

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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Juneau Audubon Society

May 2005

There are no regular Audubon Meetings or Newsletter until September

Spring Migration Bird Trips & Nature Walks 2005

Walks last about two to four hours. If you have them, bring binoculars and/or spotting scope, bird guide, rubber boots recommended for most walks and dress for weather. Beginning birders are welcome. For further information contact Steve Zimmerman_586-2597, field-trips@juneau-audubon-society.org

May 7 Area: Mouth of the Mendenhall River: Meet at Safeway Parking area for car pooling
Time: 7:00 a.m.
Leader: Gwen Baluss

May 14 Area: Mouth of the Mendenhall River. Meet at Radcliffe Road
Time: 8:00 am
Leader: Paul Suchanek

May 21 Area: Mouth of the Mendenhall River. Meet at Radcliffe Road
Time: 8:00 a.m.
Leader: Bob Armstrong

May 28 Area: Norton Lake. Meet at Moraine Ecology Trail parking lot (near the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor's Center).
Time: 7:00 am
Leader: Bev Agler

June 4 Area: Sandy Beach (Douglas). Meet in parking lot near picnic shelters.
Time: 7:00 am
Leader: Paul Suchanek

June 11 Area: Dredge Lakes (Moose Lake side). Meet in parking lot by the bridge over the Mendenhall River on the Back Loop Road.
Time: 8:00 a.m.
Leader: Gus VanVleet

June 24 Plant/Minus Tide Walk, South Bridget Cove, 37.4 Mile Glacier Highway
Time: 9:30 a.m.
Leaders: Pat Harris/Mary Lou King

ALASKA BIRD CONFERENCE: Juneau Audubon Society is helping to sponsor the next AK Bird Conference. The dates are Feb. 7-9, 2006 at Centennial Hall, Juneau. If people have questions/comments, they can contact me at 780-1168 or by email at michelle_kissling@fws.gov.

JUNEAU AUDUBON BOARD NEWS by Brenda Wright, Juneau Audubon Society President

Hello and Happy Birding,

Thanks to all of you who were able to join us for our 10th Annual Berners Bay cruises. We always peer into our crystal ball and choose dates for the cruise that might yield the highest number of birds and other wildlife. Well, we certainly had a first this year: the original sailing on April 16th had to be cancelled because of high winds! Luckily the harbormaster caught our captain before we left the dock. He had a report of 8 foot seas in Berners Bay right as we were about to leave the dock. So we took a vote on whether to try the next day or sail around Douglas Island. The majority wanted to try again on Sunday, so that is what we did. Only about 12 people could not make it back on Sunday and word of mouth worked to get the boat completely filled again. The Sunday cruise was in warm, sunny conditions. We got to see oyster catchers, twice, saw sea lions on Benjamin Island and also a group of about 80 cooperatively feeding in Berners Bay at Slate Cove. We saw whales coming and going and even got a short escort by some Dall's porpoise. Everyone was glad we got to go to Berners Bay finally.

So in between our two scheduled excursions the eulachon (hooligan) started up the rivers on 4/23. Our trips on 4/30 were not able to see many birds in Berners Bay because the majority of the birds were up the rivers. It was a sunny day and although pretty windy in the morning the afternoon trip was a lot calmer. The later trip got to see all the gull species and lots of marbled murrelets. Our captain ducked behind Mab Island and so we got to see a few goldeneye, harlequin, and mergansers too. It was such a lovely day and everyone enjoyed the scenery. Sure hope we are able to visit Berners Bay again next year, but not by road!

Juneau Audubon is trying to provide more activities on each Saturday this year. After the initial 8 weeks of migrant bird walks we will try to do several low tide and plant walks, maybe even alpine flowers above the tram in July. Please keep an eye on the weekly schedule in the newspaper and the web page for updates on activities and meeting places. (www.juneau-audubon-society.org). You can also get your local bird checklist and past newsletters on the web page.

The Juneau Airport environmental impact statement is out. If you are interested in helping with responding to the EIS or any other conservation issue, please contact Steve Zimmerman or Sari Saunders, conservation chair (conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org).

AUDUBON ALASKA BOARD MEETING By Steve Zimmerman

In 1997 The National Audubon Society reorganized into state offices and established Audubon Alaska as its state office in Alaska. Working with local Alaska chapters, Audubon Alaska advocates for the conservation of Alaska's natural ecosystems and has led comprehensive scientific studies to document the resources at stake in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, the National Petroleum Reserve (NPR), and the Tongass and Chugatch Forests. Audubon Alaska is guided by a board of directors which meets twice annually. The most recent meeting of that board was held in Cordova during April 29 – May 1.

All Audubon state offices have to be self sustaining and one of the major topics of the meeting was how to keep raising the funds necessary to support the office and its six paid staff. There are presently 26 Audubon state offices. Audubon Alaska is one of a very small number that are fully self sustaining. The board was also brought up to date on the status of Audubon-supported lawsuits to require BLM to develop more wildlife-sensitive alternatives for leasing in the northeast and northwest sections of NPRA. Audubon studies to synthesize scientific information on the Tongass National Forest and to fine-tune habitat models for deer, bear, murrelets and other species were described. Education programs to help develop a culture of conservation in Alaska were detailed and an updated list of watchlist species (birds that are vulnerable or declining) was provided to the board. A review of the 3-year strategic plan was completed and proposed changes were approved. The board also elected officers: Matt Kirchhoff was re-elected as Chair of the Board and Steve Zimmerman was re-elected Secretary. Both are members of our Juneau Audubon Chapter.

Distribution of Bats in Southeast Alaska and Their Use of Bridges as Night Roosts by Bonnie Demerjian, Wrangell, AK

There are some other aviators overhead besides birds and Oregon State University grad student Julie Boland will be in Southeast Alaska this summer studying them. She will travel north to assess the presence and distribution of bat species while also trying to determine if bats in the region use bridges as night roosts.

Earlier studies in the Pacific Northwest show that bats utilize the undersides of bridges to rest during their nighttime foraging. Bridges surfaced with asphalt in particular are warm harbors, radiating stored heat from daytime sun. Boland will also attempt to learn whether the age and density of forest surrounding the night roosts influences bat use.

She will capture bats for study using mist nets and other traps suspended over water, flyways and outside buildings, mines and caves. Using hand-held nets she will seek to capture bats under identified bridges. Boland will take tissue samples from bats for DNA analysis, will analyze guano and make recordings of echolocation calls.

Though beyond our range of hearing for the most part, we may still be fortunate enough to spot these reclusive creatures with their odd, fluttering flight some evening at twilight. Boland hopes her research will aid in understanding and appreciating the bats of Southeast Alaska.

Spring Arrives with the Sandhill Cranes Bonnie Demerjian, Wrangell

The uncanny cry of sandhill cranes broke the still afternoon peace over Wrangell last week. The disturbance was welcome, though; their appearance certifies that spring has really arrived. Our only glimpse of them will be far overhead as they make their way to the Stikine River Delta to refuel before setting out for points north: Gustavus, Yakutat, the Copper River Delta and on to their nesting grounds on the Alaska Peninsula, Bristol Bay, the Kenai Peninsula and upper Cook Inlet.

The birds we see winging over Southeast Alaska are one of two populations of lesser sandhill cranes residing in Alaska. The larger one, about 500,000, is the Mid-Continent Population (MCP) that winters in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma and northern Mexico. They take an interior route north to nest on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Tanana Valley and Yukon Flats. "Our" sandhill cranes, about which less is known, belong to the Pacific Flyway Population (PFP) and number about 20 - 25,000. The PFP is believed

to follow a coastal route during migration, using the above-mentioned staging areas after passing through the Coastal Range from interior British Columbia. In spring they are heading north through eastern Oregon and Washington from their winter home in California's Central Valley. But, there is speculation that another smaller group of cranes follows the British Columbia coast rather than using the interior route. These birds also winter in California but take a more westerly route through Oregon and Washington. Biologists speculate that there thus may be two separate PFP populations, an "eastern" (interior route) band and a "western" (coastal route) band. It may also be that the "western" cranes breed in Southeast Alaska. Anecdotal evidence places breeding sandhill cranes in scattered muskegs of our region. To learn more about these different populations, in particular to ensure habitat protection, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game began a project in 2000 using satellite telemetry to track movements of lesser sandhill cranes from their summer range in upper Cook Inlet.

As scientists slowly accumulate information about these fascinating birds, we'll continue to thrill to the harsh calls of sandhill cranes conversing in family groups as they funnel north and south each year. Most of us will never see their enormous marshy nests or view their elaborate wing-swept courting dances, but the trilling sound of their voices tunes us into the cycle of the seasons. And if it turns out that they really do summer here with us, well, that's a gift.

To view maps of sandhill cranes nesting areas and migration routes in Alaska and see photos of capture for banding and satellite telemetry go to: www.wildlife.alaska.gov/management/waterfowl/crane/crane.cfm

APRIL REPORT FROM KETCHIKAN-By Teri Goucher

Glorious warm days have certainly encouraged birders to get out and enjoy the best weeks of spring migration!

Ketchikan's 10th annual Hummingbird Festival April 12-17 providing many fun activities for the public.

Gwen Baluus did bird banding at Ward Lake which offered close up views of birds in the mist net.

The Southeast Alaska Discovery Center had displays of homemade hummingbird feeders, bird art by high school students, and hand beaded hummingbirds. There were children's bird programs and live birds from the Deer Mountain Eagle Center.

Many people flocked to the center for Steve Heintz's excellent slide presentation about Ketchikan's bird migration. Steve also led a bird walk along several beaches and used a scope for amazing bird viewing.

Andy Piston led a group around the airport where 43 species were observed, including 3 harriers, 2 kestrels, yellowlegs, killdeer, phalaropes, sandhill cranes and many flocks of waterfowl flying north. Undoubtedly, many new birders were inspired by this year's Hummingbird Festival!

Other interesting birds arriving lately are: red-winged blackbirds and savannah, golden-crowned and white-crowned sparrows. March 27 marked the 2nd earliest sighting of a band-tailed pigeon. By April 22nd the first orange-crowned, Townsend's and yellow-rumped warblers were here and singing and the first tree swallows arrived. Many raptors were seen with soaring eagles during a lunch hour, including 6 red-tailed hawks, 2 merlins, 2 sharp-shinned hawks and a kestrel! Recently a single osprey was found locally as well.

Shorebirds are just arriving here; western and least sandpipers, dunlin, dowitchers, semipalmated and black-bellied plovers are foraging on local beaches.

I'd like to thank and acknowledge Ketchikan's birding experts, Steve Heinl and Andy Piston for their many bird sightings and data which have added tremendously to my reports!

I wish you all a fantastic summer enjoying our beautiful and unique corner of the planet!!

APRIL 23 AUDUBON BIRD WALK REPORT (From Eaglechat) By Mark Schwan

This morning we had terrific weather and a great group of 15 birders to check up on spring migration in Juneau. We spent most of our scheduled time walking the airport dike trail, but a few of us chose to extend the outing and go check out the mouth of the Mendenhall River and the open spaces along the way. We were joined by Rich Gordon and subsequently crossed paths with Matt Brooks and a birding companion. We certainly found nothing comparable to the Steller's Eider but by morning's end we had tallied up about 41 species. Below is the list of species seen from the dike trail, followed by additional species seen away from the dike.

Thanks to everyone who participated in the walk.

Seen from dike trail:

Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Short-eared Owl
Mallard
American Wigeon
Common Goldeneye
Canada Goose
Bufflehead
Lesser Scaup
Greater Yellowlegs
Mew Gull
Glaucous-winged Gull
Herring Gull
Northwestern Crow
Common Raven
American Robin
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Fox Sparrow
Golden-crowned Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Lapland Longspur

Additional species during "side trip" to river mouth:

Horned Grebe
Cackling Goose (probable, after group discussion)
Greater White-fronted Goose
Green-winged Teal
Northern Pintail
Northern Shoveler
Barrow's Goldeneye
Greater Scaup
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Black-bellied Plover
Surfbird
Black Turnstone
Ruddy Turnstone (seen by Matt and Rich)
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Dunlin
American Pipit

Hummingbirds, Hawks, and Other Sightings in Haines By Georgia Giacobbe

I wrote this Haines report with great difficulty today because the weather has been so sunny and warm that it took a great deal of restraint to sit down inside and write on a computer. The birds must have known it all along though, because we have had early spring arrivals. The Varied thrushes have been sited 2 weeks earlier than usual; the Robins about 10 days earlier than what's average. The Rufous Hummingbirds arrived a week earlier, too, and we had to scramble to set up the feeder. Pam Randles has observed nest building activity by Northwest Crows, Bald Eagles (of course), Belted Kingfishers, American Dippers, and even a Peregrine Falcon. Other interesting sightings are Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings out in the Mud Bay area and Red Crossbills about 1.5 to 2.5 mile Haines Highway. Earlier in the month, several individuals sited a Mountain Bluebird just perched on the barbed wire fence near the tank farm, definitely a rare sighting. And several of us, including the bird watching challenged, have seen several "Marsh Hawks" (Northern Harriers) soaring and diving at the flats just a bit north of McClellan Flats. Add to that four violet green swallows, a couple of Canada Geese, and a juvenile Kestrel, and I would say these are positive signs of the bird population in Haines. Pam Randles Birdathon still scheduled for May 1-7 will show us more.



Pam Randles's Bluebird Photo

Petersburg: Of Sandhill Cranes and Rufous Hummingbirds By Don Cornelius

Local folklore holds that migrating hummingbirds travel to Petersburg on the backs of sandhill cranes. Apparently some former observer of natural phenomenon noticed that the two species arrive at about the same time each spring. Obviously the tiny rufous hummingbirds are too small to make the trip on their own, so it didn't take much logic to draw the conclusion. In a small town, folklore - like rumors, flies fast, But it still amazes me when I hear from residents with deep roots in this community for whom this is still their understanding of bird migration.

Today our local public radio station, KFSK, is the keeper of this scientific information. The first sighting of each species is broadcast as local residents report in. In fact, so tied to Petersburg are these species, that spring newscasts include historic information that on this date the first hummingbird (or sandhill cranes) were seen in whatever year.

While hummingbirds are local nesters, the cranes are merely passerbys. But what a passerby. One migration pattern is for the cranes to fly over Petersburg announcing their arrival with that wonderful guttural rattling call. Then, directly in front of town, the Vs break up as the cranes begin circling on updrafts over Wrangell Narrows. The circling birds spiral upwards until satisfied with their altitude, they reassume their V-formations and head northerly up Petersburg Creek.

It's a pattern I've witnessed yearly for the 20 years I've resided here. That is, until 2005. While friends a little south of my house report plentiful crane sightings this year, I only saw one flock flying past, but not over, our community. It seems either something has been slightly different about the 2005 migration pattern, or my personal behavior pattern. Despite how much time I spent outside, maybe I was inside at just the wrong moments all spring. Or was I. If the cranes didn't fly directly over my part of town before circling to gain altitude, how could the hummingbirds get here? Ah, maybe they took the ferry.

Gustavus Report -- March 22-April 30 -- By Nat Drumheller

The weather during this period was mild. The last week of March was cool with some hail and light snow. I was out of town for the first half of April, but was told that it was cool, wet, sunny, windy, and calm. The last week of April was sunny and warm with a high of 68 degrees reached at our home. Although there were some notable early spring arrivals, the migration did not hit full stride until the last week of April.

Following is a list of some of the "first arrivals" for Gustavus during the period:

Two **Lesser Scaups** were seen for several days prior to 3/22 on a pond near the airport. The first **Northern Saw-whet Owl** reported this year was heard on 3/23 in the Good River neighborhood. At least five other saw-whets were heard through the period.

A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was heard and seen singing in town on 3/24.

A **Red-tailed Hawk** was seen on 3/26 north of the Park Road.

On the beach west of Dude Creek, a lone **Savannah Sparrow** was seen on 3/28.

Also on 3/28, the first **Black-bellied Plover** was observed on the beach west of The Good River.

"Multiple" **Rufous Hummingbirds** were observed at a feeder in town on the evening of 4/5. By 4/9, hummingbirds were being seen at five feeders in town.

Although at least one **Greater Yellowlegs** attempted to ride out the winter here, three were reported along The Salmon River on 4/6.

A **Wilson's Snipe** was heard winnowing on 4/9 in the Rink Creek neighborhood. A female **American Kestrel** was also reported on 4/9, and the first **Bonaparte's Gull** on 4/10.

Tundra Swans, Greater White-fronted Geese, Snow Geese, Brants, and Sandhill Cranes began showing up in the middle of April. The geese and Brants continued to be seen in good numbers through the period. A few **Cackling Geese** were observed in mid-April. The largest numbers of cranes came through on the evening of 4/21.

On 4/17, one **Eurasian Wigeon** was observed on the beach.

Short-eared Owls became more numerous over the Gustavus grasslands in mid-April with a report of 3 or 4 owls seen together on 4/17.

On 4/20, the first **Western Sandpipers** and **Least Sandpipers** were observed along with one **Short-billed Dowitcher** and seventy-nine **Black-bellied Plovers**. Numbers of these species, especially Western Sandpipers, swelled along the Gustavus beaches over the coming days with several other species showing up such as **Long-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated Plover, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Surfbird, and Pectoral Sandpiper**. One **Pacific Golden-Plover** was seen. **Dunlins**, which over-wintered here, were numerous. **Sanderlings**, which also were here over the winter, became less numerous through the period. Sanderlings that were here as of 4/30 were still in winter plumage.

Two **Caspian Terns** were seen near the town dock on 4/22, and one on 4/25.

On 4/23, the first **Yellow-rumped Warblers, Lincoln's Sparrows, and Golden-crowned Sparrows** were reported.

On 4/24, the first **Orange-crowned Warblers** and **Townsend's Warblers** were reported. Also on 4/24, impressive flocks of **American Pipits** and **Savannah Sparrows** were seen along the beaches.

The first **Tree Swallows** and **Hermit Thrush** were seen on 4/25 as well as a flock of fifty-three **Horned Larks**.

Two **Emperor Geese** were observed with seventy-nine Brants on the beach near the town dock on 4/28 by Bruce Paige. This is only the third record for this species in Gustavus.

On 4/29, **Violet-green Swallow, Arctic Tern, and Blue-winged Teal** were added to the observed arrivals in Gustavus.

On 4/28, while Emperor Geese were being admired at the town dock, I was busy at a pond at the town gravel pits trying to find the source of a low chirping sound. I was sure it was a rare bird. Turned out to be **Boreal Toads**. There were a couple dozen of them mating at the surface of the water and “singing”.

Thanks to Bruce Paige, Theresa Sirstad, Phoebe Vanselow, Lewis Sharman, and Nate Borson for sharing their observations. By Nat Drumheller natdrumheller@hotmail.com

We need volunteers to help with our goal to try to provide outdoor educational activities for all ages on Saturdays. Steve Zimmerman has done a great job getting and then scheduling leaders for bird walks during April, May and June. Now we need to fill in the blanks for July and August. If you would be willing to lead a Saturday activity or if you know of any activity that is already planned by any agency, organization, nonprofit, etc., that could be considered “outdoor educational”, please let us know. You can call me, Mary Lou King 789-7540, or for more information see <http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org> or e-mail saturdaywild@juneau-audubon-society.org

Saturday Wild *Summer 2005*

July

2 _____

9 _____

16 _____

23 _____

30 _____

August

6 _____

13 _____

20 _____

27 _____

Coordinated by Juneau Audubon Society

Join us any Saturday or every Saturday, weather or not, as we explore the wild side of Southeast Alaska.

Clips from the Conservation Committee:

Dear Members,

The Conservation Committee has had an active year. We have followed issues as varied as development proposals on Spuhn Island, proposals regarding game management to the State Board of Game, and release of the Juneau Access Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Many thanks to all the members who provided thoughtful input regarding these issues. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to receive copies of submissions that Juneau Audubon has made.

The Conservation Committee is 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 me, at conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org, or any other committee or Board member.

Sari Saunders Chair

A few things to watch over the summer months:

1. The long awaited **Juneau Airport Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (DEIS)** has now been released. This statement covers airport developments that are proposed to occur during the 2005-2015 period. You can view the document online at:

<http://www.jnu-eis.org/>, though its approximately 1000 pages! You might try the summary (a mere 100 pages). Public meetings are expected to be held on June 1 and 2, 2005 so watch for notices. Public comments must be received by the consulting firm that produced the EIS by June 30, 2005. You can also submit comments online through a link at the above website. Steve Zimmerman has been following this process for the past number of years, and will be heading up the Juneau Audubon comments on the DEIS. Please contact Steve or me if you would like to contribute comments and concerns through JAS.

2. Public notices from the **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**, Alaska district can be viewed at:

<http://www.poa.usace.army.mil/reg/PNNNew.htm>. Here you can see the permit applicant and date by which public comments must be received. You can also link to all the documentation associated with the permit application. Anyone who plans to work within navigable waters of the U.S., or dredge or fill U.S. waters, including wetlands, must apply for a permit through the Corps. Often public comments can be submitted online for these developments.

3. Ordinances regarding dog leash laws and the Dog Task Force of the City and Borough of Juneau are in a state of flux (see Juneau Empire April 26 2005). You can follow the ongoing efforts of the Dog Task Force through their website at: <http://www.juneau.org/parksrec/dfp.php>. These proposals represent an effort meet concerns regarding wildlife, particularly staging and nesting birds (e.g., at the Mendenhall wetlands), safety needs of (nondog and dog) folks recreating, and needs of the dogs themselves.

(Ed. Note: I think it is very important for folks with concerns for birds, to comment on these proposals. As currently written in the proposals, the Airport Dike would change from “on leash” to “on leash or voice control” and the Mendenhall Wetlands would not change from “off leash”. I thought dogs were supposed to be on leash on bird refuges except dogs used by hunters to retrieve birds during hunting season.

4. Due to changes to the Alaska Coastal Management Plan, amendments to community-level plans, such as the **Juneau Coastal Management Plan (CJCMMP)** are also required. The CBJ hired a consultant to help with this process, which must be completed by July of this year, for the CJCMMP to retain its influence on management of coastal land and resources. You can read about the policy, the process, and timeline for amendment on the website of the consultants, Laroche and Associates, at: <http://www.larocheandassociates.com/Projects/juneau/juneau.htm>.

5. As always, check the **SEACC** website at www.seacc.org for recent developments in conservation issues around Southeast.

National Audubon Society Membership Application

For first time members or renewals to the National Audubon Society please mail this form to:
National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 51001, Boulder, CO 80322-1001

_____ \$20 (1-year introductory rate) _____ \$15 (1-year student/senior rate) _____ \$30 Basic renewal

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip Code _____
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_____ My check for \$ _____ is enclosed _____ Please bill me

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