



The Redpoll

Newsletter of the Arctic Audubon Society

Fairbanks, Alaska

Vol. 39 Issue No. 2

www.arcticaudubon.org

January 2017

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.

Arctic Audubon Society & the Noel Wien Library present...

National Park Service BioBlitzes: Alaska's Charismatic Microfauna

presentation by Dr. Derek Sikes, UA Museum of the North

Monday, February 6, 7:00 pm

Noel Wien Library Auditorium

To celebrate 100 years of the National Park Service, BioBlitzes were held across the nation on NPS lands during 2016. Derek Sikes, curator of insects at the University of Alaska Museum, and aficionado of all many-legged things, was invited to participate in three of these in Alaska—one in Gates of the Arctic National Park, one in the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, and one in Denali National Park. In this talk, Derek will show travel slides and discuss discoveries, methods, motivations, and the natural history of Alaska's most diverse and fascinating animals. Derek Sikes was hired as the curator of insects at the University of Alaska Museum in July 2006. He is an advocate of the study and protection of arthropod, specifically beetle, biodiversity.



Derek Sikes and a young participant in the Anaktuvik Pass/Gates of the Arctic BioBlitz.

Fairbanks Christmas Bird Count Delayed

Scheduled for Saturday December 31st, the 56th Fairbanks Christmas Bird Count was moved to Monday January 2nd due to a weekend snow storm and strong winds. Fortunately, Monday was a holiday for many, so we had good participation—81 parties combed the count area and spotted 27 species. Highlights included a single Golden Crowned Kinglet, a Great Horned Owl, Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, and Dark-eyed Juncos. Good numbers of White-winged Crossbills and Redpolls were spotted. Complete results are posted on the website. Many thanks to the Area Count Coordinators and all the participants.

President's Message

by Sherry Lewis, Board President

As we start a new year, climate change is still a major topic. Arctic Audubon's fall programs touched on this subject, and Alaska is showing the affects of a warming climate. According to the 2014 National Climate Assessment (NCA), Alaska is warming more rapidly than the rest of the country and faces threats from coastal erosion, ocean acidification, wildfires, permafrost melt, and other impacts. We can all do a little to help slow the process.

Although recycling has grown even more limited with the close of UAF recycle drop off, there is some good news. The Fairbanks North Star Borough plans to award the Central Recycling Facility Operator Contract to the Fairbanks Rescue Mission. The Borough's recycling facility is scheduled to open July 1, 2017. In the meantime, the Rescue Mission at 723 27th Ave. continues to accept aluminum, cardboard, mixed paper, newspaper, and plastics # 1 and 2. C&R Pipe and Steel, 401 Van Horn Rd. takes aluminum, steel cans, and scrap metal. Home Depot takes compact florescent bulbs and Office Max take printer cartridges. Green Star, 1855 Marika Rd. takes electronics and batteries every 3rd Friday & Saturday, 10 am-4 pm. We can support the borough's effort to start a recycling program.

Some signs are discouraging like more large gas guzzling vehicles being made because of lower gas prices. We can only hope enough people are concerned about our lovely planet to keep it healthy.

Access to Audubon-Riedel Nature Reserve Planned

After months of research, the Arctic Audubon Society Board of Directors voted to construct a driveway along a State-managed section line easement to access our property near 5 Mile Chena Hot Springs Road. Hopefully, construction will occur next summer.

In 1984, Elonore and Charles Riedel gifted 160 acres to Arctic Audubon Society. Their gift stipulates that the undeveloped, boreal forest land is to remain in its natural state for the enjoyment by all people forever. A few trails traverse the land where Elonore used to ride her horses. However, there is no physical access to the 160-acre parcel.

Last year, the Board learned that it is possible to utilize a section line easement to access property. Authorization has been requested from the Department of Natural Resources. Plans include constructing a driveway approximately 750 feet long with a turnaround at the end. A narrow pedestrian trail will continue from the turnaround to the northeast edge of the Audubon property, connecting with existing trails on the property.

As the new year begins, the prospect of easier access to the Audubon-Riedel Nature Reserve is very exciting.

3rd Annual Songbird Soirée February 18, 5–8:00 pm *a benefit for the Alaska Songbird Institute*

Support the Alaska Songbird Institute at their 3rd annual fundraiser Saturday, February 18 at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 4448 Pike's Landing Road. Bid on desserts, bird art, tours, and other bird-themed items in the silent and outcry auction at this fun, family event. Proceeds support ASI's education and research. Tickets are available online or at the door: \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door.



Yumi Kawaguchi of Dogwood Studio Alaska is the featured artist.

Great Backyard Bird Count February 17-20

Begun in 1998, the four-day Great Backyard Bird Count was the first citizen-science program to collect and display bird observation data online on a large scale. Today, the Great Backyard Bird Count is one of the most popular annual events among bird watchers. It has been merged with the eBird online checklist program to make the information gathered even more useful to science and to allow people to take part anywhere in the world with an Internet connection. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada. To get started, go to <http://gbbc.birdcount.org>.

- If you have never participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count or any other Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you'll need to create a new account. If you already created an account for last year's GBBC, or if you're already registered with eBird or another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you can use your existing login information.
- **Count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the GBBC.** You can count for longer than that if you wish! Count birds in as many places and on as many days as you like—one day, two days, or all four days. Submit a separate checklist for each new day, for each new location, or for the same location if you counted at a different time of day. Estimate the number of individuals of each species you saw during your count period.
- **Enter your results on the GBBC website by clicking "Submit Observations" on the home page.** Or download the free eBirdMobile app to enter data on a mobile device. If you already participate in the eBird citizen-science project, please use eBird to submit your sightings during the GBBC. Your checklists will count toward the GBBC.

Final Saturday of Fairbanks FeederCount—March 4

The Fairbanks FeederCount is a citizen-science project that has been tracking relative abundance and distribution of birds in the Fairbanks area for more than three decades. If you are unavailable for one or two dates, you can submit data for just the date(s) you are available. After March 4, turn in your data sheet to the Alaska Songbird Institute, PO Box 80235, Fairbanks AK 99708. Download a count form at: <http://aksongbird.org/education/fairbanks-feedercount/>.

Newly Discovered Virus a Prime Suspect in Beak Disorder

Avian keratin disorder (AKD) causes debilitating beak overgrowth, preventing birds around the world from feeding and preening. Colleen Handel, a US Geological Survey bird specialist, and fellow USGS Researcher Carolyn Van Hemert have been studying beak deformities in Alaska for many years. A potential breakthrough came when researchers at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco applied advanced DNA and RNA sequence technology to bird beak samples. The virus—Pocivirus—has been linked to avian keratin disorder. It must be determined if the relationship between AKD and the virus is causation or correlation.

For more information:

- The Alaska Science Center (USGS) is the primary location for information on Beak Deformities and includes a link to report a deformed or banded bird: https://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/landbirds/beak_deformity/index.html
- A scientific discussion of the new virus is published in the American Society for Microbiology's journal, mBio: <http://mbio.asm.org/content/7/4/e00874-16>
- A press release in Science Daily provides a summary: www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/07/160726123107.htm
- The Alaska Dispatch News documented the research in a great video: www.adn.com/video/video-beak-deformities-alaska-black-capped-chickadees



This Common Redpoll was spotted at a Becker Ridge feeder in 2001.

Birds With Deformed Beaks Spotted in Fairbanks

Fairbanksans that watch their feeders have likely spotted a bird with a deformed beak. Black-capped Chickadees are most common, but Nuthatches and Redpolls have also been documented.

Last spring, a Red-breasted Nuthatch with deformed beak showed up at a Rosie Creek area birdfeeder. Colleen Handel provided the following information:

Nuthatches affected by this disorder generally show straight elongation of the beak, sometimes with the tips slightly crossing. They generally don't develop abnormal curvature like the chickadees do. Your bird is quite interesting because the beak is slightly upcurved. I haven't seen a case like this before.

Your bird appears to be in good health, other than the deformed beak. I'm sure that's in large part due to your providing food it can actually eat. It's a bit difficult to discern its sex from the photograph due to the lighting and orientation. I think it is likely an adult female--I would expect the black on the crown of the head to be glossier if it were an adult male. The breast feathers would also likely be darker red. On the other hand, the feathers on the back seem to have a bluish cast to them, which is more typical of a male.

If you see a bird with a beak deformity, take a photo if possible and report the sighting on the USGS website,

https://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/landbirds/beak_deformity/index.html



A Red-breasted Nuthatch with a deformed beak was a regular visitor at a Fairbanks feeder in Spring 2016.

Photo by Greg Zimmerman



*Black-capped Chickadee
Photo by Ken Whitten*

Naming Eskimo Birds

by Frank Keim

What's in a name anyway? Even the most experienced of birders may take names like robin, sparrow and raven for granted, seldom wondering where the words came from. Include me in this category.

Things changed for me back in the early 1980's, however, when I started teaching Yup'ik Eskimo children in southwestern Alaska. Hooper Bay was my first teaching assignment, and the people there all still spoke Yup'ik, their Native language. Thankfully I had studied Yup'ik for a year before I took the teaching job. This made relating to my students and the community so much easier for me. And since I took every opportunity to practice Yup'ik when I visited with the people in their homes, I learned to speak it fairly well by the time I transferred to the neighboring village of Scammon Bay three years later. Little did I know then how much my knowledge of Yup'ik would come in handy over the next two decades of teaching in the Lower Yukon Delta. Or where it would lead.

My father had a passion for birds, and some of this rubbed off on me. You can imagine what happened when I began living in the Lower Yukon Delta, which is one of the bird capitals of the world. Birding became one of the central focuses of my life in the Delta, and, as a teacher, one of the ways I tried to relate my students to both their environment and culture. I found birds and their Yukon Delta habitat to be an immediate turn-on for the students and therefore a natural subject of study for them.

One of the preoccupations among the Yup'ik people was the possible loss of their language, and therefore of much of their culture. I felt that by encouraging my students to learn the names of some of the birds in their region it might help reinvigorate an interest in their language. Since I was already familiar with a community-based teaching approach called Fox Fire, I decided to blend this approach in my classroom with a bird or animal or plant theme and see what happened.

It worked. Where students had been previously turned off to classroom learning, this new cultural journalism approach kindled student interest in learning and in school in general. Over the course of 21 years in Lower Yukon Delta village schools, my students and I produced more than 40 different student books on animals, birds, plants and other themes.



The most important bird for the Yup'ik people is the Raven. After all, Raven was the creator. When traditional Yup'ik people talk about their origins, the conversation goes like this: "Yugnun ciuliaqniluku qanruteklaraat tulukaruq," or "They say the Raven is the ancestor of human beings." The name "Tulukaruq," is onomatopoeic, that is,

it derives from the sound the bird makes. Raven also has another more exalted name, "Ernerculria," which means the bearer of daylight because he was thought to have provided the people with the sun. For that reason, it is the term of respect that elders used when telling legends of the Raven. Raven has other names, too, that are more representative of his mundane qualities. "Tengmialleraq," and "Qer'qaalleraq," mean "shabby old bird," and "shabby old croaker," respectively. And "Neqaiq," means "food stealer," which the Raven does a lot of both in fish camps and dog yards.

For good reason, "Neqaiq," is also a Yup'ik moniker for the Gray Jay, aka camp robber. Another of its names, "Kisirallerr," likewise refers to some of Gray Jay's mischievous qualities. Curiously, it is also a nickname for the grizzly bear. When hunting the bear, I was told, hunters should never call it by its proper name because the bear's ambulant spirit might hear its name being spoken and thus allow the bear to escape the hunters. Like the Raven, the Yup'ik people say that Gray Jays have awareness, "cella," which means they are conscious of the world around them. Little wonder, since they have one of the largest brains per body size in the animal world.

As with the camp robber, many Yup'ik bird names are descriptive. A larger number, however, are onomatopoeic. One of my favorites is the name given to the Willow Ptarmigan, "Aqezgiq." For those who live in Alaska and parts of Canada, you've probably heard the male Willow Ptarmigan's tell-tale spring call: aqezaqezaqezazqzqzqzqz. And so the name.

Similarly with the Tundra Swan. Its Yup'ik name, "qugyuk," or "qugsuk," if sounded out correctly, is a dead ringer for its deep-throated call. More often than not, you hear the call before you see the bird. Not long ago I tried the call on a lone swan flying overhead and, to my astonishment, it landed nearby on the pothole lake I was birding by. As I continued to imitate its call, it paddled nearer and nearer until it was only about a hundred feet away. I reflected on the experience later and decided that, had I not committed the swan's Yup'ik name to memory, I wouldn't have remembered the sound it made. In a traditional culture that was so dependent on swans and other waterfowl for food, especially before the introduction of rifles and shotguns, it was extremely important to remember the bird's sound in order to attract it close enough to shoot it with an arrow or catch it with a bola. In this way, many bird names were excellent mnemonic devices for remembering their calls.

Another important food bird for which the Yup'ik name serves as an imitative mnemonic is the Sandhill Crane. This



continued on page 5

Naming Eskimo Birds

continued from page 6

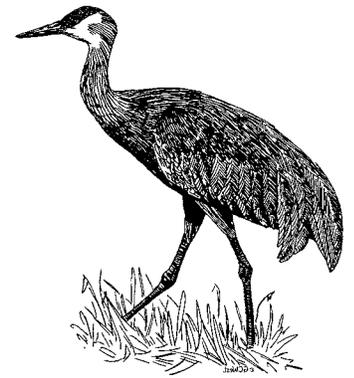
stately bird is referred to as “Qut’raaq,” along the Yukon River and “Quchillgaq,” on the Hooper Bay-Nunivak Island coast. During the years I lived on the Delta I was sometimes lucky enough during a walk to surprise a pair of cranes as they gracefully spread their long rusty gray-brown wings, bowed to one another, then bounced like rubber balls sometimes six feet in the air, all the while joyously uttering loud trumpet-like counterpoint calls that resounded for miles in every direction. “Qut’raaq...quchillgaq!”

There are many other large birds that follow the same rule as the raven, crane and swan. But there are also small birds, such as the humble chickadee, which have an imitative Yup’ik moniker. Curiously, the English common name is very similar to the Yup’ik “Chikepiiiqiq,” or “Chikepiiiir,” and is the only case I know of where there is a convergence like this.

There are a couple of other birds that have remarkably descriptive Yup’ik names. One is the Tree Swallow. Known as “Equmelnguq,” the name loosely translates as “the bird that carries a beetle on its shoulder,” referring to the diminutive beetle-shaped epaulet on the swallow’s shoulders. Its iridescent color probably mimics some of the beetles it eats.

A bird that has two especially descriptive names is the Arctic Tern. “Teqirayuli,” and “Teqiyaaraq,” mean “the dear little bird that is good at using its bottom to disadvantage others.” You know what I mean? I learned the hard way one day when I was canoeing down the John River, in the Brooks Range, a few years ago. As I came ashore I flushed a mother Arctic Tern from her nest on the gravel beach. I went back for my camera, quickly took a couple of snaps of the nest and eggs, then hightailed it. As I retreated, both male and female terns swooped down on my head from behind and, you guessed it. Bullseye! This is yet another case where the name is an excellent mnemonic.

Finally, where Yup’ik people often use onomatopoeia to describe bird species, this method was rarely used by English speakers in bestowing common names on birds. Likewise, in scientific taxonomy onomatopoeia is used even less, *Corvus corax* (raven) being the one notable exception I’m familiar with. On the other hand, the names of scientists or naturalists who first described many bird species have been included in both the scientific and common English designations. This practice was never used by Yup’ik people, which tells you something about the Yup’ik mind set. And ours.



Feed the birds

Tips to reduce bacterial outbreaks among birds at your feeders



BACKGROUND

During late winter and early spring, large flocks of redpolls often visit bird feeders. Redpolls’ habitat of eating and defecating in the same spot set the stage for a classic example of disease transmission. Many strains of bacteria occur naturally in birds. As you increase the number of birds using a feeder, the odds of one of those birds carrying harmful bacteria increase. Redpolls pick up the bacteria when they consume seed that has been in contact with contaminated feces.



Symptoms of infected birds include signs of stress such as: shivering, puffing out of feathers, drooping head and/or wings, loss of appetite and appearing “tame” or easily approached. Once birds are infected, they cannot be treated. If you find a dead bird, use a plastic bag or gloves to pick it up and put it in the trash. If you feel uncomfortable about the chance of exposing yourself, your pets, or your kids to possible infection, take your feeders down until the large flocks move on. The birds will find other sources of food.

MAINTENANCE NOTES to provide a safe feeding environment

Try to use birdfeeders that can be easily washed and disinfected. Those made with plastic or metal are best.

Keep them clean! Rinse your feeder in a 10% bleach solution twice a month to kill microorganisms found in bird feces and be sure to keep seeds fresh. This is especially important when large numbers of birds are visiting your feeder and when temperatures climb above zero. Check for mold and do not use seeds that have been stored for extended periods of time. Old seeds and hulls should be swept up to avoid the build up of pathogen communities and water should be changed regularly.

Follow these simple steps to clean and disinfect your birdfeeders. If possible, avoid washing bird feeders in your sink as bacteria can spread.

1. Disassemble all parts and wash with hot, soapy water
2. Rinse with clean water
3. Soak all parts for at least 10 minutes in a 10% bleach solution.
4. Rinse with clean water & allow to dry.

The same process applies to bird baths as well. Change water frequently and disinfect with a 10% bleach solution at least twice a month.

Remember to wash your hands with hot, soapy water.

National Audubon Society Membership, \$20

Membership includes both National Audubon Society and the local chapter, Arctic Audubon Society. You will receive National Audubon's magazine, *Audubon*, and postcard notices or newsletters from Arctic Audubon Society.

Name: _____

Address: _____ A52

City

State

Zip

Amount enclosed: \$_____ (make check payable to National Audubon Society)

Send to: Arctic Audubon Society, PO Box 82098, Fairbanks, AK 99708

Chapter Only Membership, \$10

For membership in Arctic Audubon only, make check payable to Arctic Audubon Society. You will receive postcard notices or newsletters from the Chapter.

Arctic Audubon Society publishes postcard notices or newsletters for its members monthly fall through spring. National Audubon Society (NAS) dues are \$20 and includes local chapter membership. Chapter only membership is \$10 and includes the newsletter.

Local Bird Sightings Reported on **Boreal Birder**

[http://groups.yahoo.com/
group/BorealBirder/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BorealBirder/)

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 181
Fairbanks AK

Arctic Audubon Society
PO Box 82098
Fairbanks, AK 99708



Upcoming Events—Mark Your Calendar

National Park BioBlitzes presentation by Derek Sikes, Monday, February 6th, 7 pm, Noel Wien Library Auditorium

Monday, March 6th, 7 pm, *How birds find their way: short stories of long-distance Alaskan migrants*, by Ed Murphy, Noel Wien Library Auditorium

Monday, April 3rd, 7 pm, *Exploring the West Coast of South America* by Dave Shaw, Noel Wien Library Auditorium

Final Saturday Fairbanks FeederCount: March 4th, 2016

Spring Field Trips:

April 15: Field trip to Delta Junction area

April 29: Waterfowl Identification

May 13: Shorebird Identification

May 27: Songbird Identification (birding by ear)

Arctic Audubon Board of Directors

President: Sherry Lewis (479-0848)
Vice President: Gail Mayo (479-2954)
Secretary: Paulette Wille (479-3688)
Treasurer: Mary Zalar (479-4547)
Education: Joyce Potter (479-3523)
Conservation: Dan McGauhey (451-0776)
Programs: Gail Mayo (479-2954)
Melissa Sikes (374-2826)
Newsletter: Mary Zalar (479-4547)
Membership: Mary Zalar (479-4547)
Field Trips: Frank Keim (775-762-3510)
Website: Tricia Blake (388-5930)

website: www.arcticaudubon.org
email: arcticaudubon@gmail.com