

alaska region



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Summer actually set into the Region in mid-Aug., and warm, unseasonably dry conditions prevailed south of the Alaska Range into late Sep. Quickly followed by 2 weeks of cool, clear high pressure conditions across the Region, a brief but effective window for out-migration concentrated fall departures, such that few lingerers remained after early Oct. Although the season returned to mild conditions well into Nov., passerine migration was essentially over, and the weather played little role in protracting migration and retaining semi-hardy types or many noteworthy tardy departures. Although unfavorable winds dominated, early season field coverage in the Bering Sea again produced significant and surprising records from St. Lawrence I., Nome, the Pribilofs, and the Bristol Bay coast—few other fall pioneer sites were sampled this year. Of the season's rarities, two Asiatics made second visits to the Region after a considerable hiatus for each, while several casual forms again reached their extremes for northward dispersal.

A new open ocean state ferry, the *M/V Kennicott*, initiated trans-N. Gulf service between Seward and n. SE this summer, and reports from those runs were encouraging. This route should provide good chances to see for less common pelagic visitors, since there is no other commercial vessel that transects the Continental Shelf and the always productive Fairweather Grounds in the N. Gulf. This season, observers spent time in late autumn on Prince of Wales I. in s. SE, and produced rare birds, late dates, and generally noteworthy data. These larger s. SE islands (Annette, Prince of Wales,

probably Dall) and their protected large bays provide a diverse, rich, and protected mix of habitats that have always produced noteworthy finds. This subarea remains one of the Region's pioneer strongholds and awaits further evaluation.

Abbreviations: N. Gulf (*Northern Gulf of Alaska*); SE (*Southeastern Alaska*); SC (*Southcoastal Alaska*); SW (*Southwestern Alaska*); UCI (*Upper Cook Inlet*).

LOONS THROUGH RAILS

Despite good seawatch coverage, no Arctic Loon reports were received this season. Especially given the past few year's weak showing, Pied-billed Grebes were distributed in the classic SE sites, with two each seen at Sitka Aug. 11 (early; MLW, MET), Juneau Sep. 14–Nov. 29 (GVV, PS, MWS), and Ketchikan Nov. 13–30 (SCH+, first Alaska specimen). This year's fall W. Grebe counts showed some recovery from the past few years, which had been low due to lost coverage from Petersburg staging sites. Up to 150 were counted in the Ketchikan area by late Nov. (SCH). The only Short-tailed Albatross report was a single in the Shelikof Straits n.w. of Kodiak Aug. 10 (SH, CM), observed from the *M/V Tustemena*. This fall's Bering Sea dispersal of Short-tailed Shearwaters seemed particularly heavy and concentrated in late Aug., with impressive peaks of 500,000+ off Gambell's Northwest Cape Aug. 24 (WINGS) and 200/minute of Southwest Pt. at St. Paul I. the same day (ST. PAUL). Although most of the Alaska population of this s. visitor range into the Bering Sea each summer, relatively small percentages of these move n. beyond the Bering Strait. Still unsubstantiated for the Region but probably an annual summer visitor in the N. Gulf, a single Pink-footed Shearwater was observed from the new ferry on the Fairweather Grounds in the e. N. Gulf Sep. 11 (PS, SZ). No photograph or specimen has been secured for this pelagic form since Willett's 1918 sight record off Forrester I., the first for the Region. The group of six Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels noted off St. Paul I. Aug. 19 (WINGS) fit nicely into the pattern of regular fall northward dispersion towards the Bering Strait, while the single inshore off Anchorage's Coastal Trail Aug.

20 (TGT), where casual, was the earliest of five UCI reports. At least six Fork-tailed off the Seward docks Nov. 29 (NS, RLS, TGT) were unprecedented and late inshore. The season's westward push of Great Blue Heron found only about six individuals around greater Kodiak Aug. 20–Oct. 15+ (RAM, RB, LM) and a single at Seward Nov. 29 (RLS, NS, TGT). One of the Region's latest, a **Cattle Egret** appeared near Ketchikan Oct. 28 (JFK, AWP ph.), a 4th local record for this casual fall visitant.

Greater White-fronted Geese were widely dispersed beyond normal staging sites and lingered later than usual, including singles that remained into Dec. at Kodiak (BB, RAM) and Sitka (MLW, MET). Another six at Ketchikan Oct. 10 were also latish (AWP)—most White-fronts depart the Region by the 3rd week in Oct. SE's Trumpeter Swan population increases again made news, at least in the greater Ketchikan area, with multiple sightings of flocks and combined family groups Oct. 13 into Dec. between the Cleveland Pen. and offshore on Prince of Wales I. (SCH, MAW). Possibly because of the protracted full freeze-up, fall waterfowl highlights were disappointing and concentrated after mid-Oct., including: high numbers of Ring-necked Ducks and good dispersion to the periphery of their range, with unusual peaks of 17 at Kodiak Nov. 21 (RAM), seven at Ketchikan Nov. 1–30+ (SCH), and a SE record 52 at Sitka Oct. 22 into Dec. (MLW, MET); three Tufted Ducks, casual and well e. of regular fall sightings, around Kodiak, Oct. 11–Nov. 15 (RAM, JB); an early s. Bering Sea drake Spectacled Eider at the Pribilofs Oct. 16–23 (ST. PAUL), and a single Spectacled probably in-between migrant periods off Gambell Aug. 25 (WINGS); a single extralimital Hooded Merganser to Kodiak Nov. 15 (RAM), with a season maximum 9 near Juneau Oct. 23 (PS); and two female **Ruddy Ducks** in SE, where distinctly casual, at Ketchikan Oct. 19 (first local, SCH*) and Juneau Nov. 25 (GVV, PS, MWS, LE).

Arn. Coots made a significant and broad incursion across the Gulf Coast, beginning with a very early single near Juneau Aug. 29 (PS). Individuals otherwise arrived on time in early Oct. and actually staged on fresh water in unprecedented numbers, highlighted by the 60+ on Klawock L., Prince of

Wales I., Nov. 17+ (MAW). Elsewhere, high counts included four+ at Ketchikan (SCH), 23 around Juneau Nov. 2 (m. ob.), five+ at Sitka's Swan L. Sep. 29–Dec. (MLW, MET), and three in the Kodiak area Oct. 9–Nov. 28 (BB, RAM), where after one historic record, coots have now been found the last three Fall seasons. These concentrations dwarf previous fall counts for the Region. Interestingly, an Am. Coot made it to the Bering Sea (where accidental) to St. Paul I. Oct. 23 (ST. PAUL), a Pribilof first. Forty years after N. America's (and Alaska's) first report (of a spring migrant from Fairbanks), a **Common Crane** was picked out of the massive Sandhill Crane flocks staging in the Delta Junction barley fields Sep. 15–20 (SD, RLS* et al.).

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH ALCIDS

Again with decent peak season coverage, shorebird highlights were mainly Asiatics from Bering Sea/Aleutian outposts, including: single Mongolian Plovers at Nome, where clearly rare, Aug. 22 and Gambell Sep. 3 (both WINGS); the Region's 2nd ever **Marsh Sandpiper**, a clean juvenile photographed at Adak I. Aug. 29 (DC) in the same week as the only previous Alaska report from 1974; up to 8+ Gray-tailed Tattlers from Gambell Aug. 25–Sep. 9 (WINGS), another five from the Pribilofs Aug. 2–Sep. 20 (ST. PAUL, RLS) and one from Adak I. Sep. 26 (PB*, ph.); a late Bristle-thighed Curlew, again from the Pribilofs, where casual in Fall, at St. Paul Aug. 26 (ST. PAUL); and rather low fall peaks of five Red-necked Stints around St. Paul I. Aug. 9–20 (ST. PAUL); and 47 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers from Gambell Aug. 24–Sep. 6. Other notable shorebird reports represented tardy departures or extralimitals, highlighted by a nearly record-late four UCI four Killdeer at Anchorage Nov. 5 (TGT) and a record SC departure date of Oct. 30 for Greater Yellowlegs, a single at Redoubt Bay in s. Cook Inlet (REG). A good count for SE of five Semipalmated Sandpipers was taken near Ketchikan Aug. 14 (SCH), and an exceptional flock of 1500+ Surfbirds staged at Juneau Aug. 26 (RAM, GVV). Interesting Red Knot observations bracketed their fall range and departure dates, with singles at Gambell Aug. 26 (WINGS) and near Juneau Aug. 15 and Oct. 18 (GVV)—there are few records later than early Oct. and few SE fall reports. Stilt Sandpipers covered the complete breadth of their fall extralimital periphery, with two at Kodiak Aug. 18 (RAM) and at Anchorage Aug. 8 (TGT, NS, SS, DWS; earliest & 3rd

UCI report) and a new SE high of 20 for the season at Juneau Jul. 30–Aug. 5 (GVV, PS).

This season's obligatory N. Gulf South Polar Skua turned up e. of Kodiak Aug. 31 (JBA). Notably rare anytime in shore in SE, a juv. Long-tailed Jaeger was described near Haines Aug. 25 (AD*), one of few SE reports. Departure and distribution data for fall season jaegers remain poorly defined Regionwide. Once again, the larid highlights centered in s. SE, where this season, the staging hordes attracted to canneries were exceptionally high. Franklin's Gulls were present in the Ketchikan area Aug. 26–Sep. 25, with a one-day maximum of three first-winter birds Aug. 27 (SCH). Another "probable" Franklin's was marginally described exceptionally late from Sitka Oct. 29 (MLW*, MET). The season's only Black-headed Gulls were described from the Naknek area, on c. Bristol Bay, Aug. 26–Sep. 23+ (MC, RC, RB* et. al). Bonaparte's Gulls lingered later than normal, e.g. one in Anchorage to Oct. 2 (TGT)—the species was still common at Ketchikan into early Dec. (SCH), where an earlier peak reached 1500+ in Ketchikan's Clover Passage Nov. 13 (SCH). The fresh first-winter *brachyrhynchos* Mew Gull at Adak Sep. 24 (ph. PB) was one of few c. Aleutian records. Ring-billed Gulls staged their best showing ever in s. SE, where in the Ketchikan area they were common from mid-Aug. into Sep. The season's maximum reached 48, all juveniles, Aug. 27 at Ketchikan (SCH). Surprisingly, only a few were noted n. of Ketchikan, with late finds including two at Juneau Nov. 1 (DWS, MWS) and a single n. of Ketchikan Oct. 21 (SCH). It also was an excellent season for dispersing California Gulls, again concentrated in the Ketchikan area, with a peak 1950 there Aug. 27 (SCH). Northernmost for the season was a single in Haines Sep. 9 (AD), and latest were two in Clover Passage Nov. 22 (SCH). An excellent late summer count of 22 Slaty-backed Gulls, cautiously identified in the Nome area Aug. 22 (WINGS, ph. PEL, ph. SEF), represented one of the Region's highest one-day tallies. Heintallied seven Western-type Gulls around Ketchikan Sep. 19–Nov. 18, most of which appeared to be hybrids. Two of these were described as pure W. Gulls, singles on Sep. 23 and Oct. 19 (SCH*). Hybrid W. Gulls have been found each fall in the Ketchikan environs. Pure Westerns have been occasionally documented there by photograph and specimen over the past 10 years. Another ad. Red-legged Kittiwake wandered into the N. Gulf, where they are casual in fall, e. of Kodiak Sep. 21 (JBA).

DOVES THROUGH PIPITS

Mourning Doves were nicely dispersed in average numbers in SE, with a single at Sitka Sep. 10 (MLW, MET), three at the Ketchikan Airport migrant trap Sep. 16–19 (SCH), and another two around Juneau Oct. 24–27 (GVV, MWS). Little is still known about the breeding season status and distribution of N. Pygmy-Owls, although recent reports from the SE Mainland and adjacent islands suggest possible local breeding. Most of the fall season's reports came in from beyond summer reporting sites, including 2+ offshore on Prince of Wales I. Aug. 20–Oct. 2 (SCH, AWP), a pair on the Mainland n. of Ketchikan Sep. 22 (SCH, AWP), and a single out the Haines Hwy Aug. 11 (AD). By date and locality, these observations presumably represented post-breeding dispersal. The season's only Com. Nighthawks were found on the Haines area floodplains Aug. 11 and 27 (AD), near sites where breeding evidence was exhibited the past two years. The Region's 4th and latest **Costa's Hummingbird**, a male, was documented in Anchorage Oct. 16–26 (DWS, RLS*, ph., DFD). Three of the four state records have come from Anchorage feeders. A female Rufous Hummingbird braved odds and reached St. Paul I. Aug. 5 (PW, ph. RP), the Pribilofs' first and one of few Bering Sea confirmed records.

Attesting to the early and efficient passerine departure, there were no late flycatcher reports, although a Hammond's described near Ketchikan Sep. 13 (SCH*) was getting tardy. Alder and especially Hammond's flycatchers are casual away from the SE Mainland river corridors. Once again, a **Tropical Kingbird** appeared in Ketchikan Nov. 2–7 (SCH*, ph.), the site of all 3 Alaska records. One of the Region's latest in fall (when casual), a Red-eyed Vireo turned up near Juneau Sep. 19 (PS*) Significant swallow finds were few, limited to a surprisingly late Tree Swallow at Nome Aug. 29 (WINGS) and a rare fall report of N. Rough-winged Swallows, a family group of six around Ketchikan Aug. 3, with two lingering to the 14th (SCH). The season's peak Arctic Warbler count came from Gambell, where 50 were tallied Aug. 23–Sep. 6, with a daily high 15 Aug. 26 & 28 (WINGS), while a single at St. Paul I., where casual, Aug. 27 (ST. PAUL) was the only other notable report. Season peaks for other Palearctic-bound breeders out of Alaska at Gambell included 28 Bluethroats Aug. 23–Sep. 6, with a daily high 14 Aug. 28 (WINGS), and 122 N. Wheatears, with a

maximum of 45 Aug. 27 (WINGS). Always the latest *Catharus* to depart, extremely late Hermit Thrushes were reported at Seward Nov. 11 (TGT, LJO) and near Ketchikan Nov. 28 (SCH). There are about four Dec. records for the Region. Single Am. Robins ventured offshore in the Bering Sea to Gambell Aug. 30–31 and Sep. 5–6 (WINGS, ph. PEL) and St. Paul I. Oct. 24 (ST. PAUL), both sites where this thrush wanders periodically. The only extralimital European Starling find was beyond the taiga at a King Salmon feeder Oct. 15 (RR)—there are few records for SW. About average for Gambell in fall were the 144 Yellow Wagtails for the season and a daily high of 39 Aug. 28 (WINGS) and a season tally there of 18 Red-throated Pipits and a daily peak of 11 Sep. 7 (WINGS). Olive-backed Pipits were nicely described early and east of known fall passage areas: a single was banded at Mother Goose L. on the Alaska Pen. Jul. 27 (KC, JF *) and another found at St. George I. Sep. 2 (RLS*). Olive-backed Pipit is accidental in fall east of the W. Aleutians; the Alaska Pen. bird fits no pattern and may be the Mainland's first documented record.

WARBLERS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

Despite a moderate second half of the season, there were few late warbler reports. Highlights included: a rare fall Tennessee Warbler from Juneau Aug. 13 (GB, *vide* GVV); single late Orange-crowneds from Anchorage Oct. 31+ (TGT) and Juneau Nov. 7 (GVV); Bering Sea Yellow-rumped Warblers, where accidental, at Adak Sep. 7 (2nd Aleutian record, ph. DC); at St. Paul I. Oct. 23 (ST. PAUL), an unprecedented record late *auduboni* Yellow-rumped at Ketchikan Nov. 2 (SCH*); another Townsend's Warbler beyond habitat out the Alaska Pen. near Becharof L. Aug. 18 (CDA*, PC, CV); a rare offshore and late MacGillivray's Warbler at Ketchikan Sep. 19 (2nd local report; SCH); and several late Com. Yellowthroats in SE with latest singles at Ketchikan Sep. 25 (SCH) and Juneau Oct. 28 (LE). There are only a handful of Alaska yellowthroat reports after late Sep.

With Bering Sea coverage limited to late Aug. and early Sep., notable emberizids were limited to Nearctic sparrows, two of which came from Gambell. St. Lawrence I.'s 2nd ever and first autumn Chipping Sparrow skulked around the Gambell middens Aug. 30–31 (RJG, PEL, SEF ph.) while another "Sooty" Fox Sparrow (i.e., not the taiga form *zaboria*) also hung around the same middens Aug. 27–Sep. 5 (WINGS, FL ph.).




This vagrant Brown-headed Cowbird enjoyed a light protein snack (its perch is a whale carcass) while affording a first Bering Sea record at Gambell, Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska. Only a few more miles to be the first Asian cowbird! (Go, go!) Photograph/Paul Lehman

Although these species periodically wander to odd sites in fall, both were several hundred km beyond known breeding sites and remain casual on the Bering Sea coast. White-throated Sparrows, the standard annual fall SE-SC extralimital, were widespread, with singles at Ketchikan Nov. 7–17 (JFK, SCH, DWS), Kodiak, the 3rd local record Nov. 23–25 (RAM), and Juneau Nov. 30+ (DM). Heinl notes for Ketchikan: "Since 1990 13 White-throated Sparrows have been found in the fall season." After at least 2 SE site records and a very poor Fairbanks area photograph, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** was finally substantiated in Juneau, where a female-type was photographed and observed Sep. 17–18 (ph. PS, MWS, SZ, RGJ). Likely the same male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** that had turned up in Anchorage in late Jul. found its way to the Palmer area farms Oct. 16–26 (DWS ph.) and in the process became the latest of 6 fall Alaska records. Five Brown-headed Cowbirds were exceptional for SE at Ketchikan Aug. 27–Sep. 3 (SCH, MB, TG), while a single at Juneau Oct. 17 was very late (*vide* LE, GVV). The juvenile that somehow found Gambell Sep. 6–7 (ph. PEL) was, of course, a first island and offshore Bering Sea record. Another (no details) was also reported near the Bristol Bay coast at a King Salmon feeder Sep. 21 (BB, RR, SS). Although cowbirds are annual and local in early summer mostly on the SE Mainland river corridors and adjacent towns, (mainly) juveniles have periodically reached most of the Region's periphery between late Jul. and Sep. Bramblings made a nice Bering Sea showing, where less common in fall, with three

around Gambell Sep. 6–7 (KE, ph. PEL) and a one-day count of 10 at St. Paul I. Sep. 20 (ST. PAUL). The only report beyond was a single in UCI, where still casual, on the Susitna Flats Oct. 23 (REG)

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**St. Paul
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ALASKA'S PRIBILOF ISLANDS

**REMOTE. WILD.
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A birder's paradise ♦ Over 230 species identified ♦ Common species, such as Red-faced Cormorants, Red-legged Kittiwakes, Parakeet, Least and Crested Auklets, murre, fulmars, and comical Horned and Tufted Puffins ♦ Uncommon species and rare Asian vagrants, such as Falcatated Teal, Mongolian Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Gray-tailed Tattler, and Common Cuckoo.

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