

# Alaska



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Following the mild and relatively storm-free spring, summer 2005 continued fair and warm across the Region. This year's fire season was prolific, mainly across the breadth of the Interior, where thousands of lightning strikes started several very large fires. Most of these were in July and probably did not radically disrupt breeding success. As a result of the early breeding season, bird song trailed off earlier and more abruptly in late June than is normal, and many species dispersed from breeding areas earlier than usual. Possibly also related to the warm weather, southbound shorebird migration was missing the typical large concentrations at scattered coastal staging sites. It was a quiet rarity season, and waterbirds provided the few highlights.

## HERONS THROUGH GROUSE

Although Great Blue Herons winter in small numbers in the Kodiak Archipelago, there were no summer records so far w. in the Region until this season, when one lingered around Kodiak through 27 Jun (*fide* RAM). Observers identified a Short-tailed Shearwater flying northward in a very low-salinity

section of Upper Cook Inlet in Knik Arm 24 Jun (DE), a first for the upper inlet. Two Manx Shearwaters, photographed just off the beach at Middleton I. 3-24 Jul (ph. BG, NB), showed intriguing site tenacity at what could represent a suitable breeding area. The quality of the photographs allowed the Alaska Checklist Committee to elevate this casual summer visitor in the North Gulf to the formal Alaska list.

Of the handful of summer Cackling Goose reports, which focused mainly on some late northbound migrants in Southeast, a group of 9 in Gustavus 28 Jul (BP) was most unusual and likely nonbreeders from n. populations. A pair of Trumpeter Swans with 2 cygnets along a Traitor R. slough 27 Jul (PR, *fide* SCH) represented a first breeding pair from Revillagigedo I. and probably the 2nd documented nest from s. Southeast. A drake Cinnamon Teal in Juneau 4 Jun (MB) was certainly a late migrant and provided the season's only report. Other than Greater Scaup, *Aythya* are rare in Southeast in summer, so a male Redhead in Juneau 15 Jul (PS, GVV) and a Ring-necked Duck pair in Ketchikan 11 Jun (AWP, SCH) were notable. Thirteen Greater Scaup were noted 10 Jun+ at Gambell (PEL), where they are scarce and usually earlier. A pair of ad. King Eiders mixed with local Commons at Kodiak 22 Jun (RAM); Kings are usually seen here in winter and are rare in summer. At least one *stejnegeri* White-winged Scoter was described off Gambell's Northeast Pt. 10 Jun (†PEL), the site of most of the few Alaska records; this subspecies may be split (as

Velvet Scoter) in the future. Also scarce offshore in the n. Bering Sea were Common Goldeneyes in numbers at Gambell, with a maximum of 12 on 14 Jun (PEL).

A subad. Bald Eagle was seen near Kivalina n. of the Noatak R. Delta 13 Jul (GVV). Although Bald Eagles are known to breed up the Bering Sea coast locally to at least the lower Noatak R. watershed, there are only occasional reports n. of there, especially along the immediate coastal fringe. Ketchikan observers were able to locate and further document Rock Ptarmigan in the alpine areas above town, with 2 males first noted 11 Jun (RN, ph. AM) and a female with a brood of 6 at Mahoney Ridge (elev. 750 m) 26 Jun (AWP, ph. SCH). This marks only the 2nd record of local nesting for the area, where access to higher-elevation alpine sites is limited.

## RAILS THROUGH NIGHTHAWKS

Both extralimital railids that surfaced in Gustavus this spring called from territories into midsummer: the Virginia Rail called from its favored sedge marsh 7 Jun-6 Jul (v.r. ND, PV, BP), while the local Sora also called from its spring location through 10 Jun (ND, PV). The Juneau Soras were also busy breeding, and an ad. attended 2 chicks in the Mendenhall Valley 11 Jun+ (GB). This marks the Region's 2nd confirmed nesting of the species. A pair of Sandhill Cranes over muskeg near Ketchikan 11 Jun (AWP, SCH) was in an area where breeding has been suspected for years but has yet to be confirmed. It was an average season for wandering Asian shorebirds. In Jun-July, a handful typically appear at the standard Bering Sea island sites as either late nonbreeding migrants or southbound birds. This season, these included a Lesser Sand-Plover at Gambell 13 Jun (vt. PEL), a Common Greenshank 11-12 Jun and a Common Sandpiper 17-18 Jun, both at Gambell, where not annual, and 2 Red-necked Stints, also lingering at Gambell 13-21 Jun (vt. PEL). Kodiak's first Greater Yellowlegs nest was discovered at 420 m elevation above town 3 Jun (WD); few nests are known from that elevation in the Region. An aggregation of 85+ Hudsonian Godwits was at Juneau's productive Eagle Beach 15 Jul (ph. PS), probably a record high count for Southeast. An ad. Stilt Sandpiper in Juneau 24-27 Jun was also rare for Southeast (PS ph., RJG). A Short-billed Dowitcher was reported from St. Paul I. 3 Jun (ST. PAUL), where there are few Jun records. A group of 4 Red Phalaropes in Upper Cook Inlet's Knik Arm 19 Jul (DE, *fide* TT), furnished Upper Cook Inlet's 4th record.

Casual in summer, a Franklin's Gull near Ketchikan 2 Jul (AWP) provided the 3rd summer report there, the locale with most of the Region's reports. Another ad. Franklin's Gull reached Kodiak, where there a several

early summer records, 17 Jun (JBA, IM, MP). Also rare in midsummer were single imm. Ring-billed Gulls at Ketchikan 11 Jun (AWP, SCH) and Juneau 29 Jun–11 Jul (PS). Ring-billed typically enter the Region in very small numbers in s. Southeast after early Aug. The ad. Lesser Black-backed Gull seen near Juneau 19 Jun was felt to be the same bird that has been attached to the Mendenhall gull colony and seen occasionally for the past decade (RJG). Imm. Black-legged Kittiwakes were drawn to nearshore estuaries from Haines (PEL et al.) to Juneau, with large flocks noted at least in the season's first half, including a maximum 1500+ at Eagle Beach n. of Juneau for most of Jun (PS, GVV). It has been suggested that these inshore aggregations tend to happen in years when local North Gulf water temperatures are above average.

Caspian Terns were well represented across the North Gulf, with the season's peak of 39 birds found in Gustavus 19 Jul (ND). Historic high counts usually come from the Copper R. Delta/Cordova area. Thirteen Caspians in the Juneau area 20 Jun (PS) was an above-average count there. Surveys in several of Glacier Bay's inlets produced exceptional Aleutian Tern tallies, including 37 in Adams Inlet during the week of 12 Jun (YA, *vide* ND). At least four nests were substantiated. Although there are historic Aleutian Tern nest records from Glacier Bay, these are exceptional contemporary numbers, which may be a result of habitat succession. USGS staff ran shipboard transects around the perimeter of Unalaska I. this season and counted an amazing 410 Kittlitz's Murrelets in Jun (*vide* JP). Even without extrapolation, these numbers confirm this area as one of the species' strongholds in the Region. Considerable DNA sampling and analyses of this e. Aleutian population is beginning to provide evidence that Aleutian Kittlitz's may be genetically distinct from Mainland birds from points farther e. in the North Gulf. USGS staff also located a Kittlitz's nest with an egg in an alpine section of Agattu I. in late Jul, only the 2nd nest ever found in the Aleutians (*vide* GVB). The season's most intriguing find was a pair of Black Guillemots seen consistently in Valdez Arm in e. Prince William Sound 17 Jul–1 Aug+ (AB, TA & JG ph.) associating with food-gathering Pigeon Guillemots. Besides being a first ever for Prince William Sound and the e. North Pacific, the only known closest records comprise a few winter sightings from the se. Bering Sea in years when extreme winter pack ice advances to the vicinity of the Pribilof Is.

A Mourning Dove in Petersburg 15 Jun (RL) was rare in summer; the species is largely a fall straggler in Alaska. Three Common Cuckoos (reported without details) arrived with a late storm at St. Paul 19-30 Jun

(ST. PAUL), providing the season's only report. An Oriental Cuckoo photographed at Gambell 23 Jun+ (HI, ph. GK) was extremely late but within the range of most of the Region's recent reports. Juneau's Western Screech-Owl pair bred for the 3rd consecutive year near Douglas, where at least 3 young fledged in Jun (PS). The summer's only Northern Pygmy-Owl report was a single near Ketchikan 12 Jun (SCH), where they are rare at this season. A displaying Common Nighthawk over the Juneau area 22-30 Jun (DR et al.) was an intriguing summer report away from known or suspected nesting sites in the Chilkat and Kellsall watersheds.

## WOODPECKERS THROUGH WAXWINGS

A mid-Jun follow-up visit to the w. White Mountain habitat that last summer produced a discrete "colony" of breeding Yellow-bellied Flycatchers again confirmed several pairs and nesting behavior (*vide* DDG). Access to similar habitats at points e. of there is limited or lacking, so it may take



This Oriental Cuckoo at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska 23 June 2005 (here) and later was the only one reported in spring/summer 2005 and rather late. Photograph by Gerard Koonooka.

a long time to establish and delineate the extent of Yellow-bellied's presence in the e. Interior. The season's only other Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was a singing bird outside Juneau 26-27 Jun (GVV, SZ, PS). Least Flycatchers were also missing except for one in song at Ketchikan 5-15 Jun (ph. SCH), a local and offshore Southeast first, and one at Hyder 22 Jun (SCH), where there are several Jun records. Most unexpected offshore in the Bering Sea was a Say's Phoebe at Gambell 10 Jun (vt. PEL). There are no previous offshore Bering Sea area records of this very local

nester that breeds as close to the coast as the w. side of the Imuruk Basin in the vicinity of Teller. Considered annual but not actually recorded every summer, the season's only Eastern Kingbird was seen just s. of Juneau Pt. Snettisham 12-13 Jul (ph. GB); most summer vagrants come from the Southeast Mainland river corridors.

Alaska's first Cassin's Vireo nest was located in a riparian thicket e. of Haines along the Chilkat R. 4 Jun (ph. LD, ph. NH). The pair was actively tending to fairly advanced chicks on that date. Given the date and stage of this breeding record, the Region's earliest spring record (mid-May), previously considered enigmatic and without precedent, now appears within what could be this species's early-arrival range. The only other Cassin's report was a singing bird 14 Jun in Juneau's Mendenhall moraines (RJG), where several have been documented over the past decade. A first at least for the Kodiak population was a Northwestern Crow nest discovered on the ground on an offshore islet 5 Jun (IM, ph. RAM). Extralimital swallows included a juv. Tree Swallow way n. on the Bering Sea coast 13 Jul at Kivalina (GVV), where they are not known to nest, at least 4 ad. Cliff Swallows attending nests attached to houses at Kivalina 13 Jul (GVV), and 2 white-bellied Barn Swallows around Gambell 21-22 Jun (vt. PEL), one of which hung around through 10 Jul (HI). When birders visit some of the more isolated or smaller Bering Sea coast villages (e.g., Wales, Sheesalik, Kivalina, Pt. Hope) in Jun, they sometimes discover a few boreal forest nesters (e.g., White-crowned Sparrow, swallows, American Robin) that may have reached the coast as overshoots or as pioneers and are then drawn to various artificial habitats.

A few *Muscicapa* flycatchers were identified by the observers from St. Paul I. after a mid-Jun storm event, including one Dark-sided Flycatcher and up to 6 Gray-streaked Flycatchers 19-22 Jun (ST. PAUL). The Pribilofs have produced several Old World flycatchers in Jun over the past few years. Unprecedented in Southeast, and one of the latest Jun records for migrants away from the known Alaska breeding range, was an Eastern Yellow Wagtail in Juneau 20 Jun (GVV); there are few extralimital reports from the Mainland, and most are from early fall. A pair of Bohemian Waxwings was unusual so far n. at Kiana 15 Jul (GVV) on the lower Kobuk R.

## WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Single Tennessee Warblers in Juneau 24 & 26 Jun (GVV, GB) were late for spring migrants but were not detected after those dates. Tennessees are fairly common at adjacent latitudes e. of there into the dry deciduous foothills of the e. Coast Range. A Lin-

coln's Sparrow singing near Nome 26 Jun (WP, PJB) was well w. of known breeding sites on the Seward Pen. Two juv. Golden-crowned Sparrows were discovered at 690 m elevation in the Mt. Roberts alpine zone above downtown Juneau 24 Jun (GVV). Their presence at this date provided good evidence of local nesting farther s. and on the w. slope of the Coast Range than had been previously documented. Golden-crowns are known to breed up to nearly 1200 m, mainly on the dry e. slopes and higher plateaus of the e. side of the Coast Range. A rare summer visit to King I. produced at least four pairs of territorial and probably nesting McKay's Buntings 14-21 Jun (KN, *vide* GVV) well n. of known nesting areas in the Bering Sea: breeding McKay's are established only at St. Mathew and Hall Is., with infrequent nests located on St. Lawrence I. Ephemeral nesting attempts, often with Snow Bunting mates, are occasional in the Pribilofs.

Still casual for the Region in summer was a female Black-headed Grosbeak at a Juneau feeder 18-24 Jun (ph. PS, RJG); since the early 1990s, there has been a pattern of apparent overshoots reaching into the Region only in the s. half of Southeast in Jun; vagrants are also detected in early fall. Nice documentation was received of another

imm. male Yellow-headed Blackbird from Anchorage's Potter Marsh 26 Jul (ph. PE), which was relocated sporadically through about 10 Aug (*vide* SS); this furnishes Upper Cook Inlet's 3rd record. A pair of Brown-headed Cowbirds cavorted around the small pastures in Gustavus most of the summer (ND et al.). Although cowbirds occur periodically in late spring, usually on the Southeast Mainland, they are rare this far n. and are typically singles, usually males. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches (*littoralis*) are rarely detected in the remote alpine terrain of Southeast, so an ad. above Juneau 31 Jul (ph. RA) and 3 juvs. at Ketchikan 26 Jun (AWP, SCH) were excellent finds and confirmation of local nestings. Because of difficulties in accessing many sites, the Southeast range of *littoralis* remains poorly delineated.

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# British Columbia



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**A** westerly jet stream directed storms across southern British Columbia through most of June; in July, it moved northward, bringing mainly soggy weather to the northern half of the province while the south dried up. Floods and late-season snowstorms, however, were unreported, and so nesting success was assumed to be high. Rare species were well reported, including Manx Shearwater, White-winged Dove, Western Scrub-Jay, Northern Parula, Prothonotary Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Dickcissel.

## ALBATROSSES THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

An observer aboard a cruise ship provided an impressive sample of pelagics 16 km wsw. of Carmanah Pt. 2 Jul: 1000+ Black-footed Albatross, 5000+ Sooty Shearwater, 5000+ Northern Fulmar, 500+ Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, and one Laysan Albatross; another Laysan was 20-30 km w. of the Queen Charlotte Is. 27 Jun (BB). A Manx Shearwater was seen from shore along the

West Coast Trail near Dare Pt. 2 Jun (†NH), furnishing a 6th record for the province. American White Pelicans are rare along the s. coast; 2 ads. flying nw. from Tsawwassen toward Vancouver I. (RTo, CI) were the only coastal ones reported. Other displaced White Pelicans included 112, a large count, on Swan L. in the Peace R. area 27 Jun (CC et al.). Brown Pelicans were again prevalent along the coast; most noteworthy were the sightings of single imms. in the Lower Mainland: White Rock Pier 9 Jul (GP et al.), Steveston Jetty Tip 10 Jul (JI, IS), and Iona and Sea Is. 16 Jul (MN et al.). A Eurasian Wigeon was exceptionally late at Forest Grove 20 Jun (TG).

The Okanagan's first mid-summer Broad-winged Hawk came from Naramata 6 Jul (RJC). Very rare in the s. interior, an ad. Ferruginous Hawk was seen gliding over the sage at Douglas Lake Ranch 26 Jun (RTo, CI), a location where nesting has previously been suspected. Yellow Rails are extremely local in the province, known mostly from a few scattered locations in the Peace R. area; this season, 2 were reported at Valleyview, a new location, n. of Dawson Creek 15 Jun (JG).

Pacific Golden-Plovers are very rare anywhere away from the coast, but one