

Notes for Birders Visiting Juneau

by Gwen Baluss

When visiting Juneau expect to immediately find an abundance of Common Ravens, Northwestern Crows, and Bald Eagles. On the water in spring and late summer Surf and White-winged Scoters are Common. Marbled Murrelets are often spotted off shore. Gulls, especially Glaucous-winged, Herring and Mew; also, Bonaparte's are common in the summer. All forest or even shrub areas ring with the beautiful songs of Varied, Hermit and sometimes Swainson's thrushes. Other common regional songbirds include Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific Wren, Oregon Junco, and Steller's Jay.



Bald Eagle near Mount Roberts

There are no specific birding guides/companies in Juneau at this time, but many local companies do offer hikes or whale watch tours - and the companies in general have guides that are quite knowledgeable of local birdlife. Guided tours are available however, in Hoonah, see <https://www.facebook.com/icystraitbirding/>



Rock Ptarmigan in the alpine

Additionally, Wilderness Birding Adventures offers pelagic trips that begin in Juneau <https://www.wildernessbirding.com/goa/>

Luckily, there are great options for independent birding too.

Short layovers

For short trips to Juneau, two great places to for birding, and spectacular scenery are the **Mount Roberts Tramway** and the **Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center**. At both locations you can find specific and detailed birding info for the site that is either free, or for sale at a reasonable price. Both places charge an entry fee.

The **Mount Roberts 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 subalpine and alpine and is an excellent place to look for Rock and Willow Ptarmigan, and Sooty Grouse. American Pipits nest on the higher slopes and you may be lucky to spot a Golden-crowned Kinglet in the lower forest.

The **Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center** can be reached within a mile by public bus, or you can get right the parking lot with local bus and cab companies. Some of the naturalists at MGVC are expert birders; all have at least some training in local birds and resources for birders. In addition to forest and shrublands, the lake shore hosts unique nesting birds such as Arctic terns. Waterfowl such as Barrow's Goldeneye and Common Merganser nest nearby, as do Yellow-rumped Warblers, Townsend's Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets.



Northwestern Crow boards ferry.

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 Red-breasted Sapsuckers and Sooty Fox Sparrows in summer.

Also near the ferry **Auke Bay Harbor** is good for sea birds, especially Marbled Murrelet. Both take about a half hour to arrive by foot and are easily found by walking along the only main road that runs by the terminal.

Cruise ship passengers. A simple **walk around town** will yield many of our common forest species; listen for the lovely morning or late evening chorus of thrushes. A short walk uphill abruptly leads to natural habitat, even mature forest. A stroll along the waterfront of Gastineau channel is good for local water birds. Look for Pigeon Guillemots right under the docks in the harbor.



Pigeon Guillemot

A more ambitious walk to the end of Gold street meanders leads to the **Perseverance Trail**, a scenic hike with alpine access for the athletic, and a chance at American Dipper, and species more associated with interior climates such as Yellow Warbler and Warbling Vireo.

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**. Alternatively, look for trails starting behind the Extended Stay Hotel that also lead to the greenbelt. This is a great place for breeding songbirds like Sooty Song Sparrows and Rufous Hummingbird and for migratory warblers in spring and fall. It is one of the few good places to look for Alder Flycatcher locally. Use caution in this area if walking alone at dawn or dusk.

Nowhere in Juneau is “high crime” but these woods are occasionally used for illegit activities.



Young Rufous Hummingbird feeds on fireweed at city greenbelt

A longer walk (half hour) or short (5 minute) cab ride 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 (for more info see <http://netapp.audubon.org/IBA/Site/1090>) and an eBird hotspot. Shorebirds and waterfowl, all seasons, are a highlight there.

Longer Stays

A rental car gives you access to many local hotspots such as **Eagle Beach** or the **Fish Creek Delta**; but some good spots, such as **Salmon Creek** and **Auke Bay Harbor**, are accessible by **public bus** <http://www.juneau.org/capitaltransit/>.

At the US Forest Service Juneau Ranger District (Address: 8510 Mendenhall Loop Rd., Ph. 907-586-8800) ask for the free “**Finding Birds in Juneau**” booklet. This free publication highlights all the main birding spots and species found on the Juneau road system. Note that the text is about 20 years old, so there have been minor changes to the bird community.

The **Alaska Marine Highway system** provides relatively inexpensive passenger service to nearby communities, and makes a reasonable waterbird viewing platform. Check the AMHS website for links to new information about birding coastal Alaska via the ferry <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/amhs/pubs/>.

Nearby destinations with fantastic seabird viewing include **Tracy Arm** and **Glacier Bay National Park**. Look for tour companies that service these areas. (Not for the budget birder, but likely a worthwhile adventure; many of the small ships offer excellent naturalist guides).

What to wear

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

Field Guides

Any standard guide that covers Western N. America (e.g. Sibley, National Geographic, Petersen, Kaufman) will be adequate here. For more detailed discussion of Alaskan birds, look for 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.



Varied Thrush

Other resources:

- Birds of Southeast Alaska Checklist: <http://www.alaskageographic.org/store/products/birds-of-southeast-alaskalist>
- Explore the Juneau Audubon Society <http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org/> website to find downloadable bird lists for Juneau and nearby communities, regional bird reports and more under the tab: "Regional Birding Information". Also posted are bird walks and other natural history events.
- Local expert Mark Schwan created a nice write up of local birding at <http://home.gci.net/~juneaubird/>
- For a great book covering Alaska birding check out *A Birder's Guide to Alaska*, by George C. West.

Finally, enjoy your visit and please report your observations on Ebird (www.ebird.org) Eaglechat (<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/eaglechat/info>) or the JAS Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Juneau-Audubon-Society/138280412980789>).

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