

Patagonia L. and along the S.P.R. s. of Hwy. 90. Common Yellowthroats were found at higher elevation and farther n. than usual during the late fall and winter; 2 were at Willow L. 11 Nov–6 Jan (CST), one was at Lynx Cr. 25 Nov–21 Dec (W. Anderson), and up to 3 were at Watson L. 6 Jan (CST). Scattered Wilson's Warblers were reported later than usual into Dec, with one exceptionally late at Pena Blanca L. 29 Jan (B. Hilsenhoff). One of the best finds of the winter was a Red-faced Warbler in Humboldt Canyon in the Patagonia Mts. 24 Dec+ (J. Stewart, MB); there are very few U.S. winter records. A Rufous-capped Warbler discovered in upper Sycamore Canyon, Santa Cruz 6 Dec+ (D. Jones, KK; ph. DS) provided the first relatively accessible individual in the state since the species disappeared from French Joe Canyon.

A Western Tanager, casual in the state in winter, was at B.T.A. 26 Dec–19 Feb (G. Burgess et al.). Green-tailed Towhees were found farther n. than usual, with several reports from the Prescott area Nov–Dec (*vide* CST). A Field Sparrow reported from Springerville 12 Feb (†H. & C. Fellows) is under review by the A.B.C. and would represent only a 7th Arizona record if accepted. A Lark Sparrow at Watson L. 21 Dec (ph. S. Burk) was n. of its usual winter range in the

state. A Grasshopper Sparrow at Paloma Ranch 28 Jan–26 Feb (TC) was in an odd habitat; this species is seldom seen away from the grasslands in the se. portion of the state, where it is resident. At least 20 Fox Sparrows were found statewide in the expected ratio (about 75% *schistacea* from the Rocky Mts. and 25% *zaboria* or *iliaca*). No fewer than 20 Swamp, 20 White-throated, 8 Harris's, and 5 Golden-crowned Sparrows were reported this winter, all above normal counts. Up to 2 McCown's Longspurs were present at A.V.S.T.P. 8 Dec–20 Jan (DS, MP), w. of the species' normal winter range in the state. Two Lapland Longspurs, still only casual in the state, were at Reservation Tank 43 km e. of Flagstaff 4 Feb+ (J. Prather et al.).

Both casual in the state in winter, an imm. male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was in Scheelite Canyon 1 Jan (SH) and a female Black-headed Grosbeak was reported from Portal 5 Feb (M. Willys, *vide* DJ). A male Indigo Bunting was at Banning Cr. in the Mule Mts. 20 Jan (PL); there are very few mid-winter reports from Arizona. A female Orchard Oriole wintered in an Ahwatukee yard for a 4th consecutive year 15 Nov+, and a male appeared there 15 Feb+ (G. & S. Barnes). Another male was in a Queen Creek yard 22–26 Dec (ph. D. Sejkora), and yet another male reappeared in

a Tucson yard 18 Feb+ (N. Markowitz, J. Ogdan et al.). Casual in winter, female-plumaged Hooded Orioles were at Ahwatukee 1 Dec+ (G. & S. Barnes) and at Yuma 14 Dec (HD). The Streak-backed Oriole found during the fall at G.W.R. remained until 22 Mar; another was located along Sonoita Cr. near Patagonia 18 Dec (ph. GHR, DS), with the same individual being seen sporadically at different locations upstream until 22 Jan (T. Watkins, MB et al.), only a 2nd Santa Cruz record.

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With mild conditions lingering from a late fall season and a slow snow-pack deposition across most of the Region, winter 2005–2006 was nearly a carbon copy of the previous winter. Indeed, because of a fairly stable Aleutian Low coupled with sporadic freeze-up conditions and moist, northerly upper-atmosphere flows, at

least the coastal sections of the southern half of the state continued to produce above-average numbers of late migrants and semi-hardy species. Christmas Bird Counts were at or slightly above long-term averages for species totals and highlights, and waterbirds, as is typical, dominated accounts of noteworthy species. Many birds previously considered rare and/or irregular in

Alaska a decade ago are now, because of better coverage and experiences of local residents, being found annually and in many cases are widespread, at least on the coastal periphery.

Abbreviation: North Gulf (North Gulf of Alaska). Referenced documentation is on file at the University of Alaska Museum. *Italicized place names or dates* denote especially unusual locations or dates for the noted species.

WATERFOWL THROUGH RAPTORS

Although there are occasional reports of Snow Goose into early Dec, an imm. around Juneau 14 Dec–5 Feb (GVV, DM) was unique and one of the Region's few "true" winter reports. Two Brant were very late and rare at Cordova 17 Dec–16 Jan (AL), especially given that most fall migrants bypass the North Gulf; a few, usually singles, winter in milder North Gulf sites. Unusual and late Cackling Geese were reported from Kodiak, with a single present through 18 Dec (ph. RAM), and the Juneau area, with 2 present 14 Dec–15 Jan (GVV). Dabbling ducks covered North Gulf habitats in near-record numbers, which diminished only slightly through the season. Examples of unprecedented winter tallies included 1235 Gadwalls around Kodiak 31 Dec (SS), 638 American Wigeons and 3988 Mallards on the Juneau C.B.C. 17 Dec, 71 Northern Pintail in Gustavus 17 Feb (BP), and 169 Green-winged Teal in Juneau 17 Dec (all *vide* GVV, PS). Collectively, these probably represent the highest counts of "regular" wintering dabblers for the North Gulf subregion. No-

table diving duck reports included 4 Ring-necked Ducks in Gustavus 20 Feb (BP), where they are not annual in winter, at least 9 in Ketchikan 13 Dec (TLG), and another 2 offshore at Metlakalta 18 Feb (AWP, SCH, DWS, AL, BD); an exceptional Southeast tally of 24 Lesser Scaup in Juneau 17+ Dec (*fide* GVV, PS); and a single female Hooded Merganser in Cordova 6 Jan (AL), plus 2 males out in the Gulf at Kodiak 16 Feb (ph. LM). Tufted Ducks were certainly in evidence, with a male in Cordova Oct–6 Jan (AL) and at least 3 on Kodiak lakes 31 Jan–19 Feb (ph. RAM, JBA). Both of these relatively mild coastal sites have a history of harboring winter Tufteds, at least sporadically.

A one-day count of 46 Pacific Loons near Gustavus was noteworthy 18 Feb (BP). The season's only Pied-billed Grebe report was of 2 at Ketchikan's Ward L. 10 Dec+ (ph. SCH, AWP). Only one Brandt's Cormorant was located in the Ketchikan area, where it was seen sporadically all season (ph. AWP, SCH). At the edge of what has become known to be the w. limit of its winter range were 12+ Great Blue Herons in the Kodiak–Old Harbor area through the period (*fide* RAM). Raptor highlights include 2 Sharp-shinned Hawks in Gustavus 8 Jan–3 Feb (ND, PV, BP) and at least 6 in the Ketchikan area all season (AWP, SCH) and a few northerly Merlins in Anchorage through 3 Feb (TT) and Palmer 6 Feb (AL). At least 4 Red-tailed Hawks in the Ketchikan area, where singles are only occasional in winter, were noted 1 Jan–27 Feb (ph. SCH, AWP), a high winter tally; the later birds were considered northbound migrants, but one 27 Feb was a well-documented light-morph Harlan's Hawk, previously unsubstantiated in the state in winter. Moreover, there are few substantiated records of *harlani* from any season in Southeast. An imm. Golden Eagle was a rare coastal winter find in Juneau 16–28 Feb (BD, AL, DWS, ph. MS et al.).

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH ALCIDS

Significantly late but within the range of recent late fall reports was a single Black-bellied Plover in Gustavus 2 Dec (ND). Killdeer went unreported from all coastal sites except for the Juneau area, which produced extremely high counts of 29 on N. Douglas I. 20–27 Feb (PS) and 11 near Salmon Creek 25 Feb (GVV). Juneau's habitats supported up to 50 through the season, which continues a recent trend of unusually high numbers there. Two

different mid-season Greater Yellowlegs showed up in the Gustavus area, 1 Dec–5 Feb and 19 Dec (ND, BP, PV). Any *Tringa* after early Dec is unprecedented. Gustavus also had above-average peaks of 500 Sanderlings and 3000 Dunlins 19 Feb (BP). Two banded Dunlins from that group had been captured from a breeding population on the Yukon Delta near the Tutakoke R. in 2004 and 2005. The Upper Cook Inlet wintering population of Rock Sandpipers (nominated subspecies) shifted to the e. side of the Inlet, probably in



This female Brewer's Blackbird in Gustavus, Alaska 11 through (here) 17 February 2006 represented the state's most northerly winter record. Photograph by Nat Drumheller.

response to the mid-Dec cold snap; upwards of 10,000 birds remained in the Kasilof–Kenai Flats through the period, in areas where few had ever been found previously (TE, REG). Unprecedented as a winter species was a lone Long-billed Dowitcher in the Gustavus area 7 Dec–18 Feb (BP, ND); most are gone from the North Gulf by mid-Oct. Of the handful of winter Wilson's Snipe observations, a tally of 7 in the Ketchikan area 15 Jan (AWP, SCH) set a local mid-winter record and one of the Region's high counts after Dec.

Larid highlights were surprisingly few after late migrants noted from Dec, including an ad. California Gull at Juneau that remained through late Feb (RJG), an ad. Slaty-backed Gull in the Homer Spit flocks late Dec–8 Jan (NH, AL, BD), and several ad. and first-winter Thayer's Gulls area through the period in the Kodiak area (ph. RAM), where they are not annual. The season's only notable Marbled Murrelet concentrations came from the Ketchikan environs, with a local peak of 2000 estimated 12 Feb at Mountain Pt. (AWP, SCH, TLG). Cassin's Auklets also made a rare showing in the same area, where they are generally absent in winter, with counts of 32 from Clover Passage 14 Jan (AWP) and another 3

near Pt. Higgins as late as 20 Feb (AWP, SCH). Most Cassin's presumably winter well offshore of the Alexander Archipelago. Crested Auklets appeared well inshore in the North Gulf, both at Kodiak, where numbers are often detected, and into Resurrection Bay, where they are casual in winter. Small numbers, 5–10, were described from off the Seward docks 14–15 Feb (CG), and up to 30 were noted in the vicinity through the period. At Kodiak, MacIntosh noted that although Cresteds can be abundant offshore and at several traditional sites in winter, this year's observations included huge flocks occupying inshore waters, with a maximum count of 14,433 from the Narrow Cape area 31 Dec and later (RAM).

OWLS THROUGH PIPITS

Following trends of the past few years, owls made news early and across the Region's s. half. Again, Great Gray and Boreal Owls were vocalizing during warming trends from the Tanana R. Flats s. of Fairbanks in Jan–Feb (*fide* Alaska B.O.). Apart from Ketchikan's regulars, the season's only Western Screech-Owl was one calling 19 Feb in the Gustavus area (ND), where they have been nearly regular the past few years. Snowy Owl sightings were above average at sites where they

are not annual after fall migration, including at least 5 in the Gustavus flats 4 Dec–8 Feb (ND, BP, PV), several of which likely perished; another specimen from Annette I. off Ketchikan from 1 Dec (*fide* SCH); a single in Petersburg 15 Dec+ (RL); and one from Kodiak 12 Dec (HH). Northern Hawk Owls are always rare out onto the Southeast coast, so singles at Gustavus 28 Dec–7 Jan (KW, ND) and in Juneau 7 Dec+ (EB, JJ) were special. Following what was considered a record fall season for Northern Pygmy-Owls in Southeast, at least 4 remained in the Ketchikan area through the period (AWP, SCH), up to 3 were located around Juneau 3 Dec–14 Feb (GVV, PR, MS, PS), and maybe 3 others were documented in Gustavus 20 Dec–17 Feb (ND). Prior to about 2000, this mainly winter visitor had been confined to coastal Southeast sites from Juneau southward, with an occasional summer report from the Southeast mainland watersheds. Winter reports are now more widespread and even annual along several Southeast rivers, especially in the Chilkat Valley. Two Short-eared Owls were unusual for Gustavus 1 Dec–5 Feb (ND, BP, PV), and 2 were on the Kodiak flats 1 Dec–8 Feb (RAM, ND, JD, MM, IB). Furnishing one of few local

reports of Northern Saw-whet Owl after Dec, one around Anchorage 30 Dec–19 Jan (*fide* SS) was unusual.

Northern Flickers were more in evidence this winter compared to long-term averages, especially in the Ketchikan area, where a count of 25 on the C.B.C. 17 Dec (*fide* AWP) was representative of their presence through the season. Scattered singles were reported from other coastal sites. Following a very normal fall passage, Northern Shrike reports were few except for a good count of 6 wintering at Kodiak through at least 31 Dec (RAM). Few observers mentioned Golden-crowned Kinglets, even within their regular winter ranges and habitats, and there were no reports from the ephemeral habitats along the North Gulf or from the Boreal/Coastal Forest interface in Cook Inlet or Prince William Sound. Anecdotally at least, it seems this species has been retreating out of these ephemeral wintering areas for the 10 years or so.

This winter's Townsend's Solitaire reports again came from Upper Cook Inlet, with singles located in Bird Creek 26 Dec (TT) and in Anchorage 3–4 Feb (*fide* SS). As has been the case for years, the presence of solitaires in the Region in winter is attributable to the widespread availability of exotic plantings of fruit-bearing landscape plants in the greater Anchorage area; sheltered local concentrations of Mountain Ash in Turnagain Arm and in Homer also support frugivores, especially in low snowpack years. The season's latest Hermit Thrush was a single in Gustavus 17–21 Dec (ND). American Robins were widespread in slightly elevated numbers led by a peak count of 115 from the Ketchikan C.B.C. 17 Dec (*fide* AWP). Probably the most northerly winter record for the continent, the waif **White Wagtail**, first located in Nov in Ketchikan, remained in disturbed edges of gravel parking lots there through the period (ph. SCH, AWP). American Pipits made a very strong showing this winter, with a record 21+ present in Ketchikan all season (SCH, AWP), including maximum day counts of 8 each from Ketchikan 15 Jan and Annette I. 18 Feb (SCH, AWP, DWS, AL, BD) and singles from Juneau 13 Feb (BA, PS) and Kodiak 31 Dec (RAM). These likely represent the most ever reported from a winter season.

About average in the winter warbler trend for the past decade were an Orange-crowned Warbler in Juneau 12 Dec–5 Jan (ph. MS, GVV, RJG) and single Yellow-rumped Warblers from Annette I. 18 Feb (SCH, AWP, DWS, AL, BD) and from well n. at Trapper's Creek Dec–20 Feb (*fide* DP): the latter represents the Region's northernmost winter record of any parulid. Semi-hardy sparrows

were found in scattered coastal sites, often at feeders, in numbers slightly above long-term averages. Always rare anywhere in the Region after Nov, a Savannah Sparrow wintered in the Ketchikan area 31 Dec–9 Feb (AWP, SCH), a 2nd local winter find. A single Lincoln's Sparrow offshore in Southeast on Annette I. 18 Feb (AWP, SCH, DWS, AL, BD), and about 4 in the Kodiak area all season (RAM), was a normal winter tally. One of the fall season's **Swamp Sparrows** lingered at a Juneau feeder through 20 Dec (PS); although the species is now annual in Southeast in fall, there are still few mid-winter records. Three White-throated Sparrows at Homer late Dec–8 Jan (*fide* AL, BD), Juneau Dec–25 Feb (GVV), and Ketchikan 17 Dec+ (SCH) made an average season for the species, which is rare but regular in fall and winter at coastal sites. A Harris's Sparrow in Homer late Dec–8 Jan (*fide* AL) provided the only report of the species, which was very rare but nearly annual at feeders in Southeast for a long stretch of winter seasons in the 1970s and 1980s but not since. White-crowned Sparrow reports of note included one n. of the Alaska Range at a Fairbanks feeder 5 Dec–31 Jan (*fide* Alaska B.O.) and 5 on Annette I. 18 Feb (AWP, SCH, DWS, AL, BD). Two Snow Buntings found on one day in Fairbanks 3 Jan (Alaska B.O.) were not without precedent for midwinter but certainly represented a rare find from the Interior. McKay's Buntings staged a mini-in-cursion s. and e. of their normal Bering Sea coast winter range, with 2 at Kodiak 17–28 Feb (ph. RAM), where they are occasional, and 2 n. to Cook Inlet near Kenai 25–28 Feb (*fide* TE). These are the northernmost McKay's for Cook Inlet.

Red-winged Blackbirds are casual in winter, usually in Dec as late migrants, so a male in Anchorage 30 Jan–8 Feb (*fide* SS) and up to 9 in the Juneau area 11–23 Feb (GVV, LE) were significant mid-winter records. On the heels of local fall reports, a **Western Meadowlark** made a winter living on some ball-fields near Ketchikan 4 Dec–23 Feb (ph. SCH, AWP), a 6th Ketchikan record. Single Brewer's Blackbirds in Gustavus 11–17 Feb (ph. ND, PV) and Ketchikan Oct–18 Feb (ph. SCH, AWP) made an average winter tally, at least for recent years; the Gustavus bird represents the Region's northernmost in winter. The Ketchikan area's fall **Common Grackle** remained at its favored feeder through 17 Feb (SCH, AWP). There are few Alaska winter reports of this generally casual visitor.

Two Bramblings that materialized in Kodiak late in the fall remained at a local feeder through Feb (*fide* RAM), the season's only report. Wandering Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches

were presumably pushed out of coastal or alpine winter niches into Anchorage neighborhoods, one each from 30 Jan–8 Feb and 6 Feb (SS). Rosy-finches are found occasionally away from more traditional North Gulf Coast winter sites and into Upper Cook Inlet. One Purple Finch in Juneau (LE, BW) and a female n. to Cordova, both 17 Dec (AL et al.), were likely late migrants and furnished the season's only reports; it is surprising that this species is not more widely found in fall and winter, given its range and distribution over the Coast Range and n. into w. British Columbia and sw. Yukon Territory. Only Gustavus observers noted an abundance of the conifer cone crop, with an associated late-Dec incursion of White-winged Crossbills. Several nests with young were found there in Feb (ND). Few to none were reported elsewhere in the entire Region. For the first time ever, late-winter population increases of Common Redpolls, which typically bring massive numbers of birds across much of the Region by mid-Feb, never materialized. Most locations had few to no redpolls, save for an occasional flyby pair, whereas hundreds to thousands are typically the norm. Redpoll wanderings have been shown via band returns to include circumpolar trips to and from Alaska and northern sections of the Palearctic.

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