

# WILDLIFE WATCHERS' NEWSLETTER



published twice a year by  
Nongame Wildlife Program

Division of Wildlife Conservation

Alaska Department of Fish & Game

## Creamer's Visitor Center

Many of our Nongame projects rely on volunteers. Some, like the Loon Watch and Fairbanks FeederCount depend on large numbers of local residents to do most of the field work and data collection. Others involve individuals working alongside staff biologists, as on the Norton Sound peregrine falcon survey. A special volunteer effort is underway in Fairbanks, where Terry Duzynski has undertaken the task of coordinating the renovation of a historic farmhouse to serve as a visitor center for the Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge.

Volunteers have long played a key role in Creamer's state refuge. When the dairy's owners decided to sell the farm in 1966, local residents, who enjoyed viewing the waterfowl that stopped to feed in the pastures each spring, gathered sufficient funds to hold an option on the property until the state could arrange to complete the purchase.

In 1988, ADF&G decided to develop a refuge visitor center in the farmhouse. Some state funds were available, but they were not sufficient to complete the project through normal bureaucratic channels. That's where Terry stepped in to help. He had long been active in the Alaska Craftsman Home Program, and saw an opportunity to use the farmhouse as a demonstration of an energy efficient retrofit project.

It was not a simple undertaking. In addition to the practical problems involved in making an 82 year-old structure (half built of timbers, and half frame with sawdust insulation) energy efficient, strict historical guidelines required that original windows and other traditional features be preserved. But Terry (continued on next page)

## Forest Owl Nest Boxes

In 1981, two dedicated raptor biologists set out on their own to study small owls in the spruce-hardwood forests of southcentral Alaska. Working during their spare time and at their own expense, Ted Swem and Bob Dittrick began



Bob Dittrick with fledgling saw-whet owl

to build wooden nest boxes and place them in the forests of the lower Matanuska and Susitna River valleys. They hoped to attract boreal owls, and the more elusive northern saw-whet owls to their boxes so they could learn about owl breeding biology, productivity, and food habits. Being long-time bird banders, they also banded adults and young in hopes of learning more about the owls' seasonal movements, nest-site fidelity, and mortality.

Boreal owls inhabit the broad expanse of northern coniferous forests across North America, Europe, and Asia. They have been studied extensively in Europe, (continued on next page)



### **Creamer's Refuge** (cont'd)

and his crew of volunteers persevered. Much of the work is done. The house has passed its infiltration and insulation tests. Interior finishing and outside landscaping are the big tasks that remain. The work should be completed by mid-summer.

Terry has had lots of help on this project. The Interior Home Builders Association pitched in on reconstruction; the local IBEW helped with electrical work; many local merchants and contractors have provided materials at cost; and a long list of other individuals and groups have gone out of their way to assist and support the effort. Thanks! to all of these volunteers.

### **Boreal Owl Nest Boxes** (cont'd)

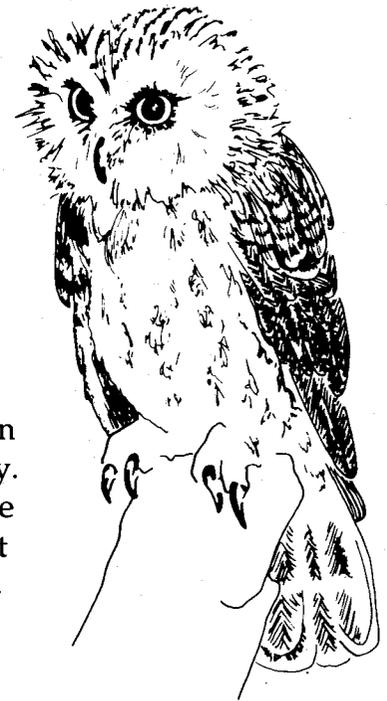
where they are known as Tengmalm's owl, but have received little attention in Alaska. In Scandinavia, the vast majority of Tengmalm's owls nest in man-made boxes. Over 6,100 nest boxes have been put up for owls in Finland alone.

It took 2 years before Ted and Bob had their first owl tenants. Their busiest year was 1988, when 21 nest boxes were used by owls to successfully rear their young. While checking for owls in spring can be exciting work, the boxes

also require cleaning and maintenance that usually keeps the landlords busy well into winter. This year, Ted and Bob will monitor more than 100 nest boxes.

The density of nesting owls and their nesting success is thought to depend largely upon prey abundance and availability. In Finland, male Tengmalm's owls feed on a broader range of prey than females, taking more birds while females take more voles. Of 72 prey items identified by Ted and Bob from their boreal owl nest boxes, 72% were voles, 6% were shrews, 21% were birds, and there was one young snowshoe hare.

Little is known of the habits of the small owls outside of the breeding season. Most owl biologists think natural nest sites are rare and that owls must compete for them. In some areas, adult male boreal owls are more sedentary than females or young, given the need to defend a nest site. Females and young owls are believed to migrate in times of prey scarcity. In areas with stable vole populations and light snow accumulation, both male and female owls are probably year-round residents.



Northern  
Saw-whet Owl

At this time we do not know what comprises "owl habitat" in Alaska. Until we understand our local forest communities better, it is impossible to assure the continued existence of forest owls in managed forest stands.

Thanks to the personal commitment of researchers Ted Swem and Bob Dittrick we are beginning to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge of Alaska's forest owls.

## **Alaska Wildlife — Part of the Global Community**

Many of the fish and wildlife we Alaskans like to think of as "ours" are really residents of a larger world, the earth. The salmon that spawn in Alaskan rivers and lakes spend most of their lives off at sea in international waters. Caribou of the Porcupine Herd that calve in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge may spend 8 months or more of the year in Canada. An eagle joining the great congregation on the Chilkat River in the fall may have hatched in a nest on the British Columbia coast. Shorebirds that breed on the wetlands and tundra of Alaska may winter in Surinam, Argentina, or Polynesia. One arctic fox tagged at Prudhoe Bay was later trapped near Hudson's Bay in Canada, about 1,300 miles away.

*Alaska Wildlife — Part of the Global Community* is the theme for this year's Alaska Wildlife Week, that coincides with the national celebration of Earth Week, 22-28 April 1990. This 8<sup>th</sup> annual Alaska Wildlife Week focuses on Alaska's fish and wildlife and their environments as parts of the earth. In March, an Alaska Wildlife Week Gazette of teaching activities and a color poster featuring Alaska ecosystems was distributed to Alaska's schools. These materials are designed to complement the National Wildlife Week packet with the theme of "Earth Day Every Day — you can make a difference!" produced by the National Wildlife Federation.

### **Updating Alaska Wildlife Week**

In a cooperative effort, the Nongame Program, ADF&G's Waterfowl Program, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are revising and expanding the educational packet on "Water, Wetlands, and Wildlife" that was originally produced and distributed in 1984. The updated packet will be available in fall 1990. See the March/April *Alaska Fish and Game Magazine* for a preview of some Alaska wetland topics.

## **Earth Day 1990**

On Earth Day 1990, April 22, concerned citizens around the world will demonstrate their interest in protecting our planet's life supporting natural systems. The first Earth Day, in 1970, was the largest organized demonstration in human history with an estimated 20 million participants across North America.

That overwhelming expression of concern was the springboard for the modern environmental movement, and has been credited for the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Clean Air and Clean Water acts.

Twenty years have passed. Today, international environmental issues, such as global warming, acid rain, and the wholesale cutting of forests have captured the world's attention. Closer to home, each area has its own special problems — Alaskans are still feeling the effects of the oil spill — while many ills are shared, such as the handling of solid and toxic wastes. Earth Day provides an opportunity for individuals and organizations to unite and express their concern and their commitment to be responsible stewards of our planet.

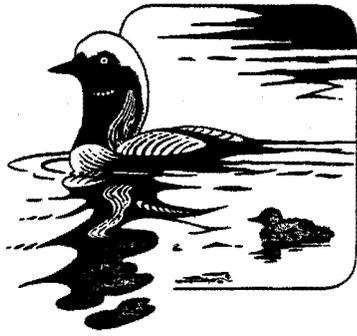
To celebrate Earth Day 1990 in Alaska, special activities are planned in many communities, including Kenai, Ketchikan, Moose Pass, Petersburg, Portage, Seward, Tok, and Wrangell. Earth Fairs are scheduled for Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau.

Citizens in most of these communities are developing procedures to recycle solid wastes. Several coastal towns are planning to clean up their shorelines. Tree plantings, in some locales coordinated with Arbor Day, are also scheduled.

Activities centered on Earth Day are still being planned in many communities. Keep an eye out for announcements in your local media, or contact Joanne Welch, statewide Earth Day coordinator at the National Wildlife Federation office in Anchorage (phone 258-4800), to learn of events in your area.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Alaska Loon Festival



Don't miss the second annual Alaska Loon Festival at East High School in Anchorage, May 12 and 13 from 11am to 6pm. This will be a fun-filled family event featuring guided walks to see loons, guest speakers Dennis "Dr. Loonacy" Olson and renowned wildlife artist John Pitcher, loon book and craft sales, children's activities, a loon calling contest, exhibits, movies, and much more! Admission is free, with a small charge for the Dr. Loonacy show.

A banquet with John Pitcher will be held Saturday night, followed by an entertaining and informative show by Dr. Loonacy. For reservations, call 258-6425.

The festival is co-sponsored by Anchorage Audubon Society and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. Last year's festival raised about \$2,400. All proceeds support loon conservation efforts in Alaska.

## Course on Loon Biology and Conservation

A one credit graduate course designed for teachers, youth group leaders, or others interested in loon biology and conservation issues is being offered in conjunction with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Alaska Loon Festival, May 12 and 13 in Anchorage. Projects in one of following 4 areas are required: 1) loon art or photography, 2) instructional methods or materials, 3) field/scientific study, and 4) creative writing. Contact Nancy Tankersley, 344-0541.

## Loon Watch 1990

As Loon Watch enters its sixth year, it will be expanding to encompass all lakes in southcentral Alaska, including the Kenai Peninsula. In 1989, more than 150 volunteers took part in this project that identifies and protects loon nesting areas. If you would like to join in this fun and rewarding effort, contact Nancy Tankersley at the Anchorage ADF&G office (phone 344-0541).

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game operates all of its public programs and activities free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Because the department receives federal funding, any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against should write to O.E.O., U.S. Department of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240.

Alaska Wildlife Week • 22-28 April 1990

Alaska Wildlife — Part of the Global Community

State of Alaska  
Department of Fish & Game  
Nongame Wildlife Program

Marilyn Sigman  
P.O. Box 20  
Douglas, Ak 99824  
465-4265

Nancy Tankersley  
333 Raspberry Road  
Anchorage, AK 99518  
344-0541

John Wright  
1300 College Road  
Fairbanks, Ak 99701  
456-5156

BULK RATE  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 145  
ANCHORAGE  
AK 99518

Address Correction Requested