

## SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

### RECENT OBSERVATIONS IN THE WRANGELL MOUNTAINS, ALASKA

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Little has been published on the avifauna of the Wrangell Mountains in southern Alaska. Therefore I wish to record some of my observations there during late June and July 1973. Of 56 species recorded in the study area, details are given below for 22 species which are of interest. In view of their known distribution in Canada, most of these species might be expected to occur in the Wrangell Mountains but have not previously been recorded there.

The area studied was the immediate vicinity of Rock and Ptarmigan lakes in the eastern Wrangell Mountains, some 140 miles ESE of Glennallen on the Richardson Highway, and close to the Canadian border at 61°48' N 141°15' W. The terrain was comprised of the two lakes and their connecting river valley, in which was a small unnamed lake, surrounding muskeg and spruce forest, and the adjacent mountains up to elevations a little in excess of 5000 ft above sea level. Willow and birch scrub extended from the lakes up the mountain slopes almost to the highest elevations, and above the spruce forest a belt of *Populus balsamifera* was usually present at 3900–4100 ft.

*Aythya marila*. Greater Scaup. A pair on Rock Lake on 30 June, three pairs in the valley east of this lake on 4 July, and three females on Rock Lake on 15 July. No evidence of breeding was found.

*Bucephala islandica*. Barrow's Goldeneye. There were more than six females on the unnamed lake on 1 July. On 3 July a female with six young was located on a pool on the south side of Rock Lake, and on the same date four females were seen on the river.

*Bucephala albeola*. Bufflehead. A female appeared on Rock Lake on 16–17 July but was not seen again.

*Melanitta perspicillata*. Surf Scoter. There were two pairs on Rock Lake on 3 July.

*Oxyura jamaicensis*. Ruddy Duck. A female was present on the unnamed lake on 9 July. This duck has been recorded closest to the Wrangell Mountains in the Tetlin Lake area, about 100 miles to the north (Hansen, Condor 62:137, 1960).

*Aquila chrysaetos*. Golden Eagle. Two adults, a subadult, and a juvenile were seen on various dates over the mountains immediately north of Rock Lake. A recently occupied aerie was located at about 5000 ft.

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*. Bald Eagle. Two adults were seen over the mountains southeast of Rock Lake on 3 July; a subadult, over the lake on 11 July, followed by an adult later that day; an adult, on 12 July; an immature, on 16 July; and an adult, on 17 July. With the exception of the 3 July observation, all these occurrences coincided with low clouds and stormy conditions. There was no evidence of breeding in the area.

*Circus cyaneus*. Marsh Hawk. A male was noted

flying east along the 4600 ft contour just south of Rock Lake on 7 July.

*Falco rusticolus*. Gyrfalcon. One was seen at 5000 ft in the mountains south of Rock Lake on 7 July.

*Falco sparverius*. American Kestrel. A pair in the valley just east of Rock Lake had a nest containing five young. Another pair, almost certainly breeding, was present a mile or so further east along this valley, and a third pair was seen on the hillside above the south side of Rock Lake at 3950 ft. There are few actual nesting records of this species in Alaska.

*Lagopus leucurus*. White-tailed Ptarmigan. A pair and a single male were flushed at 4950 ft on the mountains immediately south of Rock Lake on 7 July.

*Pluvialis dominica*. American Golden Plover. A pair with a nest were located on a plateau at 5075 ft to the north of Rock Lake on 10 July. Published data on the breeding of this species in Alaska refer primarily to localities north of the Arctic Circle.

*Bartramia longicauda*. Upland Sandpiper. At least four pairs holding territory were located in the area. From their behavior, all these pairs were breeding, and on 8 July a nest with three young and one egg in the process of hatching was found just northeast of Rock Lake. The habitat in all cases was open boggy areas with scattered trees and scrub on the edge of the spruce forest.

Formerly known to breed only in the central-interior north of the Alaska Range, this species was reported breeding near Nabesna, some 70 miles northwest of Rock Lake, in 1962 (Williamson et al., Condor 67:75, 1965). It probably breeds in suitable habitat throughout the Wrangell Mountains area.

*Tringa melanoleucus*. Greater Yellowlegs. Three breeding pairs were found in the vicinity of Rock Lake. This species is not recorded as breeding in the adjacent area of Canada.

*Surnia ulula*. Hawk-Owl. A pair with two newly fledged young was seen in the forest just east of Rock Lake during the first week of July, after which they left the area.

*Colaptes auratus*. Common Flicker. A pair with two young in the forest on the north side of Rock Lake, and another pair further east on 8 July were located.

*Sayornis saya*. Say's Phoebe. A pair were located at 4200 ft to the north of Rock Lake on 5 July. A pair at 4400 ft and another pair at 4800 ft to the south of Rock Lake were found on 7 July. The latter pair was seen taking food to young in the nest.

*Eremophila alpestris*. Horned Lark. On 5 July a pair with two young was found at 4657 ft to the north of Rock Lake, and on 10 July two or three pairs were located on a nearby plateau at 5000 ft. There were four to five pairs on the 5000-ft plateau immediately south of the lake on 7 July. The few nesting records given in Gabrielson and Lincoln (Birds of Alaska, Wildl. Mgmt. Inst., Washington, D.C., 1959) include the Chitina Moraine in the Wrangell Mountains. It probably occurs in suitable habitat throughout the range.

*Parus cinctus*. Gray-headed Chickadee. During the period 7–9 July a total of 12–14 was seen in the forest around Rock Lake, but no evidence of breeding was obtained. All the records given by Gabrielson and Lincoln (1959) are for localities north of the

Alaska Range. It may well prove to be resident in suitable habitat in the eastern Wrangell Mountains, or possibly the birds seen at Rock Lake were wanderers from a breeding area across the nearby Canadian border.

*Lanius excubitor*. Northern Shrike. A pair with two young was seen at 4100 ft on the south side of Rock Lake on 7 July.

*Euphagus carolinus*. Rusty Blackbird. A male seen at Rock Lake early in July was accompanied by a juvenile on 7 July.

*Calcarius pictus*. Smith's Longspur. Seven breeding

pairs were located on two different plateaus at 5000 ft and 5075 ft, respectively, to the north and south of Rock Lake during the first 2 weeks of July.

The Rock Lake localities are some 520 miles southeast and 400 miles south-southeast of the nearest other reported nesting sites of this species in Alaska, which are in the Brooks Range, although it has been observed between the Tanana and Yukon rivers (Irving, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 217:125, 1960; Kessel and Schaller, Biol. Papers Univ. Alaska No. 4, 1960).

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## SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN A MIXED WATERFOWL ASSEMBLY

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Feeding relationships between Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*) and Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus serrator*), often involving other waterbirds as well, have been the subject of published comment on several recent occasions. Christman (Condor 59:343, 1957) described an occurrence in San Diego County, California. Parks and Bressler (Auk 80:198, 1963) and Emlen and Ambrose (Auk 87:164, 1970) were concerned with similar feeding movements in Florida, the former also citing an instance involving Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*).

Another, but more complex, example was observed early in the morning on 2 December 1972 at Bahía de la Concepción (ca. 26°38' N, 111°50' W) on the Gulf of California in central Baja California. The principal element consisted of about 40 Red-breasted Mergansers which were swimming together, with their heads often below the water, parallel to the rocky shoreline and ranging from 10 to 30 ft from the shore. Moving along the shore abreast of the ducks were 7 Snowy Egrets, a Reddish Egret (*Dichromanassa rufescens*), 18 Heermann's Gulls (*Larus heermanni*), and 3 Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*). This assemblage was gradually augmented by another Reddish Egret, two Brown Pelicans (*Pelecanus*

*occidentalis*) and a Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). The pelicans and cormorant stayed on the open-water side of the ducks.

When the mergansers found fish and commenced diving, the whole scene became one of frenzied activity. As the fish sought to escape, some fled toward the shore, and the herons moved into shallow water and darted about, snatching them up. The pelicans and cormorant fed on fish which moved toward deeper water. The Heermann's Gulls showed an interest in the mergansers but did not obtain any food from them; they did successfully harass the pelicans, and both they and the Ring-billed Gulls robbed the Snowy Egrets. Both species of gulls also waded in to get food from the shallow water, perhaps bits of fish. It was not possible to examine any of the fish but they appeared to be small, about 3 inches in length.

After a few minutes, the school of fish was dissipated or moved to deeper water. The procession then moved on. Three such scenes of activity involving the same group of birds were observed in the 40 min of observation.

Parks and Bressler (1963) commented that published accounts of joint feeding activities of different species of piscivorous birds are uncommon. Evidently, the relationship between mergansers and the Snowy Egret is widespread. However, it can operate only when mergansers are feeding close enough to shore and cannot reach maximum efficiency unless the movement is parallel to the shoreline.

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## DISCOVERY OF A GOLDEN EAGLE NEST ON THE ALASKA PENINSULA

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On 10 July 1973 a Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) nest was found atop Mt. Simeon located 5 miles W of Cold Bay (162°43' W, 55°12' N), near the tip of the Alaska Peninsula. The nest contained two downy young (fig. 1) along with the remains of a duck and two ground squirrels (*Citellus parryi*). The nest, built mainly of alder (*Alnus crispa*) sticks, was located on a west-facing andesite bluff at approximately 1000 ft elevation. I observed both adults come to the nest a few seconds apart with ground squirrels. The eaglets appeared about 5-6 weeks old (Gabrielson and Lincoln, Birds of Alaska, Wildl. Mgmt. Inst., Washington, D.C., 1959). Pinfeathers on their necks and backs were just beginning to protrude through their white down.

The nest was visited again on 12 July; both eaglets



FIGURE 1. Eaglets at about 5 weeks of age near Cold Bay, Alaska. This is the westernmost known nesting record of Golden Eagles in North America.