

at Eldorado since December was singing Apr. 9 and last seen May 9 (SOW). West and late were two **Rusty Blackbirds** at Mangas Mar. 15 (ph. JNP). Common Grackles continued their westward push, including three at Aztec May 5 (TR), two at Waterflow May 28 (TR), three at Zuni Apr. 25 (DC), and a male at San Luis Pass, *Hidalgo*, May 25 (SOW).

Bronzed Cowbirds continued to thrive, with reports from *Socorro*, *Hidalgo*, *Luna*, *Doña Ana*, *Eddy*, and *Lea* (v.o.); far north was one at Boone's Draw May 14 (JEP, ph. JO). Single Orchard Orioles were n. to Clayton May 16 (*fide* LF), Madrid May 13 (LS), and Sumner Dam Apr. 24 (JEP). A good season for **Baltimore Orioles** found a male at N.R.T. May 2 (ph. JO), and a male and female there May 2 (v.o.). Up to 82 rosy-finches, including all 3 species, were at the Taos Ski Valley Mar. 29–Apr. 12 (JO, JEP, DE, JH). Cassin's Finches were practically non-existent, with singles near Taos Mar. 22 (JT) and Apr. 10 (DE) and Emory Pass Mar. 14 (JEP). Only small numbers of Red Crossbills were seen. The few Evening Grosbeaks reports were confined to the San Juan, Sangre de Cristo, and Jemez mountains (v.o.).

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 295.

alaska region



T. G TOBISH JR.

The working assumption I had expressed in the past that El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) years dominated Alaska's weather in a way that made it *seemingly* simple to predict an inconsequential and plain dull spring passage was shattered in spring 1998. All of the signs were in place early in the season, including a dissipated Aleutian Low with few North Gulf anticyclones, near-record sea surface temperatures, low snowpack, and early warm trends that typically generate poor conditions for grounding and holding migrants and concentrations. In less than a two week period, beginning in the first few days of May, prevailing winds and a reactivated Aleutian Low combined in spectacular fashion to produce a set of conditions responsible for what has to be considered one of Alaska's most incredible spring seasons ever. While Bering Sea birders, especially the Western Aleutian contingent, had a lifetime of fantasies fulfilled in about five days, extralimitals and rarities punctuated all of the Region's outposts and well-covered areas except the North Slope. (See S.A.)

Warm early-season conditions in late March and early April created a window for the typical sprinkling of early migrants, e.g. Upper Cook Inlet produced another three to five record arrivals. But things quickly shut down with nearly a month of cool, wet conditions, where regular migrants straggled in late with few notable concentra-

tions. The above mentioned early May weather conditions modified the timing and content of migration throughout the Region from the Bering Strait to Southeast, where excellent in-shore waterfowl and shorebird counts were noted. Once this dominating weather system finally began to weaken, by the third week of May, migration resumed uneventfully and late through the period. Documentation of rarities was exceptional, highlighted by substantiation of one new species for North America and another first for Alaska.

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

LOONS TO RAPTORS

At Gambell's sea watch, the Region's best Arctic Loon spring outpost, passage was light with only four per day noted into June (WINGS). A single in alternate plumage hung around Attu's e. bays May 30–June 6 (ATTOUR). Very rare, a single Pied-billed Grebe, which had probably wintered in SE, was noted at Sitka's Swan L. May 10–14 (MT, MLW). The Region's first **Eared Grebe**, documented on a remote *Fairbanks* area pond May 21 (†DCW, ph. SL, JB, PDM), was not where this form is expected. This alternate-plumaged individual associated with a Horned Grebe pair before disappearing May 26.

Westbound outmigration of Aleutian

SA The passage of 2 moderate low pressure systems across the W. Aleutian/s. Bering Sea interface within a few days of each other in the first few days of May seemed typical enough. Both storms deposited advance numbers of waterbirds at Attu. But these slow moving storms, which originated—as most such spring anticyclones do—in the Ohkotsk and N. Pacific Basins, merged in the s. Bering Sea somewhere around May 12. At that point, a strong Continental High over the Mainland allowed this newly formed low to expand into atypical proportions for spring. This system became stationary, massive, and intense, peaking below 975mb, and for days covered the entire Bering Sea from coast to coast. By May 14–19, surface and high altitude winds generated continuous gale conditions with a westerly component from Chukotka into the N. Pacific. Combined with classic fallout-producing conditions of mist and fog, the Aleutians were hit with an avian wave of unprecedented dimensions, a migration grounding equivalent to a 500-year flood event.

With the constant westerly flows influencing weather well into NE Asia beyond Kamchatka and the N. Kurile Is., the numbers of certain Asian species in W. Aleutians were staggering. From the following numbers, and data from several islands e. to at least Adak, a significant proportion of n.e. Asian migrants headed for Kamchatka and the Koryak Highlands crossed the W. Aleutians. [See regular column for other highlights.] It has never been clearer that the W. Aleutians indeed mark the easterly edges of the regular migration corridor for dozens of n.e. Asian species. Weather conditions (and field coverage) are obviously the key factor that modify annual combinations of species content and numbers.

Although the mid-month totals were the season's highlights, the early crew that arrived at Attu May 5 found enticing numbers of the typical early migrants, including 12+ Whooper Swans May 10, dozens of Eur. Wigeon and Tufted Ducks, and hundreds of the supposed "resident" Green-winged Teal (which peaked at an Aleutian record-high 250+ May 15). The first morning reports from the field at Attu May 16 provided an inkling of an extraordinarily heavy passage, at the time comparable to the famous springs of 1976 and 1982 (q.v.). For the next 2 days, and especially May 17–19, field coverage was limited as flocks of shorebirds and passerines were literally falling out of the fog across Attu's e. front. Field groups working Attu's e. beaches had multiple flocks of dozens of Olive-backed Pipits, Eyebrowed Thrushes, and shorebirds landing throughout the day. By the end of the peak, around May 20, new Alaska high counts, in some cases by a factor of 10, were tallied for at least 12 species. Many passerines and shorebirds remained in appropriate habitats and initiated song territories.

By May 19, representative small groups of most of these species that overran Attu began to show to the east, from Buldir I. to Adak I. Although numbers of individuals were minuscule compared to Attu, new c. Aleutian records were attained for Eye-browed Thrush, with an Adak peak eight+ May 22; Black-tailed Godwit, with two there May 22 a first Aleutian report e. of Amchitka I.; and probably for Wood Sandpipers, with a local maxima 75+ May 21 (DDG). The Pribilofs, the last Bering Sea landfall before the Mainland, represented the e. edge of this mid-May movement. Local highlights from St. Paul included excellent documentation of numerous unusual records, and new Pribilof counts for Com. Greenshank, with four+ May 18; 150+ Wood Sandpipers May 18; 45 Long-toed Stints May 18; 40+ nominate Com. Snipe May 18–22; 13 Eyebrowed Thrushes May 28; three+ Olive-backed Pipits May 24; and 25 Bramblings May 16–29 (all ST.PAUL, ph. RP).

Although this broad wave of May 16–19 migrants was certainly the season's highlight, the northbound passage continued with few lulls into the first week of June. By then, Attu had produced 43 Asian species.

**New Alaska High Counts
(all conservative totals)**

Tufted Duck	90+, throughout May
Smew	16, May 15
Wood Sandpiper	700+, May 18
Black-tailed Godwit	35+ including 24 in one flock, May 22
Long-toed Stint	110, May 19
Eyebrowed Thrush	180, May 17
Gray Wagtail	4+, May 17–21
Olive-backed Pipit	225, May 17
Pechora Pipit	9, May 18
Rustic Bunting	193, May 17
Brambling	366, May 17
Hawfinch	18, May 17

**Eyebrowed Thrush
on St. Paul Island,
Pribilofs, Alaska,
May 21, 1998.
At the same time
that Attu Island
was setting records
for numbers of individuals
of Asian species,
the Pribilofs were racking
up their own records,
including a daily high
count of 13
Eyebrowed Thrushes.
Photograph/ Ram Papish**



wintering Whooper Swans was very late past Attu, with small groups offshore noted past May 10 and a single lingerer to May 25 (ATTOUR). The previously active L. Nicholas Whooper nest at Attu was unattended and snowbound June 1 (DDG). A pair of Trumpeter Swans that arrived at Kodiak May 6 remained site-tenacious and defensive in typical breeding habitat into June (RAM). There are no previous breeding or summer records for the Kodiak Archipelago. Bean Geese made their best showing in years, with singles at Attu May 19–27 (ATTOUR), St. Paul I. May 16–19 (ST.PAUL), and n. to Gambell June 1–2 (WINGS, TS).

The timing of waterfowl movement was somewhat late, and nearly all the notable concentrations came from the immediate coast mainly in SE. Highlights included: a **Wood Duck** pair near Juneau May 12–13 (ph. PS, m.ob.), the 3rd local record and a first in spring; a peak six Cinnamon Teal around Juneau during the 2nd half of May (JK, MLK, DWS); a pair of Gadwall at Gambell, where casual, May 30 (WINGS), and a drake at Bethel May 5 (CH); a rare pair and later a female Ring-necked Duck at St. Paul May 20–June 10 (ST.PAUL, WINGS); an overshoot drake Tufted Duck at Gambell June 3–4 (WINGS), three+ around Kodiak April 12–May 17 (ph. RAM), and two at Seward May 17, significant since they are casual e. of Kodiak and away from Prince William Sound (WS); and two Hooded Merganser pairs at a *Talkeetna* pond for the 2nd time April 24–May 2 (MN, JR, DB, CM), one of few inland reports ever. The Hooded Merganser pair that overwintered at Kodiak (q.v.) remained near Kalsin Bay to Mar. 8 (RAM).

Unusually early was an Osprey over the Kuskokwim R. Apr. 22 (CH), while another near Nome May 27 (WINGS) may represent a local first and is certainly rare on the Seward Pen. beyond habitat. The season's only Swainson's Hawk report, two birds over the *Juneau* wetlands May 16–29 (ph. PS, GVV, MWS, SZ, RJG), represented SE's 2nd in spring.

RAILS TO ALCIDS

The only Sora sightings were very early and beyond the standard sites: singles at *Fairbanks* May 21–23 onward (*vide* PDM), and at Juneau's Eagle R. Trail marsh May 17 (PS, GVV). The only spring Am. Coot report was a pair at Sitka's Swan L. Mar. 21–Apr. 6 (MET, MLW). Attu's 2nd, and the W. Aleutian's 3rd or 4th, spring Semipalmated Plover surfaced June 1 (ATTOUR). For the

2nd time, a Killdeer appeared in UCI in *March*, this time a single near Palmer Mar. 14 (RH), the Region's earliest ever "migrant," although this individual certainly wintered somewhere in the Region. Another Killdeer in downtown Seward May 11 (WS) was also early and rare on the N. Gulf Coast beyond e. Prince William Sound, while another single at the Nome R. mouth June 8 (*vide* WINGS) represented the Nome area's 3rd in spring.

Shorebird highlights, beyond the record numbers from the mid-May grounding, were above average and widespread in the Bering Sea, with few elsewhere, lead by an incredible displaying Greater Yellowlegs at *Gambell* May 31 (WINGS), where accidental at best; single Wood Sandpipers around *Gambell* May 28–29 (BB, TS) and June 1–2 onward (WINGS, ph. GHR ph.); a **Green Sandpiper** (no †) briefly at Attu May 18 (ATTOUR); three Far Eastern Curlews at Attu May 20–June 6 (ATTOUR); Marbled Godwits from coastal sites from Apr. 24 (local peak=25, MET, MLW) to May 1 at Kodiak (RAM), and Homer to May 13 (m.ob.), with another extralimital at Anchorage May 19 (TS); Attu's first, and the Aleutian's 3rd spring, **Great Knot** May 21–22 (ATTOUR); 35+ Temminck's Stints May 17 at Attu (ATTOUR); a Long-toed Stint at Gambell June 4 that had followed a Least there May 30 (WINGS†); another White-rumped Sandpiper near *Juneau* May 18–19 (RJG, PS, GVV); and single Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at Attu May 29 (ATTOUR) and Gambell May 31 (TS). In the midst of the Attu fallout, among near-record numbers of nominate Com. Snipe (50+ May 17–19), two separate **Pin-tailed Snipe**, the Region's 3rd record, were documented May 19 (*ATTOUR) & 30.

Another Com. Black-headed Gull turned up in Nome May 28 (WINGS), where it was accidental until recently. Two different "Kamchatka" Mew Gulls were substantiated from Gambell, a 2nd-summer bird May 31 and a first-year

individual June 3 (WINGS). This form has now been documented in the Bering Sea in both spring and fall. Notable inshore Sabine's Gulls included four adults around Kodiak May 14–24 (JBA, RAM, ES) and others at Homer May 6–10 (TS et al.) and at Anchorage's coastal trail flats May 11 (TS et al., 4th UCI record). A single and then two Caspian Terns over Juneau's wetlands May 23–30 (MWS) were the earliest in years. Ancient Murrelet is typically a rare fall dispersent into the n. Bering Sea, so an adult at Gambell June 2 (WINGS) constituted one of few reports before August.

OWLS TO MOTACILLIDS

Northern Pygmy Owls were well represented on the Mainland SE river corridors, including singles near the n. Stikine R. delta Apr. 30–May 5 (MET, MLW) and a few along the Unuk R. June 8 onward (TS). Casual in spring, a male Anna's Hummingbird found Armstrong's s. Juneau feeder May 26 (RJG). Rufous Hummingbirds pioneered record local arrivals at Juneau Mar. 30 (RA, GVV), and at the n. edge of their range at Portage Apr. 26 (*vide* RLS). At least five other Rufous Hummingbirds overshot their coastal rainforest habitat in Turnagain Arm into UCI, Anchorage May 16–18 (m.ob.), Palmer, and well beyond to Talkeetna May 12 (JC, RC). Skylarks were nicely dispersed in above-average counts, with six at Attu May 16 (ATTOUR) and four around St. Paul I. May 21–June 6 (ST. PAUL). A single reached Gambell early, where casual, May 25–28 (BB).

The Attu onslaught produced very early single Gray-spotted Flycatchers May 18 & 30 (ATTOUR). With the incredible species diversity in this spring's Aleutian migration, only three Siberian Rubythroats turned up, at Attu May 19–30 (ATTOUR).

After providing one of the highlights of the preceding winter, this Siberian Accentor lingered well into the spring at Anchorage, Alaska, where it was photographed March 26, 1998. Photograph/ David F. Delap



Another **Red-flanked Bluetail**, Alaska's 6th, and 4th from the Aleutians in spring, skulked in the Attu willows May 31 (ATTOUR). A stunning male N. Wheatear arrived at Attu May 18, the Aleutian's 2nd in spring in 25 years (ATTOUR). Casual beyond the s. Bering Sea islands, Eyebrowed Thrushes predictably reached Gambel, for the 2nd time, with singles reported May 25–27 (BB) and June 4 (WINGS). For the first time in years, a Dusky Thrush appeared, typically early, at Attu just ahead of the big wave May 14 (ATTOUR). The Anchorage wintering **Siberian Accentor** (q.v) hung on at its favorite feeding sites to Apr. 5 (DFD). Small numbers of Olive-backed Pipits remained in the Attu thickets and bluff habitats through June 6, while at least two late additional birds were found at St. Paul I. June 10–11 (ST.PAUL et al.).

A well-described singing **Cassin's Vireo**, a likely overshoot, graced the fringe red alders near Pt. Bridget and Berner's Bay n.w. of Juneau May 9 (PS+), the Region's earliest by weeks. Most unusual for spring in the Bering Sea, three Yellow-rumped Warblers pushed well beyond the taiga to St. Paul, where casual mainly in fall, May 30 (ST.PAUL). The only other notable warbler news came also from the Juneau area, a singing **Black-and-white Warbler**, the

Region's 3rd, May 31 (ph. PS, RA, RJG, SZ, MWS, GVV).

No White-throated Sparrow reports were submitted for the winter, but the immature discovered at Homer Mar. 4–11 (GVV) certainly wintered locally, while the Sitka area's wintering Harris's Sparrow remained at its feeder to Mar. 30 (MET, MLW). The mid-May Attu highlights culminated with the appearance of a male **Yellow-throated Bunting** (*Emberiza elegans*) in Blue Robin Canyon May 25 (ATTOUR, ph. DWS), a first North American record. Although photos of this relatively short-distance migrant were not definitive for subspecies recognition, the nominate race is inferred since it is the wide-ranging form, found in riparian thickets in the Amur R. watershed e. into Ussuriland. This surprising report fits within the timing of most Japanese records, which focus on the w. remote islands in the Sea of Japan.


With Bramblings found everywhere from Attu to the Pribilofs in May, it was not a surprise that well-covered Gambell produced a pair June 2–3 (WINGS). Although there have been sporadic records of this finch at St. Lawrence I., it remains very rare in the n. Bering Sea. Much less common in spring in SE, where they are rare in fall and winter, a female-type Purple Finch was at a

Juneau feeder May 23–30 (KT, ph. GVV, SZ). Still casual in the Aleutians since the first sightings at Attu in the 1970s, a female **Oriental Greenfinch** hung around the ravines there May 14–20 (ATTOUR).

Cited observers: Details (+), specimens (*) and photographs (ph.) referenced are on file at University of Alaska Museum. J. B. Allen, R. Armstrong, **ATTOUR** (S. C. Heinl, P. J. Baicich, J. Bouton, T. J. Doyle, J. Huntington, C. Roberts, G. B. Rosenband, D. W. Sonneborn, P. W. Sykes, et al.), B. Benter, D. Brocke, J. Coil, R. Cook, D. F. Delap, D. D. Gibson, R. E. Gill, R. J. Gordon, C. Harwood, S. C. Heinl, R. Holbart, J. King, M. L. King, S. Lewis, R. A. MacIntosh, C. Mannix, P. D. Martin, V. Nelson, D. Pearson, J. Robinson, T. Schantz, R. L. Scher, M. W. Schwan, N. Senner, W. Shuster, D. W. Sonneborn, E. Stirrup, **ST.PAUL** (St. Paul Tours: S. D. Smith, R. Papish), P. Suchanek, M. E. Tedin, K. Titus, G. Van Vliet, M. Walsh, M. L. Ward, D. C. Weisensel, **WINGS** (G. H. Rosenberg, J. L. Dunn, S. Finnegan, S. Howell, et al.), S. Zimmerman.

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