



This pair of Wood Ducks remained in warm Ketchikan through the winter, here photographed New Year's Day. Photograph by S. C. Hain.

included at least 21 near Sitka, a near-record for there, 17 Dec + (MLW, MET), up to 6 tardy migrants near Juneau 2 Dec (GVV), and scattered family groups elsewhere in the greater Ketchikan area 12 Dec–17 Jan (MAW). Farther north, another imm. Trumpeter spent most of Dec with Tundras at Kodiak, where casual (JB, RAM), while a single in spring-fed waters near *Eagle River* 16 Jan (DL *vide* RLS) constituted UCI's 3rd winter record. Given the obvious dispersal and open habitats for winter waterfowl, this season's highlights were above par, highlighted by: a pair of **Wood Ducks** in Ketchikan 16 Dec + (SCH ph.); a season estimate of 425+ Gadwall from the Kodiak area, well above average there (RAM); scattered Eurasian Wigeon from SE and SC sites, with a peak of at least 3 at Kodiak 10 Dec–25 Feb (RAM, MY), and an unusually high winter tally of 53 Am. Wigeon on Kodiak freshwater 19 Feb (RAM); only 2 Redhead in SE at Sitka (MLW, MET) all season, where nearly annual; an imm. female Steller's Eider near *Ketchikan* 11–28 Feb+ (†SCH ph., †AWP ph., JFK, TG), a first for the area and one of only a handful from SE, especially for s. of Mitkof I. sites; and a decent winter peak of 14 Hooded Mergansers from Juneau from 16 Dec+ (MCS). UCI's notable waterfowl finds included a repeat Green-winged Teal from last winter (q.v.), a single Northern Pintail, a single drake Harlequin Duck, and 2 Bufflehead, all from coastal Anchorage sites (RLS, DWS, DFD, TT), and all now more or less annual where and when habitats are available.

Bald Eagles seemed to be thriving at or near their n. limits in UCI, with daily counts between Wasilla and Anchorage producing 30–50+ indi-

viduals regularly, about double normal winter numbers. Although unreported elsewhere, minimal snow cover in Anchorage no doubt allowed 2 Northern Harriers to linger on the out migration 31 Dec (NA, DR *vide* RLS). These are the first in winter for UCI and one of the northernmost for the Region beyond Nov. At least as represented in C.B.C. data, Northern Goshawks were doing well this season, with count totals collectively over double (52) the past ten-year averages (20+; *vide* RLS). Two American Coots at Sitka to 13 Dec (MLW, MET) were the season's sole report.

Plovers Through Woodpeckers

Piston and Hein were more than a little surprised to not only find a *Pluvialis* plover in intertidal habitat at *Ketchikan* 13–14 Jan, but then to see that this bird had a fine whitish wing bar and clean white axillars and underwing coverts. This **European Golden-Plover** (†SCH *, †AWP ph.) became Alaska's, and apparently, the Pacific Basin's first ever. Essentially all Pacific Coast North American winter golden-plovers have been identified as Pacifics, with records as close to Ketchikan as sw. British Columbia, including a few recent site records from the Queen Charlotte Is. (NASFN 52:244, 1998). There are no Alaska winter records beyond extreme late migrants from perhaps early Dec. Additional details will be published elsewhere. Beyond the Ketchikan plover, shorebird highlights focused on semi-hardy/irregular species in otherwise above-average numbers, including: 3 Killdeer in Ketchikan 28 Jan (AWP) and at least 10 from the Juneau C.B.C. 16 Dec (*vide* SZ, GVV); an unusual count of 1000 Black

Turnstones in Juneau from 15 Jan (PS); and up to 1000 Rock Sandpipers in the Juneau area 15 Jan + (PS), often seen with good counts of Dunlin there as well, e.g. 400+ 16 Jan (GVV) Gill's UCI Rock Sandpiper (mostly nominate birds) summaries included season peaks of 13,657 (Jan 1) and 12,608 (Feb 1) from the inlet's standard nw. corner near Trading Bay (REG). These midwinter numbers were an increase over last winter but still below 1996–1998 historic counts of 18,000.

This winter's Larid highlights came in from the standard coastal hotspots, with Bonaparte's Gulls, casual after Dec most years, in Ketchikan into Feb, including 10+ from Dec–17 Feb (SCH, AWP), excellent winter concentrations of Mew Gulls, highlighted by daily maxima of 7500 around Kodiak 2 Feb (RAM) and 1000 on the Ketchikan waterfront 8 Feb (SCH, AWP), an above average total of 50 Thayer's Gulls n. of Juneau 28 Dec (PS), and an ad. **Western Gull** again documented near Ketchikan 20 Jan+ (†SCH, AWP ph.). The season's only Slaty-backed Gull mentioned was a single fourth-year bird in Juneau 8–29 Jan (GVV, PS, DWS et al.) The mild season and a lack of sea-ice cover in UCI allowed Glaucous-winged Gulls to remain in downtown Anchorage, where a few single first-year birds lingered irregularly to about 15 Dec (TT). A mid-season warming trend and a warm s. flow produced a few other singles in Anchorage 15–17 Jan (TT), UCI's first in mid-winter since the Anchorage landfill closed in the early 1980s. Southern SE Marbled Murrelets again spent much of the winter concentrated in the Ketchikan area, with a peak 910 counted from the road system 19 Feb (SCH, JFK).

Notable reports for semi-hardy or otherwise irregular wintering owls included a Snowy at Sitka 1–16 Dec+ (*vide* MLW) and at least 3 Short-eareds in Kodiak, where not annual, 21 Dec–late Feb (IM, JD, SD). Northern Pygmy-Owls failed to show in SE sites where they had become regular. At least 2 Northern (Red-shafted) Flickers were noted n. to Juneau 10 Dec into Feb (GVV, MCS), where they are casual after Nov, while the Ketchikan area produced at least 9 through the season (SCH, AWP), which was considered a normal number.

Nuthatch Through Finches

Red-breasted Nuthatches made strong showings, at least through the December C.B.C. period in Anchorage and Juneau, both sites where contemporary numbers of this species, which is quite tenacious at feeding stations, continue to grow. Mild conditions and an excellent berry crop were favorable for late and out-of-range Townsend's Solitaires in UCI, where at least 6 were accounted for in Dec (*vide* RLS), but only 2

lingered through the season in Anchorage (AE, RLS, DFD). Solitaires have become irregular late migrants and occasionally attempt and successfully overwinter in UCI. Probably tardy migrant Hermit Thrushes included singles at Sitka 11 Dec (MLW, MET) and at Seward 30 Dec (BA *fide* RLS), one of SC's latest ever. American Robins were about average or only marginally more common at most coastal sites, except in UCI, where easily 30 spent most of Dec to early Jan in downtown Anchorage and another 15 were noted from farther n. in Eagle River 15 Jan+ (*fide* RLS). For the first time ever, a **wagtail** wintered in the Region. The bright immature bird, considered by most reviewers to be a Black-backed, was present at least 16 Dec–7 Mar at King Cove (JS ph., MS), out the w. end of the Alaska Pen. I know of no White/Black-backed Wagtail reports in Alaska after the first week of Oct—there are about five White/Black-backed records in SC and SE. Two American Pipits, casual in winter at coastal microhabitats, in Juneau 23 Dec (PS, GVV) may have been late migrants, but another there 21–22 Jan+ (GVV) was clearly wintering. Warblers made unusual winter news. A **celata Orange-crowned** found enough sustenance in downtown Juneau to winter through at least 20–24 Jan+ (PS, GVV). Single **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were also in Juneau 20–24 Dec and 22 Jan+ (GVV) and from the outer coast at Sitka Dec 13+ (MLW, MET). The January Yellow-rumped Warbler represents about the 5th “true” winter record for Alaska, while the Orange-crowned is approximately the Region's 3rd in midwinter.

Semi-hardy and sporadic wintering sparrows were slightly above average from most sites, highlighted by a casual **Savannah Sparrow** at Kodiak Dec–11 Feb+ (RAM ph.), a season high 22 Fox Sparrows (*insularis*) from the Kodiak feeder system (RAM), only two Lincoln's Sparrow reports, from Kodiak 2 Dec–Jan (RAM), 2 and one each White-31 Dec–20 Jan (SCH, AWP) and Wrangell 16 Dec (+CLR), and single daring White-throated Sparrows from Ketchikan crowneds from Tok 20 Dec and Fairbanks 30 Dec (*fide* RLS). Any sparrow n. of the Alaska Range past 1 Dec remains noteworthy. Two Red-winged Blackbirds from Juneau wetlands to 25 Dec (PS) were getting late but expected somewhere in this season's mild conditions. A Gray-crowned Rosy Finch (SE *littoralis*) from the Ketchikan dump 4 Feb (SCH, AWP) was only the 2nd local record and the first in winter—SE winter Rosy Finches are very scarce. Details came in for only one Purple Finch, a male at Ketchikan 14–15 Dec (+SCH, TG) where most of the Region's winter records emanate, while 2 **Evening Grosbeaks** appeared in downtown Juneau 17–

18 Jan (GVV), the source for most of Alaska's winter reports. Both crossbill species were irregularly noted or scarce, with White-winged reported as common and local only in Turnagain Arm by late season (TT).

SA The end of winter was distinctly punctuated with a **Eurasian Bullfinch** report from Fairbanks. An ad. female of the *cassinii* form was the first confirmed sighting for the e. Interior and Fairbanks when it first appeared at a feeder 24 Feb and was seen almost daily for 38 straight days (VB). The feeder was located at a cabin in a Black Spruce forest along the Tanana R. floodplain just s. of town. With clear views of the bird at 10–12 feet from the living room, this gaudy bird attracted over 90 birders, 30 of whom traveled from outside Fairbanks and 17 from out of state. Many excellent photographs were obtained to document this rare visitor (VB et al, ph.).

The *cassinii* race of this bullfinch ranges throughout much of Russia e. to Kamchatka. Interestingly, *cassinii* was first described by Dall and Bannister (1869) from a bird collected in the w. Interior at Nulato in 1867. It was believed that a New World population had been discovered, but as no subsequent birds were found, this theory was proven incorrect. Even with sporadic contemporary records, Eurasian Bullfinch remains casual in the Region, with most reports from the w. Aleutians and the Bering Sea Is. The maximum count for Alaska is a flock of 7 in spring from Gambell, and most sightings are of single birds. Mainland Alaska accounts are scarce, with the Fairbanks record making the 10th. The last known observation of the Fairbanks bird was 3 Apr. (Contributed by Valerie Baxter)

Contributors and observers: ABO (N. DeWitt et al.), B. Agler, J. B. Allen, B. Andres, N. Arneson, V. Baxter, R. Berns, J. Blackburn, L. Chilton, M. R. Dalton, D. F. Delap, J. & S. Doyle, A. Eash, D. D. Gibson, R. E. Gill, R. J. Gordon, T. Goucher, S. C. Heinel, J. F. Koerner, E. Lance, D. Lloyd, I. MacIntosh, R. A. MacIntosh, L. J. Oakley, A. W. Piston, P. Pourchot, D. Rosenberg, C. L. Ross, S. Savage, T. Schantz, R. L. Scher, M. A. Schultz, W. Schwan, N. Senner, S. D. Smith, D. W. Sonneborn, J. & M. Staab, P. Suchanek, P. Sunberg, M. E. Tedin, T. Tobish, G. Van Vliet, M. L. Ward, M. A. Wood, M. York, S. Zimmerman.



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