

Perhaps the most unique characteristic of Juneau Airport deciduous habitat is its “island” character. The focusing tendency of island habitat patches for migratory birds is known as the Central Park effect. We discuss this phenomenon on page 44 of our Hotspots report.

The combination of excellent songbird viewing with the great accessibility of sloughs and lagoons that attract waterfowl and shorebirds makes the Airport Dike Trail the premier location in Juneau for SeaWeek birding field trips and Discovery Southeast bird outings. These exceptional bird values of Juneau Airport property must be held in mind as we evaluate proposals for habitat change to improve safety conditions. The challenge is to maintain or improve conditions for songbirds and other non-threatening species while making the airport area less attractive to birds of concern.

DIPAC fish

DIPAC hatchery releases millions of salmon young per year (30 million in 2001) into waters immediately adjacent to the Mendenhall Wetlands. Many of these fish rear throughout the wetlands before heading out to deeper water. As adults many stray into refuge streams. We suspect that most, if not all of the salmon spawning in the lower reaches of Duck Creek are of DIPAC origin. These fish create a much greater attractant to birds than all of the fish naturally produced from Duck and Jordan Creeks combined. Seen in this light, enhancement of the natural runs from Duck and Jordan would have virtually no effect on the amount of gull, eagle and corvid activity at their estuaries. Opposition to such enhancement might therefore be more logically directed at the actual point of origin of the bird-attracting fish.

Need for further study and for more public participation in decisions involving bird/safety issues.

Barring relocation of the airport to Douglas Island (which merits discussion) we may have to accept the necessity of reducing the attractiveness of Juneau Airport’s surrounding habitats to heron, waterfowl, gulls, eagles and corvids. **But we**

must mitigate for resulting habitat loss at safe distances from the runway.

Obviously, national experts in wildlife hazard management have an important role to play at JNU. But we believe that mistakes have already been made as a result of the failure to incorporate local knowledge. An example is the tree clearing at Jordan triangle. Other actions proposed in the Wildlife Hazard Management Plan (FAA, 2002) appear equally unrealistic to us.

To more effectively inform such management decisions, an intensive bird monitoring program must be established, expanding upon the Wilmoth and SWCA work. In 2002, the local office of USFWS planned such a study but was subsequently informed by Wildlife Services that they would not conduct it. In addition to addressing the uniqueness of Juneau’s bird/mammal/fish habitats, a bird/plane safety program should solicit the observations and opinions of local birders, naturalists and researchers with deep knowledge of many aspects of the Mendenhall Wetlands. As we have shown, the unintended consequences of tree clearing were predicted by local biologists whose opinions were not heeded.

A recent FAA Advisory Circular (AC150/5200-33A) recommends the establishment of a Wildlife Hazards

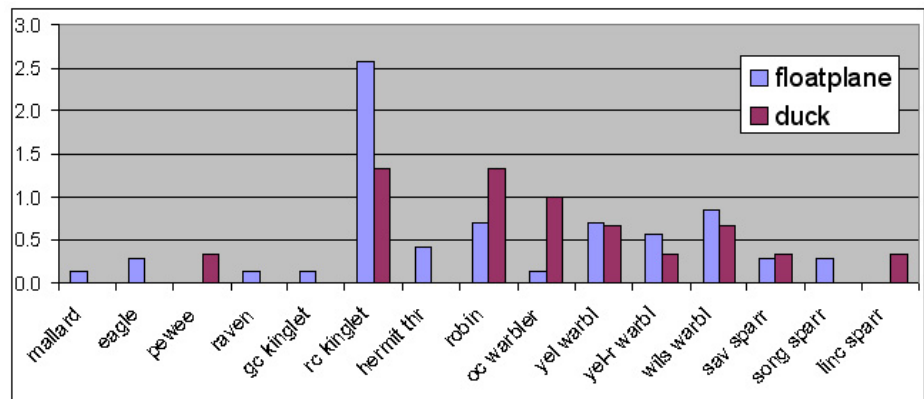


Fig 24 Number of breeding birds per point count, comparing floatplane basin area (7 sites) to Duck triangle (3 sites). Number shown is the greater value for two count periods during time of peak song in May and June.

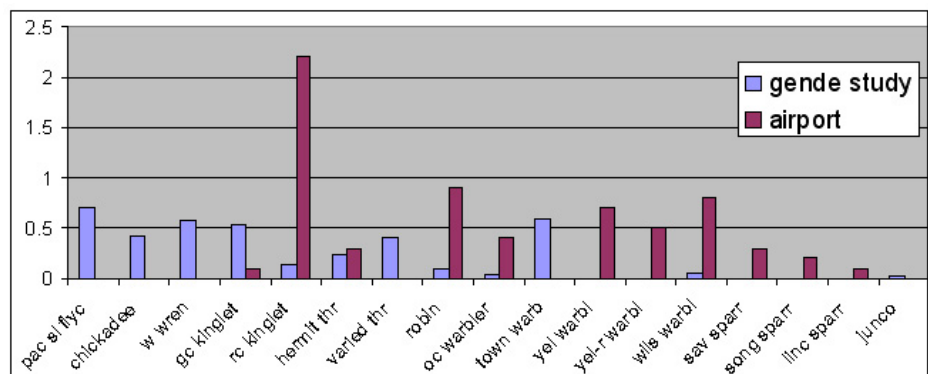


Fig 25 Number of breeding birds per point count, comparing our combined floatplane basin and Duck triangle sites to data for anadromous salmon streams in conifer forest in the Juneau area (Gende and Willson, 2001). Birds on left are conifer forest species; birds on right tend to be deciduous brush and mixed forest species.



Fig 26 Western Wood Pewee, a rare nester locally, was present in breeding season at Duck triangle



Fig 27 Middle school field trip on Airport Dike Trail, Juneau's best location for educational birding.

Working Group, and states: "Whether on or off the airport, the input of all parties must be considered when a potentially hazardous wildlife attractant is being proposed."

No community in Southeast enjoys the level of wildlife and fisheries expertise available in Juneau. Many of those experts are devoted dike trail walkers. Local knowledge can contribute as much to safety improvements as to habitat enhancement. We all fly. We all wish to fly more safely.

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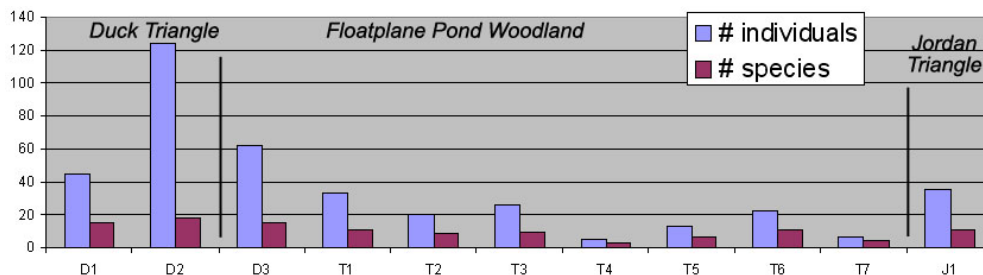


Fig 28 Landbirds at JNU (excludes waterbirds) Number of individuals counted and species richness for 11 point count circles in 2002. Site locations are shown in fig 1.