

December 2011

Audubon Alaska eNews

Dear Friend,

As the holidays approach, birders look forward to a special event: the Audubon Christmas Bird Count! Read more about the Christmas Count, some early presents Santa gave Alaska birders, and more in the December Audubon Alaska eNews.

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'Tis the Season for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count

From Ketchikan to Prudhoe Bay to Shemya Island in the Aleutians, every year Alaskans bundle up and gather together to celebrate the holiday season...by braving the elements for the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. This year Tok and Prudhoe Bay lead the way, doing their counts on December 14, the first day of the Christmas Bird Count window (December 14–January 5). The majority of Alaska's counts fell on December 17. See the [Christmas Bird Count Calendar](#) on the Audubon Alaska website for a list of locations and dates.

There are more birds than you might expect in Alaska in the winter. The 1,009 observers who participated in the Christmas Bird Count last year tallied 152 species, and 134,016 individual birds (although the number of species was near record, the number of birds was below the five-year average). One of the most surprising results was the expansion of Eurasian Collared-Doves. This species appeared for the first time on Mitkof Island in Southeast Alaska on the Christmas Bird Count two years ago. Last year, observers found a total of 41 doves on six different counts, including one bird as far north as Cordova. What else did the last count reveal? Read the [detailed results of last year's Christmas Bird Count](#).

This year marked the 112th Christmas Bird Count. Alaska has held counts for nearly 70 years—since before statehood! Mr. Whitekeys, President of Anchorage Audubon, [presents the history of the Christmas Bird Count](#) in his...unique...style on the Anchorage evening news. It's a hoot!

**Oil Drilling in the Arctic Ocean Gains Momentum...
*Upcoming Opportunity to Speak Up for the Arctic Ocean***

Recently, the Department of the Interior approved Shell Oil's plan to drill for oil in the Arctic Ocean during the summer of 2012, despite the widely recognized inability of the industry to clean up a spill in the Arctic's extreme conditions.

As you read this, Audubon Alaska is joining with Earthjustice in a legal challenge to block the proposed drilling. In addition to the well-documented oil spill "response gap" in the Arctic Ocean, there is also a large gap in the scientific understanding of Arctic marine ecosystems and how they would be affected by drilling. A great deal more basic scientific research is necessary to understand the true risks and consequences of oil development in the Arctic Ocean.

The ocean coast along Alaska's North Slope provides vital habitat for many iconic wildlife species including polar bears, walrus, beluga whales, ice seals, and birds that migrate south to various points around the globe. Next month there will be an important public comment opportunity about the future of the Arctic Ocean—there is a pending plan to lease even *more* places for oil development. We'll need your help! Preventing additional oil and gas lease sales until spill response and data gaps are addressed is critical.

Keep an eye out for an action alert in January!

Rare Birds Are Holiday Treats in Alaska

The last month has blown in rare birds that had Alaska birders, and a few from outside the state, scrambling to see them. Two types of Asian thrushes turned up in unexpected places.

The Redwing gobbling up a mountain ash berry. Photo by Beth Peluso



On November 15, Carol Griswold in Seward spotted a Redwing, the first ever to show up in Alaska. Foraging on mountain ash berries in a particular yard, sometimes poking through seaweed on the beach, the Redwing lingered for about a week and a half, a special treat for birders. Some of the Audubon Alaska staff

converged with people from Anchorage and Fairbanks, and others who flew in from Juneau and Kodiak (and one from Texas), to enjoy the visitor from another continent. The Redwing even made it into an [Alaska Public Radio story](#).

A few weeks later, reports of a Dusky Thrush, another Asian visitor, surfaced in Anchorage. A more elusive bird, Audubon Alaska staff members trooped out to the wilds of Anchorage and were fortunate enough to see this bird as well. The Dusky Thrush spent time mixed in with a large flock of American Robins, who were roaming through neighborhoods with mountain ash trees. Although the Dusky Thrush wasn't spotted the day of the Anchorage Christmas Bird Count, there were reports that fit into Count Week! That's a fabulous record for Alaska's counts. (The link to Mr. Whitekeys' history lesson in the Christmas Bird Count story includes a photo of the Dusky Thrush.)

Who knows what other rarities the Christmas Bird Count will rustle up in Alaska?

The Season of Giving

Audubon Alaska can only accomplish our conservation goals with the help of supporters like you. Whether it's protecting Teshekpuk Lake from oil and gas lease sales, or creating innovative ways to determine marine Important Bird Areas, your support is the building block for all that Audubon Alaska does. In the next year, Audubon Alaska will be working on projects such as supporting the US Forest Service's "Transition Plan" to keep logging out of old growth and roadless areas, while moving to sustainable second-growth harvest. Since exploratory drilling in the Arctic Ocean is slated for next summer, we will continue our efforts to protect critical wildlife habitat.

In this season of giving, if you haven't yet, we hope you will consider a tax-deductible donation to Audubon Alaska. We thank you for your dedication!

You can [donate online](#) to make sure your contribution falls within 2011 (especially if you want to use a credit card). You can also mail checks to Audubon Alaska, 441 West Fifth Avenue, Suite 300, Anchorage, AK 99501—but it must be postmarked by December 31!

WatchList Quiz

How many [Alaska WatchList](#) species have "red" or "green" in their names?

Hint: You'll have to click on the WatchList link to count!

PRIZES: Email your answer to me at bpeluso@audubon.org by January 6, and I'll do a drawing for 3 prizewinners. This prize will be a 2012 Alaska Migratory Bird calendar.

LAST MONTH'S ANSWER: The answer to last month's quiz question "What [Alaska WatchList](#) species winters almost entirely in one large flock in ice-free waters of the Bering Sea?" is... Spectacled Eider

Happy holidays and enjoy your winter birding,
Beth Peluso

PS You've received this email because, at one point or another, you shared your email address with Audubon. If you'd rather not receive emails from me, just let me know.