

# 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

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## **SOUTHEAST WILD, Public Nature Series**

**February 8, Egan Room 222/221, the Glacier View room, immediately above the Egan lecture hall. 7:00 p.m.**

### **Cold-water Corals of Alaska**

**Bob Stone, NOAA Fisheries scientist, will share some spectacular videos of cold-water corals and other deep-sea life from around the State of Alaska including some from our own watery "front" yard. Come learn more about these fascinating marine creatures that until recently have been hidden beneath the surface of the North Pacific Ocean and whose discovery has captivated marine scientists from around the world.**

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**March 8th presentation: "Birding and Turtling in Trinidad and Tobago" with Linda Shaw and Beverly Agler**

**Birder Profiles - Sitka:** by Jeff Sauer Juneau Audubon President

This month we profile three big birders in Sitka. The situation in Sitka parallels that of Gustavus, reported last month in the Raven. There is the older retired expert(s), who are out every day, and have birded for decades. (Bruce Paige in Gustavus). Then there is the junior, with just a few years of serious birding experience, but coming on like gang busters. (Matt Drumheller in Gustavus). The senior bird experts in Sitka are Marge Ward and Marlys Tedin (known as Tedin). The junior is Matt Goff.

#### **Marge Ward and Marlys Tedin**

Marge and Tedin have been a birding institution in Sitka for decades. Marge came to Sitka in 1949 as a nurse with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to help build the Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital. Tedin moved to Anchorage around 1953 to help build the BIA hospital there. Both hospitals were built in large part due to a Tuberculosis epidemic in Alaska. Marge came from upstate New York and had never been farther west than New York State. Tedin came from South Dakota. In 1955 Tedin moved from Anchorage to Barrow, which she loved, and eventually to Sitka a couple years later. In 1958 the two nurses bought some land together and put a trailer on it (and eventually a house). In the

winter, with heavy snow back then, they felt bad for the birds in their yard, so they started feeding them. There was no birdseed back then so breadcrumbs were tried. That evolved into oats. They bought so many oats one winter that the boy at the grocery commented, "Wow you must really like oatmeal!" Thus, in the late 50s and early 60s they became backyard birders. They sent for a bird book by mail, expanded beyond their yard, and kept a list in the back of the book. In 1980 a guy at the forest service taught a natural history/ bird class and they both took it. The teacher asked them to keep detailed bird observation records once a week. They started that, but then soon started doing it every day. It was done on 5x8cards. They have been doing it ever since. Tedin retired as a nurse in 1982 and Marge in 88. They are out birding every day as they have done for decades. Besides their daily records, they compile the rare-bird quarterly reports from Sitka for the state tally.

### **Matt Goff**

Marge and Tedin were starting to wonder what would become of their decades of bird observations after they were gone. They thought they had something that might be of some value. But the records are all on index cards. Then came along a young mathematician/ statistician who had gotten the birdwatching bug. Matt Goff grew up in Sitka and graduated from high school there in 1993. He went off to college and came back with a masters degree in Statistics and a PhD in Mathematics. (Washington State University). He returned to live in Sitka in 2002 and became a math professor at Sheldon Jackson College. He had been interested in plants for some time, but in 2003 got seriously into birding. In the fall of 2003 he got a decent telephoto camera lens that allowed him to shoot pictures of birds. That was it. He has been birding seriously ever since. He is out birding three or four times a week (by bicycle and on foot - he has no car). He is a frequent contributor to Eaglechat and has come upon some excellent rarities in Sitka. He is taking pictures of birds and has his own website, Sitka Nature. He will soon be taking over the quarterly rarity reports for Sitka. And, he is beginning to work on compiling and digitizing the tremendously valuable data that Marge and Tedin have gathered. After all he has a masters in statistics and doctorate in math. Matt's internet site is at [Sitkanature.org](http://Sitkanature.org). It has lots of bird pictures and his Sitka bird observations.

In future issues we will profile other birders including Alice Johnstone, in Sitka, as well as the extraordinary birders of Ketchikan.

### **NOTES FROM SITKA** By Matt Goff

The Common Redpolls have invaded Sitka in numbers that are apparently unusually high for the area. Sizable flocks of Common Redpolls (sometimes mixed in with Pine Siskins) have been seen regularly around since the first snows in November. There have also been a couple of Hoary Redpolls reported in the mix.

Trumpeter Swans seem to have decided Starrigavan Estuary is the place for them to be this winter. There have been two adults for about 2 months and earlier this month they were joined by 6 additional birds, 3 adults and 3 juveniles. More recently, two more adults have joined the party.

Starrigavan has also seen up to 20 Black Oystercatchers feeding on the tideflats at low tide. A lone Dunlin was also spotted. Dunlin are casual along the Sitka road system outside of migration periods.

A mostly frozen Swan Lake has provided excellent viewing opportunities of several Ring-necked Ducks, a female Northern Pintail, and a Glaucous Gull. A couple of male Hooded Mergansers also visited one day (they may be the same ones that have also been seen at Starrigavan this month).

The first seminar in the Natural History series at Sheldon Jackson College is 25 January. It will be a talk on the Birds of the Sitka Area. Along with photos of many species taken around Sitka, the talk will feature information from an unpublished manuscript written by J. Daniel Webster (now available on-line at

[http://www.sitkanature.org/life/animals/aves/Webster\\_Birds\\_of\\_Sitka.html](http://www.sitkanature.org/life/animals/aves/Webster_Birds_of_Sitka.html)

). This manuscript was written in 2005, and does a pretty thorough job of covering the published records of birds in the Sitka Area. Also featured will be some initial findings of interest taken from the observation data collected by Marge Ward and Marlys Tedin. They have been recording daily observations of birds in Sitka since 1980. The amount of information they have amassed is inspiring. For more information about this data and what is being done with it, see visit <http://www.sitkanature.org/wordpress/2007/01/04/a-preliminary-look-at-marge-and-tedins-data/>

Other bird related topics tentatively planned for the seminar series include Antarctic Birds, American Dippers, Avian Internal Anatomy, Chilean Birds, and Learning to Understand Bird Language. As plans solidify, the updated schedule will be kept at <http://www.sitkanature.org/seminar.html>

### **MEG CARTWRIGHT, MEMBERSHIP JUNEAU AUDUBON SOCIETY**

In the January board meeting, Meg Cartwright agreed to fill the vacant board position. She will be primarily responsible for membership organization and recruitment of new members. Meg recently retired as a fisheries biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Although she considers herself an intermediate birder, her one claim-to-fame was the result of being in the right place at the right time. Meg and Andy McGregor recorded the first sighting of the Steller's Sea Eagle on the Juneau area in the mid-1980s while hauling camp equipment up the Taku River in early summer. It would be several more years before the bird was sighted again and documented with a photo by Skip Wallen. She is looking forward to getting more involved with the Juneau Audubon Society. "It has always been one of my favorite organizations because of its commitment to conservation issues as well as recreational birding." she said. Meg can be reached by e-mail at [membership@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:membership@juneau-audubon-society.org) and welcomes any suggestions on how to get more people involved in the Audubon Society.

## **SKAGWAY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT REPORT** By Elaine Furbish

Skagway's 5th Christmas Bird Count fell on a quiet, snowy day; visibility was difficult with flat light conditions. Despite the poor conditions, the number of species seen on count day was 33, with 3 additional species recorded during count week - about average for our circle. New species for us were Snowy Owl, Merlin, and Hoary Redpoll. Our record of Hoary Redpolls this year may indicate that we're getting better at distinguishing them from Common Redpolls. The Snowy Owl and Merlin aren't considered to be out of range or that unusual, but this is the first time we've seen them during the CBC. We did note that Stellar's Jays were about twice the number we've seen in the past, and birders in the Yukon have reported unusual numbers of Stellar's Jays in the southern Yukon this autumn/winter. We are happy to report that no beak deformities were seen among any of our birds.

## **WRANGELL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT REPORT** by Bonnie Demerjian

Thirteen participants scanned water and shore for Wrangell's 2006 Christmas Bird Count. Clear, calm weather made birding by boat easier and a number of the usual species showed up for the count. Among the most numerous were Harlequin Ducks, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and Common Mergansers. Smaller numbers of Greater Scaups, Common Goldeneyes, Red-breasted Mergansers, Pacific, Common and Yellow-billed Loons were reported as well as Horned, Red-necked and Western Grebes. No scoters were observed.

One Northern Goshawk showed up near the airport and the beaches produced Black Turnstones and Rock sandpipers. Magpies have been around town all winter and 8 were spotted on count day. European Starlings also seem to be increasing in Wrangell, doubling their numbers from 2005. Songbird numbers were low, perhaps due in part to fewer participants this year. Particularly noticeable was the lack of Golden-crowned Kinglets. One White-crowned Sparrow and small numbers of juncos, Pine and White-winged Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins were reported. Total individual birds numbered 2585, total species reported was 49.

## **BIRDING NEWS FROM KETCHIKAN**-by Teri Goucher

January's blustery weather has made birding rather challenging, so only a few noteworthy species were seen.

Another vividly plumed male **Purple Finch** visited a feeder on January 12.

A flock of 8 **Ringed-necked Ducks** were seen at Ward Lake on the 15th.

The enduringly resilient **Anna's Hummingbird** has remained at the same heated feeder through late January!

On the 13th, a 1st winter **Glaucous Gull** was found at our landfill. This species is a very uncommon migrant and winter visitant through late March.

The overall numbers of gulls and frequency of uncommon gull species has declined dramatically area wide since Ketchikan began incinerating garbage in 1995.

Progress for people is sometimes detrimental for wildlife!

A few **Common Redpolls** have been here this winter. This species is irregular on our island but is much more commonly seen on the mainland areas of S.E. Alaska.

I know it's a bit early to think about spring migration, but several species may start arriving in just a few weeks!

The American Robin has been seen here as early as February 22 with the majority of the big flocks moving through around mid-March.

Both American Wigeon and Eurasian Wigeon have been very rarely spotted here in late February.

Bonaparte's Gulls will start migrating up the channel by late March and a few Ruby-crowned Kinglets begin to appear in the woods by mid-March.

I'm always excited to see the small flocks of Trumpeter Swans making their way north as early as mid-March; a sure sign that spring is on the way!

Thanks again to Steve Heinl and Andy Piston for their great information that helps add so much to our birding news each month!

### **GUSTAVUS SIGHTINGS -- December 2006 - January 23, 2007**

**Common Redpoll** numbers continued to increase through December, and flocks of redpolls could be seen at most feeders and in most habitats through January. Interestingly, there have been few, if any, **Pine Siskins** around Gustavus during this time. **White-winged Crossbills** are seen regularly in small numbers, but nothing like the large numbers of last winter, and they are not singing like they did last winter.

A **Western Grebe**, reported late October to early November, was seen once in December and once in January. A **Ring-necked Duck** was seen on 1/17. After a brief absence, a **Greater Yellowlegs** made an appearance on 1/11. **Dunlin, Rock Sandpipers, and Sanderlings** have been along the beaches through the winter. Their numbers have been difficult to estimate due to movement of the birds along beaches accessible only on foot and due to weather conditions. On 1/11, a flock containing 3,000 to 5,000 shorebirds was spread out along the eastern end of the Gustavus beach. Of these, it was roughly estimated that 85% were Dunlin, 10% were Rock Sandpipers, and 5% were Sanderlings.

There were two sightings of **Snowy Owls** during the period and one report of a **Short-eared Owl**. There were many reports of **Northern Pygmy-Owls**. A pygmy-owl was recently observed taking a redpoll at a feeder. A **Barred Owl** was heard on several nights through the period, making this the first winter this bird has been detected in Gustavus. Vole numbers continue to be high, so owls should have no trouble finding prey.

The hybrid **Northern Flicker** reported in the last newsletter continues to make the rounds to local suet feeders. Five **Horned Larks** were seen on 12/31. An **American Pipit** was seen on 12/19 and 12/31. Six **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches** were observed near the town dock on 1/8, a first winter record for the area.

Thanks to Bruce Paige for records information. Thanks to Bruce Paige, Phoebe Vanselow, Sally McLaughlin, and Kathy Lochman for sharing observations. By Nat Drumheller. natdrumheller@hotmail.com

### **HAINES CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT** By Georgia Giacobbe

The birders in Haines braved lousy weather two days before Christmas to count birds in town and in the Bald Eagle Preserve. Many of the forest birds were hunkered down, so the largest counts were sea ducks. Thirty species of all birds were identified with Barrow's Goldeneyes leading the list at 567. Gulls counted included 198 Glaucous-winged Gulls and 148 Mew Gulls. The next most numerous were 101 Northwestern Crows. Only one sighting of note was 7 Surf Scoters. They are not always spotted here in the winter.

Out at the eagle preserve, 10 species were counted, with the eagles toping the list, naturally. This year 1,193 bald eagles were counted, up from last year. Of these, 1094 were adults and 99 were immatures. Eighty-four Ravens were out in the blustery weather. The next most common birds were Common Merganzers at 75, then 67 Glaucous-winged gulls, 13 Trumpeter Swans, 8 Red-breasted Mergansers, and 2 Common Redpolls.

This January, continuing snow storms have kept both the birds and people hunkered down. However, there has been one possible identification of a crow with a deformed beak. Verification is being pursued.

### **REPORTS TAKEN FROM EAGLECHAT**

**Posted by: "Paul Suchanek"**  
**Mon Jan 22, 2007 2:44 pm (PST)**

Up until this week, I was having intermittent feeder visits of a flock of about 75 to 100 redpolls but I haven't seen them during the last few days. This is the first year that I have ever seen redpolls consistently in January here in Juneau, in a few other years I have seen them consistently sometimes in February but more often in March. There have been good numbers of redpolls since late October - estimated there were perhaps 500 on the rocky peninsula in front of the glacier on November 5. The "fall" redpolls were mostly feeding in the alders and I didn't see any come to my feeder until early January. The movements of this species seem mysteriously unpredictable.

At Fish Creek this AM, there was a flock of 25 green-winged teal containing a male which was a hybrid with Eurasian (common) teal (illustrated in Sibley guide).

**Posted by: "Beth Peluso"**  
**Sun Jan 14, 2007 1:51 pm (PST)**

I've had the pleasure of watching a very large flock of redpolls at my apartment in Douglas (by Lawson Creek for the Juneau-ites). At times there have been almost 60 birds! I've been trying to find a hoary redpoll among them, but so far no luck. I did get to watch one take a snow bath--he'd

carve a little off the side of the hollow he was in and then roll in it, flicking it over his back with his wings. Looked cold to me, but he seemed to enjoy it. The whole flock has been here all day for the past two days.

**Posted by: "Michael Goldstein"**

**Wed Jan 17, 2007 3:41 pm (PST)**

I'm hoping you can help me compile any black oystercatcher observations in the Juneau area. Actually I will take any locations out to Hoonah and Pt Adolphus, but not in GBNP (places I can get to in a day from Juneau docks). I'm actually trying to map out locations for some survey and capture effort we will complete this May. But any locations you can offer (during any season) will be helpful for our efforts at determining interseasonal movements and wintering areas.

If you would like to help or have questions, contact Michael at Email: [mgoldstein@fs.fed.us](mailto:mgoldstein@fs.fed.us) Office: 907.586.7905. Cell: 907.350.3087

The Yukon Bird Club posted the following information and Web sight in their email:

**"The latest updated Alaska Bird Checklist"**

<http://www.uaf.edu/museum/bird/products/checklist.pdf>

**DEFORMED BIRD ALERT** Over the past several years, Alaskans have witnessed a startling increase of beak deformities among local birds. Large numbers of Black-capped Chickadees and smaller numbers of many other species of birds have appeared with grossly overgrown and crossed beaks. We began research in 1999, and have since identified nearly 1,500 deformed Black-capped Chickadees in south-central Alaska—the highest concentration of such abnormalities ever recorded in a wild bird population anywhere! More recently, rapidly increasing numbers of other species, including Downy Woodpeckers, Northwestern Crows, Steller's Jays, and Black-billed Magpies, have also been reported with beak deformities by biologists and local residents throughout the state.



Although we do not yet know the source of this widespread problem, we continue to investigate potential causes, including environmental contaminants, nutritional deficiencies, and disease. Nearly all of the species affected are year-round residents, and factors responsible for this cluster of deformities appear to be unique to Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. In addition to a multi-year study of chickadees in south-central Alaska, we are beginning the next phase of research. We need additional information about the distribution and prevalence of beak deformities among Northwestern Crows and other affected species. Reports from the public will help us to determine where and how many birds are affected. If you see a bird with a deformed beak, please note the following information.

- Species and number of deformed individuals
- Date of observation
- Location of observation
- Description of deformity
- Habitat where bird was observed
- Behavior
- Flock composition
- PHOTOS are especially helpful!

Submit this information via our online form:

[http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/landbirds/beak\\_deformity/observerreport.html](http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/landbirds/beak_deformity/observerreport.html)

Or contact Caroline Van Hemert at the Alaska Science Center: 1011 E Tudor Rd, Anchorage, AK 99501 (907) 786-3981 [caroline\\_vanhemert@usgs.gov](mailto:caroline_vanhemert@usgs.gov)



**Save these birding dates!**

As the seasons change, we hope you'll join in with some of the winter birding activities that Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology will be hosting over the next few months throughout the U.S. and Canada.

### ***Great Backyard Bird Count***

**Mark your calendars for the tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count, 16-19 February 2007. We'd like to make this the best GBBC ever, and could use your help in spreading word about this event. It's fun and helps everyone learn more about birds. If you represent an Audubon chapter and want to promote GBBC, send an email to [aenglish@audubon.org](mailto:aenglish@audubon.org). If you'd like to spread the word about the Great Backyard Bird Count more generally, consider joining us as a Great Backyard Bird Count Ambassador.**

### ***Project Feeder Watch***

Project FeederWatch needs your help to keep track of the birds at your feeders this winter. Count birds as often as two days each week from November 11 to April 6. Your counts will help scientists monitor changes in feeder bird populations over the entire winter. New participants receive a kit with a handbook, a bird-identification poster, calendar, and instruction booklet. For more information or to sign up in the U.S., please visit <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/> or call (800) 843-2473; if in Canada, please visit

<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/national/pfw.html> or call (888) 448-2473.

As an ambassador, you can choose your level of involvement—from putting up posters in your neighborhood to contacting newspapers or leading workshops. For more information, visit [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc) or sign up to receive an ambassador packet by mail. Write to Jennifer Smith at [jls39@cornell.edu](mailto:jls39@cornell.edu). Type GBBC in the subject line. Include your name, address, phone number, and email address in the message. Write "Media OK" if it would be all right for us to give your contact information to reporters who would like to speak with a GBBC participant from their area.

Paul Green Janis Dickinson  
Director of Citizen Science  
National Audubon Society /Cornell Lab of Ornithology

## **JUNEAU AUDUBON WEIGHS IN ON SECOND CROSSING** By Matt Kirchhoff, Conservation Chair

Members of the Juneau Audubon board met recently with Jan Caulfield, of Shineberg and Associates, to get an update on planning efforts for the second channel crossing. This crossing has been talked about for many years, primarily as a means of encouraging further development on north Douglas Island, easing traffic congestion at the current bridge, and improving access to Eaglecrest for residents of the Mendenhall Valley. A total of 15 different crossing routes have been under consideration at one time or another, ranging all the way from relatively short crossings near salmon creek, to a tunnel under the airport runway. The costs, both fiscal and environmental, of these alternatives vary widely. The City Assembly has passed a resolution narrowing the scope of potential crossing routes to 4. All four are on the Mendenhall Refuge.

The Juneau Audubon Society is recommending to the Assembly that they reconsider the underlying need for a second channel crossing. If the community supports making the second channel crossing a high priority, the Assembly should consider a wider range of Alternatives.

This project is a long way from final planning stages, and it is far down on DOT's list of transportation priorities (meaning funding is scarce). Nonetheless, on an issue of this potential impact, it's important for the Juneau Audubon Society to weigh in early.

**Ed. Note:** Federal funds are not available for crossing the refuge and a high bridge over the boat channel is not allowed near the airport. A crossing at Salmon Creek directly accessing the hospital would be shorter and might avoid these problems with the Assembly's four choices. Juneau Audubon recommends a Salmon Creek crossing as the only practical route.

## 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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