

Spring's dearth of storms provided a platform for a strong high-pressure-filled, glorious summer across Alaska. Indeed, wherever observers characterized breeding conditions and timing, these were noted as 10 days to two weeks ahead of long-term averages. Overall, dry circumstances prevailed across the Region, most sections of which entered the third year of a water deficit. Above-average warm temperatures reigned throughout the season, with several locales recording multiple record daily highs (e.g., Anchorage equaled or exceeded record highs for 14 days between 1 April and 1 August). As usual, how these conditions interacted with and qualified the breeding season was usually unclear. But judging by the earliest southbound and post-breeding/staging taxa, the season's timing continued ahead of typical key arrival and departure dates. Most of the season's Asiatic highlights were bunched around two late storms, which tracked through the Aleutians. Otherwise, rarities were dominated by passerines, as is typical in summer. Early shorebird movements and July concentrations were both uneventful.

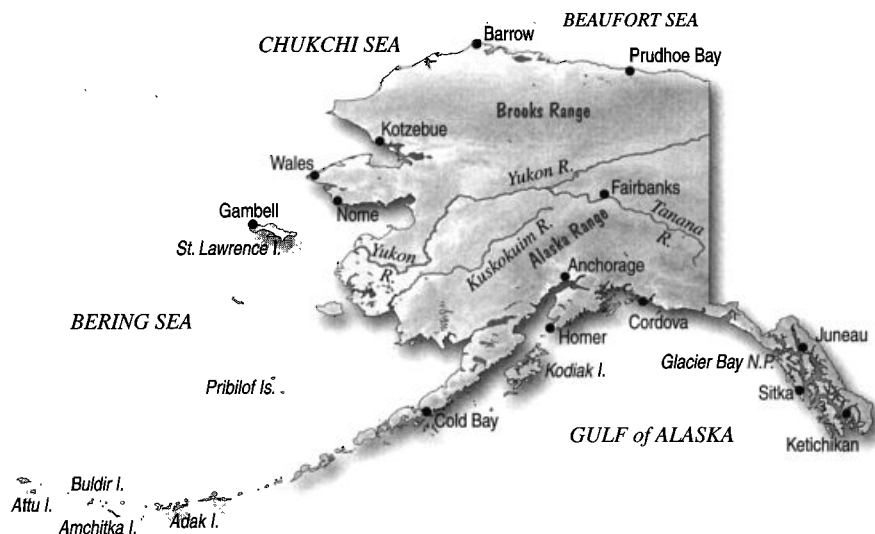
For the first time in many years, observers spent the season at remote St. Matthew I. in the central Bering Sea, one of Alaska's most isolated islands, and the ensuing reports matched expectations for this unique island. Highlights are provided herein, but details will be published as a follow-up to a recent 2002 *Wilson Bulletin* paper (114: 491-509) from the University of Alaska Museum, which summarized the history of bird records there.

Abbreviations: A.B.O. (Alaska Bird Observatory); S.E. (Southeast Alaska); S.C. (Southcoastal Alaska); U.C.I. (Upper Cook Inlet). Referenced details, specimens, photographs, digital photographs (dph.), and videotape are on file at the University of Alaska Museum. *Italicized place names* denote especially unusual locations for the noted species.

LOONS THROUGH RAILS

Once spring passage ends and birders depart St. Lawrence I., Arctic Loon sightings fall off, with the only summer report being of 4 at Nome 8-14 Jun (WINGS). Even with the increase in tour vessels crossing the Aleutians, and pelagic day trips out of Homer and Seward, unusual procellariids were not much reported this season. Of note continues to be the consistent increase in Laysan Albatross numbers in the North Pacific/Bering Sea interface, where this year's peak one-day maximum was 100+ between Kiska and

Alaska



Adak Is. (RS).

Unusually late were single Bean Geese that surfaced after a late-May storm arched across the Aleutians and into the s. Bering Sea: at Buldir I. 1 Jun (ILJ) and farther e. at St. Paul I. 5-17 Jun (VENT, ST. PAUL). Waterfowl highlights were otherwise few, save for the standard scattered Hooded Merganser broods from Mainland S.E., a rare summer S.E. Canvasback, a drake in Juneau 24-26 Jul (DM), continued Aleutian Canada Geese pioneering out into the Bering Sea, with 3+ at St. Paul I. 4-14 Jun (ST. PAUL), and an odd mid-season male Smew at Attu I. 18 Jul (JH, VG).

Possibly the same "imm." White-tailed Eagle was reported (no plumage details) from Shemya I. 1 Jun (GVB) and later at nearby Nizki I. 24 Jul (JW). These follow a similar report from spring 2002. Seemingly late for a migrant and w. of usual sightings was a light-morph Swainson's Hawk observed after snow squalls 7 Jun at the Denali N.P. entrance (†SB). Swainson's Hawk, the Region's rarest breeding *Buteo*, is only sporadically reported, and local nesters are known mostly from the e. half of the Alaska Range. Observers tendered several reports of Eurasian Hobby, all noted briefly in flight with varying details, including a (probable) flyby near Cape Nome 31 May. (VENT, †KZ), a bird near the same site 8 Jun studied directly overhead (WINGS, †GHR), and a similar report from St. Paul I. 25 Jun (†GB). While all of these sight-

Thede Tobish

2510 Foraker Drive

Anchorage, Alaska 99517

(tgt@alaska.net)

ings were certainly correct, only the Jun Nome sighting included definitive details and thus becomes the Region's 2nd from the Mainland.

Spruce Grouse accounts are always of interest from S.E., and especially off the Mainland, where there are few records. A female photographed from Zarembo I. 2 Jul (*fide* SCH, ph. SWE) constitutes the first substantiated island report of the race *isleibi*, described in 1996, which is confined to S.E. islands. The season's only Sora reports were calling singles—submitted from Wasilla, of all places—on 10-17 Jun+ (*fide* RLS, RW), in the same area where one (or the same) was noted from the previous two summers. From farther e. at Cordova, another Sora was noted 13-16 Jun (*fide* AL, PM), where the species is casual. There is only one prior Sora record from elsewhere in U.C.I.

PLOVERS THROUGH OWLS

Aside from the early Jun Gambell sightings, the season's other Common Ringed Plover report came from the Aleutians,

where casual, with a single at Buldir I. 1–2 Jun (ILJ). On the heels of a spring report from the Pribilofs, 2 more **Black-winged Stilts** were noted at Shemya I. 1–9 Jun (GVB), Alaska's 3rd such find; all were apparently of the nearest form, nominate *himantopus*. Late Common Greenshanks included storm-deposited singles at Shemya 1–2 Jun (GVB) and St. Paul I. 14 Jun (ST. PAUL). A Terek Sandpiper at St. Paul I. 7 Jul (ST. PAUL) constituted one of few mid-summer Alaska records and the 2nd Jul record for the Pribilofs. A late report arrived of a Black-tailed Godwit at St. Matthew I. 30 May (FEDS), a local first and one of few from the n. Bering Sea. Casual in the Bering Sea, a single Black Turnstone was found at St. Paul I. 23 Jul (ST. PAUL, †DL), only the Pribilofs' 2nd report. Decent peep numbers made landfall at St. Paul I. in Jul, highlighted by an ad. Little Stint 24–28 Jul (ST. PAUL, †DL). Most of the Region's south-bound Little Stints have occurred in the Pribilofs in Jul and Aug. Casual in S.C., a bright Ruff attracted notice at Kenai 25 Jun+ (*vide* RD; ph.).

Significant out into the Bering Sea was an ad. Bonaparte's Gull at isolated St. Matthew I. 8–23 Jun (FEDS). The obligatory wandering Ring-billed Gull was an ad. that appeared in Juneau 26–28 Jul (SZ, PS). Slaty-backed Gulls were fewer this season in the Bering Sea, as evidenced by mostly singles in the Nome area and around the Pribilofs. Out of nowhere appeared an ad. **White-winged Tern** with staging Arctic at the Fairbanks Cushman Street ponds 12–14 Jul (JB, KR, A.B.O. et al.), Alaska's 4th overall and 2nd Mainland record—three of the four have been in midsummer. Of note was a brood of 4 recently fledged Western Screech-Owls with an attendant ad. in Juneau 14–29 Jul+ (PS, BA), in an area where a calling bird was first located 10 Jul. A rare and local species in the Region, there are few certain breeding records, which are mostly on the S.E. Mainland in older riparian cottonwood/ alder/evergreen forests.

HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH THRUSHES

Extremely rare in summer, or any time outside of the species' visitation periods from fall through early winter, was a female Anna's Hummingbird at Juneau

23 Jun (GVV); I know of one prior S.E. summer record. Extralimital Red-breasted Sapsuckers wandered n. and w. beyond normal S.E. breeding zones, with single males reported from Cordova 4 Jun (SB) and Valdez 17 Jun (PW). There



A dream species for shorebirders in most of North America, Terek Sandpiper strays almost regularly to Alaska, where this bird was photographed on St. Paul Island 7 July 2003, a rare mid-summer appearance. Photograph by Derek Lovitch.

are irregular fall reports from coastal sections of S.C. but few early summer over-shoots.

It was another classic flycatcher rarity season, initiated by the Bering Sea's 2nd documented Olive-sided Flycatcher at St. Paul I. 10 Jun (WINGS, ST. PAUL), a Pribilof first. Well away from the species' restricted breeding sites in the Tanana Hills were singing Hammond's Flycatchers: singles at 930 m near Tetlin 20 Jun and near Chitna 21 Jun (TT, RLS). Another, away from favored S.E. riparian



In addition to five Red-breasted Flycatchers and seven Gray-spotted Flycatchers in Alaska in summer 2003 came five rare Siberian Flycatchers, including this bird (not mentioned in the text of this report) at Polovina Hill on the east side of St. Paul Island 13 June 2003. This species has, incredibly, been recorded as a vagrant to Bermuda as well. Photograph by Larry Manfredi.

cottonwood forests, held a Juneau area territory 8–25 Jun (GVV, PS). Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was finally substantiated for the Region, with excellent photographs delivered of an ad. male near Juneau 9 Jul (ph. JK, MLK, ph. PS et al.). There were three older sight records from

S.E. between early Jun and late Jul. This year's summer Eastern Kingbirds included a rare offshore single at Ketchikan 13 Jun (†ME) and another farther n. on the S.E. Mainland at Juneau 16 Jul (PS). Eastern Kingbird remains a rare, probably annual visitor to the Region, typically from the S.E. Mainland in Jun and Jul.

Two singing Cassin's Vireos were again reported from Juneau sites 8 & 10 Jun (PS, RJG), where singles have been located for the past few years. A Steller's Jay pioneered well into the Alaska Range to Denali N.P. 6 Jun (SS), one of few records n. of S.C., where it is restricted to the coastal fringes and Kenai Pen. forests and casual n. of U.C.I.

Notable parids at their respective peripheries included at least 3 Black-capped Chickadees in the

Glacier Bay-Gustavus area 9–31 Jul (ND, PV) and two pairs of food-gathering Chestnut-backed Chickadees plus another ad. up Girdwood Valley's Crow Creek Rd. 7 Jun (TT). Both areas produce these species occasionally in fall and winter. One of the spring's last cyclones deposited a Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler at Buldir I. 7 Jun (ILJ), a 2nd there and the Aleutian's 3rd in spring.

Old World flycatchers made a strong showing in the Aleutians and more significantly n. into the Bering Sea. Two female Red-breasted Flycatchers seen at Agattu I. 5–6 Jun (GVB, JW) were bracketed by a single and then 2 at Shemya I. 1 & 9 Jun (GVB). With the same weather came Siberian Flycatchers reports from the Aleutians, with singles identified at Buldir I. 1 & 9 Jun (ILJ), Shemya I. 1 Jun (GVB), and considerably farther e.—and the first time away from the W. Aleutians—to Kasatochi I. in the Andreanofs 14 Jun (*vide* GVB, DB, KL). Gray-spotted Flycatchers were also well represented in the early-summer storm fallout from across the Bering Sea. Singles surfaced at Buldir I. 1–3 Jun (ILJ), Attu I. 2 & 6 Jun (CB, BT), and Agattu I. 9 Jun (CB, BT), with an additional 2 reaching St. Paul I. 12 Jun and 6 Jul (ST. PAUL, †TP, †DL). Outside of this group was another Gray-spotted located at St. Matthew I. 27 May (FEDS), the northernmost Bering Sea record.

Jun Siberian Rubythroats included at least 2 males at Shemya I. 1–2 Jun (GVB) and singles at St. Paul I. 24–26 Jun (ST.

PAUL), plus one n. and onshore at Nome 13–14 Jun+ (*fide* RS), a local and Mainland first. Late Eyebrowed Thrush reports from the spring included one from the cen. Aleutians, where casual, at Kasatochi 29 May (*fide* GVB, DB, KL), and n. from St. Matthew I., where singles were described from 29 May–2 Jun and 19 Jun (FEDS).

MIMIDS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

In keeping with the species' history as a sporadic visitor to many sections of the Region, without a clear pattern, was a lone Northern Mockingbird at Juneau 25 Jul+ (PS), about the 9th overall for Alaska. Still not annual but certainly irregular in May and Jun since the 1970s at the Region's outposts, single Gray Wagtails surfaced in synchrony 9 Jun at Shemya and Kasatochi Is. (GVB, DK, KL). Yet another wayward White/Black-backed Wagtail built a nest and produced four eggs, this time near Cordova on a bridge structure. First found in the area 23 Jun, the completed nest with eggs was located 15 Jul (CB, AK, PM). Although only one individual was ever seen through 19 Jul, photographs supplied to date are equivocal for species identification—if possible, a follow-up on the identification will appear in the fall report. This odd nest find matches a similar situation from Talkeetna, where a lone Black-backed Wagtail laid a few eggs in a nest in Jun.

Of the season's few Cedar Waxwing accounts, of a single near Gustavus 27 Jun (ND, PV), was most interesting as a 2nd local record and one beyond typical riparian breeding sites from farther s. in S.E. The season produced about average numbers of unusual warbler observations. Away from standard breeding areas (to the e. inside the Coast Range in adjacent sections of B.C. and the Yukon) were Tennessee Warblers: a single at Gustavus 23 Jun (ND, PV) and 2 in the Juneau area 4 & 10–18 Jul (GVV, PS, SZ, RJG). Appearing w. and n. of known riparian populations in S.E. was an American Redstart in Gustavus 7 Jun (ND, PV), one of few local records. Common Yellowthroats were again reported in the e. Interior, where they have been sporadically noted in early summer and fall, with 2 singing near Northway 20 Jun (RLS, TT). Another singing bird appeared 8 Jul



Hawfinch may be increasing as a spring visitor to Alaska; this bird was photographed 6 June 2003 on St. Paul Island. The maximum count here was 7 on 2 June, with the last seen 20 June. Photograph by Derek Lovitch.

SA The spring's Red Crossbill irruption, showing hints of a strong northward push from late May, turned into one of the Region's most extensive ever. Pine Siskins showed a similar surge. Hundreds of Red Crossbills, in noisy, active groups of 5–50+ pushed into and past the Anchorage/U.C.I. area by mid-Jun (m. ob.), and by Jul, the species had been reported from within and then through the entire Alaska Range and out into the Bering Sea. Highlights from the irruption's extremes included: dozens of small groups moving n. past Eureka Summit (at Glenn Hwy. milepost 123) and past the Talkeetna Mts. 12–13 Jul (TT); up to 3 at St. Matthew I. 19 Jun & 5 Jul (FEDS); many at the Pribilofs 24 Jun–30 Jul, with 27 the maximum count on 20 Jul (ST. PAUL); and n. to St. Lawrence I. at Gambell 2–31 Jul+, with up to 30 birds towards the end of the month (*fide* PEL). Red Crossbill, typically more irruptive than its congener in Alaska, stages such large-scale movements in the Region every 5–10 years, and these broad pulses historically reach beyond the Alaska Range and into the Bering Sea islands. Notable with the Reds was a single White-winged Crossbill at St. Paul I. 23 Jul (ST. PAUL), where casual.

Pine Siskins moved n. with their own impressive push, loosely associated with the Red Crossbill movement, in more or less the same ranges. Notable were Jul peaks of thousands in the Interior at Fairbanks (*fide* DDG) and decent offshore totals of 6+ at St. Paul I. 20 Jul, where present 5 Jun–24 Jul (ST. PAUL), and at least 4 n. to St. Matthew I. 18–29 Jun (FEDS).

near Cordova (*fide* AL, MB), where casual.

At the extreme n. limits of known breeding range, which includes discontinuous pockets of sedge habitats into n. U.C.I., were 2 territorial Song Sparrows along the Knik River Rd. near Palmer 4 Jul (TT). Surprising was an overshooting Red-winged Blackbird pushing its Nearctic limits near Nome 3 Jun (VENT), only the 2nd Seward Pen. observation and one of few from w. Alaska. Bramblings made a decent summer season showing, highlighted by one well e. in the Aleutians at Kasatochi I. 28 Jun (DB, KL), and 2 and

Contributors and observers: A.B.O. (N. DeWitt et al.), B. Alger, R. Armstrong, S. Bailey, G. Baluss, T. Barber, D. Barton, C. Becker, B. Benter, S. Berns, J. Bouton, C. Braun, G. V. Byrd, M. Burcham, L. Cole, L. Craig, R. Davis, J. Dearborn, L. DeCicco, D. F. Delap, B. Dinneford, R. Dodelson, N. Drumheller, M. Eanes, S. Wise Engle, C. Erwin, FEDS (U.G.S.S./St. Matthew staff: M. Dementiev, J. Johnson, I. L. Jones, K. Lindquist, M. Litzow, S. Matsuoka, D. Ruthrauff), R. M. Fowler, R. Fritz, D. D. Gibson, R. E. Gill, V. Gill, S. Golodof, R. J. Gordon, T. Goucher, J. Haddix, D. Hanna, S. C. Heintz, J. Helmericks, P. Hunt, L. Johnson, I. L. Jones, A. Kenyon, J. & M.L. King, J. F. Koerner, A. Lang, P. E. Lehman, J. Levison, R. Lowell, R. A. MacIntosh, D. MacPhail, P. Meyers, R. Meyers, R. Nelson, L. J. Oakley, A. Palmer, A. & A. W. Piston, D. Porter, P. Pourchot, B. Pyle, H. & M. Renner, K. Risen, D. Rudis, K. Russell, D. Salesky, J. Sauer, S. Savage, R. L. Scher, M. A. Schultz, W. Schuster, M. Schwan, S. Senner, D. Shaw, J. Sinclair, D. W. Sonneborn, R. Spahn, ST. PAUL (St. Paul Tours: G. Bieber, D. Lovitch, T. Plath, M. Rukovichnikof), S. Studebaker, P. Suchanek, A. Swingley, B. Taylor, M. E.

then a single at St. Paul I. 27 Jun and 8–14 Jul (ST. PAUL).

Credit the productive early-Jun Aleutian storm with bringing in a handsome pair of Eurasian Bullfinches to Agattu I. 6 Jun (GVB, JW), the Chain's latest of very few spring records.

Tedin, T. Tobish, K. Turley, P. Vanselow, G. Van Vliet, VENT (Victor Emanuel Nature Tours: K. Zimmer, D. Wolf et al.), M. L. Ward, J. Williams, R. Winckler, WINGS (Wings, Inc.: J. L. Dunn, G. H. Rosenberg, P. Holt et al.), M. A. Wood, K. Zervos, S. Zimmerman. ☪