

NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF THE DUTCH HARBOR AREA OF THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

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Dutch Harbor lies on tiny Amaknak Island within Captains Bay on the northeastern corner of Unalaska Island in the Aleutian chain. The entire island is under four miles in length. To the north it is open to the blasts and buffets of the Bering Sea, and on all other sides it is subjected to the gusty blasts of the "williwaws" that pile over the surrounding mountains and attack it from every direction at once. On all sides mountains shoot up from the sea to a height up to 5000 feet, with snow-capped tops even in summer. All shores are rough with wave-pounded rocks, and there are only few gravel beaches, and still fewer sand beaches. The entire area is treeless, except for two little clusters of spruces planted by the Russians around 1865; these have survived but never reproduced. It is a land of gales, fog, sleet, rain, snow and, on occasion, glorious sunshine and blue skies. The average winter temperature is around 32° above zero; the average summer temperature is 52°; the annual precipitation varies around 59 inches.

Prior to the war, the Aleutian Islands had been studied only spasmodically because of their isolation and uncongenial climatic conditions. During the war I served at Dutch Harbor for 47 consecutive months, which gave me an opportunity for more or less continuous ornithological observations. The following list is offered as a contribution to the ornithology of the Aleutian area.

Gavia immer. Common Loon. Not uncommon in winter in Captains and Makushin bays. One seen in Iliuliuk Bay on January 5, 1943; two near same place January 16, 1943; four in Makushin Bay on December 3, 1945. Latest date is March 3, 1946.

Gavia stellata. Red-throated Loon. Apparently about as common as the preceding species in winter, but also rarely present in summer. Seen on Unalaska Lake on June 6, 1944, and on Coxcomb Lake on May 8, 1946, both on Unalaska Island. Behavior of a pair seen at the mouth of Makushin Bay on June 10, 1945, suggested possible nesting.

Colymbus grisegena. Red-necked Grebe. Not uncommon in Captains Bay and Iliuliuk Bay in November, December and January.

Colymbus auritus. Horned Grebe. Seen sparingly in any of the bays during December and January, always solitary and rather shy. One was seen almost daily in Iliuliuk Bay during January, 1943. December 2, 1943, and February 21, 1946, are the extreme dates of record.

Diomedea nigripes. Black-footed Albatross. These birds follow ships from Seattle to the mouth of Unimak Pass and beyond into the Bering Sea, but only very seldom do they come within sight of Amaknak Island. In a big wind on November 19, 1942, two were blown into Captains Bay, but did not remain longer than was necessary. Ships in the Bering Sea repeatedly report these birds.

Fulmarus glacialis. Fulmar. In the late summer and winter these birds congregate in enormous flocks and are especially abundant about Unimak, Akutan, Unalga and Umnak passes. Thousands were seen in flocks at the north end of Akutan Pass on June 5, 1946. Nest abundantly on the cliffs in uninhabited and undisturbed cliff areas.

Puffinus tenuirostris. Slender-billed Shearwater. Common in very large flocks in Bering Sea during the summer months, but the species does not come inshore and hence is unrecorded from Amaknak Island itself. It seems to disappear about mid-August and to return sometime in May.

Oceanodroma furcata. Fork-tailed Petrel. Seen abundantly in the fall and winter far out in Bering Sea; apparently does not come inshore. On September 30, 1945, a female was brought in alive, having been picked up on the street in Dutch Harbor. It had a broken wing.

Phalacrocorax pelagicus. Pelagic Cormorant. Abundant everywhere along the rocky shores from September to May, when they desert inhabited areas completely to breed in less disturbed regions close by. Before Dutch Harbor became a Navy base, the birds bred commonly on Amaknak Island.

Phalacrocorax urile. Red-faced Cormorant. Much less common than the preceding species; seen during the fall and winter sparingly and in small groups, chiefly in Captains Bay.

Philacte canagica. Emperor Goose. Not uncommon locally in the winter and spring in all the larger bays. On April 2, 1944, a flock of 17 was seen near the mouth of Captains Bay, the birds resting on the shoreside rocks; they were very tame and permitted approach and study for half an hour from within fifty yards. On April 5, 1944, a flock of some 150 was seen deep in Captains Bay; on December 2, 1945, a flock of 16 flew low over Dutch Harbor and later that day a single bird was seen in Iliuliuk Bay. Makushin Bay and the rock-bound marshy country around it is an ideal refuge for the birds.

Anas platyrhynchos. Mallard. Common only in Makushin Valley during the winter, where the fresh-water swampy conditions provide a suitable habitat for the birds. A few remain into the summer and breed in this swamp; a flock of nine downy young accompanied by the female was seen in the mouth of the Makushin River on July 2, 1945.

Anas acuta. Pintail. Occasionally seen only during the fall migration in Makushin Valley; I saw one that was shot there on October 24, 1943.

Anas crecca. European Teal. Quite common only in Makushin Valley; present in the period from March to September and may breed here. One seen on October 14, 1943; two on December 2, 1943; two seen that had been shot on September 22, 1945.

Anas carolinensis. Green-winged Teal. Observed in every month of the year except August in four years of observations; inhabits the same area as *A. crecca*, but more common.

Nyroca marila. Greater Scaup Duck. An abundant winter inhabitant of all the larger bays, in common with the Harlequin Ducks and White-winged Scoters. The greatest numbers occur in December and January, and the species disappears entirely in April as a rule; May 3, 1946, is the latest recorded date. It returns again a few at a time, in September and October, gradually increasing in abundance.

Glaucionetta clangula. Common Golden-eye. Strictly a winter visitor, present in considerable numbers but never in large flocks. Golden-eyes drift in by one's and two's in late October (October 24, 1943) and are common in the larger bays during the period of December through February, at which time they disappear far more abruptly than they arrive. April 11, 1946, is the latest recorded date; this is unusually late.

Charitonetta albeola. Buffle-head Duck. On February 22, 1944, a single male of this species was observed flying over Dutch Harbor toward Makushin Bay. This is my only record.

Clangula hyemalis. Old-squaw Duck. Strictly a winter visitor but common in all of the larger bays, especially Captains Bay; usually seen in small flocks or solitarily. Earliest date of occurrence is November 3, 1943; the latest, April 19, 1946.

Histrionicus histrionicus. Harlequin Duck. These exquisite ducks leave the Dutch Harbor area in May and return, a few small flocks at a time, starting in mid-September. Three females, apparently stragglers, were present as late as June 29, 1946. During the winter the birds are abundant, occurring normally in small flocks of as many as a dozen birds; but toward spring they gather in larger flocks and leave. On June 14, 1946, in company with Dr. Ira Gabrielson, I saw several flocks of several hundred individuals each, deep in Captains Bay. The birds seem to segregate somewhat as to sex in flock formation. They are quick divers and I have frequently timed their submergence at 30 seconds and over.

Somateria mollissima. Pacific Eider. Not uncommon as a winter visitor from late November to early March. Never seen in large numbers, and females seem to predominate over males.

Somateria spectabilis. King Eider. Considerably more common than the last species; present from early December to early March, usually in small flocks of three to six, or solitarily. December 2, 1945, is the earliest record, April 3, 1944, the latest. The gizzard of a female found dead contained two specimens of the snail *Calliostoma*.

Melanitta fusca. White-winged Scoter. An abundant fall and winter visitor, especially from December to February. Often seen in Captains, Makushin and Summer bays in flocks of large size, and often associated with the Black Scoter.

Melanitta perspicillata. Surf Scoter. Apparently rare. I have but two records, both from Captains Bay: three on April 3, 1943, and a single individual on March 16, 1945.

Oidemia nigra. Black Scoter. Common in very large flocks in all the major bays from December to February, inclusive. During the winter gales they congregate on the leeward side of the islands

and ride the waves. Earliest date of arrival is November 28, 1942; latest spring record (possibly an injured bird), April 19, 1944.

Mergus serrator. Red-breasted Merganser. Common in Makushin and Captains bays during the late spring, summer and early fall. On July 4, 1945, I found a female with eleven downy young on Coxcomb Lake. On June 23, 1944, a female and nine young were found in the Makushin Valley swamp.

Aquila chrysaëtos. Golden Eagle. While probably not rare in the higher and wilder parts of Unalaska Island, this species is uncommon around Dutch Harbor. Two records in four years: June 17, 1944, over Mt. Ballyhoo, and August 7, 1944, sitting atop a mast on a ship anchored at a dock.

Haliaeetus albicilla. Sea Eagle. Observed only on May 16, 1945, over Dutch Harbor and Mt. Ballyhoo. When first seen the bird was in low flight over a fresh-water lake on the island and was clearly observed for about 10 minutes as it circled over the lake; it then sailed slowly overhead toward Mt. Ballyhoo.

Haliaeetus leucocephalus. Bald Eagle. Very common; seen almost daily the year round, although less common in winter than in summer. In late April, a considerable flight of these eagles occurs; on April 12, 1944, 56 were seen over the island in two hours; on April 28, 1946, 27 were seen at one time over Dutch Harbor. Nests in the high, inaccessible cliffs of both Amaknak and Unalaska islands. Two pairs nested each summer on the northwest side of Mt. Ballyhoo. Young are out of the nest by early August.

Circus cyaneus. Marsh Hawk. There are but two records on hand of this species: a male on June 7, 1943, in Makushin swamp area, and a female on July 7, 1944, over the swamp around the Shaishnikof River at the end of Captains Bay.

Lagopus mutus. Rock Ptarmigan. Generally distributed among the mountains, but nowhere abundant. Ptarmigans nest rather high, and bring their young down to the lower slopes after hatching. On August 2, 1944, five young were found on Mt. Ballyhoo, but the species has been disturbed so much here that it has practically deserted the island. On November 19, 1945, two were seen on Ballyhoo at 1500 feet, in the intermediate plumage. On July 1, 1946, an individual was flushed from under foot on Ballyhoo at an elevation of less than 200 feet. Search revealed no young, but I suspect they were present.

Haematopus bachmani. Black Oyster-catcher. Three birds were seen on the sand beach of Summer Bay on July 4, 1945; two were seen flying over the water in the same area on June 9, 1944, and one over the beach of Makushin Bay on June 14, 1943.

Arenaria interpres. Ruddy Turnstone. An individual of this species was seen on July 18, 1944, on the beach of Summer Bay, in company with numerous Rock Sandpipers.

Erolia ptilocnemis. Rock Sandpiper. Although seldom seen in numbers, this sandpiper is a regular and constant resident; I have at least one record for each month of the year except November. During most of the year the species is found along the rocky coast, but it nests above the rocky region in the dry grass well up from the shore.

Erolia minutilla. Least Sandpiper. On July 4, 1946, Dr. Gabrielson saw two and collected one along the river entering Nateekin Bay.

Limosa lapponica. Bar-tailed Godwit. On May 21, 1946, one was observed feeding on the sandy beach of Hog Island.

Lobipes lobatus. Northern Phalarope. Not recorded from the Dutch Harbor area, but large flocks were seen often in the Bering Sea between Amaknak Island and Unimak Pass. On May 28, 1945, one was brought to me by the captain of an incoming ship, the bird having flown into his searchlight on a very foggy night.

Stercorarius parasiticus. Parasitic Jaeger. Apparently a resident, but very seldom seen about Dutch Harbor. I have seen them on the cliffs in uninhabited sections of Unalaska, Unimak and Akutan islands. On September 15, 1944, two were seen over Captains Bay, and on June 4, 1945, one individual was seen in Nateekin Bay.

Larus hyperboreus. Glaucous Gull. Not common in the immediate vicinity of Dutch Harbor; in fact, birds in adult plumage are definitely rare. From April 1 to May 27, 1946, two immature birds were present at Dutch Harbor dock; these were pure white, with a black-tipped white bill and pinkish legs. Although there were hundreds of Glaucous-winged Gulls present, the two Glaucous Gulls did not associate with them.

Larus glaucescens. Glaucous-winged Gull. A resident species, extremely abundant except in the breeding season, when many individuals move to less populated areas; they do not breed about Amaknak Island. These gulls are practically domesticated: they feed out of the garbage cans, practically raid the galleys, roost on the door steps, and in general have about taken over Dutch Harbor.

Rissa tridactyla. Black-legged Kittiwake. This is a common species in the Eider Point-Cape Cheerful area of Unalaska Island, from which the birds range seaward. Observed on Amaknak Island only on September 28, 1945.

Uria lomvia. Northern Murre. A rare and solitary fall, winter and spring visitor, arriving in November and departing by early April for less disturbed areas. Often associated in Captains Bay with the Common Loon and Red-necked Grebe. They are not at all shy and are easily approached for study. Extreme dates are November 16 and April 22.

Cephus columba. Pigeon Guillemot. A common resident species, but less numerous in summer, as the species nests only sparingly here. A few pairs breed on cliffs at the south end of Amaknak Island, and a few more on the east shore of Captains Bay.

Synthliboramphus antiquus. Ancient Murrelet. Not uncommon during the winter months, especially from January to early March, but present in numbers only off shore. On December 26, 1942, an oil-soaked specimen was picked up on the shore at Dutch Harbor. On March 4, 1945, I examined another specimen found in a local warehouse. Apparently does not breed near Dutch Harbor.

Cyclorhynchus psittacula. Paroquet Auklet. A single individual, brought to me alive, alighted on the deck of a vessel some 15 miles off Eider Point on March 3, 1945.

Aethia cristatella. Crested Auklet. Common in flocks off shore but rare at Dutch Harbor itself. On August 19, 1944, a male hit a local building and killed itself; on the morning of November 20, 1945, a bird was found sitting in the middle of Ballyhoo dock; on June 2, 1946, three were seen deep in Captains Bay.

Aethia pusilla. Least Auklet. Common at sea, but not found near Dutch Harbor. On May 16, 1946, a female in summer plumage which came aboard ship just off Eider Point was brought to me.

Fratercula corniculata. Horned Puffin. Extremely abundant in summer, but only in the larger, rock-bound bays. May 5, 1946, is the earliest recorded date, September 2, 1944, the latest. Puffins have continued to breed, although not abundantly, on the rock faces of Unalaska Island, even in the vicinity of troop activity; their nests are quite inaccessible.

Lunda cirrhata. Tufted Puffin. Much less abundant than the Horned Puffin; occur only at sea and in considerable numbers. Flocks of considerable size seen about Cape Cheerful, west of Eider Point, on May 16, 1945, and northeast of Priest Rock on June 23, 1945.

Nyctea scandiaca. Snowy Owl. Rare on Unalaska Island, but present in the uninhabited and rugged interior. On January 22, 1943, I saw a male that had been shot near Pyramid Mountain; on February 5, 1945, I saw another male shot near Unalaska village. During the war, men stationed on Bogoslof Island, 40 miles northwest of Dutch Harbor in the Bering Sea, shot three during the winter of 1943.

Asio flammeus. Short-eared Owl. On August 14, 1943, I flushed one from the tundra behind the village of Unalaska, and on August 1, 1944, I surprised another near Summer Bay.

Megaceryle alcyon. Belted Kingfisher. I have three records for this species, all in the area of Captains Bay: on August 17, 1943, a male and female were seen flying over the tip of that bay; on August 21 a single individual was seen near the village of Unalaska; and on July 27, 1944, a male was seen and heard near the mouth of the Shaishnikof River.

Corvus corax. Holarctic Raven. Extremely abundant everywhere at all times; breeds commonly on the slopes and cliffs of Ballyhoo. Like the Glaucous-winged Gulls, the ravens have foregone their natural food for locally available garbage, and as a result, are tame. Twice I have watched a raven kill a rat; the second time a young Bald Eagle was also watching, and when the rat was dead, the eagle took it away from the raven without argument.

Cinclus mexicanus. American Dipper. Observed only on the rocky bed of the swift Shaishnikof River entering the tip of Captains Bay. Here an individual usually can be found almost any time from mid-April to September; on June 12, 1946, three individuals were seen at one time.

Troglodytes troglodytes. Winter Wren. Found only among the rocky boulders along the shore. One gets, at best, but rare glimpses of this shy and secretive species; records extend from April 15 (1945) to September 3 (1943).

Anthus spinoletta. Water Pipit. A common summer resident, especially on wet swampy areas, but by no means confined to them; almost equally common on high mountains. Pipits arrive in early May (earliest date, May 3, 1944), and remain until mid-september.

Leucosticte tephrocotis. Rosy Finch. A common resident, becoming abundant from May to September and especially so about inhabited areas where they are tame. Rosy Finches normally nest in

tundra grasses, but one unusual nest with four well grown young was found on June 18, 1946, placed on the ledge of a window of a warehouse.

Passerculus sandwichensis. Savannah Sparrow. Apparently arrives in numbers almost overnight; by late May (earliest date, May 20, 1943) or early June they are suddenly everywhere among the tundra grasses, and in full song at once. During June, July and August they are extremely abundant and nest in the open tundra.

Passerella iliaca. Fox Sparrow. One was seen on June 5, 1944, at the foot of Mt. Ballyhoo.

Melospiza melodia. Song Sparrow. The large Aleutian race of Song Sparrow is a conspicuous inhabitant of the rocky sea shore and grassy areas above the sea. I have numerous records between April 7 (1945) and September 22 (1945) but no winter records. The species nests here in grass in open places; young appear out of the nest by early July. Possible second nesting is suggested by a nest with newly hatched young found on August 8, 1945.

Calcarius lapponicus. Alaskan Longspur. Abundant from May to September; extreme dates of occurrence are May 8, 1945, and September 23, 1943. Found from sea-level to the tops of the mountains. Young out of the nest were observed on June 24, 1946.

Plectrophenax nivalis. Snow Bunting. A regular, but never abundant winter visitor. The species was particularly numerous from January to March, 1943, in flocks of as many as 35 individuals. In 1945, there were many flocks on Amaknak Island between March 3 and 8. In the winter of 1942, I saw none. A male in full summer plumage was seen at 1100 feet on Mt. Ballyhoo on June 30, 1946; another and possibly the same one was seen on July 3.

Dutch Harbor, Alaska, July 2, 1946.