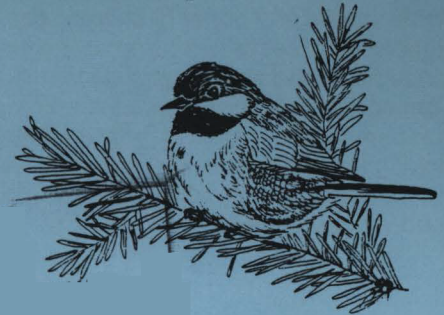


WILDLIFE WATCHERS' NEWSLETTER



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NONGAME WILDLIFE PROGRAM GAME DIVISION ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

Peregrine Falcon Surveys

For the second year in a row, the Nongame Wildlife Program conducted surveys of endangered Peregrine Falcons under a cooperative agreement with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Potential nesting habitat in coastal western Alaska was searched in July 1987 with encouraging results.

Six pairs of Peregrine Falcons were found last summer. This was in an area that historically has supported only a few nesting peregrines at widely scattered locations. Only one pair was found in earlier surveys of the region in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Those surveys occurred at the time when many peregrine populations were reaching the lowest point of a dramatic decline attributed to chemical contamination by pesticides. By restricting the use of harmful pesticides and establishing ambitious recovery programs, the decline was stopped and turned around in many parts of the United States.

Closely monitored peregrine populations in northern and interior Alaska began recovering in the late 1970s and continue to increase in the 1980s. The results of this summer's survey indicate that peregrines in coastal, western Alaska are experiencing a similar increase.

Information from the survey will also be put to use in land use decisions. The Northwest Alaska Area Plan is currently being developed by the state, with oil leasing offshore and onshore mining, and other large scale developments envisioned in the region. Information on peregrine nesting habitats will be used to protect this endangered species.



fat). Peanut butter mixed with melted suet and cornmeal or rolled oats is also good. Spread it on a pine cone and hang for an attractive feeder.



Seed-eating species, like redpolls, siskins, crossbills, and grosbeaks prefer sunflower seeds, millet, thistle seeds, or various other seeds. The small unsalted 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. Reports are available free at Fish and Game offices.

If you're an "early bird," winter is a good time to clean out or build bird nesting boxes for spring. Boreal and Saw-whet Owls use nest boxes as early as February. For more information, get a free copy of "Birdhouses for Alaska-A Guide to Building and Placing Birdhouses" available at Fish and Game offices.

Placing and maintaining feeders and houses at a nursing home, hospital, or school is a good community service project for your service organization.



Winter Bird Feeding and Birdhouses

Dreading another case of those winter blahs? Afraid cold weather will get you down again? Try backyard bird feeding to refresh your spirits. 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



Bird Counts at Fairbanks Feeders

This winter marks the second full season for bird counts in the Fairbanks area. Volunteers are invited to help monitor winter bird populations by counting birds using their feeders at three times during the winter, beginning in mid-November.

Last winter, 41-46 respondents counted an average of 24-30 birds during each of the three counts. The number of participants was up from the 27 who took part in the first count in March 1986. Overall, fewer birds were seen at feeders in winter '86-87 than during the first count in March '86. This was due to a drop in redpoll numbers.

If the abundance of tree seeds is any indication,

feeders in Fairbanks should be busy this coming winter. White spruce and paper birch trees produced an extraordinary crop of seeds this summer and fall, attracting white-winged crossbills and pine siskins to the Fairbanks area. Coming on the heels of a poor seed crop in 1986 with low numbers of overwintering redpolls, Fairbanks birders are looking forward to the coming winter.

If you would like to take part in the bird count, contact John Wright at the Fairbanks ADF&G office (456-5156).

Loon Watch Update

Monitoring loon nesting success in the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna Valleys continued during the summer of 1987, with the help of more than 100 volunteers. By documenting nesting success and nest sites, and investigating factors that inhibit loon use or successful nesting on a lake, we hope to avoid the fate of six states in the lower 48 that no longer have breeding loons.

Of the 66 lakes and ponds in the greater Anchorage area (Potter Marsh to Eklutna), Common and Pacific Loons were seen on 26 of them. At least eight breeding pairs (two Common, six Pacific) and possibly ten pairs (three Common, seven Pacific) on different lakes successfully raised seven or eight chicks (four Common, three or four Pacific).

Common and Pacific Loon chick production was similar to that from Anchorage in 1985, and higher than in 1986, although there may be fewer nesting pairs of Pacifics. This indicates that the greater Anchorage area has relatively stable populations. However, because of the small numbers of breeding pairs, these populations are very susceptible to an irreversible decline in future years.

In the Mat-Su Valley, observations were made on 155 lakes and ponds, mostly along the road system between Sutton and Willow. Common, Pacific, or Red-throated Loons were seen on 113 of these waters, while 80 hosted breeding pairs. This occupancy rate is similar to that found in 1986, although the reasons for loons not using certain lakes are not clear.

There were 36 known breeding Common Loon pairs that raised 31 chicks. In addition, there were 27 more probable breeding pairs, from which an additional maximum of 31 chicks may have survived. Even if only a total of 31 chicks survived from these 63 pairs, the survival rate is still comparable to stable loon populations in other parts of North America.

Also in the Mat-Su area there were 12 known breeding Pacific Loon pairs that raised nine chicks. In addition, there were six more probable breeding pairs, from which an additional maximum of seven chicks may have survived. Even if only a total of nine chicks survived from these 18 pairs, the survival rate is still adequate to maintain the current population size.

Red-throated Loons were only reported from two Mat-Su lakes, and no breeding pairs or chicks were reported.

Floating signs to deter lake users from loon nesting areas, constructed by volunteer Matt Miller, were placed

on five busy recreational lakes this year where disturbance was thought to be a factor inhibiting chick survival. Two of the lakes were in Anchorage (DeLong and Little Campbell), and three in the Mat-Su area (Anderson, Flat, and Long near Willow). None of these lakes had chicks surviving last year, and two of them (Anderson and Flat) had not had chicks for four or five years, although a breeding pair was present each year. Fortunately, all five of these lakes had chicks surviving this year, and we appreciate the cooperation of lake users in heeding these signs during incubation and early chick rearing.

However, that was not the end of the story for the set of chicks on Anderson Lake in Wasilla. See the following article on "Loon Rescue Succeeds."

We appreciate all the help and support of the people who volunteered for Loon Watch 1987. A more detailed report on Loon Watch 1987 will be sent to all volunteers soon.

If you are interested in joining the Loon Watch for 1988, please contact Nancy Tankersley at 267-2149, or send in the coupon in this newsletter. We still have need for observers on many Mat-Su lakes between Sutton and Willow.

Loon Rescue Succeeds

Each fall, there are migratory waterbirds that do not leave lakes before freeze-up. This is not a problem for dabbling ducks, like mallards, that can become airborne directly off the ice or from a small puddle of water. However, it is a serious problem for diving ducks and birds like loons that need a long stretch of open water for take-off. Each year, some birds die from this occurrence, and it is a sad, but normal part of nature.

This year, two loon chicks on Anderson Lake in Wasilla were still there when it froze over in late October.



One suffered from a wing deformity and could not fly; and the other, although healthy, did not fly. The residents were

very interested in saving these chicks, since none had been raised on that lake for four or five years. However, the new ice was not safe for walking or canoe use. Three of the residents decided to try taxiing a float plane through the ice and scooping them up with a dip net. This was a successful tactic, and then they turned them over to Fish and Game.

We gave the loons a free ride to Dr. James Scott's office, a veterinarian trained in wildlife rehabilitation, and ultimately released them after banding on winter habitat near Seward.

Unfortunately, not all birds in this situation can be rescued, nor is it desirable for fish and wildlife agencies to allocate a lot of time to rescuing individual animals. Fortunately, there are people in the general public who are interested and willing to assist.

Fish and Game and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintain a list of individuals with wildlife rehabilitation permits. If you encounter wildlife in need of assistance, contact either of these agencies for information on how to contact a nearby wildlife rehabilitator.

Wildlife Education Page

Alaska Wildlife Week — Past, Present, and Future.

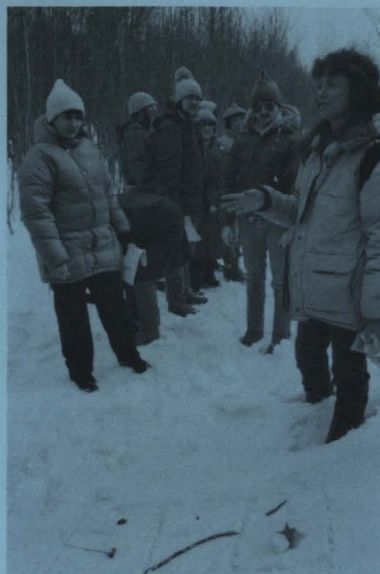
Past. . . The 1987 Alaska Wildlife Week educational packets on Alaska's forests were delivered to schools in March, and all indications are that they were well received by teachers. Twenty-five teachers in Fairbanks, and 26 in Anchorage participated in college-level courses on material from the packets. Related activities from Project WILD and Project Learning Tree, were also included. Participants viewed the Alaska Wildlife Week filmstrips, learned by participating in activities and games from all the curriculum materials, listened to lectures by local experts, and braved an exploration of the still chilly boreal forest.

The Fairbanks course was jointly taught by Sue Quinlan, Bud Lehnhausen, and Larry Bright and sponsored by Conferences and Continuing Education of the University of Alaska. The course in Anchorage was taught by Nancy Tankersley and Beverly Farfan (USFWS), and accredited by UAA School of Education.

An evaluation on the use of the 1987 packets was delayed until this fall for a variety of reasons. Evaluation forms were sent to all schools in Alaska in mid-October. Please be sure that your school returns the evaluation so that they will be included on the list to receive 1988 materials.

Present. . . Yes, there will be a 1988 Alaska Wildlife Week! The project was reinstated to our budget for another year thanks to the support of many teachers and individuals throughout Alaska. "Alaska's Living Tundra" is the 1988 theme and official week will be April 25-29.

Preparation of the 1988 education packet is now underway. The materials will cover alpine and lowland tundra ecosystems and plant and animal adaptations to tundra environments. The format is similar to the 1987 packet on forests, and will include a poster, teacher's guide, and tundra wildlife cards. As always, the packet will include background information for teachers along with interdisciplinary activities, worksheets, and games. Due to a reduced budget, we will not include a filmstrip this year.



Janet Ady (USFWS) leads an outdoor activity using identification, memory and classification skills at a recent teacher workshop.

Anyone interested in contributing activity ideas or in reviewing the draft materials on Alaska's tundra should write Alaska Wildlife Week, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 1300 College Road, Fairbanks, AK 99701.

A workshop on Alaska Wildlife Week and Project WILD will be presented by Dolores Scott and Sue Quinlan at the Native American Science Education Association Bridges Conference in Anchorage this February. Credit courses on the 1988 materials are planned for this spring in Fairbanks and Anchorage. Please send us your name if you are interested in receiving a flyer when the course details are available.

The Future. . . With the completion of the 6th Alaska Wildlife Week unit on tundra, we are planning to begin revising previous packets. If you have any suggestions for improving past materials, methods of revising them, or if you might be interested in participating in reviews, revisions, or field testing of the Alaska Wildlife Week materials, Units 1-6, please contact Sue Quinlan, ADF&G, 1300 College Road, Fairbanks, AK 99701.

Please check appropriate boxes and return this coupon:

☐ Please add my name to your mailing list.

Suggestions:

☐ I have information on Northern Hawk-Owls.

☐ 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 is a check or money order for \$12.95 each (includes shipping charge). Please send to Anchorage office.

☐ I want to participate in Loon Watch 1988 for _____ Lake between Sutton and Willow. Daytime phone number _____.

☐ I have information on Ospreys in Alaska _____

Osprey Banding Update

Ospreys occur nearly worldwide and they commonly nest near waters where they prey primarily on live fish. Although Ospreys can be seen throughout most of Alaska south of the Brooks Range, they are not abundant and we have scant information regarding Ospreys in Alaska. The Nongame Wildlife Program began an inventory and banding project in 1983 to learn more about these magnificent birds of prey.

This past summer concluded the fifth year of our ongoing survey and banding project to determine the distribution, abundance, and productivity of Ospreys nesting in interior Alaska. Our surveys have centered around the Tetlin Reservation and adjacent Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge near Tok. The project consists of two parts: an initial aerial survey to determine the number and location of occupied nests, usually in late May; and a second survey to count young, completed later in the summer prior to the nestlings leaving the nest. Young in accessible nests are also banded with metal leg-bands during the latter trip.

This year we located 26 active Osprey nests, four active Bald Eagle nests, and two active raven nests during the initial survey flown on 28 May. When we returned in late July, 12 of the 26 Osprey nests and three of the four Bald Eagle nests observed in May contained young. Total production included 23 nestling Ospreys and six young eagles. The raven production is not known since their young leave the nest in early July, three to four weeks prior to our second visit.

This summer, Lynn Fisher, a biologist with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bener Jones, a forester with the Bureau of Land Management, provided volunteer assistance to the project by climbing trees to get into nests

and banding young birds. We were able, with Lynn's and Bener's help, to band 23 young Ospreys and six Bald Eagles.

Since 1983, there have been two bands recovered from Ospreys banded during this project. A nestling Osprey banded in August of 1983, was found dead near Roseville, California during November of the same year. The second band return was from Guadalajara, where a nestling banded near Tok in August of 1986, was recovered less than two months later on the southwestern coast of Mexico! We speculate that wintering areas for interior Ospreys are along the coasts of Baja and western Mexico, and possibly into Central America.

During the past five years, we've observed significant differences in the total number of young Ospreys produced each year in the Tetlin area. A thorough analysis of our data reveals a difference in Osprey brood sizes among years. This means that in a good year, nests usually contain two or three young, while in a poor year these same nests produce only one or two young.

It's difficult to explain exactly why this happens but it's apparently not related exclusively to poor spring weather conditions. It's often assumed, as with other breeding birds, particularly waterfowl, that lingering snow and ice conditions and cooler spring temperatures have a great impact on production of young. In Ospreys, overwinter survival of their nests appears to be important. Breeding pairs that build a new nest or extensively remodel an old nest usually produce only one young during that year. However, pairs that return in the spring and find an intact nest, usually produce two or three young.

We hope to learn more about Osprey productivity, wintering areas, and nesting locations in Alaska as we continue the project. If you know of any Osprey nests in Alaska, we would be most interested in getting more information about them.

AVISE BIRD BAND
WRITE WASHINGTON DC USA
1077-37959

***Thanks to Michael Rees for contributing part of his
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