

# 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 8

Juneau Audubon Society

April 2005

**CELEBRATE NATURE SERIES APRIL 9, 7:30 P.M.  
EGAN LECTURE HALL, UAS**

## **ACCESSING WILDLIFE PARKS AROUND THE WORLD INDEPENDENT TRAVEL ON A BUDGET**

**This is the final talk in our Celebrate Nature series this year. It's going to be special—don't miss it!**

Biologists Steve Lewis and Michelle Kissling enjoy their time off traveling to some of the world's greatest wildlife parks and reserves. Recent itineraries included southern Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America, Ecuador, and Alaska's own Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Accessing remote landscapes to maximize wildlife viewing opportunities without joining a tour group can be an expensive and difficult task. They will share their experiences and tips on how to travel independently and responsibly in less-developed countries. Steve and Michelle will discuss conservation challenges and myths as they provide information on costs, logistics, and biggest bang-for-your-buck destinations. Whether you're an experienced birder or an amateur wildlife viewer, please join us on April 9 at 7:30pm at the Egan Lecture Hall, UAS.

### ***Berners Bay Cruises – 2005***

Saturday, April 16, 8:30 a.m.

Saturday, April 30, 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

***Adults - \$35 Children under 12 - \$5 (must be accompanied by adult)***

**Tickets at Hearthside Books**

## **JUNEAU AUDUBON NOONTIME BIRD WALK** By Virginia Harris

We meet at noon in the lobby at Rainbow Foods (224 4<sup>th</sup> st.) every Wednesday 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. Please—no dogs.

Things were quiet in downtown neighborhoods on our first walk, so we aimed for the waterfront for some marine activity on March 2. We were pleased to spot porpoise and seals and agreed on the challenge of various Glaucous-winged Gull plumages. We were glad to put aside plumage puzzles and a cormorant in the middle distance.

Our next walk was to Cope Park on a breezy Wednesday with light rain. We heard kinglets and a Chestnut-backed Chickadee at the top of town and dropped down to the park under the heron rookery on Goldbelt. A mixed flock of crossbills flew into alder above Gold Creek, which kept us busy with a show of olives, rusts, and an occasional flash of white wing bars.

The next walk was a sunny Wednesday loop up the steps of Starr Hill to a back yard feeder that had been busy a few weeks ago with Slate-colored and Oregon species of Dark-eyed Junco. There were Oregons this day and kinglets in the woods at the start of the Mr. Roberts trail. We found siskin in the brush along lower Basin Road and heard Steller's Jays in the distance.

With our start at Rainbow, we have a chance to share updates about our recent activities and upcoming events. Traffic has stopped to ask about what we were doing and we returned with an explanation and an invitation to join next week.

Song Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos are singing in downtown and dippers are regular in Gold Creek near Northern Light Church on lower flow volumes. A heron was recently seen in a stand of spruce near the Governor's Mansion.

Hope to see you on one of our walks.

(Ed. Note) As I enter these articles in the newsletter, there are a dozen crossbills, one an especially vivid orange, six healthy looking siskins, several juncos and a song sparrow all feeding together. And flying overhead, two ravens frantically gathering sticks and moss, high up in trees, and carrying them to the nest they are building in a tree a couple hundred feet from our house. Bird watching is such great fun, especially if you can do it while sitting at your computer.

### **HELP NEEDED**

Spring has appeared and so has the pesky plant *Alliaria petiolata* (garlic mustard). The annual spring pull has been scheduled for April 12<sup>th</sup> at 9am. We would greatly appreciate a few hours of help from all who can squeeze this event into their schedule. There is a lot of work to be done at the downtown site behind the Fireweed Place and just below the Gov'ners mansion. We could use help from anyone and everyone! Please contact me if you have any questions.

Lance Lerum, USDA 790-7479

## ***Spring Migration Bird Trips & Nature Walks 2005***

*Walks last about two to four hours. If you have them, bring binoculars and/or spotting scope, bird guide, rubber boots recommended for most walks and dress for weather. Beginning birders are welcome. For further information contact Steve Zimmerman\_586-2597, [field-trips@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:field-trips@juneau-audubon-society.org)*

- April 9 Area: Airport Dike Trail. Meet at Radcliffe Road  
Time: 8:00 am.  
Leader: Steve Zimmerman
- April 16 Area: Berners Bay boat trip.  
Time: Vessel leaves at 8:30 am from the transient float in the Don Statter Harbor in Auke Bay. Be there 15 minutes before sailing time.
- April 23 Area: Airport Dike Trail. Meet at Radcliffe Road  
Time: 8:00 am  
Leader: Mark Schwan
- April 30 Area: Berners Bay boat trips (2)  
Vessel leaves at 8:30 am and 1:30 pm from the transient float below the Harbormaster's Office at Don Statter Harbor in Auke Bay. Be there 15 minutes before sailing time
- May 7 Leader: Gwen Baluss
- May 14 Area: Mouth of the Mendenhall River. Meet at Radcliffe Road  
Time: 8:00 am  
Leader: Paul Suchanek
- May 21 Area: Mouth of the Mendenhall River. Meet at Radcliffe Road  
Time:  
Leader: Bob Armstrong
- May 28 Area: Norton Lake. Meet at Moraine Ecology Trail parking lot (near the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor's Center).  
Time: 7:00 am  
Leader: Bev Agler
- June 4 Area: Sandy Beach (Douglas). Meet in parking lot near picnic shelters.  
Time: 7:00 am  
Leader: Paul Suchanek
- June 11 Area: Dredge Lakes (Moose Lake side). Meet in parking lot by the bridge over the Mendenhall River on the Back Loop Road.  
Leader: Matt Brooks
- June 24 Plant/Minus Tide Walk time place announced later—Pat Harris/ML King

*Alaska Conservation Foundation Presents*  
**Celebration for the 25th Anniversary of the**  
*Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act*  
*(ANILCA) July 6 and 7, 2005, Hilton Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska*  
*Register before March 31, 2005 to ensure your place at the conference and the Jimmy Carter Luncheon!*

Please join us in celebrating Alaska and commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). This extraordinary event includes a day and half long conference where you will have the opportunity to learn about Alaska conservation issues and how this remarkable piece of legislation, which protected over 100 million acres of land, has affected Alaska and the nation. For additional information and to register for the conference, please visit Alaska Conservation Foundation's website at [www.akcf.org](http://www.akcf.org). Questions can be directed to Shari Showalter, the event coordinator, at (907) 646-9000

**Sandhill Crane Gathering in Nebraska**

Every spring at this time Central Nebraska experiences a spectacular invasion. Hundreds of thousands of Sandhill Cranes migrate up from the South. These birds spend about three weeks feeding in Nebraska before they move on to their northern nesting grounds, often in Alaska. Check out (<http://www.horizontours.com/cranes3email.htm>) for pictures and tour opportunities.

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

Hello and Happy Spring,

This is always such a fun birding time. Every morning as I awake and realize it is light outside (already!); I can't wait to hear what bird might have started singing. Varied thrushes and song sparrows are joining the juncos and even one brave winter's wren. Spring bird walks begin in April and hopefully this year there will be Audubon sponsored activities throughout the summer. But now it is time to get the nest boxes cleaned out and put up and time to get your tickets for our cruises to Berner's Bay.

The visits to Berners Bay are always a fun way to get to see our neighborhood from the water. We might see lots of marine mammals, but maybe not. No one can exactly predict the peak of the hooligan run. This year, with all the proposed changes with mine development and Juneau road access, it seems an especially good time to visit Berners Bay while it is still wild. I hope you will join us.

Do you have time to help Juneau fourth grade students learn about birds? This year Seaweed spring wetland study will be April 25-29. They are looking for volunteers for 2-hour increments from 8:30-3:00 for every day that week. Birders help the students look through binoculars and identify common birds. If you are interested in helping, please contact me at 789-4656 ([president@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:president@juneau-audubon-society.org)).

The Juneau Airport environmental impact statement may be out in April. If you are interested in helping with responding to the EIS or any other conservation issue, please contact Steve Zimmerman or Sari Saunders, conservation chair ([conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org](mailto:conservation@juneau-audubon-society.org)).

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)).

## UNUSUAL BIRD LOCATION

Kim Kirby wrote: “On a recent walk at Ward Lake, February 16, I stopped to use the outhouse and was really surprised to see this fellow standing on the floor, there is no way in or out except through the spring loaded door. Maybe somebody propped it open and then it closed with this guy inside... We chased him out and he seemed to fly off just fine. I am thinking he is boreal owl but am open to expert opinion.”



Mary Lou, Can't say I've ever located a good bird in an outhouse. I will let him know it is a screech-owl. Paul

### **Spring on the Stikine River** By Bonnie Demerjian, Wrangell

We're all familiar with the autumn concentration of bald eagles on the Chilkat River, but did you know that the Stikine River supports the world's second largest gathering of bald eagles? They will arrive in April to feast on eulachon, popularly known as hooligan, a small oily fish that spawns on the sandy river bottom. The eagles gather in numbers estimated to be from 1000 to 2000, perching in bare-branched cottonwoods and atop gnarled roots strewn along sandbars. At low tide they pace the mud flats and feed on eulachon that become stranded in shallow pools. The birds begin gathering in Wrangell as early as February, restlessly biding their time perched in trees as they wait for ice to leave the river and the run to commence. Steller sea lions and harbor seals are also attracted to the fish.

Besides bald eagles, the intertidal wetlands of the Stikine River serve as an important staging area for up to three million shorebirds each spring. Twenty-two species have been documented but the most numerous are Western sandpipers representing over ninety percent of the arriving shorebirds. Western sandpipers banded in Peru and Mexico have been located on the Stikine River. The grass flats and tidal sloughs are also important spring and fall refueling stops as many as 15,000 snow geese, on their way to Wrangell Island in Siberia. A partial Stikine River bird checklist can be found on the web at [www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/forest\\_facts/resources/fauna\\_flora/chklststkn.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/forest_facts/resources/fauna_flora/chklststkn.html)

Wrangell's Garnet Festival is held the third week in April each year to capitalize on the Stikine's attraction to birders. The festival is named for the garnet deposits at the mouth of the river. This year Alaska Airlines is offering discounts to Wrangell between April 14 and 24 for festival attendees. Local charter boat operators offer tours of the river flats for birders and several Forest Service cabins are well located for observing arriving birds at close hand.

### ***KETCHIKAN SPRING*** by Teri Goucher

Spring has arrived, although snow squalls and chilly nights continue to challenge early avian migrants tempted by recent warm days.

The last week of February brought our first robins with flocks up to 23 individuals on area lawns earlier than usual. Fox Sparrows are showing up a bit early as well, and 60 were spotted near the airport on March 20<sup>th</sup>. A Purple Finch was seen north of town and a Snow Bunting was seen along a mountain

road. Ruby-crowned Kinglets are here and singing! Swans are always thrilling to see, and 5 small flocks of Trumpeter Swans flew over the Vallenar area on nearby Gravina Island. A pair of Tundra Swans remained at Ward Lake several days marking the 3<sup>rd</sup> record for that species in Ketchikan. The first male Rufous Hummingbird was seen at a residence 17 miles north of town on March 16<sup>th</sup>, shattering previous arrival date records. Other early dates for this harbinger of Spring are 3-21 in 2003, and 3-20 in 1996.

The next weeks will be exciting as longer, warming days urge migrating birds to their summer ranges. The forest awakens with bird song while flocks of waterfowl fly overhead and beaches become crowded with shorebirds. Make time to enjoy this brief explosion of birding opportunities! Who knows what new record breaking species may visit this Spring!!

### **Gustavus Report** By Nat Drumheller [natdrumheller@hotmail.com](mailto:natdrumheller@hotmail.com) 2/24 to 3/21

The weather during this period was mild with temperatures mostly in the 30's and 40's. The last week was clear and colder with a low of 18 degrees on the morning of 3/21.

The previous Gustavus report ended with forty-five Red-throated Loons observed off the town dock. The next day, 2/24, twenty-five **Pacific Loons** were seen at that location by the same observer.

On 2/27, a juvenile **White-crowned Sparrow** was seen in town.

A small number of **Ring-necked Ducks** continued to be seen on a pond near the airport with four on 2/27 and three on 3/8.

**American Robins** were seen in ones and twos from March 1st on, but no flocks have been reported. The first singing robin reported was on 3/14.

On 3/3, the first singing **Varied Thrush** in Gustavus was reported.

On 3/3 and 3/5, one **American Pipit** was observed along the shore south of Bartlett Cove where one had been seen in the previous month.

**Red Crossbills** made their first appearance of the winter at a backyard feeder with two observed on 3/6 and four on 3/7. (Although these were the first Red Crossbills reported, **White-winged Crossbills** have been common through the winter.)

Five **Rusty Blackbirds** were seen near the school on 3/4 and a lone Rusty Blackbird was observed singing on 3/8. These birds had been seen in the same area on several occasions over the previous month.

On 3/12, a **Western Screech-Owl** was heard, and on 3/16 another was heard at a different location. A **Great Horned Owl** was heard in the Rink Creek area on 3/13. This is only the second Great Horned Owl reported this winter. The other has been heard regularly through this winter at Bartlett Cove. A **Barred Owl** was reported by three separate parties on the night of 3/16. One was heard at 10:00 p.m., one at 11:00 p.m., and one at 12:00 midnight. The owl heard at 10:00 was moving in the direction that the two later reports came from, so it was possibly the same bird.

One **Lapland Longspur** was observed in the rye grass east of the town dock on 3/16 and a male in breeding plumage was observed in the rye grass west of the Salmon River on 3/19.

**Common Redpoll** numbers had dropped by the end of the period, although there are still some around. Sixty-one redpolls were counted at a backyard feeder on 3/12. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** continue to be fairly common.

Thanks to Allison Banks, Bruce Paige, Chad Soiseth, George and Lynne Jensen, Greg Streveler, and Phoebe Vanselow for sharing observations.

### **Petersburg Bird Feeder Blues** Don Cornelius

Feeding birds, I thought -- what a pleasant way to commune with nature without leaving the comfort of my favorite easy chair. Just build a feeder, toss out some seed and watch the flocks descend like snow on a January day.

Well, not quite. The first living creature to find our feeder, a week before the first juncos, was a cat -- a cat that led a long procession of multi-hued felines over the years.

But cats have not been our only scourge. If low tide occurs in the early morning hours the murder of crows that frequent Petersburg environs descend on the shoreline to terrorize the local invertebrates. But when high tide occurs close to dawn, Petersburg crows are not about to sit around telling Norwegian jokes while patiently waiting for the next low tide. No, they go elsewhere.

One such elsewhere is my homemade bird feeder. One crow would be fine -- maybe even three -- but when I hear that caw, caw, caw from a local crow scout, I know I'll soon see 50 or more of the black beauties covering our feeder and leaving our deck a fecal-strewn mess.

Don't get me wrong. I love the intelligence of the corvids. I just don't like how they use it. I've found that crows do not like the sound of clapping hands -- maybe they think I'm an out-of-control middle-schooler with a box of firecrackers. It works for five, maybe six minutes, but who has the patience to guard their feeders all morning. So, some days, I feed crows.

Worse than the crows are rock pigeons, ex-rock doves. My initial reaction to a pair of them descending on our feeder was, welcome friends, there's plenty for all. The next day they arrived with five of their closest friends and the next day each of these friends brought their relatives. It wasn't long before my first look at the dawning day revealed a power line packed with hungry pigeons all staring at my bird feeder. It didn't matter how much seed I put out, it was always gone long before any other bird had a crack at it.

When our roof began to smell like a sewer outfall I stopped feeding birds for two quiet years. And still a few pigeons occasionally showed up to see if I had changed my mind. When I finally put out that first handful of seeds it didn't take long for them to arrive. But this time I declared war.

I haven't seen a pigeon in our yard for awhile now, but I know they're out there lurking behind the bushes. I'll be ready when they come, just as I am with the crows and cats -- a paranoid wreck of a bird lover -- guarding, ever guarding. I'm ready. Come on -- try me.

**JAS Award Winner  
2005 Southeast Alaska Regional  
Science Fair**



Congratulations to Jill Carlile, the winner of the Juneau Audubon Society's award at this year's regional science fair. Jill won \$100 and a year's membership to JAS for her project entitled, "The effects of ambient air temperature on food consumption by Pine Siskins (*Spinus pinus*)". Her abstract is below.

JAS presents the award for a poster that indicates an interest in conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Criteria for selection include: careful definition of the scientific question, consideration of appropriate field or analytical techniques, critical thinking about results, and awareness of both positive aspects and limitations of the study. Judges also look for an understanding of natural history and broader conservation issues related to the topic studied.

Jill is a sophomore at JDHS. Although she says she has hasn't been much of a birder in the past, this project, along with her family's recent purchase of a nice pair of binoculars, has piqued her interest. Next year she is planning to go on a semester-long exchange to Chile, and says it will be interesting to observe the various species of birds there. Jill enjoys rock and ice climbing as well as skiing, snowboarding, and hiking.

**The effects of ambient air temperature on food consumption by Pine Siskins (*Spinuspinus*) by Jill Carlile**

To determine how ambient air temperature affected food consumption by Pine Siskins, daily average air temperature and food consumption of Siskins was measured over a 60-day period. A bird feeder filled with sunflower hearts was placed inside an elevated enclosure to keep squirrels and larger birds away. The high and low air temperatures as well as the food consumption were measured once a day at 9:00 pm AST from December 5th 2004 to February 3rd 2005. The mass of food consumed was measured as using a Harvard Trip Balance. The temperatures were measured using an electronic thermometer. During the project, the average ambient air temperature, as measured with an electronic thermometer, ranged between -12.65 and 5.55 °C.

The hypothesis for this project was that as the temperature drops, the Pine Siskins will consume less food. This hypothesis of a positive linear relationship between food consumption and temperature is supported by statistical tests on a linear model. Although this linear relationship was shown to be significant, a statistically significant non-linear regression model accounted for even more variability in food consumption, suggesting that the hypothesis was correct down to a point. At about -5.1° C the relationship became negative.

These results could be applied in further bird studies and contribute to our understanding of bird physiology as well as general biology. Because this study suggests that Pine Siskin feeding behavior is in part dictated by ambient temperature, it could be used as an indicator in studies on global warming.

### **Crossbill Morning**

Text and photo by Joe McCabe  
March, 2005  
Juneau, Alaska

During a few frenzied hours on the morning of Sunday, March 13, our backyard near Twin Lakes became, what seemed to me, the center of the Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) universe. From about 9am until about 11am, a very large number (too many to count) of Red Crossbills descended upon the nearly barren floor of our wooded backyard to gobble up all the hemlock cones that had been laid bare by the melting snow. The colorful little critters made wonderful photo subjects. They were quite unfazed by my big camouflaged lens, flash, tripod and wild, uncombed hair. One handsome red male took up a perch on my front tripod leg and watched curiously for a few minutes as I photographed his companions! I'm told by my birder friends that it's unusual to see them cavorting freely on the ground so I feel lucky to have had a chance to photograph and observe these guys and gals.



## Male Red Crossbill



Female Red Crossbill

The opportunity to intimately observe and photograph these birds while feeding was an interesting experience. The Crossbills' bills are highly specialized for removing seeds from between the scales of conifer cones. There seems to exist a bit of a disagreement as to just how these birds use their crossed bills to remove the seeds from the cones. In doing a bit of Internet research, I came across three descriptions of how the bills are used. According to eNature.com ([www.enature.com](http://www.enature.com)), the Crossbills hold the cone with one foot, insert their closed bills between the cone and scales and pry apart the scales by opening their bills thus enabling the Crossbills to use their flexible tongues to remove the seeds from the cone. Cornell's "All About Birds" site (<http://birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds>) describes a different method of seed extraction: since a bird's biting muscles are stronger than the muscles used to open the bill, Crossbills place the tips of their slightly open bills under a cone scale and bite down whereupon the crossed tips push the top and bottom scales apart, exposing the seed inside for easy extraction. Seattle Audubon Society's BirdWeb (<http://www.birdweb.org>) notes that Crossbills start at the bottom of a cone and spiral upward, prying open each scale and removing the seeds with their tongues. The bills can cross in either direction, and the direction of the cross dictates the direction that the bird spirals up the cone.

From my observations on that Sunday morning and from an examination of my photographs, I offer a competing theory regarding the use of the Crossbills' specialized

bill. First a couple of caveats: I'm a beginning birder so my observation skills might not be as highly developed as more experienced folks and I'm a photographer first and observer of behavior second (until I have what I consider some quality images then I relax and start observing for the sheer sake and joy of observing). Having laid down those caveats, it certainly appeared to me that the Crossbills often used their bills in a scissor type action to scoop seeds from both the upper and lower sides of a scale, with the top part of the bill scooping the seeds from the top of the scale and the bottom part of the bills scooping the seeds from the bottom side of the scale. The Crossbills then used their tongues to gather up the seeds that had been pushed out the sides of the cone and/or that had ended up covering their bills. The fact that the Crossbills often had seed-covered bills after they had been diligently attending to a cone reinforces, to me, that they were using their bills as scoops not just pry bars. My observations and photos do confirm that Crossbills hold the cone in place with one foot. Sadly, I was unaware that Crossbills may remove the seeds in a spiral fashion so I wasn't looking for that behavior and neither did it strike me that that was indeed what the Crossbills were doing. Hopefully, they'll pay another visit to our backyard and I can try and catch that behavior.

The image below shows what I think is the "Scissor Bill" method of seed removal.



Female Crossbill demonstrating the "Scissor Bill" seed removal technique. Note foot holding cone.

## 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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\_\_\_\_\_ 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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***Berners Bay Cruises – 2005***

Saturday, April 16, 8:30 a.m.

Saturday, April 30, 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Come and join Audubon naturalists on a cruise past the end of the road. Wildlife drama is just beyond Echo Cove. The yearly eulachon run may arrive any time in April and that means large congregations of marine mammals and birdlife in Berners Bay. We won't know until we get there if our timing is good for seeing sea lions, whales, seals, or thousand's of gulls, but we'd love to have you join us. It's a fun way to see our neighborhood from the water. Many changes are proposed for Berners Bay. This is a special opportunity to visit while it is still wild.

Cruises last 4 hours. Vessels depart Statter Harbor at Auke Bay (pier to left of boat ramp). Boarding begins about 15 minutes before departure.

***Adults - \$35      Children under 12 - \$5 (must be accompanied by adult)***

Tickets at Hearthside Books

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