

Hi there, I'm Diego! Welcome to my conservation story postcard. I'm a student at the University of Alaska Southeast; I originally came here for one semester and am now staying. I've created this project to share with you what I am learning about Alaska and climate change through my eyes. I want to say that this is my perspective and not the objective truth; although I use sound science and an open mind, many perspectives and dimensions must be considered.

Anyway, thank you for buying this postcard of Goldeneye ducks. Your purchase is already helping sea ducks. Ten percent of the proceeds go toward the Kachemak Bay Conservation Society (KBCS), which does sea duck research and conservation, and you are helping me continue my education. If you haven't purchased a postcard yet, please consider doing so.

This episode is about the beautiful, tough, and interesting creatures called sea ducks.

Although sometimes elusive when birding for them, birds sing and fly around, which makes them easier to find and observe than many other animals.

Sea ducks are diving ducks that live in saltwater environments. They have specialized salt glands and are uniquely adapted to living at sea.

(Rapidly display list of sea ducks: common eider, king eider, spectacled eider, steller's eider, black scoter, white-winged scoter, surf scoter, barrows goldeneye, common goldeneye, bufflehead, long-tailed duck, harlequin duck, common merganser, red-breasted merganser, and the hooded merganser.)

I'd like to share some things I've learned about these incredible animals. We are going to get into some numbers, so bear with me.

The US and Canada alone have lost **3 billion** breeding birds since 1970. Yes, I'll say that again: 3 billion!

A common perception is that Alaska is so wild that it couldn't be affected by climate change and environmental issues. However, that is not the reality. Based on the memory of the people who have lived in Alaska for a long time, the wilderness is not the same as it used to be; for example, the soundscape has changed, historically you could hear long-tailed ducks calling from many places in Kachemak Bay with their distinct call (sound of the call), and this isn't the case anymore, their silence rings loudly, because their populations have declined.

From our stories and data, sea duck populations are tiny compared to the past. There are a few possible causes for the decline in birds. Globally, the most obvious is habitat loss. Locally,

causes could include a decline in the prey population due to global warming, the collapse of shellfish populations, the Exxon-Valdez oil spill, or overhunting for sport that is focused on trophy birds to be taxidermied. This differs from the traditional subsistence harvest for food, which still plays a vital role as a food source for some Indigenous peoples in Alaska.

It's important to pay attention to the magnitude of sport hunting on sea ducks in Kachemak Bay and the rest of Alaska because sea ducks have a few traits that make them especially vulnerable to overhunting. 1. Sea ducks have a low clutch size, usually only one clutch per year, compared to dabbling ducks with 2-3 clutches per year. 2. Their breeding age is 3 years old. This means that when populations are thinned, they are not able to rebound rapidly. 3. Sea ducks have a remarkable degree of site fidelity—around 5 miles or so of their wintering grounds, which means that if an area's population is depressed, birds from other areas will not fly over and boost recovery. Overhunting for sport is especially troublesome in KBAY because it is one of the easiest places to access and hunt sea ducks in the entire state.

The best way to protect sea ducks is by knowing more about their populations. No organization was doing population counts of sea ducks in KBAY, so KBCS has started to do periodic surveys with the help of community members to track the populations of the sea ducks.

They will soon submit a new proposal to make the harvest reports mandatory. This wouldn't place bag limits on birds but would provide more data to make informed conservation efforts. They need your support. Please find the link at the bottom of this page and sign the petition.

The conservation goal of KBCS for sea ducks is to recover the lost abundance and ensure the populations are sustainable in Kachemak Bay. By recovering the populations, indigenous Alaskans could still rely on sea ducks for subsistence, and increased populations would allow for recreational birding and other forms of harvest.

The birds, hunters, and all Alaskans would benefit if we take meaningful action to ensure bird populations are sustainable. The goal is to restore and preserve the abundance of birds and all wildlife in Alaska. Thanks again for your purchase. Please see below to learn more.

Protect Alaska Sea Ducks: <https://www.kbayconservation.org/protect-kbay-sea-ducks-petition>

Sources:

“Diving into the Mysterious World of Sea Ducks | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.” *Www.fws.gov*, 2023, www.fws.gov/story/2023-11/diving-mysterious-world-sea-ducks.

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