

# The Raven



## Juneau Audubon's Celebrate Nature Lecture Series 2006

**This Will Be the Last Scheduled Evening Meeting Until Next September  
Saturday Bird Walks (Schedule Below), Saturday Wild Walks, Wednesday  
Downtown Noon Walks Will Continue During Spring, Summer and Fall**

### Mike Blackwell - Bicycle Touring in Indonesia Thursday, April 13

UAS Egan Auditorium, 7:30-8:30 P M



Mike Blackwell and his bicycling friends continue to search for the end of the road. This time, their travels take them to the mountains and valleys of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Mike will show slides and maps of their ride, describing 1200 km of good food, good beer, friendly folks, decent roads, interesting terrain, and astounding geology (occasionally cloud-shrouded).

### **BERNERS BAY CRUISES – 2006**

**Saturdays, April 15, 8:30 a.m., May 6, 8:30 a.m. and second cruise 1:30 p.m.**

**Adults \$40, Children under 12 \$5.00 Tickets at Hearthside Books**

**Vessels departs Don D. Statter Harbor below DeHarts. Boarding begins about 15 minutes before departure. Cruise lasts four hours. Juneau Audubon Society members will be on board as natural history interpreters.**

### **BIRDWALKS ARE COMING** Jeff Sauer, Vice President

How exciting it is that spring has arrived. With the arrival of spring, the song birds are singing and the sapsuckers are hammering. And, Juneau Audubon is once again leading bird walks for all to enjoy. These walks begin April 8<sup>th</sup> and run into early June. Whether you know a little or a lot, it is a fun way to get out and enjoy the spring weather and increase your knowledge of the birds around us. The leaders will certainly be identifying the birds by sight and hopefully also by their song. The walks, however, are much more than that. They are a way to experience nature, and the spring renewal and rebirth. And, in getting out and experiencing nature, some pretty extraordinary things are sometimes seen.

I am reminded of one Audubon bird walk that I missed. The birdwalk group was on the dike trail and was observing some recently arrived small song birds. While the group was watching the tiny Ruby-crowned Kinglets the big birds were being ignored. What happened next was that the eagles preempted the song bird show. Two Bald Eagles up in the air drew everyone's attention. The eagles were locked together, their talons entwined. They were quickly tumbling, spiraling down out the sky. To the amazement of all the two continued their decent, locked together, spiraling, autorotating towards the earth. And they did not separate. They continued down, and at what appeared to be an unsafe speed, crashed into the ground. The group approached. The birds were alive. In fact they were conscious and did not appear to be frantic. Someone in the group came up with a pair of leather work gloves. The leader Mark Schwan approached the still entwined birds and pulled the one bird's talons out of the abdomen of the other bird. The talons it turned out had not been locked together, but rather one bird had dug its talons into the abdomen of the other bird. Mark pulled the talons out of the abdomen, and the birds separated. They then got up and flew away. An extraordinary scene witnessed by all who went on the walk that day.

Another Audubon bird walk on the dike also produced some more extraordinary wildlife watching. With several spotting scopes set up and lots of binoculars, the group was looking at ducks in one of the ponds. As the group watched, a hawk came screaming out of the sky nailing one of the ducks near the shore. After striking the duck with its talons, the hawk ended up standing on top of the duck, holding it under water. The hawk was completely above the water except for its legs. The duck was underwater. The birds stayed in this position for a while as everyone watched. Then, all of a sudden the hawk lifted off and flew away. Up popped the duck. In nearly the same instant a bald eagle, flashed across the field of view in the binoculars and scopes, striking the duck with its talons. Eagle is bigger than hawk. Eagle takes hawk's duck. As in the first story, everyone was left with a big "Wow, that was amazing!"

Finally once on the bird walk/ hike out the Amalga trail to the marsh, the group was taking a break sitting and resting. As we sat there from the top of the trees above us we heard a Red-tailed Hawk. It was loud, and the call unmistakable. We all looked at each other with a look of (but not spoken), "What in the world, a Red-tailed Hawk?" Gus Van Vliet, the leader, without missing a beat said, "No, not a Red-tailed Hawk, Steller's Jay." And so the amazement of a Red-tailed Hawk overhead, was replaced with the amazement of hearing a perfect imitation of the hawk by the jay, and the lingering question of why this jay did what it just did?

Not all birdwalks produce amazing wildlife spectacles. But when these things occur there is only one way to see them. You have to be out there to see it. But don't come out to see the extraordinary. That just sorta happens sometimes. Come out and see the ordinary, the new spring, rebirth, the warm air, and the birds singing. Come see for yourself.

Many thanks to Steve Zimmerman for organizing the bird walks, and to the Audubon birdwalk leaders, for leading the walks.

"If you listen to the thrush and hear a thrush, you've not really heard the thrush. But if you listen to a thrush and hear a miracle, then you've heard the thrush. Zen parable

**JUNEAU AUDUBON SOCIETY  
SPRING 2006 WILDLIFE WALKS**

- April 8. Airport Dike Trail. Meet at 9:00 am at the end of Radcliffe Road. Steve Zimmerman will lead the walk.
- April 15. Berners Bay Boat Trip. 8:30 am Don D. Statter Harbor below DeHarts
- April 22. Point Bridget Trail. Meet at 7:15 am for car pooling at DeHarts, or at 8:00 am at the trailhead. Gwen Baluss will lead the walk.
- April 29. Fish Creek Trail. Meet at 7:30 am by the bridge over Fish Creek (Douglas Island). Paul Suchanek will lead the walk.
- May 6. Berners Bay Boat Trip. 8:30 am and 1:30 pm Don D. Statter Harbor below DeHarts
- May 13. Perseverance Trail. Meet at 9:00 am the trailhead (end of Basin Road). Beth Peluso will lead the walk.
- May 20. Mendenhall Wetlands. Meet at 8:00 am at the end of Radcliffe Road. Marck Schwan will lead the walk.
- May 27. Outer Point Low Tide. Meet at 7:30 am at the old Outer Point Trail (Douglas Island). Carol Thelenius and Mary Lou King will be the leaders
- June 3. Dredge Lakes. Meet at 8:00 am in the parking area by the bridge over the Mendenhall River along the Back Loop Road. Matt Brooks will lead the walk.
- June 10. Amalga Trail. Meet at 8:00 am at the Amalga Trailhead. Jeff Sauer will lead the walk to the marsh where rails have been seen.

**Skagway Bird Report – March 2006**

*By Meg Hahr*

Signs of spring are slowly appearing this month. Flocks of crows had returned to town by the beginning of March – earlier than normal it seemed to many. Most of March was characterized by colder than normal conditions with gale force winds, choppy seas and freezing spray keeping many people indoors or in vehicles. A few hundred hearty mallards, Barrow's goldeneyes, and common mergansers were seen at the mouths of the Skagway and Taiya Rivers and head of Nakhu Bay during the worst of the cold weather, probably drawn to these refuges by the relative calm conditions found there. The usual cast of characters have been frequenting feeders in Skagway and Dyea this month – Steller's jays, magpies, and chestnut-backed chickadees. A northern goshawk hunting songbirds was seen along the road at Dyea Point and observed for several minutes. White-winged

crossbills have been active along the trail to Upper Dewey Lake, and flocks of pine grosbeaks are seen regularly along the AB Mountain Trail. Hairy woodpeckers, ravens, dippers, and bald eagles are some of the other birds that have been with us all winter. A flock of snow buntings was seen foraging along the beach at the mouth of the Skagway River. Although it has been a frigid month in Skagway, we know spring is on the way by the longer days, muddy roads, the sound of blue grouse hooting in Dyea, and varied thrushes singing their familiar song at Smuggler's Cove. *Thanks to John McDermott, Barb and Betsy Kalen, Joanne Beierly, Mike Conseller, Debbie Sanders, and Jeremy Simmons for sharing their bird sightings this month.*

## **Gustavus Report**

**February 26-March 29, 2006**

By Nat Drumheller, natdrumheller@hotmail.com

**White-winged Crossbills** and **Pine Siskins** continue to be abundant around Gustavus with lots of vocalizing from both species. Six active White-winged Crossbill nests have been observed since mid-February. As of this writing, two of these nests were abandoned with un-hatched eggs, one has a female sitting on eggs or nestlings, and two have nestlings being fed by adults. It is not clear if the sixth nest is still active. Through a week of bitter cold temperatures and high winds in the middle of March, during which the temperature dropped below zero degrees Fahrenheit, female crossbills could be seen on their nests, swaying as the trees moved with the wind. At one of these nests, a crossbill was first observed feeding nestlings on 3/18. The next day, about five inches of snow fell. The nest looked to be buried under snow, and it was thought to be abandoned. Then, a bill was seen moving at the edge of the nest, and it was evident that the female was sitting on the nestlings with snow piled high around her.

A **Boreal Owl** was again seen in the woods between The Salmon River and the Good River on 3/3. A **Western Screech-Owl** was heard on 3/25. There were several reports of **Great Horned Owls** hooting in three different areas. There was only one report of a **Northern Pygmy-Owl** during this period. A **Short-eared Owl** was observed for over a week. There were numerous reports of **Northern Saw-whet owls** during the period. They were heard hooting on multiple dates in at least five neighborhoods. One was seen hunting along the edge of the beach and woods during daylight on three dates. Two were seen perched in the sun on a cold morning. And, a pair of saw-whet owls is nesting in a nest box in town.



*Northern Saw-whet Owl on the morning of 3/16/06 in Gustavus. It was cold.*

The only report of **Common Redpolls** to date is of two on 3/1. Single **Lapland Longspurs** were seen in the beach grasses on 3/18 and 3/25, and eight were seen on 3/29. Two **Horned Larks** were seen along the beach on 3/22. The first flocks of **American Robins** were seen on 3/25 (there were single robins observed on a handful of dates through the winter). A **Killdeer** was reported on 3/26. The first **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was heard on 3/29. And, four **Yellow-billed Loons** were seen off the town dock on 3/29.

Thanks to the following for sharing observations: Paul Barnes, Abigail Calkin, Tania Lewis, Sean Neilson, Bruce Paige, Lewis Sharman, Chad Soiseth, Phoebe Vanselow, and Rusty Yerxa.

**UPDATE ON SAINT LAZARIA ISLAND: SEABIRD MONITORING WORK  
CONTINUES! –By Leslie Slater, Wildlife Biologist  
Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge**

In 1993 we began a seabird monitoring program at Saint Lazaria that has continued every summer since. The purposes of the work are to detect long-term trends in nine species of seabird populations, and to evaluate on an annual basis, productivity, chick growth rates, and diets of a subset of these species. We also record all wildlife seen incidentally; we now have a total of 91 bird and 10 mammal species observed from the island.



*Glaucous-winged Chicks*

*A few tidbits:* Generally, we've not seen drastic changes in seabird populations. However, murre counts conducted from land, though inclusive of a just a portion of the colony, show a decline between 1994 and 2004. Counts conducted from the water, however, show a slight increase. Those counts include the entire colony, so we could be documenting a shift in different cliff portions being used.

We counted an average of 76 pigeon guillemot in the mid-1990's (1994-1997), and since then, the average of counts between 1998-2005 was 110. Thus, it appears that the guillemot population increased during the latter time period.

Yearly counts of pelagic cormorants have fluctuated widely, from a low of eight nests in 1994 to a high of 297 nests in 2002. The nature of cormorant breeding habits (i.e., their unpredictable changes in breeding locations used between years) makes it difficult to evaluate population trends.

We found an apparent advance in egg hatching dates in fork-tailed storm-petrels in 5 of the 11 years we've monitored them. Those early hatch dates occurred in 1996, 2000, 2002-2004 when the average was 29 June. A significant difference in timing was found compared to the other group of years (1995, 1997-99, 2001, and 2005) when the average hatch was about one month later, 27 July. Leach's storm-petrels showed no significant change in the timing of egg hatch over the 11-year period.

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Sitka spruce loom over the island puts on its tawny cloak in the fall as salmonberry stands lose their leaves and rye grass become dormant. Storm-petrels are the last to fledge their young, and once they depart, there are just a handful of birds that stay through winter -- mainly hardy winter wrens and song sparrows.

Wind and waves pummel the island sending foamy spray 200 feet into the air. It's a harsh place in the winter for wimpy humans!

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**VIDEO CAMERA FOCUSES ON ST. LAZARIA MURRES**

A significant enhancement came to the St. Lazaria seabird monitoring work when a video camera was installed near the murre colony. In summer, live images are transmitted to

the Harrigan Centennial Hall in Sitka where the public can view them. People can also control camera movements and zoom options by using a touch screen. In the past, the live-feed was also transmitted on the local cable channel. Rumor has it that charter operators sometimes used it to learn about current sea conditions as well.

### **Southeast Alaska Regional Science Fair (High School)**

Juneau Audubon, as in past years, was at the SE Alaska Regional Science Fair. Two "local" awards were given by Audubon relating to the conservation or restoration of natural ecosystems. They went to:

Paige Pahlke-- The Effects of Gold Mine Tailings on Marine Amphipods

David McCasland and Colin Flynn-- The Ability of Beach Wild Rye, Compared to Nugget Bluegrass, to Take Lead Ions Out of the Environment

Many of these high school science projects dealt with environmental issues. In addition to the ones we awarded for, there were other good projects dealing with local sewage contamination affecting Blue Mussels, local lands and isostatic rebound, and studies dealing with environmental issues concerning fish and shellfish.

### **CONSERVATION NOTES**

**PEBBLE MINE:** We hear a lot about the possibility of the enormous Pebble Mine that would occupy a range of hills that drain directly into Lake Iliamna. We have been hearing concerns about possible affects on Bristol Bay salmon but not much about what it would do to Lake Iliamna, largest lake in Alaska and is by all odds the grandest salmon lake in the world now or ever.

In 2005, the commercial harvest of sockeye salmon in Bristol Bay was 39.3 million (39,300,000) fish. This huge number of fish was the 14<sup>th</sup> largest for the period 1950-2000. The fish had a value of \$93 million to the fishers who caught them (this does not include the value to processors). In addition to the commercial catch of sockeye salmon, there were 14.8 million allowed through the fishery to spawn in the pristine (currently) rivers and lakes feeding Bristol Bay. Lake Iliamna and its rivers supports over half of these numbers. An estimated 22 trillion eggs are laid each year in the gravel of lakes and streams.. Of those about 15-20% would go out to the ocean after a year living in lakes. So over 400 million rear in the Bristol Bay lakes and rivers and go to saltwater every year. Any detriment to such waters should be unthinkable.

**JUNEAU ACCESS ROAD:** According to DOT's website, the State is scheduled to advertise this May for \$100 million worth of paving projects in Berners Bay. Fortunately, the Juneau road extension is not yet a done deal. The legislature is starting to put together the State's capital budget. The Governor wants the legislature to approve \$45 million from the state's general fund this year to go towards road construction. With so many other pressing needs, it's unclear how high a priority constructing half a road is on their list. There

are many other pressing needs that we should be spending our general fund dollars on right now.

Call, Write or E-mail: Representative Bruce Weyhrauch (the only legislator actively supporting the dead end extension) Rep\_Bruce\_Weyhrauch@legis.state.ak.us, 465-2273.

Senate Finance Committee Members: Co-Chair Senator Gary Wilken  
Senator\_Gary\_Wilken@legis.state.ak.us, 465-3709 Co-Chair Senator Lyda Green  
Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us, 465-6600 Senator Con Bunde  
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\_\_\_\_\_ \$20 (1-year introductory rate) \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 (1-year student/senior rate) \_\_\_\_\_ \$30 Basic renewal

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**If you prefer to support Juneau Audubon Society only, and receive 9 months of *The Raven*, send the completed form above with \$10 to: Membership Chair, PO Box 21725, Juneau, AK 99802. Please let us know if you prefer to have the newsletter sent by electronic \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail or paper copy \_\_\_\_\_**

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