

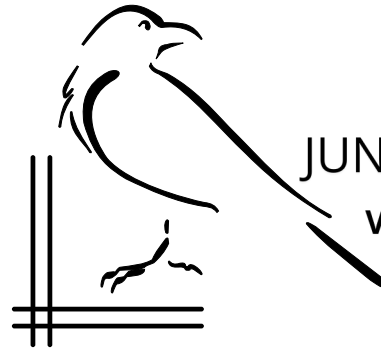


The Raven newsletter from Juneau Audubon Society
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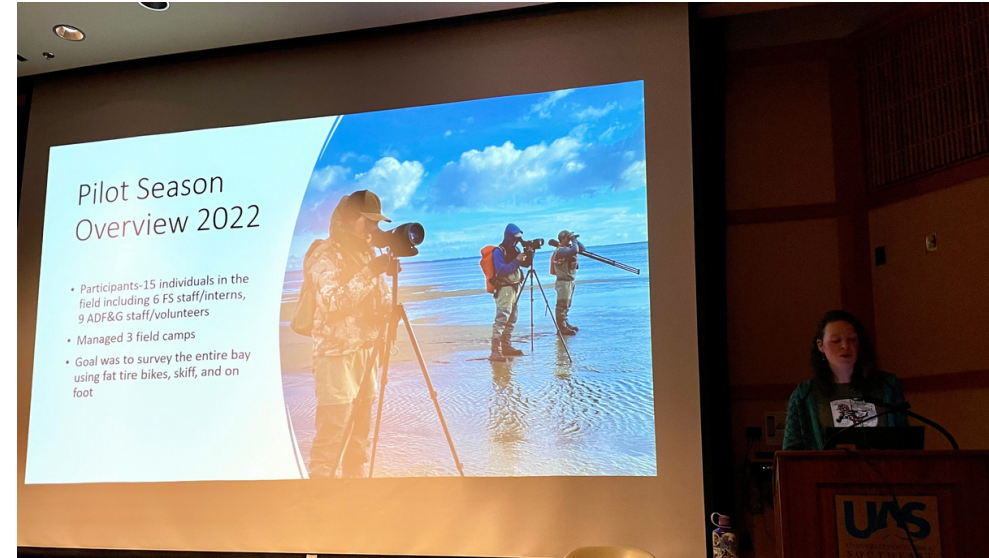
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Edited by Lauren Cusimano



THE RAVEN

JUNEAU AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 49, ISSUE 3, Quarter 1 2023



December program on Red Knots of Controller Bay. Photo: Lauren Cusimano

Please note: The Raven, a publication of the Juneau Audubon Society, is moving to a quarterly publication schedule. Please expect The Raven to be mailed out and published online in January, April, July, and October 2023.

JAS 2022-23 Program Season

Juneau Audubon Society's monthly programs are back — and so is the audience! JAS is hosting in-person programs each month until April 2023. Each presentation is free and open to the public.

Jan. 12, 7 p.m., UAS Egan Lecture Hall — Bear Viewing and Its Future: Bjorn Dihle is a lifelong Alaskan, writer and wildlife guide

JAS 2022-23 Program Season Cont.

and enthusiast. He enjoys watching and working with most animals, but for the past 12 years has spent perhaps an abnormal amount of time with brown bears. He regularly writes for various magazines, including *Alaska Magazine* and *Outdoor Life*. His most recent book, "A Shape in the Dark: Living and Dying with Brown Bears," examines our relationship with brown bears. Dihle will present a history and synopsis of bear viewing in Alaska, and talk about his recent work in trying to develop new potential viewing sites.

Feb. 9, 7 p.m., UAS Egan Lecture Hall — Birds to Book: Getting to know Birds Through Making Art: Artist Evon Zerbetz will share her thought process while creating a book, which will heavily feature her latest publication "Alaska is for the Birds."

Bonus: Feb. 17, 7 p.m., Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center — Birding with a Beginner's Mindset — A Lifetime Adventure: The free, annual Fireside Lecture series is a 12-week program of hour-long public presentations happening every Friday from January to March. One of the early chats will feature Laurie Lamm discussing beginner-level birding.

March 9, 7 p.m., Goldtown Nick — The Singing Planet: Join JAS for a screening of the 2021 short Liz McKenzie film. "Set in Glacier Bay National Park, one of the most spectacular wild places on earth, The Singing Planet immerses viewers in these natural voices and the places that give rise to them."

April 13, 7 p.m., UAS Egan Lecture Hall — Aleutian Tern Research: To end the 2022-2023 JAS program season, Tory Rhoades will present highlights of fieldwork from 2017 to 2021 of four colonies of Aleutian Terns. Her research offers insight into breeding season movements, migratory routes, timing, and more.



Black-billed Magpie: in short supply this winter. Photo: Gwen Baluss

JAS Has Two Open Board Positions!

Email: president@juneau-audubon-society.org

Vice President: Do you care about birds, people, board members, and working to connect all three? The Juneau Audubon Society needs a Vice President! Responsibilities for this role includes attending all meetings for JAS members and the Board of Directors, coordinating JAS internship(s) and community partnerships, overseeing special projects, interpretive signs, and planning our JAS summer retreat.

As a member of the Board of Directors, the Vice President shall exercise all the powers, authority, and duties of the President during the President's absence or inability to act. That includes countersigning all negotiable instruments made by the Treasurer, signing all contracts entered into on behalf of the Chapter, fixing the time and place of any special meetings, and other fun duties.

Education Committee Chair: Love to teach about birds and birding? The JAS Education Chair's main responsibility would be to further the purposes and programs of the National Audubon Society and JAS through education, outreach, and interpretation. The Education



Open Board Positions Cont.

Committee Chair would plan, develop, and present educational programs while coordinating with the Program Committee. Examples of this can include hosting educational programming at regional schools and institutions, creating educational birding activities, attending events on behalf of JAS like the UAS Campus Kickoff, art shows, book releases, and more!

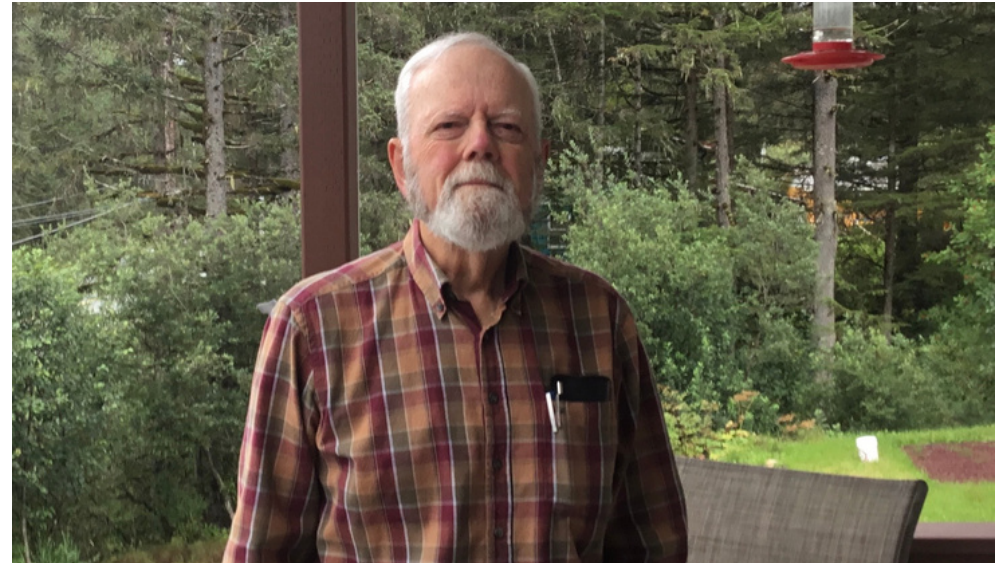
Juneau Audubon Society acknowledges the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples of Southeast Alaska who have been the caretakers of this land since time immemorial. We at JAS are grateful to bird and hold events, field trips, and presentations on the ancestral and traditional lands of Indigenous peoples in the Áak'w K̄wáan and adjacent T'aaḱú K̄wáan territories and throughout Lingít Aaní.

Updated JAS Bylaws

As a result of the Juneau Audubon Society board retreat in August 2022, followed by several months of discussion and tedious work, the JAS Bylaws have been revised and updated.

For your review, JAS Bylaws can be found at juneau-audubon-society.org.

Pick.Click.Give to Juneau Audubon Society!
JAS strives "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 filing for your PFD this year, choose JAS as one of your Pick.Click.Give. recipients at pfd.alaska.gov!



JAS Conservation Chairperson. Photo: Courtesy of Winston Smith

JAS Board Member Spotlight

Conservation Chair Winston Smith

I currently have a research appointment with the University of Alaska, though I am a retired principal research scientist with the Pacific Northwest Research Station. In 1995, I was recruited from the Southern Research Station to be the wildlife viability specialist on the Tongass team of U.S. Forest Service scientists for the 1997 Forest Plan revision. I remained at the Juneau Forestry Sciences Laboratory to research questions that arose during the forest plan revision.

I received a Bachelor of Science and master's degree at Louisiana State University in 1971 and 1976, respectively, with an emphasis in zoology, and completed a Ph.D. in wildlife science and zoology at Oregon State University in 1981. Much of my career has focused on the conservation biology of vulnerable birds and mammals, including the design and implementation of avian monitoring protocols as Chair of Partners in Flight, Southeast Working Group Monitoring Committee. Before coming to southeast Alaska, my research included several federally listed species, including an ecological profile of a white-tailed deer population in southwestern Oregon.

Smith Spotlight Cont.

As a member of the U.S. Forest Service team of scientists, I reviewed and analyzed much of the wildlife science that went into the 1997 Tongass plan, and participated in the design of the Tongass Wildlife Conservation Strategy (WCS). Most of the ensuing research examined underlying assumptions of the WCS, with a primary focus on population and landscape ecology of northern flying squirrels, especially the endemic Prince of Wales subspecies.

I joined the JAS board in 2018 as an At-large chairman and was recently appointed as the Conservation Chair.



Marbled Murrelets. Photo: Bob Armstrong

Marbled Murrelets: Frequent Flyers of Southeast By Winston Smith

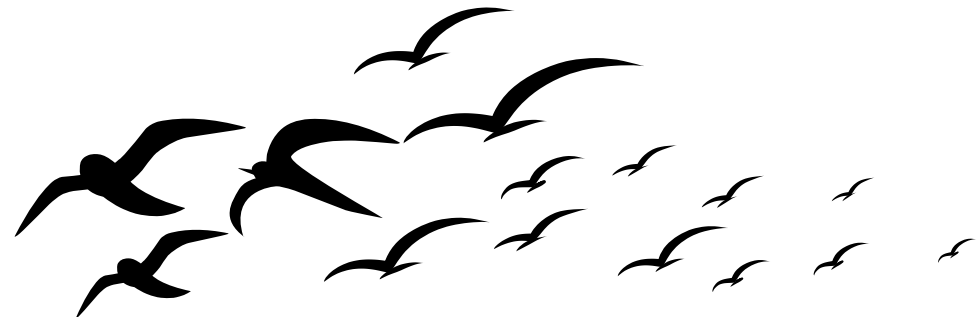
The Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) is a seabird that nests inland. It is unique among Alcidae — the family of seabirds that include Murres, Murrelets, and Puffins, or Alcids — of the western hemisphere in its use of old-growth trees in coastal coniferous forests as nesting habitat. Within their range in western North America, Marbled Murrelets are nearshore or coastal feeding seabirds but are known to fly long distances inland to their solitary nests (generally within 25 miles of the coast, although birds have

been found up to 75 miles inland).

Because murrelet nests are concealed within the forest canopy, and breeding birds are cryptic, secretive, and primarily crepuscular (dawn and dusk) at nest sites, relatively few active nests have been found. A collaborative study between the Juneau Forestry Sciences Lab and Oregon State University monitored the movements and behavior of seven female and two male radio-collared murrelets that were nesting near Juneau. The birds were captured at night with a dip net within Auke Bay and Fritz Cove; they were nesting in old-growth along Fish Creek (Douglas Island) and above the West Glacier trail in Juneau's Mendenhall Valley area.

I and the other researchers of authors of the published article — “Foraging Distances Of Radio-Marked Marbled Murrelets From Inland Areas In Southeast Alaska” — detected murrelets at inland sites and at sea on the same day on 20 occasions with an average distance between these locations of 45 miles. The majority of murrelets were located at sea in western Icy Strait, a productive feeding area at the mouth of Glacier Bay, Alaska. While tracking from a fixed wing, we observed that radio-collared murrelets flew around Point Retreat rather than across Admiralty to reach their foraging areas. During the study, we recorded 46 locations that were at least 75 miles from their inland nest sites.

Given that these birds are willing to travel so far from nest sites to get food, this finding emphasizes the importance of old-growth forest as nesting habitat in southeast Alaska.





Eurasian Collared-dove spotted on Christmas Bird Count. Photo: Gus van Vliet

Juneau Christmas Bird Count Results

By Patty Rose

The 50th Juneau Christmas Bird Count took place Saturday, December 17, during which 36 volunteers reported 55 species on count day. An additional 10 species were reported during count week, for a total of 65 species. The total number of individual birds counted was 6,650.

Low temperatures and high winds during count week likely contributed to the relatively low number of count-day species. On count day, observers reported clear skies and temperatures ranging from 12 degrees in the glacier forelands to the mid-20s in coastal areas. Most of the area was windy. Standing water was frozen, and snow was not reported.

Highlights on count day included a Cackling Goose at Fish Creek on North Douglas and a Eurasian Collared-dove at an Auke Bay residence. A Spotted Towhee was seen at a Mendenhall Valley residence during count week. Also seen during count week but not on count day were Hooded Merganser, Common Loon, Killdeer, Pigeon Guillemot, Northern Shrike, Brown Creeper, Bohemian

Waxwing, Rusty Blackbird, and Pine Grosbeak.

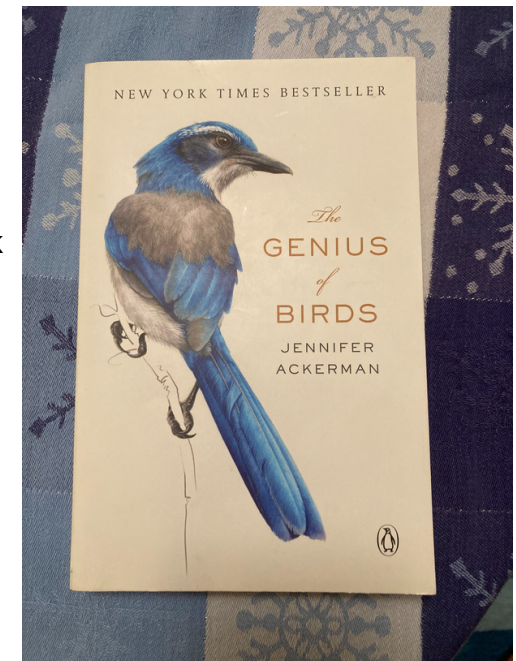
Twenty-two species have been seen on each of the previous 49 counts and were seen on this count. The five most numerous species were Mallard (1,221), Glaucous-winged Gull (961), Canada Goose (661), American Wigeon (456), and Barrow's Goldeneye (451). This year, we recorded new high counts of Lesser Scaup (30), Iceland Gull (Thayer's) (34), Anna's Hummingbird (5), and a new low count of Black-billed Magpie (5). Thanks to those who volunteered! Here are the total count day numbers.

Cackling goose - 1
Canada Goose - 593
Gadwall - 18
American Wigeon - 456
Mallard - 1221
Northern Pintail - 5
Green-winged Teal - 15
Greater Scaup - 12
Lesser Scaup - 30
Unidentified Scaup - 40
Harlequin Duck - 19
Surf Scoter - 661
White-winged Scoter - 30
Unidentified Scoters - 5
Long-tailed Duck - 18
Bufflehead - 108
Common Goldeneye - 84
Barrow's Goldeneye - 451
Unidentified Goldeneyes - 48
Hooded Merganser - count week
Common Merganser - 60
Red-breasted Merganser - 47
Unidentified Mergansers - 1

Christmas Bird Count Cont.

Pacific Loon - 6
Common Loon - count week
Yellow-billed Loon - 1
Horned Grebe - 17
Red-necked Grebe - 7
Pelagic Cormorant - 6
Great Blue Heron - 1
Bald Eagle - 184
Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1
Killdeer - count week
Dunlin - 252
Unidentified Sandpipers - 2
Wilson's Snipe - 1
Pigeon Guillemot - count week
Marbled Murrelet - 83
Mew Gull (Short-billed Gull) - 104
Iceland Gull (Thayer's Gull) - 34
Glaucous-winged Gull - 961
GWGUxHEGU hybrid - 3
Unidentified Gulls - 21
Eurasian Collared-Dove - 1
Rock Pigeon - 68
Anna's Hummingbird - 5
Belted Kingfisher - 6
Downy Woodpecker - 1
Hairy Woodpecker - 1
Northern Shrike - count week
Steller's Jay - 18
Black-billed Magpie - 5
Northwestern Crow (American Crow) - 236
Common Raven - 367
Chestnut-backed Chickadee - 82
Brown Creeper - count week
Pacific Wren - 3

American Dipper - 9
Golden-crowned Kinglet - 21
American Robin - 2
Varied Thrush - 1
European Starling - 91
Bohemian Waxwing - count week
Spotted Towhee - count week
Fox Sparrow - 1
Song Sparrow - 5
White-crowned Sparrow - 1
Dark-eyed Junco - 82
Rusty Blackbird - count week
Pine Grosbeak - count week
Red Crossbill - 26
White-winged Crossbill - 11



“Expect a real page-turner.” Photo: Thom Young-Bayer

Jennifer Ackerman's “The Genius of Birds”

By Thom Young-Bayer

Researchers have long grappled with the question of what defines “intelligence” and how it manifests in non-human animals. Jennifer Ackerman adeptly tackles this question in her 2016 book, “The Genius of Birds.” Ackerman dismisses the notion that, for birds to be “intelligent,” they must somehow display the same kind of cognition that humans and other apes are accustomed to. Rather, the author focuses on the diversity of ways in which these feathered dinosaurs have evolved to adapt to the challenges of their environment and to their social systems.

The book provides an accessible survey of a wide range of impressive and entertaining bird behaviors, from the spatial memory of chickadees caching food for the winter, to the multiple navigation strategies of pigeons, to the intricate tool fabrication skills of crows and the unparalleled musical abilities of songbirds.

Rather than singing the praise of all birds' intelligences, Ackerman

“The Genius of Birds” Cont.

deftly identifies where some birds fall short on perceived intelligence scales and discusses the myriad factors that may cause natural variation in learning, innovation, or other forms of intelligence among bird species and populations. For instance, chickadees in milder climates tend to have reduced spatial learning capacity and a smaller hippocampus than those living in places like Alaska or Maine, and bird species that lack long-term pair bonding tend to have smaller brains and less complex social interactions. The emerging picture is that of a broad taxon — Aves — that has evolved as many adaptive ways to perceive its surroundings, interact with others, and solve problems as it has evolved body shapes and plumages.

For casual bird enthusiasts and serious students of animal behavior alike, expect a real page-turner. For those new to the vast world of birds, expect a newfound respect for these colorful, complicated, and always (at least a bit) mysterious animals.



American Crow. Photo: Ann Doty

Great Backyard Bird Count 2023

By Brenda Wright

Every February, we have a fun winter birding event to look forward to: The Great Back Yard Bird Count — which is happening this year

from February 17 to 20, 2023. All of us can participate at our homes or all our favorite birding places. The rules are simple: Just go to your favorite places for watching birds and then report them. The rules ask that we watch for at least 15 minutes and notice the birds around us. Identify the birds, count them, and submit them online to help scientists better understand and protect birds around the world.

Everything you need to know about Great Back Yard Bird Count can be found at birdcount.org. If you do not have an eBird.org account, please contact me, JAS Member At Large Brenda Wright, at 907-321-4739 or at-large_b@juneau-audubon-society.org to help submit your data.

This is a worldwide event and looking at previous years' data in your neighborhood is amazing and fascinating. The website also has information on the new data as it is arriving from anywhere in the world. Plus, maps of how many counts have occurred or where the most birding is occurring are updated every day.

For me, one of the most fun things about this winter bird count is getting to choose all my best birding sites and visiting them four days in a row. Or even better, I could choose the best tide or weather during the event to see more birds.

Signs of Nature in Hoonah

By Amy Clark Courtney

If knowledge leads to appreciation and the desire to conserve, then interpretive signs about local birds can only be good. Over the past couple of years, JAS has been working with Hoonah artist Kassie Pesch-Johnson to produce interpretive signs to be featured at two bird attractions in Hoonah. One is a small Pigeon Guillemot (kootl éit aa, in the Línígít language) rookery near the ferry terminal.

During the breeding season, it is common to see the guillemots performing pair-bonding displays on the water or flying up to the



Hoonah resident Kassie Pesch-Johnson (left) is the sign's artist while Amy Courtney (right) is the owner of Icy Strait Birding Tours. Photo: Courtesy of Amy Clark Courtney

Signs of Nature Cont.

overhanging cliff face before disappearing into their burrows. Though hundreds of tourists and many locals stroll by the rookery on the paved sea walk each day, the vast majority do not know what the birds are called, let alone anything else about their lives. Accompanied by beautiful illustrations, one sign shares some Pigeon Guillemot life history and a brief identification key of other auks (alcids) and sea ducks commonly seen from that location. The State of Alaska has graciously given permission for the sign to be installed on their ferry terminal property, at a location overlooking the rookery.

The other bird attraction in Hoonah receiving a sign — and perhaps the harder one to miss — is a large Bald Eagle nest lofted in a cottonwood tree, right smack in the middle of town. A pair of Bald Eagles (ch'áak' in Línígít) has nested here for approximately the past decade. Many tourists stop throughout the summer to admire the stern-faced parents or marvel at the adult-sized juveniles working up their nerve for their first flight. Perhaps a nest cam will be possible in the future. Still, for now, a sign describing Bald Eagle's life history

and other interesting facts will be a welcome addition to the visitor experience.

Thanks to Marsha Squires and Kassie Pesch-Johnson for their hard work on this project, which JAS funded with donations from Icy Strait Birding Tours and Icy Strait Point.



Birder, naturalist, and environmental leader Rich Gordon. Photo: R.T. Wallen

Remembering Richard Gordon

By Gwen Baluss

Alaskans lost a legendary birder, naturalist, and environmental leader last October when Rich Gordon passed away at the age of 90. Even though Rich moved away from Juneau over a decade ago, his local footprint remains large. He was a founding member of the Juneau Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, and Friends of Admiralty Island. He had extensive knowledge of wild places in Alaska and was instrumental in identifying lands to be designated as parks and monuments for the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

His observations were foundational to early local bird lists and understanding the value of places like Mendenhall Wetlands. But what those who knew him seem to remember most is the great

Remembering Richard Gordon Cont.

passion he held for nature, especially birding, spending an exceptional amount of time outdoors doing whatever it took to see nature up close — really close. He overcame his natural shyness to fight for conservation, and to chat up aspiring naturalists on the trail. He was almost like the birds he chased, popping up suddenly in good habitat. Despite his vast knowledge, he always seemed to have a question and would scribble some notes on tiny scraps of paper. Many of his observations were entered into eBird (by another patient birder, Paul Suchanek). Rich still holds the number two spot for most species seen in Juneau.

For more on Rich's exceptional life, see this obituary, by Lynn Wallen in the *Juneau Empire* at legcy.co/3Qa4hzM.

Below are a few memories submitted by friends, colleagues, and fellow birdwatchers:

"In the early 1960s, the University of Wisconsin Department of Anthropology developed a research program centered on two Alaskan islands — Kodiak and Umnak ... As a part of this project, I was enlisted as Zoologist to undertake the fieldwork in order to quantify intertidal food items ... my field crew included three students of Zoology ... Rich Gordon, Greg Streveler, and Skip Wallen. Rich was the eldest of the eager group. Getting from Madison to the field site on Umnak required driving to Alaska and flying out to the island. On the long auto trip, the three students began a friendship that has lasted to the present day ... Rich was, even then, a diligent and expert ornithological observer. He used his spare moments to elaborate on the presence and numbers of the oceanic bird species seen there. He participated actively in the collection of reef fishes as well as invertebrates. The fishes were not only eaten for dinner, but their skeletal elements were in many cases preserved to return to the Osteology collection at the University." — *William Reeder*



Richard Gordon taking a break in the snow is approached by "Romeo" the wolf. Photo: Bob Armstrong

"While skiing along Mendenhall Lake one winter I saw Rich sitting in the snow watching the Black Wolf. Our dog Nola ran up to visit Rich. The wolf then came up to our dog quite close to where Rich was sitting." — *Bob Armstrong*

"In 1962, Rich Gordon, Greg Streveler, and I were three undergraduate students selected to partake in a University of Wisconsin zoological-anthropological expedition in Aleut-Koniag prehistory on Umnak Island in the eastern Aleutians. Greg and I collected specimens and identified bones in a Chaluka Midden, an ancient occupational site, while Rich was stationed on Anangula, a mile-and-a-half long, steep-sided though fairly low tundra and volcanic ash-covered island, about a mile offshore from the village of Nikolski. His work was to monitor seabird colonies on the island, to find out the composition of species there, and also to learn some of the resources that the early occupants of the midden had near at hand for birds and eggs.

Rich lived all alone much of the summer in a pup tent. Depending on weather, we tried to check on him at least once each week. We had a dory-style skiff, seaworthy in design, but rather old. Sea water

Remembering Richard Gordon Cont.

squirted up between the floorboards under certain conditions when making the passage to and from Rich's island. He was alone with the birds 98% of the time and Greg and I used to joke that he was becoming a puffin. Perhaps, on one of our check-up trips, we'd bring food, and he would emerge from his tent with his arms flapping. To the east quite close, his view was of Umnak Island and Mount Vsevidof, while to the west, way out on the horizon, lay the next group in the Aleutian chain, the Islands of the Four Mountains.

One night Rich awakened in his tent to a series of tremendous crashes as powerful waves battered against his island. After a few minutes the sea settled down to its regular rhythmic pounding on the cliffs but Rich lay awake. In the first light of dawn, he scanned the horizon with his binoculars to see one of the volcanos, I think it was Chuginadak, the nearest of the islands, smoking in an eruption.” — *R.T. Wallen*

“Rich's love of nature and disappointment with the human race combined with brilliance and independent means to make him the best student and advocate for North American ecology I've ever known. He was a birder who used that passion as an entree into broader perspectives. One of Rich's "hot spots" was Dry Bay at the Alsek River mouth. When ANILCA provided the possibility of adding this to Glacier Bay NM, Rich Jumped on it... Rich's persistence and focus had a lot to do with the extension of Glacier Bay's boundary to include Dry Bay”. — *Greg Streveler*

“It really is a small world! Back in the 1980s, Rich was in a remote part of Mexico birdwatching. He fell off the side of a hill and ended up in a ravine with a broken hip.

A short time later, Barry, a carpenter who had worked on our house and had met Rich there, happened by on that same trail and saw Rich laying at the bottom of the hill. He called in rescue services.



RG watching birds in our Sanibel Island yard in Florida. Photo: R.T. Wallen

Rich spent many weeks in a Mexican hospital but survived and went on to many more birding expeditions, thanks to the sharp-eyed carpenter from Juneau”. — *Lynn Wallen*

“I used to see Rich in the spring shore-birding by the Mendenhall River. He always had intel on the best spots to go — some behind the airport security fences! One evening hundreds of Ruddy Turnstones arrived on the mudflats. I looked back to see the tide had pushed the birds to where Rich was waiting. I could see his characteristic silhouette, sitting on his cane, a knit cap pulled over a weathered ballcap peering intently through binoculars. He was surrounded, birds nearly pecking at his toes. I think maybe that evening he got a close enough view.” — *Gwen Baluss*

“I loved running into him at the most unexpected places on the trails. We were coming down from a Juneau ridge hike once and approaching the Perseverance Trail from Granite Creek. Sure enough, there was Rich tucked away on a little switchback on the Granite Creek Trail. When we asked him what he was doing there, he told us he was listening for a MacGillivray's Warbler that someone else had reported. We had no idea what he was talking

Remembering Richard Gordon Cont.

about, but he explained that it was a beautiful song and planned to stay in the area for several hours until he heard it. We just shook our heads and wished him well. What a cool guy and a very sweet man!" — *Betsy Fischer*

Complete text from which these stories were excerpted, and more (even some songs written by Rich himself!) can be viewed at bit.ly/rich-c-gordon.

No doubt there are more stories readers of *The Raven* would like to share. Contribute to an evolving album by emailing at large_a@juneau-audubon-society.org.

Special thanks to Lynn and R.T. for contributing biographical information and for all their support of Rich as lifetime friends, especially in his later years.

Juneau Douglas North Crossing Update

The Juneau Douglas North Crossing, or second crossing, could impact the Alaska state wetland conservation area between the mainland and Douglas Island from Salmon Creek to beyond Mendenhall Peninsula Road.

Vancouver geese use the wetlands. So do many other waterfowl including Trumpeter swans, and countless other species. The Mendenhall Wetlands is a globally recognized important bird area (for more information, see bit.ly/3HNjvbR).

The public can still comment on the preliminary alternatives until February 3, 2023. There is also a quick survey at surveymonkey.com/r/DGDT6PT.

For all information and documents on the Juneau Douglas North Crossing, see jdnorthcrossing.com.



One of five Anna's Hummingbird's seen on Juneau's CBC. Photo: Gwen Baluss

JAS Membership — Need to Join or Renew?

Joining or renewing membership with the National Audubon Society using an address in Southeast Alaska will include automatic JAS membership. Visit action.audubon.org/renew/membership to do so. Or for local-only JAS membership, print or copy and mail this section with a check for \$10 made to Juneau Audubon Society for annual dues. Members receive a one-year subscription to *The Raven*.

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