

# The Raven



*The mission of Juneau Audubon Society is to conserve the natural ecosystems of Southeast Alaska, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations.*

<http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org>

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The Celebrate Nature Lecture series will resume on January 13th. (But do join us for the December Christmas Bird Count!)

## **JANUARY PROGRAM: Cruising the Bering Sea-- Adventure on the Wild Side**

For the January program, Dr. John Schoen, will share images and observations from his 2004 cruise in the Bering Sea. From Nome to Dutch Harbor, he and a group of Audubon travelers visited several of Alaska's remotest islands and experienced firsthand their spectacular scenery and wildlife. John will describe his perceptions of this wild, infrequently visited part of Alaska, and describe the natural history, and the conservation concerns, facing the incredibly rich Bering Sea ecosystem.

The talk will be Thursday, January 13, in the UAS Egan auditorium (new classroom wing) from 7:30-8:30 PM

## **JUNEAU CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

The National Audubon Society will be conducting its 105th Christmas Bird Count this year. The society estimates that more than 55,000 volunteers will count birds during this year's count period. Last year, more than 63 million birds were counted. In Juneau, Christmas Bird Counts began in the mid 1960s, and have been held annually since 1976. Our count area is contained in a circle with a 15-mile diameter, centered over northern Douglas Island. This year's count will be held on Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup>. If we have a "typical" count, we will have 25 to 35 people participate, locate about 65 species, and count from 9,000 to 10,000 individual birds on our count day.

As always, anyone with an interest in birds and birding is welcome. Volunteers will assemble in small groups to identify and count all birds seen in their portion of the count area. Each group will be led by an experienced birder, so volunteers need not be expert on bird identification. The more eyes the better. Birders should have binoculars and be prepared for any type of weather.

Volunteers, age 19 or older, are also asked to pay a \$5.00 participation fee. The count fees collected during each CBC help to cover the cost of generating materials for compilers, producing the annual CBC summary issue, and maintaining the CBC website and database. The effort to develop this website has been substantial and it is now a great resource. All paying U.S. participants will receive a copy of *American Birds: Summary of the CBC* published once per year after the conclusion of the CBC season. This summary issue contains articles on the many ways that CBC data has shown us early winter

bird population trends, as well as information about those that participate in the CBC. Participants can choose not to receive this publication if they so desire.

People wishing to participate should meet at either of the two McDonald's Restaurants on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> by 8:00 A.M, and yes, the downtown establishment will be open on Saturday (We didn't know last year that they aren't open on Sundays during the winter). Those interested in counting downtown, in Douglas, or on north Douglas Island, should meet downtown; those interested in working in the Lemon Creek, airport, Mendenhall Valley, and Auke Bay areas should meet at the valley location. Groups will be assembled as quickly as possible and be on their way to begin the count. Normally, counting is over by 3 to 3:30 pm., or earlier if it has been a rough day. There will be the traditional potluck dinner later that evening, beginning at 5:30 P.M., at the home of Mark Schwan and Debi Ballam, at 12090 Cross St. near Auke Bay. After dinner, Gus van Vliet will lead the group on the tallying of all birds seen during the day. For more information please call Mark at 789-9841.

## **KETCHIKAN REPORT AND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT PLAN**

**By Terri Goucher**

Ketchikan's location often results in more late season sightings of certain southbound species, especially in the wake of autumn storms many birds appear at new areas. A mourning dove remained in the Saxman area a couple weeks until November 7<sup>th</sup>, a month later than previous sightings. In town, Steve Heintl reported a female Western Tanager and heard, then saw an evening grosbeak.

Other late October sightings include 2 American coots and a pied-billed grebe at Ward Lake. About 23 red-breasted sapsuckers were very active in a relatively small area at the lower Mahoney Lake. Northern pygmy-owls have been heard calling both north and south of town recently. A juvenile sandhill crane visited the Saxman neighborhood for a first November record! Three individuals of the cackling subspecies of Canada geese were seen at Mud bight. A few golden-crowned sparrows, a white-crowned sparrow, and a tree sparrow have been visiting feeders. A chipping sparrow was north of town on November 12<sup>th</sup>; the latest of the three records for Ketchikan!

**The Ketchikan area Christmas Bird Count will be December 18<sup>th</sup>.** There will be an organizational meeting at the Discovery Center December 10<sup>th</sup> at 7pm. Contact Cathy Tighe at 228-4134 for more information. Remember to look around all count week to perhaps discover any unusual birds to add to the final results!

Although our cooler days continue to lose daylight hours, wintering bay ducks are increasingly gathering to mark the beginning of a new birding season to enjoy!!

## **SKAGWAY BIRD CLUB REPORT (SBC) By Meg Hahr**

We had our monthly meeting on Wednesday, November 10<sup>th</sup> and selected Saturday December 18<sup>th</sup> for the Skagway **Christmas Bird Count** (same day as Juneau I believe). We would love to have help from Southeast birders too, and several of us have spare bedrooms that we might have available for out of town birders who will be in the area and would like to participate. SBC member John McDermott is hosting a party that evening for all CBC participants. (983-3103) Any questions? Contact me - Meg Hahr (907) 983-9228 (w) 983-2036 (h) or Elaine Furbish (907) 983-2049

The SBC meets monthly during winter and we are very interested in sponsoring natural history programs for club and community members. If any Juneau or other Southeast birders are planning on visiting Skagway this winter or passing through while heading into the interior, we'd love to see you at one of our meetings. Anyone interested in giving a presentation at one of our meetings or leading a field trip in the area, should contact me. We'd especially like to improve our gull and waterfowl identification skills!

### **FROM PETERSBURG By Don Cornelius**

I rarely mark bird sightings on my calendar, but October 22nd was an exception. And it wasn't even a sighting. I stepped outside at 11:30 PM as Petersburg lay quietly enveloped in fog. Then I heard them -- coming across Wrangell Narrows and seemingly low -- the unmistakable sound of trumpeter swans. I stared into the fog, but all I could see was the reflected glow of city lights. I traced their path as they passed directly over my head, and then on in the direction of the Stikine River. However, I would have needed radar to see them that night.

My mind wandered. What if they need to land? How long could they stay aloft if all of southeast Alaska was engulfed in this fog? Where had they started? Where would they rest? Maybe the Stikine Delta would be open. Maybe they were headed for the lakes in British Columbia where I've seen them during a past November. The trumpeting faded in the distance and quiet recaptured the night.

I basked in the glow of the moment as my mind wandered back to another October night in the early 1970s. I was living in Anchorage, and winter had begun seizing its grip on southcentral Alaska. Here again I stepped outside and gazed towards the night sky.

Passing overhead I saw a flock of ghostly white silhouettes, low-flying swans perfectly illuminated by the city lights against the backdrop of a chill black night. And then I saw another, and another. Flock after flock eerily passed low over the city, filling the skies with their glowing forms. Although it doesn't seem reasonable, I don't remember any sounds that night -- like the swans were simply ghosts passing silently over the city -- a stark contrast to the urban landscape.

They were vacating the Susitna Flats as the last open water froze -- headed towards Turnagain Arm, Prince William Sound and points south. To this day, the image of those glowing silhouettes remains one of my most memorable bird sighting -- an experience I savored once again this past October night.

Several days later I received a call. A friend had been out to Blind Slough. The swans are back for the winter.

**Petersburg's Christmas Bird Count has tentatively been set for Saturday, December 18th.** Contact Bill Pawuk at 772-3985 for details.

### **HAINES REPORT By Georgia Giacobbe**

Hanging out in Haines this month are a lot of birders. Naturally the bald eagles have drawn them to town and you can find them lined up with their cameras with long-range telephoto lenses and tripods at the pull-outs before and after 19 mile and at the Council Grounds as well. This was before the "official" start of the festival on November 17. It's almost embarrassing to show up with just a good set of binoculars. However, the day I went out, the eagles were not the only attraction. A loud and boisterous

raven pranced along the cement parking barrier and proceeded to call and “talk” to all who were setting up their cameras and binoculars. The bird seemed like a trained bird planted there to amuse everyone during their extended eagle watching and picture taking. Also hanging out in Haines have been the diving ducks wintering over, some sharing the Chilkat River with the eagles, and flocks cruising up and down Lutak Inlet. One Sunday, I was able to identify at least a dozen male and female common golden eyes, female white winged scoters, a few male and female buffleheads, and mallards, too.

**The Christmas Bird Count will take place in Haines on December 18, 2004.** Once again, Tim Shields and Dan Egolf (766-2876) will coordinate the counting. Alaska Back Country Outfitters will be the rallying point for the count. They hope to count at two locations in Haines if they get enough volunteers.

**REPORT ON GLACIER BY SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM** By Nancy Waterman  
Glacier Bay is all about change...and what a laboratory it is for studying the dynamics of change.

Many Juneau folks presented and attended the National Park Service and USGS Alaska Science Center, Science Symposium featuring Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, October 26-29, 2004, Centennial Hall in Juneau. <http://www.nps.gov/akso/symposium.htm>

The National Park Service and U.S. Geological Survey will jointly publish results presented at the Science Symposium. According to Scott Gende, the publication will be available in Spring, 2005. For more information on publications, contact either John\_Piatt@usgs.gov or Scott\_Gende@nps.gov.

### **OWL STUDY** By Michelle Kissling

As daylight shortens and the autumn rains commence, most Alaskan birds migrate south to warmer climates for the winter months. But don't put those binoculars (and birding skills) on the shelf just yet! The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Michelle Kissling) and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Steve Lewis) are launching a study to investigate seasonal distribution and abundance of forest owls throughout Southeast Alaska – and we're asking for your help!

Very little is known about the natural history, distribution, and abundance of forest owls in Southeast Alaska. Our 3-year study will gather information to design a Southeast Alaska –wide owl monitoring program. One of our objectives is to document seasonal distribution by gathering observations from you – the public!

There are 8 species of forest owls known to occur in Southeast Alaska, and 7 of these species are suspected or known to breed here. While owls are assumed to breed in our region in late winter / early spring (Feb – Apr), many are thought to occur throughout the entire year. Three characteristics are helpful when identifying an owl – size, presence of ear-tufts, and sound. Some of the more common forest owls that are known to breed in Southeast Alaska include (ordered from largest to smallest):

Great Horned Owl – This species is the largest forest owl to occur commonly in Southeast Alaska, and the only large owl to have ear-tufts. It's loud, deep, resonant hooting can be heard at great distances. Territorial hooting consists of 3 to 8 notes – HOO, HOO-OO, HOO, HOO. A mnemonic, or useful phrase to help remember the rhythm, is “Who's awake? Me too.”.

Barred Owl – This is a medium-sized owl with dark brown eyes and no ear-tufts. This species is undergoing a rapid western expansion, and only within the last 25-30 years has this species been documented in Southeast Alaska. Hooting of Barred Owls is usually more emphatic, and not so deep, than that of a Great Horned Owl. A reliable mnemonic for this species is, “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?”.

Western Screech-Owl – This is the only small owl in Southeast Alaska that has ear tufts. These birds are strictly nocturnal, spending the day concealed in vegetation or cavities, with eyes closed, body feathers compressed, and ear-tufts raised to blend with tree bark. Song is a series of hollow whistles on one pitch, accelerating in tempo (like the rhythm of a small ball bouncing to a standstill).

Northern Saw-whet Owl – Similar in size to the Northern Pygmy-Owl, the Northern Saw-whet lacks eye-spots and ear-tufts. This species is crepuscular, meaning that it is most active during late evening and early morning. Hooting is a mellow, whistled note repeated mechanically in endless succession – usually 100 to 130 times per minute! It is higher pitched, and much faster than the Northern Pygmy-Owl. This species was named after its non-territorial call, which sounds like a saw being sharpened.

Northern Pygmy-Owl – This is a very small owl, about the size of an American Robin! These birds have false eye-spots on the back of their heads, lack ear-tufts, and are commonly seen hunting during the day. Unlike most owls, this species is diurnal, meaning that they are active during the day rather than at night. The song of this species is a single, mellow whistle – HOO – repeated every 1 to 2 seconds. It is usually slower than the Northern Saw-whet Owl.



*Northern Pigmy Owl Photo By Paul Suchanek*

Rare or uncommon forest owls that are encountered in Southeast Alaska include the Boreal Owl, Great Gray Owl, and the Northern Hawk Owl. The Short-eared Owl and Snowy Owl also occur in this region, but are commonly associated with open habitats (e.g., Mendenhall Wetlands), and are not considered forest owls.

To take advantage of opportunistic observations made by the public, we are creating the Southeast Alaska Owl Network. We are currently recruiting one volunteer in each community of Southeast Alaska to conduct owl surveys near their home once per month and to compile information about owl sightings in their area. All sightings (both visual and aural) will be documented on an observation card. This is an attempt to standardize information throughout all of Southeast Alaska. Volunteers also may have opportunities to participate in surveys and other aspects of our research. No survey experience is required – just a good ear and a motivated spirit! We will provide training materials to all volunteers, and will be available for questions throughout the survey period.

We are currently taking names and contact information from interested volunteers. In January, more detailed information will be mailed to you describing listening station criteria and protocol. If you're interested in volunteering or learning more about the Southeast Alaska Owl Network, please email us at [michelle\\_kissling@fws.gov](mailto:michelle_kissling@fws.gov), or telephone Michelle Kissling at 586-7242 for more information.

**Answers to Name That Bird:** 1. blue grouse, 2. bald eagle, 3. Steller's jay.

## **BIRD WALKS IN WINTER?**

One of our members, Virginia Harris, would like to find other birders in downtown Juneau to try noon walk bird walks this winter. If interested, please contact [president@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:president@juneau-audubon-society.org).

## **NATIONAL AUDUBON RELEASES “STATE OF THE BIRDS”**

On Tuesday, October 19, The National Audubon Society released the “The State of the Birds”, a report documenting the health and abundance of North America’s birds. Appearing in the October issue of *Audubon Magazine*, “The State of the Birds” paints a disturbing picture. Almost 30% of America’s bird species are in “significant decline,” a situation that signals seriously degraded environmental conditions in the habitats these birds call home.

The bottom line: the state of the birds in 2004 is not sound. In particular, a disturbing 70 percent of grassland species; 36 percent of shrub-land bird species; 25 percent of forest bird species; 13 percent of wetland species; and 23 percent of bird species in urban areas are showing “statistically significant declines.”

According to “State of the Birds,” these declines are abnormal. Not part of the natural, cyclical rise and fall of bird populations, “statistically significant declines” are due to outside factors such as loss of native grasslands, overgrazing, development of wetlands, bad forest management, invasive species, pollution, and poor land use decisions.

Audubon’s President John Flicker sees a clear message in this report. “Like the canary in the coal mine warning the miner of danger ahead, our birds are an indicator of environmental and human health,” he said. “Birds signal that we are at risk next.”

But, Flicker also sees a clear path out of trouble. “People may have created these problems, but people can solve them, if we act now,” he stated. To that end, Audubon is now addressing the findings of “State of the Birds” in its conservation agenda at the legislative and policy making level, and in the states where the greatest conservation challenges exist.

Compiled by Audubon Scientist Greg Butcher, “State of the Birds” analysis makes the case for private and public action. Based on the report’s findings, Audubon is advocating for improved grassland, forest, and wetland protection, stronger pollution controls, partnerships with private landowners, and backyard habitat programs for homeowners.

“State of the Birds” summarizes the status of nearly 700 birds species native to the continental United States, focusing on the condition of species in each of five habitat types: grasslands, shrub lands, forests, wetlands, and urban areas (the fastest growing habitat type in the U.S.). Written using USGS Breeding Bird Survey and Audubon’s WatchList - cross-referenced with Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count data, the report will be issued on a yearly basis, and will inform Audubon’s conservation agenda, identifying key areas requiring immediate action.

Birds not only serve as reliable indicators of environmental conditions, they also contribute greatly to the U.S. economy. Keeping birds - and their home habitats - in good condition is not only a good

conservation policy, it is also good business. The worth of birds beyond their aesthetic and conservation value is something that is beginning to be more fully appreciated, a situation that has created allies for bird conservation in small and large business, and local governments - entities that have been historically unlikely conservation partners.

“According to the U.S. Forest Service, 70 million Americans - one-third of all adults in this country - call themselves birdwatchers. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service notes that they contribute at least \$32 billion in retail sales, \$85 billion in overall economic output, and \$13 billion in state and federal taxes, creating 863,406 jobs,” continued Flicker. “Birds also contribute to the bottom line in more subtle ways, providing free pest and weed control, distributing seeds, and pollinating flowers and crops. American businesses and communities simply cannot afford to ignore the state of the birds.”

A digest of the report was published in the October issue of *Audubon* magazine and a further analysis is available on the Audubon website, [www.audubon.org/bird/stateofthebirds](http://www.audubon.org/bird/stateofthebirds).

### **Name That Bird – for The Raven** By Marge Hermans

About 53 species, or 16%, of the bird species found in Southeast Alaska live here year- round. Can you identify these Southeast residents, all “Common” year-round?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Eat insects, buds, and flowers most of the year. Have special bacteria in their gut that help them digest spruce needles, one of the few foods they can find in winter.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Often survive winter by capturing occasional ducks and gulls to supplement their usual diet of fish.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Use a special pouch in their throat to carry off extra food and cache it so they can eat it later. May imitate the call of a hawk to chase other birds from feeders.

**A new book, “Southeast Alaska’s Natural World,”** has been published by Juneau Audubon members Bob Armstrong and Marge Hermans. It will be available in bookstores and from the authors at various holiday events in Juneau. It’s 8-1/2”x11,” softbound, 224 pages, with 40 lively articles and 350 of Bob’s color photographs, covering topics from American dippers to slime molds. About a third of the book is about Southeast birds; the rest is about insects, mammals, plants, and other topics the authors think are particularly interesting in our region. Some of the articles describe research by local scientists, and some include Bob’s “Recollections” about various wildlife encounters. Cost is \$29.95.

### **Clips From the Conservation Committee:**

The Conservation Committee welcomes involvement from all members. We are always keen to have new members who would like to follow an issue in the community and help keep other JAS members informed. If you have comments or would like to become involved, please contact the chair, Sari Saunders, at [conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org), or any other committee or Board member.

**1. Board of Game meeting** – To see a summary of the proposals that were before the Board and actions taken by the Board at their meeting Nov 2-5, go to:

<http://www.boards.adfg.state.ak.us/gameinfo/meetsum/groadsumm1104.pdf>. With respect to some of the proposals on which JAS commented: the proposal to allow bear baiting in the Juneau area failed; the proposal to allow archery hunting in the area around Mendenhall Lakes failed; the wolf management plan for Douglas Island was adopted with amendments, establishing a bag limit of 3 wolves per year on the Island; the proposal to finalize review of all controlled use and closed areas in Region 1 (statewide proposal) carried with amendments.

**2. Yankee Cove Dock** - CBJ Planning Commission did approve the Conditional Use Permit to Yankee Cove Development for a development of a wharf and adjoining ramp for landing craft at Yankee Cove (by Adlersheim Wilderness Lodge). This approval is subject to 17 conditions. These include, for example, requirements regarding wood treatment, the need to keep floating structures from grounding during any tide (to prevent damage to intertidal areas), restrictions from any mining-related uses of the facility (e.g., associated with the Cascade Point facility which will be approximately 8 miles north), restrictions on timing of in-water work to avoid effects on salmon populations, restrictions to minimize aesthetic impacts. The staff report and permit conditions can be read at the CBJ site, [http://www.juneau.lib.ak.us/plancomm/documents/STF\\_USE04-50.PDF](http://www.juneau.lib.ak.us/plancomm/documents/STF_USE04-50.PDF).

**3. Kensington Gold Project** – The Final Environmental Impact statement and Record of Decision (FEIS/ROD) for the mine, and associated developments, are expected to be released around Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>. There will be a public comment period post release. JAS will consider whether to submit comments at that time; if any members reading that material would like to have their concerns submitted through JAS, please contact a committee or board member. JAS continues, along with other community groups, to weigh the potential role of economic opportunities afforded by mine development relative to the ecological and economic costs of industrial development in Berner's Bay (associated with Alternative B). Please let me know if you'd like to see a copy of comments submitted by JAS on the earlier SEIS.

**4. Housing and Subdivisions** – Recently, the nature of housing availability in Juneau has been back in the news (see Juneau Empire Nov 9 – City eyes plan for cluster housing). Applications for changes in allowable housing densities around Montana Creek were submitted earlier this year. The CBJ is now working on two new development ordinances, the cluster/conservation subdivision ordinance, and the cottage housing ordinance, associated with density, open space, and design of subdivisions. There will be public meetings regarding these development issues on Nov 22, at Mendenhall River Elementary School Library, 7 p.m., and on Nov 29 at Auke Bay Elementary School Library at 7 p.m. (see [http://www.juneau.lib.ak.us/plancomm/Cluster\\_Cottage\\_Mtg.htm](http://www.juneau.lib.ak.us/plancomm/Cluster_Cottage_Mtg.htm)). The CBJ staff report on proposed changes to zoning in the Montana Creek area can be seen at [http://www.juneau.lib.ak.us/plancomm/documents/MAP2004-0304\\_06stf.pdf](http://www.juneau.lib.ak.us/plancomm/documents/MAP2004-0304_06stf.pdf). Note that some of these changes would abut General Commercial zoning against what is currently Natural Parkland (CBJ comprehensive plan).

Every membership supports Audubon's vital efforts to protect birds, wildlife and natural habitats. As a national member, you will become an important part of our chapter and receive Audubon magazine and Raven newsletter.

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