

Eldorado 2 Jan–3 Feb (BF, DF); Lessers were on 13 CBCs n. to Farmington, Española, Santa Fe, and Las Vegas, and they outnumbered Americans at Caballo, Las Cruces and the Peloncillo Mts. A bright male **Lawrence's Goldfinch** at Caballo Dam 4 Feb (LM) provided the state's first record since 1997.

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Winter 1999–2000 showed no weather pattern continuities and was simply odd. Following a mild, protracted, and relatively storm-free second half to the fall, early December had little snow accumulation and slowly dropping daily temperatures. It was not until the CBC season that cold extremes fell upon the Region. For the entire season, it was only the last twenty days of December that resembled something close to “normal” winter conditions. The remainder of the season, at least south of the Alaska Range, vacillated between all forms of extremes, most notably and often in immediate succession, rain (sometimes heavy), then snow and refreezing, and subzero to 40°F. The jet stream apparently shifted several times in the season to an extreme oblique north-south axis and shoved moist and warm North Pacific flows into the Region, fondly dubbed by meteorologists the “pineapple express.” Most surprising were the extreme cold conditions across the central and western Aleutians, which for several weeks were considerably cooler than the Gulf Coast. What affect this had on winter bird distribution was, as is the norm, difficult to assess, espe-

cially because these extreme conditions commenced after migration ended. There were near-record numbers of Gulf Coast raptors, including owls, and above-average numbers of less-than-annual waterbirds were recorded. Winter coverage in the Region continues to expand as we venture farther afield and spend more time scouting the potentially productive and milder coastal “oases.”

Abbreviations: ABO (*Alaska Bird Observatory*); North Gulf (*North Gulf of Alaska*); SE (*Southeast Alaska*); SC (*Southcoastal Alaska*); SW (*South-west Alaska*); UCI (*Upper Cook Inlet*); Y-K Delta (*Yukon-Kuskokwim River Deltas*).

LOONS THROUGH RAPTORS

Observers in SE produced exceptional winter concentrations of Pac. Loons, notably 500+ mainly in Ward Cove near Ketchikan 18 Dec–8 Jan (SCH) and 338 around Auke Bay in Juneau 25–26 Dec (new local record, GVV). About average for SE were single Pied-billed Grebes at Ketchikan 28 Dec (AWP) and offshore at Klawock on Prince of Wales I. 10 Feb (RLS, DWS, AWP). One each of Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses turned up inshore at Kodiak 15 Jan (RB) and 7 Jan (JB, RAM†). The Laysan was close to the site of last year's first local winter find, while the Black-footed was the Archipelago's first mid-winter record. Rare anywhere inshore after November, two Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels were located on the Kodiak CBC 26 Dec (DZ). Heinel continues to produce winter **Brandt's Cormorants** in the Ketchikan area, this year with a new winter record high 15 among cormorant flocks in Revillagigedo Channel south of Ketchikan 11 Feb (SCH, RLS, DWS et al.). He wonders if these Ketchikan area birds are related to the species' documented expansion into n. areas of the Queen Charlotte Islands (see Campbell et al. 1990, *Birds of British Columbia*).

Winter westward-dispersing Great Blue Herons peaked at 16+ around Kodiak's bays through the season (RAM et al.).

Casual in SE in winter were three Emperor Geese in the Sitka area 23–30 Dec (MLW ph., MET). Observers identified a **Cackling (Canada) Goose**, a casual winter visitor at best, with wintering *fulva* 8–10 Feb at Craig on Prince of Wales Island (RLS, DWS). Juneau birders distinguished a *parvipes* wintering with Canadas there 5 Feb (GVV, PS), another unique winter find. Forty-six Trumpeter Swans in one flock on Prince of Wales I.'s Big Salt L. 8 Feb was an exceptional offshore count for SE. SE's expanding winter Trumpeter populations are basically turning up at nearly all viable open-water habitats, of which there is plenty on Prince of Wales Island. The diversity of noteworthy casual waterfowl this winter was about normal, but numbers of those present were high. Highlights included a single N. Shoveler at Kodiak 20 Jan (RAM); a hardy drake Green-winged Teal that spent the season in a 20 ft. × 30 ft. patch of spring-fed creek in Anchorage (m.ob.); and unusual counts of 25+ and six Green-wingeds near Klawock, Prince of Wales Island 8 Feb+ (AWP, RLS, DWS) and at Sitka 5 Dec–Feb (MLW, MET) respectively; 11 Canvasbacks, less than annual in SE, in a group in the same Klawock estuarine lagoons 8–9 Feb (AWP, RLS, DWS); and groups of six, nine and 30+ Ring-necked Ducks at Ketchikan Dec to mid-Jan (AWP, SCH), Kodiak 26 Dec–Feb (SES, RAM), and Sitka all season (MLW, MET). About average numbers of Lesser Scaup wintered, with one in Anchorage all season (m.ob.) and a maxima of 8 at Kodiak 12 Dec (RAM) being the most notable. Single Steller's and King Eiders were again located in Seward's Resurrection Bay 30 Dec+ (RLS, et al.). Ketchikan's fish-processing plants concentrated diving ducks along the waterfront, highlighted by 1300+ Long-tailed Ducks 11 Feb (SCH), nearly twice the winter average. Good Hooded Merganser counts came in from suitable SE habitats, including peaks of seven each at Juneau 13 Dec (RJG) and Klawock on Prince of Wales I. (AWP, RLS, DWS), and eight near Ketchikan 22 Jan (MAW).

Perhaps more than any other group, raptors wintered in exceptional numbers, although observers made no indication about prey populations. Mainly at Kodiak, where accurate estimates were limited by a lack of observer coverage, grassland species were nearly ubiquitous, highlighted by at least a dozen N. Harriers 26 Dec through Feb and 15+ Rough-legged Hawks all season

(RAM et al.). Other raptor notables included two Red-tailed Hawks all season near Ketchikan, where they are not annual in winter (SCH, AWP), and a male **American Kestrel** around Kodiak 27 Dec–24 Jan+ (ph. RAM), a 2nd local winter record and one of few from the Region. Two imm. Red-tailed Hawks near Juneau 24 Dec (GVV, PS) were likely late migrants.

COOTS THROUGH ALCIDS

Two December Am. Coots in the Ketchikan boat harbor were presumably late migrants and not refund (SCH), while up to five spent 1 Dec–1 Feb at Sitka (MLW, MET), the season's only account. Given the generally mild conditions, prominent shorebird finds and concentrations were surprisingly few. Kodiak birders tallied that area's highest ever Black Oystercatcher count, a roost of 318 on 20 Dec (RAM, m.ob.) while two Sanderlings 23 Dec in Ketchikan, where there is limited shorebird substrate, were that site's first in winter (ph. AWP). Gibson turned up two hardy **nominate Common Snipe** at Shemya 29 Jan–2 March (DDG*), the Region's first-ever winter record for this Palearctic form that is otherwise a common migrant in the w Aleutians. The temperate winter did accommodate gulls, however, including several Dec Bonaparte's Gulls, three in Ketchikan to 18 Dec (SCH) and a single at Juneau 12 Dec (GVV). Another imm. stayed all season at Kodiak (ph. RAM), one of the Region's few ever for winter and a first for the Kodiak Is. Thayer's Gulls are uncommon and inconsistent winter visitors in SE and casual further n. into the North Gulf, so this season's counts of 100+ at Juneau's Eagle Beach 17 Jan (GVV) and another 2–4 around Kodiak all season (DWS, RAM) were beyond average. Considerably more significant, a first-winter *glaucoides* **Iceland Gull**, accidental for Alaska, was described from Kodiak 26 Dec–14 Feb (ph. DWS, RAM). The Ketchikan gull flocks attracted the winter's only Slaty-backed Gull 4–31 Dec (SCH, AWP, both ph.), the first there since 1997, and a pure Western Gull, an adult, 8 Jan–21 Feb (AWP, SCH†). With Heinel's coverage over the past decade, Ketchikan has become the Region's key site for rare and odd-date gulls

Alcid highlights were on inshore counts. Herring aggregations attracted Com. Murres near Juneau in Jan, with a new winter-high 500+ on the 4th (GVV), while Ketchikan's Nichols Passage had a Marbled Murrelet consolidation of 500 on 11 Feb (SCH, AWP). Others out of typical winter habitats included a first-winter Rhinoceros Auklet at Ketchikan 6 Feb (SCH, AWP, TG), where

previously unrecorded, and a Horned Puffin at Kodiak 26 Dec (ph. DWS).

OWLS THROUGH MUSCICAPIDS

As with the diurnal raptors, owls made winter news across the Region. At least three N. Pygmy-Owls around Juneau 12 Dec–6 Feb (PS, GVV, RJG) and another 3+ scattered between Ketchikan and Prince of Wales I. 8–10 Feb (RLS, DWS) were about average for the past decade. A semblance of a Great Gray Owl irruption commenced in January, when one was noted near Juneau 13 Jan–7 Feb+ (RJG, et al.), one of SE's few ever and Juneau's first. Another surfaced along Anchorage's coastal trail 11 Feb (CE, DWS, RP, GB) and was joined by at least one other in the same area through Feb. Numbers grew in the Anchorage area to higher peaks into late March. Two Great Grays were reported in Fairbanks, also from Feb–Mar (*fide* ABO/DDG, ND). Great Gray reports have been predictably consistent through the years, so at least the coastal reports are quite unusual. Perhaps most significant were this winter's Short-eared Owl summaries, highlighted by two in Anchorage 25 Feb–Mar (DWS), about the 4th UCI winter report, and a single in Ketchikan 14 Dec that was presumably a tardy migrant (*fide* SCH). A virtual horde of Short-eareds overwintered in the Kodiak grasslands, with a maximum of 20+ from 30 Dec+ (RAM et al.). The Kodiak numbers, considered conservative estimates, constituted the Region's highest-ever winter tally. A Boreal Owl carcass found in the *Ketchikan* area 28 Feb (BH, JB, *fide* SCH) furnished only that area's 3rd record. Casual especially off the Mainland in SE in winter, these secretive Taiga breeders are probably more regular than records indicate.

TURDIDS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

Surprisingly, given the mild season, only one Townsend's Solitaire was turned up, at Juneau 2–19 Feb (SW). A single Hermit Thrush near Sitka 3–7 Dec (MLW, MET) followed the past few years' pattern of tardy out-migrants. American Robins were widespread, if only in limited numbers, and UCI again had a least a dozen scattered between Eagle River and s. Anchorage (m.ob.). Anchorage's now resident N. Mockingbird, present in downtown neighborhoods since Aug 1998, wintered again (m.ob.). A Fox Sparrow wintered at an Anchorage feeder 12 Dec–mid-Jan+ (*fide* DFD), UCI's 4th in winter. Fox Sparrow numbers were otherwise at or slightly below average in SE. This year's coastal White-throated Sparrows included two at Ketchikan 18 Dec–11 Feb+ (SCH, AWP, TG), and singles at Juneau 12

Dec–15 Jan+ (PS) and Kodiak all season (RAM). Snow Buntings appeared in UCI again in *early Feb*, including seven on 2 Feb in Anchorage (RLS), a "large flock" in Palmer, and a dozen in Eagle River 5 Feb (*fide* RLS, BM). This timing is nearly a month earlier than historic spring arrivals, so these birds must have wintered in the Region. The season's only extralimital McKay's Bunting, a lone bird, turned up with Snow Buntings at Seward 30 Dec (RLS). This Beringian form remains casual e. of the Alaska Peninsula.

Blackbirds went mostly undetected after Dec. The single first-year male Red-winged Blackbird that lingered at a Girdwood feeder in UCI 2–30 Dec+ (*fide* RLS, TT) provided one of few UCI winter finds and the Region's only report. Kodiak feeders supported a single Brambling 23 Dec–Feb (RAM, SD, ph. JD), also the season's only report. Casual in the Region, an adult **Evening Grosbeak** found a Juneau feeder 12 Jan–13 Feb+ (BD, GU, MWS et al.). After a rash of winter reports in SE in the 1970s, there have been few records from the Region since. Alaska's finches were essentially gone from the Region this winter. Redpolls were hard enough to find that some observers actually reported individual flocks through the season. Nowhere were redpolls common, except perhaps in the Fairbanks area, while both crossbill species went nearly unreported. This winter's finch summaries represented perhaps the lowest population estimates for the Region in decades.

Cited observers: Details (†), specimens (*), photographs (ph.) and videotape (v.t.) referenced are on file at University of Alaska Museum. C. Adler, J. Ainsworth, J. B. Allen, C. Anderson, R. Armstrong, J. Ball, P. Bartley, K. D. Bell, R. Berns, J. Blackburn, B. Blush, M. Brown, G. Bullock, B. Daugherty, D. F. Delap, N. DeWitt, J. Doyle, S. Doyle, L. Edfelt, G. Etherington, D. D. Gibson, R. E. Gill, R. J. Gordon, T. Goucher, S. C. Heinel, B. Hunt, M. Jefferson, J. F. Koerner, R. A. MacIntosh, B. J. McCaffery, C. McIntyre, L. McKinnon, B. Myers, L. J. Oakley, R. Pintner, A. W. Piston, M. Resoff, B. Rowe, D. Russell, L. Sanborn, S. Savage, R. L. Scher, M. W. Schwan, M. Schwitters, N. Senner, S. E. Senner, W. Shuster, D. W. Sonneborn, S. Springer, D. Stokes, P. Suchanek, M. E. Tedin, K. Titus, G. Utermohle, G. Van Vliet, S. Wallen, M. Walsh, M. L. Ward, S. Wellborn, J. Williams, M. A. Wood, S. Zimmerman.

