

**SUMMARY OF SOUTHEAST ALASKA BIRD OBSERVATIONS:  
*WINTER SEASON—December 2009 to February 2010***

**Sub-regional Compilers:**

Steven C. Heinl, P.O. Box 23101, Ketchikan, AK 99901

Andrew W. Piston, P. O. Box 1116, Ward Cove, AK 99928

This report summarizes bird sightings from Southeast Alaska for the winter season, which covered December 2009 to February 2010, and is intended to provide interesting observations for inclusion in an Alaska-wide column written by Thede Tobish for the journal *North American Birds* (published by the American Birding Association <http://www.aba.org/>). We would like to thank all of the people that directly sent us observations, shared their photographs, and answered our inquiries about their sightings, all of whom are cited below. We were particularly pleased to again receive extensive reports from Carol Ross and Bonnie Demerjian (Wrangell), Nick Hajdukovich (Juneau), Nat Drumheller (Gustavus), and Matt Goff (Sitka). We also greatly benefited from access to sightings entered into eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) which we've incorporated into this report (nearly all of the information from the Juneau area was obtained from eBird). We also forwarded all of the notes and photographs that we received to Thede as well.

December often marks the tail end of the fall migration for late-lingering species, and there was a good smattering of hardy species lingering into December (e.g., thrushes, Yellow-rumped Warbler, sparrows). Most, however, disappeared following severe cold weather during that month and, with the exception of sparrows at Ketchikan feeders, other semi-hardy species were poorly represented in Southeast in January–February. The remainder of the winter (January–February) was much warmer and drier than average throughout the region, but what affect this might have had on birds was not particularly noticeable.

Names and Initials of observers cited in the text and/or who reported sightings: Beverly A. Agler (BAA), Robert H. Armstrong (RHA), Gwen S. Baluss (GSB), Melissa Cady (MC), Snapper Carson (SC), Don Cornelius (DC), Bonnie H. Demerjian (BHD), Nat K. Drumheller (NKD), Cheryl A. Fultz (CAF), Bill Gass (BG), Matt R. Goff (MRG), Nick R. Hajdukovich (NRH), Steven C. Heinl (SCH), Brad Hunter (BH), Halli Kenoyer (HK), Jerold F. Koerner (JFK), Debbie Koons (DK), Jim H. Lewis (JHL), Kathy Lochman (KL), Carrie McCormack (CM), Alan Murray (AM), Paul H. Norwood (PHN), Bill H. Pawuk (BHP), W. Larry Peavler (WLP), Andrew W. Piston (AWP), Julie Reynolds (JR), Kathy M. Ripley (KMR), Patty A. Rose (PAR), Carol L. Ross (CLR), Mark W. Schwan (MWS), Gary Smith (GS), Dennis Strom (DS), Paul M. Suchanek (PMS), M. Tedin (MT), Brian Uher-Koch (BUK), Gus B. van Vliet (GBV), Marge Ward (MW), Susan Wise Eagle (SWE), Michael A. Wood (MAW), Will Young (WY).

**EURASIAN WIGEON:** This duck is casual in Southeast Alaska during the winter (Kessel and Gibson 1978). This was the fourth straight winter that this species was found in the Juneau area—a male was present at the Mendenhall wetlands all winter (PMS, NRH) and a female was also present on 28 January 2010 and 26 February 2010 (PMS).

**CANVASBACK:** This species has not been reported annually during the winter in Southeast Alaska, so one at Juneau's Mendenhall Wetlands from late December 2009 through the end of the period was noteworthy (m.obs.).

**RING-NECKED DUCK:** Normal small numbers were reported this winter, with a maximum count of 32 at Sitka 15 February 2010 (MRG).

**BLACK SCOTER:** Excellent counts of this generally uncommon scoter were made at Gustavus, where a peak count of 420 on 6 February 2010 provided a new local high count (NKD), and Juneau, where 45 on 8 February 2010 was the observer's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest local count (PMS).

**HYBRID WATERFOWL:** Two hybrid ducks were found in the Juneau area. A male Common x Barrow's goldeneye spent its 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive winter near Fritz Cove (PMS) and an interesting bird identified as a Hooded Merganser x Barrow's Goldeneye was found at Sandy Beach 2 February 2010+ (PMS; m.obs.; Figure 1).

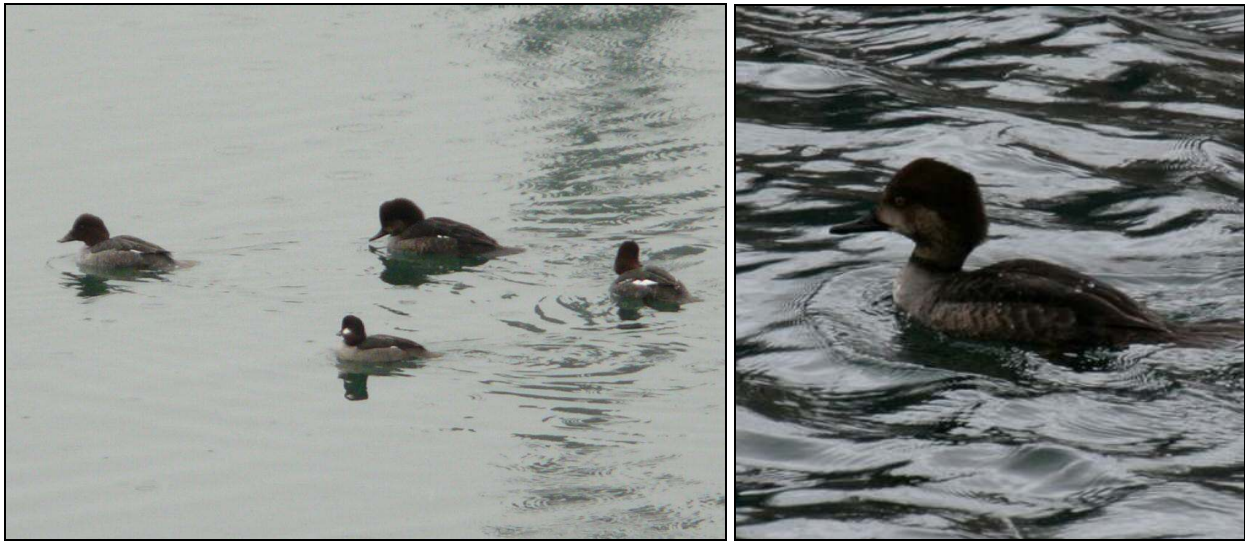


Figure 1. This curious-looking duck was identified as a hybrid goldeneye x Hooded Merganser by Juneau observers. The narrow bill, pale face, and shaggy head seem to indicate a merganser as one parent, while the size and general body coloration seem to indicate a goldeneye as the other parent. Photographed here with two female goldeneyes and a female Bufflehead on 3 February 2010 (on the left; *photo by Paul M. Suchanek*) and nearly two months later, on 26 March 2010 (on the right; *photo by Nick R. Hajdukovich*).

**ROCK PTARMIGAN:** The Rock Ptarmigan is resident on the large northern islands and the mainland of Southeast Alaska. It was also recently found to be resident on Revillagigedo Island in southern Southeast Alaska (Heinl and Piston 2009). Thus, while two Rock Ptarmigan found on Deer Mountain 19 December 2009 (AM) were not a surprise, they did represent the first local winter record and helped Ketchikan crush Juneau in total species count on Christmas Bird Count day.

**PIED-BILLED GREBE:** One Pied-billed Grebe was found on saltwater at Ketchikan 25 January 2010+ (Snapper Carson; JHL). This species is a very rare winter visitant in Southeast Alaska.

**WESTERN GREBE:** This grebe is a locally common winter visitant in southern Southeast Alaska, as indicated by a flock of 1000+ reported near Wrangell on 26 February 2010 (DS). It is rare north of Sumner Strait. Five were found on the Gustavus CBC 19 December 2009 (the largest local count ever) and at least one was present there into mid-February 2010 (NKD). One was reported at Juneau 4 January 2010 (MWS) and two were found at Sitka 12 December 2009 (PHN).

**BRANDT'S CORMORANT:** During the winter, this species has only been found in Alaska in the Ketchikan area where it is a regular winter visitant, but primarily along the more open shores south of Ketchikan (Heinl and Piston 2007). This winter at least three were observed in the Ketchikan area; maximum, two on 29 December 2009 (AWP, SCH).

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK:** Perhaps larger-than-average numbers of this species wintered in Southeast Alaska, primarily in the vicinity of feeders. At least seven at Ketchikan all winter was above average, and there were many reports in the Juneau area (m.obs.)

**RED-TAILED HAWK:** At least two Red-tailed Hawks wintered at Ketchikan, one wintered at Sitka (fide MRG), and another was reported at Wrangell 17 December 2009 (MC). This hawk is a very rare winter visitant in southern Southeast Alaska. An immature Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) successfully wintered at Juneau, where this species is distinctly casual in winter (GBV, m.obs.; Figure 2).



Figure 2. Immature Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) at Juneau 13 December 2009 (left; photo Robert H. Armstrong) and 20 January 2010 (right; photo by Nick R. Hajdukovich).

**AMERICAN KESTREL:** A lingering kestrel at Ketchikan 13 December 2009 provided a new late local date (AWP, SCH). Another kestrel lingered to 12 January 2010 (GBV) in the Juneau area where there are at least two prior mid-winter records.

**GYRFALCON:** An immature Gyrfalcon was photographed at Juneau on the CBC 19 December 2009 (PMS, photo). Most of the Southeast Alaska reports of this very rare visitant come from the Juneau area.

**PEREGRINE FALCON:** A Peregrine Falcon was found at Juneau 23 January 2010 (NRH, PMS). This species is a very rare winter visitant in Southeast Alaska.

**AMERICAN COOT:** This rare winter visitant was reported at Ketchikan (one, 19 December 2009; AWP), Juneau (maximum, two 4 December 2009; GBV), and Sitka (maximum, four; MRG).

**SURFBIRD:** A flock of 2,500 Surfbirds at Juneau's Eagle Beach was still present 6 December 2009 (BAA, PMS); fewer than 100 were present at that site later in the winter.

SANDERLING: The maximum Sanderling count at Gustavus was 200 on 8 February 2010 (NKD). Sanderlings are very rare elsewhere in Southeast Alaska during the winter.

ROCK SANDPIPER: Large numbers of Rock Sandpipers wintered at two favored locations in northern Southeast Alaska: 200 at Gustavus (NKD; Figure 3) and a maximum count of 1,000 Eagle Beach, Juneau, 3 January 2010 (PMS). Rock Sandpipers wintering in Southeast Alaska are subspecies *tschukschorum*; a small, dark race that breeds along the Bering Sea coast and St. Lawrence and Nunivak islands (Gibson and Kessel 1997). At least one Rock Sandpiper found at Gustavus had been banded at the Tutakoke River, Yukon River Delta, in 2007 (fide NKD; Figure 4).

Amongst the Rock Sandpipers at Gustavus and Juneau were a few larger, paler, nominate *ptilocnemis* (NKD; maximum at Eagle Beach was two on 3 January 2010; PMS). One *ptilocnemis* at Ketchikan 19 December 2009 represented the 1<sup>st</sup> local report (SCH). This subspecies breeds at St. Matthew, Hall, and the Pribilof islands (Gabrielson and Lincoln 1959). Large numbers (perhaps 80% of the population) winter in lower Cook Inlet (*Field Notes* 51:787). Gabrielson and Lincoln (1959) considered it a straggler to Southeast Alaska though a few probably occur annually.



Figure 3. Mudflats in the vicinity of Gustavus provide important wintering habitat for shorebirds, including Sanderlings, Dunlin, and Rock Sandpipers. This photo was taken near the mouth of Rink Creek 25 February 2010. *Photo by Nat K. Drumheller*



Figure 4. This flock of Rock Sandpipers was photographed at Gustavus 24 February 2010. Note the yellow band on the bird just left of center; it was banded in western Alaska in 2007. *Photo by Nat K. Drumheller*



Figure 5. These Long-billed Dowitchers at Juneau's Mendenhall Wetlands (here, 20 January 2010) provided only the 2<sup>nd</sup> mid-winter report of this species in Alaska. *Photo by Nick R. Hajdukovich*

DUNLIN: The peak count of Dunlin at Gustavus was 1,900 on 8 February 2010 (NKD). As in recent winters, at least one of the birds had been banded at the Tutakoke River, Yukon River Delta, in 2005 (fide NKD). This species winters locally at sheltered, shallow bays throughout Southeast Alaska—e.g., 400 were at Eagle Beach, Juneau, 3 January 2010 (PMS), and a flock of 600 was found near Petersburg in mid-February 2010 (BH).

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER: Two Long-billed Dowitchers wintered at Juneau 10 December 2009–24 January 2010 (GBV; Figure 5). There was only one prior mid-winter record for Alaska (one at Gustavus 7 December 2005–18 February 2006; *North American Birds* 60:271–273).

WILSON'S SNIPE: This species is typically a very rare winter visitant in Southeast Alaska but more than usual were found after December. Small numbers were found through the end of January at Juneau (maximum, two 20 January 2010; NRH) and through the end of February at Ketchikan (maximum, four 3 February 2010; AWP, SCH) and Gustavus (NKD), and a single snipe was reported at Sitka 6 January 2010 (fide MRG).

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE: One at Gustavus 13 February 2010 provided a rare winter find (NKD). This species is sparsely distributed in the Bering Sea and throughout Gulf of Alaska in winter (Hatch et al. 2009) and is a rare winter visitant to inside waters.

BONAPARTE'S GULL: One at Ketchikan 3 January 2010 (AWP, SCH) was rare, as the species typically departs Southeast Alaska by mid-December.



Figure 6. The very pale overall appearance, long wings and whitish primaries, small rounded head, tiny, bicolored bill, and finely barred tertials that lack darker centers, easily identify the gull on the left as a 1<sup>st</sup>-cycle Kumlien's Iceland Gull—photographed at Juneau 5 February 2010. *Photo by Paul M. Suchanek*

RING-BILLED GULL: An adult at Ketchikan 24 January 2010 (SCH, AWP, CAF) provided only the 2<sup>nd</sup> local mid-winter record. This species is a rare visitant to Southeast Alaska, but is casual during the winter.

ICELAND GULL: A 1<sup>st</sup>-cycle Iceland Gull at Juneau 5 February 2010 was well photographed (PMS; Figure 6). This form is likely a casual migrant and winter visitant in southeast Alaska, and there are probably fewer than 10 documented records.

THICK-BILLED MURRE: This alcid was reported at Sitka in mid-February, with a maximum count of two on 15 February 2010 (MRG).

MARBLED MURRELET: A high count of 1,360 was made at Clover Passage, near Ketchikan 24 January 2010 (SCH, AWP). It is not unusual to find large numbers of murrelets at this location when feed is concentrated there.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE: Following the invasion of this species into the region last summer, Eurasian Collared-Doves were present all winter at Juneau (maximum, five; m.obs.), Petersburg (five; BHP), and Ketchikan (DK). This was a remarkable number considering that one at Ketchikan in February 2009 represented the first winter record for Alaska.

SNOWY OWL: One Snowy Owl was found at Ketchikan 11 January 2010 (MAW).



Figure 7. Northern Pygmy-Owls were frequently sighted on the Juneau roadsystem this winter (left; 23 January 2010; *photo by Nick R. Hajdukovich*). The Barred Owl was photographed at Juneau 30 December 2009 (*photo by Gus B. van Vliet*).

NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL: Pygmy-owls reported on 20 different days over the course of the winter in the Juneau area, including a maximum of two at Point Bridget 28 January 2010 (JR; Figure 7). Elsewhere, singles were found at Gustavus 13–15 February 2010 (KL, NKD) and Petersburg 22 February 2010 (DC).

**BARRED OWL:** Barred Owls were found at Juneau 28 December 2009–4 January 2010 (GSB, GBV; Figure 7), Gustavus in mid-December (fide NKD) and two were found at Ketchikan 11 December 2009 (WLP) and 28 December 2009 (BG). This species is a rare to uncommon resident throughout Southeast Alaska.

**SHORT-EARED OWL:** Very rare in southeast Alaska in the winter, several wintered in the Juneau area, with maximum counts of two birds at the local golf course on 22–23 January 2010 (JR, BUK).

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD:** An adult male Anna's Hummingbird successfully wintered at a Ketchikan feeder (SC; JHL, Figure 8). Another unidentified hummingbird at a Wrangell feeder through 16 December 2009 was also likely this species (fide CLR).



Figure 8. This adult male Anna's Hummingbird spent the entire winter at a Ketchikan feeder; it was photographed here on 28 January 2010. *Photo by Jim H. Lewis*

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE:** A flock of 42 was found at Juneau 28 February 2010 (GBV). Although this species is a regular winter visitant to the northern Southeast mainland, this was a remarkable number. One at Sitka 5 December 2009 (GS) was rare along the outer coast.

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET:** A Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Juneau 5 December 2009 was the latest reported this winter (PMS, BAA).

**MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD:** A very late female was reported at Wrangell 20 December 2009 (DS). This species is a locally uncommon spring migrant and casual or rare fall migrant and winter visitant in Southeast Alaska, where it occurs primarily on the mainland.

**TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE:** One at Wrangell 17 December 2009 was very late (MC, CLR).

**HERMIT THRUSH:** Single Hermit Thrushes at Sitka 5 December 2009 (MRG) and Ketchikan 19 December 2009 (WY) and 22 December 2009 (AWP) were very late.



AMERICAN ROBIN: Numbers of this species appeared fairly average. Maximum mid-winter count was 20 at Sitka 7 January 2010 (MRG).

VARIED THRUSH: Very large numbers of Varied Thrushes lingered into December at Ketchikan and 234 on the CBC 19 December 2009 was a new high count for the circle. Numbers declined after late December. Elsewhere, normal small numbers were reported (e.g., only five was the high count at Juneau all winter; NRH) and maximum of only eight at Sitka 3 January 2010 (MW, MT).



Figure 9. This American Pipit was found staggering down a frozen sidewalk on the Ketchikan CBC 19 December 2009. *Photo by Andrew W. Piston*

AMERICAN PIPIT: Late pipits were found into December at Juneau, Wrangell, and Ketchikan (maximum, four at Ketchikan 12 December 2009, JHL; Figure 9). American Pipits lingered into January at Ketchikan (maximum, three 1 January 2010; SCH; latest, two 26 January 2010, JHL), and singles were found at Juneau 27 January 2010 (NRH) and Gustavus 13 February 2010 (NKD).

BOHEMIAN WAXWING: Small numbers of Bohemian Waxwings were found in Ketchikan and Juneau through January; maximum was nine at Ketchikan 19 December 2009 (Ketchikan CBC) and a flock of 56 at Juneau 15 January 2010 (GBV).

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER: Several Yellow-rumped Warblers lingered into December at Ketchikan, with two on 18 December 2009 maximum (WY, CAF) and one on 29 December 2009 the latest (AWP, SCH). This species is casual winter visitant in Southeast Alaska.

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW: Larger-than-average numbers of American Tree Sparrows were found in northern Southeast Alaska following a very large fall incursion. At Gustavus, 38 were found on the CBC 19 December 2009, and 20 were found in town on 22 February 2010 (NKD), and small numbers were found all winter at Juneau (m.obs.).

SAVANNAH SPARROW: At least six Savannah Sparrows lingered into December in Ketchikan and singles were reported at Sitka (MRG) and Petersburg (BHP). At least three of the Ketchikan birds were present during mid-winter, January–February (JFK, JHL, et al.). This species is casual in winter and there were only three prior mid-winter records for Ketchikan.

FOX SPARROW: Not many Fox Sparrows were reported from Southeast Alaska away from the Ketchikan area where 35 on 19 December 2009 was the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest local CBC count. In addition to the usual “Sooty” Fox Sparrows, Interior “Red” Fox Sparrows were also reported from Ketchikan, where three wintered, and Juneau, where at least four were reported over the winter (m.obs.). The “Red” Fox Sparrow is a casual or very rare migrant and winter visitant in southeast Alaska.

LINCOLN’S SPARROW: Above average numbers of this species was reported at Ketchikan and Juneau. Six on the Ketchikan CBC 19 December 2009 was the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest local CBC count, and at least five were reported all winter at Juneau (m.obs.).

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW: Following the excellent fall reports of this species at Ketchikan, numbers were still present in December, including four recorded on the Ketchikan CBC 19 December 2009 (m.obs.) and at least four that lingered into mid-winter at feeders (JFK, JHL, et al.). At least nine White-throated Sparrows were found at Ketchikan between fall and winter 2009–2010. One at Sitka 13 December 2009 (MRG) was the only other report this winter.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW: Normal small numbers of this species wintered at Ketchikan (e.g., five on the Ketchikan CBC 19 December 2009). It was poorly represented elsewhere in Southeast Alaska, however; e.g., one at Juneau 6 December 2009 was the only Juneau report we received of this species.

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW: A few Golden-crowned Sparrows were reported from Sitka, Juneau, and Wrangell. Fifteen were found on the Ketchikan CBC 19 December—the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest total for that CBC.

LAPLAND LONGSPUR: Late longspurs were found at the Mendenhall Wetlands, near Juneau (one on 3 December 2009; NRH) and at Gustavus (six on 19 December 2009; Gustavus CBC).

SNOW BUNTING: This species was only reported from Juneau where maximum was 70 on 19 December 2009 (PMS) and smaller numbers lingered through January (latest, 18 on 31 January 2010; NRH).

RUSTIC BUNTING: The Rustic Bunting present since fall at Jerry Koerner’s feeder in Ketchikan successfully overwintered and was present beyond the winter season (JFK).

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD: Red-winged Blackbirds, casual in winter, lingered into December at Wrangell (two 6 December 2009+; CM) and Ketchikan (one 21 December 2009; HK). A flock of 10 at the Juneau Pioneer Home 10 December 2009 (GBV) lingered spent the winter and a dozen were found at that location 26 February 2010 (BUK).

WESTERN MEADOWLARK: A Western Meadowlark was found on one day only in Ketchikan 13 December 2009 (WLP, SCH; Figure 10). This species is a casual visitant in Alaska. Most Alaska records of this species come from Southeast Alaska and this was the 8<sup>th</sup> local record.



Figure 10. This Western Meadowlark was found feeding along the grassy edge of busy Tongass Avenue in Ketchikan 13 December 2009. *Photo by Steven C. Heinl*

**RUSTY BLACKBIRD:** This species made a good showing this winter. Up to four males found at Ketchikan over the course of the season provided the first local winter records. A flock of 50 was found at Gustavus on 7 February 2010 (NKD) and flocks of more than 20 were reported on three dates in Juneau, with a maximum of 26 on 7 February 2010 (BUK). This species is a rare winter visitant to Southeast Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

**PURPLE FINCH:** Up to five Purple Finches wintered at Ketchikan, including a male and three brown-plumaged birds at one feeder most of the winter (KMR; Figure 11). A Purple Finch was also found at a Wrangell feeder this winter (SWE). This species is a very rare fall and winter visitant to Ketchikan (Heinl and Piston 2009) but is casual elsewhere in Southeast Alaska (Gibson and Kessel 1992).

**RED CROSSBILL:** Generally noted to be present in low abundance; e.g., only 3 reports all winter from Juneau (PMS), none observed in Gustavus (NKD), and scarce at Ketchikan (AWP, SCH).

**COMMON REDPOLL:** Common Redpolls were found in northern Southeast Alaska all winter. In the Gustavus area, small flocks of up to 80 could be found widely scattered around town in early December 2009 and February 2010, and a flock of 400 was found in Bartlett Cove on 27 February 2010 (NKD). Smaller numbers were found all winter at Juneau (maximum, 40 on 28 January 2010; BUK, JR). Small numbers of redpolls were also found in southern Southeast in December at Petersburg (fide BHP) and Ketchikan (41 on 19 December 2009; AWP), and a single bird was found at Sitka 1 February 2010 (MW, MT).

**PINE SISKIN:** Pine Siskins were noted to be present in very low abundance throughout most of Southeast Alaska, including Ketchikan (m.obs.), Wrangell (few noted; CLR), Petersburg (“scarce;” BHP), and Gustavus (only a few observed; NKD).

HOUSE SPARROW: At least four House Sparrows wintered in Ketchikan (three were recorded on the Ketchikan CBC 19 December 2009; AWP)—part of the flock of seven birds that were present at the end of the fall season.



Figure 11. Purple Finch at Ketchikan 2 January 2010. *Photo by Steven C. Heinl*

#### **LITERATURE CITED:**

- Gabrielson, I. N., and Lincoln, F. C. 1959. *The Birds of Alaska*. the Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, and Wildl. Manage. Inst., Washington, D. C.
- Gibson, D. D., and Kessel, B. 1992. Seventy-four new avian taxa documented in Alaska 1976–1991. *Condor* 94:454–467.
- Gibson, D. D., and Kessel, B. 1997. Inventory of the species and subspecies of Alaska birds. *W. Birds* 28:45–95.
- Hatch, S. A., Robertson, G. J., and Baird, P. H.. 2009. Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), in *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the *Birds of North America Online*: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/092>.
- Heinl, S. C., and Piston, A. W. 2007. The Brandt's Cormorant in Alaska. *Western Birds* 38:141–144.
- Heinl, S. C., and Piston, A. W. 2009. Birds of the Ketchikan area, Southeast Alaska. *Western Birds* 40:54–144.
- Kessel, B., and Gibson, D. D. 1978. Status and distribution of Alaska birds. *Studies Avian Biol.* 1.