

Info for Birders Visiting Juneau

By Gwen Baluss

Juneau Audubon Society offers free public walks on Saturdays during the spring and summer. These and other events are always posted on our website. <http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org/>

We do not offer any personalized services. Sometimes one of our volunteer board or membership will accompany a local visitor on a bird walk. Usually this is because we are heading out birding anyway and like to connect with other birders. This is entirely dependent on personal schedules and inclination. Everyone is busy in the summer. *We have no fee but do request a donation to continue our education and conservation projects.* Please post your info as a message to our Facebook page or the local bird Chat group Eaglechat to see if there are local birders interested in accompanying you.

There are no specific birding guides/companies in Juneau at this time, but many local companies do offer hikes and boat trips and have guides that are quite knowledgeable of local birdlife.

Luckily, there are great options to bird on your own too.

Short layovers

For short trips to Juneau two great places to go birding are the Mount Roberts Tramway and the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center. Both places you can find local birding info that is free or for sale at a reasonable price. Both places charge an entry fee.

The tramway is a short walk from the cruise ship dock, then a vertical ride up. Provides good access to forest and shrub habitats. The tram also hosts alpine and is excellent for ptarmigan and grouse.

The MGVC can be reached within a mile by public bus, or you can get right to the parking lot with local bus and cab companies. Naturalists at the MGVC have birding knowledge. In addition to forest and shrublands, the lake shore hosts unique nesting birds such as Arctic terns

Free birding on foot

Ferry passengers. From the ferry dock check out the Auke Village Recreation Area <http://www.recreation.gov/recreationalAreaDetails.do?contractCode=NRSO&facilityId=236212> Representative near-shore and forest birds occur. Open areas are good for sapsuckers and fox sparrows in summer. Also nearby and good for sea birds, especially Marbled Murrelet, is Auke Bay Harbor. Both take about a half hour to arrive by foot and are easily found by walking along the only main road from the terminal.

Cruise ship passengers. A simple walk around town will yield many of our common forest species; listen for the lovely chorus morning or evening of Varied, Hermit and Swainson's thrushes. A walk along the waterfront of Gastineau channel is good for local water birds. Look for Pigeon Guillemots right under the docks in the harbor.

Airport area. Walk past the rental car lot to nearby Ward Air (less than 5 minutes). There, cross the paved street and look for overgrown trails and a bridge leading to a city greenbelt. This is a great place for breeding songbirds like Sooty Song Sparrows and Rufous Hummingbird and for migratory warblers in spring and fall. Use caution in this area if walking alone. Nowhere in Juneau is "high crime" but these woods are used by the homeless community.

A longer hike (half hour) will take you to the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge at the end of Radcliffe Road. This is one of the best places to bird in the region; an Important Bird Area <http://netapp.audubon.org/IBA/Site/1090> and an eBird hotspot. Shorebirds and waterfowl, all seasons, are a highlight there.

Longer Stays

At Juneau Ranger District (Ph. 907-586-880) ask for "Finding Birds in Juneau" booklet. This free publication is a bit out of date but highlights all the main birding spots and species.

A rental car gives you access to many local hotspots; but some are accessible by public bus.

The Alaska Marine Highway system provides relatively inexpensive passenger service to nearby communities, and makes a reasonable waterbird viewing platform.

Nearby destinations with fantastic seabird viewing include Tracy Arm and Glacier Bay National Park. We do not have information on tours, but many companies do go to these areas. (Not for the budget birder, but likely a worthwhile adventure).

What to wear

In summer, any comfortable walking or hiking shoes, a rain jacket and hat with a brim should suffice. Other seasons prepare for freezing cold and rain or snow.

Field Guides

Any standard field guide that covers Western N .America (e.g. Sibley, National Geographic, Petersen, Kaufman) will be adequate here. For more detailed discussion of Alaskan birds, we recommend Robert Armstrong's "Birds of Alaska" available at <http://naturebob.com/> OR https://www.hearthsidebooks.com/search/apachesolr_search/armstrongand many other vendors who sell Alaska books.

Explore the JAS website to find bird lists, regional reports and more under the tab: "Regional Birding Information" and similar "Even more regional birding information."

Enjoy your visit!

And don't forget to report your sightings on Ebird, Eaglechat or our JAS Facebook page!