

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 34, Number 5

Juneau Audubon Society

January 2008

**Juneau Audubon Public Nature Series
Thursday, January 10, UAS Egan Room (221) (Glacier View) 7:00 p.m.**

YUP'IK COUNTRY BIRDING

Discover Alaska's newest birding destination - the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. Volunteers from Juneau and elsewhere have helped to pioneer birding tourism based in the villages of Chevak, St. Mary's, and Bethel and to explore other opportunities. Highlights include nesting Spectacled Eiders, Emperor Geese, Sabine's Gulls, and Yellow Wagtails - and the quest for Bristle-thighed Curlews. Karla Hart, Watchable Wildlife Program Coordinator with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will share pictures and stories from assessment tours in 2006 and 2007, and future opportunities for birders to visit.

Great Backyard Bird Count February 15-18, 2008

- 1. Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes during February 15–18, 2008.** Count birds at as many places and on as many days as you like—just keep a separate list of counts for each day and/or location.
- 2. Count the greatest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time, and write it down.** (You can get [regional bird checklists here http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/checklist](http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/checklist))
- 3. Enter your results** <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>



That's it! We'll look forward to receiving your counts.

If you are interested in more information about the count, visit the official website for the GBBC at www.birdcount.org. There's also a great intro PowerPoint presentation posted that can provide you with all the details of the programs.

Two Southeast Sites Get Global Recognition as Important Bird Areas

To some people, the Mendenhall Wetlands are just a marshy unusable area surrounding the airport and Port Snettisham is a place where Juneau gets hydro-electric power and produces hatchery fish.

Now these two areas will be known for something else... they were recently designated as Important Bird Areas (IBA) with global significance by BirdLife International in partnership with the National Audubon Society.

The IBA program is an international effort to identify, conserve, and monitor a network of sites that provide essential habitat for bird populations. It is based on two founding principles: 1) habitats that are important to birds are also important to other wildlife and 2) people are an important part of conservation in that how we think and behave affects how we treat our environment. Because a wide spectrum of the human population is interested in birds, this program works to create local, continental, and global partnerships between conservation groups as a way of encouraging conservation, protecting biodiversity, and improving the quality of people's lives. IBA status does not necessarily preclude development in the area. It just provides a platform to include bird habitat protection in any future development plans and to identify and rank areas needing rehabilitation funds.

The IBA program began in Europe in the 1980s and has grown to include about 8,000 sites in 200 countries. In 1995, the National Audubon Society formed a partnership with BirdLife International to initiate the IBA program in the United States. Some special projects were started in Alaska in 2000, but the program did not expand to the rest of the state until 2004. Since then, 4 of the 126 identified Important Bird Areas in Alaska are in Southeast: Berners Bay, Blacksand Spit, Mendenhall Wetlands, and Port Snettisham. Berners Bay (just north of Juneau) and Blacksand Spit (near Yakutat) were the first areas in Southeast to be identified as IBAs. Berners Bay is known for its high concentration of gulls (up to 60,000), waterfowl, and shorebirds during the spring when large numbers of eulachon and herring spawn in the area. Blacksand Spit, 10-mile long narrow spit in Ahrnklin estuary is the breeding grounds for 2,000-3,000 Aleutian Terns and 200-2,600 Arctic Terns annually.

In 2006, the Mendenhall Wetlands and Port Snettisham areas were identified as IBAs on the state level. In November of 2007, these areas were also recognized as important bird habitats with global significance by the U.S. IBA Committee. Only 5% of the state IBAs are elevated to a globally significant status level. This additional recognition offers more attention from the international conservation community and the potential for more protection and funding.

The Mendenhall Wetlands, the third largest wetland in Southeast, is a major migratory stopover for waterfowl and shorebirds traveling the coast of Alaska. The wetlands are used by some 230 bird species—about 77% of all species seen in Juneau and 69% of all species seen in Southeast. This vegetated salt marsh is visited by 41 species of shorebirds and 36 species of waterfowl each year. Ensnconced in an urban setting, conservation concerns center around pollution from an international airport, a sewer treatment plant, a landfill, and an aquaculture facility. Two major development projects, slated for the near future, may also encroach on the Mendenhall Wetlands—the expansion of the airport and a second bridge crossing over Gastineau Channel.

Port Snettisham, a large fjord located southeast of Juneau, is home to a high concentration of Marbled Murrelets. Results from an Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) study in 2005 and 2006 estimated 6,000 to 10,000 Marbled Murrelets fly into Port Snettisham each day and fly out to Stephens Passage each night to forage during peak periods in late July and early August. This is

2-3 times greater than the number of Marbled Murrelets along the entire outer coast of Washington State. Given that Marbled Murrelet populations in the lower 48 have declined to low numbers, studying the Port Snettisham population to determine why this area is so heavily used by Murrelets becomes even more important. Most likely the high numbers of Marbled Murrelets in the area is due to the high concentrations of forage fish in the area and a relatively intact old growth forest surrounding the fjord. Several species of loons are also present in high numbers. ADF&G biologists counted over 500 loons per hour over a 2 day period—estimating more than 4,000 loons are present on any given day during peak spring migration.

The next step in the IBA process is to inform the public about the IBA areas by issuing a news release, posting signs in the area, or, if appropriate, working with private landowners. Juneau Audubon Society will publish a news release or write a feature article for the paper in the future. Upon completion of this phase, the status of these four IBAs will change from an Identified IBA to a Recognized IBA. A special thanks to Bob Armstrong and Rich Gordon for compiling and submitting the Mendenhall Wetlands for IBA consideration and to Matt Kirchoff for submitting the Port Snettisham proposal. The applications required a very detailed description of the bird species and their use of the areas. More detailed information about IBAs can be found at the following web site http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba/iba_intro.html.

Overview of Juneau's Christmas Bird Count By Mark Schwan

We had about 40 volunteers working our count circle on our count day, Saturday, December 15.

The weather turned out to be agreeable and the tides were in our favor. There was a seemingly above average amount of waterfowl hunting activity on the wetlands, which likely negatively affected our count somewhat. There was also one very badly behaving hunter who actually shot at our airport wetlands group. I guess he felt they were encroaching on his territory? Fortunately no one was hurt. To my knowledge, this has never happened before.

We found 70 species of birds on count day, about average for over the last 20 years of counts. We counted 10,875 birds, just a little above our average, with our two most abundant species being Mallard and Glaucous-winged Gull. Although our Glaucous-winged Gull count was above average, we found the bulk of the birds outside of the airport and landfill areas (where we traditionally see many), which is likely due to the bird deterrent programs at the two sites, especially at the landfill. We had an all-time low count for Northwestern Crow, only 189 birds, but we had a new high count for Common Raven, at 575 birds. We were below average for Steller's Jay and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Brown Creeper was only a count week bird. Golden-crowned Kinglets and Brown Creepers have been scarce this year after last winter. We had a number of rare birds for this time of year and several casual species for Juneau; highlights included three Wood Ducks in the Mendenhall Valley, one White-throated Sparrow downtown, and one Harris' Sparrow near the airport.

In addition to birds seen on the count day, local birders found an additional 15 species during our count week. This by far exceeded the number of additional count week species seen around any previous count day. However, our total for the week, 85, was not a record, as back in 1987 and 1988, we had record counts on our count days, and with additional species during those count weeks, we had a total of 88 species for the week in both of those years. Thanks to all who helped, and thanks to Gus van Vliet for maintaining the week's list and compiling the species and numbers at the

potluck. Thanks also to Steve Gilbertson for covering Auke Bay in his boat, and a special thanks to Gus, Paul Suchanek, and Patty Rose for locating so many count week birds!

2007 JUNEAU CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

Juneau's Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 15. Forty volunteers located 70 species and counted 10,875 birds during the day. Highlights included three Wood Ducks, one White-throated Sparrow, and one Harris' Sparrow. Eighty-five species were seen during the entire count week. Unusual species and/or numbers are bolded.

<u>Species</u>	<u>Count or CW</u>		
		Bald Eagle	132
	Only	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Cackling goose	1	Northern Goshawk	1
Canada Goose	947	Merlin	cw
Wood Duck	3	Unidentified Falcons	1
Gadwall	14	Black Turnstone	75
Eurasian Wigeon	cw	Rock Sandpiper	5
American Wigeon	169	Dunlin	23
Mallard	2340	Wilson's Snipe	2
Northern Pintail	cw	Bonaparte's Gull	4
Green-winged Teal	13	Mew Gull	248
Greater Scaup	148	Herring Gull	11
Lesser Scaup	cw	Thayer's Gull	4
Unidentified Scaup	177	Glaucous-winged Gull	2007
Harlequin Duck	114	Glaucous Gull	cw
Surf Scoter	551	Unidentified Gulls	80
White-winged Scoter	255	Common Murre	33
Black Scoter	cw	Pigeon Guillemot	3
Unidentified Scoters	100	Marbled Murrelet	193
Long-tailed Duck	65	Rock Pigeon	7
Bufflehead	175	Northern Pygmy-owl	cw
Common Goldeneye	191	Short-eared Owl	2
Barrow's Goldeneye	289	Belted Kingfisher	2
Unidentified Goldeneyes	82	Downy Woodpecker	cw
Hooded Merganser	1	Northern Shrike	1
Common Merganser	48	Steller's Jay	28
Red-breasted Merganser	140	Black-billed Magpie	37
Pacific Loon	43	Northwestern Crow	189
Common Loon	19	Common Raven	575
Yellow-billed Loon	cw	Chestnut-backed	
Unidentified Loons	10	Chickadee	104
Horned Grebe	77	Red-breasted Nuthatch	1
Red-necked Grebe	28	Brown Creeper	cw
Western Grebe	cw	Winter Wren	3
Pelagic Cormorant	26	American Dipper	6
Great Blue Heron	5	Golden-crowned Kinglet	6

Ruby-crowned Kinglet	cw	White-crowned Sparrow	4
Unidentified Kinglets	3	Golden-crowned Sparrow	1
American Robin	cw	Dark-eyed Junco	342
European Starling	1	Lapland Longspur	cw
American Pipit	1	Snow Bunting	25
Bohemian Waxwing	12	Red-winged Blackbird	cw
American Tree Sparrow	28	Rusty Blackbird	3
Savannah Sparrow	4	Pine Grosbeak	3
Fox Sparrow*	2	Red Crossbill	150
Song Sparrow	16	Common Redpoll	30
White-throated Sparrow	1	Pine Siskin	433
Harris' Sparrow	1		

* One Fox Sparrow reddish, interior form.

WRANGELL BIRD REPORT By Bonnie Demerjian

Undocumented rumors of the Brown Pelican that appeared in Wrangell last month are continuing to pop up. Birders are scanning the beaches close to town and hope to get another, better photo now that more eyes are alerted for the bird.

In the meantime observer Carol Ross found two White-crowned Sparrows, a White-throated Sparrow and a Harris's Sparrow all at her feeder. They stayed for several days before moving on. Several other out-of-season birds spotted this month include a Yellow-rumped Warbler, a Wilson's Warbler, three American Pipits and a female Red-winged Blackbird that was feeding with a flock of Starlings. A large mixed flock of Varied Thrush and Robins frequented one yard this month and was preyed on by an attentive Northern Goshawk.

The cold snap early in December brought a small flock of Great Blue Herons together to soak up the afternoon sun in protected trees above the ferry terminal. A flock of about 20 Bohemian Waxwings, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Pine Siskins, killdeer, and several Red-breasted Sapsuckers were also reported this month.

Wrangell's Christmas Bird Count was held December 15. The day was punctuated with heavily overcast skies, rain and wind. Nonetheless, several entertaining birds showed up for the count. These included a Double-crested Cormorant, two Brown-headed Cowbirds, a Tree Sparrow and several hundred Common Mergansers. More results after they are tabulated. Twenty-one birders participated this year.

GLACIER BAY/GUSTAVUS BIRD BITS By Bruce Paige

For the 35th time since 1968, I got up before light, cleaned the binocs and spotting scope, gathered them up, along with a digital camera, lunch, a thermos of hot chocolate, a few snacks and as soon as the trees surrounding the yard were faintly discernable, headed for the door. It was 8:15 AM, but still nearly dark so a brief stop on the deck was in order to listen for owls. It was eerily quiet. Come to think about it, the treetops were hidden, as the flashlight's beam struggled to pierce a thick mist; not good signs.

The Glacier Bay/Gustavus Christmas Bird Count had an inauspicious beginning. One learns over the years that weather plays a very major role in the day ahead. There was yet no snow on the ground, so it would be easy to get around, particularly compared to last year when one floundered through a 30 inch snow cover at the same time of year. It was calm; a very good thing indeed, since peering into the teeth of gale winds and trying to stay warm all day is no fun and not very successful! The zero degree temperatures of the week before had warmed to the 30's, a bonus for birds and birders alike.

I had taken long walks every day for two prior weeks trying to reconnoiter the Gustavus tidelands, uplands, forests, and waterways for birds. There had been some very unusual species around for the time of year, but birds are so mobile, the question was would they be seen and counted this day? Individuals can be hundreds of miles away overnight, if a lake starts to freeze, or if it is just a moonlit night right for flying. Here today, but gone tomorrow!

As I slogged the muck and slipped on the ice like a noisy, wraith through misty woods towards the Dude Creek beach, there was some comfort in knowing that 23 other observers were also out or beginning to stir. They would soon be walking, driving, boating, and intently watching bird feeders within the 15 mile diameter circle of Gustavus, nearby Icy Strait, Lower Glacier Bay, and the Beardslee Islands recording every individual bird they saw along the way. At the end of the day, the totals would add to a compelling database of wintering bird populations across Alaska and North America.

Emerging onto the open beach, a Northern Harrier glided by searching the uplands for voles or small birds- a good bird not seen often in December. A flock of 30 Snow Buntings undulated over me, then, came back for a second look, and a third. In the same area, a secretive bird flirted among the rye grass clumps: a Horned Lark, recorded only once before on a count day. Fog or not, perhaps this was going to be a productive day.

After dragging back to the house at dark with 10 miles afoot and 15 miles driven, the calls and e-mails began to come in to confirm that this was indeed an exceptional day. A new high of 74 species of birds were recorded during the day, topping the old record by one. 10,317 individual birds were counted, well above the average number. The most startling sighting was that of a Swamp Sparrow by Phoebe Vaneslow, a bird skulking near Bartlett Cove for over a month, and finally photographed the day before the count for the first ever sighting of this eastern species in our area. Other birds not previously seen on a Christmas Count were a Rough-legged Hawk, a Red-tailed Hawk, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet: all are commonly wintering southward this time of year.

New high numbers were observed of Common loons (105), Northern Harrier (4), Thayer's Gull (31), Chestnut-backed Chickadee (171), White-crowned Sparrow (4), and Common Redpoll (132). Some of the absences were also notable. No Northern Pintails, Herring Gulls (only the fourth count missing them), owls of any kind, or Dippers were recorded. As good as the count was, there were several unusual species that were present during the count week that could not be found on count day, including White-fronted Goose, Barred Owl, American Pipit, and Savannah Sparrow. A complete list of Christmas Count results is posted at the Post Office.

A hearty thanks again to all of the observers who braved the elements on count day, Allison Banks, Paul Barnes, Abigail Calkin, Mary Cook, Nat Drumheller, Bobbi Foster, Mark Foster, George Jensen, Lynn Jensen, Ernie King, Barb Kruger, Sally Mclaughlin, Tom Mclaughlin, Sean Neilson, Sharon Paige, Laura Ross, Maya Seraphin, Bruce Smith, Chad Soiseth, Colleen Stansburry, Greg Streveler, Phoebe Vaneslow, and Julie Vathke. Special appreciation goes to the National Park Service for making a patrol boat and operator available to cover the Glacier Bay routes.

December Birding News From Ketchikan-by Teri Goucher

The dedicated birders in the Ketchikan area managed to find an all time record of 69 species during our Christmas Bird Count on December 15th. There were 22 people participating, comprising 13 groups that searched for birds, and one dedicated feeder watcher. The weather was decent here with temperatures hovering around 40 degrees, light winds and high overcast that was occasionally broken by brief peeks of sunshine. The weather the day before the count was terrible and the day after began four days of snow showers that left a foot of snow at sea level.

There were some exceptional sightings that were exciting for our area. A total of 6 **Brandt's Cormorants** were seen which is the first CBC record for the entire state of Alaska! Another new species for the state CBC list was an **Iceland Gull** that was confirmed by Steve Heidl on that Saturday! An elusive **Red-breasted Nuthatch** was feasting on a suet block and an **Anna's Hummingbird** remains close to a couple of feeders town.

There must be a lot of feed in our area waters attracting higher than usual numbers of **Pacific Loons** and even 6 **Red-throated Loons** were seen. Five **Bonaparte's Gulls** were spotted off the waterfront along with well over a thousand **Long-tailed Ducks**. Lots of **Mallards** are around as usual but 4 **American Wigeon** and some **Gadwall** also made it on our count list. Two **Sharp-shinned Hawks** and a **Goshawk** were seen as well.

Sparrows remain relatively numerous with lots of **Song Sparrows** and **Fox Sparrows** still here. Other sparrow species seen included two **White-throated Sparrows**, a **Lincoln Sparrow**, **American Tree Sparrow**, **Harris's Sparrow** and a **Golden-crowned Sparrow**.

No Crossbills were observed and only one flock of **Pine Siskins** were seen on count day. A dozen hardy **American Robins** were found still wintering in the Ketchikan area!

Thanks again to Andy Piston who took on the task of organizing our local birders and compiling all the data to be submitted for the 108th Christmas bird count!

Happy New Year and happy birding to all the Raven readers! Have a great 2008!!

Comment Period Opens on Environmental Assessment for Restoring Wildlife Habitat on Rat Island

Uninhabited Rat Island, located in the Aleutian Island chain about 1,300 miles west of Anchorage, is part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. This Refuge with 2400, islands extends

from Forester Island Southwest of Ketchikan, to the western end of the Aleutian Islands and north to Cape Lisburne in the Arctic Ocean. Some 15 to 30 million birds, 55 species nest on the Refuge Islands. Rats have decimated the population of nesting birds on Rat Island. Because a number of Juneau Audubon members were very knowledgeable and interested in this Refuge, about 20 years ago, when adoption of refuges was encouraged, our group adopted this refuge and has given support to the managers when appropriate.

Refuge managers are seeking public comments on the recently completed Environmental Assessment. Authors of the assessment evaluate two alternatives: a no action alternative and the proposed action to eradicate rats from the island in an effort to restore the native ecosystem. The Environmental Assessment and other informational materials can be viewed or downloaded at <http://alaskamaritime.fws.gov/news.htm>. Written comments will be accepted on the Environmental Assessment through January 11, 2008, and can be submitted by e-mail to rat_island@fws.gov, by fax to (907) 235-7783, or by mail to Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, 95 Sterling Hwy., Suite 1, Homer, AK 99603.

SOUTHEAST -- FIVE PUBLIC EASEMENTS OVER STATE TIDE LANDS

Comments are due on proposal to grant five public easement over State tide and submerged lands to the US Forest Service. Each easement would reauthorize an existing log transfer facility for a term of 55 years. Proposed easement locations are: 1) PAT CREEK located in Zimovia Strait adjacent to Wrangell Island. The facility is located north of the mouth of Pat Creek and about 8 miles south of the City of Wrangell. The easement area is about 14 acres in size and there has been a log transfer facility at this location since about 1957; 2) UPPER CARROLL INLET located on the east shore of upper Carroll Inlet adjacent to Revillagigedo Island, about one mile northwest of Swan Lake and about 24 miles northeast of Ketchikan. The easement area is about 13 acres in size and there has been a log transfer facility at this location since the 1960's; 3) TONKA MOUNTAIN located on the west shore of Wrangell Narrows, adjacent to Kupreanof Island and about 7 miles south of Petersburg. The easement area is about 11.5 acres in size and there has been a log transfer facility at this location since 1978; 4) HOMESHORE located in Icy Strait, adjacent to the Chilkat Peninsula about 15 miles southeast of Gustavus. The easement area is about 11 acres in size and there has been a log transfer facility at this location since 1975; and 5) NICHIN COVE located in Nichin Cove, adjacent to Tuxekan Island and about one mile southeast of Naukati. The easement area is about 12 acres in size and there has been a log transfer facility at this location since 1967. For more information or to submit comments, contact Jim Anderson at 907-465-3427, FAX 907-586-2954 or email jim.anderson@alaska.gov.

BOOK REVIEW – in the Journal of Alaska History, Spring/Fall 2007 issue written by Kaylene Wilson, Wasilla

Roll On! Discovering the Wild Stikine River, By Bonnie Demerjian

There is usually so much more to know about a topic that what can fit between the covers of a single book. This is especially true of the human and natural history in the vast landscapes of the North. In Roll On! Discovering the Wild Stikine River, however, Bonnie Demerjian gives the reader an amazingly comprehensive look at a river whose colorful history is as appealing as its

wilderness shores. Demerjian's use of language brings out her passion for the Stikine, and through words and images the reader comes to experience the rich and vivid tapestry of the place.

Demerjian's fluid and engaging writing keeps the pages turning as she details the river's history from its geologic formation to its present-day importance in our ecosystem. Laid out and organized in an appealing format, each chapter of the book begins with a quote about rivers from a famous author. Many pages have interesting sidebars about individuals, places, and historic features found along the banks of the Stikine.

The book has twelve chapters. The first chapters describe the geologic and human history of the river. Demerjian tells how the land was formed and she writes about the rich and complex history of the river's Native peoples. Contact, the region's gold rushes, riverboats, and the impact of the twentieth century are addressed in the early chapters. Subsequent chapters describe the river's natural history including mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, and plant life. The chapter "Landmarks from the Mouth to Telegraph Creek" should be of interest to river travelers and historians. Finally, Demerjian thoughtfully considers the pressing issues of the river today, including the conflict between development and preservation.

The stunning photograph of Ivan Simonek illustrates the river's vast reaches from the waters of Southeast Alaska to the immense Stikine Plateau, the river's source in northern British Columbia. The book is punctuated with historical photographs and illustrations that give a taste of Native ways and frontier days. Because the river is so intricate and its shorelines so intriguing, I would have enjoyed more detailed, color maps throughout the book.

I began reading Roll On! Discovering the Wild Stikine River knowing very little about the place and turned the final page with enthusiasm to explore this wild and historic destination. In any future travels to the Stikine River, I will surely pack this book along.

****Book Reviews of other Southeast Alaska books or other books that would be of interest to Southeast readers are welcome.**

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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. You will receive the *National Audubon Magazine* plus Juneau Chapter newsletter *The Raven*.

\$20 (1-year introductory rate) _____; **\$15 (1-year student/senior rate)** _____
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Local Audubon Society Membership Application

If you prefer to support Juneau Audubon Society only, please complete the form above and send \$10 (*1-year membership*) to: Juneau Audubon Society, Membership Chair, PO Box 21725, Juneau, AK 99802. You will receive the Juneau Chapter news letter *The Raven*.

Please consider getting *The Raven* by e-mail instead of snail mail to save paper, time, and money. To choose this option, write your email address here _____.

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