

# The Raven



*The mission of Juneau Audubon Society is to conserve the natural ecosystems of Southeast Alaska, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations.*

<http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org>

Volume 31, Number 7

Juneau Audubon Society

March 2005

**Audubon's Celebrate Nature Lecture Series moves to a new night.**

## **BIRDING IN BOLIVIA**

**On Saturday, March 12th**, plan to join Juneau Audubon's intrepid birders, Deanna MacPhail, Paul Suchanek, Liz Blecker, and Bev Agler as they explore Bolivia's towns and countryside in search of birds and adventure! The event will be held at the **UAS Egan Auditorium, from 7:30-8:30 PM. Admission is free!**

Our Celebrate Nature lecture series has been very successful this winter, due in large part to the excellent speakers we've arranged. Last month, Jill Fredston's talk drew over 275 people! This March and April, our lecture series will move to a new night, Saturday, and move back to the UAS Egan Auditorium. We hope the public will continue to enjoy these fine lectures and slide shows. They are a real treat during these winter months!

## **NEW JUNEAU AUDUBON SOCIETY NOONTIME BIRD WALK BEGINNING IN MARCH** By Virginia Harris

Join us for birding in downtown Juneau at lunch on Wednesdays beginning in March. We will tune our eyes and ears to the pulse of Juneau's downtown bird scene.

We will meet at noon in the lobby at Rainbow Foods (224 4<sup>th</sup> st.) beginning on Wednesday March 2 and loop out from there. We will keep an eye on the greenbelts and feeders and the waterfront and parks.

Please contact Virginia Harris at 586-7559 or Beth Peluso at 957-1050 for more information. We look forward to meeting you in March. Please—no dogs.

### **US Forest Service Friday nights at the Glacier Visitor Center 6:30 & 8:00 p.m.**

March 4—A Tectonic Masterpiece-The Geologic History of Southeast—Chris Dewitt  
March 11—What New Technologies are Teaching Us about Brown Bear Ecology  
March 18—The Grizzly Maze—Timothy Treadwell's Fatal Obsession  
March 25—The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—Debbie Miller

## **BOARD NEWS by Brenda Wright, Juneau Audubon Society President**

Hello and Happy Birding, I hope you all had a fun time participating in your Great Backyard bird count. It's always fun to hear how many and what kinds of birds were found in all the communities in southeast Alaska and all over the north American continent. If you want to check out the results go on line to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc> It was calm for the first three days of the count in Juneau, but then we got some good snow flurries and squalls for the last day. I noticed of the 84 reports from Alaska, all reported a bald eagle.

Its time to get ready for our spring hooligan (euchlacon) cruises to Berner's Bay. This year our trips will be on April 16 and 30. We try to plan the trips to coincide with the greatest numbers of marine mammals and/or seabirds. Its luck of the draw whether we hit the peak of the run, but we hope you will join us. The tickets this year are \$35/adult and \$5/child.

Do you have time to write a letter? We would appreciate some help on letters concerning Berner's Bay, road vs. ferry access for Juneau, commercial uses and eagle baiting in the Eagle Preserve in Haines, and the upcoming release of the Juneau Airport environmental impact statement (due out in March). If you are interested in helping, please contact me at 789-4656 ([president@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:president@juneau-audubon-society.org)) or Sari Saunders, ([conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org)).

Now is your chance to influence choices for NON-Game research conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). Please review it's draft Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS). The public review period begins on February 18th and ends April 4, 2005. You may access the draft strategy and submit comments at the CWCS public web site. <http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/ngplan/>

Check your Juneau Audubon web page for the local bird checklist, lecture schedules, and past newsletters ([www.juneau-audubon-society.org](http://www.juneau-audubon-society.org)).

## **JUNEAU AUDUBON BOARD MEMBERS MEET WITH ALASKA CONSERVATION ALLIANCE DIRECTOR By Matt Kirchhoff**

Juneau Board members Sari Saunders and Matt Kirchhoff met with Tom Atkinson, Executive Director of the Alaska Conservation Alliance, to learn more about how the conservation alliance functions, and how it might better serve conservation groups like Juneau Audubon. ACA is located in Anchorage, and is comprised of 45 different conservation groups (including Juneau Audubon). Tom also serves as the executive director of Alaska Conservation Voters (ACV) which is the sister organization to ACA. Both organizations have separate boards, but their functions are closely related. The ACV is a 501(c)4 organization, which allows direct lobbying on legislation, and support of progressive conservation-minded candidates for political office (some may remember this as the old Alaska Environmental Lobby). ACA is a traditional 501(c)3 organization, which has restrictions on direct lobbying, but can provide education and information on issues to the public. Tom was encouraging Audubon's active participation in ACA and ACV to ensure that issues important to us were highlighted, and they could devote resources to them. For example, they are helping train and support progressive candidates for election to the Juneau Assembly, as well as statewide offices. Juneau Audubon pays annual dues of 300 dollars a year to help sustain the organization. For more information, Audubon members can check their website at [www.akvoice.org](http://www.akvoice.org). To have your Chapter weigh in on issues important to you, please contact Sari Saunders, our conservation chair, at [scsaunde@mtu.edu](mailto:scsaunde@mtu.edu)

## **WINTER BIRD SURVIVAL** by Bruce Paige

January of 2005 came in and went out like a lamb, but the middle of the month managed a stretch of below zero temperatures and three feet of snow cover anyhow. Birds that had lingered since fall under the illusion of finding a winter “Camelot”, suddenly discovered otherwise. The first ever January observations of redhead duck, horned lark, lapland longspur, greater yellowlegs, mountain bluebird, water pipit, and fox sparrow all were made in Gustavus early this past month. The question is how many of these individuals that made it through the bitterly cold conditions will successfully forage with so much ground under snow. If the red-breasted nuthatches are any indication (early in the winter there were 5-8 nuthatches at every feeding station- now 1-3 remain) getting through even a mild winter is not easy. Consider the day length for feeding is only a few hours this time of year, then birds must survive the 18 hour nights of wind, freezing rain or snow..... Not too many of us would like to give it a try, I’d bet!

I’ve actually followed chickadee flocks at twilight many times to see where they spend the night. Do they pile into tree cavities together for warmth? It doesn’t seem so, as most nights I’ve found they sought out dense vegetation, such as spruce, that shed most of the rain and snow, and break the wind. It’s possible they huddle together among the inner branches, “shivering” while burning fat reserves for warmth. Other species use different techniques to survive our winter. Ptarmigan will bury themselves in the snow, where temperatures are somewhat moderate and they are safe from predators, except perhaps a passing wolverine, coyote, or wolf. The ptarmigan flock then “pops up” anew each morning. Rock sandpiper flocks crouch together on the exposed shores. Many waterfowl and waterbirds have downy undercoats that are so good at retaining body warmth, their owners hardly notice the SE Alaska cold. It is truly amazing that some of the tiniest birds, like the winter wren and golden-crowned kinglet make it through the winter, but after the coldest spells, there they are, busily feeding in the brush and treetops. Our hardy January birds are a constant reminder that winters do pass night by night and soon the days are longer, warmer, and full of Spring promise!

## **THEY’RE NOT “JUST” CROWS** by Bonnie Demerjian, Wrangell, AK

Each week when I submit my FeederWatch results online, I get an alarmed message about my crow report- “An unusually high number! Are you SURE you counted correctly?” Yes, I mumble. There really *are* a lot of them. Forty-six last week. That’s because we live on the waterfront. When those Northwestern crows aren’t stuffing themselves silly on birdseed, they’re cruising the beach for mussels, clams and anything else they can find. I’ve long ago quit trying to battle them; this is their territory too. But just recently I found a way to make their daily breakfast stop useful to science.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has several Urban Bird programs; one of these is Crows Count. The project focuses on understanding group sizes among corvids: crows, ravens, magpies and jays. Some corvid species live in family groups during the spring and summer nesting season. Crows in particular roost together in a small area in often spectacular numbers but, aside from knowing that the size of these groups changes, little else is known about the subject. Because corvids are some of the most easily recognized birds and because they are bold and vocal around humans, they make ideal study subjects.

Crows Count seeks to help scientists answer the question, “How do crow group sizes change with the seasons?” To participate all I have to do is find a study site (my deck), record simple habitat information, count the birds and record their behaviors and mail in the report to the Cornell Lab of

Ornithology. Instructions and necessary forms can be downloaded from the Lab's website for the project: [http://www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/urbanbirds/About/ubs\\_CRCAboutEN.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/urbanbirds/About/ubs_CRCAboutEN.html)

Chances are most crows we'll see in Southeast Alaska are Northwestern crows (*Corvus caurinus*). This crow ranges along the west coast from Southern Alaska to Washington. It rarely strays from tidewater except when spawning fish and eulechon enter coastal rivers. Then it has been recorded as much as eighty miles upriver. Along these shorelines it forages for marine invertebrates. During winter, when the lowest tides are at night, the Northwestern crow responds by concentrating near human habitats such as parking lots, wharfs, marinas and landfills.

During non-breeding season the Northwestern crow congregates in large flocks that commute twice daily between feeding and roosting sites: once at dawn and again in the late afternoon following flight paths called flyways. They may roost together at night for protection from predators, though this has not been confirmed.

As anyone who has tried to sneak food into their feeder knows well, crows use sentinels - alert birds perched high and watching for impending danger. They might also be scouts for feeding opportunities as I learned one day after being away from home for several weeks. My feeders were long empty but within minutes of stepping outside to fill them I heard a familiar "caw caw" and I knew I would soon have company for dinner.

Besides marine invertebrates, Northern crows will also eat seeds, fruit, fish, carrion and garbage. They are a major predator and scavenger on seabird colonies where they prey on eggs and nestlings. They are known to cache food such as clams, cormorant eggs and fish plucked at low tide. They store and cover each item in the ground, then retrieve it, usually within the next twenty-four hours.

Despite their seeming abundance, Northwestern crows have been identified as a priority landbird species by the Landbird Conservation Plan for Southeast Alaska because their strict adherence to the coast may leave them vulnerable to ocean pollutants such as oil spills and industrial waste dumped into estuaries and coves.

So, the next time you send in a birding report, don't mentally groan "only crows". They still have a lot to teach us and we have more to learn.

### **Gustavus Report -- January 20-February 23 --** By Nat Drumheller,

The period wrapped up with the Great Backyard Bird Count from 2/18 through 2/21. This was the third year running that Gustavus participated in the count. Participation and effort were up over the last two years, as was the number of species observed over the four days. As of the writing of this report, 69 species have been tallied. The weather for the count was mild with morning fog on the first three days and snow and wind on the last day. Highlights from the count include **2 Lapland Longspurs**, **5 Rusty Blackbirds**, **5 Ring-necked Ducks**, and **2 American Robins**. Species that were considered lucky finds included **1 Northern Goshawk**, **1 Blue Grouse**, **1 Yellow-billed Loon**, **1 Double-crested Cormorant**, **20 Black-legged Kittiwakes** and **1 Great Horned Owl**.

A personal highlight during the count came at the end of the third day. I was tired from three days of non-stop birding and had just spent thirty minutes trudging through wet snow along a dike in an open,

wet meadow without seeing or hearing a single bird. I stopped to rest and admire the scenery and noticed a Northern Shrike watching me from the top of a small spruce. The shrike flew to a nearby cottonwood and started to sing. It sang for several minutes, while I stood watching and listening, before it flew off.

Other birds seen in the area in the days leading up to the count that were not observed during the count were 1 **Greater Yellowlegs**, 2 **Horned Larks**, 1 **Western Screech-Owl**, 1 **White-crowned Sparrow**, 1 **Fox Sparrow**, and 14 **American Pipits**.

**Common Redpolls** were abundant throughout the period and could be found just about everywhere in all weather conditions.

On a final note, just today, 2/23, **45 Red-throated Loons** were reported off the Gustavus dock.

Thanks to all GBBC participants and to Bruce Paige and Phoebe Vanselow for sharing observations.

### **LATE WINTER NOTES FROM KETCHIKAN by Teri Goucher**

February has already shown early signs of spring in Ketchikan. Fuzzy pussy willows are budded and a few blooming crocus have added color around town.

Our local channels have been busy with the usual scoters, goldeneye, murre, murrelets, bufflehead, cormorants, a few loons, Red-necked grebes, mallards and Canada geese.

Hundreds of common mergansers and long-tailed ducks remain off the waterfront.

The woods are awakening with active golden-crowned kinglets, juncos, chickadees and a couple downy woodpeckers, flickers, and sapsuckers. A record number of 31 common redpolls were seen near Ketchikan Creek, the most since 1984.

There have been high numbers of siskins this winter and thankfully no reports of any sick or dead siskins or redpolls locally. A few white-winged crossbills were seen and there were several interesting reports of red-crossbills coming to feed at birdfeeders. There were single sightings of savannah sparrow, northern shrike, red-tailed hawk, and a killdeer.

A rare anna's hummingbird was seen north of town for a couple days early in the month.

As spring approaches we eagerly await the exploding growth of plant life and the exciting rush of migrating birds.

### **SKAGWAY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT BRINGS HOLIDAY CHEER By Andrew Cremata**

Skagway's 2004 Christmas Bird Count saw a decrease in overall numbers from 2003 but the highlights included above average weather, some unusual species, and a fabulous dinner of homemade pizza from the oven of John and Lorna McDermott.

Near the McDermott's home on the Dyea Road, two participants were nearing the end of a full day with the light of day drawing to a close. As they made their way over a grassy slope they came upon a symphony of common merganser's bathing, sleeping and frolicking on the bank of the Taiya River. A quick head count determined their number at 84 and just as the tally was complete they all sprang into

flight and swooped back and forth and away, over the ebbing tidal flats with the spectacular Chilkat range as their backdrop.

It was a fitting end to the days observing which included some help from seasoned Whitehorse birders, some of Skagway Bird Clubs finest, and some new faces that took in the experience for the first time.

Some other highlights included the spotting of a goshawk near Skagway, 50 mallards on the Dyea Flats, and a brown creeper that crept up beside a birder who was using Mother Nature's facilities.

Skagway's bird count presents a unique set of circumstances due to the large area that must be covered by a limited amount of people with little time. Still, the pleasures of the count were evident when bright, cold-kissed faces met at the McDermott's. All compared notes and tallies on a large board while enjoying the company that ultimately guarantees success for all involved.

## **REPORT ON SICK AND DEAD PINE SISKINS AND REDPOLLS**

More than 100 birds, mostly Siskins, are believed to have died in the Juneau area. Other sick and a few dead birds were reported in Gustavus. The following quoted material came from an article by Tony Carroll in the February 17, Juneau Empire:

"Recently a Juneau resident saw about 30 dead birds in one month. Sometimes he saw as many as three or four a day, he said.

Deborah Rudis, environmental contaminants biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Juneau, agreed that people with feeders could be doing more harm than good. She said a salmonella bacterial infection is most likely to blame for dead siskins and redpolls reported in the area.

An outbreak of salmonellosis, from salmonella bacteria, was determined to be in flocks of siskins visiting Juneau-area bird feeders.

Salmonella can be spread in feeders where large numbers of birds converge, she explained. Birds don't care where they leave their droppings and the droppings that spread the bacteria can get mixed in with feed.

"We received calls from individuals in north Douglas, the airport neighborhood, Back Loop and near the Pioneer Home," she said of dead siskins. "Most recently we have received reports of dead siskins and redpolls at 16 mile."

**If you do feed birds**, then it is very important to keep the area and the feeders as clean as possible. Clean and disinfect feeders regularly - Use one part of liquid chlorine household bleach to nine parts of tepid water. Make enough solution to immerse an empty feeder completely for two to three minutes. Allow to air dry. Once or twice a month should do, but weekly could help more if you notice sick birds. **If you do find sick and dead birds, call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 907-586-7240. They are monitoring the spread of disease and may wish to have you send the birds to them for testing.**

## **Clips from the Conservation Committee:**

The Conservation Committee welcomes involvement from all members. We are always keen to have new members who would like to follow an issue in the communities and help keep other JAS members informed. If you have comments or would like to become involved, please contact the chair, Sari Saunders, at [conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org), or any other committee or Board member.

### **1. Juneau Access, a.k.a. The Road** – The website

[http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/projectinfo/ser/juneau\\_access/index.shtml](http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/projectinfo/ser/juneau_access/index.shtml)

provides links to the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement, about which there were recent public meetings and hearings in Juneau (Feb. 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>). The SDEIS evaluates a number of “Reasonable Alternatives” to provide transportation within the Lynn Canal corridor to and from Juneau. These include the State’s preferred alternative, a road along the east side of the Canal, and a number of other options (some of which are primarily ferry-based). Audubon will submit comments regarding this document and analyses therein. If you would like to contribute, please contact the conservation chair. We’d be happy to include members comments in our letter. If you’d rather submit material independently, comments must be received by Mar. 21<sup>st</sup>. These can be sent in writing or via email (see link on the webpage).

Some issues that JAS members may want to consider are impacts on bald eagles (there is an entire Appendix R on this), indirect and cumulative effects (Appendix U), reduced connectivity between nearshore and upland habitats for wildlife (some coverage in wildlife technical report, Appendix Q), loss of wildlife to road kill, and impacts to wetland habitats (Appendix O). Dispersal of non native, weedy plants (and other organisms) is also an issue of concern. Roads provide a mechanism for rapid transfer of non native species into new habitats. Modification of the habitat adjacent to the road in terms of temperature, moisture, compaction, and other factors (i.e., creation of “edge effects” that extend adjacent to the road) plays an important role in establishment of these species. There are limited data specific to this part of the coastal temperate rainforest to assist in evaluating the loss of habitat from edge effects along the road, and the potential rate of establishment of invasive species.

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reminder** – Just a reminder that many of the projects of interest to JAS members in Southeast Alaska often involve permitting through the US Army Corps of Engineers. These permits are required if work is to be done in navigable waters of the United States, or if persons will discharge (dump, place, deposit) dredge or fill material in waters of the United States, including wetlands. You can check the public notices site of the Corps to examine staff reports associated with permit applications, and to determine dates by which comments must be received by the Corps. <http://www.poa.usace.army.mil/reg/PNNew.htm>

**Ketchikan – POA-2003-401-4** Extend North Point Higgins Rd---Comment Period ends March 11

**Ketchikan – POA-1922-22-33** City of Ketchikan—construct 3,700 sq. ft. new deck and steel pile dock—  
Comment Period ends March 7

**Petersburg – POA-1998-998-M** Construct 25 ft extension to Rose Ln W Subdivision Rd—Comment Period ends March 11

**Petersburg – POA-2005-111** – 11 miles south of Petersburg – construct three driveways to lots for prospective homeowners – Comment Period ends March 7

**Petersburg – 2004-1390-4** – Mile 9.25 – Retain fill for 2 private residences, plus additional fill and beach access road.

**Metlakatla – POA-2004-1038-4** – Public Health Service – Construct 6 units of staff housing and health center –  
Comment Period ends March 21

## National Audubon Society Membership Application

For first time members or renewals to the National Audubon Society please mail this form to:  
National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 51001, Boulder, CO 80322-1001

\_\_\_\_\_ \$20 (1-year introductory rate) \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 (1-year student/senior rate) \_\_\_\_\_ \$30 Basic renewal

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Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ My check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed \_\_\_\_\_ Please bill me

If you prefer to support Juneau Audubon Society only, send the completed form and \$10 to  
Membership Chair, PO Box 21725, Juneau, AK 99802

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10 (1 year Juneau Audubon Society Chapter dues) You will receive 9 months of the  
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**Please let us know if you prefer electronic \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail  
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