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WILDLIFE WATCHERS' NEWSLETTER

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NONGAME WILDLIFE PROGRAM GAME DIVISION ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

155 Participate in Loon Watch 1988

Loon Watch 1988 was successful at obtaining information on loon nesting efforts at 145 lakes around Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. 155 volunteers participated by submitting observations of loons and chicks on a monthly basis. Volunteer Gary Nilson deserves special mention for the hundreds of hours he spent observing loons on eight lakes.

The number of chicks produced this year in the Mat-Su Valley was the highest recorded in the three years of the survey. Signs posted at lakes near public access points and some nest sites aided in reducing human disturbance of loons. An artificial nesting island, built by volunteer Wayne Williams, was used by a nesting pair of Commons that hatched one egg. Human disturbance and loose dogs had been a problem disturbing their nesting efforts for five years.

Unfortunately, some adult loons in the area did not fare as well. One Pacific Loon died from ingesting an abnormally large number of rocks, one Common died from lead poisoning from ingesting lead fishing sinkers, one Common was shot by a misguided young waterfowl hunter, and another Common was found dying from an unknown cause in a farmer's field. However, these deaths should not adversely impact the loon populations in this area.

A study comparing lakes used by successfully nesting Common Loons to lakes with little or no loon use was begun this year by University of Alaska Fairbanks graduate student Anne Ruggles. This research was supported by funds from the North American Loon Fund, a nonprofit group dedicated to restoring and maintaining loon populations in North America. ADF&G and UAF provided some logistical support.

Preliminary results from lakes studied in the Wasilla area indicate that the amount of fish, shallow water and marshy shoreline are some of the main habitat differences

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Calling All Bird-Feeder Watchers!

Have you ever wondered where the birds at your feeder come from, where they go when they leave, and why bird numbers change from year to year? Do you want to know what birds come to feeders in different parts of North America? *Project FeederWatch* is a new continent-wide survey of bird feeders designed to help answer questions such as these, and you are invited to join.

Project FeederWatch is a cooperative research venture of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Canada's Long Point Bird Observatory, and is in the midst of a successful pilot year with 4,000 participants from all across North America. The project is modelled on a survey run successfully in Ontario for the past 11 years, which has shown that male Evening Grosbeaks winter farther south than females, Black-capped Chickadees are found in low numbers when Evening Grosbeaks are abundant, and numbers of many species at feeders parallel those found on Christmas Bird Counts.

Sound interesting? Project FeederWatch needs thousands of additional observers across the continent to help answer questions about feeder birds on a broad geographic scale. You need not be an expert birder to take part—the project concentrates on common species, and baffling rarities can be ignored. Although counts are made over a one- to two-day period of your choice every other week from November through March, you are not obliged to watch every time, nor must you watch continuously on count days. All observations are recorded on computer-readable forms so that detailed summaries can be provided to participants promptly each season and to insure that the data are readily available for further analyses.

In return for your observations, Project FeederWatch will send you an annual newsletter and report on the season's results, plus 2 issues of "Birdscope," the Laboratory of Ornithology's research newsletter. If you can't take part but would like to receive these publications anyway, you may subscribe to them separately.

Project FeederWatch requires an annual registration fee of $9, which helps to pay for data forms, analysis and preparation and mailing of reports and newsletters. If you would like to participate, send your check for $9 (made payable to "Project FeederWatch") to Project FeederWatch, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Sapsucker Woods, Ithaca, NY 14850. Sign up right away because the season begins in mid-November, 1988.

Sigman Heads Alaska Wildlife Week Project

Marilyn Sigman is the new coordinator for the Alaska Wildlife Week educational project, replacing Sue Quinlan who resigned last spring. Marilyn will work for six months a year in the ADF&G office in Douglas (Juneau), which will allow close coordination with ADF&G's Project WILD coordinator, also based in Juneau. Marilyn may also work on other nongame projects in southeastern Alaska if time permits.

Marilyn has a background in bird and big game studies, and has worked for ADF&G's Division of Habitat for six years. Her past work included monitoring oil and gas development in Interior and Arctic regions, land use planning, and reviewing logging-related impacts to fish and wildlife in Southeast.

Marilyn also has a strong background in wildlife education. She is an active member of the Alaska Natural Resource and Outdoor Education Association (ANROE), a statewide network of environmental educators, and is owner and manager of Scavengers, Alaska's only science education supply company. She has also written wildlife curriculum for the National Wildlife Federation and has led "Seaweek" field trips for Juneau's fourth-graders to the Mendenhall State Game Refuge each spring.

We welcome Marilyn to the nongame staff, and are happy to have such a well-qualified, dedicated project leader for Alaska Wildlife Week.

Ospreys Surveys Continue in Interior

1988 was the sixth consecutive year that ospreys have been surveyed in the Tetlin are of eastern Interior Alaska. The spring survey in late May identified 23 active osprey nests and eight active bald eagle nests. In late July, we returned to assess productivity and band nestlings.

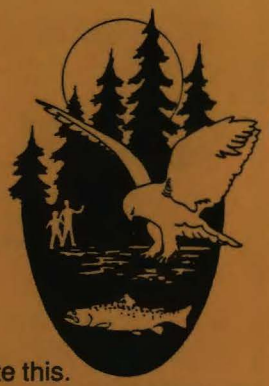
We found 15 of 23 osprey nests and six of eight bald eagle nests with young. The productive osprey nests contained an average of 2.0 young per nest. Twenty-one nestling ospreys and six bald eagles were banded. We greatly appreciate the volunteer assistance of retired ADF&G biologist Raymond Kramer, and ADF&G moose biologist Rod Boertje, who helped climb the nest trees to count and band young.

At the end of July, we traveled to McGrath to look for nesting ospreys along the Kuskokwim River and two of its larger tributaries, the Holitna and Hoholina rivers. Jack Whitman, ADF&G's area biologist in McGrath, had located several nests on those rivers earlier in the summer. We saw several ospreys but could find only two active nests.

Four young were banded, and radio transmitters were attached to three of these nestlings. These small radios will be monitored by experimental remote receivers near Tok and Gulkana to learn more about migration routes of raptors within Alaska as the birds depart for southerly wintering areas.

If you know of any osprey nests or see a number of ospreys during spring or fall migration, we would like to hear the details from you. Contact Jeff Hughes in Anchorage or John Wright in Fairbanks.

"Let's Help Wildlife" Contest for Schools



School classes that use Project WILD and Alaska Wildlife Week materials are invited to compete in a contest by doing a project to help wildlife. Project WILD and Alaska Wildlife Week curricula promote awareness of wildlife leading to responsible action. Any wildlife project submitted should demonstrate this.

Teachers are encouraged to review Project WILD and Alaska Wildlife Week materials for suggestions of meaningful projects. Local Fish and Game biologists may also be consulted for ideas. Projects could include building and posting nest boxes (see ADF&G's brochure), stabilizing a stream bank, or changing some personal habits (e.g. disposing of fishing line properly), that would reduce detrimental effects on wildlife. Projects are to be documented in a scrapbook, and then submitted to ADF&G in April 1989.

Regional winners in four grade categories will be selected from four areas of the state. Regional prizes will be a VIP field trip to a special wildlife area, accompanied by a ADF&G biologist. Regional winners will be entered into a statewide contest, and statewide winning classrooms will be treated to a special VIP trip or prize especially developed for them by ADF&G in conjunction with the annual Alaska Wildlife Week celebration in April.

Any teacher who uses Project WILD and Alaska Wildlife Week materials may enter the contest by submitting the Contest Participation Card from the Wildlife Scrapbook Contest booklet by December 16, 1988. For contest booklets or information, contact Dolores Scott, ADF&G Project WILD Coordinator, Box 3-2000, Juneau, AK 99802, 465-4190.

The Future of Alaska Wildlife Week

With the completion of six units in the Alaska Wildlife Week curriculum, the project will shift focus this year and emphasize distributing, and implementing the curriculum.

The Alaska Wildlife Week packets, which have been distributed free of charge to all schools in the state, have been a popular source of wildlife information and activities which can be used year-round. The unit themes include habitats, wetlands, endangered species, ecology, forests, and tundra, which complement material available in the Alaska Sea/River Week curriculum and Project WILD.

Many of the units are out-of-print and only available in school libraries or on loan from ADF&G offices in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau. We plan to revise and reprint these materials to meet the growing demand, as our budget allows. We also plan on encouraging the use of these materials, through teacher workshops, credit courses, development of cross-references to other wildlife and science curriculum, and integration into school district science studies.

We welcome your ideas for the future direction of Alaska Wildlife Week. Please contact Marilyn Sigman at ADF&G in Juneau (Douglas office) at 465-4265.

Peregrine Falcon Surveys Continue in Western Alaska

A thorough follow-up survey for peregrine falcons along the coast of western Alaska resulted in the discovery of additional nests. With federal funding from the Endangered Species program of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Nongame Wildlife Program conducted a more complete search of the coast from Unalakleet north to Cape Prince of Wales — an area where a surprising number of nests had been found in 1987.

Surveys conducted in the late 60s and early 70s found only one pair present in this area. Peregrines populations were very low then due to pesticides entering their food chain base and interfering with their reproduction. After the U.S. began restricting the use of pesticides harmful to birds and establishing recovery programs for the endangered peregrine falcons, populations have rebounded in many parts of the U.S.

This past summer, two surveys were conducted, one in June to locate cliff sites occupied by falcons, and a second in early July to determine productivity and to band nestlings. Results from these surveys suggest the local peregrine population is doing very well, especially compared to prior estimates of historic levels in the area.

In a single survey of the area in 1987, 6 nests were located — and that was considered remarkable at the time. This year, 13 nests with young were located, and adult peregrines were seen at 7 additional sites. Twenty-nine nestlings were banded.

A nestling that we banded in 1987 was seen alive along the gulf coast of Texas. This provided evidence that the peregrines of coastal western Alaska belong to the migratory *anatum* or *tundrius* subspecies. These birds spend their winters in South America, where unfortunately many pesticides harmful to birds are still in use.

Information from these surveys has already been supplied to Alaskan land managers and will be incorporated into the Northwest Alaska Area Plan. Large scale mining, both offshore and onshore, is being contemplated in the area, along with offshore oil leasing and other developments. Impacts of these and other activities on peregrine populations should be monitored to insure that their healthy recovery continues.

Kestrels Monitored for Pesticides

Recent grasshopper outbreaks in the Delta agricultural project have local farmers considering large-scale application of chemical pesticides. Because endangered peregrine falcons nest close by the farms, there is concern about effects of pesticides on area wildlife.

So far, spraying has been limited to individual efforts by a few of the farmers. In response, we have begun to address potential impacts of pesticide use by starting a study of American kestrel, a common, small falcon that nests in tree cavities and man-made nest boxes.

Because kestrels will use nest boxes, it is relatively easy to monitor their abundance and productivity. Early this past spring we put up 12 boxes in the Delta area. In June, we found that 6 were occupied by kestrels and that flickers were nesting in a seventh. By comparing pesticide levels in eggs (which reflect the pre-exposure level of the adults) to those in fledglings (which have been raised on local prey exposed to locally applied contaminants) we hope to learn if chemical contaminants are entering local food chains. Results of tests on this year's samples are not available yet.

Viewing Trail Built On Palmer Refuge

Three hundred energetic Boy Scouts under the supervision of Carl Grauvogel, Palmer game biologist, recently constructed a wildlife viewing trail along a bluff above the Palmer Hay Flats Refuge. The trail has several viewpoints overlooking the refuge, with a panoramic view of the towering Chugach Mountains in the background.

The viewpoints provide excellent viewing opportunities of the shorebirds, waterfowl and birds of prey that use the refuge. Views of migrating Tundra Swans, Canada Geese and ducks should be especially good during spring migration in late April and early May. To get the best look, binoculars and a spotting scope are recommended.

In honor of the superb work by the Boy Scout troops from the Mat-Su Valley, Eagle River, Anchorage and Valdez, the trail was named "Scout Ridge Trail." The trail is located above Cottonwood Creek off the Knik-Goose Bay Road south of the Parks Highway, and is suitable for use by families and school classes. Contact the Division of Game in Palmer or Anchorage for more information.

Please check appropriate boxes and return this coupon:

☐ Please add my name to your mailing list.
☐ Address correction:

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Suggestions:

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☐ I have information on Ospreys in Alaska _____
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_____.

☐ 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 1989 for _____ Lake between Sutton and Willow. Daytime phone number _____.

☐ I want to help coordinate a "loon festival" in Anchorage during May 1989. Daytime phone number _____.

Volunteers Needed for Fairbanks Bird Feeder Count

More than 80 volunteers counted birds at their feeders during the winter 1987–88 Feeder Count in the Fairbanks area. This project was started in March 1986 to monitor trends in species and numbers of birds wintering in Interior Alaska.

This past winter, redpolls returned in droves to Fairbanks feeders back up from low numbers in recent years. The feeder regulars — black-capped and boreal chickadees, grosbeaks, gray jays, hairy and downy woodpeckers — were present in numbers similar to the previous two winters. Dark-eyed juncos were more common this past winter. Two white-crowned sparrows and one tree sparrow also visited feeders.

White-winged crossbills were abundant in the Interior last winter, but were not attracted to many feeders. Several counters reported that earlier in the fall, crossbills were drawn to water in buckets or barrels in their yards. For the first time in more than a decade, ptarmigan were common right in downtown Fairbanks, though few showed upon on the feeder counts.

With a good snow cover already in place by mid-October, it will be interesting to see what Fairbanks feeders will attract this winter. The three count dates are scheduled for 19 November, 31 December, and 11 March. If you would like to participate, contact John Wright at the Creamer's Field ADF&G office in Fairbanks, 456-5156.

Alaska's Waterfowl Conservation Stamp

Artists have until January 2, 1989 to submit original designs of Barrow's Goldeneye for this year's Alaska Waterfowl Conservation Stamp competition. Barrow's Goldeneyes are stocky black and white ducks that nest in forested areas of interior and southcentral Alaska.

The winning design will be reproduced as a stamp, a required purchase for waterfowl hunters in Alaska, and as a high-quality art print for general sales. Since the program began in 1985, nearly $1.4 million has been raised from the sales of stamps and prints for waterfowl and wetland conservation and enhancement projects in Alaska.

The Trumpeter Swan was the subject of the 1988 Alaska Waterfowl Conservation Stamp, and a limited number of art prints are still available in galleries statewide. Once an endangered species, there are now nearly 10,000 trumpeters in Alaska, over 80% of the world's population. Trumpeter Swan restoration programs are being developed in five states, including Minnesota, which has collected and incubated Alaskan swan eggs.

Conservationists are encouraged to buy stamps and art prints to support this program. For more information on the competition or sales, call the Division of Game, Anchorage at 267-2180.

Loon Watch *continued*

between the two types of lakes. Ruggles also discovered an interesting commensal relationship between nesting Common Loons and nesting Bonaparte's Gulls. Loons benefit by having nesting Bonaparte's nearby because they are highly vigilant and very belligerent toward hawks, eagles and owls that might eat eggs or chicks, yet these gulls do not disturb the loon eggs or chicks. Ruggles' study will continue next year on lakes in the Willow area. Results will help ensure that our future management efforts are directed to lakes with suitable loon habitat.

Plans for next year are to continue the Loon Watch around Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley between Sutton and Willow. Protection of nest sites will be sought from public and private landowners. As other states have discovered (sometimes too late), protection of nest sites from development is a key action to insuring the future of nesting loons on a lake. In response to requests, signs alerting lake users to avoid disturbing nesting loons will be made available at ADF&G offices in Anchorage, Palmer and Kenai for volunteers to post at lake public access points. Also informational flyers on how to deal with harassment of loons and other wetland wildlife, and flyers on loon biology will be available for volunteers to use.

Volunteers are still needed to observe many lakes in the Mat-Su Valley and a few in Anchorage. Also, vounteers are needed to help coordinate a "loon festival," a day of workshops, speakers, displays, fun and frolic in Anchorage during May 1989. Contact Nancy Tankersley, 267-2149 if you are interested.

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