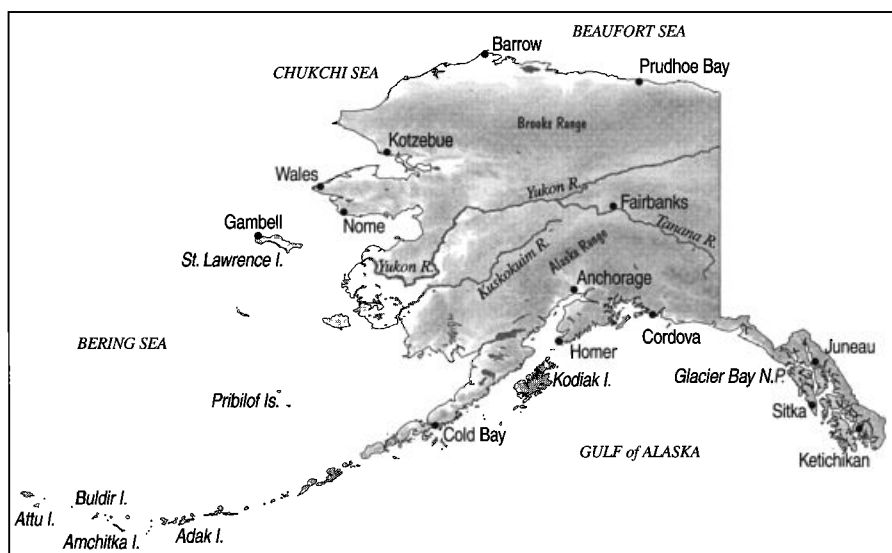


Alaska



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Following the late autumn's rapid freeze-up and heavy snows, winter '01-'02 began under a continental high-pressure blanket. Early-season temperatures that were well below average set the tone until early January, when some moderation came mostly with snowstorms tracking along the North Gulf Coast. Even after such an exciting fall season, rarities and otherwise noteworthy winter records were below the past few years' norms. Heavier-than-usual snow packs probably contributed to the season's low returns. As is so often the case for an Alaskan winter, the season's highlights were discovered during the C.B.C. period. Open fresh water was at a premium this season, and significant waterbird reports were confined to a few coastal strips and saltwater refuges. After a hiatus of several years, I received a complete report from the Cordova environs, where Pete Isleib uncovered numerous winter rarities in the 1970s and 1980s.

Abbreviations: North Gulf (North Gulf of Alaska); Southeast (Southeast Alaska). Referenced details (+), specimens (*), photographs (ph.), and videotape (vt.) are on file at the University of Alaska Museum. Italicized place names denote especially unusual locations for the noted species.

LOONS THROUGH RAILS

An intriguing **Arctic Loon** description (minimal detail) from just off Cordova 20-21 Jan (†AL, NO) would represent a first winter report for Alaska away from the W. Aleutians. Notable Pacific Loon concentrations were about average from typical staging sites, including 200 in Ketchikan's Ward Cove 2 Dec (SCH) and 80 near Juneau 17 Feb (GVV). Western Grebe peak counts of note included up to 215 in the Ketchikan area 10 Feb (SCH) and another flock of 140 off the n. side of Annette I. 21 Jan (SCH). A single Western lingered in the Juneau area to 19 Jan (GVV), the latest ever there in winter and one of very few n. of the traditional winter range between Frederick Sound and Annette I.

After several winters of multiple reports and small groups, only a single ad. Brandt's Cormorant was located in Nichols Passage off Ketchikan 21 Jan, where nearly all of the Region's winter records originate. A rare winter Greater White-fronted Goose spent the season with Trumpeter Swans in the Sitka area, one of few ever beyond Dec (MLW, MET). The only unusual Trumpeter Swan report was a group of 3 probable late migrants moving s. at Juneau 13 Jan (GVV). More unusual were single Tundra Swans, which lingered or attempted to stay the season, at Cordova 9 Dec—9 Jan, when found dead (AL et al.), and at Juneau 15 Dec—13 Jan+ (GVV). Four of the original 5 Ketchikan-area Wood Ducks lingered there until 23 Dec (SCH). The season's few waterfowl highlights

otherwise included: 3 Eurasian Wigeon and 2 Northern Shovelers at Kodiak all season (RAM), a returning male Green-winged Teal in an Anchorage groundwater spring all season (RLS), a Canvasback at Cordova until 10 Feb (AL), a high count of 12 Ring-necked Ducks at Sitka's Swan L. all season (MLW, MET), a drake Tufted Duck at Cordova 21 Jan—10 Feb (AL, WB, CR, NO), where there are a handful of historic winter reports, a local record high 21 Lesser Scaup in Ketchikan through Jan (SCH), Seward's male Hooded Merganser at its traditional site (WS), and a pair of Hoodeds on Cordova's Eyak L. 10-26 Feb+ (WB, AL, PM). Probably because of the season's early heavy snow and subsequent prolonged cold, unusual raptor reports were few. Southeast observers commented on good numbers of Sharp-shinned Hawks. Most unusual was an ad. male **American Kestrel** in the Juneau area all season (GVV ph.), one of the Region's few true winter records.

PLOVERS THROUGH DOWES

Distribution and status of the Region's semi-hardy shorebird species was greatly diminished this season, also likely because of the combined heavy snows and early-season low temperatures. Rock Sandpiper concentrations in traditional Cook Inlet bays were elusive, with high counts well below the 10,000 to 15,000 of past winters. Rocks were also poorly accounted for at Seward and other coastal spots. Given the season, Juneau harbored decent flocks of Surfbirds, with maxima of 125 on 17 Feb and 200 Black Turnstones the same day (GVV). Typically rare in winter away from a few regular coastal sites, a Sanderling surfaced in Juneau 13 Jan—18 Feb (GVV). Eight Common Snipe in Juneau in one group 31 Jan (GVV) was also a good winter count for the Region.

Reasonable details were submitted for a bird thought to be a first-winter Kamchatka Mew Gull (*Larus canus kamschatschensis*) from Cordova 18 Jan (AL†, WB, CR, NO). Direct comparisons with similar-aged Mew Gulls were included in the description. Juneau's Eagle Beach again provided roosting habitat for Thayer's Gulls, with peak counts of 135-175 tallied between 26 Dec and 13 Jan (GVV). Only singles are sporadically found in winter n. in the Region beyond Juneau. Another clean ad. Western Gull was photographed in the Ketchikan area, present Nov—5 Jan+ (ph SCH). Black-legged Kittiwakes, rare or missing from inshore harbors and bays in the North Gulf, apparently moved farther offshore than normal, perhaps due to weather and commercial fish closures. Excellent mid-sea-

son Marbled Murrelet feeding aggregations came in from protected Southeast waters, with a peak 5000 in lower Lynn Canal 23-24 Feb (GVV) and 1300 s. of Ketchikan 30 Dec (SCH). Rare inshore in winter for the Southeast was an Ancient Murrelet near Ketchikan 21 Jan (SCH).

OWLS THROUGH THRUSHES

Following the minor fall coastal dispersion of Snowy Owls, the Kodiak individual remained in the harbor to 15 Dec+ (RAM), a local first "winter" record. No others were refound or wintered. Short-eared Owls were missing from the Kodiak grasslands, but one lingered in the Juneau wetlands 5-28 Jan+ (GVV). The season's only Northern Pygmy-Owl was located near Juneau briefly 18-28 Feb (GVV). As the season moderated in mid-Feb, Boreal Owls initiated displays, at least in the Fairbanks area by the end of the period, while 1-2 Northern Saw-whet Owls spent the season and called occasionally in Anchorage 10 Dec—early Jan+ (NS, GJT, RLS). Certainly the season's highlight was an immaculate male **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, which had apparently taken up residence at a remote homesite feeder s. of Talkeetna near Caswell Lakes in Sep. Driven by her inability to find the bird in her bird books, the homeowner called down to Anchorage birders for some assistance, and after the homeowner provided compelling details, Delap was at the feeder the following morning (5 Feb) to confirm and document the identification. This individual constituted Alaska's first mainland record and the 8th report overall of this forest dweller from ne. Asia. Except for a spring Pribilof report, all prior records came from the W. Aleutians. There are a few Commander Island reports, and these birds likely originated from Kamchatka forests. Winter Northern Flickers were average, including singles in Sitka 29 Jan (MLW, MET) and Juneau 2 Dec+ (the latter a hybrid; GVV). Exceptional otherwise was a conservative count of 13 flickers in the Ketchikan area all season, among them 5 intergrades (GVV).

Another Mountain Chickadee, sporadic in winter out of the Coast Range into coastal Southeast, made a brief appearance at a Juneau area feeder 25 Jan—mid Feb+ (*fide* GVV), the season's only report. Given the tough season, American Robins held their own, at least where exotic shrubs provided decent berries, with a peak in Juneau of 6 as late as 10 Jan (GVV), and a dozen or so again in the greater Anchorage—Eagle River area all season (DFD). The season's only notable Varied Thrush report included 10 together in Sitka Jan 21 (MET, MLW), and very few were observed elsewhere. A single Cedar Waxwing wintered in Ketchikan 16 Jan+ (SCH), this winter's only find. Bohemian

Waxwing peaks were below average, and for some reason late, in the Anchorage Bowl, where certainly most of the Region's population focuses on local landscaped berry crops in Dec. A few dozen lingered through the period in downtown Anchorage, while few others were spotted after the first of the year.

WARBLERS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

The very late **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, Alaska's first, at a Juneau feeder was not seen after 2 Dec (GVV) during an extended cold snap down to -20o F. For the first time in several winters, no warblers made it past the first days of Dec. Given the snow and cold, it was an exceptional sparrow season, especially in Southeast. American Tree Sparrows were concentrated at a few coastal sites, including 4 on 19 Jan in grasses at the Copper R. Delta (AL), 6 in Juneau wetlands 16 Dec (GVV), and at least one in Ketchikan 5 Feb (SCH), where casual. Rare in winter, and offshore, was a Chipping Sparrow in Sitka to 11 Feb (MET, MLW). Excellent Fox Sparrow tallies included 24 (*insularis*) on the Kodiak C.B.C. 15 Dec (*fide* RAM), at least 25+ all season at Ketchikan feeders (a new winter record; SCH), and a few offshore at Sitka 27 Jan—24 Feb (MET, MLW). They were otherwise missing or fleeting in the Seward area, where a few can be counted on most winters. This winter's only Lincoln's Sparrow was a lone bird that spent the season at a Ketchikan feeder (SCH), where casual. Following a decent fall showing, only 2 White-throated Sparrows remained through the season, both at Ketchikan (SCH). Seward's Harris's Sparrow reappeared in Feb across the bay from where it was discovered in Nov (WS), that locale's first "true" winter record. And Golden-crowned Sparrows, the most reliable and hardy winter *Zonotrichia*, were in good evidence, with good counts of 13 at the Kodiak C.B.C. 15 Dec (RAM) and 12+ in the Ketchikan area all season (SCH), that area's most ever. Elsewhere, only singles were noted, mostly in Dec, from Anchorage, Seward and Juneau.

The season's only Brambling record was a single found near downtown Kodiak Dec 14-28 (ph. RAM, IB). Kodiak produces late fall and winter Bramblings with the most regularity of the Region's coastal hotspots. Red Crossbills were distinctly absent or poorly represented Regionwide, except from the Kodiak forests, where they were fairly common all season. Two Red Crossbills in the Kenai area 17 Feb (ph. RD) were unusual in the boreal forest extension from the Interior across Cook Inlet. Common Redpolls exploded out of the Interior and through the Coast Range in mid-Jan, with hundreds noted around Juneau by early Feb (m.



A truly rare species in Alaska but one recorded several times in recent years, a Great Spotted Woodpecker spent the season at a feeder between Willow and Talkeetna (here 22 February 2002). Photograph by Randall Davis.

ob.). Every few years, redpolls reach the Southeast coast, usually towards the latter half of the winter. This year, small numbers reached s. into the Ketchikan area, with a peak 13+ by 21 Feb (SCH), where there had been only four previous winter reports. A pair of **House Sparrows** wintered at Ketchikan feeders 2 Dec—22 Feb+ (SCH ph.), a local 2nd record and the Region's first ever through the winter.

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