

alaska region



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Following winter's long reach of subzero cold, early spring continued in the below average temperature mode across the Region. Although the late winter snowpack was 50–75% of normal, several March and April storms nearly doubled accumulations, especially north of the Gulf of Alaska. Coastal areas continued 1–5°F below long-term averages, which in reality meant an endless winter, a laboriously slow break-up, and unsuitable migrant habitats. The late winter Bering Sea ice pack reached considerably south of average and likely played a role in unfavorable coastal habitat conditions and in the odd gull movements into May. All stations reported generally late arrivals for all groups, particularly passerines, whose profile was essentially one of the tardiest on record. At the Alaska Bird Observatory in Fairbanks, for instance, at least nine passerine species' first arrivals were later than average, ranging from five days to three weeks. Even when arrival dates were close to local long-term standards, subsequent numbers for most local populations had protracted arrivals, with numerous examples submitted from Ketchikan to Nome. The Asiatic component, with historically little connection or timing parallels to our Nearctic migrants, was about on time but in low numbers, although Gambell had an excellent shorebird flurry. For the first time since the late 1970s, there was synchronized coverage in the w. Aleutians, which generated great comparative results. And, albeit brief, there was also good coverage from the Southeast mainland rivers in addition to reports from more typical Southeast sites. As a unit, this season's coverage produced a classic profile of spring migration in



Normally a denizen of more southerly latitudes, this female Wood Duck at Ketchikan, 1–16 May 1999, was a 2nd for the area and one of few for Alaska of this casual vagrant. Photograph/Steve C. Heint

Alaska, with predictable rarities from regular sites interspersed with the usual surprises from the heavily covered outposts.

Abbreviations: A.B.O. (*Alaska Bird Observatory*); North Gulf (*North Gulf of Alaska*); SE (*Southeast Alaska*); SC (*Southcoastal Alaska*); SW (*Southwest Alaska*); U.C.I. (*Upper Cook Inlet*); Y-K Delta (*Yukon-Kuskokwim River Deltas*). Details (†), specimens (*), photographs (ph.), and videotape (v.t.) referenced are on file at University Of Alaska Museum.

LOONS THROUGH RAPTORS

As with last spring at Gambell's sea watch, the Region's consistent Arctic Loon spring outpost, passage was light with five per day noted into June (WINGS). Two each in alternate plumage settled into coves at both Attu 24–29 May+ (ATTOUR) and Shemya 23–27 May (DDG). Arctic Loons seem to have become more regular in this decade, at least in April–May, in the w. Aleutians. Migrant Pied-billed Grebes showed in SE, where casual, at Sitka 25 Apr (MLW, MET) and Haines 25 May (AD). After several years of poor counts, mainly because of decreased coverage, W. Grebes made a strong presence in s. SE, with a high 530+ in Ketchikan area waters 21–28 Mar (SCH); northernmost was a migrant near Juneau 22–24 Apr (PS).

The only Bean Goose drifted e. to St. Paul I. 22–31 May (ST. PAUL, ph. RP). Possibly because of late April storm conditions, Greater White-fronted Geese were noted from all SE and SC sites, where they are less than regular. More significant was Kodiak's first Tule Goose, a rather early, banded individual near town 26 Apr (RAM). Extremely rare n. and off the mainland was a *minima* Canada Goose at Gambell 31 May onward (WINGS), one of few from St. Lawrence I. Also notable was the single Brant with Canada Geese in the Interior at Fairbanks 19 Apr (ND). Westbound outmigrant Whooper Swans were again later than average in the w. Aleutians, with a family group of five encountered at Shemya 27 Apr (GVB, ALS) and another three noted on freshwater at Attu 16–25 May (ATTOUR).

Given this spring's poor weather and late break-up conditions, waterfowl migration was unusually protracted across the s. half of the Region. Most areas reported poor concentrations, few rarities, and late first arrivals. Highlights were about evenly split between Palearctic and Nearctic forms, including another SE **Wood Duck**, Ketchikan's 2nd, along productive Ketchikan Cr. 1–16 May (ph. SCH); widely distributed but mostly single Eur. Wigeon including one at Haines 12 May (AD), where casual; an early U.C.I. Blue-winged Teal at Palmer 25 May

(NM); a surprising *Aythya* showing on the Naknek R. near King Salmon, with up to 42 Canvasbacks 24 Apr–13 May, two Redheads 28 Apr–13 May, and one Ring-necked Duck 19 Apr (LK)—where all are rare to casual—and a SE high six Redheads near Juneau 3 May (SZ, PP); three female Com. Pochards, the only report, from Shemya 21 May–1 Jun (DDG); a probable migrant Tufted Duck at Kodiak 18 Apr (RAM); two–three Smews from Attu (ATTOUR) and Shemya (DDG) 17–18 May and 19 May–Jun; a migrant Hooded Merganser pair from Kodiak, where casual in spring, 17 Apr (RAM); and a drake Ruddy Duck at the extreme n.w. edge of the species' (casual) range for the Interior at Fairbanks 23 May (JD, ND). Spawning herring again provided ephemeral scoter bounty at typical SE sites. This year's extraordinary peaks included 15,000+ Surf Scoters 23 Apr near Ketchikan (Totem Bight–Pt. Higgins), and another 8000 to the north at the traditional Berner's Bay sites 9 May (RJG).

An Osprey spent 27 Apr–26 May onward exhibiting breeding behavior on the little-birded Naha R. on Revillagigedo I. e. of Ketchikan; this species is a sporadic local breeder generally n. of SE, where most records are from the Mainland n. of the Stikine. R. Gibson followed a 3rd-year **White-tailed Eagle** along the s. shore of Shemya 16 May as it tacked W out of sight over the N. Pacific, a first report for the Region in several years. This spring's only Swainson's Hawk, a single overshoot, reached way w. to the Andreafsky Mts. towards the s. shore of Norton Sound 25 May (†NS, REG). Most of the less-than-annual spring reports of this rare and local breeder come from within the breeding range in the e.c. Interior. The closest w. Alaska record is from Nulato up the Yukon R. some 350 km to the northeast. Rare in spring in SE, a very early Am. Kestrel, moved along the Ketchikan coast 21 Apr (MB); they have made several April appearances over the past decade.

GROUSE THROUGH TERNS

Single Willow Ptarmigan 8 mi up the Unuk R. 5 & 10 Apr were late into the season near sea level and within the potential intergrade zone with British Columbia's *albus*. Four Soras were in the Haines area's limited habitats 24–25 May (AD), the season's only record. Hounded by poor conditions, the shorebird passage protracted well into May and grounded a high species diversity along the coastal routes. Species otherwise casual in SE in spring, especially Hudsonian and Marbled godwits and Semipalmated Sandpipers, were well represented Highlights

and rarities included the usual species from both continents from the standard sites, including: a Com. Ringed Plover at Shemya 19 May (DDG), the Aleutian's 5th in spring, and at least six around Gambell 1–5 Jun (WINGS); the w. Aleutians' first Black Oystercatcher, a single at Shemya 24 May–4 Jun (DDG) that at least made the 130 km over-water flight from the nearest known site at Buldir I.; mostly single Com. Greenshanks at Attu and Shemya 16–24 May (ATTOUR, DDG) and, more significantly, one at Gambell 3 Jun (WINGS); high Com. Sandpiper numbers synchronized at Attu (20+) and Shemya (10) 31 May–5 Jun (ATTOUR, DDG); five Terek Sandpipers at Attu 30 May (ATTOUR) and two n. to Gambell 30 May–5 Jun (WINGS); a rare offshore Bering Sea Surf-bird at *St. Paul I.*, the Pribilof's first ever, 30 May (BIRDQUEST, *vide* KB); a popular Red-necked Stint at the Homer Shorebird Festival 7–8 May (DS, †RLS), one of few Gulf Coast reports; and a Long-toed Stint documented at Gambell 3–5 Jun (WINGS, v.t. GHR).

Long-distance, large shorebirds, and trans-Pacific forms also made news across the N. Pacific, including single Bristle-thighed Curlews at Homer 12–13 May (ph. AS) and Attu 16 May (ATTOUR), and two at Shemya 18–21 May (DDG), and spring Hudsonian Godwits from otherwise casual locales from Sitka 7–11 May (MLW, MET), Haines 10–11 May (AD), Kodiak 4–8 May, the 2nd local record (RAM), and points between. Marbled Godwits were similarly in evidence with a peak 64 from Kodiak 4 May (RAM), that site's highest ever. Unprecedented Pectoral Sandpiper densities congregated in riparian meadow habitats of the Y-K Delta in the last 2 weeks of May (BJM) and included territorial males in active breeding behavior. Pectorals are typical mid-May migrants across the Delta but are generally rare and local breeders in the Y-K Delta, with most breeding n. to coastal N. Alaska. The female **Wilson's Phalarope** at Juneau 23 May (GVV) was one of the Region's earliest ever for this casual visitor.

Pomarine Jaegers, normally an offshore overflight migrant in the Norton Sound region, provided an unusual inland presence over the Y-K Delta, concentrated 24–27 May (CH, BJM), with daily *maxima* peaking at 45 on 26 May (CH, GB), one of the Delta's highest spring counts. The Ketchikan area herring spawn provided a staging enticement for Bonaparte's Gulls, where numbers reached 4500 18 Apr (SCH). The same phenomenon attracted an atypical convergence of 10,000+ Mew Gulls there the same day

(SCH). Along with scoter data and winter concentrations in many of the same coves, this section of Nichols Passage and Tongass Narrows provides critical Pacific Coast waterbird habitat.

Two *kamtschatschensis* Mew Gulls came ashore at Shemya 17–18 May (DDG). This eastern form remains less than annual in the w. Aleutians. This year's Thayer's Gull peak over herring spawn in Berner's Bay reached 12,000 on 9 May (RJG). Aside from average numbers at the standard sites (i.e., max 5 at Shemya 19 May; DDG), a conservative count of 75 at St. Paul 25 May (ST. PAUL) represented one of the Region's highest spring tallies. Without a hint of their presence in the N. Pacific from the winter reports, Glaucous Gulls made headlines across the N. Gulf in early season. Beginning in late April, unusual numbers were reported from Sitka n. to Kodiak and into UCI Unprecedented peaks included 50+ at Sitka 16–31 May (MLW, MET), 15 from Homer Spit 3 May (CF), six+ around Anchorage 10–15 May (NS, DWS, DFD, TT), and a spectacular 67 in the Kodiak area 8 May (RAM) that included 32 adults. Typical late winter-early spring counts from anywhere in the Region's N. Pacific zone are two–four individuals, nearly all of which are not adults. Most unusual so far inland for any season were two ad. Sabine's Gulls at *Denali Nat'l. Park's* Wonder L. 31 May (SR), certainly one of few Interior records. The ad Ross's Gull at Attu 20 May (ATTOUR) was essentially without precedent—there is one previous spring Aleutian report. Another adult was ashore at St. Paul 26–30 May (ST. PAUL), where there are periodic spring finds. Firm arrival dates for Caspian Tern included two extremely early birds near Juneau 2 May (GVV) and three near Cordova 9 May (NS).

CUCKOOS THROUGH MIMIDS

Common Cuckoos invaded the Bering Sea outposts, with two each at Shemya 2–7 Jun onward (DDG, CLP), Attu 1–5 Jun (ATTOUR), and Gambell 4–5 Jun (WINGS). Northern Pygmy-Owls were again detected on several Mainland SE river corridors and from the Juneau area, including 1–2 reports each from the Taku, Unuk, and Chilkat watersheds (AP, AD, GVV) 1 Apr–13 May. The single Boreal Owl in the Haines area 3 Apr (CE) was likely on territory rather than a winter holdover, providing a rare spring report from SE tidewater. Another representative of the late season was an exceptionally late first arrival for Vaux's Swift 29 May at Ketchikan (SCH).

one of the latest ever. Out of nowhere, a female **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** turned up in the A.B.O. Fairbanks banding nets 19 May (AMB), the Region's westernmost and earliest of few records. Also closing in on a record late arrival was the first Pacific-slope Flycatcher at Ketchikan 25 May (SCH). Sky Larks arrived on time at Shemya 4 May (GVB, ALS) and peaked at 10 on 17 May at nearby Attu (ATTOUR). One reached n. to Gambell 31 May (WINGS), where they are casual overshoots, likely from Koryak Highland populations.

Noteworthy swallow finds included the usual N. Rough-winged from the Ketchikan area, two on the Naha R. 31 May (AP) and singles in town 30 Apr–17 May (SCH), and Barn Swallows in Fairbanks 26 May (JL, SL), on the outer Y-K Delta 12 May (MW), and at St. Paul 22 May (ST. PAUL), all casual locales for this wanderer. Migrant Arctic Warblers (probably *xanthodryas*) dropped out with the late season storm in the w. Aleutians, where they are occasional in spring, with one at Shemya 2 Jun (DDG) and a maximum of 19 at Attu 3 Jun (ATTOUR), one of the Aleutians' highest spring counts. Alaska breeding Arctics were near record late to arrive and had not been reliably reported by normal arrival times.

The early June low pressure system produced a terrific flycatcher fallout in the w. Aleutians, highlighted by three Red-breasted Flycatchers at Shemya 2–3 Jun (DDG), an unparalleled *three Siberian Flycatchers* at Attu 1–5 Jun (ATTOUR), and an equally impressive 27 Gray-spotted Flycatchers 2 Jun (both ATTOUR). Siberian Rubythroats were also represented in the June fallout, with nice counts of 21 at Attu 1 Jun (ATTOUR) and 17 at Shemya 2 Jun (DDG). A **Red-flanked Bluetail** topped the storm deposition at Attu 2 Jun (ATTOUR), the Region's 7th and the 5th spring Aleutian report. Mountain Bluebirds made perhaps their best ever spring showing across SE with a new local high 7 at Juneau 2 May (BT) and two–three on the Unuk and Taku R. 5–19 Apr (AP, AD). A roving flock of 27+ Am. Robins in an Anchorage neighborhood through the last half of March (NS, TT) was unprecedented for late winter, when they are normally casual at best. The Anchorage **Northern Mockingbird** survived the winter, and was last seen 19 Apr (DWS); another found Heinl's Ketchikan feeder circuit 19–22 Apr (HM, GM, ph. SCH), a first local report and one of few for SE. Wagtails were generally quiet all season. Only one Gray Wagtail was reported, from Attu 2 Jun (ATTOUR). Warbler news focused on

across-the-board late arrivals and otherwise poor showings until the end of the period.

EMBERIZIDS


THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

Given the late season it was odd that a Savannah Sparrow arrived record early, in Ketchikan 27 Mar (JFK). Ketchikan's wintering White-throated Sparrow remained to 4 Apr (SCH), a new late date. A stunning male **Reed Bunting**, the Region's 6th, arrived at Shemya 24 May (DDG), in the middle of previous dates. Unusual and early Brown-headed Cowbirds included an extralimital at Fairbanks 22 May (SS, KR, LD, CM) and a male on the Jaha R. e. of Ketchikan 29–31 May (ph. AP). Twenty-nine Bramblings was the maximum, at Attu 23 May (ATTOUR). Other notables included singles at Juneau 18–24 Apr (PS et al.) and again n. to Gambell 28–30 May (WINGS). Uncommon in spring in SE, where more regular in fall/winter, single female-type Purple Finches appeared at feeders at Ketchikan 14 Mar (†SCH, AP) and to the e. at the Naha R. 13 May (AP). A Hawfinch arrived early at Attu 20 May, where the peak was five 1–2 Jun (ATTOUR). Only the 2nd for St. Lawrence I., an overshoot hung around *Gambell's* carcass fields 31 May–5 Jun onwards (WINGS, †JLD, v.t. GHR).

Cited observers: J. B. Allen, R. Armstrong, **ATTOUR** (P. J. Baicich, J. Huntington, G. B. Rosenband, D. W. Sonneborn, P. W. Sykes et al.), G. Balogh, A. M. Benson, M. Brown, K. Burton, G. V. Byrd, J. Dearborn, D. F. Delap, A. DeMartini, L. Devaney, N. DeWitt, C. Eckert, L. Edfelt, M. Edfelt, C. Field, D. D. Gibson, R. E. Gill, R. J. Gordon, C. Harwood, S. C. Heintz, L. Kirk, J. F. Koerner, S. Lewis, J. Logan, R. A. MacIntosh, B. J. McCaffery, C. McIntyre, H. Metcalf, G. Metcalf, N. Mollett, N. Moore, A. Piston, P. Pourchot, C. L. Pruett, K. Russell, S. Russell, S. Savage, T. Schantz, R. L. Scher, A. Schmierer, M. W. Schwan, N. Senner, S. E. Senner, W. Shuster, D. W. Sonneborn, A. L. Sows, **ST. PAUL** (St. Paul Tours: K. Burton, M. Greenfelder, L. Ness, P. Paulus, S. Toussaint, S. D. Smith, R. Papish), S. Springer, D. Stokes, P. Suchanek, M. E. Tedin, K. Titus, G. Van Vliet, M. Walsh, M. L. Ward, M. Wege, M. A. Wood, **WINGS** (J. L. Dunn, S. Finnegan, S. Howell, G. H. Rosenberg et al.), S. Zimmerman.

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