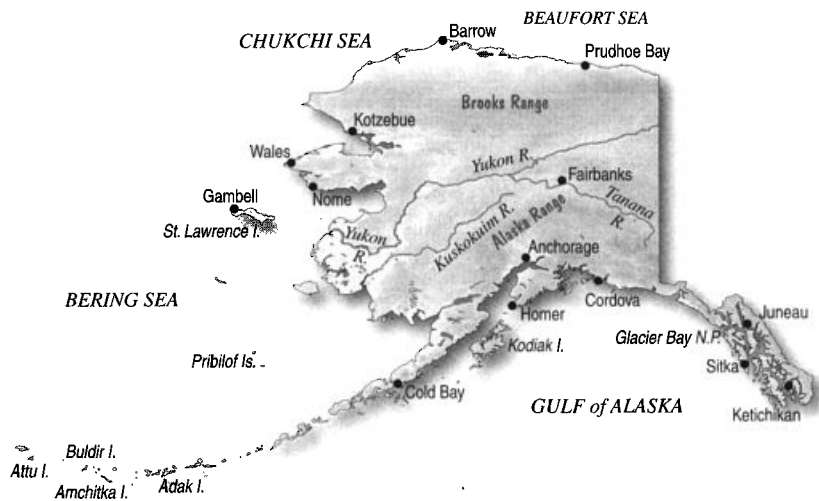


# Alaska



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**T**imely Regionwide coverage—coupled with exceptional documentation of vagrants, unusual storm patterns, and record-mild late-season conditions—produced probably one of the best profiles of fall migration ever. The Aleutian Low was slow to concentrate into its traditional latitudes, and warm, broad-ranging continental highs kept the Mainland generally mild and snow-free, allowing many portions of the southern half of the state to bask in the warmest November in history. Storm tracks pursued a northerly route into the Region, with few in the western Aleutians and a half-dozen mid-season lows, which had originated at northerly latitudes, moving rapidly across the Bering Sea. Associated surface winds were often southerly and/or westerly, uncommon for the Bering Sea in fall.

Four species were added to the Alaska List this fall, which stands at 469. Lehman's systematic and fruitful pursuits at Gambell solidified the true nature of that Bering Sea outpost as a melting-pot refuge for waifs from all Northern Hemisphere directions. His report alone could have taken up the Region's allotted publication space! In addition to the many unusual species were scattered high counts and late departure dates, many of which extended into December. Despite the synopsis of this season's unusual and broadly distributed rarities, we lack consistent coverage from the Interior and the North Slope, as well as from traditional or newly dis-

covered fall hotspots such as Middleton, Prince of Wales Islands, and the Pribilofs. Alaska's vastness continues to amaze, reward, tantalize, and frustrate those who attempt to cover even portions of it during migration.

**Abbreviations:** A.B.O. (Alaska Bird Observatory); North Gulf (North Gulf of Alaska); P.W.S. (Prince William Sound); S.E. (Southeast Alaska); U.C.I. (Upper Cook Inlet). Referenced details (†), specimens (\*), photographs (ph.), and videotape (v.t.) are on file at the University of Alaska Museum. Italicized place names denote especially unusual locations for the noted species.

## LOONS THROUGH CRANES

Few Arctic Loons were reported, none from Gambell and only 2 from the Nome shore (PEL, KLG). Exceptional numbers of offshore migrant Pacific Loons came in from the w. side of Prince of Wales I., with up to 550 flybys 8-9 Oct (AWP). Two imm. Pied-billed Grebes, for the season's only report, were noted in the 24-Mile Marshes near Haines 24 Aug (RAM, IRM), where this rare fall migrant may prove regular. This year's Clipper Co. Bering Sea cruise netted the season's Laysan Albatross maxima, up to 300 in the vicinity of the Rat Is. group 10 Aug (RLS, CR, JS). Short-tailed Albatrosses were in evidence all season, with 3 in Andreanof and Rat I. passes 10-11 Aug (RLS, CR, JS), and at least 2 others into the Bering Sea between 144 and 208 km nw. of the Pribilofs 26 Sep—5 Nov (RAM, ph.). Some 400+ Mottled Petrels in deep water and off the Shelf in the Andreanof Is. 10 Aug (RLS, CR, JS) constituted the Region's highest one-day totals. Continued late-summer Bering Sea observations mirror and magnify Kuroda's findings for this species from the 1950s (*Condor* 57: 290-300). Still casual away

from two known small colonies off the outer S.E. coast, a lone ad. Brandt's Cormorant arrived record early in the Ketchikan area 2 Nov (AWP), where winter quarters for small numbers have been revealed over the past few years.

After no certain prior fall reports, single Bean Geese showed up at Gambell 7 Sep (†PEL) and Shemya I. 10 Sep (MS). VanVliet reported an Aleutian Canada Goose in Juneau 23 Nov (GVV), which would be S.E.'s 2nd ever, and quite late generally for this race. Decent numbers of Trumpeter Swans, including up to 15 on 15 Nov (AWP), appeared offshore on Prince of Wales I., while ice-free conditions in U.C.I. permitted several family groups to linger in Portage and Summit L. into early Dec (RLS, TT). Trumpeter family groups typically remain on breeding lakes until the early Oct freeze-up pushes them away. Likely due to the tardy freeze-up, other waterfowl highlights were fleeting, limited to: 2 Falcated Ducks at Shemya 22 Sep (MS), one of few fall records, a group of 4 Blue-winged Teal, rare offshore in S.E., in Carroll Inlet se. of Ketchikan 16 Sep (†RN, fide SCH), another juv. Baikal Teal, again at Shemya 25 Aug (MS\*), an exceptional autumn tally of 29 Tufted Duck at Shemya 13 Oct (MS), one Ring-necked Duck and 2 Lesser Scaup from Dutch Harbor 31 Oct—14 Nov (ph. RAM), both extremely rare in the Aleutians, and 2 Ruddy Ducks in Juneau 24-28 Oct (GVV, JS, SZ).

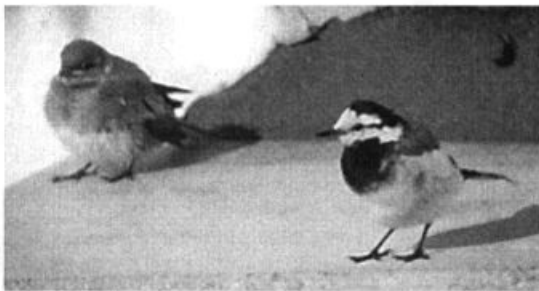
Up to 16 Osprey moving through the Ketchikan area 18-19 Sep (SCH) represented an excellent and rare offshore concentration for any season. The famed Taku R. Steller's Sea-Eagle in S.E. was last reported from favored perches 21 Sep (fide SZ). At least 2 Golden Eagles were soaring over Captain's Bay near Dutch Harbor 2 Oct—10 Nov (RAM), near the w. limit of the species' known range. Murie (*Fauna of the Aleutian Islands*) first summarized his own and historic records in 1959 and described Golden Eagles as "an occasional straggler in the Aleutian Peninsula region." Subsequent documentation has confirmed that status. Another juv. Eurasian Hobby, the Region's 4th in autumn, and on the heels of last year's report, was found at Shemya 16-26 Sep (MS). American Coots were reasonably widespread, with a peak of 8 in Juneau 22 Sep—19 Nov (MS, SZ, GVV) and another 4 offshore at Sitka 27 Sep—Dec (MET, MLW).

## PLOVERS THROUGH ALCIDS

Greater Yellowlegs tested their hardiness this fall, with local record-late birds detected at Kodiak, 2 on 10 Oct (RAM), Ketchikan, one 20 Oct (SCH), and Juneau 3 Nov (GVV). A Lesser Yellowlegs wandered w. to Shemya 1 Sep (MS), one of few in fall ever for the w. Aleutians, no doubt on its way to an Asian Pacific winter site. A storm-related Common Sandpiper 7-8 Sep at Shemya (MS), and lone Little Stints from St. Paul I. (no details) 21-22 Aug (GB, RK) and Shemya 9 Sep (MS\*), were the only standouts in a weak showing of Eurasian shorebirds in the Aleutians. Most of the Region's autumn Little Stint reports, subsequent to the first record from Buldir in 1975, have come in late Aug every few years. Additional noteworthy shorebird finds came in mainly from the Region's s. half, including a good peak of 10 Stilt Sandpipers for the season in Juneau 13 Aug—5 Sep (PS, BA, GVV) and a single in Homer 27 Aug (RAM); a rare

occurrence for the North Gulf), 4-5 Ruffs from St. Paul I. 6-28 Aug (GB), and extralimital Buff-breasted Sandpipers, with 2 at Kodiak 2 Sep (ph. RAM, IRM) and singles at Sitka 25 Aug (MET, MLW) and Anchorage 26 Aug, the latter a first U.C.I. record (ph. RAM, IRM et al.). Another juv. Wilson's Phalarope appeared this season, in Juneau 2 Aug (PS, SZ), consistent with the few prior fall reports. Decidedly late Red Phalaropes included 12 at sea some 92 km n. of the Pribilofs 2 Nov (RAM) and 3 off Prince of Wales I. 13 Nov (AWP). Red Phalarope concentrations off Gambell went undetected or never materialized this season. Of the few jaeger reports, a flight of 35 Pomarines off the point at Gambell 25 Sep (PEL) was getting late for such numbers.

Always the best season for gulls, this fall's highlights followed suit, especially in the S.E. Surprisingly only a single Franklin's Gull, a juv., was detected in the gull concentrations at Ketchikan 29 Aug (†SCH). An estimated 600 Bonaparte's Gulls feeding over a pod of Humpback Whales n. of Juneau 11 Nov were getting late for numbers so far n. (GVV). Ketchikan's 3rd Black-tailed Gull, an ad., appeared in the channel off the docks 28 Sep—1 Oct (ph. SCH). With apparent continued expansion of n. populations, Black-tailed Gull has become nearly annual in the Region's periphery, mainly in summer or fall. Lehman documented Gambell's 2nd autumn *kamtschatschensis* Mew Gull 24-27 Aug (ph. GLA; vt., †PEL). This large form remains casual in the Bering Sea. MacIntosh described an ad. Thayer's Gull at Dutch Harbor 2 Oct (†RAM). There are few documented Aleutian/Bering Sea records of this form. Slaty-backed Gulls were widespread from essentially the entire coastline, highlighted by singles in Kotzebue 27 Oct (RM), Kodiak 30 Aug (RAM), Juneau 8-15 Aug (IRM, GVV, PS), and s. to Ketchikan 12-22 Oct (ph. SCH). The season's peak again concentrated around the Nome dump, with 30 there 9-14 Sep (KLG). Although annual post-breeding movements send Glaucous-winged Gulls into the n. Bering Sea, this year's Gambell counts were unusually late and



**This Black-backed Wagtail successfully bred at Shemya Island, where one fledgling and two adults were present 25 August through 16 September 2002. Five more, all migrants, were noted here through the late date of 15 October. Photograph by M. T. Schwitters.**

high, with a peak 74 there 10 Sep (PEL). Smaller numbers of 15-20 were still observed daily at Gambell through 2 Oct (PEL), likely a result of the mild, ice-free season

## DOVES THROUGH PIPITS

This season's Mourning Doves included an early

single at Cordova 21 Aug (PM, SS), a lone bird offshore at Sitka 16 Sep (MLW, MET), and 2 around Ketchikan 28 Aug—2 Sep (SCH). A hepatic-morph Oriental Cuckoo skulked around the Gambell middens 15 Sep (DWS, DC; vt. PEL), the 2nd autumn report for St. Lawrence I. About half of the Region's dozen or so records have come in fall. Of the few Northern Pygmy-Owl accounts, at least 2 offshore on Prince of Wales I. 4-30 Sep (AWP) and another duo around Juneau 29 Sep—29+Nov (GVV) were unusual. The only Anna's Hummingbird reported was a male at a Juneau feeder 10 Oct—Dec+ (GVV). Surprisingly unknown away from the taiga forests farther e. on the Seward Pen., a Downy Woodpecker edged w. close to Nome in coastal tundra at Safety Lagoon 9 Sep (KLG), perhaps only about the 3rd such coastal record. Similarly rare offshore was a Hairy Woodpecker at Kodiak 6 Oct, the 7th report ever for that island.

Begging, newly-fledged Pacific-slope Flycatchers in Juneau 14 Sep (GVV) were exceptionally late, as the species is generally gone from the Region by 25 Sep. Kodiak's first ever was a Say's Phoebe near downtown 17 Aug (†JD, †TB, *fide* RAM); the species is casual in the North Gulf. Alaska's 4th Tropical Kingbird was nicely documented while foraging (and vocalizing) in a yard n. of downtown Ketchikan 20 Oct (CF, JFK, †AWP; ph., †SCH). Unbelievable was a Warbling Vireo in the productive Gambell middens 22 Sep (PEL; vt. DC), obviously St. Lawrence I.'s first ever. Warbling Vireo is all but unknown in the Region away from its known breeding range on the Mainland S.E. river systems. Also casual away from Mainland S.E. riparian corridors, a Red-eyed Vireo wandered n. and into A.B.O.'s banding lanes in Denali N.P. 18 Aug (NS\*, A.B.O.). One of the Region's earliest fall Clark's Nutcrackers was a single n. of Ketchikan 17-24 Aug (ph. CF, *fide* SCH). Nutcrackers remain sporadic and casual in the Region, documented mostly from the S.E. Mainland in late fall.

The usual small numbers of Sky Larks were found in the w. Aleutians, from Shemya 22 Sep—13 Oct (MS), while one farther n. at Gambell 28 Sep (vt. PEL) was only the 2nd in fall for the n. Bering Sea. Flava Horned Larks again reached e. in the Bering Sea to Gambell, where this ne. Asian form is occasional in autumn, with one on 1 Sep and 4 substantiated 13 Sep (vt. PEL). Given the mild season, the only extreme late swallow was a lone Barn Swallow in Ketchikan 1 Oct (SCH), a new late record for

that locale. This year's Bering Sea Ruby-crowned Kinglets reached Gambell, with 3 together 22 Sep (DC, vt. PEL). With more widespread coverage on the Bering Sea islands, this common Mainland taiga breeder is proving to be at least an occasional Sep visitor to those sites.



**This adult Black-tailed Gull (top), the third for Ketchikan, Alaska, was present 28 (here 29) September through 1 October 2002. This species, whose range is expanding to the north, visits the Region almost annually, mainly in summer and fall. Photograph by Steve Heinl.**

Fall birding for passerines and near-passerines at Gambell focuses most attention in the middens, where mounds and lush vegetation provides some semblance of thickets and vertical cover for refuge. A plain *Phylloscopus*, which eluded birders in the Gambell middens 25 Aug, was relocated over the following five days (through 30 Aug) in several different areas, and was nicely documented as Alaska's first Willow Warbler (†PEL, vt. PEL, ph. GLA et al.). Northeastern Asian populations (*P. trochilus yakutensis*) of this northern scrub nester, which breed into the lower Arctic latitudes in Siberia e. to the upper

Anadyr R. basin, migrate southwest to winter grounds in Africa. This individual is likely part of a fairly recent trend, which brings a few odd Willow Warblers into the Pacific Region, for instance to Japan in autumn. Given the subtle plumage variation between races, this individual's subspecies assignment remains uncertain as of this writing. Also at Gambell were 4 Dusky Warblers scattered in Gambell middens 29 Aug—19 Sep (ph. GLA; vt. †PEL et al.). Since the Region's first Dusky Warbler, a spring bird at Gambell in 1977, most of the now dozen or so reports for this form—which occupies a ne. Asian range similar to but slightly more easterly than Willow Warbler's—are from the autumn migration. On the heels of 1999's first North American record, the Gambell middens harbored another Yellow-browed Warbler 30 Aug (ph. GLA; vt., †PEL). Westbound Arctic Warblers made a strong showing at Gambell, with 74 counted for the season and a record maximum of 29 (23 Aug), and record-latest 16 Sep (PEL et al.). At least 4 Arctics (including one \* of ne. Asian race *P. b. xanthodryas*) were substantiated at Shemya 20 Sep—11 Oct (MS).

One of the season's big surprises at Gambell was the imm.-type Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*) in the far middens 8-9 Sep (vt., †PEL), Alaska's and North America's first ever *Sylvia*—and a species not considered as a candidate for occurrence. Opinions are still being sought about the subspecies of this individual, but by range, *S. c. blythi* seems the most logical; it breeds in central Siberia w. to the e. edges of the middle Lena R. watershed and e. to the foothills e. of L. Baikal, and winters southwest from there into Iran and n. India. Completing the incredible trio of Gambell's North America firsts was a pale Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) foraging in the middens 14 Sep (vt., †PEL; ph. DWS). Two pale-plumaged races of this w. Palearctic flycatcher breed e. to the se. of L. Baikal; there may be no prior Pacific Coast

records of this muscicapid.

Northern Wheatears lingered later than usual, with one at Gambell record-late for St. Lawrence I. 17 Sep (PEL) and an imm. at Palmer 5 Nov (RF, *fide* RLS), the Region's latest ever. Casual offshore in the Bering Sea were separate Hermit Thrushes at St. Paul I. 23 & 25 Aug (GB). Not annual in fall, Eyebrowed Thrush passed through the Aleutians, where 4 appeared at Shemya 26-28 Sep, and another late bird remained 11-15 Oct (MS). Of all things, a European Starling flushed out of the beach grass at Shemya 12 Sep (MS\*), obviously the Aleutians' first. As a rare, mostly fall wanderer to cen. and occasionally n. Japan, including e. Hokkaido, this w. Pacific population is more likely a source for this record than is Alaska's small, isolated, and very local Mainland populations. Three Siberian Accentors passed through Gambell 29 Aug—1 Oct (ph. GLA; vt. †PEL), St. Lawrence I.'s 4th through 6th fall records.

### WAGTAILS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

Following a few sporadic and isolated nesting records from the w. Aleutians/Bering Sea, Black-backed Wagtail successfully *bred* at Shemya, where a fledging was attended by ads. 25 Aug—16 Sep (ph. MS). In addition, 5+ other migrants, including imms., were methodically identified there through 15 Oct (MS), one of the Aleutians' latest. A bright Tree Pipit surfaced in the Gambell middens 21-27 Sep (vt., †PEL; ph. DWS; DC), Alaska's 3rd, first in autumn, and 2nd for Gambell. Sporadic in fall, at least 3 Olive-backed Pipits were discovered at Shemya 17-20 Sep (MS), for the season's only report. An imm. Cedar Waxwing was photographed at Valdez in "mid-Sep" (ph. PCW), the only extralimital away from S.E.

Not surprising in such a mild season, parulids made big news, with both extralimital and very late birds. The latest warblers all came from Ketchikan, including an Orange-crowned 2-4 Nov (SCH), one Yellow-rumped Warbler 22 Nov (AWP), and a lone Common Yellowthroat 12 Oct (AWP). Significant offshore Bering Sea warbler records included: single Orange-crowns at Gambell, including one each *celata* 12 Sep (vt. PEL) and *lutescens* 22 Sep (†PEL), up to 5/day Yellow Warblers on St. Paul I. 26-31 Aug (*fide* GB), and one at Gambell 19 Sep (vt. PEL), the season's only Magnolia Warbler at Gambell 21 Sep (DWS, †PEL), a 3rd for the Bering Sea, a single Yellow-rumped also at Gambell 22 Sep (vt. PEL), the Bering Sea's first-ever MacGillivray's Warbler in the Gambell middens 26-29 Sep (vt., †PEL; remarkable away from S.E. Mainland breeding areas and latest date for the Region), an incredible one-day count of 8 Wilson's Warblers at St. Paul 31 Aug (*fide* GB), and singles at Gambell 31 Aug & 5 Sep (PEL). Casual in the Interior were Fairbanks's 3rd Fall Palm Warbler, caught in the A.B.O. nets 25 Sep (A.B.O.), the season's only report, and 3 Common Yellowthroats mixed in with migrant flocks near the Alaska border at Scotty Cr. 25 Aug, where a single had been noted back in Jun.

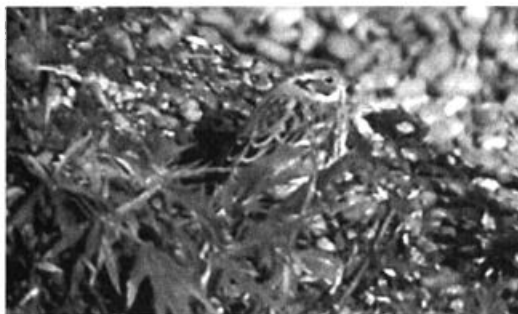
Another was near Northway the following day (RAM, IM). Distinctly rare offshore in S.E. (and nearly record late), were up to 4 Western Tanagers in the Ketchikan area 10 Sep—20 Oct (KM, AWP, SCH); most Westerns exit S.E. cottonwood forests by the first of Oct.



North America's second Yellow-browed Warbler turned up at Gambell, Alaska, on 30 August 2002, part of an impressive assemblage of Asian landbirds on 29-30 August that also included a Dusky Warbler, Siberian Accentor, and continuing Willow Warbler and Reed Bunting. The only previous record of Yellow-browed was also at Gambell, in late September 1999. That this species has been seen only these two times in Alaska is possibly the result of the limited autumn coverage of the Bering Sea Islands. Photograph by George L. Armistead.



An immature Orchard Oriole was hardly an expected vagrant to the Ketchikan coastal highway 18 October 2002—a first for Alaska. Photograph by Steve Heint.



Two Little Buntings were found at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska in autumn 2002; this individual was present 30 September through 2 October. There are now six fall records for Gambell, comprising just over half the records for North America. Another bird was found this season on Southeast Farallon Island, a second for California. Photograph from videotape by Paul E. Lehman.

A single Spotted Towhee took up residence at a Juneau area feeder 11 Nov+ (BD, BA et al., ph.), about the Region's 5th record, most of which are from the Juneau area in late fall. Single Chipping Sparrows at Gambell 14 & 30 Sep (vt., †PEL, DWS) are curiously the 4th and 5th island records since 1998. The now usual few Fox Sparrows wandered out into the Bering Sea, recorded from a ship at sea some 202 km nw. of St. Paul 24 Sep (ph. RAM), from St. Paul I. 27-

29 Aug (GB), and from Gambell 1-29 Sep (vt. PEL, GLA), 2 of the 3 there this year being Sooty forms. Two different Swamp Sparrows again skulked around the *Rubus* thickets near Ketchikan 12 Oct—25 Nov (†SCH), the location of the majority (10) of Alaska's records.

Four White-throated Sparrows at Ketchikan 6 Oct+ (TLG, JFK, ph. AWP) were about average for the Region in fall; no others were reported. Unusual at sea in the Bering was an imm. Golden-crowned Sparrow 202 km nw. of St. Paul 24 Sep (ph. RAM). Two different Little Buntings hung around the Gambell boneyards 10-11 Sep and 30 Sep—2 Oct (vt., †PEL, vt. RD). There are now six Gambell fall records and few others in the Region. New for the Region in fall, and the first away from the w. Aleutians, was a dull-plumaged imm. Reed Bunting substantiated at Gambell 28-30 Aug (ph., †GLA; vt., †PEL). Dispersing McKay's Buntings first reached Gambell 30 Aug, with a group of 7 present there 30 Sep—1 Oct (vt. PEL).

Alaska's 5th Rose-breasted Grosbeak was photographed in a Juneau yard 5-9 Oct (ph. MM, SZ, GVV et al.), a first substantiated for Juneau. Adding on to recent finds, 2 imm.-plumaged Black-headed Grosbeaks reached into parts of S.E., at Petersburg 28-30 Sep (DC, KC, vt. BH) and offshore at Sitka 8 Nov+ (KZ, MLW; a local first). Out of the blue was an imm. Orchard Oriole that popped up in *Rubus* thickets along the Ketchikan coastal hwy. 18 Oct (ph. SCH), Alaska's first. This icterid breeds as close to the Region as s.-cen. Saskatchewan, although vagrants are known on the Pacific Coast as far n. as Washington. A Purple Finch in dull basic plumage, the only one reported this season, made it to a Ketchikan feeder 30 Oct (†SCH), from which nearly all of the fall/winter reports of this casual visitor have come. Similar to the above casual visitor, Ketchikan is home to most of the Region's few House Sparrows, observations of which this season included a female at a local feeder 26 Oct (SCH) and a pair down the road at another feeder 29 Oct+ (JFK, ph. AWP).

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