

THE



RAVEN

JUNEAU AUDUBON SOCIETY

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State Watchlist Birds in SEAK: Part III, Early Spring

By Gwen Baluss

We continue to discuss the Audubon "red" watchlist for Alaska, updated in 2017. The list uses the best available trend information to highlight species that are in decline, or especially vulnerable to big population drops, and for which key parts of the birds' habitat is within Alaska.

Black-legged Kittiwake

This species might even be appropriately called "sea gulls" because they make their nests in sea cliff and tend to spend winters far out to sea.

In Southeast Alaska, there are a few nesting colonies from Glacier Bay North into Aleutian and Arctic zones. Mostly we see



Black-legged Kittiwake by TheMadBirdLady/Flickr Creative Commons

them in spring, as birds stop by to eat tasty fish like capelin, fattening up before they go to nest.

These medium-sized gulls are one of the more distinctive, making them slightly less maddening to identify than most gulls. The key is the thick dark colored wing tips, said to look as if the wing tipped was dipped in ink. And yes, they do have dark legs, making them stand out from other local species.

It was surprising to see a gull on the watchlist; gulls as a group tend to be nu-

merous and successful. And indeed, the world-wide population is over 2 million. However, according to Audubon Alaska: "Numbers in the Gulf of Alaska dropped after the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill and have been in a long, steady downward trajectory over the last three and half decades. Current declines appear to be correlated with increasing ocean temperatures." And Alaska hosts the majority of the world's kittiwakes.

So, while the conservation of this gull is not urgent, it can be added to species that are affected by ocean temperature changes in the north. Like other seabird species, any efforts to conserve water quality and combat global warming will help kittiwakes survive into the future.

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Annual Berners Bay Cruises

Join Juneau Audubon Society on a cruise to Berners Bay aboard a spacious, comfortable Allen Marine Tours catamaran. Learn all about spring wildlife from humpback whales and sea lions to gulls and eagles while supporting JAS! The dates this year are Saturday, April 28, and Saturday, May 12. The boats leave from Statter Harbor in Auke Bay at 8:30 a.m., and board about 15 minutes before departure. Conditions permitting, we will go up into Berners Bay, returning to Statter Harbor at 12:30 p.m. During the cruises, our onboard naturalists will speak on the history and wildlife of the area.



Tickets will be available at Hearthside Books in early April at a cost of \$70 for adults, \$40 for students, including UAS, and \$25 for children under 12. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Hope to see you there!

Upcoming Birding Events:

JAS Meeting—Identifying Spring Arrivals and Migrants Apr 12
UAS Rec Center rm 116 at 7pm

Berners Bay Cruise Apr 28 & May 12
Tickets available at Hearthside Books

2018 Alaska Hummingbird Festival Apr 6-28
Southeast Alaska Discovery Center, Ketchikan

2018 Stikine River Birding Festival, Wrangell Apr 27-30
Keynote by Julia Parrish, Executive Director COASST

2018 Yakutat Tern Festival, Yakutat May 31-Jun 3
Celebrate one of the largest breeding colonies of Arctic tern

Sooty Grouse



Sooty Grouse by Gwen Baluss.

Locally, this grouse is more familiarly known as "hooter". And its distinctive "whoop" "whoop" is a happy sign of spring. The sound is made from pushing air through colorful throat sacs.

Formerly this species was lumped with a closely related species, the Dusky Grouse, into the Blue Grouse.

Found from sea level to alpine, Sooty Grouse are fond of openings with older trees, like subalpine zones, or old growth forest with well-spaced trees and gaps. They do not do well in urban areas.

Concerns include: forest management practices (creating overly thick or shady types of forest); global warming in the southern part of their range where they are re-

stricted to tall, isolated mountains, and a simple lack of monitoring range wide. Historically, game transplants, such as the addition of Marten to Baranof Island, may have contributed to loss of grouse there.

Grouse of course are hunted. This is both an opportunity to engage hunters in studies and conservation efforts, and a potential hazard. The current bag limit of 5 birds per day may be over-generous given the low densities of grouse in some areas, and the world population estimated by

Audubon as only around 533,000. Over-hunting has contributed to the extinction of one grouse species in North America, the Heath Hen, and the endangerment of others such as the Attwater's Prairie Chicken.

This species can be helped by supporting the AKDF&G efforts to monitor and study this species. Hunters can participate in wing submissions of game birds when requested. See more about the watchlist (including some yellow-listed birds) here: <http://ak.audubon.org/conservation/alaska-watchlist>

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JAS Needs You!

The JAS has an ongoing need for board members and volunteers. Currently we have a vacancy for Conservation Chair. Are you interested in conservation of birds and other wildlife? Contributing just a few hours a month would be a big help. No special expertise required, just some time and interest. Also, we welcome help from Southeast AK communities beyond Juneau. We've been doing very well in community engagement and even with fundraising. However, our "bottleneck" that limits how we can service our community is in people power. Please join us! Contact: president@juneau-audubon-society.org

Be a part of conservation in your community

Juneau Audubon Society's mission 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.** When you become a member, you support this mission.

National Membership~

Join [online](#) at and you'll automatically join the Juneau chapter. Memberships start at just \$20. When you join, you receive a one year subscription to the Raven newsletter and support JAS education, research, and more!

Local Membership~

If you don't want to join nationally, you can support JAS directly by mailing your name, address, email, and a check for \$10 to P.O. Box 021725 Juneau, AK 99802

Board Seats~

Think you want to take your love for birds a step further? The JAS board of directors has seats open. Send inquiries via email to president@juneau-audubon-society.org

A BOREAL BIG YEAR



over by the Alaska Songbird Institute. Now, he is going to help out with their work with an interesting challenge. Nick says: "I will be participating in ASI's Big Year fundraiser. The rules are simple: find as many bird species as you can in the year 2018! Instead of keeping a list of birds that I see around the entire state, I will be limiting my list to species that I find in Alaska, North of the Arctic Circle. My goal throughout the year will be to visit areas north of the Arctic Circle several times, at places such as Utqiagvik (Barrow), Prudhoe Bay, Kaktovik, and Kotzebue, to name a few." Working as a pilot, Nick will have an opportunity to visit and explore some of the "underbirded" corners of the far north. Winter of course is tough up there, so to date Nick has only logged . But he hopes for a lot more species as the spring comes.

We should also note that ASI helps support our efforts to monitor Tree Swallows locally. They have provided grants to initiate a banding effort this year and have been responsible for protocol development and data keeping state wide.

If you would like to support this effort, consider donating. Learn more at www.borealbirdatho.org where you can search for Nick to add your support. Best of luck, Nick!

If you follow eBird, or Alaska rare bird postings, you probably know of Nick Hajdukovich. Most notably, he found a Great Crested Flycatcher on the UAS campus in late September, 2009. Local birders still remember that incredible find. Nick got his start in birding helping with swallow boxes and other projects at Alaska Bird Observatory in Fairbanks. Following the closure of ABO, projects were taken

2018 Stikine River Birding Festival

Visitors to the Stikine River in the spring have a chance to see one of the biggest migratory bird gatherings on the entire West Coast. Thousands of sandpipers, thousands of Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes and more stop at the delta, an Audubon Important Bird Area. From April 27-30, activities in town include bird walks with local experts, songbird banding demonstration, Ducks Unlimited banquet, bird art, and more. This year's featured speaker is Julia Parrish, the Executive Director of the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team. Also featured is Alaskan Photographer Mark Kelly. For more information about the festival see: <http://www.wrangell.com/birdingfestival>



Southeast Alaska Birding Resources

- Haines:** [Birds of the Chilkat Valley Checklist](#)
Haines Birders Facebook group
- Juneau:** [Juneau Audubon Society](#) webpage www.juneauaudubonsociety.org
Links to even more bird lists and quarterly reports about whats hot (and what's not) compiled Steve Heint and other local experts are archived here: <http://bit.ly/2oNaZPY>
JAS Facebook
- Sitka:** Sitka Nature [bird postings](#)
- Skagway:** [Skagway Bird Club](#)
- Regional:** Join EagleChat to see discussions and birding events taking place in Juneau and the rest of Southeast AK. Contact Gwen Baluss for an invitation! (president@juneau-audubon-society.org)
- Also check out:**
[Southeast Alaska Regional Bird Observations—Spring](#)
This quarterly report summarizes seasonal bird sightings complete with locations and photos.
[6th Edition Audubon Guide to the Birds of Alaska](#)
<http://wiki.seaknature.org/Category:Bird>
Ever wonder which community is the best (or worst) place to find a target species? Want to see multiple online lists in one easy spot? Matt Goff's SEAKnature has it!
www.naturebob.com
Articles, photos and links to free articles and natural history books can be found on local nature writer Bob Armstrong's site.