



Figure 1. Map of Alaska with the six biogeographic regions delineated by dashes.

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-one years have elapsed since Gabrielson and Lincoln (1959) concluded data collection for their comprehensive book, *Birds of Alaska*. This work provided a foundation for further ornithological studies in Alaska by consolidating a wealth of previously unpublished as well as published detail on the birds of the State; and, because their treatise was remarkably complete, it continues to be the single, basic reference on the birds of Alaska. Information has accumulated, however, at an ever increasing rate in the years since its publication. Seventy-five species have been added to those known to have occurred in Alaska, of which 30 have been new also to North America; and the status and distribution of more than half of Alaska's species are now known to be substantially different from those outlined by Gabrielson and Lincoln (op. cit.). The quantity of recent data, coupled with the need for it by ornithologists, wildlife managers, environmentalists, and others, has prompted the preparation of the following updated compilation.

In this compilation, we have used Gabrielson and Lincoln (op. cit.) as a base and have included only those birds for which the earlier volume no longer gives a satisfactory picture. For each of these species, we have prepared a complete account of its current status and distribution in Alaska.

Alaska's extensive and deeply sculptured coastline and the nearness of Siberia across the Bering Sea have presented problems in geographically defining Alaska, especially in terms of seabird distribution. Our solution has been to outline Alaska using 1) the political boundary dividing Alaska and Canada, 2) the international dateline bisecting the Chukchi and Bering seas between Alaska and Siberia, and 3) the 200-nautical mile (370 km) fisheries economic zone elsewhere along the coastline (see Fig. 1). The resulting geographic area encompasses approximately 5,191,655 km² (2,004,500 statute mi²), two-thirds the area of the contiguous 48 states of the United States, and extends across 27 degrees of latitude and 62 degrees of longitude.

PATTERNS OF DISTRIBUTION

The avian distribution patterns in Alaska are the result of a number of interacting factors, historic (geology, species evolutionary history, historic species ranges and migration habits, etc.) and contemporary (habitat and ecological niche, current species ranges and migration routes, etc.). But basic to all these factors is the geographic position of Alaska—relative to the earth's axis, to the arrangement of the earth's land and water masses, and to the area of geographic origin (or at least the current centers of distribution) of the various avian species:

- 1) Alaska is relatively far north, with over 80% of its land mass north of 60°N. Hence, most species are those associated with tundra or taiga habitats; also present are species with affinities for the edge of the sea ice.

- 2) Alaska is at the northwestern extremity of the North American continent, with the result that it serves as the normal terminus of migration for many species wintering farther south; also, many accidental or casual species are those that "overshoot" their usual summer ranges in interior Canada or that engage in post-breeding wanderings from these interior ranges. The distance, too, from South and Central America accounts for the relatively small number of species representing South American and Pantropical avifaunal elements (see Mayr 1946).