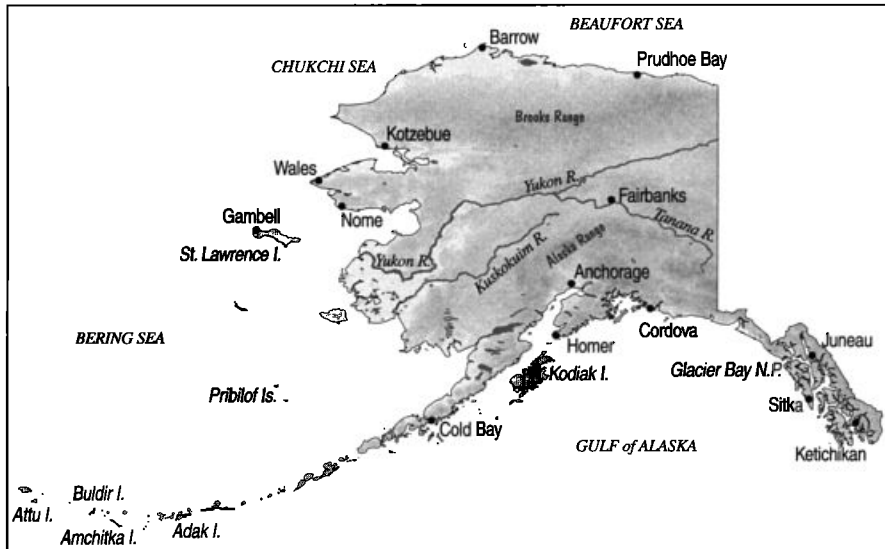


# Alaska



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No doubt because of Alaska's grand size and broad exposure to several sources of weather influences, each successive spring season continues to impress and surprise students of Alaska's birds. Without an obvious El Niño influence, spring 2001 provided an intrigue of contrary conditions in a brief six-week period. What started as an easy, early break-up with mild conditions and few storms proceeded, after early April, into an endless Regionwide funk of cold, wet, and windy weather. After a scattering of local new early arrivals and a "normal" northbound procession, migrants were held up and mostly a few days to weeks late through 1 June. The Aleutian Low apparently stabilized in a position such that continental high pressure developed over the Mainland. In this process, North Pacific storms tracked mostly south of the Aleutians and a few lows crept into the Region in the northern Bering Sea. Only two influential storms crossed the Aleutians. The second half of the season was virtually storm-free, cold, and mired in mid-pressure cloudy situations. In our first post-ATTOUR summary, the Aleutian report remained tantalizing, with notes mostly from a six-week field survey at Shemya. Reports from the Pribilofs continue to highlight that isolated group's role in the east-

ward dispersion of Asiatics, while heavy fog limited early coverage at St. Lawrence Island. Because of this limited Bering Sea access, reports from those areas will be included in the Summer report. The Ketchikan contingent's trip to offshore Annette Island produced unusual reports and waterbird concentrations (especially grebes and shorebirds) that likely represent the true breadth of diversity of migrants across the Southeast. With its wealth of habitats and good access, Annette is one of the Region's "hotspots" and an ideal site to sample migration. In the midst of the spring season, Tim Schantz was taken from us while on his way to Gambell. Tim had quickly become one of Alaska's budding and most enthusiastic birders. We will all miss his presence across the state.

**Abbreviations:** A.B.O. (Alaska Bird Observatory); North Gulf (North Gulf of Alaska); P.W.S. (Prince William Sound); S.E. (Southeast Alaska); S.C. (Southcoastal Alaska); U.C.I. (Upper Cook Inlet). Referenced details (†), specimens (\*), photographs (ph.), and videotape (v.t.) are on file at the University of Alaska Museum.

## LOONS THROUGH RAILS

Arctic Loons again were located in the W. Aleutians, both at Attu and Shemya Is., with up to 3 the peak at Shemya (DDG, MTS). Northbound loons have always been sporadic in S.E., with numbers only seen offshore or

when movements correspond opportunistically with spawning herring. This season's reports from offshore Annette I. probably were representative of an actual corridor leading to offshore routes, e.g. 30 Common Loons there 1 May (SCS, AWP, TG). Migrant, as opposed to late wintering Pied-billed Grebes, made an unusual showing, with 3 around Ketchikan 1 Mar–13 Apr (SCH, AWP) and a single farther n. in Juneau 19–29 Apr (LS, RJG). Western Grebes delayed departures from southern S.E. winter sites well into the spring, with unusually high Apr tallies of 370 and 200 on the 9 & 14 Apr in the greater Ketchikan area (SCH). Latest for the season was a pair near Ketchikan 21 May (SCH, AWP). With only one previous inshore report in southern S.E. in spring, up to 22 Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels in the Ketchikan waterfront 3–22 May (SCH, AWP) was significant and indicative of offshore storm conditions. Four Brandt's Cormorants, mixed with various other (non-breeding?) cormorants in the Boca De Quadra channels outside of Ketchikan 15 Apr (AWP), may have been in breeding habitat. Ketchikan birders have found a few Brandt's wintering over the past three years, but there remain only a few rock islets in S.E. where Brandt's have been found in spring and summer.

Asiatic waterfowl were essentially absent from the Region save for 3 Smews from Shemya—a single 24 Apr and a pair 15–17 May (DDG, MTS)—another Smew e. to St Paul I. 7–9 May (ST. PAUL), and a wandering pair of American Wigeon at Shemya 28 May (DDG, MTS), where casual. The few other duck highlights included Ketchikan's wintering Wood Duck pair through 17 Mar (SCH), an exceptional S.E. concentration of 13 Redheads in Juneau 19 May (BA), at least 6 Lesser Scaup in the Bering Sea, where still rare, at St. Paul I. 11–31 May (REG, PT, MD) and another 2 at Unalaska May 28 (RAM), and another strong peak of 8970 Surf Scoters at a herring spawn site near Ketchikan 28 Apr (AWP, SCH).

Up to 8 Ospreys 28 Apr–6 May over the Ketchikan area provided a clearer picture of timing and numbers for a species we know little about during migration, especially in S.E. Far from its elements was an ad. Northern Goshawk on the sea bluffs at Shemya 25–27 May (DDG, MTS)—old sight reports from Dutch Harbor, the Shumagin, and the Commander Is. are the nearest records. Although Golden Eagle is sporadic in winter from various alpine sections of the Region, one sighted in lowlands along the Tagagawik R. near Selawik 25 Mar (JD, *vide* RM) was



This Little Gull was found 28 April (here photographed 30 April) at Ketchikan made for a well-documented first state record; it remained in the area for two weeks. Another bird in alternate plumage was found in Juneau this season. Photograph by Steve C. Heintz.

noteworthy and out of typical habitats. An imm. Gyrfalcon described from Hyder 21 May (TH, †JH), likely a nonbreeder wandering the Coast Range, was one of few S.E. spring records.

### PLOVERS TO DOVES

It was a down year for Asiatic shorebirds, likely because of clement weather in the Bering Sea and w. North Pacific. Highlights were few and concentrated at Shemya and the Pribilofs only, including: a rare w. Aleutians Semipalmated Plover at Shemya 19 May (MTS, DDG), a Common Greenshank casual to the e. at St. Paul I. 22 May+ (ST. PAUL), a rare Aleutian Lesser Yellowlegs also at Shemya 29–30 Apr (MTS; certainly a bird returning from some Palearctic winter site), an unprecedented flight of 11 Bristle-thighed Curlews, the most ever from the Pribilofs, at St. Paul in May (REG, PT, MD), and a single Far Eastern Curlew also at St. Paul 27 May–1 Jun (ST. PAUL, SDS ph.). Gambell's only unusual Asiatic shorebird was a single Long-toed Stint in the middens 29 May (VENT), one of few recent records there. Elsewhere, the rather stormy and cloudy May produced an excellent assortment of high concentrations and rarer forms in unusual locations. A group of 9 Killdeer in Ketchikan 6 May (AWP, SCH) was rather sizeable for the Region, while Nearctic

Godwits made big news. Hudsonian Godwits were grounded by poor weather in parts of S.E. where they are rare or unknown, notably 140+ way up the Taku R. on the S.E. Mainland 2–4 May (AD) and 20 in Juneau 4–12 May (RJG, PS). Marbleds were reported across the entire breadth of this unique Alaska subspecies's spring range, probably in record array. Among these were multiples in S.E., including 6 in Sitka, where not annual, 29 Apr–8 May (MLW, MET), a single inland on the Taku R. 23 May (AD), where previously unknown, at least 4 around Ketchikan 21 Apr–6 May (ph. AWP, DM), and another offshore at Annette I. 1 May (SCH, AWP, TG). Two made it n. to Anchorage 18 May (*fide* RLS), and Kodiak produced up to 19 on 30 Apr (RAM). Most years find scattered small groups and singles at one or two of the above-mentioned sites. The ad. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper that came onshore with Pectorals at Seward 10 May (†WS) represents one of few spring Mainland reports for S.C. In a similar vein, but rarer yet for S.C., was a Reeve at the Homer beaches 12 May (RLS, TS).

A well-documented ad. **Little Gull** in the Ketchikan harbor 28 Apr–13 May (AWP, †, ph. SCH et al.) provided Alaska's first substantiated record, while another in similar definitive alternate plumage appeared in the Juneau area 23–24 May (PS et al.). Alaskan

archives include five previous sight records between S.C. and S.E. What was likely the same ad. Black-tailed Gull was first noted on Shemya beaches 25–27 Apr and then reappeared in the same area 1 Jun (MTS ph, DDG). There are now six Aleutian records of this casual spring/summer visitor, which has shown up on the Mainland and s. to Ketchikan. Of the handful of Ring-billed Gull sightings, a single from Fairbanks 20–23 Apr (JW, A.B.O.) was most noteworthy and approximately the Interior's 3rd in spring. Two "clean" Western Gull observations were submitted from Annette I. 1 May and Ketchikan 11 May (AWP, SCH, TG), from areas where they are now expected. Five Ivory Gulls 27 May (VENT) were above average for spring on the Nome waterfront where these birds, associated with retreating pack ice, are not annual. One of the Region's earliest records away from P.W.S. breeding sites and S.E. migrant stopovers was a single Caspian Tern at the Homer Spit 13 May (TS, RLS). An overshoot Mourning Dove surfaced near Ketchikan 26 May (ph. TPZ), one of few for the Region from spring and a local spring first.

### OWLS THROUGH FINCHES

Probably to be expected after the past few fall irruptions, a Northern Hawk Owl was nonetheless newsworthy offshore in S.E. from Sitka 3–13 Apr (MLW, MET). There are few historic records from the Alexander Archipelago. A Short-eared Owl near Anchorage 28 Mar (*fide* RLS) was distinctly early but likely a bird that wintered in S.C. somewhere. Another Short-eared from the lower Noatak R. 26 Apr (JD) seemed an early extreme from the nw. coast, especially in such a heavy snowpack year. A pair of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers was discovered at an active nest just s. of Fairbanks 31 May (A.B.O.), the farthest w. and 3rd breeding find in the Region for this casual spring/summer visitant to the eastern Interior. Early field work uncovered single **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**, the Region's 7th and 8th individuals, at St. George I. 6 May (†SDS) and on the beach at Shemya 11 May (ph. MTS). Given the severe winter of 2000–2001 in the w. Aleutians, which no woodpecker from the previous autumn flight could have survived in the Near Islands, these spring birds were certainly spring migrants from ne. Asia. Exceedingly rare in S.E. was a Black-backed Woodpecker near Juneau 19 May (GVV). Brief details were submitted for a female-type, large swallow, identified by the observer as a Purple Martin in Juneau 14 May (†MS),

the Region's first in several years and a first ever for S.E. There are few substantiated records of this accidental late spring visitor.

The season's only Siberian Rubythroats were also early: 3 males at Shemya 21–23 May (MTS, DDG). More significant was a female **Red-flanked Bluetail**, also at Shemya in the same storm fallout 19 May (DDG, MTS). Of the Region's now eight spring records, most are from late May from the w. Aleutians. Northern Wheatears seemed early on the Mainland, with the first noted near Kotzebue 23 May (RM), while exceptional numbers, up to 11, made landfall at St. Paul I. 19–27 May (ST. PAUL), where they are not annual. A decent "wave" of Eyebrowed Thrushes reached the w. Aleutians with the mid-May storm, such that small groups were flushed from most thickets for several days 14–16 May+, with a peak of 17 at Shemya 15 May (MTS, DDG). In the mid-May storm, a single **Dusky Thrush** skulked around Shemya 14–15 May (MTS, DDG). This form remains casual in spring. The mid-May storm focused exceptional numbers of motacillids at Attu and Shemya 14–16 May+. *Simillima* Yellow Wagtails, the regular w. Aleutian migrant form, were ubiquitous in scattered noisy groups, with a peak of 68 on the first day after a large storm 14 May (MTS). Another Yellow Wagtail fitting the description of *simillima* turned up at Unalaska 28 May (†RAM), where there are few records of the form. St. Paul I. birders recorded at least 9 Yellow Wagtails in one group 24 May (ST. PAUL). Included with the Yellows were at least 3 Gray Wagtails on 14 & 15 May, "dozens" of Olive-backed Pipits, and at least 3 Pechora Pipits from Attu and a single at Shemya in the same period at Shemya (*vide* DDG). New World Warblers were unremarkable except for a Tennessee Warbler in Juneau 12 May (RJG) and a single MacGillivray's also at Juneau 30 Apr (RJG), both of which were well ahead of average arrivals.

Three Rustic Buntings were the maximum of the few recorded in the mid-May storm at Shemya 14 May (MTS, DDG), while another 3 drifted e. to St. Paul I. by 24 May and stayed to 1 Jun (ST. PAUL). Possibly indicative of the tough winter and weak beach rye seed crop, McKay's Bunting were noted moving n. along the coast around Kotzebue in late Feb–early Mar, with 4 in town on the 10 Mar (RM) and a single farther n. at Shesholik Spit through 9 May (BU). These are rather far n. and beyond typical winter/early spring locales for McKay's. Following the exceptional record spring numbers of Bramblings from 1998, this year's mid-May fallout of 176 birds at



This Eyebrowed Thrush was photographed 14 May on Shemya Island, where a mid-May cyclone was responsible for counts as high as 17 of this species on the following day. *Photograph by M.T. Schwitters.*

Shemya 16 May (DDG, MTS) was easily the Region's 2nd highest total. Bramblings remained common there over the next week, while up to 14 were tallied around St. Paul I. 25–29 May (ST. PAUL). An ad. female Eurasian Bullfinch hung around the Shemya bluffs 15–23 May (MTS, DDG), the 5th for the Aleutians (all from early spring), while a classy ad. male was already in the Gambell middens when birders first arrived 28–31 May+ (*vide* VENT; ph.). The Fairbanks wintering female Bullfinch was last noted at its favorite feeder 10 Apr (VB, ph. EC). Single male and female Hawfinches bounded around Shemya at irregular intervals 14 May–6 Jun (DDG, MTS), the season's only reports. Resident finches continued in patterns outlined in the past few seasonal columns with the exception of Red Crossbills, which some observers noted in moderate numbers in por-

tions of the S.E. Mainland and the North Gulf Coast.

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