

Some combination of El Niño-related conditions and their subsequent impact on the Aleutian Low in the Bering Sea/North Pacific interface produced a relatively storm-free spring season across Alaska. High pressure and a weak snowmelt dominated the Region in early spring. A few anticyclones did track northwest across the western Aleutians and into the northern Bering Sea in the second half of May. The already mild weather patterns from preceding winter months simply continued into May.

With few exceptions, essentially all northbound migrant forms were at or near their earliest local arrival dates. Due to the lack of large storms, shorebird concentrations never developed. This season's Asiatic element came almost exclusively from the Bering Sea, the Pribilofs and Gambell, as no one was in the field in the Aleutians until the end of the period. Even without an Aleutian report and with mild conditions, and perhaps because of excellent coverage and timely visits to hard-to-reach locales (Bering Sea pack-ice edge, Annette Island, pre-bird tour dates at Gambell), spring 2003 was exceptional, with plenty of overshoots, early date highlights, and above-average numbers of rarer species. Unfortunately, as has been the case for years, documentation and timely reports of rarer species is inconsistent—I receive too many second-hand reports, or simple lists, with little or weak follow-up substantiation. Although such information is deposited in the University of Alaska Museum, it will not be published herein without documentation.

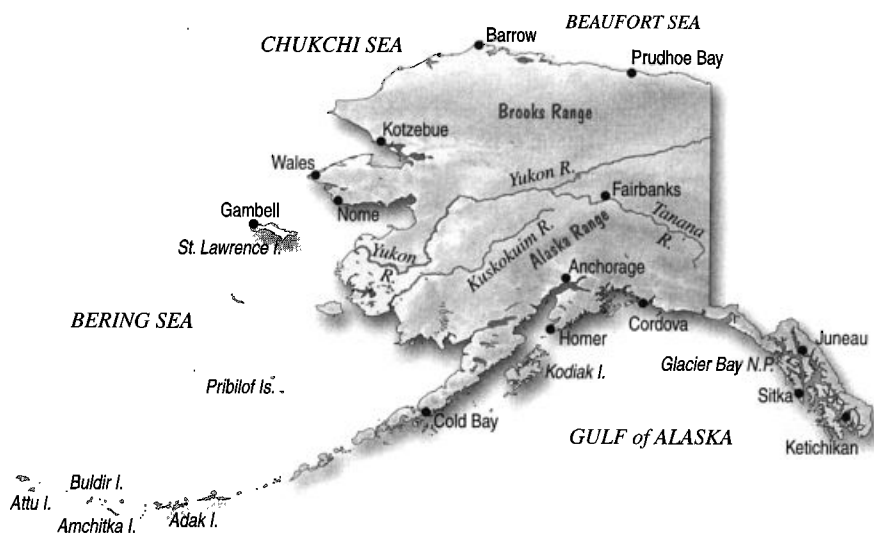
Abbreviations: A.B.O. (Alaska Bird Observatory); North Gulf (North Gulf of Alaska); P.W.S. (Prince William Sound); S.E. (South-east Alaska); U.C.I. (Upper Cook Inlet). Referenced details (+), specimens (*), photographs (ph.), digital photographs (dph.), and videotape (vt.) are on file at the University of Alaska Museum. Italicized place names denote especially unusual locations for the noted species.

LOONS THROUGH HAWKS

Arctic Loon numbers were down in the N. Bering Sea, with mainly sporadic singles found at Gambell from late May. Better access and exploration of outer coast sections in S.E. produced a good concentration of 222 northbound Pacific Loons off Ketchikan in Vallenar Bay 10 May (AWP). The season's only Pied-billed Grebe sighting was of a pair in breeding habitat on Annette I. 14 May (AWP, SCH, TG), where a pair has nested previously. A large flock of 635 Western Grebes was concentrated at the entrance to Carroll Inlet near Ketchikan 11 Apr, a new high maximum for the Ketchikan area.

MacIntosh's late Mar Bering Sea ice cruise produced the usual interesting reports from

Alaska



that ephemeral ecotone, including at least 2 Laysan Albatrosses 24–27 Mar, both se. and nw. of St. Paul I. Following the winter report from Ketchikan, Brown Pelican has been added to the Alaska List. At least 2 Brown Pelicans reached the s. end of the Region, with an imm. photographed in Clarence Strait 23 May (dph. KT, *vide* SCH) and an ad. documented n. of Ketchikan 24–28 May (+, ph. SCH). Still less than annual in the Region, an American Bittern was described from Juneau 18 Apr (RJG), record early by nearly a month and the Region's first in several years. Also sporadic, and then mainly in the S.E., a Great Egret was at Juneau 7–11 May (GB et al.), the Region's 13th and the 5th for Juneau.

Waterfowl highlights were few. A season-high 13+ Eurasian Wigeons were at Kodiak 12 Apr (RAM), a local new high count. Very early and widespread Blue-winged Teal were noted in S.E., with the earliest a single at Juneau 14 Apr (DM); offshore finds were at Sitka, one on 26 Apr (MLW, MET) and 4 at Annette I. 30 Apr (AWP, SCH). Two single Cinnamon Teal were at Juneau 2 & 17 May (PS, GVV), and another was at Kodiak 24 May, where accidental (SS, ph. RAM). A female Redhead was a local first among 19 Ring-necked Ducks at Annette I. 30 Apr (AWP, SCH); 2 Ring-neckeds that likely wintered were at Dutch Harbor 6 Apr (RAM). Extralimital Tufted Ducks were at Dutch Harbor 22 Mar (ph. RAM) and Kodiak 20 Apr (ph. RAM). A winter group of 7 Lesser Scaup 22 Mar–6 Apr was also rare at Dutch Harbor, where they were discovered in win-

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ter (RAM). Casual from S.E., a drake Steller's Eider near Ketchikan was the 2nd record there 10–15 May (ph. AWP).

Two Northern Goshawks in riparian woods along the Pilgram R. e. of Nome 30 May were likely the pair found at an active nest at Pilgram Hot Springs 1 Jun (DH, V.E.N.T.). Goshawks are casual beyond the taiga at the base of the Seward Pen., where there are few documented nests. The traditional mid-Apr Sheep Mt. hawkwatch, where mountains squeeze southbound raptors out of the Interior, produced an interesting mix of Red-tailed Hawk phases, including 75 "classic" *harlani*, 4+ rare light-morph *harlani*, 10 standard *calurus*, and another 6+ various rufous-morph *calurus* (RD); most nesting birds s. of here are *harlani*. Juneau-area birders documented a *krideri* Red-tailed there 18 Apr (GVV), a 2nd local record.

STILT THROUGH ALCIDS

What was certainly one of the Region's slowest shorebird spring migrations ever was nevertheless ushered in with a bang by Alaska's 2nd Black-winged Stilt, which

appeared at St. George I. in the Pribilofs 15 May (CE, *U.S.F.W.S.). This follows 20 years after the first late-May find from the W. Aleutians. Otherwise the few shorebird standouts came mostly from the Bering Sea shore and included: early and easterly Pacific Golden-Plovers making landfall at Gustavus, with 3 on 2 May (ND, PV), and farther south at Annette I., a single there 14 May (AWP, SCH, TG); up to 3 Mongolian Plovers in the Gambell middens 21–29 May (BB, V.E.N.T., WINGS); single Common Greenshanks at St. Paul I. 20–22 May (ST. PAUL) and Gambell 2 Jun (WINGS), where both are irregular; a fair spread of Common Sandpipers from the Bering Sea, with at least 2+ at Gambell 25 May–6 Jun (BB, V.E.N.T., WINGS) and another s. at St. Paul I. 27 May (ST. PAUL); an obvious successfully wintering Spotted Sandpiper in Juneau 2–5 Mar (BA, DM, RJG), perhaps the Region's first "true" winter record; 2 different Great Knots from their most consistent sites, at Gambell 30 May (WILDERNESS, WINGS, dph. GHR) and Safety Lagoon out of Nome 30–31 May (*vide* V.E.N.T., DWS); and a Ruff, casual in S.E., at Annette I. 14 May (ph. AWP, ph. SCH, TG). The season's only Wilson's Phalarope reached Juneau 21 May (RJG), within the same time frame as virtually all of S.E.'s records. Certainly a big percentage of Alaska's Red-necked Phalaropes concentrated near Clarence Strait between Annette I. and Ketchikan 30 Apr, where the Ketchikan crew cautiously estimated 35,000 from the ferry (SCH, AWP). This is one of the Region's largest ever spring tallies.

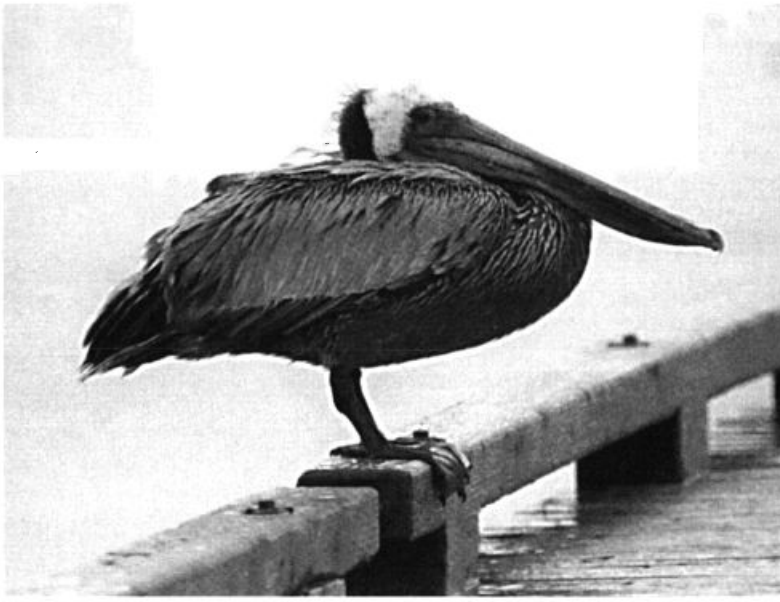
It was a stretch to glean significant gull records from this spring's reports. An imm. *kamtschatschensis* Mew Gull was described from the Gambell seawatch 31 May (WINGS), one of few for St. Lawrence I. for any season. Heintz gave a nice accounting of California Gull's spring entrance to the Region. Considered typical was a single 21 Mar arrival at Ketchikan, followed by small groups thereafter. Less understood is California's distribution offshore, so a group of 80+ ads. off Prince of Wales I. 2 May and another 16 to the n. in Kashevarof Passage 4 May were more interesting and indicative of the northerly flow. None were noted n. of there in the next few days (SCH). MacIn-

tosh substantiated at least 3 Thayer's Gulls in the Dutch Harbor area 6–7 Apr (†, ph. RAM), where they are casual and may have wintered. Although reasonably well documented as an icepack-edge winter visitor, it's always exciting to get Ivory Gull reports

counts submitted for these pre-breeding aggregations from the south.

DOVES THROUGH THRUSHES

After a decade of occasional spring reports, another Mourning Dove appeared this season, at Ketchikan 25–30 Apr (JFK), a local 2nd in spring. The bulk of the Region's records come in fall. Of the few Barred Owl reports from s. S.E., a single calling bird offshore at Annette I. 30 Apr (AWP, SCH) was most unusual and an island first. Perhaps 2 Northern Pygmy-Owls were calling in the Juneau area 2–21 Mar (GVV) but not thereafter, and these were probably migrants or wintering birds. Given the mild conditions, it was not surprising that the 21 Mar Rufous Hummingbird arrival date from Ketchikan probably set a new record for the Region (AP). Very near the early end of the Region's arrival dates were



After several unsubstantiated reports of the species in Alaska in 2002, two Brown Pelicans reached the northernmost U. S. state this spring, with this adult documented north of Ketchikan 24–28 May (here 25 May) 2003. Photograph by Steve Heintz.

from the s. limits of sea ice. At least 4 were found at the ice limits some 93 km n. of St. Paul 25 Mar (RAM). This season's earliest Caspian Tern, and a new early record for the Ketchikan area, was a single offshore at Annette I. 30 Apr (AWP, SCH). No others

at least 3 singing Cassin's Vireos in the Juneau area 27–30 May, where this species has been annual for the past few years. Early coverage at Gambell was surprisingly productive: at least one Horned Lark was in the middens 4–8 May (BB), the earliest possibly by a month and one of the very few spring St. Lawrence I. reports. Most spring arrivals barely reach the n. half of the Region by early May.

Remarkable as the Bering Sea's 5th record was a mottled female Purple Martin at St. Paul I. 5 Jun (V.E.N.T., ST. PAUL, †DL), one of few in the Region over the last 20 years, of this casual late-spring overshoot. Three different male Siberian Rubythroats excited the Gambell bird tours 28 May–5 Jun+ (WINGS, dph. GHR, V.E.N.T., WILDERNESS), where typically singles have been sporadic since the early 1980s, when this skulker came to be known as an annual component of the W. Aleutian Asian spring avifauna. An imm. Stonechat surfaced briefly on the Gambell hillside 31 May (KR, *vide* WINGS, dph. GHR) and was quickly followed by an alternate-plumaged male 3 Jun (WINGS). These represent St. Lawrence I.'s 4th and 5th spring records for this accidental migrant, which has reached Alaska's periphery only seven times previously. The Ketchikan area's first Mountain Bluebird, considered long overdue, was a female in



This Mongolian Plover (also known as Lesser Sand Plover) was one of three present at Gambell 27–29 May 2003. Photograph by Gary H. Rosenberg.

Ωwere reported.

Eleven Dovekies on the cliffs at Gambell 29 May was one of that colony's biggest counts (LC) of this rare and very local Bering Sea breeder. The season's best Marbled Murrelet pre-nesting staging concentration was a tally of 1500 n. of Juneau 2 Mar (GVV). There are still few such inshore

subalpine habitat near the White R. valley 13 Apr (ph. AWP). The S.E. peak otherwise reached an average 5 at the productive Pt. Bridget n. of Juneau 14 Apr (PS). The same Pt. Bridget site produced an amazing group of 9 Townsend's Solitaires 25 Apr (PS), when singles, especially in S.E., are typically noted in passage. Eyebrowed Thrushes made perhaps their strongest ever push into the Bering Sea, where they are casual away from the W. Aleutians, arriving after a storm surge from the w., with a male reported from Gambell 22 May (BB) the first, followed by 2 at St. Paul I. 24 May (ST. PAUL). Subsequent searches produced another 4+ at Gambell, 2 each on 26–29 May and 31 May–5 Jun (LC, WINGS, dph. GHR, V.E.N.T.), and a peak of 9 from St. Paul I. sites 26 May (ST. PAUL). Dusky Thrush made a first-ever appearance to St. Paul I. with the same late May storm 24 May (ST. PAUL), where locals also submitted a report of a nominate-form Dusky Thrush (known as *Naumann's Thrush* in Eurasia) present the following two days (ST. PAUL, †DL). Surprising early and extralimital Varied Thrushes reached peripheral sites this spring, at Gambell, where up to 3 looked uncomfortable 1–4 May (BB), and on the North Slope near Prudhoe Bay 5 May (JH). Another 2 Varieds found Gambell 27–31 May and 2 Jun (HIGH LONESOME, WINGS). Rounding out Gambell's spring highlights were 2 Olive-backed Pipits in the middens 4–5 Jun (WINGS, dph. GHR). Another single was submitted from St. Paul I. 30–31 May (ST. PAUL, †DL). Olive-backed remain casual in the Bering Sea away from the W. Aleutians, with most records from late spring.

WARBLERS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

Warblers made their typical understated entry into the Region this spring, with the only notable reports being of male Yellow-rumpeds offshore in the Bering Sea at St. Paul I. 19 May (ST. PAUL) and Gambell 5 Jun (HIGH LONESOME); the species is casual in spring here. Juneau's winter season Spotted Towhee remained at its favorite feeder until 10 Apr (PS), when it sang for the first time and immediately departed. An overshooting, early Fox Sparrow ventured offshore to Gambell 1 May (BB), where there are few prior spring records, and where at least three

species have been detected historically, mostly in fall. A lone Rustic Bunting, the season's sole report, was submitted from St. Paul I. 31 May (ST. PAUL). With unusually early cov-



An Eyebrowed Thrush photographed at Gambell, Alaska 30 May 2003 was one of at least four found there this spring. Photograph by Gary H. Rosenberg.

erage at Gambell, from late Apr on, came a decent summary of the McKay's Bunting "movement," probably from St. Lawrence I. winter sites. The spring peak reached 25 birds in small groups there 30 Apr (BB), nearly a month in advance of the bird tours' dates, which usually produce a few singles at best in most years. Ketchikan's wintering Western Meadowlark departed that site by



At least one Common Sandpiper was present each day 27 May (here, at the "boatyard") through 6 June 2003 at Gambell, Alaska, where birding tour participants saw them well again this spring. Photograph by Luke Cole.

27 Apr (SCH). The Region's earliest-ever Yellow-headed Blackbird—by nearly a month—came to a Ketchikan feeder 1–7 May (JFK, AWP, ph. SCH), that area's first record. There are at least four previous S.E. records from the Jun–Aug period. Bram-

blings made perhaps their best showing into the Bering Sea with the same storm noted earlier. Three together at crab-pot stacks at St. Paul I. were first arrivals 24 May (ST. PAUL), whereafter peak counts reached an unprecedented 36 at St. Paul 27 May (ST. PAUL) and 8 from farther n. at Gambell 3 Jun (WINGS, dph. GHR et al.).

Imm. Red Crossbills were noted near record-early for Kodiak I. on 20 Mar (SB), while the late-winter surge of Reds continued into S.C., with regular Anchorage observations noted after late Apr (m. ob.). Pine Siskins appeared to be joined, as a secondary irruptive component, with the above Red Crossbills, so it was not unusual to have singles out into the Bering Sea, at St. Paul I. 29 May (ST. PAUL) and Gambell 3 Jun (WINGS et al.). Hawfinches reached St. Paul I. late in the season, with a single 26 May followed by at least 5 around the village on the 29th, and 3 still in the area to 31 May (ST. PAUL).

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