

Notes for Birders Visiting Juneau

by Gwen Baluss

When visiting Juneau expect to immediately find an abundance of Common Ravens, American (Northwestern) Crows, and Bald Eagles. On the water in both spring and late summer sea ducks such as Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck and Surf Scoters are Common. Marbled Murrelets are often spotted offshore. Gulls, especially Glaucous-winged, Herring and Short-billed are numerous; Bonaparte's Gulls can be common in migration. All forest or even shrub areas ring with the beautiful songs of Varied, Hermit and sometimes Swainson's thrushes. Other common regional songbirds include Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific Wren, Oregon Junco, Townsend's Warbler, and Steller's Jay.



Bald Eagle near Mount Roberts



Rock Ptarmigan in the alpine

There are no birding-specific guides or companies specializing in birding in Juneau currently. Additionally, there are not any organizations that can match visitors with local birdwatchers, due to safety concerns. However, many local companies do offer hikes or whale watch tours. In general these businesses hire naturalists that can help identify local birdlife.

Guided tours are available in Hoonah, see: <https://www icystraitbirding.com>
Additionally, Wilderness Birding Adventures offers pelagic trips that begin in Juneau <https://www.wildernessbirding.com>

Luckily, there are great options for independent birding.

Where to bird

➤ Top birding sites for short layovers

For short trips to Juneau, such as *visitors arriving by cruise ship*, two great places to for birding, and spectacular scenery are the **Mount Roberts Tramway** and the **Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center**. At both locations you can find specific and detailed birding info for the site that is either free, or for sale at a reasonable price. Both venues charge an entry fee.

The **Mount Roberts Tramway** is a short walk from the cruise ship dock, then a vertical ride up. It provides good access to forest and shrub habitats. From the tram it's a short hike to subalpine and alpine habitats, and thus is an excellent place to look for Rock and Willow Ptarmigan, and Sooty Grouse. American Pipits nest on the higher slopes and you may be lucky to spot a Golden-crowned Kinglet in the lower forest.

The **Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center** can be reached within a mile by public bus, or you can get right the parking lot with local bus and cab companies. Some of the naturalists at MGVC are expert birders; all have at least some training in local birds and resources for birders. In addition to forest and shrublands, the lake shore hosts unique nesting birds such as Arctic terns. Waterfowl such as Common Merganser nest nearby, as do Yellow-rumped Warblers, Townsend's Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets.



Crow catches a ride on the ferry.

Ferry passengers. From the ferry dock check out the **Auke Village Recreation Area** (US Forest Service), reachable by a 30-minute walk from the ferry dock. Representative near-shore and forest birds occur. Open areas are good for Red-breasted Sapsuckers and Sooty Fox Sparrows in summer.

Also near the ferry, **Statter Harbor** is good for sea birds in all seasons, especially Marbled Murrelet. It takes about 30 minutes to arrive by foot and is easily found by walking along the only main road that runs by the terminal towards Juneau.

Cruise ship passengers. In addition to the tram and glacier mentioned above, a simple walk **around down town** will yield many of our common forest species; listen on the outskirts to the lovely morning or late evening chorus of thrushes. A short walk uphill abruptly leads to natural habitat, even mature forest. A stroll along the **waterfront of Gastineau Channel** is good for local water birds. Look for Pigeon Guillemots right under the docks in the harbor. A more ambitious walk to the end of Gold Street meanders leads to the **Perseverance Trail**, a scenic hike with alpine access for the athletic, and a chance at American Dipper, and species more associated with interior climates such as Yellow Warbler and Warbling Vireo.



Pigeon Guillemot

Airport area. A 30 minute walk or short (5 minute) cab ride will take you to the **Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge** accessed on the **EVAR (Dike trail)** the end of Radcliffe Road. This is one of the best places to bird in the region and is an Audubon designated Important Bird Area. Shorebirds and waterfowl, all seasons, are a highlight there.

➤ More locations for longer stays



Young Rufous Hummingbird feeds on fireweed at a city greenbelt

A rental car or taxi tour gives access to many local hotspots such as **Eagle Beach** or the **Fish Creek Natural Park**; but some good spots, such as **Salmon Creek** and **Auke Bay Harbor**, are also accessible by public bus.

<https://juneaucapitaltransit.org>

The Alaska Marine Highway System (ferry) provides passenger service to nearby communities and makes a reasonable waterbird viewing platform. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game website has wildlife viewing information, including birding from the ferry.

<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=viewing.guidebooks>

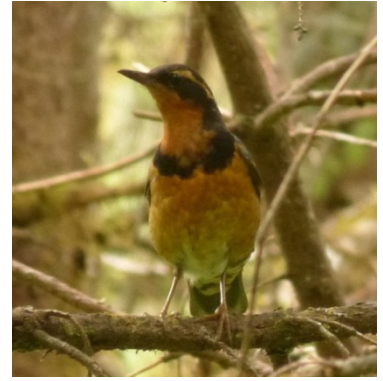
Nearby destinations with fantastic seabird viewing and the area's most spectacular scenery include **Tracy Arm** and **Glacier Bay National Park**. Look for tour companies that service these areas. Many of the small ships offer excellent naturalist guides.

What to wear

In summer, any comfortable walking or hiking shoes, a light fleece or wool jacket, a light rain jacket and a hat with a brim should suffice. Other seasons, prepare for freezing cold and rain or snow. For longer stays, consider stopping at any local outdoor or hardware store and investing in waterproof boots. Most birding hotspots have muddy, flooded, or tidal portions.

Field Guides

Any standard guide that covers Western N. America (e.g. Sibley, National Geographic, Petersen, Kaufman) will be adequate here. For more detailed discussion of Alaskan birds, look for Robert Armstrong's *Birds of Alaska* available at <http://naturebob.com> or local book vendors.



Varied Thrush

Other resources

- ✓ A classic book covering Alaska birding is *A Birder's Guide to Alaska*, by George C. West.
- ✓ The Southeast Alaska Birding Trail is a comprehensive account of 18 communities in the region, including Juneau. <https://ak.audubon.org/southeast-alaska-birding-trail>
- ✓ Birds of Southeast Alaska Checklist, compiled by Steve Heintz 2010 is the most comprehensive published list for the region. It is out of print, but can be viewed and printed here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y5eIArT8aAa537BuujLVXrp97Fukid4m/view?usp=sharing>
- ✓ Explore the Juneau Audubon Society Website for more information. Also posted are bird walks and other natural history events. <https://www.juneauaudubon.org/>
- ✓ Juneau Birds Checklist: <https://www.juneauaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/JUNEAU-Checklist-Rev-Jan-2007.pdf>
- ✓ At the US Forest Service Juneau Ranger District (Address: 8510 Mendenhall Loop Rd., Ph. 907-586-8800) ask for the "Finding Birds in Juneau" booklet. This free publication highlights all the main birding spots and species found on the Juneau road system. Note that the text is about 25 years old, so there have been minor changes to the bird community.

Finally, enjoy your visit and please report your observations on eBird (www.ebird.org). Please remember to provide photos and details of anything that flags as rare or is not on a locally curated checklist and make locations as specific as possible. This will help the local birding community who have voluntarily taken time to compile accurate birding information.

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