

# 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

December 2005

## Juneau Audubon's **Celebrate Nature** Lecture Series 2005-2006



**Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Jamie Womble & Kevin White - Going to Gondwanaland**

UAS Egan Auditorium, 7:30-8:30 PM

The southern super-continent known as Gondwanaland included most of the landmasses which make up today's continents of the southern hemisphere. Jamie Womble and Kevin White have visited a variety of exotic places in the

southern Hemisphere, including the Andean Altiplano, Patagonia, New Zealand, and KwaZulu Natal. Come see slides and hear stories of their adventures in these faraway, exotic locales.



**Thursday, January 12<sup>th</sup>**

**Mark Hickey - Journey to the White Continent**

UAS Egan Auditorium\*, 7:30-8:30 PM

Spend an evening in the Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica. King penguins, black-browed albatrosses, southern right whales, elephant seals and lots of ice – all up close and personal. Mark Hickey will present his

beautiful digital images, and describe his 18-day expedition cruise to the white continent at the height of the Antarctic summer. Photographers and naturalists alike will not want to miss this show.

**BOARD NOTES FOR DECEMBER** by Brenda Wright, Juneau Audubon Society president  
Hopefully by the time you read this Southeast's theme song will have moved on from our present favorite: "Soggy Shoes"! If it is still raining, just look forward to the coming solstice. Increasing daylight is just around the corner.

The Juneau Audubon board is happy to be a sponsor of the 11<sup>th</sup> Alaska Bird Conference and Workshops to be held in Juneau February 7-9, 2006. The conference offers contributed papers and also special lectures. This year Bob Armstrong will give a public lecture "Photographing Alaska's Birds: 45 Years Worth" on February 7 at 7:30pm. There will also be a public lecture on February 10 featuring David Quammen, author and adventurer. I hope you are able to attend

one of these outstanding opportunities. There is more information on the conference available on the web at [www.abc2006.juneau-audubon-society.org](http://www.abc2006.juneau-audubon-society.org).

The Juneau Audubon board always appreciates suggestions for improvements or changes. Please contact any of us at our web page. Your local Juneau Audubon web page has a local bird checklist, lecture schedules, and past newsletters ([www.juneau-audubon-society.org](http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org)).

Seasons Greetings and we hope you can participate in the annual Christmas bird count in December in your neighborhood

## The 2005 Juneau Christmas Bird Count By Mark Schwan

The Juneau CBC will be held this year on Saturday, December 17, the first Saturday during the designated count period, of December 14 through January 5<sup>th</sup>. The count period is the time during which the individual bird counts can take place. As usual, volunteers should meet at either of the two McDonalds Restaurants no later than 8am on count day, with appropriate attire and binoculars. People interested in counting in the downtown, Douglas, and north Douglas Island areas should meet at the downtown restaurant; birders wishing to work the Lemon Creek, airport, Mendenhall Valley and Auke Bay areas should meet at the valley restaurant. As always, there will be a potluck after the count to share in the events of the day and to conduct the tally of birds and species seen. The potluck will be at the home of Mark Schwan and Debi Ballam.

Last year there were 35 Christmas Bird Counts conducted in Alaska and 12 in the Southeastern region. Kodiak led all Alaskan counts with 78 species on count day, with Juneau and Glacier Bay tied for second most with 71 species. For the 12 counts in Southeast Alaska, 203 participants counted slightly more than 50,000 birds on their count days. More people participated in Sitka's count (54) than in any other Southeastern count.

We are entering an exciting new era for the Christmas Bird Count, as the Audubon Society is becoming immersed in the new world of information technology. Count data are now accessible as never before and compilers are entering count results directly into the database via the internet. Count data are now available online, at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>.

For more information on this year's Juneau Christmas Bird Count, you can call Mark Schwan, at 789-9841.

Results and participation for counts held in Southeast Alaska last December and January:

<b>Count Location</b>	<b>Species Recorded</b>	<b>Birds Counted</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Chilkat	14	227	4
Craig-Klawock	21	795	2
Glacier Bay	71	7,296	11
Haines	29	1,464	15
Juneau	71	14,210	42
Ketchikan	49	3,903	15
Mitkof Island	50	6,598	7
Sitka	59	8,481	54
Skagway	36	800	24
Tenakee Springs	29	2,317	8
Wrangell	36	2,798	10
Yakutat	61	1,488	11

# Saturday Wild



December 2005

**F**or over a century, volunteers have been collecting information on the birds in their communities in a holiday tradition, the Christmas Bird Count. Data collected over the years provides a valuable resource for learning more about bird behavior and bird conservation. Thanks to new information technology, data is available as never before. Learn more at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>. This one-day annual event is an opportunity to meet other local volunteers, hone your birding skills, and take part in a seasonal tradition.

**December 10**

## **Christmas Bird Count 101**

Meet at 10 a.m. at McDonald's Restaurant, downtown or valley. This is a chance to learn how the annual Christmas Bird Count works, why it matters, and what birds will likely be seen on count day. You can practice your identification and count skills, then decide if you'd like to participate in the official count on December 17. **Sightings on Dec. 10 will NOT be recorded as part of the annual CBC.** Bring binoculars, bird guides, DRESS FOR THE WEATHER. Leaders: Mark Schwan & Paul Suchanek

**December 17**

## **106<sup>th</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count**

Meet at 8 a.m., McDonald's Restaurant downtown or in valley (*Meet at downtown restaurant to count downtown, Douglas & North Douglas Island.*  
*Meet at valley restaurant to count Lemon Creek, airport, Mendenhall Valley and Auke Bay areas.*) Bring binoculars, bird guides, DRESS FOR THE WEATHER. Participants are invited to a pot luck following the count at the home of Mark Schwan & Debi Ballam. Call 789-9841 for more information.

### **Saturday Wild is coordinated by Juneau Audubon Society**

NOTE: starting in December, Saturday Wild will go on a winter schedule of two walks per month. Weekly walks will resume in the spring. For more information on these free community walks, see <http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org> or e-mail [saturdaywild@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:saturdaywild@juneau-audubon-society.org). Programs will also be announced through local news media.

*Special thanks to Mark & Paul and all leaders and participants in the CBC.*

## **From: Paul Suchanek *Eaglechat* Point Bridget Observations - 11/19**

Took advantage of the small break in the rain today to go out and bird in Point Bridget State Park. Highlights included a pygmy-owl on the edge of the muskeg near the trailhead, a female or juvenile male king eider out in the bay with about 20 white-winged and 3 black scoters, and 2 yellow-billed loons. Not much in the way of land birds as I didn't even see any jays, sparrows, crows, or magpies, however, there was a lingering hermit thrush and ruby-crowned kinglet along with a flock of about 40 white-winged crossbills.

## **PETERSBURG KRILL MYSTERY** Don Cornelius

In early October the shoreline at the mouth of Wrangell Narrows was lined with thousands of gulls of multiple persuasions, but primarily Glaucous-winged. A couple of days later it was at least a thousand sea ducks, mostly surf and white-winged scoters and harlequins. Local canneries had pretty much reduced their output of ground up fish wastes so I knew what I'd find when I walked down to the beach. Krill -- or euphasids would be stranded along the shoreline and swimming just offshore -- a feast for waterfowl, gulls, shorebirds, ravens and crows.

It's a common occurrence at the north end of Wrangell Narrows. In past years I've seen dead krill at least a foot deep in places. Considering their tiny size, that's a lot of dead critters. In querying a more knowledgeable friend as to what causes these die offs or strandings, he suggested it might be just their exoskeletons after the invertebrates molted. So I poked some recent arrivals and they wiggled. So much for that theory.

I wondered if they spawn and then die. An internet search suggested no, euphasids can live for two years at mid latitudes and six years at high latitudes. Females can carry several thousand eggs in their ovaries and produce multiple broods each year.

Yet periodically I'll go down to the beach and there the feasting birds will be. Krill spend their days in deep water and migrate to shallow water at night. The proximity of strong upwelling currents at the mouth of Wrangell Narrows to the high densities of krill in Frederick Sound could contribute to these die offs as those that end up near shore could easily be stranded by falling tides.

One thing is for certain, the periodic arrival of krill along the shores of Wrangell Narrows makes for some wonderful birding and, I suspect, some healthy birds.

A couple of interesting observations in November include an immature cliff swallow on the sixth and a pair of rusty blackbirds around the same time.

**Petersburg's Christmas bird count is scheduled for December 17th. Contact Bill Pawuk at 772-3985 for details.**

## **AN UNCOMMON GRACKLE** By Bonnie Demerjian, Wrangell

November seems to be a month of birdy surprises around Wrangell. Just when most birds have fled the country leaving us with our faithful few, up pops an unusual species. A few years ago it was a Western meadowlark, then an Anna's hummingbird. This year several feeder watchers have reported that among the Steller's jays a Common grackle is also hustling for seeds. While not rare in Southeast Alaska the Common grackle is considered a casual visitor and is not known to breed

anywhere in the state. The Common grackle is truly common in the eastern and central part of the United States and has been reported in Canada north to Hudson Bay and west to northeastern British Columbia. Since its range is expanding it may one day breed in Alaska, though since it prefers open areas with scattered trees, it may never favor our region.

Common grackles are large (11 – 13.5 inches in length), iridescent blackbirds with yellow eyes, a sharp black bill and a long tail that is often keel-shaped in flight. They are opportunistic feeders stalking invertebrates, mice, birds and lizards and even wading in water to catch small fish. In winter they turn to plant food. The clearing of eastern forests and increase in agriculture there boosted their survival rate by providing winter forage. It is now one of the most abundant breeding birds in North America says the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The appearance of our grackle reminds us not to give up hope while our feeders draw their daily grind of juncos or jays and proves, after all, my personal birding mantra, “You never know . . .”

**Wrangell’s Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for December 17. The count organizer is Bonnie Demerjian who can be contacted at [bonniede@aptalaska.net](mailto:bonniede@aptalaska.net) or at 970-874-3665.**

#### **NOVEMBER NOTES FROM KETCHIKAN**-by Teri Goucher

Our weather was a bit wetter and warmer than usual this November allowing Autumn migrants to continue lingering in Ketchikan. There were interesting birds seen around the northern area of the road system.

A flock of 18 magnificent Trumpeter Swans flew low over Ward Lake on 11-4. A lone Short-eared Owl was spotted at North Point Higgins School the next day. One yard with many apple trees was lucky to attract many warbler species, including Tennessee, Nashville, Townsend’s and Wilson’ the past few weeks. In town a Snowy Owl was seen for more than a week by many in the hillside neighborhoods.

Amazingly on 11-14 a **White Wagtail** was spotted by Steve Heinel and Andy Piston from their office adjacent to the waterfront. They promptly found this “accidental” again in a gravel lot and got some photographs. This is a first record for this species in Ketchikan and possibly a first sighting for all of S.E. Alaska. Sometimes luck provides unique birds even for experts!

Two Snow Buntings were seen around the island and a Red-winged Blackbird was also found this month. The Mountain Point area again provided a haven for birds, including more unusual species such as; Western Meadowlark, Swamp Sparrow and both an adult and juvenile Northern Shrike. There still have been quite a few sightings of Hermit Thrush, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Yellow-rumped Warbler well into November.

**Ketchikan’s Christmas Bird Count will be held on December 17.** The CBC has compiled valuable data for over a century and is traditionally a fun day enjoying nature every December! **For more information contact Andy Piston at 225-9677.** Andy will be giving a slide presentation about area birds including recent rarities on 12-16 at the Discovery center.

Everyone should get out there and enjoy Autumn birding before winter arrives!

## **HAINES REPORT** By Georgia Giacobbe

Although many activities are planned and enjoyed at the Bald Eagle Festival, the real attractions are still all the eagles that gather on the Chilkat River. During the height of the festival, the week of November 7<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup>, the Valley was filled with snow, the best backdrop for viewing them. The largest gathering was at about 20 mile on November 12<sup>th</sup>. Two mature eagles and one immature eagle were released at 19 mile that day at the annual Eagle Release, well attended that day. They hopped out of their carriers and flew off and joined the wild eagles without incident. They may even have returned to Juneau later. The total count of eagles is estimated to have been between 3,000 and 3,500 in the Valley this year. Next month a **Christmas Bird Count is planned, but date not set yet.**

## **GUSTAVUS BIRD REPORT--October 25 - November 20, 2005 .** By Nat Drumheller, natdrumheller@hotmail.com

The 35th Glacier Bay/Gustavus Christmas Bird Count will be on Saturday, December 17. Contact Bruce Paige, count coordinator, at 907 697 2262 if interested in participating.

During this report period, there was snow cover for about twenty-four hours and a low temperature of 17 degrees.

A variety of owls continued to be reported. **Northern Hawk Owls** were seen in the State Critical Crane Habitat west of town on 11/2, 11/4, and 11/6, with two observed there on 11/10. Sightings of **Snowy Owls** between November 14 and 19 provided an incentive to get out on the local beaches in the rain and wind. Single Snowy Owls were reported at five locations. Sadly, one Snowy Owl was observed battling with a Bald Eagle along the road inside Glacier Bay National Park. The eagle departed as a person came upon the scene and the owl was later observed at the location sitting inside the forest with a nasty wound to the head. **Short-eared Owls** were seen hunting the beach grasslands throughout the period with up to four at one time near the Salmon River. Also during this period, a **Great Horned Owl** was heard, **Northern Pygmy-Owls** were seen on two dates, and a **Western Screech-Owl** was found dead at Bartlett Cove.



*Northern Saw-whet Owl photographed in Yakutat this fall*

**Dunlin** numbers grew steadily through the period. Five hundred and ten Dunlins with fifty **Rock Sandpipers** were counted on the beach near Dude Creek on 10/29. On 11/6, a flock near Dude Creek was estimated to contain eleven hundred Dunlins and two hundred Rock Sandpipers. On 11/13, there appeared to be fifteen to seventeen hundred Dunlins with about two hundred Rock Sandpipers and fifty **Sanderlings**, but an accurate count was not possible as the birds were spread out on the beach and very active.

**Snow Buntings** became more common along the beaches with as many as seventy in one flock observed. **American Tree Sparrows** began showing up in small numbers during this period.

**Steller's Jays** are still common at the local feeders, but their numbers seem to be dropping, and people are starting to see some of the more common feeder birds return.

Some rarer sightings were: single **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** with single **Pectoral Sandpipers** on 10/27 and 10/28, a juvenile **Gyrfalcon** on 10/25, a **Eurasian Wigeon** on 10/28, two **European Starlings** on 11/8, and a male **Mountain Bluebird** 11/10.

Some observations that were late for the season included: a male **Blue-winged Teal** on 10/28, an **American Golden-Plover** on 10/29, a **Black-bellied Plover** on 11/1, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** on 11/12, a **Ruby-Crowned Kinglet** on 11/13, and a **Savannah Sparrow** on 11/15.

Thanks to Bruce Paige, Lexa Meyer, Jeff Duckett, Rebecca Duckett, Rusty Yerxa, Lauri Ross, Kim Ney, Phoebe Vanselow, Melanie Heacox, and Neil Barten for sharing their observations.

### **FROM AUDUBON NEWSWIRE – NOVEMBER 18**

Like Climbing Into Their Nests (Review of the best binoculars for birding - Greg Butcher quoted and Audubon Equinox HP included in round-up of binoculars)

<http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=FA0F12F63E5A0C738DDDA80994DD404482> (registration and payment required)

For 30 Years, a Political Battle Over Oil and ANWR (Stan Senner, executive director of Audubon Alaska, discusses the battle to prevent drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5007819>

### **FREE PUBLICATION**

To launch their colorful new magazine the **National Wildlife Refuge Association** is offering complementary one-year introductory memberships. Benefits include *Wildlife Refuge* magazine, electronic updates and alerts, and the knowledge that you're helping to ensure a sound future for America's wildlife. To join visit [www.refugenet.org](http://www.refugenet.org) and click on the "Free Membership" button or write to the National Wildlife Refuge, Association, 1010 Wisconsin Ave. NW Suite 200, Washington, DC 20007.

This is an organization worthy of support by Alaskans as we have more than 77 million acres of Refuges in our own state. Juneau Audubon Society is still listed as an official "Friend of Alaska Maritime NWR" which includes Forester Island near Ketchikan, Hazy Islands north west of there and St. Lazaria Island west of Sitka.

## 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. You will receive the National *Audubon* Magazine plus Juneau Chapter newsletter *The Raven*.

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

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**If you prefer to support Juneau Audubon Society only, and receive 9 months of *The Raven*, send the completed form above with \$10 to: Membership Chair, PO Box 21725, Juneau, AK 99802. Please let us know if you prefer to have the newsletter sent by electronic \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail or paper copy \_\_\_\_\_**

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**Vice-President:** Jeff Sauer, [vice-president@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:vice-president@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
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**Treasurer:** Liz Blecker, 586-4210, [treasurer@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:treasurer@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Programs:** Matt Kirchhoff, 586-5816, [programs@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:programs@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Membership:** Donna Carroll, [membership@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:membership@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Education:** Beth Peluso, [education@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:education@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Publicity:** Amy Skilbred, [publicity@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:publicity@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Conservation:** Sari Saunders, [conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Field Trips:** Steve Zimmerman, 586-2597, [field-trips@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:field-trips@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Raven Editor:** Mary Lou King, 789-7540, [raven@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:raven@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Public Market** Ellen Anderson, 789-1412, [public-market@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:public-market@juneau-audubon-society.org)  
**Web Master:** George Utermohle, [webmaster@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:webmaster@juneau-audubon-society.org)

**JUNEAU AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**PO BOX 021725**  
**JUNEAU, AK 99802**

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US Postage Paid  
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