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Owl booklet published for Birds of Prey Week

Governor Bill Sheffield proclaimed the week of September 7 through 13, 1986 as the third annual Alaska Birds of Prey Conservation Week. "Birds of prey are a valuable wildlife resource that enrich our lives in Alaska in numerous ways; they are important components of wildlife communities in the state, and they are



good indicators of environmental quality," said Sheffield in this proclamation.

Each year since 1984, when a National Birds of Prey Conservation Week was declared by President Reagan, the Nongame Wildlife Program has coordinated efforts of a number of state and federal agencies, as well as private organizations and individuals, to focus public attention on the value of birds of prey in wildlife communities. There are 23 different birds of prey (raptors) regularly found in Alaska. This diverse group of Alaska raptors includes 14 species of hawks, falcons, and eagles, and 9 different species of owls. Our efforts have been to provide educational and informational materials splendid birds.

This year's major effort was to produce The Alaska Owlmanac — a sequel to last year's handy dandy hawk* handbook. The Owlmanac is a booklet featuring the state's nine species of owls: the Great Gray Owl, Great Horned Owl, Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl, Northern Hawk-owl, Boreal Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Western Screech-owl, and Northern Pygmy-owl. It is available from the offices of Alaska Birds of Prey Conservation Week sponsoring agencies: Alaska Center for the Environment; Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Game Division); Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation: Alaska Falconers' Association; Alaska Natural History Association; Alaska Wildlife and Natural History Museum; Arctic (Fairbanks), Juneau, and Anchorage chapters of the National Audubon Society; National Park Service; Sierra Club; Southeast Alaska Conservation Council; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Forest Service; and Wildlife Federation of Alaska.

In addition, a cassette tape of owl calls was produced because owls are more often heard than seen, and learning their calls makes identification easier. The tape can be ordered with the coupon printed in the Owlmanac, or see the adjacent article.

With tight budgets in both the public and private sectors this year, we are especially grateful for the numerous donations made by private individuals who support the efforts being made on behalf of Alaska's birds of prey.

Who's whooo in the night

Learn to identify Alaska's owls by their call. *Who's Whooo in the Night* is a fourminute cassette tape with calls of seven of Alaska's owls: Great Gray, Great Horned, Northern Hawk-owl, Boreal, Northern Saw-whet, Western Screechowl, and North Pygmy-owl. For your copy of this cassette, simply mail your request with a check or money order in the amount of \$4.50 (includes postage and handling) for each tape to:

ALAŠKA SCAVENGERS 174 S. Franklin Street Upstairs Emporium Mall Juneau, Alaska 99801





Winter bird feeding

If you haven't gotten around to it already, now is the time to spruce up your bird feeders for the coming winter. Some birds may visit feeders during the summer, but winter is the easiest time to attract

a number of birds because natural food supplies are least abundant then. Insect-eating birds, such as chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers, are attracted by suet (animal fat). Peanut butter mixed with melted suet and corn meal or rolled oats is also good. Seed-eating species, like redpolls, siskins, crossbills, and grosbeaks prefer sunflower seeds, millet, thistle seeds, or various other seeds. The small black sunflower seeds sold in bulk at feed stores are a favorite of many species, even attracting insect-eaters such as chickadees. Alaska Wildlife Watcher's Report No.1, *Winter Bird Feeding in Alaska*, provides detailed information on types of feeders, where to place them, and which foods are attractive to specific types of birds. This report, like others in the series, is available free at Fish and Game (ADF&G) offices.

Residents of the Fairbanks area are invited to join in an effort to monitor populations of winter birds by counting birds at their feeders. Twenty-seven respondents reported a total of 1,429 birds of 10 different species late last winter. Redpolls accounted for three quarters of the total, Blackcapped Chickadees were second, followed by Boreal Chickadees, Gray Jays, Downy Woodpeckers, Pine Grosbeaks, and Hairy Woodpeckers. One person reported a Brown Creeper and a Dark-eyed Junco at her feeders, and another saw a Three-toed Woodpecker on his porch railing, though it did not use a feeder. This winter we will conduct three counts — in early, mid, and late winter. If you would like to participate, send in the coupon inside this newsletter or call John Wright at the Fairbanks ADF&G office (456-5156).

Loon watch successful



Nearly 100 volunteers participated in last summer's Loon Watch program. Observations were gathered from all Anchorage area lakes (Potter Marsh to Peters Creek) and 113 lakes in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. Preliminary tabulations are 5 chicks (3 Pacific, 2 Common) survived in the Anchorage area from 10 breeding pairs, and 28 chicks (7 Pacific, 21 Common) survived from 67 breeding pairs on the Mat-Su lakes surveyed from Sutton to Willow. A more detailed report will be sent to all the volunteers this fall. The Loon Watch will continue next year with more emphasis on reducing disturbance at loon nest sites. If you want to join the growing numbers of Loon Watch volunteers in the Anchorage and Mat-Su area, call 267-2149.



Nancy Tankersley (left), nongame biologist, presents volunteer recognition patches to three of the most active Loon Watch participants — (left to right) Barbara Passage, Gary Nilson and Elise Scheffel.

Bats in Alaska??

Although five different species of bats are known to occur in Alaska, they're certainly not at the top of the list when Alaska's rich wildlife resources are discussed. Even where bats are relatively common, Alaskans are often surprised when they discover these flying mosquito traps foraging in their backyard. Little attention is paid except in cases where bats have taken up residence in occu-



pied buildings. Even then, their presence usually leads to questions concerning eradication rather than questions concerning biological facts.

The five bat species known to occur in the state belong to the order Chiroptera ("hand-wing") and the family Vespertilionidae ("evening bats"). They are largely nocturnal, usually feeding on flying insects. The most common and wide-ranging bat is the little brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*). Two other myotis species occur in Alaska (the long-legged myotis, *M. volans*, and Keen's myotis, *M. keeni*). All three species prefer to roost in colonies in abandoned or occupied buildings, but are sometimes found roosting alone in trees or rock crevices. Because of relatively subtle differences, they are extremely difficult to distinguish from each other, and should be sent to a qualified expert for verification. All three myotis species weigh only about ½ ounce (9 grams).

It is suspected that the long-legged and little brown myotis probably migrate to warmer climates for the winter. The Keen myotis, however, may spend the winter in Alaska in hibernation. Winter records are needed to confirm this suspicion. Accurate documentation of the range of these bats is lacking throughout much of the state.

The other two bat species known to occur in Alaska are the silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*) and the big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*). Confirmed records indicate that these two species are only presently known from the southeastern panhandle of the state. As in the case for the myotis group, these two large bats (12-14 grams) are also nocturnal and insectivorous. Unlike the others, however, the silver-haired and the big brown bats are generally more solitary in their roosting and foraging habits.

Most Alaskan bat species produce one or two young annually, generally born in June or July. Within a month of birth, the young are generally able to fend for themselves. Some banded bat specimens have recorded life spans of over 20 years.

As mosquito eradicators, bats have no equal. A colony of 500 little brown bats can easily consume half a million mosquitos in a single night. The relative scarcity of bats in Alaska, coupled with the low population density of man, has led to the fact that the rabies virus has never been isolated from bats from the state. However, as is the case with other wild animals, they should be handled only with extreme caution.

If you have questions concerning bats in Alaska or if you find specimens or sightings, please contact the nongame program of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Anchorage (267-2201).

Wildlife Education Page



Sue Quinlan, nongame biologist and author of Alaska Wildlife Week, points out woodpecker holes to Fairbanks teachers at the March workshop.

Teacher training courses offered on wildlife ecology

Two teacher training courses were offered in both Fairbanks and Anchorage last spring to train teachers for use of the 1986 Alaska Wildlife Week packet, and related educational materials on Alaskan ecology. One course exposed teachers to activities from the wildlife-oriented curricula from Alaska Wildlife Week, Project Wild, Alaska Sea/River Week, and CLASS Project. In this class, teachers explored the outdoors and found that even with snow on the ground and cold wind, you can have fun and find all kinds of interesting things outdoors - from plants to fungi, squirrel middens and even bacteria. Indoors, teachers acted out symbioses, became entangled in a food web, and played food chain tag. Mineral cycling became clearer through a game of energy and mineral "sandwiches." It took a few trials before teachers realized that they couldn't all be top carnivores and expect the ecosystem to work! After a bit of jostling, and an exhaustion of minerals, some relented to become the all important detritivores and break down the mineral and energy 'sandwiches' so plants could continue photosynthesis. By the end of the class, teachers had many tried and true ideas, plus an arm load of materials to keep their classes interested in and learning about the outdoors for years to come.

The second course stressed material about Alaskan ecology, rather than activities. Through lectures and slide presentations by local experts, teachers discovered more about local ecosystems and the variety of organisms that exist in them. After a 2 hour session on fungi, several commented that they never thought fungi were interesting before, but now wanted to learn even more! On a final day's outdoor scavenger hunt, participating teachers proved they'd learned to look with new eyes by locating and identifying local examples of the 5 kingdoms of living things, predation, herbivory, competition, photosynthesis, commensalism, parasitism, and mutualism. "Its amazing what is out here when you know how to look!" commented one enthusiastic teacher.

Both courses were well-received by participating teachers. They felt they had gained a better background knowledge as well as useable activities for classroom teaching of the subject matter. Best of all, these enthusiastic teachers shared their new knowledge and activities with their 70 classrooms! Look for more graduate credit courses offered on Alaska Wildlife Week themes and activities each spring in Anchorage and Fairbanks.

Alaska Wildlife Week 1987 Alaska's forests—more than just trees

Alaska contains 119 million acres of forested land including significant portions of two of the great forests of the world: the Pacific coastal forest and the boreal forest. The Pacific coastal forest extends along the Alaska coast from Kodiak to Ketchikan and down the coast through British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and northern California. The boreal forest covers most of central Alaska and stretches around the world through Canada, Scandinavia, and Siberia. The Alaska Wildlife Week 1987 educational packet will open the door for teachers and students to learn more about these two great forests. How and why are they different? What are the largest living things on earth and how do they make forests special? What do forests have to do with the climate, water supplies, the air we breathe? If you don't know, perhaps you'll be interested in Alaska Wildlife Week 1987, too.

By using the 1987 Alaska Wildlife Week materials, students and teachers will discover that it isn't necessary to go to Africa, or even the Lower 48 to understand the interrelationships among living things and the environment — its going on all around us.

The 1987 Alaska Wildlife Week packet includes information on well-known forest wildlife, like deer, moose, squirrels, woodpeckers, and bears, but also uncovers some of the little known, but amazing organisms that also live in Alaska's forests. Have you ever heard of a fungi-gardening beetle? Or a wasp that lays its eggs inside caterpillars? How can a fungi digest its food outside its body, and why wouldn't we have blueberries if we didn't have fungi? The primary objective of the 1987 Alaska Wildlife Week packet is to create an awareness and appreciation of forests as living tapestry, woven by a myriad of interactions among non-living and living things.

Its secondary objective is to help students recognize the many important values of forests and their responsibility as joint owners and caretakers of our vast public forests. As coowners of the forest, we are all decision-makers who can help determine the future of Alaska's forests. In order to be responsible owners and caretakers, we must be well-informed. In the final sections of the 1987 packet, the values of forests as wildlife habitats, watersheds, air purifiers, climate modifiers, recreational areas, and as sources of fuel, food, building materials, paper, rayon, and a host of other valuable products are discussed. Older students will explore some of Alaska's forest management issues, including clear-cutting in southeast Alaska and fire management in the boreal forest.

The filmstrip, posters, and educational packet on Alaska's forests are due out in early winter. They will be mailed to all the schools in Alaska for use before, during, and/or after the fifth annual Alaska Wildlife Week, April 19-25, 1987. We hope you will join students and teachers in celebrating this event by learning more about Alaska's forests — they really are more than just trees!

Guide to birds now available

Four years ago, the Nongame Wildlife Program and the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Alaska cooperated to publish *Alaska's Birds* — *A Guide for Youth Groups*. Our first printing was of 500 books, which were sent to youth group leaders and selected educators throughout Alaska. The book was well-received and widely used. The bird book was the most requested publication of the Cooperative Extension Service in 1983. However, the 500 copies soon ran out, and no funds were available for revisions or reprinting. Happily, however, funds did become available this past spring and the book was revised and reprinted. It is now for sale, for \$8, by the Cooperative Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The booklet includes introductory chapters on birds and their identification, followed by illustrated chapters on waterbirds, hawks and owls, grouse, long-legged, and wading birds, as well as perching and other birds. Each of these chapters includes line drawings of common Alaskan species and information about their identification and habits. Each chapter includes a list of projects suitable for 4-H fairs, scout badges, or further learning. A chapter on bird migration discusses where many Alaskan birds go, how scientists have learned migration routes, and how birds navigate on migration. The final chapters in the booklet include information on bird feeding, bird houses, and landscaping for birds.

'Fish-hawks' in the Interior

It appeared to be a very good year for ospreys nesting in interior Alaska. This past summer marked the fourth year of our osprey survey and nestling banding project. This year, as in the past, our efforts have centered around the Tetlin Reservation and adjacent Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge near Tok, and in the Susitna Valley near Talkeetna.

This summer two aerial surveys were completed, followed by ground visits to nests that contained young.

John Wright was able to get a thorough nest survey completed in mid-May, early in the nesting season. The initial flight in May is to determine the location and number of nesting osprey pairs. It is followed with another in late July or early August to count the young produced. Two surveys improve our knowledge of nesting failures and thus strengthen our estimates of osprey productivity in Alaska.

Over fifty nests were located and checked for breeding activity in mid-May. Thirty-one nests were determined to be active, that is, a pair of adults were observed at the nest or in the immediate vicinity. During the last week of July we flew the area again and found sixteen nests containing a total of thirty-six young ospreys.

Nestlings were banded with standard, aluminum leg bands. The banding of young can provide valuable information on age-specific mortality, longevity, migration routes, and wintering areas of ospreys. Climbing into the nests, usually located in the tops of mature spruce trees, and attempting to band the young birds provides quite a challenge and often some excitement. The tree climbers this year included Jack Whitman, John Wright, Jeff Hughes, and volunteer, Ted Swem. Twenty-one young ospreys were banded without incident.

Two addled eggs were also recovered from active nests and we will attempt to determine why the eggs didn't hatch normally. The eggs were sent to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service facilities at Patuxent, Maryland for pesticide analysis. We are particularly interested to know if environmental contaminants were to blame.

We intend to continue our efforts to learn more about ospreys nesting in Alaska. If you know of any osprey nests in Alaska, we would be most interested in receiving any information about them.

Artificial nest platform at Clearwater Lake

A man-made nesting platform was placed in a white spruce tree at Clearwater Lake this April in an attempt to attract nesting Ospreys. Clearwater Lake, near Delta Junction, is spring-fed and known for the large number of waterfowl it attracts each spring during migration. It is also an excellent area to view moose and other animals common to wetlands in the boreal forest of Alaska. An osprey nest on nearby Shaw Creek had been destroyed in a storm the previous spring and it was hoped those birds might be enticed to move to a ready-made site at Clearwater lake. In the month following construction of the nest, ospreys were seen fishing on the lake. On the 10th of May



a Bald Eagle was observed chasing and osprey, attempting to steal the fish the osprey clutched in its talons. Then on May 19, a Bald Eagle was seen on the nest, incubating, with its mate perched nearby. Surveys of eagles on the adjacent Tanana River found that a regularly-used Bald Eagle nest a mile north of Clearwater Lake had fallen down. The eagles from that nest likely were the ones that had moved into the artificial nest. Two eaglets were banded in the Clearwater Lake nest on July 31. About the same time, a new osprey nest was reported on Shaw Creek, a short distance upstream from the nest that had blown down in 1985 — so the Shaw Creek ospreys appear to be doing fine without any help from us.

Trumpeter swan eggs transported to Minnesota

In June, the Nongame Program of Minnesota and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service collected eggs of Trumpeter Swans from the Minto Flats west of Fairbanks to begin a swan restoration project in Minnesota. On June 10, 50 eggs were taken from 17 nests which held an average of 5 eggs per nest. At least 2 fertile eggs were left in each nest. The eggs flew south in first class seats (packed in special, heated suitcases) to Minnesota, arriving within 26 hours after the first egg was taken from the wild. By June 28, 43 of the 50 eggs had hatched successfully. The cygnets hatched this year are scheduled for release in spring 1988 in the Detroit Lakes region of western Minnesota. Additional eggs will be collected in Alaska the next two summers.

Bald Eagles are also taken from Alaska to replace depleted populations in New York and California. Reintroductions such as these are common projects of nongame programs in the lower 48. We in Alaska are fortunate to have an abundance of wildlife so that we can provide animals for reintroduction to areas where they have been extirpated.



Inland cormorant colony closed to visitors

In 1981, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) began documenting breeding populations and productivity of gulls and cormorants in southcentral Alaska. One such colony is located at Lake Louise, approximately 32 miles northwest of Glennallen, and is located on a one-half acre island known locally as "Bird Island." This grasscovered island supports breeding populations of herring gulls and is the northernmost known colony of doublecrested cormorants.

Two visits are made to the colony each year by USFWS biologists. These are usually in early June immediately following egg laying, and again in late July just before the gull chicks begin to fledge. Usually during the June visit, all adult cormorants and gulls are counted as accurately as possible from a boat. Biologists then land at the colony and search for gull nests and record the number of eggs in each nest. Counting is done as quickly as possible to avoid disturbance to the nesting cormorants. Double-crested Cormorants nesting on Bird Island are particularly susceptible to predation by gulls. Unattended cormorant eggs or young are quickly taken by the ever-alert gulls. Any disturbance that causes the cormorants to leave their nests and take flight usually results in a failed nesting attempt for the year.

Wildlife biologists from the Nongame Wildlife Program assisted the USFWS during the late July trip this past summer. During this visit, surveyors counted all immature cormorants and gulls from near-shore in a boat. Flightless, immature gulls, swimming in the water were approached by boat, captured with a long-handled dipnet, and banded with a USFWS metal leg band.

This summer, after receiving complaints about human disturbance of nesting birds, Bird Island was closed to visitors during the nesting season. Public assistance and cooperation in reducing disturbance of nesting cormorants should ensure the future of this unique breeding colony at Lake Louise.

Raptor nesting surveys



The Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management worked together this past summer conducting raptor nesting surveys in northern and northwestern Alaska. These surveys were designed to determine the distribution, abundance, and productivity of birds of prey including common ravens nesting along selected rivers in these areas.

Surveys were conducted along the Wulik, Kivalina, Ipewik, and Kukpuk Rivers in northwestern Alaska. Observers floating in rafts checked cliffs and steep bluffs along the river for nesting raptors with binoculars and spotting scopes. Three rivers on the north slope, between the Canning and Sagavanirktok Rivers were surveyed by Bob Ritchie of Alaska Biological Research, working as a volunteer for the Nongame Wildlife Program. Bob completed an aerial and foot reconnaissance of suitable cliffs in this area.

Rough-legged Hawks were the raptors most commonly observed. We also encountered Gyrfalcons, Golden Eagles, Common Ravens, Northern Harriers, and an occasional Merlin. Active nest sites were often visited on foot to collect prey remains and band nestlings. The information will assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with raptor management and aid the state in land use allocation and planning.

Nongame program survives budget cuts



There's bad news and there's good news the bad news is the Department of Fish and Game's budget was severely reduced this fiscal year. This necessitated cuts in programs and personnel throughout the department including the Nongame Wildlife Program. The good news is the Nongame Wildlife Program will survive — a bit leaner and working more efficiently than ever! We've tightened our belts but remain confident we can maintain an effective program throughout the state. Thanks for your support.

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Suggestions:

I want to participate in winter bird feeder counts in Fairbanks. Daytime phone number ______

Send me _____ copy(ies) of a Guide to Wildlife Viewing in Alaska. Enclosed in a check or money order for \$12.95 each (includes shipping charge). Please send to Anchorage office.



A book for wildlife watchers

Looking for a holiday gift for your favorite naturelover? How about *A Guide to Wildlife Viewing in Alaska*, a full-color 170 page soft-bound book written by three Fish and Game wildlife biologists? It's available by mail from the Anchorage office (see coupon) or from most major bookstores for \$12.95. For quantities of 20 or more, the price is \$8.95 each.



State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game Nongame Wildlife Program

Jeff Hughes, Coordinator Nancy Tankersley, Biologist 333 Raspberry Road Anchorage, AK 99518 344-0541

John Wright, Biologist Sue Quinlan, Biologist, Alaska Wildlife Week 1300 College Road Fairbanks, AK 99701 456-5156 BULK RATE U.S. POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO. 145 ANCHORAGE AK 99518

