SUMMARY OF SOUTHEAST ALASKA BIRD OBSERVATIONS:
Summer: June–July 2014

Sub-regional Compiler:
Steven C. Heinl, 2603 4th Avenue, Ketchikan, AK 99901
Andrew W. Piston, P. O. Box 1116, Ward Cove, AK 99928

This report summarizes bird sightings from Southeast Alaska for the summer season, June–July 2014, 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/nab). Generally we report on sightings of birds that are out of range or out of season or occur regularly in small numbers, noteworthy breeding records, unusually large or small numbers of a particular species, unusual migration dates, etc., and so on, and so forth.

The Mendenhall Forelands, near Juneau, provided local birders with a lot of entertainment and many of the Region’s birding highlights this summer, including Alaska’s 3rd report of Veery, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, an American Redstart nest, a nest attended by a Red-eyed Vireo (and another vireo of undetermined identity), and an invasion of Tennessee Warblers. Highlights elsewhere around the region included a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (!), a House Finch, and a White-rumped Sandpiper.

While June–July temperatures were close to normal across the region, it was a very wet summer. The wettest June on record at Juneau (7.48 in. = 131% above average) was followed by the 2nd wettest July on record (8.26 in.). Precipitation at Ketchikan didn’t set any records but was still 86% above average in June (12.25 in.) and 96% above average in July (12.85 in.). Sitka birders also enjoyed a wet June (5.95 in. = 106% above average) but seemed to get a bit of a respite in July when precipitation was only 56% above average (6.42 in.).

We would like to thank everyone who sent us observations, shared their photographs, and answered our inquiries about their sightings, all of whom are cited below. We particularly appreciated the extensive reports from Matt Goff (Sitka), Gwen Baluss (Juneau), and Bonnie Demerjian (Wrangell). We benefited from access to sightings entered into eBird (www.ebird.org) which we’ve incorporated into this report, and we thank Gus van Vliet for reviewing the eBird data from Juneau. Gus van Vliet and Matt Goff provided information and reviews that improved the final draft of this summary. Our past seasonal reports (since fall 2008) have been archived at the Juneau Audubon website (http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org/SE%20AK%20Birding.html).

Names and Initials of observers cited in the text or who reported sightings: Beverly A. Agler (BAA), Robert H. Armstrong (RHA), Gwen S. Baluss (GSB), Nancy Christensen (NC), Russ Christensen (RC), Amy C. Courtney (ACC), Bonnie H. Demerjian (BHD), Stuart Fety (SF), Karis Garner (KG), Daniel D. Gibson (DDG), Robert E. Gill (REG), Matt R. Goff (MRG), Karla Hart (KH), Steven C. Heinl (SCH), Brad L. Hunter (BLH), Alexia Kiefer (AK), Jerrold F. Koerner (JFK), Kitty L. LaBounty (KLL), Laurie A. Lamm (LAL), Paul E. Lehman (PEL), Joanne Leighton (IL), James D. Levison (JDL), Jim H. Lewis (JHL), Deanna K. MacPhail (DKM), Paul McLaren (PM), Martin Meyers (MM), Lisa Moorehead (LM), Walter Moorhead (WM), Bill K. Neumann (BKN), Tana O’Leary (TO), Bruce B. Paige (BBP), Andrew W. Piston (AWP), Patty A. Rose (PAR), Carol L. Ross (RLS), Robert L. Scher (RLS), Mark W. Schwan (MWS), David W. Sonneborn, Jon Sund (JS), Chuck P. Susie (CPS), Theodore G. Tobish, Jr. (TGT), Gus B. van Vliet (GBV), Marge L. Ward (MLW), Alex C. Wertheimer (ACW), E. L. “Butch” Young (ELY).
SPECIES ACCOUNTS:

CACKLING GOOSE: Up to three late Cackling Geese were observed in the Juneau area through 14 June 2014 (BAA, PAR, AK, GBV). As with other migrant geese (e.g., Greater White-fronted and Snow geese), small numbers of stragglers are expected in June.

LONG-TAILED DUCK: Up to two Long-tailed Ducks at Juneau 1–2 June 2014 (AK, ACC) were late but not unexpected, as this species is a rare non-breeding visitant in Southeast (particularly in the Glacier Bay area).

BRANDT’S CORMORANT: At least four Brandt’s Cormorants were reported at nests at the seldom-visited Hazy Islands 27 June 2014 (JS; Figure 1). Brandt’s Cormorants were first documented nesting at this isolated site, which is west of Coronation Island, in 1982 (23 pairs; Nelson et al. 1987). Nesting Brandt’s Cormorants were found again in 2000 (57 adults and 40 nests), and up to 50 birds were observed on several occasions from the mid-1990s to 2000 and annually 2001–2005 (Heinl and Piston 2007).

Figure 1. Brandt’s Cormorants at nests on the Hazy Islands, 27 June 2014. At least four adults are identifiable in the photo (note the contrasting buff throat patches); however, all of the cormorants in this photo are likely Brandt’s. *Photo by Jon Sund*

OSPREY: Ospreys were reported at several locations this summer, including singles at Gustavus 2 June 2014 (BBP), Thomas Bay 28 July 2014 (KG; and on an earlier date, too, BLH), and Swan Cove, Admiralty Island, 31 July 2014 (ACW). This species is a rare nester in Southeast Alaska (Hughes 1982).
SORA: Up to two Soras were present at the “duck ponds” near the Gustavus airport 1 June–7 August 2014 (BBP). This species is a rare migrant, summer visitant, and local breeder on the Southeast mainland (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

SANDHILL CRANE: Three Sandhill Cranes were found at the Castle River mudflats, Kupreanof Island, 29 July 2014 (BLH); cranes were present in the area earlier in the summer, too, so could indicate a potential nesting area (BLH). Pairs at Zarembo Island and Salmon Bay, Prince of Wales Island, 1–3 August 2014 were also presumed to be nesting (WM). Sandhill Cranes nesting in southern Southeast are likely Greater Sandhill Cranes, either subspecies *tabida* or *rowani* (Gibson and Kessel 1997).

Figure 2. Nice comparison of Lesser Yellowlegs in adult and juvenile plumages at Juneau 10 July 2014 (with a Long-billed Dowitcher hidden in the background; PEL, MM). The bird on the right is identified as an adult by its barred flank feathers, coarsely streaked head and neck, and worn feathers on its upperparts, which are a mixture of gray feathers and blackish feathers with large white spots. The bird on the left is identified as a juvenile by its fresh, uniform plumage with neat, small buff spots on the upperparts, and finely streaked neck. Although the date was very early for a juvenile, which typically don’t begin appearing in Southeast for another 1–2 weeks, Lesser Yellowlegs nest as close as the Yakutat area (Isleib and Kessel 1973) and the northwestern corner of British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1990). Photo by Martin Meyers

UPLAND SANDPIPER: Two Upland Sandpipers at Gustavus 4 June 2012 (BBP) were late migrants. This species is a very rare migrant in Southeast, and most records are from the northern mainland during late July–mid-September.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT: A Hudsonian Godwit at Hyder 6 June 2014 (JDL) provided the first local record. Non-breeders and fall migrants were noted at Gustavus 25 June–1 August 2014 (maximum six on 27 July 2014; BBP), and in the Juneau area at Eagle Beach 22 June 2014 (seven; LAL, PAR, BAA, MWS) and Mendenhall Wetlands 20 July 2014 (two; LAL, GBV, PAR, BAA).
BAIRD’S SANDPIPER: Up to 19 Baird’s Sandpipers at Gustavus 4–5 June 2014 (BBP) represented an unusually large count for Southeast Alaska and there are few June reports for the region.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER: A White-rumped Sandpiper amongst the Baird’s Sandpipers at Gustavus 4 June 2014 (BBP; details) was a very rare find. This shorebird is a rare migrant and breeder on the northern Alaska coast and a very rare spring migrant in eastern central Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978); it is casual elsewhere in the state, and there are probably fewer than 10 Southeast records.

WILSON’S PHALAROPE: A pair of Wilson’s Phalaropes was observed at Gustavus 20 June 2014 (BBP). This shorebird is a very rare migrant and summer visitant in Southeast Alaska; it has been found nearly annually in the Gustavus and Juneau areas since the late 1990s.

Figure 3. Flock of Common and Thick-billed (bird in foreground) murres near St. Lazaria Island 3 June 2014. In addition to the white “tomial line” at the base of the upper mandible of the Thick-billed Murre (lacking on the Common Murres), the Thick-billed Murre also lacks the dusky streaking on the flanks exhibited by the Common Murres. St. Lazaria is probably as good a place as any to see this species in Southeast Alaska—Nelson et al. (1987) estimated about 2,900 Common and 2,200 Thick-billed murres were present at St. Lazaria on 18 June 1981. Photo by Matt R. Goff

KITTLITZ’S MURRELET: A Kittlitz’s Murrelet at Auke Bay, near Juneau, 22 June 2014 (GBV) provided a very rare local sighting.

FRANKLIN’S GULL: An adult Franklin’s Gull was a nice find at the Mendenhall Wetlands 19 June 2014 (BAA). This gull is a rare migrant and summer visitant to Southeast Alaska.

BAND-TAILED PIGEON: The Band-tailed Pigeon is rare or locally uncommon in southern Southeast Alaska, and singles at Petersburg 24 July 2014 (ELY) and Wrangell 14 June 2014 (CLR, WM) were at the northern edge of the species’ Alaska range.
MOURNING DOVE: A Mourning Dove at the Stikine River 11 July 2014 was apparently present most of the summer (BKN). This dove is a rare fall migrant in Southeast Alaska, but it is very rare in spring and summer (Kessel and Gibson 1978) and is certainly not found annually at those seasons.

NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL: Two Northern Pygmy-Owls observed in the vicinity of the Mendenhall Glacier, near Juneau, 17 July 2014, gave insect-like trill calls that sounded very much like juvenile birds (KH, recording; GSB). There is only one documented Alaska nesting record (Mitkof Island; Walsh 1990); however, a juvenile picked up alive at Haines 19 June 1988 and late spring and summer reports the length of mainland southeast Alaska and adjacent islands suggest this species likely nests in small numbers throughout the region (Heinl and Piston 2009).

BLACK SWIFT: The Black Swift is a locally uncommon summer visitant and probable breeder on the mainland river systems of southeast Alaska from the Stikine River south (Swarth 1911, Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959). Twenty Black Swifts at Hyder 2 June 2014 (JDL; Figure 4) had possibly just arrived, as this species is a late migrant and none had been observed in the two days preceding the sighting. Remarkable were reports of a single Black Swift observed hours apart over the Mendenhall Wetlands, near Juneau, 20 July 2014 (GBV, GSB), as there are few Alaska reports of this species north of the Stikine River.

Figure 4. These Black Swifts were photographed at Hyder, the best (or most accessible) place to see this species in Alaska. The forked tail and white forehead of the bird on the left (9 June 2014) identifies it as a male, and the square tail and white tipping on the abdomen feathers of the bird on the right (11 June 2014) identifies it as a female (see Pyle 1997). Photos by James Levison

ANNA’S HUMMINGBIRD: Anna’s Hummingbirds were reported again in Southeast for at least the 4th consecutive summer: at least three at Ketchikan (AWP, JFK, SCH), two in the Juneau area during July (GSB, PM), and at least two at Sitka (fide MRG)—most or all of those hummingbirds had likely been present prior to the summer season.
YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER: A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was observed at the Mendenhall Forelands, near Juneau, 19 June 2014 (GBV; PAR, photo; MWS, sound recording). This species is casual in Southeast Alaska (where there are now about 10 reports), and it is also a rare fall migrant, summer visitant, and breeder in east-central Alaska (Benson et al. 2000, Martin et al. 2006).

ALDER FLYCATCHER: For the 2nd consecutive summer, a singing Alder Flycatcher was found at Rust Lake, west Chichagof Island (1 August 2014; KLL). The Alder Flycatcher is an uncommon migrant and breeder on the southeast Alaska mainland and a locally rare probable breeder in the Alexander Archipelago (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

WILLOW FLYCATCHER: A singing Willow Flycatcher was well-documented at Yakutat 1 July 2014 (GB, photo, vocal recording), and another singing and calling bird was described at Eagle Beach, near Juneau, 22 June 2014 (PAR, BAA). This species nests as close as southern British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1997); it is casual in Alaska and there are about a dozen records from the Southeast mainland between mid-June and early July.

LEAST FLYCATCHER: Territorial Least Flycatchers were found in the Hyder area beginning 8 June 2014 (JDL), and at least three were located through 15 June 2014 (TGT, DDG, REG, RLS, SCH). This species is a rare possible breeder in Southeast (Johnson et al. 2008), and it has been found nearly annually in deciduous habitats along the mainland river systems, particularly near Hyder.

HAMMOND’S FLYCATCHER: A Hammond’s Flycatcher at Gustavus 26 June 2014 provided only the 3rd local summer report (BBP). This species is an uncommon breeder along the mainland rivers of Southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

EASTERN KINGBIRD: An Eastern Kingbird was reported at St. Lazaria Island 20 June 2014 (SF, USFWS). This flycatcher is a rare migrant and summer visitant in Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER: One of the outstanding finds of the summer was a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at the southern tip of Kruzof Island (near Lesnoi Island) 19 June 2014 (SF, USFWS; Figure 5). This flycatcher breeds no closer to Alaska than the western Great Plains; however, it occurs casually throughout most of North America outside the breeding range (AOU 1998), and there are five prior Alaska reports, all from Southeast in June–July (Gibson et al. 2008).

CASSIN’S VIREO: A singing Cassin’s Vireo in the Fish Creek woods, near Hyder, 14 June 2014 (TGT, DDG, RLS, REG, SCH; Figure 6) provided the only report this summer. This vireo is a very rare annual visitant to mainland Southeast Alaska (DeCicco and Hajdukovich 2008).
Figure 5. Three photos of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Kruzof Island 19 June 2014.  *Photo by Stuart Fety, USFWS*

Figure 6. Cassin’s Vireo at Fish Creek, near Hyder, 14 June 2014.  *Photo by Steven C. Heinl*

**RED-EYED VIREO:** At least two singing Red-eyed Vireos were found at the Mendenhall Forelands, near Juneau 21 June (GBV, et al.). One singing male was present through 27 July 2014 (m.obs.) and the bird was discovered attending a nest with two chicks on 20 July (GSB). The Red-eyed Vireo was paired with another vireo that was clearly not a Red-eyed Vireo (Figure 7). The vireos were observed feeding the chicks a variety of food, including dragonflies, and one of the chicks fledged by 25 July 2014 (DKM). The Red-eyed Vireo is very rare in Alaska, and most records are from the Southeast mainland during the summer (Kessel and Gibson 1978, Johnson et al. 2008). There were no prior documented Alaska nesting records (or, in this case, nesting attempts).
Figure 7. This vireo nest (top left; photo by Mark Schwan) was found near Juneau 20 July 2014, attended by an adult Red-eyed Vireo and another adult vireo of undetermined identity. The Red-eyed Vireo (top right; photo by Mark Schwan) was easily identified by its strong face pattern, including black lores, greenish tone to the wing coverts and back, and, of course, its red eye. The other vireo (bottom left, photo by Mark Schwan; and bottom right, photo by James Levison) was uniform grayish on the upperparts, had paler lores, and a dark eye, and was clearly not a Red-eyed Vireo. Some thought the bird to be a Warbling Vireo in worn plumage. Warbling Vireos do not typically show such a strong white supercilium and there is a suggestion of dark lores (which Warbling Vireos lack), but both might be explained by the bird’s worn plumage and the missing feathers around the face and bill. At least one authority (Peter Pyle) thought the bird was a better fit for a hybrid Red-eyed × Warbling vireo. There are apparently very few documented reports of successful nesting by a mixed pair of vireo species (Blundell and Kus 2011).
TOWNSEND’S SOLITAIRE: A Townsend’s Solitaire near Gustavus 1 July 2014 provided a rare local summer report (BBP). This species is considered a rare, probable breeder in Southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978), though there are apparently few summer reports for the region.

VEERY: Among the highlights of the summer was a Veery at the Mendenhall Forelands, near Juneau, 15–19 June 2014 (LAL, sound recording; BAA, MWS, GBV, AK, DKM, et al.). The bird’s distinctive songs and calls were heard repeatedly; however, it teased local birders by not responding to recordings and it was never observed. The only prior Alaska reports are from Hyder in 1990 and 1991 (Gibson and Kessel 1992). This thrush nests regularly as close as south-central British Columbia, and it is locally rare or uncommon west and north to the Skeena and Nass rivers (Campbell et al. 1997) and Stewart (pers. obs.). It is noteworthy that there have been no confirmed reports at Hyder since 1991, despite the regular presence of Veeries within two miles of the Alaska border at Stewart!

TENNESSEE WARBLER: Tennessee Warblers invaded the Mendenhall Forelands, near Juneau, where at least eight singing birds were located 9–26 June 2014 (MWS, AK, GSB, GBV). Singles were also found near Yakutat 30 June 2014 (GSB, vocal recording), Gustavus on 12 and 26 June 2014 (BBP), and near treeline above the Lemon Creek Trail, near Juneau, 6 July 2014 (GSB). This warbler is a rare migrant and local breeder on mainland southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

AMERICAN REDSTART: An American Redstart nest was discovered at the Mendenhall Forelands, near Juneau, 28 June 2014 (LM) and observed to at least 10 July 2014 (GSB, RHA video, et al.; Figure 8)—it was potentially the first redstart nest to be found in Alaska. This warbler was considered an uncommon breeder along the Southeast mainland by Kessel and Gibson (1978), and Johnson et al. (2008) considered it a fairly common breeder on the major mainland rivers. That status was exemplified by a total of 33, mostly singing males, tallied in riparian areas along Fish Creek and the town of Hyder on 15 June 2014 (SCH, RLS).

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER: Another interesting nest report was a male Yellow-rumped Warbler with a yellow throat at a nest at Chichagof Island 29 June 2014 (ACC). Yellow-
throated subspecies *auduboni* nests primarily in southern Southeast Alaska, where it intergrades with white-throated subspecies *hooveri* (Gibson and Kessel 1997; Heinl and Piston 2009).

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW:** For the 2nd consecutive summer, White-crowned Sparrows were reported along the Mt. Roberts trail, near Juneau, with several reports of single birds during late June–mid-July (PAR, ACC, et al.). It would be very interesting to know the subspecies of those birds, since *gambelii* nests in nearby British Columbia, and *pugetensis* has been reported at sea level in the Juneau area. There were a few scattered reports of White-crowns elsewhere in northern Southeast (m.obs.). The only Southeast Alaska breeding records to date are from Ketchikan (subspecies *pugetensis*), and at least four *pugetensis* were singing on territory at the Ketchikan airport by 1 June 2014 (SCH).

**GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW:** The Golden-crowned Sparrow is a regular, uncommon breeder on the northern Southeast mainland, primarily in subalpine habitat but also in tidewater subalpine-like habitat in upper Glacier Bay (Wik and Streveler 1968, Kessel and Gibson 1978). An adult at a Ketchikan feeder 30 June–2 July 2014 (JFK), clearly a non-breeding straggler, provided only the 2nd local summer record.

Figure 9. This Western Tanager at Ketchikan 17 July 2014 provided one of few local mid-summer records. This species is an uncommon probable breeder along the rivers of mainland Southeast Alaska and occurs rarely as a migrant and summer visitant to islands near the mouths of those rivers (Kessel and Gibson 1978). *Photo by Jim H. Lewis*

**BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK:** A female Black-headed Grosbeak at Ketchikan 18 June 2014 (JFK) provided the season’s only report. This grosbeak is a rare, annual migrant and summer visitant in Southeast Alaska.
BREWER’S BLACKBIRD: A female Brewer’s Blackbird observed at Gustavus 27 July 2014 (BBP) provided the first Alaska report for July. There are now at least 25 reports of Brewer’s Blackbirds in Alaska, all but one of which are from Southeast.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD: The Brown-headed Cowbird is a rare migrant and breeder in Southeast Alaska. This year’s sightings included a pair at Eagle Beach, near Juneau, 7–8 June 2014 (NC, RC; PAR, BAA); up to four observed intermittently at the Mendenhall Wetlands, near Juneau, 7 June–10 July 2014 (m.obs.); a male at Saltery Cove, Prince of Wales Island, 15–18 June 2014 (JL) a pair at a Ketchikan feeder (present since May) to late June 2014 (JFK); and two pairs at a feeder at Farm Island, Stikine River, in early June 2014 (BKN).

Figure 10. A pair of Red-winged Blackbirds probably nested at Sitka’s Swan Lake in June (male shown here 4 June 2014), in the same location where a pair successfully nested in 2013, but it was not determined if the birds fledged young in 2014. Photo by Matt R. Goff

HOUSE FINCH: A male House Finch at Ketchikan 20–22 June 2014 (SCH, DLS, JHL, AWP; Figure 11), provided the 6th local and 10th Alaska record and the first Alaska report since 2005 (Heinl and Piston 2009).

Figure 11. Bull male House Finch at Ketchikan 20 June 2014. Photo by Jim H. Lewis
HOUSE SPARROW: A male House Sparrow at Petersburg (likely the same bird that has been present since December 2012) was joined by a female 25 July 2014 (TO). On 30 July 2014, the male was observed carrying what looked like nesting material in its bill to the roof of the Petersburg Insurance building (BLH). To date, nesting in Alaska has only been documented at Ketchikan, where nesting activity was noted again in 2014, though local birders spent no time keeping tabs on them.

LITERATURE CITED


Martin, P. R., Bonier, F., and Gibson, D. D. 2006. First nest of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher for Alaska, with notes on breeding biology. Western Birds 37:8–22.


