

(JAT). A high 26 Chestnut-collareds were at Zuni Dec. 20 (JAT), where up to four persisted through January (DC) and 14 were counted Feb. 7 (DC).

ICTERIDS TO FINCHES

Very rare in New Mexico, up to three **Rusty Blackbirds** were in the Caballo area Jan. 2 and later, including one–two on Las Animas Cr. Jan. 2–17 (DE, JEP, ph. JO) and one at Arrey Jan. 2 (JNP, ph. BZ). Several Com. Grackles lingered very late, including eight n. to Ft. Sumner Jan. 2 (JEP, JO), one at House Jan. 2 (JO), three at Santa Rosa Dec. 30 (WW), and three at San Antonio Jan. 11 (BZ). Very late was a Scott's Oriole at C.C.N.P. Dec. 31 (V. Sartori). Rumors of "rosy-finches" at the Los Alamos Ski Basin in early December unfortunately remained just that—rumors; birders again are encouraged to document their sightings, not just "phone them in." In contrast to a year ago, Cassin's Finches were practically non-existent, with only small numbers noted in a few mountain ranges and with no sub-montane movement. Red Crossbills were similarly conspicuous by their absence; the 2 reports consisted of eight in the Chuska Mts. Dec. 20–30 (ph. TR) and three in the Sandia Mts. Dec. 27 (JY). The only Evening Grosbeak reports were 30 at Chama Jan. 18 (JO, CR) and 17 at Tesuque Dec. 27 (CR). In contrast to other carduelines, however, small to moderate numbers of Pine Siskins were relatively widespread, including to the e. plains and s. to the Mexican border (v.o.). Lesser Goldfinches lingered late, but went unreported anywhere after Jan. 3; singles reappeared at Gila Feb. 24 (LM) and Zuni Feb. 25 (DC).

Initialed observers: Sherry Bixler, David Cleary, Alan Craig, Narca Moore Craig, Steve & Nancy Cox, Doug Emkalns, Gordon Ewing, Ralph Fisher, Bernard Foy, Lavina Fry, Lois Herrmann, William Howe, Paul Lehman, Eugene Lewis, Larry Malone, Alan Nelson, Bruce Neville, Jerry Oldenettel, John E. Parmeter, James N. Paton, Michael Patten, Anita Powell, Tim Reeves, Christopher Rustay, Robert T. Scholes, Hart Schwarz, Roland S. Shook, Dale Stahlecker, Joyce Takamine, John A. Trochet, Brad Vaughn, Gordon Warrick, Steve West, William West, S. O. Williams, Jonalyn Yancey, Barry Zimmer, Dale and Marian Zimmerman.

Sartor O. Williams III, 65 Verano Loop, Santa Fe, NM 87505



alaska region



T. G. TOBISH JR.

After one of the most consistently mild winters since the early 1980s, winter 1997–1998 ended up producing near-record numbers of waterbirds and wintering raptors. Although the fall season protracted moderate conditions and little snow into December, the late October freeze-up and initial snow accumulations drove out lingering or late-migrant passerines at least from the North Gulf and points south. The influential Aleutian Low drifted well east into the western North Gulf for most of December, at least 1000 miles east of its usual semipermanent position. This unusual condition produced heavy and relentless snow storms that covered the Region south of the Alaska Range. But no High Arctic cold high pressure systems filled in after this snow season, and the entire Region languished in mild, well-above normal temperatures through the period. Although El Niño was quick to be blamed for this unusual winter, remaining near-record high surface water temperatures (from late summer) in the North Gulf and the eastern Bering Sea certainly were more important in this weather moderation. The Bering Sea pack ice peaked well north of average and was very late moving south in the autumn, no doubt one of the factors contributing to the widespread late arrivals of winter waterbirds in the North Gulf. Weather permitting, Christmas counts were exceptional and Kodiak broke the State's count record.

Waterbirds and winter raptors showed above-average densities, and record-high counts came in for several species and from numerous sites. Although the season's snowpack remained minimal for most of the State, passerines were disappointing given the mild conditions.

Terry Doyle, one of Alaska's pioneer biologist/birders, has left the Region for points south. Since his arrival as refuge biologist in the eastern Interior, Terry and his staff produced more data on bird status and distribution from the field in the Upper Tanana Valley in his short tenure there than had been realized all century. Terry's systematic and relentless field presence will be difficult to replace, but we know he'll be a valuable contributor to the Florida Region. We wish him well.

Abbreviations: North Gulf (*North Gulf of Alaska*); SE (*Southeast Alaska*); SC (*Southcoastal Alaska*); SW (*Southwest Alaska*); UCI (*Upper Cook Inlet*).

LOONS TO RAPTORS

Although waterbird winter concentrations were unusually high after late and protracted arrivals well into December, there were surprisingly no notable peak counts. With most local fresh water frozen after the season's only cold snap, Kodiak CBC crews were amazed to find a Pied-billed Grebe in a shallow pool in the Buskin R. Jan. 3 (DWS, †RAM). Not found after the 3rd, this individual constituted a first for the

Kodiak Archipelago and the winter's only report. With no reports from traditional concentration sites, the season's W. Grebe maxima represented a six-year low 150 around Ketchikan (SCH).

Without a doubt, the unseasonably warm North Gulf surface water temperatures permitted exceptional numbers of albatrosses to remain in the near-shelf waters around Kodiak. A single **Short-tailed Albatross**, described 8 mi off the s.e. flank of Kodiak I. Feb. 17 (†RB, *fide* RAM) probably furnished the Region's first true winter record. Equally rare from mid-winter were six-plus **Laysan Albatrosses** off Kodiak early January–Feb. 21+ (RB, RC, *fide* RAM). Interestingly, other tubenoses were not referenced all season.

Another imm. **Brandt's Cormorant** was found Jan. 31 in the wintering cormorant flocks in Nichols Passage s. of Ketchikan (TH, *CH), where this very rare form is likely annual. This winter's westerly Great Blue Heron dispersal was exceptional, highlighted by at least *nine* around in the Kodiak Archipelago all period (RAM, RB) and another six near Cordova through December at least (MAB, DL). Winter Trumpeter Swan reports continue to increase in number and locations. Highlights included a group of 20 that wintered on salt water near Ketchikan (MW), a peak of 138 at traditional Cordova sites (MAB, DL), two from Juneau's Auke Bay chased out by ice-up in early January, and, providing UCI's 2d winter report, a single at Portage Jan. 10 on (*fide* TGT). Prior to the late 1980s, Trumpeters were rare winter birds in the Cordova area only, with typical counts of 10–50 birds. After their latest departure ever from SC points, well into October, Canada Geese made news at or beyond typical n. extreme winter sites. At least 41 were attempting to winter at Cordova through December (MAB, DL), while a local record high 1009 remained in the Juneau wetlands most of the season (*fide* GVV). No information was submitted concerning which subspecies were involved.

Numbers, diversity, and densities of winter dabblers were exceptional from all reporting stations. Although there were few true rarities, normally casual forms (Green-winged Teal, N. Shoveler, Eur. Wigeon) were widespread and in decent numbers, from Kodiak, Juneau, and Seward (m.ob.). Groups of 30 and 25 Green-winged Teal in 2 of e. Kodiak's bays Dec. 20 through the period (RAM) and another 40+ around Cordova through December (MAB, DL) were exceptional and probably both new

local winter peaks. Of the five+ Eur. Wigeon in the Kodiak area from December, a few remained through the period (RAM). *Aythya* also at or near record highs were widespread, including 14+ Ring-necked Ducks in protected Kodiak waters Dec. 15 into January (RAM), which more than doubled the area's previous winter high; another five in Juneau Dec. 20–Jan. 1 (*fide* GVV) and two in Cordova through December (MAB, DL); two Canvasbacks from Juneau Jan. 11 (PS) and one at Kodiak, where casual, Feb. 28 (RAM); and single Redheads from Juneau Dec. 20–28 (LE, ME), a local winter first, and Sitka's Ward L. Dec. 1–12 on (MLW, MT). Noteworthy at Kodiak—and the season's only report—was a hen Tufted Duck Dec. 15–Jan. 3 on (DWS, RAM). For the first time in the Upper Tanana Valley, a Com. Merganser found ice-free conditions along the swift-flowing Chisana R. near the Alaska-Canada border Feb. 13+ (DJ, RJ). Small numbers of this diver usually find winter habitat in the spring-fed Clearwater R. farther west near Delta Jct. Interestingly, they were unreported or well below typical winter counts at traditional sites, e.g. Seward and Ketchikan. A drake **Ruddy Duck** briefly visited Sitka's productive Ward L. Dec. 20–24 on (MLW, MT), the only report and one of few winter records for the Region.

This winter's mild factors provided excellent conditions for semi-hardy raptors in available North Gulf habitats. Highlights included the Region's best N. Harrier showing ever with at least 12 in the Kodiak grasslands Dec. 4–Jan. 31 onward (RAM, DWS); an equally unprecedented number of Rough-legged Hawks there, with the seven in similar habitats Dec. 7–January onward (RAM, WED) more than the total from all previous winters; and two Golden Eagles in the Juneau area early December through mid-January (*fide* GVV). One of these eagles, found near Berner's Bay, carried a satellite tracking device and had been tracked through the fall from its Denali N.P. banding site. Golden Eagles are casual in SE in winter.

COOT TO HUMMINGBIRDS

Following the fall's (q.v.) excellent irruption into the s. half of the Region, Am. Coots concentrated at Juneau's open freshwater in December with a remarkable maximum of 19 Dec. 20 (PS). This tally built a new winter high for Alaska. Another group of seven at Sitka's Ward L. Dec. 6–7 and beyond (MLW, MT) was also significant, while one of the Kodiak area's fall birds

stayed on L. Rose Tead to Jan. 25 on (MB, RAM). Shorebirds were surprisingly absent or in below-average numbers at regular sites, likely dispersed with the mild conditions. This year's follow-up surveys in UCI produced a steady winter peak Rock Sandpiper (nominate *ptilocnemis*) population of 18,000–24,000 individuals in small groups, mainly between Trading Bay and the mouth of the Little Susitna R. (REG). These numbers and the locations follow last year's trends (q.v.). The Juneau area's peak Rock Sandpiper aggregation at Eagle Beach reached an above-average 650 Jan 11 (GVV).

Gulls clearly took advantage of the light winter in SE especially. Highlights included very late Bonaparte's Gulls, with a flock of 20 at Ketchikan Dec. 20 (SCH), and an overwintering adult in the same area to Feb 10+ (=5th Alaska winter record, SCH), a decent local Mew Gull peak of 267 from Juneau Dec. 20 (*fide* GVV), which must have included late migrants; a significant northerly concentration of 50–75+ Tayer's Gulls n. of Juneau Jan. 11–31 (=2nd consecutive new local high, GVV, PS, RA), and the Region's 3rd and 4th winter California Gulls, with single adults from Juneau Feb. 21 (GVV, PS) and Ketchikan Feb 23–24 (SCH+). Given the mild winter, both of these adults may have been vanguard migrants, since the species typically wanders north by late March. Heintz again noted a standard hybrid ad. Western × Glaucous-winged Gull in Ketchikan Feb. 10 (SCH+)

Driven away (?) from regular offshore winter zones, Com. Murres invaded sheltered nearshore areas in atypical concentrations by December, with significant local peaks of 251 at Seward Dec. 27 (m.ob.), 1500+ in Juneau's Auke Bay area Jan 31–Feb. 1 (GVV, PS, RA), and 1200+ Feb 8 (SCH) at Ketchikan's rich Clover Passage. The later 2 tallies designate the highest ever for inshore SE waters. Similar above-average seasonal peaks were also noted for Marbled Murrelets at Cordova, with 78 on the mid-December CBC (MAB, DL), and in Ketchikan's Clover Passage, with another remarkable peak of 1953 Jan. 19 (SCH)

In an otherwise mild winter with decent coverage, owl reports were uneven. At least three Short-eared Owls overwintered at Juneau's wetlands to Feb. 14 and beyond (PS), but 10+ over grassy flats near Kodiak Dec. 26 was unprecedented (RAM). Only a single could be located in the area after Jan 31. Two Boreal Owls actually seen in the Tok area Jan. 4 and Feb. 10 (CLG, JMB) were doing just fine, while a single N

Saw-whet Owl invaded an Anchorage garage stash of dog food until about Dec. 19 for one of UCI's few winter reports (*vide* DFD) The season's only surviving Anna's Hummingbird was a male at a Juneau area feeder to Jan. 4 (GVV, PS).

WOODPECKERS TO WARBLERS

The Ketchikan area continues to provide winter season increases of Red-breasted Sapsuckers, a recent phenomenon, with up to three noted there at least to mid-January (SCH, KV, TG). Prior to the 1980s this woodpecker was accidental after early December. CBC woodpecker counts again pushed previous limits in areas with widespread spruce-bark beetle damage. December maxima around Anchorage included near-record peaks of 113 Downy, 86 Hairy, and 18 Three-toed woodpeckers. Another N. (Yellow-shafted) Flicker overwintered in midtown Anchorage (DFD); Anchorage area feeders have produced 7 winter records of this otherwise very rare winter visitor since the mid-1980s.

Casual away from the SE Mainland river systems, a single Black-capped Chickadee reached Douglas I. near Juneau early in the season and remained through the period (PS, MS), likely the 2nd winter record. Interior observers noted them as unusually common all season. Red-breasted Nuthatches continue to thrive on the Anchorage area feeder circuit; this year's CBC tally was another phenomenal 197 Dec. 19 (m ob). Numbers were unremarkable elsewhere, and for the first time since a northward invasion pushed nuthatches n. of the Alaska Range a few falls ago, none was detected in the Interior.

Townsend's Solitaires were in what has become recent average numbers, with two-three in the Eagle R.-Anchorage area after December to Feb. 1 onward (TGT, DWS). Another single at Seward Dec. 27 (RLS, TGT) represented one of very few North Gulf winter records. The Klines were certainly surprised (and disappointed) when they discovered a **Siberian Accentor** at their feeders the morning (Dec. 21) after the Anchorage CBC, since they decided to skip elsewhere during count day. This solitary skulker—the Region's 6th substantiated record, first in winter, and UCI's 3rd report—often eluded the crowds and apparently made a living gleaning desiccated insects from under sheltered decks in the subdivision (PK, CK, DFD, ph.). American Robins were unusually common locally, with 49+ around Anchorage to Dec. 20 and beyond (m.ob.) and 27+ in Seward Dec. 27

(m.ob.). Perhaps a dozen remained in the Anchorage area through the period, where they are increasing at this season, but are still not annual after December.

Rare in winter, this year's coastal Am. Pipit appeared (or lingered) near Juneau to Dec. 20 (RA). Taking advantage of new crab apple plantings, Bohemian Waxwings managed to spend the season near Tok, where a flock of nine braved serious cold and dark to Feb. 24 (TJD), Upper Tanana Valley's first in winter. Winter peaks elsewhere were subpar. Northern Shrike CBC counts of 12 (Dec. 19) and 15+ (Jan. 3–5) in Anchorage and around Kodiak, respectively, and another in Ketchikan Dec. 20 (SCH) indicated above-standard winter numbers. Unfortunately, lack of observers in vast areas between these points, as always, kept the picture incomplete. As expected, the winter's only warbler reports came from Ketchikan, where one-two Yellow-rumpeds hung on at feeders to Dec. 27 (JK, SCH).

SPARROWS TO FRINGILLIDS

Given the late-to-develop and generally mild season, winter sparrow numbers and diversity were predictably above average. Only Dark-eyed Juncos were found in decent aggregations, with maxima of 342 in Juneau Dec. 20+ (CBC, m.ob.) and 225 around Anchorage through December, while at least four survived the season in Tok out of an original count of 11 in the area from December (TJD). The numbers and duration of these Tok area juncos was unprecedented for winter in the remote Interior, i.e. away from Fairbanks feeders. Sparrow highlights included up to 18 Fox Sparrows in the Kodiak area into January, with at least two rusty *zaboria* types substantiated there Dec. 20 (RAM, ph.). Another *zaboria* surfaced at Seward Dec. 27 (TGT, RLS). This Interior subspecies continues to turn up in SC in small numbers in fall migration and recently occasionally in winter. Winter season Lincoln's Sparrows included two late migrants in Ketchikan Dec. 20 (SCH), up to four around the ubiquitous Kodiak brush habitats all season (RAM), and a single in Juneau (late migrant?) Dec. 30–Jan. 1 onward (SZ). Three White-throated Sparrows overwintered in the Ketchikan area November through the period (JK, TG, SCH). The only Harris's Sparrow all season was a single offshore, where this rare winter visitor is casual, at Sitka Dec. 28–Feb. 20+ (MLW, MT). Snow Buntings were well represented in typically sporadic numbers from most coastal sites

More unusual inland were two different singles that wintered in the Upper Tanana Valley, at a Tok horse corral all season (CM, CM) and near Delta Jct. to Feb. 14 and beyond (DJ, RJ).

Still worthy of mention are winter Red-winged Blackbirds, and this season's only report was of two near Juneau (where most recent sightings have come) Jan. 1, with a single sticking around to Feb. 7 (PS). Surprising again for such a mild season, few Rusty Blackbirds could be found, with 20 around Juneau to Feb. 26 and beyond (GVV) the only decent count. Significant among the very few reports was one that attempted to stay at a Tok area homestead, where it survived to Jan. 3 (CM, CM), one of very few mid-winter Interior reports. Given the complete turnaround in Brambling occurrences, i.e. few to none in the past few years, the single at a Sitka feeder Jan. 9–27 (MLW, MT) was welcome news.

For whatever reasons, including possible local salmonella outbreaks, Pine Grosbeaks could not be found in numbers s. of the Alaska Range, especially before the mid-season cold snap. CBC totals were down throughout SC sites and once the mild conditions dominated the 2nd half of the season, even these low numbers seemed to disperse. A recent, perhaps short-term local decline, at least in SC, has generated caution for this low density fringillid. Except for a few spots of local abundance, White-winged Crossbills continued to be found in very small groups only, with no obvious large scale movements having been noted for well over a year. Siskins and redpolls staged typical winter season movements in very average numbers.

Contributors and observers: B. Agler, R. Armstrong, M. Berlijn, R. Berns, Mary Anne Bishop, J. M. Burritt, R. Carter, D. F. Delap, W. E. Donaldson, T. J. Doyle (Eastern Interior Sub-regional Compiler), C. L. Gardner, D. D. Gibson, R. E. Gill, T. Goucher, S. C. Heintz, T. Hunt, D. Jandt, R. Jandt, C. Kline, P. Kline, J. Koerner, D. Logan, R. A. MacIntosh, C. Miller, C. Miller, D. Pingree, R. L. Scher, M. Schwan, N. Senner, S. Senner, W. Shuster, D. W. Sonneborn, P. Suchanek, M. Tedin, H. K. Timm, K. Vicchy, G. Van Vliet, M. L. Ward, M. Wood, S. Zimmerman.

T. G. Tobish Jr., 2510 Foraker Drive, Anchorage, AK 99517

