

# The Redpoll

Newsletter of the Arctic Audubon Society, Fairbanks, Alaska

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[www.arcticaudubon.org](http://www.arcticaudubon.org)

October 2009



*Mission of Arctic Audubon: Earth has unparalleled natural diversity, productivity, and beauty, and provides for life. Recognizing the full value of nature, we work to protect Alaskan ecosystems by encouraging research, education, and management that will contribute to appreciation and good stewardship of this natural heritage. We also strive to conduct our own lives in harmony with nature.*

*The Arctic Audubon Society publishes The Redpoll for its members monthly fall through spring. National Audubon Society (NAS) dues are \$35; new members are \$20. NAS membership includes local chapter dues. Chapter only membership is \$10 and includes the newsletter.*

Arctic Audubon Society and Alaska Bird Observatory present...

## Life & Birds in the Bush with Julie & Miki Collins

Monday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, 7–8:30 pm  
at ABO's Center for Education & Research

This month, Arctic Audubon is joining with the Alaska Bird Observatory (ABO) to enjoy a presentation by Julie and Miki Collins while they are in Fairbanks. Come see slides and hear stories about bush life and wilderness adventures. Barring bad weather or other setbacks, Julie Collins, and hopefully her sister Miki, will be in Fairbanks to share some of their photos and to sign books. While these lifelong Alaskans will



condense their standard show to make room for a few of their favorite bird pictures, they still plan to tell some old favorites, including the story of the horse in the airplane!

The Alaska Bird Observatory is located in the Wedgewood Resort Complex off of College Road, 418 Wedgewood Drive, 451-7159.

## Arctic Audubon Board Sets Goals for Year

After a summer break, the Arctic Audubon Board met in mid-September to initiate the next season of Audubon activities. Board meetings will be on the first Wednesday of each month (excluding January) at 6:30 pm at Gulliver's Second Story Cafe. Members are welcome to attend! If you would like to contribute, check our list of Board positions on the back page for jobs that need a person to give them attention.

Our regular public meeting time is 7:00 pm on the second Monday of the month at the Noel Wien Library (except for this month). We plan to bring a variety of programs to you, and we always want to hear from you if you have any ideas for programs. We are planning to add more field trips to our offerings. We plan to submit an IBA application for the Yukon Flats this fall and look forward to promoting energy legislation by the state legislature. We look forward to seeing you in the coming season.

## Mark a Date for Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count occurs between December 14 and January 5 by protocol. Anyone with a good idea for the best date to choose in this year should contact the coordinator soon. We will be settling on a date at the October 7<sup>th</sup> Arctic Audubon Board meeting. Available dates are December 19, 20, 26, 27 or Jan 2 or 3. Call Gail Mayo at 479-2954 with your preferences.

## Annual Conservation Awards

Arctic Audubon congratulates Mark Ross for his selection for the Jerry S. Dixon Award for Excellence in Environmental Education and Roger Kaye for receiving the Lowell Thomas, Jr. Award for Outstanding Civil Service. The awards will be given October 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Alaska Conservation Foundation's 2009 Conservation Achievement Awards banquet in Anchorage.



S. Quinlan

## Questing for Cranes

By Frank Keim, Field Trip Chair

September 6<sup>th</sup> was a day to remember for 14 Fairbanksans who carpooled to Delta Junction and then to Donnelly Dome in search of Sandhill Cranes and other birds on their journey south to warmer climes.

Right away we hit the jackpot in Delta where we spotted a huge skein of sandhills gliding over just south of town. Following them were two large flocks of more than a hundred White-fronted Geese that cruised only 400 feet above us.

As we approached Donnelly Dome, we spotted yet another wide V-formation of what were probably white-fronts strung out across the sky. The day had already fulfilled its promise, and there was more to come.

We met Larry and Gail Mayo at the base of Donnelly Dome, and Gail joined us for our climb to the top of the enigmatic dome. It stands at the edge of the outwash plain of the Delta River that 12,000 years ago began to drain an immense glacier that once filled the valley. As we wended our way to the summit, we could see hundreds of kettle lakes to the east and south, more evidence of the existence of this ancient, vast sheet of ice.

On the way up, Joseph Ransdell-Green spotted a Golden Eagle and several other raptors. A Varied Thrush and small flocks of Robins flew by, all undoubtedly migrating south. Then we watched 14 Ravens mob a Harlan's Hawk as it kettled high in the thermals above the summit. A small bird even joined the fray, as the hawk soared higher and higher, trying to outdistance the circling mob.

With Mt. Hayes directly in front of us, and Deborah and Hess not far away, the view from the top was majestic. All around us the world had turned a vivid scarlet red with gashes



Participants in the Donnelly Dome Field trip were treated to glorious fall colors, beautiful vistas, and great birds.  
Photo by Sherry Lewis

of yellow birch and aspen accenting the red. The vegetation on the dome was the same color except in a dwarf alpine mode. Only one species of wildflower still bloomed at this late date, the alpine harebell, but their deep blue bell-shaped petals lit up the pebbly ground like radiant stained glass.

Just as we finished lunch and were thinking of heading down again, we heard the tell-tale sound of cranes. Off to our west we could see the waver line of almost 200 sandhills. They were coming straight for us and we craned our necks to watch them as they flapped and glided, following the north wind south. Their V-formation broke a few times, separating into smaller skeins, but eventually they got it together again and continued uninterrupted east and south toward their winter homes in the American Southwest and Mexico. Watching them brought tears to my eyes, and I heard many others voice their own versions of the awe that I know all of us felt at this wonderful miracle of nature that we were so privileged to behold.

We took a different route down the mountain so we wouldn't have to deal with the unstable rocky trail we followed going up, and also to check

out some tors about halfway down where I remembered Golden Eagles had nested many years ago. Unfortunately, it looked as though the three aeries we found hadn't been occupied for nearly a decade. During our slow descent, we did see a few other smaller raptors including a Harrier, Merlin and Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Back at the cars as we chatted about our very full day, we decided this was an experience worth repeating next year. And so it shall be.

*Note:* Arctic Audubon also led an all-day Spring outing of 18 people to the Delta Clearwater River and nearby barley fields where we spotted untold hundreds of geese, swans, gulls and ducks, a migration of more than 30 Rough-legged Hawks and one Mountain Bluebird.

### Email Delivery of Newsletter

E-Delivery of Arctic Audubon's newsletter, *The Redpoll*, is now an option. Contact the newsletter editor at [zalar@alaska.net](mailto:zalar@alaska.net) to receive your newsletter via email instead of by postal delivery.

## A Backyard Birdathon

by Joyce Potter

Working quietly in the yard and greenhouse, feeling sorry for myself with my back and knee out and having already decided that it was not possible for me to participate in Birdathon this year, I suddenly had a flock of Waxwings land nearby. I realized that I could do the Birdathon right here, in my yard, starting right now!

The day was May 17<sup>th</sup>, a warm sunny morning. The time was 10 am and in sight were not only the Waxwings, but a Hairy Woodpecker, several Gray Jays, a Black-capped Chickadee, and a Slate-colored Junco. Several of the Gray Jays were black and made a terrible racket trying to get their parents to feed them. I knew my numbers would not be awesome, but it seemed a great way to spend a beautiful day. And if I got tired or hurting, I would just call time.

By evening, I had seen and heard lots of American Robins and Northern Flickers and seen one Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Lunch and dinner were spent outside. During a dinner with salmon, salad and wine, my husband and I watched a flock of seven Sandhill Cranes fly over the top of us headed for the Quist Farm a few miles away. A Herring Gull could be seen in the distance over the Tanana River. And the threesome of Common Ravens we see most evenings flew by. A Yellow-rumped Warbler was singing nearby.

As the evening deepened, I retired to the balcony with an overview of the Tanana River, a warm drink in hand, and my scope nearby. I heard Varied Thrushes, a Boreal Chickadee, Hammond's Flycatchers, and just before going to bed, was treated to an Orange-crowned Warbler landing just a few feet away. A lone Black-billed Magpie came into one of my birdfeeders.

At 1:30 am, my dog Harry woke me up to go outside. Waiting for him to finish, I suddenly heard a Boreal Owl

close by and decided to spend a little more time on the balcony. And sure enough, in the distance, I heard two Great Horned Owls calling back and forth. There were also singing Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes. Just as I got up to return to my warm bed, I heard a Great Gray Owl! Goose-bump time!

Getting up at 7 am and armed with a cup of coffee and breakfast, I enjoyed an early morning at the picnic table listening to a Wilson's Snipe off toward the river and watching a flock of Canada Geese flying noisily overhead. By 8:30 am, back on the balcony, I suddenly spotted a raptor flying over a nearby ridge. Watching with my scope and seeing what I thought was a white rump patch. I decided it was a Northern Harrier. But it bothered me that it was flying over the ridge and not our field. And then it hovered. Not a rump patch but white on the upper tail—a Rough-legged Hawk. At a distance, I spotted a lone bird sitting at the very top of a spruce tree. With my binoculars I could see red on the breast and assumed it was a Robin. Until my three Ravens started harassing it and my "robin" suddenly took off after one of them. A ten minute altercation ensued and I realized my robin was a very upset Kestrel.

Rounding out my last hour, I watched a few Mew Gulls and a pair of Mallards fly over the river. A Downy Woodpecker came obligingly into one of my feeders and a Yellow Warbler landed nearby and began singing. Just before 10 am I saw and heard my last bird—a White-crowned Sparrow.

This was the most relaxed Birdathon I've ever done—and the greenest. It's certainly the lowest species count I've ever had at 31, but also one of the most pleasurable, with cool birds, beautiful weather, great scenery, leisurely meals, and a real feeling of accomplishment doing it on my own.

### Birdathon Summary

The 2009 Farthest North Birdathon was held May 10–June 15. Birdathons took various forms including guided walks, backyard Birdathons, and remote area counts. Many thanks to our participants and donors!

Top money raisers were Anne Ruggles & Don Hampton, Sherry Lewis, and Ken Russell & Laurel Devaney. Sue Guers won the Golden Binoculars for seeing 83 species. Weeks after the awards picnic, Chris Harwood reported counting 100 species during his Birdathon in the Kanuti Wildlife Refuge. Sherry Lewis won the Alaska Airline tickets, and Joe Ransdell-Green was awarded the Red Birdcage.

Thanks to Sue Guers, Gail Mayo, and Sherry Lewis for leading the Guided Birdathon Walks.

Many thanks to our corporate sponsors Yukon Title and Alaska Airlines and prize donors Patagonia, Hot Licks, Ivory Jacks, Dan Kennedy, and Mary Kay Teel.

### Get Ready for Change...

Birdathon will have a new look next year. The 2010 Farthest North Birdathon will be shorter and sweeter, scheduled for May 15<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup>. In addition to traditional Birdathon activities, we're going to include a new, one-day event. Read all about it in newsletters next spring!



Arctic Audubon Society  
 PO Box 82098  
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Upcoming Events—Mark Your Calendar

- Arctic Audubon Board Mtg, Oct. 7, 6:30 pm**  
 Members are welcome to join us at Gulliver's Second Story Cafe.
- Life & Birds in the Bush, October 12, 7:00 pm**  
 Julie and Miki Collins will share stories and images at the Alaska Bird Observatory.
- Birding in Ecuador, November 9, 7:00 pm at the Noel Wien Library Auditorium**  
 Jim DeWitt and Ron Teel will share photos and stories of their birding trip.
- Arctic Audubon Board Mtg, Nov. 4, 6:30 pm**  
 Members are welcome to join us at Gulliver's Second Story Cafe.

**Arctic Audubon Board of Directors**

- email address: arcticaudubon@gmail.com
- President: Gail Mayo (479-2954)
- Vice President: Open
- Secretary: Open
- Treasurer: Janet Daley (457-1583)
- Education: Open
- Conservation: River Gates (455-0273)
- Hospitality: Brook Gamble (456-3775)
- Programs: Lauren Attanas (456-1108)
- Newsletter: Mary Zalar (479-4547)
- Membership: Mary Zalar (479-4547)
- Field Trips: Frank Keim (451-9308)  
 Tom Green (452-6370)
- Birdathon: Sherry Lewis (479-0848)
- Web Site: Jim DeWitt
- Alaska Audubon Board: Dave Shaw

**Birding Hotline**  
**(907) 451-9213**

Updated by Laurel Devaney & Ken Russell

Report interesting bird sightings;  
 learn what others have spotted.

**National Audubon Society**  
**New Member Form**

Introductory rate, \$20

Membership includes both National Audubon and the local chapter, Arctic Audubon. You will receive National Audubon's magazine, *Audubon*, and Arctic Audubon's newsletter, *The Redpoll*.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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I would like to receive email announcements from Arctic Audubon Society. My email address is:

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**Chapter Only Membership, \$10**

For membership in Arctic Audubon only, check the box and make check payable to Arctic Audubon Society.