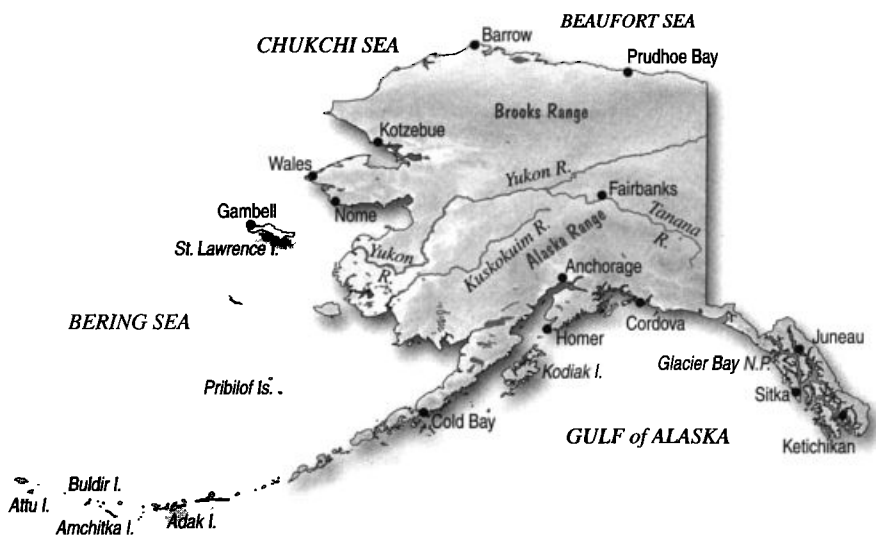


Alaska



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On the heels of a winter with heavy snow-pack, spring 2004 was enlivened by a slew of early arrivals, though most were of "token" individuals. While weather conditions and air temperatures, even into May, were not obviously favorable for a strong passage of migrants, the season could easily be characterized as "early," or at least average, for the northern half of the Region but "record early" overall in the south and west. Ketchikan was exemplary, with record-early arrivals for 15 species, many by more than week. Bering Sea and Aleutian site coverage was generally late to commence and, save for the Pribilofs, very average. Continued pioneering efforts at new sites—coupled with agency field work, reporting from Bering Sea outposts, residents' accounts from a dozen or more communities between Ketchikan and Nome, and various other reports from irregularly visited sites (e.g., Hyder)—meant that this season received unusually good coverage. Fortunately, the effort and level of rarity documentation continues to be excellent, although it remains difficult to track second-hand reports from Gambell. As in

past spring columns, I generally report the spring migration period as extending into early June. While there is never a definitive break between spring and summer, most records of clearly northbound migrants taper off sharply after about 8 June.

Abbreviations: S.E. (Southeast Alaska); S.W. (Southwest Alaska); U.C.I. (Upper Cook Inlet). Referenced details, specimens, photographs, and videotape are on file at the University of Alaska Museum.

LOONS THROUGH RAILS

Northbound Arctic Loons included only a few past Gambell 25 May–6 Jun, with the maximum being only 3 from 25 May (HLT). Inshore waters of Carroll Inlet near Ketchikan supported a local record tally of 1100 Western Grebes, probably staging in the area 4 Mar (SCH, AWP). These numbers approach historical average winter peaks when observers lived in the Wrangell–Petersburg area in the heart of the species' Alaska wintering range. Oddly, the season's only Pied-billed Grebes were extralimitals, away from S.E., noted from the Cordova road system 7 & 10 May (AL).

The recent trend of increasing Laysan Albatross numbers in the Bering Sea/N. Pacific interface continued, with several reports of groups of 20+, including a flock of 25+ between Attu and Shemya Is. 25 May (PP). The Ketchikan waterfront produced a tardy Brandt's Cormorant 2 May (†SCH), the latest of several recent reports involving small numbers of wintering birds. Getting late at

the w. edge of the species' winter range were 5 Great Blue Herons w. of Kodiak at Old Harbor 12 Mar (SB); there are no summer records from Kodiak.

Waterfowl were generally on time across the Region and included an above-average selection of the regular rarities but few notable concentrations of Alaska breeders. Highlights included single mid-May Bean Geese described at Adak 10–19 May (HLT) and Attu 14–16 May (UAM), a healthy peak pre-breeding count of 400+ Cackling Geese from Attu's Alexai Pt. 7 May (UAM), a handsome pair of Falcated Ducks at Shemya 25 May–1 Jun (PP, ph. MTS), an average peak of 17 Tufted Ducks from Adak 16 & 20 May (HLT), and a selection of Smews in various plumages at Shemya, with up to 6 together 19 May–7 Jun (UAM, MTS), plus one at Attu 27–30 May (LS, JL, PP). Nearctic waterfowl of note included local record-high 5150 Greater White-fronted Geese 28 Apr flying along the n. edge of Annette I. in s. S.E. (AWP, SCH, TG, CF). A similar record tally of 1070 Snow Geese came from near Ketchikan 17 Apr (AWP), and an ad. Ross's Goose was described from Juneau 10–14 May (PS), one of few S.E. records.

There was a broad showing of Cinnamon Teal, with a pair 5–22 May and 2 drakes 18 May in Juneau (MB, RJG, BA, PS), plus single males at Kodiak 20 May (SS, CR, ML), a 4th local record, and Hyder 7 Jun (SCH), a local first. Seven Eurasian Wigeons made the local high count at Kodiak 5 Apr (RAM). Single drake Tufted Ducks, probably arrivals from Nearctic wintering sites, were in Cordova 27–29 Apr (AL), Kodiak 1 May (RAM), and Anchorage, where casual, 22–29 May (PS, DS, ph. TT et al.). An unlikely drake King Eider was with scoters in Juneau 8 May (PS). A female Barrow's Goldeneye at Adak 14 May (HLT) provided another Aleutian report, while a drake Hooded Merganser, casual in S.W., was at King Salmon 8 Apr (SS et al.). A waif female Ruddy Duck in Juneau 5 May (SZ, PS) supplied one of few spring reports from S.E.

An Osprey over Nome's Safety Lagoon was certainly a rare overshoot to the Bering Sea coast 1 Jun (VENT); it is local and rare away from the forested se. sections of the Seward Pen. Swainson's Hawk was reported for the first time in spring in years, with a single over the Chugach–Talkeetna Mts. hawkwatch at mile-marker 119 of the Glenn Hwy. 25 Apr (RD). Most of the older records from the Region come from the e. Interior in spring. Always notable in S.E. outside of the fall season were single American Kestrels in the Ketchikan area 5 & 13–15 Apr (TG, AWP). Another ad. Eurasian Hobby visited Shemya, alighting briefly on runway lights 30 May (ph. MTS); the species remains casual in the Region, with most records coming from the w. Aleutians between the end of

SA Marbled Godwits (of subspecies *beringiae*) staged a spectacular, synchronized early arrival and movement across the breadth of their known spring range this season. At Ketchikan, an early group of 16 was seen 17 Apr (AWP, SCH), with a maximum of 23 on Annette I. 28 Apr (AWP, SCH); in Kodiak, the peak count of 100 came 27 Apr (JM, DS). Other notable Marbled Godwit reports included a single in Gustavus 22–23 May (ND, PV) and 18 in the Sitka area 28 Apr (MLW, MET). A lone bird present at the Chena ponds in the Fairbanks area 27 May–5 Jun+ (ph. NH et al.), however, was thought not to be of subspecies *beringiae*. There is no prior inland Alaska record of Marbled Godwit, and this individual may have been from the n. Great Plains population rather than from the coastal Alaska breeding population, though this assessment is tentative.

May and early Jul. Bering Sea Gyrfalcon reports outside the late autumn/early winter period are few, so 2 birds around Adak 17–18 May (HLT) and one at St. Paul I. 30–31 May (St. Paul) were significant, the latter a first spring Pribilof record.

Determining spring arrival dates for Soras has always been problematic, and most records from S.E. have been of mid-summer birds in potential breeding habitat. One in Gustavus, where casual, 14–15 May (ND) and 2 in the Juneau area 26 Apr (PS, MB, SZ, JS, RJG) were more suggestive of an arrival window.

PLOVERS THROUGH TERNS

As is typical in spring, shorebird highlights were plentiful and varied. Record early in Ketchikan by nine days, and one of the Region's earliest overall, was a Black-bellied Plover in Ketchikan 10 Apr (AWP). A survey of shorebirds in coastal tundra along the n. side of the Alaska Pen. produced surprising counts of apparently territorial Black-bellieds 10–14 May+ (Feds). If successful as nesters, these birds would extend the species' breeding limits some 300 km farther s. from known sites near Chagvan Bay. These same survey areas produced even higher numbers of similarly territorial Pacific Golden-Plovers, also 10–14 May+ (Feds): if successful as breeders, these birds would extend the known w. coast range some 500 km s. from Nelson and Nunivak Is. At least 3 Common Ringed Plovers visited Gambell 27 May–6 Jun+ (VENT, HLT), the Region's only site of regular occurrence.

A Common Greenshank was at Shemya 25–30 May (PP, MWS), and 2 were in St. Paul marshes 18–21 May (St. Paul). *Tringa* were generally ahead of schedule along the coast and in the Aleutians, with a single Greater Yellowlegs record early in Ketchikan 21 Mar (TH, PH) and a Lesser Yellowlegs at St. Paul I. 25–28 May (St. Paul), a site from which there are only a few spring reports. Wood Sandpipers, one of the Region's commonest visitors from Eurasia, were thinly distributed across the Bering Sea, with peaks

of 10 at the Pribilofs 18–19 May (St. Paul) and 12 at Attu 24 May (LS, JL), where display behavior was also reported. Common Sandpipers were equally widely dispersed but only as scattered singles within a narrow window on Bering Sea/Aleutian outposts as early as 24 May at Gambell (HLT) through 31 May at Attu (LS, JL).

The season's lone Far Eastern Curlew was

rather late for U.C.I. was a Rock Sandpiper at Anchorage 3 Jun (VENT), reportedly not a bird of the nominate race, which winters locally. A Curlew Sandpiper at Shemya 19 May (DWS) provided one of few spring reports from the Aleutians. Few Ruffs were reported, with a single on the mainland at Solomon e. of Nome 30–31 May (DW, BW, VENT) the most interesting. A Wilson's Phalarope arrived early at Juneau (where nearly annual in late May) 22 May (MB, LB); in Fairbanks, 3 congregated at the float-ponds 1–4 Jun+ (*vide* DDG).

Gull reports were average to poor. A single first-summer Slaty-backed Gull at Kodiak 8 Mar (ph. RAM) was at a location where annual Oct–Mar; the winter season's Slaty-backed from Petersburg was last noted 9 Mar (RL). An ad. Sabine's Gull at Anchorage 1



A rare spring migrant in the Bering Sea, this Bean Goose, possibly of the subspecies *semmirostris*, was at Contractor's Camp Wetland on Adak Island, Alaska 18 May 2004. Photograph by Phil Davis.

a single that hung around Attu's e. beaches 2 Jun (PP, ph. LS, JL). A flyby flock of 7 Black-tailed Godwits was also a singular event this season, at Attu 19 May (LS, JL). Coastal Hudsonian Godwits were at Gustavus, with up to 7 present 9–10 May (ND, PV), plus a single earlier offshore at Sitka, where accidental, 28–29 Apr (MLW, MET). The species is annual or well represented in records from S.E.

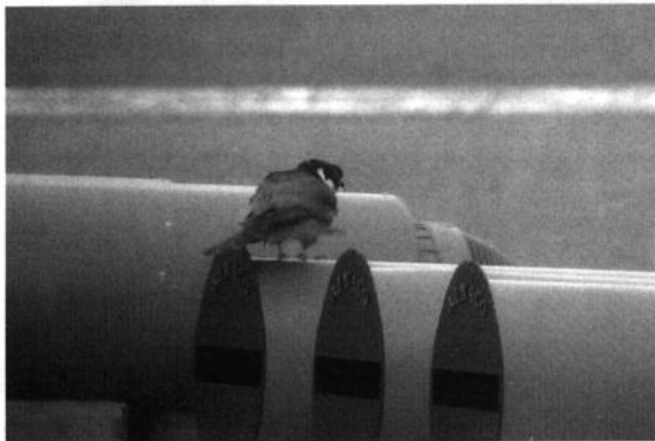
Several territorial Least Sandpipers were reported from the greater Nome area, where irregular, including singles at mile-marker 65 on the Kougarok Rd. 30 May and at Pilgrim Hot Springs 2 Jun (both VENT). Extraordinary in spring for S.E. was another White-rumped Sandpiper in Juneau 5–9 May (†MB, RJG). Unusual in spring and

Jun+ (FGI) was noteworthy inshore in U.C.I., as was an ad. Ross's Gull at Safety Sound near Nome 27 May (DW, BW). There are few arrival dates on record for Alaska's local Caspian Tern breeding population, so a single at Ketchikan and 4 near Cordova, both on 2 May (SCH, AL), provided potential arrival dates. *Longipennis* Common Terns arrived at Gambell 29 May (2; HLT), where not annual, and at St. Paul I. 31 May (one bird; St. Paul).

DOVES THROUGH PIPITS

More common in fall, the season's only Mourning Dove was one around "downtown" Hyder 5 Jun (SCH, GHR, TT). The only Common Cuckoo of the season was at Shemya 31 May (*MTS). Five Barred Owls

in the greater Ketchikan area (including birds from the outer coast, at Annette I., and the adjacent mainland) was a strong showing 27 Apr–28 May (AWP, SCH, LBo). A perched Great Gray Owl made a spectacle along the Klondike Hwy. just inside Alaska Customs near Skagway 28 May (MB); this



Eurasian Hobby remains a casual visitor to Alaska, with most records from the western Aleutians in late spring and early summer. This individual was present around the Shemya Island runways 30 May 2004. Photograph by M. T. Schwitters.

location is in the subalpine fir forests of S.E., from which there are few records of the species. Black Swifts arrived in S.E. breeding areas 3 Jun (SCH, GHR, TT), when 43+ were noted in loose flocks just up the Salmon R. near Hyder. Most of the Region's one-day high counts have come from here in early Jun.

Rufous Hummingbirds arrived in synchrony across their coastal rainforest haunts early or on time, about 30 Mar, with a single 14 May overshoot w. to Kodiak (EW), from which there are few spring reports. Flycatchers were well reported this season. Two Yellow-bellied Flycatchers along the Alaska Hwy. edge in the foothills near the Alaska-Canada Border 7 Jun (GHR, TT) provided possibly the first example of an actual arrival in the Region; these birds were clearly in westward transit. Yellow-bellied is a casual summer visitor sometimes found on song territories in the e. Interior, typically in mid- to late Jun. Its detection has accelerated since early 1990s, when breeding bird surveys were initiated along the Interior road systems. A migrant Dusky Flycatcher up the Salmon R. above Hyder 31 May (ph. GHR, †TT) furnished the Region's 2nd record in spring and about the 5th overall; it was detected by its soft *whit* calls and compared directly with adjacent territorial Hammond's Flycatchers. This species breeds locally in adjacent subalpine sections of British Columbia and into the s. Yukon. Two Western Kingbirds were early at Hyder, one on 4 Jun and 2 there 7 Jun (SCH,

ph. GHR, TT); these fall within the range of S.E. mainland records, though most records are from the latter half of Jun. Hyder continues to be the best place in the Region to find kingbirds.

Two singing Cassin's Vireos were in the Hyder thickets 31 May, and one established a territory, remaining there through 7 Jun (ph. GHR, SCH, TT). This species has appeared almost annually in S.E., after a hiatus of five years or so following the first Alaska record (Hyder, 1986). Good details were submitted for an apparent migrant Cassin's Vireo from Juneau 3 May (†LV), an unprecedentedly early date for the Region. Several swallow species moved into the Bering Sea, including single Tree and Cliff Swallows at Gambell 26 & 27 May, respectively (VENT), while a single and then 2 Bank Swallows appeared around St. Paul 28 & 30 May (St. Paul) and 5 Jun (VENT). A Common House-Martin was at Gambell 6 Jun (WBT, ph. BD), about the Region's 7th in

most entirely restricted to the late May–early Jun period. A skittish Dark-sided Flycatcher (formerly Siberian Flycatcher) was at St. Paul I. 4 Jun (FGI, ph. MC, VENT, ph. MJI). Most of the very few records of this species away from the w. Aleutians come from the Pribilofs in Jun. On the same storm front, Gray-streaked Flycatchers (formerly Gray-spotted) made a decent push into the Region, with up to 5 around Shemya I. 2–7 Jun (MWS) and at least one at Attu 2 Jun (PP, LS, JL).

Siberian Rubythroats arrived roughly on time, with a single at Attu 29 May and another there 30–31 May (LS, JL, PP), one on St. Paul I. 30–31 May (St. Paul, FGI), and a peak of 9 on Shemya 1 Jun (MTS). Rare and local in S.E. in early spring, Mountain Bluebirds were prominent at Pt. Bridget n. of Juneau, with a single flock of 26 on 16–17 Apr (MS, PS) and of 9 to the s. at Eagle Beach 15 Apr (BA, PS). Singles or small groups are more typical in spring, and the species is missed in S.E. some years. An SY Gray-cheeked Thrush was rare in S.E. in the Hyder thickets 4 Jun (SCH, GHR, TT), about a 3rd local record there. Swainson's Thrush was widespread early in the Region, initiated by a local record-early bird in Ketchikan 14 May (AWP). Most Swainson's arrive in numbers in the coastal zone late in the 3rd week of May. Eye-browed Thrush was reported only from Shemya, beginning with one there 30 May, a peak of 7 together



This Dusky Flycatcher (right) along the Salmon River at Hyder, Alaska 30 May 2004 provided one of only a few documented records for the state. Compared to the Hammond's Flycatcher photographed at Hyder on the same date (left), the Dusky has a shorter primary projection, a longer-tailed appearance, and a longer, flatter bill. Photographs by Gary H. Rosenberg.

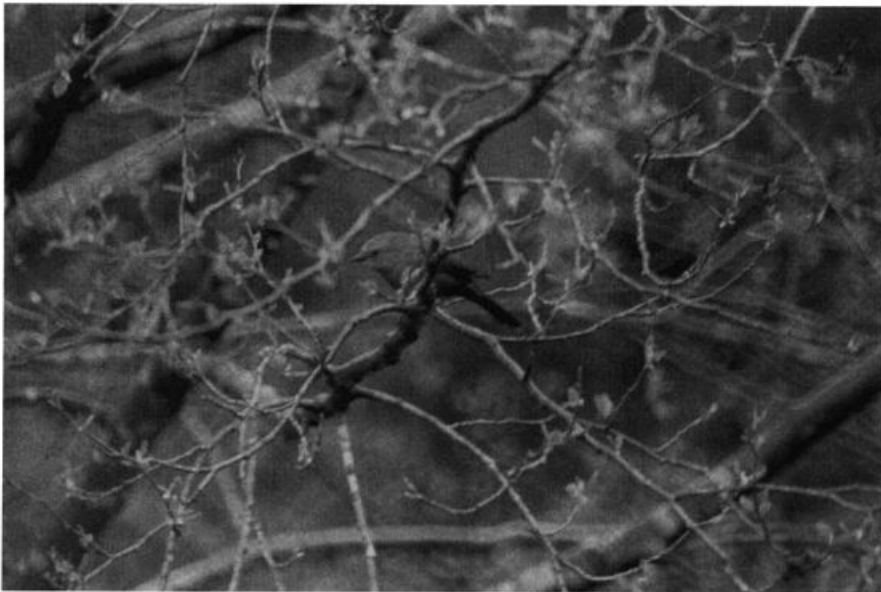
spring; there was also a 2 Jun report from Gambell with no details.

A single female-type Red-breasted Flycatcher was at Shemya 7 Jun (MTS); this species is not annual in the Region and is al-

at the island's e. end 2 Jun (MTS), and 2 there as late as 4 Jun (PP). Often earlier than Eye-browed, and a species not annual in the Region, was a single Dusky Thrush at Shemya 25 May (PP).



A pair of House Finches that turned up at a Ketchikan, Alaska feeder 24 May 2004 (here) marked the third consecutive spring/summer that this casual visitant has occurred in that area. Alaska has only one other spring record. Photograph by Steve Heint.



This female Brewer's Blackbird was notably early 25 April 2004 in Ketchikan and may have wintered somewhere in southern Southeast Alaska. There are only a few spring records for the state. Photograph by Steve Heint.

PIPITS THROUGH FINCHES

Single Olive-backed Pipits at Shemya 4 Jun (MTS) and St. Paul 4–5 Jun (FGI, St. Paul, VENT), were of interest, as the season did not otherwise see large numbers of Asian pipits into the Region. The season's only overshooting Tennessee Warbler appeared in Hyder 1 Jun (ph. GHR, TT); records here are few, even though the species is a migrant and breeder on the e. side of the adjacent Coast Range. Of the several early-season arrivals for Yellow Warbler, one in Ketchikan 4 May (CM, *vide* SCH) was remarkable and record early there by eight days. Casual in the Bering Sea, and mainly in fall, a Townsend's Warbler certainly missed its mark and drift-

ed n. and w. to Gambell 28 May (HLT, VENT). Another waif **Black-and-white Warbler** surfaced in S.E., a singing bird seen briefly in Ketchikan 30 May (†SCH), only the Region's 3rd ever. The recent previous record came from the 1990s, another singing bird at Hyder in early Jun. Also record early locally (by 12 days), and nearly so for the Region, was a MacGillivray's Warbler from Ketchikan 15 May (AWP, SCH).

Maybank struck gold during a cruise through S.E. when he discovered Alaska's first Dickcissel, a singing male in disturbed thickets n. of Juneau 22 May (ph., †BM, ph. DM), rebound by locals 23 May. The closest known records were of singing males from

Vancouver I., BC in the 1990s (2 birds). Casual in spring—and for the first time in S.E. recorded as a migrant rather than a lingering visitor from winter—were 2 White-throated Sparrows in the Hyder thickets 1 & 4 Jun (GHR, TT), also a first for Hyder. Also casual in spring, another Black-headed Grosbeak, a singing male, was noted in Hyder 7 Jun (SCH), similar to the other handful of local reports. A female Brewer's Blackbird appeared in Ketchikan 24–27 Apr (KR, AWP, ph., †SCH), a 4th local record and the 2nd there in spring. Found more often in fall, single Brown-headed Cowbirds made news near Juneau 14 May (ph. EM) and in Ketchikan 17 May (JFK). A pair of House Finches arrived at a Ketchikan feeder 24 May (CM), but only the female was noted 30–31 May. This marks the 3rd consecutive spring/summer that this casual visitant has occurred in the Ketchikan area and the 4th overall in the Region. From the Aleutian/Bering Sea reports, Brambling seemed late and unusually uncommon, while single Hawfinches were reported from Gambell, where casual, 23–25 May (HLT, VENT) and Attu 29 May (LS, JL).

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Spring 2004 weather was dry and warm—in fact, it was often unseasonably hot, especially during April. The most significant weather impacting migrants occurred farther east during May, when a string of spring snowstorms swept across the Canadian Prairies. Many May arrival migrants that approach British Columbia from the southeast were delayed in reaching the province as a result. Please note that this Region is now comprised of British Columbia only; reports from Yukon Territory are treated in the new Northern Canada regional report.

SHEARWATERS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

A Flesh-footed Shearwater, very rarely encountered in spring, was seen off the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca 29 May (BT). The male King Eider frequenting the waters of Mud Bay to Qualicum Beach, on the e. side of Vancouver I., remained through 20 Mar (GLM et al.). Spring sightings of Ross's Geese have been increasing, but this spring, there were flocks of unprecedented size: 24 near Parson, E. Kootenays (LH) and 33 (with a single Snow Goose) in Jaffray, E. Kootenays 6 May (GR). Turkey Vultures continue their impressive invasion of the province, with a pair seen in Tofino 6 May (JW, KM). This species was once accidental at this location and was certainly never seen so early in the spring. For the 2nd spring in a row, an ad. White-tailed Kite visited the lower mainland, this time in Delta 14 May (ph. JE); it is not known whether this is a returning bird.

An impressive total of 7000 American Coots was on L. Windermere in the E. Kootenays 18 Apr (LH). An American Golden-Plover furnished the first spring record for the Okanagan in Vernon 23 May (RF). A Greater Yellowlegs was on the early side, arriving in Salmon Arm 24 Mar (THil), with the first migrant Greater Yellowlegs on the coast arriving in Tofino 20 Mar (AD). Black-necked Stilts returned to T'Kumloops marshes after a one-year hiatus 6 Apr (CR, ph. RR). A potentially territorial male was in the same location where a first provincial nesting took place in 2002. Other Black-necked Stilts included a single at Elizabeth L., E. Kootenays 15 Apr (DN), 10 there 28 Apr (DN), and a pair at Serpentine Fen 10 Apr (TH et al.). The pair of wintering American Avocets along the Serpentine R. remained through 16 Apr (JA et al.). The peak of the Whimbrel migration occurred early this year, with 235 at Grice Bay, Tofino 2 May (AD). Almost annual in spring on the s. coast, an ad. Hudsonian Godwit was at Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner 18–26 May (JI et al.), with another near Tsawwassen 29 May (RTo et al.). There were unprece-

British Columbia

dent numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers in Ucluelet, where more common in the fall, with 23 on 12 May (BSL) and 18 on 15 May (JuB) the high counts. A Reeve in Somenos Marsh, Duncan 25 May (DM) furnished one of few Vancouver I. records. Tofino experienced record-high numbers of Short-billed Dowitchers, such as 8000 present 28 Apr (AD). Annually in late Apr, there are thousands of dowitchers on the Tofino mudflats, but the numbers have never been known to surpass 5000.

JAEGERS THROUGH KINGBIRDS

A pair of Parasitic Jaegers, very rarely encountered in spring in the Okanagan, was seen flying over Vernon 23 May (CS). An ad. South Polar Skua at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca 29 May (BT) furnished the first spring record for the province. A basic ad. Bonaparte's Gull was very early in Salmon Arm 24 Mar (THil). Among the massive gull flocks in the Comox–Courtenay area, a first-alternate Slaty-backed Gull was located 20 Mar (JF, RTo, GLM). Franklin's Gulls are very rare spring migrants in the interior. A pair furnished the first spring record for the Nicola Valley on Stump L. 29 May (WW). Casual in spring, an ad. Franklin's Gull was at Blackie's Spit, White Rock 1 May (IP et al.); another ad. was in Delta 22 May (RTo). Two Sabine's Gulls wandered into the Burrard Inlet and were seen by a commuter on Vancouver Harbour's Sea Bus 31 May (TPi).

A surprising count of ad. Ancient Murrelets (21) came from the entrance of the Strait of Juan de Fuca during a survey from the NOAA vessel *R/V MacArthur* 22–31 May (BT). While a few individuals have been seen in small numbers in early summer off Tofino, this record adds to the growing evidence that points to an undiscovered colony s. of Queen Charlotte Is.—especially when one considers that at least 4 chicks were observed even farther s. along the Washington coast during this same survey (BT).

Following a winter invasion of Great Gray Owls along the lower mainland, 2 remained into Mar, one at the U.B.C. Campus to 9 Mar (PC et al.), and one at Colony Farm, Port Coquitlum to 11 Mar (DS et al.). Rare along the coast, a Lewis's Woodpecker was in Pitt Meadows 24 May (PC). A pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers, first discovered 31 May (KG), successfully nested in the Kimberley Nature Park; there are few documented nestings away from the Okanagan. A Hammond's Flycatcher furnished an early record for the Comox



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Valley 9 Apr (JF) and one of the earliest on record for the province. Rare on the s. coast, a Dusky Flycatcher was at Queen Elizabeth Park 2 May (MTo et al.). A pair of Gray Flycatchers was record early in Summerland 18 Apr (LR). Western Kingbirds are occasional strays to Vancouver I.; one was found on Mt. Tolmie, Victoria 27 May (RG).

SWALLOWS THROUGH FINCHES

An early Cliff Swallow was at Serpentine Fen, Surrey 24–31 Mar (CG et al.). Single Rock Wrens have been making coastal appearances in the past few years, and this year, one was banded at Sechelt Airport 23 May (ph. JJ), for one of few Sunshine Coast records, and another was in Parksville 29 May (CSt, GLM), the latter was feeding on rooftops and gravel driveways. Coastal sightings of Mountain Bluebird are rare. Single ad. females were in Tsawwassen 24 Mar–16 Apr (RS et al.) and at Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner 11 Apr (JI). Gray Catbirds had an early start, as indicated by the 27 individuals scattered around the s. Okanagan 24 May (DGC). A Northern Mockingbird, rare in the s. interior, was near Oliver 12 Apr (ED), not far from last spring's sighting. This individual was discovered after it had mocked the observer's attempts to call in a Virginia Rail.