Ask around at any private business or government agency dealing with wildlife in Alaska and you’re likely to find more than a few UAF alumni working there. But there’s something a bit different and special about a successful, community-based nonprofit founded and operated by a bunch of Nanooks.

Inspired by a bird observatory he’d seen Outside, Tom Pogson, ’90, decided to start his own. Shortly after completing his master’s degree at UAF, Pogson began capturing and banding birds around Interior Alaska. His graduate research had involved sandhill cranes in western Alaska, where he met biologist John Wright, ’79, in Dillingham, where Wright worked for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. After Wright took a position with ADF&G in Fairbanks, he and Pogson discussed establishing the Creamer’s Field Migration Station, a permanent bird banding station, at Creamer’s Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Fairbanks. The station ran on a limited basis in 1991, and, in 1992, the Alaska Bird Observatory formally fledged.

ABO had close ties with UAF from the beginning. Dan Gibson, ornithology research associate and former bird collections manager at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, and alumni Bob Ritchie, ’76, and Brian Cooper, ’84, were instrumental in the initial development of ABO. Pogson relied on then UAF biology professor Ed Murphy, ’76, for assistance with data analysis. Those early connections created lasting associations: both Gibson and Murphy, now a professor emeritus, are current members of ABO’s scientific advisory committee, and Ritchie only recently retired from the board of directors.

Over the next few years, ABO thrived and added staff, education programs and research projects. In 1994, Pogson hired Anna-Marie (Barber) Benson, ’00, to run the banding station. Benson became the first to use data from the migration station for graduate research at UAF.

ABO has pursued its mission to advance the appreciation, understanding and conservation of birds and their habitats through research and education for more than 17 years. Staff and volunteers may have migrated through the years, but ABO’s nest is still full of Nanooks.

**UAF is a good place to study tropical birds — really**

Now a research biologist at ABO, Dave Shaw, ’06, arrived in the Interior in 1998 to run the inaugural season of a fall migration station at Camp Denali in Denali National Park and Preserve. After that experience, he was hooked. To earn his master’s degree in wildlife biology from UAF, Shaw examined bird migration and species loss near Veracruz, Mexico. “UAF is a good place to study tropical birds because of Kevin Winker and the UA Museum of the North,” says Shaw. Winker, the museum’s curator of ornithology and a professor with the Institute of Arctic Biology, has studied tropical avifauna for the past 20 years, including conducting his own graduate research at the same site as Shaw.

**Tell them a story**

Stories are part of the reason Susan Sharbaugh, ’97, was drawn to ABO after completing her Ph.D. at UAF. Sharbaugh wanted to study a small bird in a really
You Told Us!

In our spring issue, we asked, “If your degree major differs greatly from your current career, what path did you take too late to send us yours and get a cool UAF poster. Send stories to aurora@uaf.edu.

Pam Buckway ’70, ’73, Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada

It doesn’t get any more convoluted than this!

I was a UAF graduate first as an associate in electronics technology, and then received my B.A. in speech with broadcast option. I spent 23 years as an announcer/operator with the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.’s Northern Service in Whitehorse, Yukon — using technical skills and broadcasting skills I learned at UAF. After that, I sold real estate for a couple of years, and was a politician for a few years (Minister of Highways, Minister of Community Services, Minister of Justice, etc.) in the Yukon government.

When my political party was unelected, I did administrative work at my church, and by chance was asked to do vacation relief in a couple of positions at the local hospital — executive assistant and administrative assistant in the medical imaging department. That led to my current position as hospital claims assessor in the Yukon government’s Department of Health and Social Services. I deal with all the other Canadian jurisdictions, and talk frequently with hospitals in Alaska. I love it! The medical knowledge and financial knowledge required have nothing whatsoever to do with electronics or broadcasting, but all my studies are a good base for my current career. I plan to retire in this position — probably when I’m 75 because of the recession! I truly enjoy my work ALL day EVERY day. I finally got my amateur radio

President’s column

By Gail Phillips, ’67

The UAF Alumni Association is pleased to take this opportunity to congratulate Chancellor Rogers. We feel that he did an excellent job as interim chancellor and are pleased that President Hamilton made his position permanent.

We would also like to express our congratulations to all of the 2009 graduates. The graduation ceremony was a heartwarming event. It is particularly rewarding to see the satisfaction and pride that family members have for their graduates. One of the guest speakers was Vic Fischer. Mr. Fischer was a member of the Constitutional Convention that gathered at the university, as Alaskans, to write a constitution for our new state. It was appropriate that as we are celebrating our 50th anniversary of statehood this year, Vic Fischer was able to address the graduating class in person and share some of the highlights of pre-statehood days.

In June, Summer Sessions featured an evening with Grace Schaible, a longtime advocate and supporter of the university. She is a UAF graduate and a community leader with many years of involvement in Alaska and the university. Folks who were lucky enough to be able to attend the evening discussion with Grace were truly fortunate.

The alumni association is planning an outreach trip to the Portland area later this year. Be sure to check the alumni webpage for dates and more information. We look forward to meeting with many of our West Coast alumni during this trip.

Thanks for supporting your UAF Alumni Association.
Carlyn Ellis, ’05, Portland, Ore.

I wouldn’t say my story is weird or convoluted. Quite the contrary. It’s very status quo — except for the ending. I know of few undergrad psychology majors who actually stayed with psychology in their post graduation employment.

My first job outside of college was in the financial sector, a position won by my experience as a student assistant in the office of Student and Enrollment Services (thanks!). I stayed with that job and climbed the corporate ladder for 3 years only to bang my head on the ceiling of disbelief at how atrocious corporate America really is. At 26, I was working 12-hour days on salary and coming in weekends to draft retirement plans for IRS deadlines. I put in my notice, took a couple of weeks off to play (took a trip to Alaska of all places) and stepped down to a flexible hour, union job with my local community college as a student accounts rep. I winced at the pay cut but reveled at having time once again (of course I couldn’t afford to do anything with it anymore).

I decided to go with the plan A that I had tossed to the wayside at the initial temptation of 50k-plus salaries and working in the hustle and bustle of downtown. I vamped up my volunteering, took the GRE and applied like crazy to grad programs in psychology. I just got accepted to George Fox University’s doctorate in psychology program. I will begin fall 2009.

To make a long, albeit pretty straightforward story short, I did a full circle from my undergrad. I graduated and worked in a sector that had nothing to do with my degree just long enough to decide that my degree was my passion in the first place. It’s back to school and psych for me! Do I regret any of it? Absolutely not. Would I return to corporate America? Not if you put a gun to my head.

Michael Paul Combellick, ’79, ’82, Scottsdale, Ariz.

I received a B.S. in chemistry at UAF in 1979 and earned a private pilot’s license. I worked for the Federal Aviation Administration as an air traffic specialist at the Fairbanks and Gulkana flight service stations. I returned to UAF and earned a B.S. in petroleum engineering in 1982, graduating in the first class of petroleum engineers. Oil prices collapsed at about the time I graduated, and I never found a job in the oil industry. Since shortly after leaving UAF, I have worked as a computer programmer on the Microsoft platform. Although I have used my engineering degree in my work as a computer programmer, I have never worked directly in the oil industry. I currently live in Arizona and work as a programmer for OSIsoft of San Leandro, Calif., working on the PI System. The UAF power plant uses the PI software to help monitor electricity production. This software is also used by Alyeska Pipeline Service Company to monitor the pipeline and by Tesoro at their Kenai refinery. One computer simulation course that I took my senior year at UAF with my teammates Gerry Foster and Brad Berg sparked my interest in computer programming. Though my academic achievements were modest, my UAF engineering education has been very helpful in my career. I frequently vacation in Alaska. I recently earned a commercial pilot’s license and will soon return to Alaska to pursue a flying career.
1970s

Dorothy Jones, ’77, was honored as a distinguished alumna by the Longview (Texas) Independent School District in May 2009.

1980s

Julie Collins, ’81, and Miki Collins, ’81 — “As 1981 graduates of UAF, we wanted to let you know that a major revision of our book Dog Driver: A Guide for the Serious Musher, has just been published by Alpine Publications of Colorado. This in-depth guide has been long overdue for updating, and it includes all the latest on breeds, training, racing, diet and other aspects of running sled dogs … we also are continuing to write stories on bush life for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner as we have done for the last 27 years.”


Warner Lew, ’91, has been making his own biodiesel from pollock oil since 2004.

Wesley C. Klemm, ’93 — I graduated from the UAF class of 1993 with an A.A.S. degree in aviation technology. Pete Pinney was my English professor. I was a bush pilot in Alaska for 26 years and had accumulated 25,000 flying hours. I worked for Air North in 1973, for 10 years, Audi Air as chief pilot; Northern Air Cargo as flight engineer and co-pilot; Frontier Flying Service as a seven-year senior line captain; and finished my career at Warbelow’s Air as a medical evacuation pilot. I am now writing an autobiography entitled Diary of a Bush Pilot. Upon my graduation, Pete Pinney had told me to seriously consider to continue writing in some capacity. This inspiration gave me the confidence to write a book that I had spent a 26-year flying career researching.

1990s

Mark Lindberg, ’96, was the top Fairbanks finisher and third Alaska finisher in the 113th Boston Marathon on April 21. He completed the 26.2-mile course in 2:46:1, which put him in eighth place out of nearly 4,000 runners in his age division, and 288th of the more than 13,500 male finishers. Less than two weeks later, Lindberg ran another sub-3 hour race and placed fifth in his age division in the 2009 Pittsburgh Marathon. Lindberg’s wife, Maggie MacCluskie, ’97, ran the half-marathon in Pittsburgh (2:19:48).


Bharath Sriraman, ’95, was promoted to full professor of mathematics at the University of Montana and featured as an outstanding faculty member in the UM President’s Report “Standing Out.” Check it out at http://www.umt.edu/urelations/report/2008/BharathSriraman.html.

2000s

Dallas Ferguson, ’02, received the Central Collegiate Hockey Association Coach of the Year award in his first year as head coach for the Alaska Nanooks. For news about the upcoming hockey season, see page 5.

Glenda Smith, ’02, is participating in the AmazonClicks project, where writers from around the world are attempting to write a novel in one year. The team includes 18 writers from across the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Spain, Turkey, and the U.K. Follow their progress at www.amazonclicks.com/portal/.

Laren Zager, ’05, ’06, became the police chief of the City of Fairbanks in June.

Terin (Walton-Rantz) Porter, ’06 — ’Benjamin Howard Porter and Terin Aurora Rae Walton-Rantz met in August of 1998, just before my sophomore year and his senior year of high school at West Valley, and then began dating in November of 1998. We are very lucky because, although we are high school sweethearts, we had about a year and a half where we were on and off and learned many valuable but painful life lessons. Although this time was really hard for both of us, I guess it was necessary, because it made us realize that we truly are meant to be and can withstand any challenge life brings us. We got back together for good in October 2002 and have had a wonderful ride of learning ourselves, building our relationship, and realizing our dreams. In August 2008, we bought our amazing Fairbanks home and 10 acres, which we plan to live in for many, many years. We thought for years that we’d go to Vegas to get married by Elvis, but then eloped on March 3, 2009, in the living room of our home in a beautiful, slightly spontaneous and tiny ceremony. Ben is a proud...
journeyman power lineman through IBEW Local 1547, and currently works for Norcon in Fairbanks. I love my job as the new student orientation/Wood Center special programs coordinator at UAF. We love to boat and camp, watch movies at home, and spend time with our friends and family. We hope to add children to our immediate family of two Blue Heeler pups in the next couple of years, and will have our home base in Fairbanks, Alaska, forever. We love this town and our state, and are excited to raise kids in such a trustworthy community and natural playground. Eventually, we will ‘retire’ and either work for ourselves with a small company or just enjoy life and travel beyond our careers.”


Chad Johnson, ’09, was selected as the Central Collegiate Hockey Association Top Goaltie and Player of the Year in his senior year as the Alaska Nanooks’ goaltender. The Pittsburgh Penguins’ draft pick, eventually traded to the New York Rangers, also participated in the Frozen Four Skills Challenge, a first for an Alaska Nanook player, and was a top 10 finalist for the Hobey Baker Award.

**Matriculates**

Amanda Byrd — “I don’t want to toot my own horn, but maybe in the next issue you can mention that one of my polar bear pics was chosen to be made into a Canada stamp. The image on the stamp was taken in July 2004 from the Louis S. St. Laurent in Bellot Strait, Nunavut, just outside of Resolute Bay. The bear was in the water, in a channel that the ship made to get to Resolute to pick up scientists. On our way back out, the bear was hanging out in our channel. We watched for a few minutes before we had to make a new channel, under Canadian and international laws for protection of marine mammals. Bellot Strait is well known for its abundant sea mammals. Lots of narwhals, polar bears and seals live in this area. Further out on our research trip we encountered many areas of low sea ice. Canada Post, and the Canadian Government, saw this image as a good representation of global warming affecting polar bears in the Canadian Arctic. They are using the image on the stamp as part of a 30-country global warming awareness program.”

Louis L. Renner, professor emeritus — “You may have seen my autobiography, A Kindly Providence, published last year by Ignatius Press.”

**In memoriam**


Donald J. Cook, ’47, ’54, professor emeritus, June 3, Fairbanks

Frank Davis Jr., ’79, culinary arts program coordinator, June 14, Fairbanks

Susan J. Herman, professor and director of the UAF Northern Leadership Center, June 24, Fairbanks

Linda C. Hewitt, ’84, May 20, Anchorage

Elizabeth “Pat” Hjellen, Matric., May 20, Wasilla

La Shina Jones, ’96, Facilities Services staff, May 15, Fairbanks

David F. Modrow, ’04, June 1, Fairbanks

Robert C. Nauheim, ’83, July 10, Anchorage

Patricia (Fenwick) Nolan, Matric., May 7, Anchorage

David Rasley, ’66, May 8, Fairbanks

Shauna Schullo, former Center for Distance Education staff, May 7, Cross Plains, Wisc.

Kirstin D. Stoltz, Matric., July 13, Fairbanks

Emma Warwick, ’38, May 31, Fairbanks

Robert A. Wheeler, Cooperative Extension Service professor, June 29, Fairbanks

UAF alumni enjoy the nice weather and the game at an alumni association-sponsored Alaska Goldpanners baseball game. From left to right: board members Derek Miller, ’03, and Randy Pitney, ’72; Chancellor Rogers’ wife, Sherry Modrow, ’72, ’85; and Joe Hayes, ’97, association executive director.

**Take me out to the ballgame**

Tania Clucas, ’95, ’08, clowns around with the Nanook mascot while welcoming UAF alumni to the game. UAF photos by Andrea Swingley
cold place to learn how a small animal could stay active all winter in an environment that pushes it to its physiological limit. Black-capped chickadees were the perfect study subject: Are they built differently from chickadees elsewhere, which helps them survive the Interior’s harsh winters? Do they do something different? (The short answer is that black-capped chickadees in Alaska aren’t different from other chickadees; they simply do things to an extreme.)

“I think it’s all storytelling,” Sharbaugh says. “You don’t lecture at people; you tell them a really cool story. Everybody likes stories.”

“People are pretty much put off by or afraid of science,” says Sharbaugh. “But it’s not that scary. And it’s really, really cool.”

Never a dull moment

Hard science and public education often mix and mingle at bird observatories, requiring the people who work there to be flexible in their roles. As ABO’s senior scientist, Sharbaugh has her hands full with research projects, grant proposals and reports, and education and outreach.

Executive director Anne Ruggles, ’91, handles everything from day-to-day management of the organization to planning and implementing long-term goals and objectives. Ruggles attributes some of her multitasking skills to her time at UAF. “Because UAF is a small school, I could ask anybody about anything. A small school makes individual contact easier. It’s the same at a small nonprofit; you have to ask and do everything.”

Right in Fairbanks’ backyard

Philip Martin, ’83, is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist and president of ABO’s board of directors. He is also an integral part of a new venture for ABO, the Creamer’s Community Climate Observatory, which will expand ABO’s mission to incorporate a more holistic look at climate change at Creamer’s Refuge.

“If you think about what conservation issues birds face in Interior Alaska,” says Martin, “climate change has to be right at the top. Climate change is hitting faster and in more fundamental ways here than in other parts of the country.”

The project will measure environmental change at Creamer’s Refuge and connect that with changes in bird biology. For example, how are birds affected by changes in when tree leaves bud or insects hatch, if at all? To study these questions, ABO will work with climate change researchers and permafrost specialists at UAF. ABO will also invite the general public to learn about the research, help collect data and discover more about their own environment.

“This will be a way for us to track changes right in people’s backyards, right in the backyard of this community,” Martin adds.