

# Alaska Region

## T. G. TOBISH, JR

After several years of an influential and extreme El Niño oscillation—which peaked in summer 1993 with record warm and dry conditions Regionwide, and then dissipated by mid-winter 1993–1994—the Region experienced more “normal” spring conditions. The Aleutian Low acted more predictably, centering farther north in the 45° to 60° North latitudes, and pulling storms to the east which had been generated in the vast area between the Japan Trench and the Northwest Pacific Basin. Low pressure systems again roared across the Aleutian Chain in a northwesterly flow, ushering a steadier pattern of storms into and across the North Gulf of Alaska Coast. In general, this meant an earlier migration Regionwide, especially in the eastern half of the state, where continental warm, dry conditions prevailed. Snowpack conditions finished the winter in the normal range Regionwide, and then only because of an above-average snowy March. March and April temperatures were well below average Statewide, except in the eastern Interior, where passerine migration, at least, was notably early. Because the season was punctuated with continuous low pressure systems, Pacific Coast migrant numbers were steady but really nowhere noteworthy, even at traditional staging sites. As is typical in most springs, the bulk of the unusual reports was comprised of waterbirds.

After several relatively poor and unpredictable spring seasons in the Aleutians, the Attu group, in the sixteenth annual spring trip, witnessed what could be described as a more “normal” spring passage, likely characteristic of a non-El Niño year, *i.e.* earlier arrivals and good to large numbers of the regular or annual species, with an interesting mix of overshoot or more southerly forms, and an obligatory new species for North America. This overshoot phenomena appears to be apparent in those years when the El Niño influence is weak or absent in the North Pacific.

### Loons to Rails

Arctic Loons made an average showing at Gambell, where the species is annual moving N in small numbers, with >15 seen June 4 (WINGS). Attu's highest in-shore count of Laysan Albatross totaled >20 May

4 (ATTOUR) in S winds. The season's only Bean Goose was a glimpsed fly-by at Attu May 19 (ATTOUR). This year's Attu trip culminated with the arrival of an ad. ♀ Lesser White-fronted Goose, North America's first, located at the Peaceful R. mouth June 6 (ATTOUR, \*). Lesser White-fronted Goose is the last from the list, drawn up in the 1970s, of species not yet recorded in Alaska but, by breeding and migratory range in nearest n.e. Asia, were bound to occur in the W. Aleutians (of course a new list has since been generated). The “Aleutian” Canada Goose population in the w. islands continued to expand as record numbers were noted at Attu, where this endangered form was unrecorded in modern times before fall 1979. This year's peak reached 83 May 17 (ATTOUR), including banded birds from the nearby Agattu I. population.

Last spring's Attu Spotbill Duck (*q.v.*) continued to habituate the Krasni Pt. area, seen this year through at least May 19 (ATTOUR). The Region's first Spotbill remained at Adak I. for over a year also. Other dabbling duck highlights included: Two ♂ Garganeys at Attu May 22–23 (ATTOUR); record-early Blue-winged Teal in Southeast at Mitkof I., a single April 27 (PJW), and a pair at Izembek Lagoon May 13 (REG, CPD, TLT) that provided an Alaska Pen. first; widespread Cinnamon Teal, including a drake May 14 on Sergief I. at the Stikine R. mouth where the species is most regular, and up to three around Juneau May 2–19 (RJG, PS, GVV); extralimital Gadwall with a male near Tok April 26 (TJD) and up to four at Nome June 4–6 (WINGS). A late winter report of a ♂ Tufted Duck surfaced from Cordova March 5–16 (REF), where this diver had been a sporadic late winter visitor in the past. Attu's spring Tufted Duck peak was an average 20 birds May 22 (ATTOUR). Attu's Spectacled Eider, which had been found last spring (*q.v.*), was re-found this year and joined an in-shore eider flock there May 28 that contained all 4 species, certainly a first for the Aleutians (ATTOUR). The pair of Smew at Attu May 16–28 (ATTOUR) was the season's only report. Most uncharacteristic was a ♀ Ruddy Duck, described from Juneau “late April”—May 8+ (RJG, †PJW *et al.*). Only one of the previous >5 Southeast records is from spring.

Attu observers experienced an *Haliaeetus* slam this spring. The 2nd modern report of a Bald Eagle there was an adult located along Gilbert Ridge May 27 (ATTOUR). There had been only one other sight record, from spring 1976, of this Aleutian resident which breeds west, and irregularly, to Buldir I. only.

Attu's remaining resident White-tailed Eagle was also noted around the e. side of the island, while an imm. Steller's Sea Eagle, described as older than first-year plumage, appeared around Massacre Bay May 16–June 2 (ATTOUR), a 2nd island occurrence The Taku R. Steller's was again relocated at its favorite Swede Pt. perches in late May. An active Northern Hobby buzzed several Attu sites May 28 (ATTOUR). Six of the now 7 records for the Region, including the only specimen evidence, have come from Attu or nearby pelagic waters. The season's first and only Sora report was a single on Sergief I., May 28–29 (PJW), where the species is clearly annual and has bred.

### Shorebirds to Gulls

This season's Bering Sea shorebird highlights were about evenly shared between Attu and St. Lawrence Is., and both sites showed a remarkable similarity of species content and timing. Mongolian Plovers arrived late at Attu, with three there May 29 (ATTOUR), while at least two were noted at Gambell May 29–31 (WINGS), where they are not annual. Other Attu shorebird highlights included: a Com Greenshank May 19–25 (another was at Adak May 19, *vide* JW), up to three Com Sandpipers May 21–26 (ATTOUR), a Far E. Curlew May 17–21 (ATTOUR), two Black-tailed Godwits May 21–22, and the Aleutian Is.'s first Short-billed Dowitcher May 22 (\*). Gambell's early season highlights included: at least one Com. Ringed Plover June 1–3 (WINGS), up to seven (new local high count) Com. Sandpipers May 30–June 4+ (WINGS), a fly-by flock of 23 Terek Sandpipers at the Point May 29 and a group of five that dwindled to two in the midden sites to June 4 (WINGS), an unprecedented fly-by flock of 19 Great Knots May 30 (WINGS), and Gambell's first spring Buff-breasted Sandpiper June 3 (GB, WINGS). Elsewhere, notable shorebird finds included the first Kodiak I. Wandering Tattler nests (2) May 23 & 26 (HP), Southeast's and Juneau's 2nd spring White-rumped Sandpiper, a single on the Mendenhall wetlands May 19 (RJG, SZ+), four Stilt Sandpipers at Kotzebue May 28 (JR), where this n breeder is casual, and a ♀ Wilson's Phalarope at Juneau May 20 (RJG).

It proved to be a very active season for Alaska's rarer Larids, starting with 2 reports of ad. Franklin's Gulls from South-coastal. Singles were described from the middle Kenai Pen. along the Kenai R., April 25 (CD, TE) and near Cordova, a local first, May 22 (†REF). The pattern of occurrence and distribution of this prairie form in the Region is most inter-

esting. All but one of Alaska's spring reports are from s. Southcoastal, likely of Interior originated migrants, while all fall records are of Pacific Coast wanderers that reach into s. Southeast. As has become customary, single ad. Ring-billed Gulls were noted in Southcoastal, where annual: Cordova May 8 (REF) and Homer April 26–May 7 (CD, TE, GCW). California Gulls have begun to set a pattern of regularity in spring into s. Southeast, where one arrived March 18 and up to four were noted March 26 (SCH), the 3rd consecutive year after no previous spring reports. The Juneau area's "resident" **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was again noted in the gull colony at Mendenhall Glacier May 7 (GVV), this season apparently unpaired. Notable Slaty-backed Gull reports were single adults at Dutch Harbor March 17+ (DB, ph.), where the few local reports are more likely a result of poor observer coverage; at Ketchikan, where the wintering individual was last noted March 19 (SCH); and around Kodiak I., March 28 (RAM).

Two Caspian Terns near Cordova April 30 (REF) were record early for the Region, in the only area of the state where this Pacific explorer probably breeds now annually. Other Caspians were noted at more peripheral sites, with singles at Anchorage May 25 (RA), a 4th local record, and near Juneau May 14 & 25 (MWS, PS). The season's only Com. Tern report, Asiatic *S. h. longipennis*, was a single from the Pribilofs at St. Paul I., June 5–7 (FIELD GUIDES). A flashy ad. **White-winged Tern** came ashore and hung around Attu's Alexai Pt., May 19–21 (ATTOUR). There are now 3 Alaska records and 2 from the W. Aleutians. Completing this spring's *Chlidonias* slam, was an equally flashy **Black Tern**,

noted over the very productive Eliza L. in the e. Interior June 4 (TJD†, DC). This is the state's earliest and 4th recent report since the historic first 2 records published in Gabrielson and Lincoln's 1959 *Birds of Alaska*.

### Pigeons to Thrushes

Two Band-tailed Pigeons were record early by 2 months, in Ketchikan March 20 (PD, *fide* SCH). Although north-bound birds initiate migration as early as late February in s. British Columbia (Campbell *et al.* 1990, *The Birds of British Columbia*), there are very few March records n. of Terrace, B.C. on the lower Skeena R. Also record early, at the other end of the Region, was a Com. Cuckoo at Attu May 21–22 (ATTOUR, \*). Two other single gray *Cuculus* were reported from Bering Sea sites: at Gambell May 31 (WINGS), which was identified by the observers as a Common because of the well seen pure white undertail coverts, and from St. Paul I., June 5 (FIELD GUIDES). The pure white undertail coverts, if seen clearly and in all light conditions, appear to be a definitive field character for Com. Cuckoo. But any *Cuculus* reports without details or that fail to mention this mark cannot be attributable to either species. Bridging a broad gap from the previously known breeding areas in c. and s. Southeast were at least two calling W. Screech Owls in the c. Kenai Pen. mountains around Kenai L., March 13–mid-April (WS, CD, TE). This very local, rare form is a probable resident tied to riparian cottonwoods in Southeast from Ketchikan to Sitka and perhaps to Juneau. There are 2 fall specimens and a few site records from Southcoastal.

Remarkably early, especially for above the Arctic Circle, was an Olive-sided Flycatcher at Kotzebue May 9–10+ (JR). Although there are a handful of records from the lower Noatak-Kobuk R. systems, Olive-sided is accidental at the immediate Bering Sea coast, and there are only 2 nearby Seward Pen. reports. The Region's earliest ever **Western Kingbird**, one of very few in spring, was found May 2 (DM, *fide* SCH) up the rarely birded Unuk R. on the s. Southeast mainland. Also record early in the Region, a single N. Rough-winged Swallow was noted near Petersburg April 30 (PJW). Most arrival reports of this rare local Southeast breeder come from mid-May. Found 5 years and a day, and less than a kilometer away from Alaska's only previous record at Attu, was a brilliant ♂ **Narcissus Flycatcher** May 21 (ATTOUR). In a year with such good numbers of storm-deposited migrants in the w. Aleutians, it was notable that only two Siberian Rubythroats appeared, both at Attu, May 23 & 25 (ATTOUR). Eye-browed Thrushes were, however, well represented, at least at well-covered Attu, where up to six were tallied May 21–June 1 (ATTOUR). Several of these individuals showed the faded female-like first-year male plumage. Most well seen Eye-browed Thrushes appear to be in this or true female plumage.

### Motacillids to Fringillids

Wagtails, in general, were poorly represented in this spring's Aleutian Asiatic component, where the maximum day count of 12 Yellows at Attu May 22 should be considered below average for a good "fallout" spring. Notable was a bright ♂ Gray Wagtail at Attu May 19–22 (ATTOUR). Following spring Aleutians 1993's report after a long hiatus, Olive-backed Pipits reappeared at Attu, with up to five flushed out May 21–30 (ATTOUR). The Region's first true spring report, and fourth ever, **Clay-colored Sparrow**, appeared and sang briefly at one of Juneau's hotspots near the Mendenhall Glacier May 10 (†RJG). Three of the state's records are from Southeast. Still apparently in a declining trend, Rustic Bunting continued to be difficult to find in spring anywhere in the Region; the only report was a single at Attu May 23–27 (ATTOUR). A waif ♀ Brown-headed Cowbird appeared at a Tok feeder May 25–26 (TJD, ph.), one of the earliest for the Region and only about the third for the Interior of this otherwise rare migrant and probable breeder in the Southeast. As should be expected in a stormy Aleutian spring,



Bramblings were widespread in good numbers. They arrived at Attu May 19 and peaked at 77 May 22 (ATTOUR), about the 3rd-highest local 1 day tally. Bramblings drifted well E, to Amchitka I., with five May 31 and two to June 2; a single reached Adak I., May 23–25 (both *vide* JW), and a pair was reported from St. Paul I., June 4–5 (FIELD GUIDES). More unusual were up to four different Bramblings around Gambell June 3–7 (WINGS). Hawfinches made one of their best-ever spring showings. They were present around Attu May 19–June 1, with a maximum eight May 22 (ATTOUR), and a female frequented a St. Paul feeder June 4–9+ (FIELD GUIDES *et al.*).

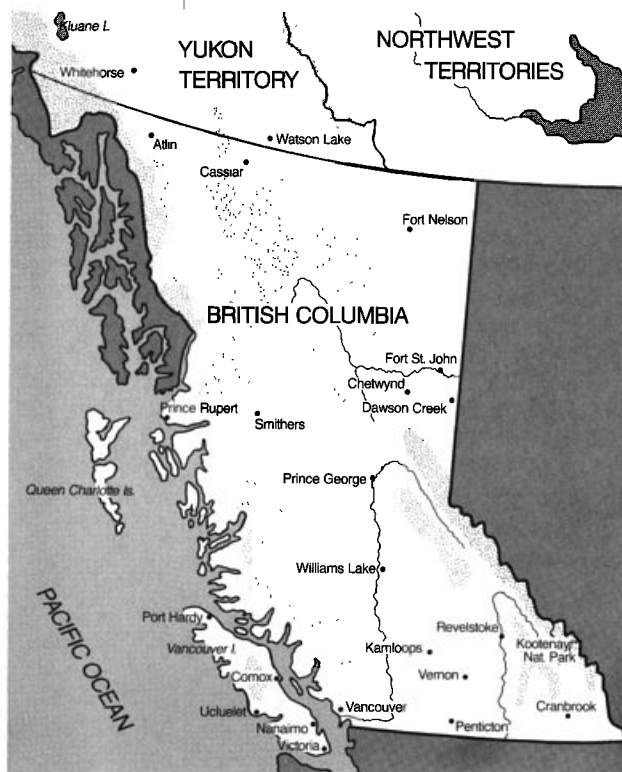
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# British Columbia/ Yukon Region

## JACK BOWLING

It was a mild season throughout the Region, as Arctic air stayed bottled up close to its source most of the period. The plentiful winter snowpack began melting early but enough precipitation was received to ensure adequate sheet water in the fields for returning waterbirds. Waders put on a good show on the coast and across the southern tier of the Region but essentially hopped central inland sections, where only token numbers were noted. Reports of early migrants outnumbered late ones. Brisk southwest winds across Alaska and Yukon, in combination with persistent northeasterlies across British Columbia early in the period, may have been a factor in the appearance of a pair of Siberian Accentors at a garden pond near Salmon Arm in March—a twitchers delight!

Chris Siddle has passed along the editor's pen after many years of dedicated service. We thank Chris for his perseverance and look forward to seeing his initials beside many records in future *Field Notes*.



Abbreviations: B.C. (*British Columbia*); D.C. (*Dawson Creek*); Ok. (*Okanagan*); Ok. L. (*Okanagan L.*); P.G. (*Prince George*); Q.C.I. (*Queen Charlotte Islands*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

## Loons to Ibises

Inland sightings of Yellow-billed Loons on Ok. L. included an alternate-plumaged adult Mar. 12 (CC, JBu), a possible holdover from October, and an immature Mar. 22–Apr. 10 (m.ob.); while an unaged bird at Ross L. near Smithers May 21–22 (RS, BH) provided a 3rd local record. The flock of 41 Yellow-billed in mid-Hecate Strait May 15 (PH) was undoubtedly a migrant gathering. Yukon's first breeding record for Pied-billed Grebe was recorded when a pair took up residence on Rat L. near Whse., May 29 (DVW). The biggest flock of W. Grebes recorded on Ok. L. off Kelowna May 13 (DB) was a paltry 550, about 40% of normal numbers. A Clark's Grebe at the n. end of Ok. L., May 22 (RJC) was the only report.

Likely only a small fraction of the main offshore migrant wave—but high numbers for inshore waters, >5444 Sooty Shearwaters were counted streaming northward past Rose Spit, the northeastern-most tip of the Q.C.I., May 12 (MH, PH) during a 90 minute vigil. Another 2102 Sootys were seen from the ferry in Hecate strait May 15 (PH), along with 179 Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels, the biggest flock of storm-petrels recorded in B.C. away from breeding colonies. Wandering ardeidids included a Great Blue Heron along the Yukon R. near Whse., May 26 (DD) and a single ad. Great Egret near the n. end of Ok. L., Apr. 15 (PG). Of special note was an ad. White-faced Ibis at a flooded field in Kelowna Apr. 13–22 (KJ, BK, m.ob.), the Okanagan's first.

## Waterfowl

A single ad. Mute Swan at Guichon Flats s. of Kamloops Apr. 24 (GSD, CS) was the first for the local checklist. Numerous Greater White-fronted Geese strayed inland from their offshore migration route, with an early arrival at Revelstoke Mar. 22 (GSD). Remaining records were from the normal migration window during the last week of April: Yukon with four (CE, GK, LK, PS) and B.C. with 51, the largest flock being >40 at Kispiox Apr. 24 (MeC). From a peak of 8000 Snow Geese at Reifel I. at the mouth of the Fraser R., Mar. 10 (KI), numbers steadily dwindled until the last was seen at Iona I., Apr. 24 (RT). As with the White-fronteds, quite a few departing Snows made it inland, with seven at Vanderhoof Mar. 19 (NK); one on Marsh L., s. Yukon, Apr. 26 (JH, Y.B.C.); an immature at Kelowna Apr. 14–25 (CC,