine Mammals Management Program and Conservation Genetics Lab (USFWS), the U.S. Geological Survey's Alaska Science Center's Walrus Research Program (USGS), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Arctic Marine Mammals Program (ADFG), and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's Environmental Section. Assisting the scientists were two walrus hunters from St. Lawrence Island lending their expertise on walrus, navigating broken pack ice with small skiffs, and reading the weather, ice, and ocean currents. The goals of the research cruise were to collect skin samples from at least 1,300 walrus, visually determine the age and sex composition of walrus groups encountered for a total sample comprising at least 1,600 adult females, and attach satellite transmitters to 36 walrus.

The skin sample collection is part of a genetics-based mark-recapture project led by USFWS to estimate the size, productivity, and survival rates of the population. Samples are collected with a biopsy tip fitted to an arrow fired from a crossbow at a distance of 10-40 meters. This is the first year of intensive sampling, and depending on recapture rates, it will take at least two more years of similar effort to begin to estimate population parameters with reasonable precision. Results will be useful in population modeling, assessing the effects of climate change, insuring the sustainability of the subsistence harvest, and in preparing a pending Endangered Species Act listing decision.

The age and sex composition data were collected for a walrus population age-structure project led by USGS to estimate age ratios (e.g., calf:cow ratios) and provide a baseline estimate of current population structure. Recent changes in summer sea ice, and subsequent changes in walrus movements and haulout behavior, have the potential to negatively impact walrus population dynamics through reduced reproductive rates and calf survival. Data from this and other age-structure surveys conducted in the 1980s and 1990s will be used in ongoing USGS efforts to model and project walrus population dynamics in the face of Arctic climate change.

The radio-tagging was led by ADFG. The satellite transmitters were deployed either with a crossbow or a harpoon. The transmitters are attached with a barbed point that pierces the skin, lodging in the blubber layer, and will stay in place for up to two months. The goals of tagging were to understand how the walrus were moving relative to the sampling efforts and to see if females with calves of the year haulout longer or at a different time of day than females with older calves. This information could be important for correcting the cow:calf and cow:juvenile ratios data during analysis of age composition data. Another goal was to collect movement data during migration through Bering Strait into the Chukchi Sea from females with calves, females with older young, and some males and to see if they entered the oil and gas lease sale areas and how much time they spent there. The project may shed light on questions of differential movement patterns of females with and without dependent young and the amount of mixing between walrus that summer in the western (Russia) and eastern (US) Chukchi Sea and the degree of interaction with oil and gas activities.

For additional information see: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Alaska-Marine-Mammals-Management/177706405688985>; <http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/walrus/>; and <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=marinemammalprogram.walrustracking>

-Jim McCracken, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Perry Pungowiwi of Savoonga, AK retrieving biopsy darts with walrus skin samples from an ice floe in the Chukchi Sea, June 2013.



Conferences, Books and Interesting Notes

Save the Date: North American Caribou Workshop set for May

The 15th North American Caribou Workshop will be held in Whitehorse, Yukon, May 12-16, 2014, at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Center on the banks of the Yukon River.

The theme of the workshop is "Caribou Conservation and Management: What's Working?" It has been three decades since the first North American Caribou Workshop was held in Whitehorse in 1983. With the 15th Workshop returning to Whitehorse, it is a fitting opportunity to examine what we have achieved, as managers, biologists, and other interested groups with respect to advancing caribou conservation and management. Have we been successful in our efforts to ensure caribou populations are being managed in a sustainable fashion? What has worked, what hasn't worked, and what can we do differently? A full day will be devoted to presentations dealing explicitly with conservation and management initiatives throughout North America, and elsewhere, that address these questions.

In addition to three days of technical sessions, there will be one day of workshops on May 12 and a field trip day on May 16. Registration and abstract submission will be conducted on-line through our website at www.2014nacw.ca, and will begin in July 2013.

On behalf of the organizing committee of the 15th North American Caribou Workshop, we look forward to an exciting meeting and hope to see you in Whitehorse in May 2014.

New book published on North Pacific Rainforests

Gordon Orians and **John Schoen** (TWS AK Chapter member) are the editors of a new book on the North Pacific temperate rainforest, titled "North Pacific Temperate Rainforests." Orians is professor emeritus at the University of Washington; Schoen is a senior science advisor at Audubon Alaska. The book provides a multidisciplinary overview of key issues important for the management and conservation of the north portion of the rainforest, located in British Columbia and southeastern Alaska. Published in June 2013. ISBN-13: 9780295992617.

Learn about Aldo Leopold's Field Notes of a lost "Soundscape"

TWS-AK Chapter members sometimes suggest articles that may be of interest to other members. Visit www.news.wisc.edu/21058 to read an interesting article from the University of Wisconsin about Aldo Leopold. Leopold, the well-known wildlife ecologist, took meticulous field notes, including recording early morning bird calls at his Sauk County shack in Wisconsin. Using those notes, a University of Wisconsin professor and graduate student have recreated a "soundscape" based on Leopold's 70 year-old notes. The work is part of the field of soundscape ecology, which examines the role of sound within a landscape.



Alaska Chapter Leadership

Your 2012-2014 Executive Board

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