



COMMUNITY REPORT

AUDUBON SOCIETY of Rhode Island

MIDDLETOWN, NEWPORT, AND PORTSMOUTH



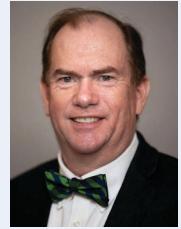
OCEAN DRIVE MARSH WILDLIFE REFUGE, NEWPORT



Audubon Society of Rhode Island

HELP AUDUBON PROTECT THE NATURE OF RHODE ISLAND.

In 2023, Audubon made significant strides in avian research, stormwater management, pollinator conservation, and enhanced accessibility to our wildlife refuges. As Audubon's new executive director, I want to reflect on the remarkable year that has passed and share our ambitious goals for 2024.



The new Audubon Avian Research Initiative positioned our work at the forefront of research in New England, and our advocacy efforts led to a significant win in forest protection through new legislation for solar siting. Inclusivity in environmental education is paramount, and Audubon educators developed accessible nature-based programming in 2023 that is inclusive to all learners.

For 2024, our focus areas include accessibility, biodiversity, and climate resiliency.

Accessibility is a core commitment for Audubon and a new initiative will make our wildlife refuges and facilities easier to access for all. Biodiversity also remains a priority, and will involve continued avian research, pollinator habitat conservation, and advocating for the ban of neonicotinoid pesticides. Stormwater management is vital for climate resiliency. The Stormwater Innovation Center, with leadership from Audubon, is working to implement nature-based solutions across the state.

Your support of Audubon directly impacts local environmental education and conservation initiatives. Together, we can build a brighter, more sustainable future. Donate to Audubon today at asri.org/donate.

Thank you for your support!

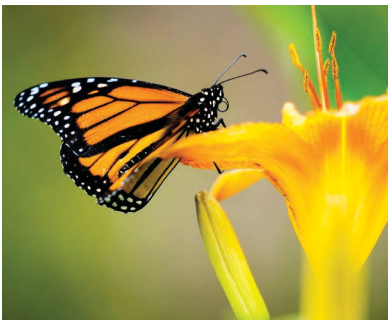


Jeffrey C. Hall
Executive Director



Audubon has been protecting nature on Aquidneck Island for over 125 years!

- Audubon protects 14 acres in Newport and 245 acres in Portsmouth, including coastal habitats that are critical for climate resiliency.
- In Newport, Audubon collaborates with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center, offering programs for youth, and after school and camp scholarships.
- Audubon has brought nature programs to Blenheim-Newport Senior Living Community, Newport Public Library, Countryside Children's Center, Hathaway Elementary School, St. Michael's Country Day School, Melville Elementary School, the Sandpiper Club, and the Episcopal Diocese of RI Creation Care Ministries.
- The Audubon Avian Research Initiative monitors bird species on wildlife refuges across Rhode Island. This data will be used to support bird populations and long-term biodiversity in the state.



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AUDUBON PROTECTED LAND

The properties below are permanently protected and remain undisturbed for wildlife. Audubon has wildlife refuges across the state with trails that are open to the public. Please visit asri.org/hike for trail maps and directions.

NEWPORT 14 acres

1. OCEAN DRIVE MARSH WILDLIFE REFUGE

Protected since 1967; approximately 14 acres

Two parcels of tidal marsh and forested upland make up this wildlife refuge. It contains valuable habitat for birds and other wildlife and supports an active Osprey nest.

PORTSMOUTH 245 acres

2. CHIPAQUISSETT WILDLIFE REFUGE

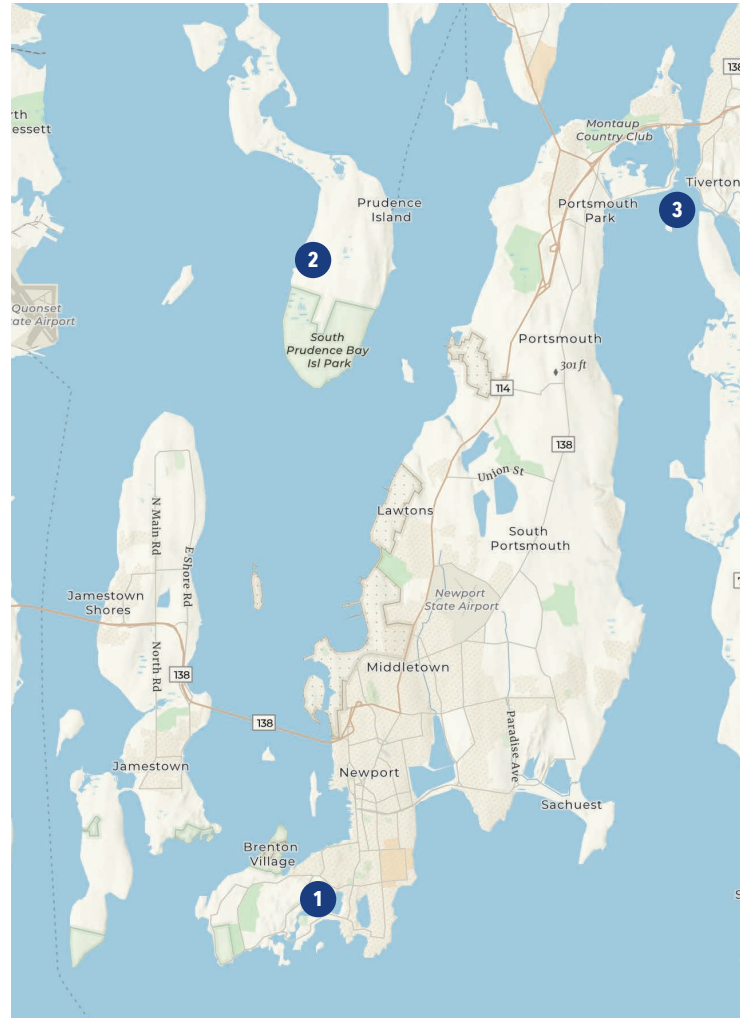
Protected since 1997; approximately 240 acres

This large forest in the center of Prudence Island offers year-round habitat for birds and other wildlife.

3. GOULD ISLAND ROOKERY WILDLIFE REFUGE

Protected since 1964; approximately 5 acres

This rocky island in Narragansett Bay contains active nesting sites for heron, egrets and cormorants.



Ed Hughes



Ed Hughes



LEARN MORE! Scroll down for a current update on Audubon's science and education initiatives, conservation work, and advocacy efforts across Rhode Island. Visit asri.org.

CONSERVATION

Rhode Island's first environmental organization, Audubon has grown to become the state's largest private landowner protecting over 9,500 acres of natural habitat. We manage 14 wildlife refuges with trails that are free and open to the public for birding, hiking, nature observation and photography.

FOREST HEALTH

Large areas of forest and coastal habitats are protected by our conservation efforts, these areas are critical in the face of climate change and sea-level rise. Audubon serves on the Forest Conservation Commission, advising the RI Department of Environmental Management on how to promote forest values and pursue strategies to preserve private forestland. Audubon also serves on the House Commission on Land Use, studying land use and zoning issues from preservation to housing.

PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

- Audubon advises land owners and helps to manage over 600 acres of forest habitat across the state in a "Forestry for the Birds" program.
- Staff coordinate the state-wide, citizen science-based Osprey Monitoring program.
- Audubon is committed to restoring native pollinator populations to our properties by removing invasive plants and creating pollinator-friendly habitats. The Audubon Palmieri Pollinator Garden in Bristol serves as a living laboratory to study and support pollinator health.

MENTORING FUTURE ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS

- The Youth Conservation League, managed by Audubon, employs high school and college students each summer to gain experience in conservation and land management.
- An affiliation of AmeriCorps, TerraCorps was founded on the principles and practices of service with an emphasis on land conservation. TerraCorps members serving with Audubon have led citizen science programs and worked to further conservation efforts across the state.



EDUCATION

Audubon reaches over 22,000 people each year with nature-related programming in Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts. Our educators provide year-round, hands-on experiential learning opportunities for children in every Rhode Island school district as well as adult and family programming at our Nature Centers and wildlife refuges throughout the state.

AUDUBON URBAN EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Each year, Audubon provides high-quality environmental education programs to 4,000 Rhode Island students living in underserved communities. These programs take place in classrooms, after-school settings, libraries, parks, and community centers; meeting the students directly in their communities. In addition, Audubon offers outdoor field investigations at four wildlife refuges in Bristol, Exeter, and Smithfield, RI, and Seekonk, MA.

TAKING ROOT: NATURE-BASED LEARNING FOR ALL

An inclusive environmental education initiative was launched by Audubon in 2023 to connect all people with nature, specifically those students with special needs in the state. Over 75 students with intellectual and physical disabilities engaged in science-based nature programs with Audubon in 2023. Our educators work closely with teachers and caregivers to develop specific educational experiences for each group.

SCHOOLYARD HABITAT RESOURCE GUIDE

Audubon encourages schools to create natural spaces on their grounds for outdoor learning and nature exploration. The Audubon Schoolyard Habitat Resource Guide provides age-appropriate activities linked to core subjects with tips for outdoor teaching and safety. It complements the national Schoolyard Habitat Program led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

AUDUBON AT HOME

A free online environmental education resource was developed for teachers and parents of children in Pre-K through Grade 4. Featuring more than 25 nature themes, Audubon at Home offers online activities, videos, crafts, fact sheets, and behind the scenes tours. Visit asri.org/audubon-at-home.

SCIENCE INITIATIVES

THE AUDUBON AVIAN RESEARCH INITIATIVE

Audubon avian research engages hundreds of volunteers to monitor the current abundance and distribution of birds in Rhode Island. The resulting data will guide habitat management plans to enhance long-term biodiversity and minimize the impacts of climate change on birds utilizing Audubon wildlife refuges and properties throughout New England.

STATE OF OUR BIRDS REPORTS AND NEW ENGLAND SYMPOSIUM

Audubon released two comprehensive “State of Our Birds” reports in 2023, offering a full accounting of species across Audubon Wildlife refuges in the state, and provided conservation recommendations for specific bird populations and habitats. These reports summarized the results from a year-long baseline data collection. Download these reports at asri.org/AvianResearchInitiative.

- The first “Birds Across New England: Regional Conservation Symposium” was held in January 2023, bringing together scientists, educators, volunteers, and the public to share information on research and work being done across New England for bird conservation.
- Data surveys continued in 2023 on breeding, nonbreeding and migratory birds on 14 Audubon wildlife refuges to understand the needs of birds over their full annual cycle.



MOTUS WILDLIFE TRACKING SYSTEM

A MOTUS Wildlife Tracking System was installed in 2023 at the Audubon Nature Center and Aquarium in Bristol. Partnering with an international effort to track migratory species, the MOTUS tower will aid researchers throughout North America in tracking birds, insects and bats. The tower allows Audubon to perform in-house research on the movement dynamics of birds using our refuges for breeding, wintering or as migration stopover habitat.

NATURE-BASED STORMWATER SOLUTIONS

As a member of the Green Infrastructure Coalition, Audubon advocates for sustainable funding for nature-based stormwater management. Stormwater pollution affects water quality throughout the state – especially with more extreme storms and flooding. Treating stormwater with efficient and low-cost green strategies like rain gardens and swales provides climate resilience and enhances wildlife habitats. Audubon provides leadership for the Stormwater Innovation Center, which showcases nature-based stormwater practices, engages communities in solutions to improve water quality, provides training on green infrastructure, and tests innovative treatment technologies.

RESEARCH ON BIRDS AND PESTICIDES

Audubon partnered with the analytical chemistry lab at URI to process soil and water samples to determine the presence of dangerous neonicotinoid (neonics) pesticides. Presence of neonics in soil or water will prompt the collection and analysis of bird feathers to determine the extent to which these chemicals may be impacting our local bird communities. Results of this testing will be announced in 2024.

ADVOCACY

CLIMATE CRISIS

Audubon works closely with our environmental partners to position Rhode Island as a national leader in its response to the climate change crisis, the largest threat to birds, wildlife, and people as it brings more intense flooding, hurricanes, and fires.

- Audubon succeeded in advocating for additional funding, \$1.5 million annually, towards the state’s climate efforts without sacrificing money from successful, existing energy efficiency programs.
- With the passage of 100% renewable electricity by 2033 and up to 1,000 megawatts of additional offshore wind, there is a path for the State to meet the mandatory carbon emission reduction goals set by the Act on Climate law. Audubon partners with fellow environmental organizations, labor coalitions, and policymakers in this critical work.

PROTECTION OF POLLINATORS

After years of leading campaigns to protect pollinators, legislation will go into effect in January 2024 that manages the impacts of harmful pesticides by regulating the use of dangerous neonicotinoids.

SOLAR SITING REFORM

Audubon led Rhode Island’s first-ever solar siting reform legislation that protects core forests and incentivizes the siting of renewable energy on already disturbed lands. Audubon collaborated with other environmental organizations, electricians, solar developers, and labor unions to pass this legislation in June 2023. The law protects Rhode Island’s core forests by pushing development towards preferred sites, like rooftops, parking lots, and closed landfills.

TOXICS AND PLASTICS

Working with partners, Audubon supported significant victories on long-time environmental issues with toxics and plastics:

- In 2023 the Assembly approved bills banning restaurants from using styrofoam food containers for packing or preparation, making great strides towards protecting our wildlife. Styrofoam is non-biodegradable and breaks into micro-plastics which are toxic to wildlife and food chains throughout Rhode Island.
- Banning of PFAS known as “toxic forever chemicals” in food packaging and capping them in drinking water, and a statewide single-use plastic bag ban.



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