

National Audubon Society Announces Decision to Retain Current Name

Organization commits an additional \$25 million to fund expansion of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging work, a decision that follows a thorough and inclusive process to examine the legacy of its namesake.

New York, NY – The Board of Directors of the National Audubon Society (NAS) today announced that it has decided to retain the name of the organization, after a lengthy process to examine its name in light of the personal history of its namesake, John James Audubon. The decision was made taking into consideration many factors, including the complexity of John James Audubon’s legacy and how the decision would impact NAS’s mission to protect birds and the places they need long into the future. The organization will continue its non-partisan commitment to habitat conservation and climate action, its agenda-setting policy work, and community-building efforts to advance its mission.

As the organization looks to maximize its impact and live its values, NAS announced a new \$25 million commitment to fund the expansion of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) specific work in both internal and conservation initiatives over the next five years. NAS recognizes that its most critical EDIB work lies in empowering and resourcing work to actualize our values of equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. The Board’s decision enables the organization to focus its time, resources, and capacity on the organization’s new Strategic Plan and putting its EDIB commitments into action.

The Board’s naming decision follows a robust and inclusive evaluation process, which spanned more than 12 months and included input from more than 2,300 people from across the NAS network and beyond—including survey responses from more than 1,700 NAS staff, members, volunteers, donors, chapters, campus chapter members, and partners and more than 600 people across the country with a focus on reaching people of color and younger people. NAS also commissioned historical research that examined John James Audubon’s life, views, and how they did—and did not—reflect his time.

North America has lost three billion birds since 1970. Birds act as early-warning systems about the health of our planet, and they are telling us that birds—and our planet—are in crisis. Based on the critical threats to birds that NAS must urgently address and the need to remain a non-partisan force for conservation, the Board determined that retaining the name would enable NAS to direct key resources and focus towards enacting the organization’s mission.

Susan Bell, Chair of the National Audubon Society’s Board of

Directors, commented, "This is an important time for birds and our shared planet, and this decision positions the organization to focus our equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging efforts and our conservation work where it is most urgently needed. After careful consideration, the Board elected to retain our name. The name has come to represent so much more than the work of one person, but a broader love of birds and nature, and a non-partisan approach to conservation. We must reckon with the racist legacy of John James Audubon and embody our EDIB values in all that we do. In doing so, we will ensure that Audubon stands for an inclusive future in which we unite diverse coalitions to protect birds and the places they need."

Dr. Elizabeth Gray, CEO of the National Audubon Society, commented, "We are at a pivotal moment as an organization and as a conservation movement. The urgency of our climate and biodiversity crises compels us to marshal our resources toward the areas of greatest impact for birds and people. This means centering equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging values into our programmatic work, as well as our internal operations, and implementing our new five-year Strategic Plan. Regardless of the name we use, this organization must and will address the inequalities and injustices that have historically existed within the conservation movement. I am confident that, like birds, the Audubon of tomorrow can be a powerful unifier and force for conservation."

The National Audubon Society was founded in 1905 and named after John James Audubon, fifty years after his death. Audubon was a naturalist and illustrator whose work was an important contribution to the field of ornithology in the mid-19th century. He was also an enslaver, whose racism and harmful attitudes toward Black and Indigenous people are now well-understood. NAS has committed to ensuring that it continues to promote an awareness and understanding of the problematic legacy of John James Audubon, the man, and the inequalities that have been inherent in the conservation movement.

With its increased funding for EDIB work, NAS will continue to expand efforts to co-develop solutions with communities of color hit hardest by the impacts of climate change, grow educational programs that reach students of color through its campus chapters focused on HBCU and MSI institutions, invest in centers that serve diverse and urban communities through conservation, science, and community programming, and increase the diversity of NAS staff.

In addition to these key actions that the organization will implement, the Board has committed to formalizing its EDIB values in its work, including increasing the diversity of its Directors, continuing EDIB education, and collaborating with the new Chief EDIB Officer on a Board committee.

About Audubon

The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. Audubon works throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation. State programs, nature centers, chapters, and partners give Audubon an unparalleled wingspan that reaches millions of people each year to inform, inspire, and unite diverse communities in conservation action. A nonprofit conservation organization since 1905, Audubon believes in a world in which people and wildlife thrive. Learn more at www.audubon.org and on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @audubonsociety.