

Alaska Region

T. G. TOBISH, JR.

Mild conditions associated with an El Niño-less summer persevered well into the early Autumn, allowing a steady, if slow and protracted, passerine out-migration across all the Region's major corridors. More than the usual synchrony was substantiated by numerous observers and at several banding stations for geese, Sandhill Cranes, thrushes, and sparrows. Insectivores staged an early, rapid, and uneventful passage, no doubt assisted by a storm-free and warm August and September. Passerine numbers quickly diminished Regionwide in front of, and especially after, a broad sweep of several crisp and clear high pressure cells near the end of September and into October. Although these cold fronts brought early snow and a swift and synchronous freeze-up across the Mainland, a few surprisingly late reports surfaced. It is still unclear what phenomenon causes occasional westerly autumn movements of semi-hardy Boreal forest migrants and residents (e.g. kinglets, chickadees), but this year these forms were documented to and into the Bering Sea at several sites. Winter season Christmas Bird Counts have been the best post-irruption indicators of the true extent of these movements. Fall 1996 was otherwise mostly normal, with Asiatic highlights focused at the Pribilofs (no report was received from the western/central Aleu-

tians), a good mix of dispersing gulls from several directions, but with generally below-average numbers of rarities.

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

Loons to Diving Ducks

Pied-billed Grebe reports were concentrated around the Stikine R. mouth, including 3 early-stage juvenals up the river at Ketili Cr., Sept. 1 and \geq two others around Petersburg Sept. 29–Nov. 19 (all PJW). Given the early date and the estimated age of the Stikine R. birds, it wasn't inconceivable that they had been raised in the Stikine system. Western Grebe arrival at the traditional Sumner Strait and Ketchikan areas was on time, although low numbers were tallied throughout this winter range. A single Western was noted at Juneau's Auke Bay Oct. 15 (GVV) at the n. fringe of this Interior visitor's fall range.

An immaculate alternate-plumaged **Chinese Pond Heron** (*Ardeola bacchus*), replete with still fresh neck plumes, appeared at isolated St. Paul I., Aug. 4–9 (RH, SAS, DWS, *et al.*). This long distance migrant breeds in a southerly arc of c.e. Asia, mainly in c. and e. Manchuria, through China to the Andamans, and winters into Borneo. Vaurie, *Birds of the Palearctic Fauna*, 1965, noted that it was a probable breeder as far east as s. Ussuriland, and stragglers have reached n. to the Sea of Okhotsk at the Amur R. mouth. According to Brazil, *The Birds of Japan*, 1991, this form has increased as a regular visitor to all of Japan, n. to Hokkaido, from all seasons since 1980, and it has bred at least twice at Kyushu and Honshu.



An unexpected first for North America was this Chinese Pond-Heron at St. Paul in the Pribilof Islands, Alaska, August 6, 1996. Photograph/ Y. Momattin and J. Eastcott.

Highlights of the post-breeding dispersing Great Blue Heron reports included a group of >15 at Yakutat Sept. 12 (GVV), at least two w. to Kodiak Aug. 3+ (early; RAM), and a single well n. at Anchorage's Ship Cr. mouth Aug. 28–Sept. 3 (RJG, TGT), where casual.

Out-migration of the Region's geese was forced early and fast in the face of several broad cold fronts that iced in intertidal staging lagoons on the n.w. coast around Kotzebue Sound beginning about Sept. 12. Heavy concentrations of Canada, Snow, and even Greater White-fronted geese were distinguished across a sweeping front of the w. half of the Mainland and into coastal SE in a fairly brief period Sept. 12–28+. Greater Whited-fronteds were noted at most SE sites, where they are normally rare in fall, and singles lingered through the period at Sitka (MW, MT) and at Petersburg's Blind Slough (PJW). There are a couple December records for the Region. Emperor Geese arrived at Alaska Pen. staging/winter sites Aug. 23, and the prime habitat from the Yukon R. Delta to the Alaska Pen. produced a fall peak of 87,018 in late October (RJK, WDE). Brant arrived at their traditional staging/winter Izembek Lagoon sites Aug. 23 and peaked at 118,188 Sept. 16–Oct. 22 (TAS, CPD). Waterfowl highlights were few, due at least in part to the season's odd freeze-up timing, and included: a ♀ Garganey at St. Paul I., Sept. 9 (RH), a ♂ Redhead at Sitka (still casual in SE) Nov. 25 (MW, MT), a single sub-ad. ♂ Ring-necked Duck offshore at Kodiak Nov. 24 (RAM), and another lingering at Anchorage through the period (TGT). Molting and staging Steller's Eiders combined to produce seasonal peaks of 25,483 at Izembek Lagoon and 36,655 farther east up the peninsula at Nelson Lagoon by late September (CPD, MRP).

Raptors to Alcids

Reports of Golden Eagles from the s.w. edge of their range included sin-



gles 30 mi n. of Cold Bay Oct. 9 and w. of there Nov. 12 (CPD). Exceptional Am. Kestrels were singles, noted at Portage Nov. 14 (*vide* RLS), the Anchorage area's latest in fall, and at Ketchikan, where rare in fall, Sept. 27 (SCH). At least 2 family groups of Rock Ptarmigan found in the w. alpine front of the Chugach Mts. just n. of Anchorage Aug. 4 (RLS) provided the first confirmed breeding from that section of the Chugach. Although Gabrielson and Lincoln (*Birds of Alaska*, 1959) included the Chugach Mts. within the broadly described range of *nelsoni*, there is little documented breeding data from UCI. American Coots were widespread within their regular SE sites, including two near Juneau Oct. 29–Nov. 8 (GVV), two at Sitka's productive Swan L., Nov. 11–16 (MW, MT), and \leq six around Petersburg Nov. 9–12+ (PJW). MacIntosh finally substantiated Am. Coot at Kodiak, with a single noted on fresh water Nov. 9 (\dagger RAM, HP). Although the bulk of the Region's Sandhill Cranes exit Alaska *via* the Interior lowlands, this year's coastal reports were unique and reasonably synchronous, doubtless influenced by the quick mid-month freeze-up and cold fronts. Northwest coast birds departed Kotzebue Sound by Sept. 9 (RU); Kodiak produced its first-ever fall cranes, with a flock overhead at night Sept. 22 (TB) and another group of 10 Oct. 8 (NS); and a full-day movement over the w. side of Admiralty I. off the SE Mainland tallied >3000 birds in "mid-September" (SG). Southbound cranes typically hug the SE Mainland and wander E up the major river systems.

Always one of the better represented groups each fall, shorebirds scored well, accented mainly by notable late dates and the inclusion of a reporting from Gambell, which remains an exciting autumn pioneer site. Highlights, extralimitals, late dates, and significant high counts included: a tardy ad. Mongolian Plover at St. Paul Aug. 17–20 (RH); a very late (= local latest ever) Greater Yellowlegs at Kodiak Oct. 24 (RAM); a Bering Sea Lesser Yellowlegs at St. Paul I., where casual, Sept. 4–9 (RH); one Wood Sandpiper well n. at Gambell Aug. 28–30 (\dagger MMSM, PG, DW, JW, SF, AD), where there are few fall reports; Solitary Sandpipers at their coastal periphery—two at Kodiak, where very rare, Aug. 7–16 (RAM), three at Juneau Aug. 24 (GVV, PS, KB), one n. of Ketchikan Sept. 12–18 (SCH), and the Region's latest at Anchorage Oct. 2 (TGT); a juv. Gray-tailed Tattler at Gambell Aug. 27–29 (\dagger MMSM, PG, DW, JW, SF, AD); a tardy Bristle-thighed Curlew

calling over St. Paul I., Aug. 23 (RH); SE's 7th or so—and a first at the Stikine R. delta—Bar-tailed Godwit Sept. 19–20 (TJD, DWS, PJW); the Region's latest-ever Marbled Godwit, at Sitka Oct. 11 (MW, MT)—there are few fall reports; a high peak of 16 Sanderlings from Juneau Sept. 14 (GVV), where singles are more regular; \leq four Rufous-necked Stints Aug. 11–Sept. 5 and one Little Stint Aug. 7–8 (RH, SS, DWS) both at St. Paul I.; a near record-late Long-billed Dowitcher Nov. 11 at Juneau (GVV); an incredible inshore count of 5500 Red-necked Phalaropes in Nanvak Bay near Cape Pierce Aug. 18 (TB, LB); and an extremely late and rare inshore Red Phalarope feeding in forming ice on Anchorage 's L. Spenard Oct. 9 (TGT; = 2d UCI record).

The SE's first Com. Black-headed Gull appeared near the Juneau airport Sept. 14 (DWS, PJW). In similar habitat to the Region's previous reports were two juv. **Heerman's Gulls** at Sitka Sept. 15–16 (*TJD, PJW, DWS). The other 2 records are both from well to the south at Ketchikan harbor. Near record late for the Interior was at least one imm. Mew Gull at Delta Jct., Oct. 20 (SD). Most Mew Gulls have fled the Interior by the first week of the month, and always well in advance of freeze-up. It was a banner small Larid year in s. SE, where unprecedented peaks included 31 Ring-billeds Aug. 31 and >2100 California Gulls Aug. 31 around the greater Ketchikan area (SCH). Latest Ring-billeds included one that lingered at the Ketchikan harbor to Oct. 19 (SCH), a new local late record, and another n. to Juneau to Oct. 27 (PS). Also late and providing only the 3rd UCI fall report was another Ring-billed well n. at Anchorage Sept. 28–Oct. 12 (DWS, TGT). The usual distribution of Slaty-backed Gulls included reports of singles from n. to s. at Gambell Aug. 24 (\dagger MMSM, PG, DW, JW, SF, AD), Cape Pierce Aug. 29–Sept. 21 (TB, LB), Kodiak Oct. 8 (RAM), and Ketchikan Nov. 8 (\dagger SCH). Another "pure" **Western Gull** was well described from the Ketchikan gull frenzy Nov. 5–12 (\dagger SCH). Notable inshore Sabine's Gull reports were clustered in Lower Cook Inlet, where they are casual, with a single unusually far north to the Kenai R. mouth July 30–Aug. 2 (RD) and \leq four around Homer July 24–Aug. 7 ((WD, DE, EM, GCW). Late and at yet another new location in the s. Bering Sea on the heels of this summer's (q.v.) breeding report from the s. edge of Norton Sound was a Caspian Tern described in passage past Cape Pierce Sept. 8 (TB, LB). This report links the established pattern of records of this recent

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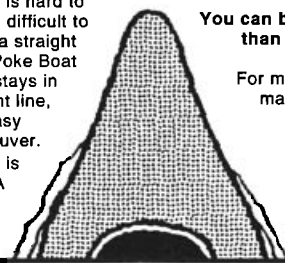
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Alaska colonizer between regular summer sites in Prince William Sound, lower Cook Inlet, Kodiak, and recent new locales in the s.e. Bering Sea. The Pribilof's first Aleutian Tern in 14 years appeared off North Pt., Aug. 21–22 (DK, SAS).

Doves to Brown Creeper

The single Band-tailed Pigeon that lingered around Ketchikan to Oct. 4 (SCH) was the Region's latest ever. Two Mourning Dove reports included lone birds at Ketchikan Sept. 15–21 (SCH) and Petersburg Sept. 16 (DWS, TJD, PJW). Confusing, given recent spring records from the e. Kenai Pen., were two calling W. Screech-Owls in the forest above Homer Sept. 11–12 (EB, *vide* GCW). A few extralimital fall records from e. Prince William Sound are the only others from SC. Since few observers comment on, or likely record, Snowy Owls in passage, this season's tallies were noteworthy and included one near Tok Oct. 17 (TL, *vide* TJD), representing only the 2nd e. Interior report, \geq 3 around Kodiak Oct. 23–Nov. 27 (RAM), and singles at Petersburg Nov. 1 (PJW), Prince of Wales I., Nov. 1 (PF), and Ketchikan Nov. 8 (*vide* SCH). Noteworthy reports of the rarer SE owls included single N. Pygmy and Barred owls offshore at Prince of Wales I., "late September–early October" and "late September" respectively (AR, *vide* SCH). The season's only Com. Nighthawk observation came in from Tok, where \leq three followed the summer's reports Aug. 1–11 (RCB, TJD, KOD).

Up to four various plumaged Anna's Hummingbirds stayed around the Juneau area early September–Nov. 23 (GVV), while another imm. male found what was probably the only (full) hummingbird feeder in Interior Alaska at Tok Sept. 2 (*TJD, KOD), establishing the first confirmed Interior hummingbird of any species n. of the Alaska Range. Always notable in SE, a single Black-

backed Woodpecker was located near Juneau Sept. 20 (MS), while the species appears to be showing a population boost in n. SC, with <five reported around Anchorage Sept. 8–Nov. 19+ (SAS, TGT). In fact, Three-toeds, Black-backed, and Hairy woodpeckers are all showing strong numbers in UCI, likely boosted by the dying and stressed coniferous forests from the current spruce bark beetle epidemic.

Tok area banders caught, measured, and photographed a juv. **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** Aug. 23 and a single **Least Flycatcher** Aug. 24 (ph. RCM), both casual in the Interior at any season. This marks the 3rd consecutive fall that Yellow-bellieds have been netted in the e. Interior. A very late Hammond's Flycatcher was also captured at this strategically located banding site near Tok Sept. 17 (TJD), for the e. Interior's latest fall observation. Since most SE Pacific-slope Flycatchers depart those forests by early September, a pair feeding young near Juneau Sept. 12 (PS) was astonishing. In the same vein, a single ad. Violet-green Swallow was found feeding two juvenals in s. Anchorage Aug. 14–18 (TGT), certainly the Region's latest date for such behavior. Swallows were otherwise late to depart, with numerous lingering groups noted from most areas s. of the Alaska Range. Notable extremes included a Bank Swallow at the Alaska Pen.'s Becharof L., Sept. 17 (TL, CA), and *November* Cliff Swallows: two at Juneau Nov. 2 (PS, GVV) followed by ≤three near Petersburg Nov. 4–5 (PJW), obviously the Region's latest ever by weeks. Casual at best in the Region in autumn, Interior Alaska's 3rd **Clark's Nutcracker** frequented a Delta Jct. feeder Oct. 12–Nov. 4 (†D. Rodencal, *fide* SD); the other records are also from fall. Chickadees staged a westward irruption out of the taiga beginning in August, when ≥four were captured at a Bering Sea coast/Cape Romanzof banding site Aug. 24–27 (*fide* BJM). Other singles appeared to the south in willow/alder thickets at Cape Pierce Sept. 3 through the end of the month (TB, LB). Black-capped were well-above average at the taiga edge around Bethel thereafter into mid-November (BJM). Numbers seemed double the usual fall averages in UCI (m.ob.). Boreal Chickadees also wandered out of the taiga, where they are casual, with several around Bethel into November, and a single drifted to a willow thicket within 22 mi of the Bering Sea, w. of Bethel Sept. 9 (BJM). Although Turner (1885) and Nelson (1887) apparently collected specimens at St. Michael village at the Norton Sound Coast below the Nulato Hills, there has not been a 20th century

record of **Siberian Tit** in the vast Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta until this season, when a single was described from Bethel Sept. 7 (†BJM). There have been a few recent unsubstantiated site reports from even farther south at Dillingham. At least three Red-breasted Nuthatches appeared at the Tok area banding site Aug. 1–Sept. 16 (*fide* TJD), the only site n. of the Alaska Range, where they continue to be found in fall. First for the e. Interior since the late 1970s was a single Brown Creeper near Tok Sept. 8 (HKT). Creepers are very localized, sporadic "residents" in the Tanana Valley, mostly around forested ridges in Fairbanks.

Muscicapids to Warblers

Gambell visitors were rewarded with a reasonably accommodating **Middendorf's Grasshopper Warbler** Aug. 30 (ph. MSM, PG, DW, ph JW, SE, AD). This skulker continues to be found casually on the Bering Sea islands (w. Aleutians to St. Lawrence), with essentially all recent reports between late July and the 3rd week in September. Two Arctic Warblers were netted near Tok Aug. 10 & 21 (TJD), at the extreme e. periphery of the range, where there are few records. At least the Interior Ruby-crowned Kinglet populations apparently had a banner year—an impressive 1069 were netted at the Tok area banding station through Oct. 3 (*fide* TJD). Wandering Ruby-crowneds turned up in the s. Bering Sea, at St. Paul I., with two singles Sept. 1 and Oct. 2 (RH, SAS) and another two at Cape Pierce Sept. 10–15 (TB, LB). The Pribilof waifs may represent the first local 20th century records.

Catharus thrushes showed up beyond normal migrant sites and, as a group, were later than average. Near record late for the Interior, a single Gray-cheeked was netted at Tok Sept. 16 (TJD), while another wandered out to St. Paul I., Sept. 8–9 (RH), where any *Catharus* is accidental. Late Swainson's Thrushes included one also net-



A vagrant that has proven to occur mainly in fall, not in spring, this Middendorf's Grasshopper-Warbler was at Gambell, Alaska, August 29, 1996. Photograph/John C. Wilson.

ted at Tok Sept. 26 (*TJD) and another single described from Sitka Nov. 3 (†MW, MT), the Region's latest ever. And a single Hermit Thrush also showed up at St. Paul I., Sept. 8 (RH), while two appeared w. to the coast at Cape Pierce Sept. 16 (TB, LB). Record late for UCI, especially during an early freeze-up season, a single Am. Pipit remained along Anchorage's coast to Oct. 17 (TGT). The season's Cedar Waxwing reports included >eight around Ketchikan Oct. 8 (SCH) and a latish bird at Juneau Nov. 23 (GVV).

Warblers generally departed early, but several late reports continue to document the recent indication that October and even November records are annual events, something never understood nor revealed until the mid-1980s. Extralimital warbler finds focused on multiple Bering Sea reports: two Orange-crowneds Sept. 7–9, two Yellows Sept. 9, and ≤four Wilson's Sept. 9 at St. Paul I (all RH). Notable late warblers included: single Yellows at Tok Sept. 16 (TJD; =latest in e. Interior) and from Anchorage in a snowstorm Oct. 2 (TGT; =latest UCI), and five at Ketchikan Oct. 13 (SCH), one Townsend's from Ketchikan Nov. 9 (SCH), a record-late N. Waterthrush Sept. 29 in Anchorage (TGT), and single MacGillivray's and Com. Yellowthroat near Ketchikan Sept. 27 & 30 (SCH), respectively.

Emberizids to House Sparrow

Two Am. Tree Sparrows Nov. 5 (TJD), a single Savannah Sparrow Nov. 8 (TJD), and another Fox Sparrow Oct. 16 (CLG) near Tok extended their respective record dates for the Interior. Indicative of the late September freeze-out of passerines from the Mainland were peak counts of >145 Savannah Sparrows and 115 Golden-crowned Sparrows (=highest ever fall *maxima*) Sept. 27 (SCH) around Ketchikan, and an virtual absence of even hardy Fringillids from UCI and the Kenai Pen. after midmonth. The first and only Harris' Sparrow report was a single at Juneau Oct. 31 (PS). Within the range of the Region's 3 previous fall records was an apparent imm. **Little Bunting** in the Gambell middens Aug. 26–29 (MSM ph., PG, DW, JW ph., SE, AD). The only Bramblings found all season were in the Bering Sea at the Pribilofs, with three at St. Paul Oct. 2–3 (SS). Its been at least 3 years since Bramblings staged what had been developing as a regular autumn eastward drift into North Gulf and occasionally SE sites. A ♀ **Common Rose Finch** surfaced at Gambell's far midden Aug. 27–29 (MSM ph., PG, DW, JW ph., SE, AD) for only the Region's 2nd fall record. Actually exhibit-

ing migrant behavior, a single winter-plumaged ♂ House Sparrow dived into a downtown Ketchikan hedge Oct. 25 (†SCH ph.) and quickly disappeared to the north. There are now 3 Alaska records of this form, two in fall and a single NE Asia form June bird from St. Lawrence I. Both crossbills remained in numbers and locales as observed from the summer season, *i.e.* Reds locally common in SE, with White-wingeds scattered throughout their range in very small numbers (m.ob.).

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British Columbia/ Yukon Region

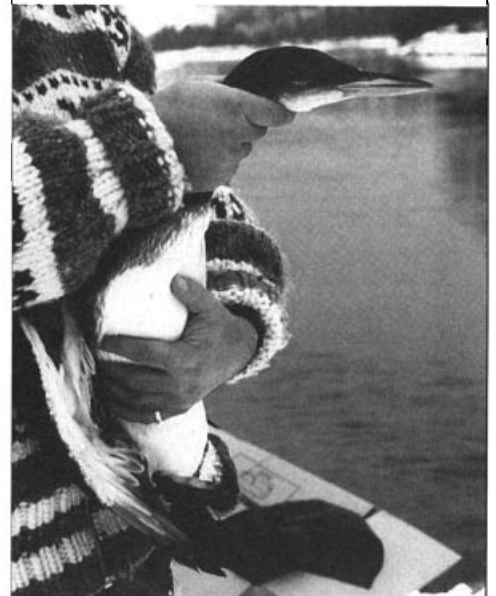
JACK BOWLING

August was a warm month, more so over the southern half of the Region. The remaining three months were cloudy, mostly cool, and wetter than normal. October saw a couple of strong storms slam into the coast. November turned out to be very much a winter month as cold Arctic air which had been sitting over Yukon descended southward, eventually encompassing the entire Region by mid-month. Many sites south of 52°N latitude received record November snowfalls. Southbound Arctic breeding larids, which normally pass by on a more seaward route, strayed inland this season, with numerous Sabine's Gulls and jaegers reported from the interior. And Snowy Owls staged the best invasion to the coast in many years through November.

Abbreviations: B.C. (*British Columbia*); Ok. L. (*Okanagan L.*); Ok. Vly (*Okanagan Valley*); P.G. (*Prince George*); p.v. (*pending verification by responsible Bird Records Committee*); Q.C.I. (*Queen Charlotte Is.*); Reifel (*Reifel Waterfowl Sanctuary, near Ladner, B.C.*); S.T.P. (*Sewage Treatment Plant/Ponds*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

Loons to Herons

An ad. Red-throated Loon at the n. end of Ok. L., Oct. 4-5 (PG, CS) provided only about the 8th record for the Ok. Vly. Another young bird was at Paddlewheel Park, Vernon, Nov. 2 (PG). It was a banner season for Red-throateds at Port Alberni, s.w. Van. I., with a high seven adults at the Harbour Quay Nov. 2 (DGC); an additional two birds were subsequently found at nearby



This Common Loon was grounded in an ice storm at Prince George, British Columbia, November 12, 1996. It is shown here just before being released the next day on the Nechako River. Photograph/Cathy Antoniazzi.

McCoy L. Usually only a single bird is seen there in the fall. There were a couple of "groundings" of loons and grebes in the P.G. area. The first was a W. Grebe found in a school parking lot Oct. 8 (*fide* BA) and taken to a good samaritan's bathtub and fed smelts for a week before being released. The next was of an imm. Com. Loon, grounded at the P.G. airport in an

