

## **SUMMARY OF SOUTHEAST ALASKA BIRD OBSERVATIONS: *WINTER SEASON—December 2010 to February 2011***

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This report summarizes bird sightings from Southeast Alaska for the winter season, which covered December 2010 to February 2011, and is intended to provide interesting observations for inclusion in an Alaska-wide column written by Thede Tobish for the journal *North American Birds* (published by the American Birding Association <http://www.aba.org/>). We would like to thank all of the people that directly sent us observations, shared their photographs, and answered our inquiries about their sightings, all of whom are cited below. We received extensive reports from Nat Drumheller (Gustavus), and Matt Goff (Sitka) and benefited from access to sightings entered into eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) which we've incorporated into this report (nearly all of the information from the Juneau area was obtained from eBird). We also forwarded all the notes and photographs that we received to Thede as well.

Winter 2010–2011 was pretty quiet and some birders, specifically, two Ketchikan birders, never got their mojo working. Still, some interesting birds were documented—very rare winter records of Mourning Dove, Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, Tufted Puffin, Horned Puffin, and Cedar Waxwing; a Wood Duck at Petersburg and a Western Meadowlark at Ketchikan; more Anna's Hummingbirds, Swamp Sparrows, and White-throated Sparrows than average; more Eurasian Collared-Doves than ever. The shocker of the winter was easily the male House Sparrow found at Juneau in February.

Gus van Vliet described high concentrations of Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills in the Juneau area as the “*signal event*” of winter 2011, and Nat Drumheller was similarly impressed with the high abundance of Pine Siskins and White-winged Crossbills in the Gustavus area—large crops of Sitka spruce and hemlock cones attracted finches to both areas.

### **WEATHER INFORMATION:**

Juneau: December: colder than average (24 days below freezing) and precipitation below average but snow average 20.6 in. (20.7 in. average). January: warmer than average and precipitation above average 5.26 in. (4.81 in. average); snow well below average 15.5 in. (28.9 in. average). February: colder than average and precipitation above average 5.65 in. (4.02 in. average); snow well above average 30.2 in. (17.8 in. average).

Annette Island: December: slightly warmer than average and precipitation well below average 6.03 in. (11.39 in. average); below average snow. January: slightly warmer than average and precipitation about average 10.24 in. (9.67 in. average); snow well below average. February: colder and drier than average; precipitation 5.46 in. (8.05 in. average) and snow just below average. Total precipitation for the winter was 75% of average.

**Names and Initials of observers cited in the text or who reported sightings:** Blain Anderson (BA), Nate Borsen (NB), Barry E. Bracken (BEB), Ernie DeBoer (ED), Melissa N. Cady (MNC), Bonnie H. Demerjian (BHD), Boris Dobrowolsky (BD), Nat K. Drumheller (NKD), Cameron D. Eckert (CDE), Cheryl A. Fultz (CAF), Matt R. Goff (MRG), Steven C. Heintz (SCH), Susan Hoyt (SH), Brad L. Hunter (BLH), Jerrold F. Koerner (JFK), Jim H. Lewis (JHL), Molly A. McCafferty (MAM), Deanna K. McPhail (DKM), Brian Merritt (BM), Janet Neilson (JN), Kim Ney (KN), Paul H. Norwood (PHN), Eleanor Oman (EO), Joseph A. Orsi (JAO), Kimber Owen (KO), Bruce B. Paige (BBP), Bill H. Pawuk (BHP), Andrew W. Piston (AWP), Lucy Pizzuto-Phillips (LPP), Kathy M. Ripley (KMR), Patty A. Rose (PAR), Laurie M. Ross (LMR), Mark W. Schwan (MWS), Jeffrey F. Sauer (JFS), Marieke D. Slovin (MDS), Mike Smith (MS), Greg P. Streveler (GPS), Dennis Strom (DS), Paul M. Suchanek (PMS), Marlys E. Tedin (MET), Kelly Tidwell (KT), Phoebe B. S. Vanselow (PBSV), Gus B. van Vliet (GBV), Marge L. Ward (MLW), Will T. Young (WTY).

## **SPECIES ACCOUNTS:**

**BRANT:** Three Brant at Gustavus 25 December 2010 were very late (MDS). The Brant is a casual or very rare winter visitant along the coast of Alaska east of the traditional wintering location at Izembek Lagoon on the Alaska Peninsula.

**WOOD DUCK:** A drake Wood Duck was found at Blind Slough, Mitkof Island, 18–25 December 2010 (BEB, BLH, BHP; Figure 1). This species has proven to be a rare, annual visitant in fall, winter, and spring over the past decade.

**EURASIAN WIGEON:** Two drake Eurasian Wigeon spent December 2010 at the Mendenhall Wetlands, near Juneau, one of which lingered to 10 January 2011 (PMS, PAR, NRH). Another Eurasian Wigeon was found at Sitka 20 February 2011 (MRG). This duck has been considered casual in Southeast Alaska during the winter (Kessel and Gibson 1978) but is likely a very rare winter visitant.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER:** A Northern Shoveler at Sitka 26 December 2010 was late (MRG; Figure 2). This species is very rare in Southeast Alaska during the winter (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

**CANVASBACK:** Two Canvasbacks were found at Bartlett Cove, near Gustavus, 15 December 2010 (NKD, PBSV). In the Juneau area, one Canvasback was found at the Mendenhall Wetlands 16 December 2010 (PMS), followed by two near DIPAC hatchery 21 December 2010 (PAR). Although this species has been considered casual during the winter in Southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978), it has been reported over the past four winters and is likely a very rare winter visitant.

**BLACK SCOTER:** Large numbers of Black Scoters were again found in the Gustavus area this winter, and the CBC total of 478 on 18 December 2010 established a new local high count (NKD, MDS).

**HYBRID WATERFOWL:** An adult male Common x Barrow's goldeneye at Juneau was present throughout the period for its 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive winter (PMS), and a male Hooded Merganser x goldeneye sp. also spent its 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive winter at Juneau (PMS, PAR).



Figure 1. Drake Wood Duck at Blind Slough, near Petersburg, 20 December 2010. *Photo by Barry E. Bracken*



Figure 2. Sitka hosted a Northern Shoveler 26 December 2010 and a Pied-billed Grebe 2 January 2011, both rare in winter in Southeast Alaska. *Photos by Matt R. Goff*

**HOODED MERGANSER:** Observers at both Gustavus and Sitka commented on the recent scarcity of Hooded Mergansers. One Hooded Merganser was found at Gustavus 19 February 2011, where the species has “become increasingly rare here in recent years” (NKD). Only one was found at Sitka 20 February 2011, where the species has been seldom seen over the last four winters (MRG).

COMMON MERGANSER: Although this well-named species is one of the most numerous and widespread wintering ducks in Southeast Alaska, much larger than average numbers wintered on the Ketchikan waterfront. The 1,685 Common Mergansers recorded on the Ketchikan CBC 18 December 2010 nearly doubled the previous local CBC total (fide AWP).

PIED-BILLED GREBE: A Pied-billed Grebe at Sitka 29 December 2010–2 January 2011 (BA; MRG; Figure 2) was the only one reported during the period. This grebe is a rare, regular winter visitant in southeast Alaska.

WESTERN GREBE: Single Western Grebes were found in northern Southeast Alaska, where rare, at Bartlett Cove, near Gustavus, 14 December 2010 and 3 January 2011 (NKD, JFS).

BRANDT'S CORMORANT: A few Brandt's Cormorants were found during the winter at Ketchikan, with a maximum one-day count of three on 9 January 2011 (m. obs.) being about typical for recent years.

NORTHERN HARRIER: A Northern Harrier at the Juneau golf course 7 December 2010 was late (GBV). This species is casual to very rare in Southeast Alaska after November.

RED-TAILED HAWK: Late Red-tailed Hawks were widely reported in Southeast with singles at Juneau 9 December 2010 (NRH), Gustavus 13 December 2010 (NKD), and Ketchikan 17–18 December 2010 (WTY). Another apparently wintered at Sitka (fide MRG). Several Red-tailed Hawks that appeared at Ketchikan in mid-to-late February (JHL, photo) may have been early migrants rather than wintering individuals.

GOLDEN EAGLE: Two immature Golden Eagles showed up at Wrangell in mid-December: an injured bird 15 December 2010 (MNC; shipped to the Juneau Raptor Center; Figure 3) and another 19 December 2010 (DS, BM). This species is a very rare winter visitant in Southeast Alaska.

AMERICAN COOT: At least three American Coots wintered at Sitka—the only report of the season (MRG, LPP).



Figure 3. This injured immature Golden Eagle was recovered at Wrangell 15 December 2010—shown here the day it arrived at the Juneau Raptor Center. *Photo Juneau Raptor Center*

**SANDHILL CRANE:** An immature Sandhill Crane at Ketchikan 7 December 2010 was very late (=new local late record; SCH). Two adults and an immature lingered into December in the Gustavus area. The immature was last observed on 9 December 2010 and the adults were last observed on 29 December 2010 (fide NKD). An immature was found dead at the state Crane Flats, Gustavus, 1 January 2011 (NKD, MDS).

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS:** A Greater Yellowlegs at Ketchikan 15 December 2010 lingered through the entire winter (JHL, et al.). This species is casual in Alaska in the winter and this bird provided the first local winter record.

**SANDERLING:** The maximum Sanderling count at Gustavus, the winter stronghold for this species in Southeast, was 200 on 7 January 2011 (NKD). Sanderlings are very rare elsewhere in Southeast Alaska during the winter.

**ROCK SANDPIPER:** Rock Sandpiper numbers at Gustavus were thought to be below average; maximum was 175 on 18 December 2010 (NKD). Up to 300 Rock Sandpipers were estimated in the wintering flock at Eagle Beach, near Juneau, on 27 December 2010 (PMS) and 30 January 2011 (GBV), including one identified as nominate *ptilocnemis* 25 February 2011 (PMS).

**DUNLIN:** The maximum count of Dunlin at Gustavus was 2,500 on 7 January and 5 February 2011 (NKD). At least one Dunlin banded at the Tutakoke River, Y-K Delta, in 2005 was found in the flock on 7 January and 5 February 2011. Two hundred and eighty-six Dunlin were banded at that time and at least one bird from that group has been observed every winter in Gustavus since December 2005 (NKD). Interestingly, 12 Dunlin were banded at Tutakoke 9 September 2010—one was found at Gustavus on 7 January 2011 and another was sighted in Taiwan in December 2010 (Tutakoke banding information provided by Dan Ruthrauff, USGS).

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER:** A Long-billed Dowitcher (seen and heard) at Gustavus 2 January 2011 (NKD) provided one of few winter records for the state.

**WILSON'S SNIBE:** Snipe wintered in larger-than-average numbers in Southeast Alaska. Seven Wilson's Snipe found on the Ketchikan CBC 18 December 2010 established a new high count, and small numbers continued throughout the winter (m. obs.). At least one snipe was found in the Juneau area through 30 January 2011 (NRH). Wintering snipe were also found at Gustavus 20–21 February 2011 (NKD) and Sitka 16 January 2011 (MLW, MET).

**BONAPARTE'S GULL:** Small numbers of Bonaparte's Gulls lingered into December at Ketchikan; maximum was 50 on 12 December 2010 (SCH, WTY) and one 19 December 2010 was the latest (SCH).

**CALIFORNIA GULL:** A 1<sup>st</sup>-cycle California Gull at Ketchikan 5 December 2010 was very late (SCH). This species is casual in Southeast Alaska after late November.

**SLATY-BACKED GULL:** Presumably the same adult Slaty-backed Gull was found at Juneau 17 January (GVB; NRH; Figure 4) and 22 February 2011 (PMS). This species is very rare along the south coast of Alaska during the winter.



Figure 4. Slaty-backed Gull at Juneau 17 January 2011. This bird displays the characteristic dark slate-gray mantle (of course), reddish-brown head streaking, and blackish eye patch of the species. The black bill markings, brownish tone to the inner wing coverts, and brown markings on the underwings (not visible here) suggest the bird was in its 4<sup>th</sup> plumage cycle. This bird had a darker-than-normal iris color. *Photo by Nick R. Hajdukovich*

COMMON MURRE: Large numbers of Common Murres were found in the Sitka area in February, including a concentration of more than 1,000 in Nakwasina Sound (MRG).

RHINOCEROS AUKLET: A Rhinoceros Auklet was reported at Sitka 20 February 2011 where it is rare in winter (MRG).



Figure 5. Horned Puffin at Sitka 20 February 2011. *Photo by Matt R. Goff*

**HORNED PUFFIN:** A Horned Puffin photographed at Sitka 20 February 2011 was unusual inshore during the winter (MRG; Figure 5). Horned Puffins disperse into oceanic habitats after breeding (Sanger 1972, Gould et al. Day 2006) and much of the population is thought to winter south of Alaska (Piatt and Kitaysky 2002a).

**TUFTED PUFFIN:** A Tufted Puffin was reported at Sitka 23 February 2011 (PHN). Like the Horned Puffin, this species disperses well offshore to oceanic habitat in winter (Gould et al. 1982, Piatt and Kitaysky 2002b).

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE:** After a strong showing in fall of 2010, Eurasian Collared-Doves wintered in larger numbers and at more locations in Southeast Alaska than in prior winters. There were more than 50 present in Southeast Alaska through the period, including 30 to 40 at Ketchikan (AWP, SCH, JFK, KMR), up to 15 at Petersburg (BHP), one at Sitka (MRG), 6 to 10 at Juneau (GBV, NRH), and at least four at Gustavus (1<sup>st</sup> local winter record; NKD, LMR, KO; Figure 6). Breeding behavior was noted at two locations this winter. At Ketchikan, Kathy Ripley observed a pair preening and feeding each other, then copulating 1 January 2011 (Figure 7). At Gustavus, a pair was observed copulating and carrying sticks into a 50-foot-tall Sitka Spruce, though no nest was located subsequently (LMR, KO). No actual nests of the Eurasian Collared-Dove have been found in Southeast Alaska despite increasing observations of breeding behavior and the appearance of juvenile birds in late summer and fall.



Figure 6. Eurasian Collared-Doves wintered at Gustavus for the first time; here photographed 14 January 2011. *Photo by Laurie M. Ross*

**MOURNING DOVE:** A Mourning Dove lingered at a Ketchikan feeding station through the entire winter period (KMR; Figure 8). This species is an annual, rare fall visitant to Southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978) but there are few (if any?) mid-winter records for Alaska.

**SNOWY OWL:** A Snowy Owl at the base of Excursion Ridge, near Gustavus, 18 December 2010 provided the only report (KN, NB).



Figure 7. More than 30 Eurasian Collared-Doves wintered at Ketchikan where these two were photographed 1 January 2011. *Photo by Kathy M. Ripley*



Figure 8. A Mourning Dove (photographed here 19 December 2010) shared a Ketchikan feeding station with collared-doves over the entire season, establishing the 1<sup>st</sup> local winter record of the species. *Photo by Kathy M. Ripley*

**NORTHERN HAWK OWL:** A Northern Hawk Owl first observed at Juneau 18 November 2010 (NRH; et al.) lingered to at least 7 February 2011 (GBV, NRH, et al.). This species is very rare in Southeast Alaska and most reports are from the northern mainland.

**NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL:** Northern Pygmy-Owls went unreported from some areas (e.g., Ketchikan, Sitka) or were scarcer than normal in other areas (e.g., Juneau; *vide* PMS). The exception was Gustavus, where at least four pygmy-owls were reported on eight days throughout the winter (NKD, JN; Figure 9).



Figure 9. Northern Pygmy-Owl at Gustavus 1 December 2010. *Photo by Nat K. Drumheller*



Figure 10. The Ketchikan area has little in the way of open grass or marsh habitat and finding a Short-eared Owl is a treat at any season. This bird provided only the 2<sup>nd</sup> winter record for Ketchikan. *Photo by Susan Hoyt*

SHORT-EARED OWL: A Short-eared Owl near Ketchikan 13 February 2011 provided only the second local winter record (SH; Figure 10). This species is a very rare migrant and winter visitant in the

Ketchikan area, primarily due to a lack of suitable habitat (Heinl and Piston 2009), but is more regular elsewhere in Southeast Alaska where suitable open habitat exists—e.g., five at the Mendenhall Wetlands, near Juneau, 20 February 2011 (GBV) and one at Gustavus 25 February 2011 (NKD).

**BOREAL OWL:** Two boreal owls were found at Juneau this winter. One bird was turned into the Juneau Raptor Center after being struck by a car near Auke Bay 2 December 2010 (*vide* GBV). Another was photographed at Pt. Bridget State Park 30 January 2011 (DKM; Figure 11). Scattered sightings around Southeast Alaska in recent years suggest this species is likely a rare resident in Southeast Alaska but its full status is not known.



Figure 11. The Boreal Owl is poorly known in Southeast Alaska. This Boreal Owl was a rare find at Point Bridget State Park, near Juneau, 30 January 2011. *Photo by Deanna K. McPhail*

**ANNA’S HUMMINGBIRD:** This species is a very rare fall and winter visitant to southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978). Following a strong fall showing of this species throughout Southeast Alaska, better-than-average numbers of Anna’s lingered into the winter. One at Gustavus through 13 January 2011 provided a first local winter record (NKD, MDS), and one lingered at Juneau until 20 December 2010 (PAR). At Ketchikan, at least four birds were present into January. Three, and possibly four, birds visited feeders at two adjacent houses, both equipped with heat lamps to keep the feeders thawed (SCH, AWP; latest, two on 8 January 2011). The three birds that were observed at the same location included an adult male, and immature male, and a female. There may have been a second immature male at this location as well (SCH). An additional Anna’s visited a Ketchikan feeder through 9 January 2011 (EO).

**RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER:** A sapsucker at Juneau on 15 January 2011 (JAO) provided a very rare winter record for northern Southeast Alaska, and there are few winter records for the Juneau area. At Sitka, several were reported through 21 January 2011, including two on 15 January 2011 (MRG). In late February, small numbers of sapsuckers appeared along the Ketchikan road system during an extended cold snap, with numbers increasing into early March.

Major cold-snaps in several recent winters resulted in large influxes of sapsuckers to low elevations in the Ketchikan area (e.g., more than 30 birds in January 2005); such winter influxes suggest this woodpecker is present all-year-round and in larger numbers during the winter than is generally realized. According to Matt Goff, sapsuckers are also fairly easy to find in Sitka during cold snaps (where they favor conifers near sea level with good southern exposure) but they seem to be rare at low elevation otherwise. Matt suggested that sapsuckers were rare to uncommon at mid-elevations near Sitka (“which is where I’ve seen most of the individuals that I have observed in winter”; MRG).

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE:** A Black-billed Magpie at Sitka 22 December 2010 (KT) was rare on the outer coast. Although this species is found annually during the winter on the northern Southeast mainland, it is not found so regularly in the islands of the Alexander Archipelago, particularly in southern Southeast Alaska; e.g., we have not heard of a Ketchikan sighting of this species since 2007.

**HORNED LARK:** Three Horned Larks at the Mendenhall Wetlands 21 February 2011 (GBV, MAM) provided only the second mid-winter record for Juneau. One was also reported at Gustavus on 18 February 2011, where there are mid-winter records for at least three prior winter seasons (NKD, BBP).

**MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD:** A Mountain Bluebird at Neka Bay, near Hoonah, Chichagof Island, was a great find 18 December 2010 (NRH; Figure 12). This species is a locally uncommon spring migrant and casual or rare fall migrant and winter visitant in Southeast Alaska, where it occurs primarily on the mainland.



Figure 12. This Mountain Bluebird made for a sweet photograph at Neka Bay, Chichagof Island, 18 December 2010. *Photo by Nick R. Hajdukovich*

**HERMIT THRUSH:** A casual winter visitant in Southeast Alaska, single Hermit Thrushes were found in Ketchikan 3 January 2011 (JHL) and 28 February 2011 (SCH); the latter provided the first local

February record. Singles were also observed at Gustavus 13 December 2010 (GPS) and at Sitka 1 December 2010–3 January 2011 (MRG).

**AMERICAN PIPIT:** American Pipits were found in January at Ketchikan, Petersburg, and Juneau (m.obs.). A few were also found in February, including one at Gustavus 18 February 2011 (NKD; Figure 13), one at Ketchikan 8 February 2011 (AWP), and three at Ketchikan 27 February 2011 (AWP).



Figure 13. This American Pipit was skillfully digiscoped at Gustavus 18 February 2011. *Photo by Nat K. Drumheller*

**CEDAR WAXWING:** This species is a casual winter visitant in Southeast Alaska. Up to three Cedar Waxwings were found at Ketchikan through early January 2011 (JHL, MS, et al.; Figure 14), and at least one remained until 7 February 2011 (SCH). These birds provided the 4<sup>th</sup> winter record from Ketchikan.

**LAPLAND LONGSPUR:** Three longspurs at Gustavus 15–28 February 2011 (NKD) and up to two at Juneau 16–22 January 2011 (PAR, NRH) provided very rare mid-winter reports for Alaska. Small numbers often linger in areas with suitable habitat into December, but they are typically absent by the end of the month.

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER:** One late lingering Orange-crowned Warbler was found at Juneau 5 December 2010 (GBV).

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER:** Typically the only warbler likely to be encountered after November in Alaska, single Yellow-rumped Warblers were found at Ketchikan 18 December 2010 (AWP) and near Neka Bay, west of Hoonah, 18 December 2010 (NRH, photo).



Figure 14. This Cedar Waxwing was one of three found on the Ketchikan CBC 18 December 2010.  
*Photo by Jim H. Lewis*

**SPOTTED TOWHEE:** A male that first showed up at Paul Suchanek's feeder on Douglas Island, Juneau, 8 November 2010 remained through the end of the period (PMS). As noted in our fall report, the Juneau area apparently has an unnatural draw for towhees: eight of Alaska's 10 records are from the Juneau area. This species breeds as close as southwestern British Columbia, where populations along the coast are considered to be mostly resident (Greenlaw 1996).

**SAVANNAH SPARROW:** Single Savannah Sparrows lingered into January and February at Juneau (latest, 22 January; NRH) and Ketchikan (2 January 2011; AWP, SCH). One also lingered at Gustavus until 16 December 2010 (NKD). This species is typically casual after December in Southeast Alaska.

**SWAMP SPARROW:** This typically casual fall migrant made its best showing ever in Southeast Alaska in the fall of 2010, several of which lingered well into the winter. In the Gustavus area, single birds were observed at Bartlett Cove 7 December 2010 and 3 January 2011 (NKD), and at the State Crane Flats 16 & 31 December 2010 and 26 February 2011 (NKD, MDS). This was only the second winter that Swamp Sparrow had been reported at Gustavus (NKD). Single birds also lingered to at least 9 January 2011 at Juneau (GBV, PAR) and through the entire winter at Ketchikan (JHL et al.; Figure 15).

**WHITE-THROATED SPARROW:** Following an unprecedented showing of this species in Southeast Alaska in the fall, at least five White-throated Sparrows lingered into December at Ketchikan (m.obs.), at least two of which spent the entire winter. At least two White-throated Sparrows were also reported in Juneau, with the latest reports 21–22 January 2011 (PMS, GBV, NRH). Finally, singles were present at Sitka through 7 February 2011 (MLW, MET), and Gustavus 13–20 December 2010 (NKD; Figure 16). This species is a rare migrant and winter visitant in Southeast Alaska.



Figure 15. Swamp Sparrows were found at several locations in Southeast this winter, many of which had lingered from the late fall including this bird at Ketchikan 26 December 2010. *Photo by Jim H. Lewis*



Figure 16. White-throated Sparrows made a good showing this winter in Southeast Alaska, including a nice adult (left) photographed at Gustavus 14 December 2010 (*photo by Nat K. Drumheller*). The Harris's Sparrow, on the other hand, is distinctly casual and one at Juneau 7 December 2010 (right) provided the only report in Southeast in 2010; this bird remained through the entire winter (*photo by Patty A. Rose*).

**HARRIS'S SPARROW:** This species is a casual migrant and winter visitant in Southeast Alaska. One Harris's Sparrow turned up at Juneau's Sandy Beach 7 December 2010 (PAR; Figure 16) through at the end of the period (PMS).

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD:** A Flock of 20 Red-winged Blackbirds at Juneau 17 January 2011 (NRH) likely provided the largest ever mid-winter count for this species in Alaska. The previous highest mid-winter count in Alaska was a flock of 12 at Juneau 26 February 2010 (*North Am. Birds* 64:311).

**WESTERN MEADOWLARK:** While taking his mother to the airport, Steve Heinel saw a Western Meadowlark drop out of the sky and land right next to him at the Ketchikan airport ferry terminal 29 December 2010 (SCH; Figure 18). The bird spent the afternoon feeding along the edge of a covered walkway that was free of snow. This species breeds north to central and northeastern BC (Campbell et al. 2001) and is casual in Southeast Alaska. There were eight prior records from Ketchikan.



Figure 18. Due to overlap in plumage characters, Pyle (1997) considered the separation of Eastern and Western meadowlarks "one of the most difficult *in-hand* species identification problems." Luckily, the extensive yellowish feathering on the malar area of the face and much reduced white in the outer three tail feathers of this bird at Ketchikan 29 December 2010 easily identified it as a Western Meadowlark and established a 9<sup>th</sup> local record. *Photo by Steven C. Heinel*

**RUSTY BLACKBIRD:** Two Rusty Blackbirds wintered at Ketchikan, where there was only one prior winter record (m.obs.). Up to 20 spent the winter at Gustavus (MDS, NKD) and up to 20 were present at Juneau through late January (GBV, NRH). This species is considered a rare winter visitant in Southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978) and has been reported most frequently at Gustavus and Juneau.

**BREWER'S BLACKBIRD:** An adult male Brewer's Blackbird first observed at Ketchikan 2 November 2010 remained through the end of the winter period. This bird provided the 8<sup>th</sup> local record (JHL, AWP; SCH) and there are fewer than 20 records of this species for Alaska.

**WINTER FINCHES:** Winter finches were widespread in the region but were particularly abundant in some areas on the northern Southeast mainland. Gus van Vliet described the situation: "The signal event of winter 2011 in the Juneau region was the really noteworthy abundance of **Pine Siskins** and **Red Crossbills**, and the near-total dearth of **Common Redpolls**. **Siskins** were in large flocks during January and eventually spread out homogenously over the coastal landscape during February—they were seemingly everywhere along the Juneau road system. **Red crossbills**, on the other hand, were in much smaller flocks, but began singing earnestly and conspicuously during February. The invasion of these two species was due to a massive mast-

crop of both spruce AND hemlock seeds in northern Southeast Alaska“(GBV). Large counts of **Pine Siskins** included flocks of 600 on 25 December 2010 (GBV) and 800 on 3 January and 21 January 2011 (PMS), which probably don’t convey just how abundant and widespread the species was.

Nat Drumheller also described **White-winged Crossbills** and **Pine Siskins** as abundant and noisy all winter in the Gustavus area where “cones were thick on the Sitka spruce.” On 18 February 2011, a female **White-winged Crossbill** was observed carrying nest lining material in her bill (NKD). The last time White-winged Crossbills were present in such high numbers in the Gustavus area was during the winter 2005–2006 which also coincided with a large cone crop—Nat found six White-winged Crossbill nests in February and March of that winter.

**COMMON REDPOLL:** In contrast to siskins and crossbills, Common Redpolls were virtually absent from most of Southeast Alaska this winter. Only a handful were reported at Juneau all winter, with the exception of a flock of 75 on 28 January 2011 (NRH), and 40 were tallied on the Skagway CBC 18 December 2010 (CDE, BD). This species was not reported from any other location through the end of the period.

**PURPLE FINCH:** Up to three brown-plumaged Purple Finches were located at Ketchikan 12 December 2010–9 January 2011 (AWP, SCH, JFK). One of the birds was an immature male, based on observations of the bird singing on 19 December 2010 (SCH). This species is a very rare fall migrant and winter visitant at Ketchikan (Heinl and Piston 2009).



Figure 19. This male House Sparrow provided the 1<sup>st</sup> Juneau record and only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Southeast Alaska record away from Ketchikan; photographed here 12 February 2011. *Photo by Patty A. Rose*

**HOUSE SPARROW:** A male House Sparrow at Juneau 10–16 February 2011 provided the first local record of this spectacular and much sought after species (GBV; PAR; Figure 19).

The occurrence of this species in Alaska has been interesting, to say the least, with records from Southeast Alaska and, at the opposite extreme of the state, from Western Alaska. A House Sparrow at Petersburg 23 October 1987 (Gibson and Kessel 1992) provided the first

Alaska record, but all other Southeast records had been from Ketchikan where it has occurred intermittently since 1996 and nested in 2009 and 2010; up to eight House Sparrows were present at Ketchikan all winter 2010–2011(ED). A House Sparrow collected at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island 13–14 June 1993 was described as “perplexing and without explanation” (*Am. Birds* 47:1140). Fourteen years later, a flock of five was found at Shishmaref, Seward Peninsula, October 2007, some of which remained to at least May 2008, followed by a single there 13 December 2008–1 February 2009 (*N. Am. Birds*). How House Sparrows made it to Western Alaska remains unknown, though House Sparrows were apparently introduced to several villages in the Russian Far East in the 1980s (*vide* Daniel D. Gibson). With respect to the occurrence of this species in Ketchikan, we’ve wondered if House Sparrows arrived on ships or even in shipping containers, and their current nesting site is in a building at Ketchikan’s shipyard.

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