

Most reporters shared similar observations about this winter, namely that conditions aligned perfectly for one the Region's most exciting in decades. Continued mild conditions from the fall extended well into the new year, and with a few brief exceptions, winter temperatures hovered at and beyond record highs all season. Snow accumulations south of the Alaska Range were brief, intermittent, or completely lacking, especially after an unusual due-north jetstream flow brought rain and +40°F to the Region's south half sporadically through the season. What transpired all season were multiple reports of extremely late out-migrants, unusual and widespread tallies of semi-hardy, irregular winter species, new winter high counts of rare forms, and more than the typical few out-of-season rarities. Indeed, the C.B.C. season collected a new all-time high 144 species, with new one-day high counts recognized for 14 species. Virtually all sections of the Region were productive, except, of course, for the North Slope, where darkness and extensive cold preclude the presence of nearly all bird species after November.

Abbreviations: North Gulf (n. Gulf of Alaska); SE (Southeast Alaska); U.C.I. (Upper Cook Inlet). Referenced details (†), specimens (*), photographs (ph.), digital photographs (dph.), 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 CRANES

Perhaps because of mild conditions, exceptional loon concentrations were lacking this season. Noteworthy was a lingering Pacific Loon near Nome 15 Dec (*fide* RLS), possible probably because of a delayed Bering Sea ice advance. Small numbers of Pacific Loons occasionally occur in the s. Bering Sea each winter. Pied-billed Grebes were well represented, with 3 around Ketchikan 1 Jan—7 Feb (SCH, AWP) and a single offshore at Sitka 4 Dec+ (MLW, MET). Of the handful of Western Grebe accounts, a single n. of Juneau 5-6 Feb (RJG) was the winter's northernmost. Rare to inside waters in SE, a Leach's Storm-Petrel wandered inshore near Ketchikan 15 Dec (JL, *fide* SCH). A non-birder provided a convincing description of a Brown Pelican from Vallena Bay near Ketchikan 21 Dec (LJ, *fide* SCH), which will be added to the Alaska Unsubstantiated List should the review committee agree. Apparently this find coincided with a huge post-breeding dispersal season up the coast of the Pacific Northwest. Scattered singles and pairs of Brandt's Cormorants were noted 28 Dec—3 Feb (SCH, AWP) on islets and bay mouths between Ketchikan and Annette I., the Region's regular outpost for this

Alaska



extremely rare and local resident. The season's high count for Great Blue Herons reached an average 22 from Cordova 14 Dec (*fide* RLS).

Waterfowl highlights included late dates, atypically high numbers, and broad distribution of the less-common and irregular species. Notably rare or extralimital in winter, or late-migrants, were: a single tardy Snow Goose from Kodiak, a first in winter there, where it lingered to 22+ Dec (RAM), at least 2 Trumpeter Swans in ice-free sections of Upper Trail L. at Moose Pass on the Kenai Pen. to at least 30 Jan (RLS), 2 Tufted Ducks in Dutch Harbor 20 Dec+ (SG), and 2 King Eiders and a single Common Eider near Nome to 14 Dec (*fide* RLS), where both species are casual after Nov, and a drake King Eider into SE at Petersburg 5-14 Feb (dph. RL). An exceptional winter season tally was the peak count of 264 American Wigeon from the Juneau C.B.C. 14 Dec (*fide* SZ). Record high for the Region counts and most widely-ever dispersed Green-winged Teal were represented by peaks of 25 in Ketchikan 1-7 Feb (SCH), 131 at Cordova 14 Dec (*fide* RLS), and 86 around Juneau to 24 Jan (SZ), with another single n. to Anchorage all season (m. ob.). Rarer *Aythya* accounts mirrored the dabbling tallies and distribution, probably supplemented by late-departing birds, including Redheads at Homer, with up to 4 there 12-14 Dec (GVB), a single at Gustavus through Dec (BP, ND, PV), and a single at Sitka, which wintered to 11 Feb+ (MLW, MET). The highest-ever winter peak was of 76 Ring-necked Ducks at Bartlett L. near Glacier Bay N.M. through Dec (BP), while maxima for Lesser Scaup came in at 73, also at Bartlett L. through Dec

Thede Tobish

2510 Foraker Drive

Anchorage, Alaska 99517

(tgt@alaska.net)

(BP); another 18 were at Kodiak 11 Dec (RAM). A surprise peak of 24 Hooded Mergansers was counted near Ketchikan 7 Feb (SCH).

Typical for milder seasons, raptors were better represented than usual, with Northern Harriers most widespread, including 2 at the Palmer Hayflats 15 Dec+ (†RW), where there are only a few U.C.I. records after mid-Nov, 2 at Gustavus also 14 Dec (BP), and singles near Juneau 29 Dec—2 Jan (BA, GVV, SZ) and Kodiak 20 Jan (SS, RAM). Harriers are sporadic in winter, especially after mid-Dec, only at the Kodiak grasslands. An expected few Sharp-shinned Hawks spent the winter at North Gulf and SE locales, with the single n. at Trapper Cr. 19 Feb (DP) being most unusual. Single post-Dec Rough-legged Hawks were described from Sitka 13 Jan (MLW, MET), where casual, and from Kodiak 16 Jan (RAM). Totally unexpected was the Region's 2nd ever winter (and 4th overall) Virginia Rail, found in sedge margins along the Salmon R. near Gustavus 16-20 Feb (†ND, dph. PV). Alaska's first was a carcass found on Prince of Wales I. in s. SE in late winter 1986. Equally rare for winter was a reasonably well-described and possibly late-migrant Sora from Kruzof I. off Sitka 29 Dec

(†RN et al.). Also tardy were 2 rare Dec Sandhill Cranes offshore at Sitka through 16 Dec (MLW, MET).

PLOVERS THROUGH ALCIDS

As with the waterfowl for this mild winter, a few exceptional shorebirds managed to linger or winter in above-average numbers, mainly from SE, including a hardy Black-bellied Plover in Ketchikan 24 Dec—14 Feb (SCH), which was a local first and one of few for the Region in winter. The season also saw record-high Killdeer totals, with 20 around Juneau 13-14 Dec (RJG, SZ et al.), 9 in Ketchikan to 16 Feb (RS), and up to 4 in Gustavus through 8 Feb (ND, PV). Able to linger well beyond more normal early-Nov late departures were a single Greater Yellowlegs at Juneau 7-21 Jan (RJG, LC, GVV, SZ), one of few "true" Alaska winter records, and a Spotted Sandpiper in Ketchikan 1 Dec (SCH). Sanderlings wintered in above-average numbers with other calidrids at traditional sites, with a single in Ketchikan 6-12 Jan (SCH) more unusual and only the 2nd local winter report. Cook Inlet Rock Sandpiper concentrations ranged in peak counts from 11,061 on 26 Dec to 15,565 on 26 Feb (REG), mainly from the n. and w. shores of Cook Inlet. Probably due to the mainly ice-free mid-season conditions, a feeding flock of 1800+ Rock Sandpipers worked the unfrozen substrate at the mouth of Turnagain Arm 17 Feb (TT), the first ever eastside U.C.I. winter report. Of the above-average Wilson's Snipe reports, 12 was the season's near-record peak at Ketchikan 8 Dec (SCH), which certainly included late-lingering migrants. Following late Ketchikan area fall reports, a single and then 2 Red Phalaropes fed inshore near Ketchikan after two storms 31 Dec and 6 Jan (†SCH, AWP). I am unaware of any other post-Dec winter reports for Alaska.

The pattern of gull timing and distribution followed that of the other waterbirds, with late migrants lingering in SE. Notable in this pattern were Bonaparte's Gulls in the Ketchikan area, where there are occasional early Dec reports, with at least 42 still present on the waterfront through 28 Dec (SCH). Still not annual in winter, Ring-billed Gull accounts included a single ad. in Ketchikan 31 Jan (†SCH), a first in winter there, and 2 around Juneau 6-7 Jan (RJG, GVV). A local food source concentrated approximately 1000 Thayer's Gulls in Ketchikan's Tongass Narrows 6 Jan (SCH), the season's high one-day maximum. Of the below-average Slaty-backed Gull reports, only an ad. on the Homer Spit 28 Feb was unusual (RLS). Gulls continued into Dec in U.C.I. at Anchorage for the first time in over a decade, with latest to 14 Dec (m. ob.), including 2 Mews, 3 Herring, and 9 Glaucous-wingeds off Anchorage. Winter alcid concentrations

went mostly undetected, save for Common Murres between Ketchikan and Annette I., where two aggregations produced rather high inshore counts of 980 and 2500 on 28 Dec (SCH, AWP). Otherwise alcids went unmentioned except for 2 Cassin's Auklets inshore at the lower end of Clarence Strait near Ketchikan 24 Dec (SCH), and 3 Whiskered Auklets from off Dutch Harbor 14 Dec (no details; *fide* RLS).

OWLS THROUGH THRUSHES

Three Northern Pygmy-Owls in the Ketchikan area all season (SCH, AWP) represented the season's maximum. A fresh Long-eared Owl carcass picked up in Gustavus 1 Feb (*BP), became the Region's 2nd specimen, about the 5th record overall, and the first in winter; all previous records are from SE. The Juneau feeder Anna's Hummingbird, which arrived in mid-Oct, remained until 25 Dec (GVV), the season's only report. Observers submitted few Northern Flicker reports away from the usual s. SE zone around Ketchikan, where they are annual, and where this winter's peak reached an above-average 11 all season. Essentially all of these were intergrades (SCH, AWP). Forty-five Northwestern Crows wandered inland and up the Kenai R. and spent most of the season at Soldotna (*fide* JS), where this strictly coastal forest form is casual. This year's Red-breasted Nuthatch C.B.C. summaries continued the picture of a population possibly expanding n. of and beyond the traditional North Gulf/U.C.I. populations, highlighted by mid-Dec counts of 23 in Eagle River, 42 in the Mat-Su Valley, and an amazing 33 well n. to Trapper Cr. (DFD, RW, DP, RLS). One in Denali N.P. and 4 on the Fairbanks C.B.C.s also in mid-Dec were even more unusual within and n. of the Alaska Range.

Mountain Bluebirds made news from two sites, with 2 located on the sw. side of Kodiak 12 Jan (dph. RAM), that island group's first ever, and a group of 5 noted in Gustavus 14 Jan (dph. ND, PV). This rare e. Interior breeder is irregular in fall from the SE mainland, with most records from Nov. No doubt surviving because of no snow and mild conditions, an imm. Swainson's Thrush was nevertheless unexpected in Anchorage 14 Dec (†TT), Alaska's first ever past early Nov. It was not located thereafter, as a snowy cold snap ensued. Four Hermit Thrushes were reported from mid-Dec C.B.C.s at Juneau and Sitka (2 each; *fide* RLS), but a single at Ketchikan 22 Jan (TG, SCH) was the only later one. Very small numbers of this berry-gleaner linger into early Dec, mainly in SE in extremely mild fall seasons. Surprisingly few American Robins were included in the season's reports, especially past Dec, with 45 the early-season

peak at Seward 28 Dec (*fide* RLS). Another 18-20 remained in Anchorage-area neighborhoods through the season (DWS, RLS, TT), while a single survived well n. in Talkeetna, where casual, to 27 Feb+ (DP). Varied Thrushes were more noteworthy and present in above-average numbers from most of the Region's s. half, highlighted by 75+ in Sitka through late Dec (MLW, MET) and a C.B.C. tally of 462 from the s. side of Kodiak in late Dec (RAM).

WARBLERS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

Indicative of the mild early season, I received warbler accounts for four species—when none would be typical. Single Orange-crowned Warblers were noted from Ketchikan 2-14 Dec (SCH) and at Homer 15 Dec (HR, MR), both first local Dec sightings, and one of few for the Region past late Nov. Unprecedented was a tardy Yellow Warbler described from Ketchikan 5 Dec (†SCH, AWP), the Region's first ever in Dec and one of only a few past late Oct. Following those were multiple Yellow-rumped Warblers, the most ever for Dec, including singles in Anchorage 14 Dec (*fide* DFD, ph.) and n. near Palmer 15 Dec (RW ph.), about the 5th ever for U.C.I., plus 2 in Ketchikan 14-20 Dec (SCH). Totally unexpected and possibly the latest ever in the Region were 2 different Palm Warblers around Ketchikan 8-19 Dec and 13 Dec (ph., †AWP, SCH). Nearly all of the Region's reports originate from late Sep through Oct.

The fall season's Juneau-area Spotted Towhee remained at its favored feeder through the period, the first of the very few Alaska records to winter successfully (BA, PS et al.). Late migrant and/or attempting-to-winter Savannah Sparrows were discovered at Homer 14 Dec+ (one bird) and at Juneau, with at least 6 on the same date (*fide* RLS). As abundant as the Alaska populations are, Savannah Sparrows are notoriously efficient in their southbound departures and typically virtually absent after mid-Nov. Three different Swamp Sparrows surfaced late in the Ketchikan area, including the earlier reported fall bird, which remained to 11 Dec. Two others were sporadically seen to only 16 Jan (ph. SCH, †AWP). These bring the Ketchikan Swamp Sparrow total to 12 records, mostly between 12 Oct and late Jan, which makes up the majority of the Region's records. *Zonotrichia* sparrows were surprisingly under-represented in this mild season, perhaps because they were dispersed and surviving just fine in open habitats. Exceptions were a group of 8+ White-crowned Sparrows associated with a Homer feeder in Feb (TT, LJO), and up to 6 on the Palmer area C.B.C. 15 Dec (*fide* RW). Only a single White-throated Sparrow was located, in Ketchikan, 15

Dec—Mar (JK, SCH, AWP). And only a single Harris's Sparrow came forward, at Gustavus 1-8 Dec (BP). Average-sized small groups of Dark-eyed Juncos formed through the season at most larger towns s. of the Alaska Range. One such flock of 19 included 2 *oreganus* birds in Girdwood 17 Feb (TT). This coastal rainforest race remains casual inland and away from the North Gulf Coast.

Unseasonal Lapland Longspurs included singles described at the Nome beaches 14 Dec (*fide* RLS) and at Gustavus 22 Jan—16 Feb (ND, PV). A few singles manage to linger most years into early Dec, but there area few midwinter reports. Out of the blue, and later than the typical fall pattern, was a very pale Western Meadowlark in Ketchikan 8 Dec+, one of few ever that stayed the season. Another single Purple Finch was found 5 Dec+ at Ketchikan feeders, where nearly all of the Region's winter reports have come. Red Crossbills were widespread and locally common within the coastal Sitka Spruce-Western Hemlock forests, w. to Kodiak and onto the Kenai Pen., including good numbers in Seward and a few in the Girdwood Valley 17 Feb (TT). Alaska's 4th American Goldfinch (and first in winter) took up residence at a Homer west-end feeder 12 Feb—12 Mar+ (MK, GJT, dph. DWS et al.). Of the previous state reports, which came from spring and late summer, only one was documented with photographs. A bright male Eurasian Bullfinch took advantage of a Nome feeder from late Dec through at least 9 Jan (*fide* DDG, dph. DS). There is a handful of winter reports scattered across the w. Alaska taiga, where the type specimen for this race was first taken. The fall season's 2 Ketchikan area House Sparrows remained at a feeder there to 9 Dec (JK, SCH).

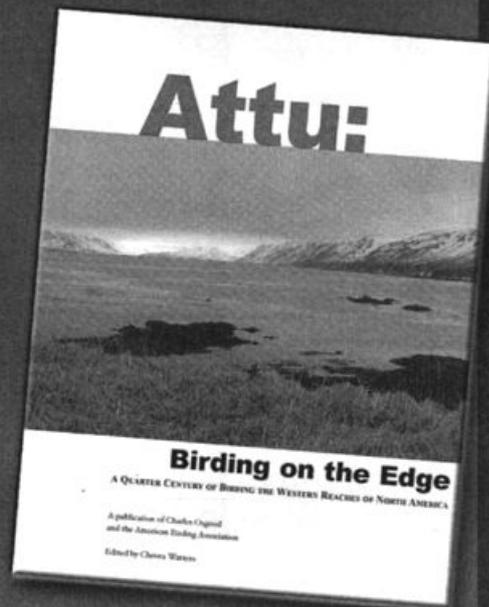
Contributors and observers: A.B.O. (Alaska Bird Observatory; N. DeWitt et al.), B. Alger, J. B. Allen, R. Armstrong, T. Barber, A. M. Benson, G. Bieber, L. Cole, L. Craig, J. Dearborn, L. DeCicco, D. F. Delap, B. Dinneford, R. Dodelson, N. Drumheller, R. M. Fowler, R. Fritz, D. D. Gibson, R. E. Gill, S. Golodof, R. J. Gordon, T. L. Goucher, H. Griese, S. C. Heintz, P. Hunt, L. Johnson, M. Kilcher, J. F. Koerner, J. Levison, R. Lowell, M., I. R. & R. A. MacIntosh, R. Meyers, R. Nelson, L. J. Oakley, B. Paige, A. Palmer, A. W. Piston, D. Porter, P. Pourchot, B. Pyle, H. & M. Renner, D. Rudis, D. Salesky, J. Sauer, S. Savage, R. L. Scher, M. A. Schultz, W. Schuster, M. Schwan, N. Senner, S. Senner, D. Shaw, J. Sinclair, D. W. Sonneborn, S. Studebaker, P. Suchanek, A. Swingley, M. E. Tedin, T. Tobish, P. Vanselow, G. Van Vliet, M. L. Ward, R. Winckler, M. A. Wood, K. Zervos, S. Zimmerman. ☺

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