

The Audubon Alaska WatchList for Southeastern Alaska

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First published in 2002 and updated in 2005, the Alaska WatchList identifies birds at risk. Species or subspecies on the WatchList are faced with a combination of population decline, small population size, limited geographic range, or threats, such as oil spills or habitat loss on their breeding and wintering grounds or along migration routes. Subspecies are included because Alaska has unique responsibility for stewardship of these important regional populations.

Attempting to recover a species pushed to the brink of extinction is difficult, costly and controversial. A far more effective approach is to work cooperatively with resource managers, land owners, industry, conservationists and others to study, monitor, manage, and protect birds and their habitats before crises arise. Hence, the primary aim of the WatchList is to focus attention on at-risk populations before they are in jeopardy of extinction and encourage preventative action.

The WatchList is compiled by Audubon Alaska, based on a database created by Partners in Flight, a coalition of state, federal and private-sector biologists, resource managers and conservationists working together to assess the status of birds in North America. Data on bird populations in Alaska are often limited, however, especially for land birds. So, the WatchList relies on the best existing information, supplemented by local expert opinion.

THREATS TO BIRD POPULATIONS

Around the world, the greatest threat to bird populations is the fragmentation, degradation and

loss of their habitats. Over the last century, such losses have often been driven by natural resource extraction, industrial development, and urban encroachment. These days, however, long-term, human-induced climate disruption is having additional dramatic effects on bird habitats on a global scale, especially in northern regions. Other threats to bird populations include pollution, such as marine oil spills and toxic contaminants, excessive harvest, introduced predators, and increased human disturbance.

In Alaska, we are fortunate that natural ecosystems are still relatively intact and large portions of the landscape are protected in state and federal conservation units. Even in Alaska, however, there are serious concerns about habitat loss, as natural resource development, habitat fragmentation, and other human influences intensify and expand into remote areas, like Southeastern Alaska (Southeast).

WATCHLIST SPECIES IN SOUTHEASTERN ALASKA

The Alaska WatchList includes a total of 52 species, 20 of which regularly occur in Southeast. As in the statewide list, the two largest taxonomic groups represented in Southeast are waterfowl (5 species) and shorebirds (5 species). At least three species recognized as at-risk in Southeast are highly dependent on old-growth forest habitat – Marbled Murrelet, Northern Goshawk, and Spruce Grouse.

TABLE 1. Alaska WatchList Species in Southeastern Alaska.

Concerns:	PT = population trend
RA = relative abundance	BD = breeding distribution
ND = non-breeding distribution	TB = threats to breeders
TN = threats to non-breeders	(TN) = threats to non-breeders outside Alaska

Species/Subspecies	Concern	Notes
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Loons - Gaviiformes

Red-throated Loon <i>Gavia stellata</i>	RA, PT, TN, (TN)	Long-term decline South of the Brooks Range. Vulnerable to marine oil spills and bycatch by fisheries.
Yellow-billed Loon <i>Gavia adamsii</i>	RA, TB, TN, (TN)	Small global population, much of which breeds on the North Slope. Vulnerable to marine oil spills and bycatch by fisheries.

Waterfowl - Anseriformes

Trumpeter Swan <i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	RA, (TN)	Breeding population increasing in Alaska, but vulnerable to habitat loss & disturbance. Highly sensitive to contaminants.
Canada Goose (Dusky) <i>Branta canadensis leucopareia</i>	RA, BD, ND, (TN)	Subspecies breeds only in the Copper River Delta. Area was altered by the 1964 earthquake, causing habitat change.
Brant <i>Branta bernicla</i>	PT, TB, TN, (TN)	Small population, decline in wintering areas. Concern over harvest. Vulnerable to disturbance during molt at Teshekpuk Lake.
Black Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i>	PT, TB, TN	Apparent decline in breeders in Western Alaska. Vulnerable to marine oil spills, concerns over contaminant loadings.
Long-tailed Duck <i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	PT, TB, TN	Long-term decline, although some recovery seen in recent years. Vulnerable to marine oil spills and contaminants.

Birds of Prey - Falconiformes

Northern Goshawk <i>Accipiter gentilis laingi</i>	RA, BD, ND, TB, TN	The Queen Charlotte subspecies breeds only in Southeast Alaska. Highly dependent on old-growth forest habitat.
Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	RA, TB, (TN)	Recently removed from federal endangered species list. Migrants vulnerable to contaminants outside Alaska.

Grouse & Ptarmigan - Galiiformes

Spruce Grouse <i>Falcapennis canadensis isleibi</i>	RA, BD, TB, TN	Small population restricted to Prince of Wales Island, Southeast Alaska. Vulnerable to loss of old-growth forest habitat.
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Shorebirds - Charadriiformes

American Golden-Plover <i>Pluvialis dominica</i>	PT, (TN)	Small population, declines observed. Vulnerable to winter and staging habitat loss.
Black Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus bachmani</i>	RA, TB, (TN)	Small breeding population. Vulnerable to disturbance by boats and kayakers at breeding sites, and to marine oil spills.
Wandering Tattler <i>Heteroscelus incanus</i>	RA, PT	Small breeding population, largely confined to Alaska and the Yukon. Vulnerable to wintering habitat loss and oil spills.
Black Turnstone <i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>	RA, BD, TB, TN	Restricted breeding distribution. Vulnerable to habitat loss and coastal oil spills, especially during migration.
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	RA, PT, BD, TN	Decline documented. Vulnerable to coastal oil spills and winter habitat loss.

Seabirds - Charadriiformes

Marbled Murrelet <i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>	PT, BD, TB	Listed as Threatened in the Pacific Northwest. Vulnerable to loss of old-growth forest breeding habitat.
Kittlitz's Murrelet <i>Brachyramphus brevirostris</i>	RA, PT, BD, TB	Small, declining population, associated with tidewater glaciers. Vulnerable to habitat loss and disturbance in foraging areas.

Owls - Strigiformes

Short-eared Owl <i>Asio flammeus</i>	RA, TB, TN, (TN)	Declines observed throughout range. Vulnerable to habitat loss, nest predation, and persecution.
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Species/Subspecies	Concern	Notes
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Perching Birds - Passeriformes

Olive-sided Flycatcher <i>Contopus cooperi</i>	PT, TB, (TN)	Breeding population declining broadly across North America. Concern over loss of wintering habitat in the Neotropics.
Rusty Blackbird <i>Euphagus carolinus</i>	RA, PT, TB, (TN)	Small population in low densities. Steep decline across range. Vulnerable to habitat loss (swampy openings in forest).