

ping Springs Feb. 6 (GE). A salmonella outbreak, centered in the Los Alamos, Santa Fe, and Cochiti areas, affected House Finches, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks; 200 birds/day were reported dying at the outbreak's peak (K. Ramsey). East were 250 Pine Siskins in *Union* Jan. 20 (CR). Northerly Lesser Goldfinches included 18 at Farmington Dec. 16 (AN), eight at Zuni Dec. 10–Feb. 4 (DC), and three at Albuquerque Dec. 17 (HS). Evening Grosbeaks were widespread, including 25 e. to Folsom Jan. 27 (JO) and singles s. to Emory Pass Feb. 18 (JEP, JO) and Dripping Springs Dec. 17 (GE).

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# Alaska Region

## T. G. TOBISH, JR.

Weatherwise winter 1995–1996 evolved into one of the strangest of the last decade, with typical patterns completely out of sync. A broad-scale upper atmosphere shift of “jet stream” conditions well to the south basically created a void in the North Pacific low pressure circulation, keeping the entire Region storm free until late January. Snow accumulations across the state into January were anywhere from 10–75 percent below long-term averages. Snowfall and storm fronts more typical of the late November–early December period eventually rolled out of the Aleutian Low, and all of a sudden February snow accumulations, at least on the Mainland, caught up and in several places surpassed local averages by up to 100 percent. Before this February snowfall catch-up, the season was abbreviated by short periods of sub-zero and locally windy conditions. And the season produced only one serious high pressure cell that built into an extended Regionwide sub-zero cold snap, highlighted by  $-50^{\circ}$  F. temperatures for over three weeks straight nearly everywhere north of the Alaska Range. Exactly the opposite of last year, the Bering Sea southward pack ice extension was one of the weakest in years, reaching only to St. Matthew Island.

As is typical in winter in Alaska, weather conditions end up having little influence on bird distribution after December.

However, early on virtually all coastal waterbird sites reported very late winter arrivals, with weak local concentrations. Long distance migrants were extremely efficient and timely in the fall departures, and early season winter condition at best only influenced the make-up, numbers, and timing of a regular (and short) list of semi-hardy lingerers. As highlighted in the Christmas Bird Count season, the relatively mild and snow free early winter conditions did allow for decent concentrations of semi-hard passerines, at least on the North Gulf Coast. Also typical of most winters, essentially all of the unusual records occurred in the first half of the season, and predictable feeder concentrations did not develop until well into January. Similar to the past three winters, an Asiatic component was lacking this season.

Abbreviations: North Gulf (*North Gulf of Alaska*); PW (*Prince William Sound*); SE (*Southeast AK*); SC (*Southcoastal AK*); SW (*Southwest AK*); UCI (*Upper Cook Inlet*).

## Loons to Waterfowl

Perhaps because of the mild and mostly ice free early season, few loon concentrations were reported. At least three ad. **Brandt's Cormorants** in near breeding plumage were picked out of a group of staging cormorants on Walden Rocks in Nichol's Passage near Ketchikan Feb. 18 (+SCH, TH). Two other single Brandt's from late winter in the same general location provided the Region's only previous winter reports. In Alaska, Brandt's Cormorant is a very rare, local breeder, known from few islets in SE and at the entrance of Prince William Sound. Great Blue Heron reports beyond typical SE and PWS wintering sites included >four around Kodiak Dec. 6+ (RAM) and one near Chenega in s.w. PWS Feb. 12 (*vide* WS).



All of the Alaska Pen./Izembek Lagoon winter goose populations were about average, except for Brant, whose mid-season peak was high at 8935 (CPD, SDS). A group of 11 Emperor Geese at St. Paul I., Jan. 27–Feb. 1+ (SDS) was notable at the extreme n. end of the species' winter range. Lack of regular winter observer coverage in suitable habitat has kept us from establishing this Beringian form's regular n. winter range extremes in the s.e. Bering Sea. Green-winged Teal remained in exceptional numbers, and to the north of the norm, including one male Dec. 16+ around Anchorage (= 2nd winter record, TGT), >40 Dec. 9 and >64 Dec. 30+ at Kodiak (= highest ever winter total, RAM), two at Cordova Dec. 15 (REF), and a single in Seward Dec. 23+ (WS). Mallards continue to show hardly adaptive abilities well n. of any regular suitable habitat, especially around Anchorage, where a conservative 3351, a new UCI high, was tallied on the CBC Dec. 16 (*fide* DFD). The nearest daily *maxima* from areas with better habitat was 857 from Kodiak Dec. 30 (RAM). Another impressive count of 39 near Delta Jan. 1 (SD), n. of the Alaska Range, had to be one of the highest Interior winter Mallard counts. Other dabbler highlights included a local 30-year high count of 180 N. Pintails through late-December around Cold Bay (CPD, SDS, RPS, GES), a single N. Shoveler at Kodiak, where casual in winter, Dec. 21 (RAM), and  $\leq$ six Am. Wigeon around Seward to Dec. 23+ (*fide* WS) and another in Anchorage Dec. 16–19+ (*fide* DFD, RLS). Noteworthy *Aythya* reports involved  $\geq$ three Ring-necked Ducks—more than average for this casual visitor—at Kodiak to at least Jan. 1 (RAM), a Tufted Duck at Cordova Dec. 15+ (REF, no †) from an area with several winter records, and single Lesser Scaup from Cordova Dec. 15 (REF) and Ketchikan Feb. 10 (SCH). Another male Barrow's Goldeneye (or the same from the only previous winter report) was noted at Cold Bay in late December (CPD, SDS, RPS, GES). Eiders (Steller's and Kings) went unreported at the e. winter extreme sites, e.g. Resurrection Bay and PWS. The Alaska Pen./Izembek Lagoon peak Steller's count was a stable >540,000 Feb. 26 (CPD, SDS). Extralimital eiders included on a male King near Juneau Dec. 17 (AK) and a well-studied female Spectacled at St. Paul I., Jan. 28–Feb. 1 (†SDS). Although the extent of Spectacled Eider's Bering Sea pack ice winter range and habitats was discovered last year, there are historic casual winter reports from the Pribilofs. Hooded Merganser reports were down from the

standard SE locales. Otherwise, notable reports included the pair all season from Seward (RLS, WS), where they've been for 3 years, and a good local count of six from Cordova Dec. 15+ (REF). Two Red-breasted Mergansers were most unusual at the mouth of the Delta R. at Delta Junction Jan. 1 (SD). Although small groups of Com. Mergansers winter regularly on spring-fed streams in the e. interior, there are few Red-breasted winter records anywhere in the Region away from tidewater.

### Raptors to Alcids

Perhaps because of little snow cover and late-to-develop winter conditions, Bald Eagles were noted in impressive numbers well away from immediate N. Gulf Coast winter sites. A loose group of >33 in Eagle R. n. of Anchorage in early January was unprecedented and—combined with >dozen farther north around Palmer and another eight–ten between Anchorage and Portage, all though mid-January—provided easily 4 times the local UCI mid-winter average. An imm. Bald Eagle apparently overwintered at St. Paul (*fide* SDS), where there are few “true” winter records; most reports from the Pribilofs include Fall waifs. The usual scattered single Sharp-shinned Hawk and Merlin reports came in from the regular N. Gulf Coast-UCI locales. Sharp-shinned sightings increased late in the season with redpoll numbers, e.g. two–three around Anchorage by late-February (*fide* RLS). Other interesting raptor reports were few, and included a N. Harrier at Kodiak Feb. 11 (RAM), a Rough-legged Hawk on the flats between Girdwood and Portage on Turnagain Arm Dec. 1–Feb. 1+ (RLS), and a Golden Eagle in the Anchorage alpine zone Jan. 7 (SDS, DWS). Certainly the Sandhill Crane seen headed S over Anchorage Jan. 2 (*fide* RLS) could have only survived with the year's conditions—it was clearly the Regions' latest Mainland record. Winter season shorebird highlights included two Killdeer in Ketchikan Jan. 27 (SCH), an exceptional winter peak count of >3400 Rock Sandpipers at Homer Dec. 17 (DE), and more than the average Dunlin reports, which included five at Seward Dec. 23+ (RLS, TGT),  $\leq$ 30 at Juneau's Eagle Beach (GVV) and 22 at Kodiak (RAM), both Dec. 30, and two near Ketchikan Jan. 27 (SCH). One of the N. Gulf Coast's latest-ever Bonaparte's Gulls was the immature at Homer Dec. 17 (*fide* DE). The latest otherwise was a single at Ketchikan Dec. 5 (SCH). Given the past few winters, it was unusual to receive only one Ring-billed Gull observation, an adult at Juneau Jan. 8 (DWS, GVV). Slaty-backed Gulls were

widespread but included only single adults from each of the Region's regular winter n. and s. extremes, from Ketchikan (*see Fall*) to Dec. 13 (†SCH), Homer Dec. 17 (*fide* DE, no †), Kodiak Jan. 13–27 (RAM), and St. Paul I., Jan. 27–Feb. 1 (SDS). This winter's only Western-type Gull report came from the Ketchikan Waterfront, where an ad. Western x Glaucous-winged appeared Dec. 19 (SCH). Surprising given the weak southward pack ice extent were “several” single Black Guillemot reports from the Pribilofs all season (AS, *fide* SDA). This rare and local Chukchi/Beaufort Seas barrier island nester is an uncommon to rare and local winter visitant, typically only within leads to the s. limits of winter pack ice. Better Pribilof coverage might produce more regular winter reports s. of the pack ice.

### Owls to Starling

Absent Walsh's Petersburg area report, it was a slow N. Pygmy Owl season. One or more in Ketchikan Feb. 1–18 (SCH, AH, JP) and >two around Juneau Dec. 30–Feb. 11 (GVV, PS) were the only reports. And only a single Barred Owl observation was received, from Juneau Feb. 1 (RJG). Other unusual owl finds included single Short-eareds near Eagle R., n. or Anchorage, Dec. 16 (=2nd UCI winter record, *fide* RLS) and at Kodiak Feb. 15–16 (RAM). The only Anna's Hummingbird was the male that had taken up residence at a Ketchikan feeder; it remained all season (JP). An uncommon event was the apparent overwintering Red-breasted Sapsuckers in the Ketchikan area, with  $\geq$ five birds noted there Dec. 15 (BU) to Feb. 8+ (SCH). Occasionally a single will be reported somewhere in s. SE to the CBC season, but few overwinter. Slightly above average, >six N. Flickers (*cafer*) wintered around Ketchikan Dec. 4+ (SCH), while a single at Anchorage Dec. 16–Feb. 10+ (RLS, R) was more unusual and n. of “regular” records. There are now about five Anchorage area true winter records. As with the other Sitka Spruce-W. Hemlock resident forms, Steller's Jay and Red-breasted Nuthatches both reached new winter highs n. of that forest type, with 79 Jays and 249 nuthatches tallied on the Anchorage CBC Dec. 16 (*fide* DFD). Steller's have also become annual in winter in very small numbers 10–15 mi n. of the Anchorage Bowl to at least Eagle R. At least three Red-breasted Nuthatches survived into the January cold snap n. of the Alaska Range near Tok, with one apparently succumbing in late January at Dry L. and two noted through Feb. 12+ (*fide* TJD). Although only one Townsend's

Solitaire was reported, from Anchorage Dec. 16–Feb. 27+ (DWS), thrushes otherwise made a strong showing in the north, where exotic berry bushes appear to sustain especially Am. Robins through the season. Five robins around Ketchikan were about average through the period (JP), but >17 in Anchorage Dec. 16 (*vide* DFD) and ≥14 through the season (TE, DWS, RLS, *et al.*), >five n. to Eagle R. though Jan 1 (EEB), and a single in Palmer Feb. 5 (*vide* RLS), where casual after mid-December, were unprecedented and well above the UCI average of two–five. The single Varied Thrush that remained at berry trees outside Eagle R., Dec. 1–Feb. 24+ (EEB) was a first local winter report and the Region's northernmost report. It was especially noteworthy since Varieds were otherwise nearly unreported from the N. Gulf Coast, including Kodiak.

Bohemian Waxwings were late to arrive in their typical early winter concentrations around the Anchorage area. Local numbers peaked at about 5000 there in late December, and >1000 remained through the season, by far the most ever found after early January, when they usually finish off their favored Mt. Ash berries. A dozen to 20 is a more typical late February find. The Cedar Waxwing that was found in an Anchorage neighborhood Dec. 28 (TDT) was unprecedented—UCI's 2nd ever, and the N. Gulf Coast's 2nd winter record. This rare and local SE breeder is a casual fall wanderer into the N. Gulf Coast w. of Glacier Bay, *e.g.* Kodiak has 4 fall records. European Starlings held average numbers in the Palmer area stronghold, about 150 through the season (DWS). Extralimitals included three around Anchorage Dec. 16–Feb. 1+ (TGT).

### Emberizids to Fringillids

It was an odd sparrow winter, with surprisingly few juncos, especially given seemingly favorable conditions, and above-average *Zonotrichia* numbers n. into UCI. A Fox Sparrow wintered n. of Anchorage at Chugiak Dec. 31+ (*vide* EEB), providing UCI's 3rd and one of the Region's northernmost winter records. Otherwise, Fox Sparrows were scarce and only one Interior *zaboria* type was located at Seward Dec. 23+ (TGT). A few of these rufous and clean-streaked types are found annually in Fall and occasionally in winter on the N. Gulf Coast. This season's Lincoln's Sparrows included an average two at Kodiak to Dec. 30+ (RAM), a return single to an Anchorage feeder for the 2nd consecutive year, all season (TGT), and another possibly still in migration along the Anchorage bluffs Jan. 1 (SDS). The

imm. Swamp Sparrow discovered near Ketchikan in mid-November (*q.v.*) remained in the same area through Feb. 18+ (SCH), and a single White-throated Sparrow, also from the Fall Ketchikan group, remained through the period (TG, SCH). Both Golden-crowned and White-crowned sparrows were well represented and locally concentrated, especially around the UCI and the N. Gulf Coast. An extreme n. White-crowned report came from Eagle R., with one all season (*vide* EEB). An impressive peak of >26 White-crowns in Anchorage Dec. 16 (m.ob.)—that actually expanded to >30 by January, including a single flock of 16 in Anchorage's richest feeder neighborhood (REG, TGT)—was the most ever recorded in winter in UCI. Clearly White-crowned Sparrows survive just fine with a steady food source and apparently little snow cover. Elsewhere, Seward had an above-average >13 White-crowns at least through December (WS, m.ob.), and the N. Gulf Coast had a high count of seven Golden-crowns Dec. 23 (WE, m.ob.). Providing UCI's 3rd winter report, a female Red-winged Blackbird appeared in a s. Anchorage neighborhood with a flock of Rusty Blackbirds Jan. 4–12+ (FW, RLS). As always seems to be the case, it was another strange redpoll year. Below-average number were reported from everywhere s. of the Brooks Range, except in UCI, where numbers swelled at feeders, especially after the near-record February snowfall. Away from inhabited areas, redpolls, Pine Siskins, Pink Grosbeaks, and crossbills were poorly represented and often difficult to locate after December.

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# British Columbia/ Yukon Region

## JACK BOWLING

The battle between Pacific and Arctic air masses was titanic this winter, the Arctic air being of High Arctic origin and the Pacific air laden with Hawaiian moisture. Other than a brief cold snap during the first week, persistent rains were common along the coast during December. Farther inland, cold and snow alternated with milder weather. Heavy snows shifted into the northern half of the Region in early January, before it turned bitterly cold and dry mid-month Regionwide. Even the usually balmy outer coast was below freezing for many nights in a row. It was the longest and deepest cold snap on record for Yukon, with frequent readings into the -40° F. and more than a few into the -50s! The weather finally turned warmer during the first week of February and stayed that way until month end, although it still below normal for many areas. Anomalous concentrations of species across the southern half of the Region, both on the coast and inland during December, shifted to the coast in January as temperatures plummeted. One has to wonder about mortality rates of those birds unable to flee the cold. Eurasian strays were scarce, suggesting advance knowledge of North America's impending winter weather.

Abbreviations: B.C. (*British Columbia*), Ok. L. (*Okanagan L.*); Ok. Vly (*Okanagan Valley*); P.G. (*Prince George*); p.v (*pending verification by responsible Bird Records Committee*); Reifel (*Reifel Waterfowl Sanctuary, Ladner, B.C.*); STP (*Sewage Treatment Plant/Ponds*); Van. (*Vancouver*), Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*), Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

## Loons to Rails

Not all Red-throated Loons spend the whole winter on salt water, as evidenced by the young bird at McCoy L. near Port Alberni Jan. 21 (DGC). There was an above-normal seven Yellow-billed Loons reported, with sightings from Pender Harbour, Sunshine Coast, Dec. 6–Jan. 2 (TG), another off Masset, Q.C.I., Dec. 17 (PH, RW), two