
CURLING UP WITH A GOOD (BIRD) BOOK

Update on 53 "Aleutian" Species Covered in the
National Geographic Society Field Guide

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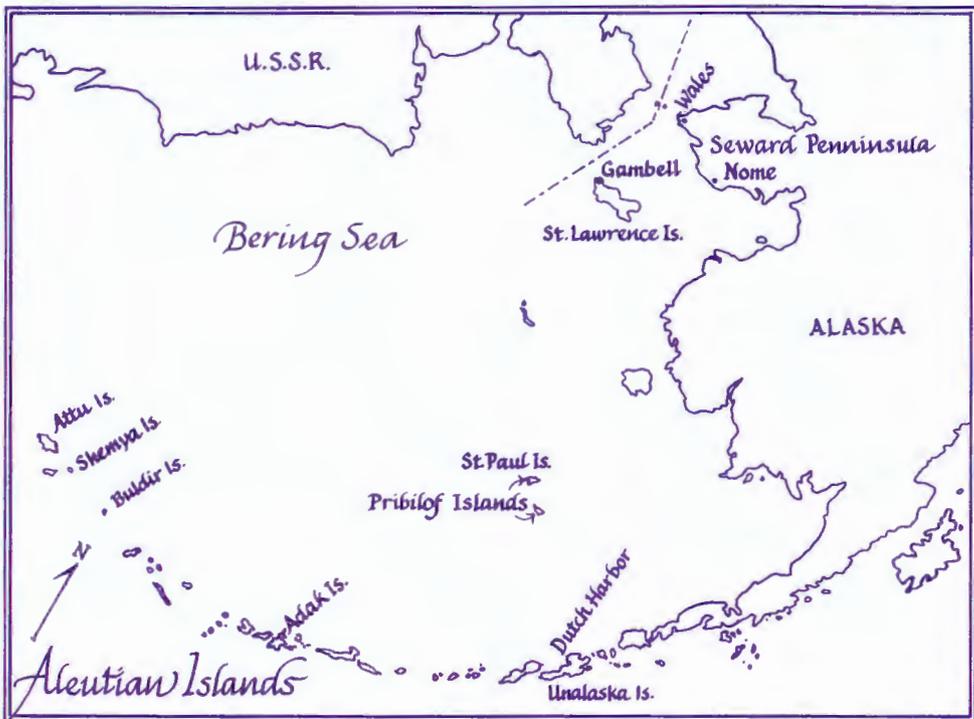
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When I started birding, I used my Peterson field guide more at home than I did in the field. I would pore through it, daydreaming about all those species I hadn't yet seen. I played all kinds of games in my head. Besides learning to put names to the pictures and sorting out similar species, I'd count the number of pages on which I had seen all the birds, all but one, and so on. Ticking off a page as "complete" always gave me a certain satisfaction. I'd learn where and when I could see birds I hadn't yet seen, and then I would daydream about being in those places and searching for them. My success at finding them was remarkable.

That was all well before the *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (hereafter the NGS guide) was published in 1983. Were I beginning my bird career today and poring through the pages of that guide, I'd be dreaming not only of Black Rails, Kirtland's Warblers, and Altamira Orioles but also of Siberian Rubythroats and Mongolian Plovers. I'd still be turning to other books and local birding guides to learn more about Black Rails and Kirt-

land's Warblers and my chances of seeing them, but I'd have a hard time finding anything about Siberian Rubythroats and Mongolian Plovers. That's the point of this article—to tell you something about your chances of seeing each of the 53 species illustrated in the second edition of the NGS guide whose range is described as being principally in the Aleutians.

Obviously, your chances of seeing these species are greatly enhanced by going to the Aleutian Islands. Many of these birds have also appeared in such places as St. Lawrence Island, the Pribilof Islands, and even in the Lower Forty-eight States, especially California, but most are much rarer there. Getting to the Aleutians is not easy. They stretch for about 900 miles, from Dutch Harbor to Attu Island. Almost without exception, the farther west you go, the better your chances of seeing any of these 53 species. Adak and beyond is really what we're talking about, with the best birding on Buldir and the Near Islands: Shemya, Nizki, Alaid, Agattu, and Attu. Only Attu, which is a National Wildlife Refuge and in part a National



Monument, is open to civilian travel. Here are the ways I know of to get to these islands: join the Navy, Air Force, or Coast Guard; become a biologist who works for the Aleutian Islands Unit of the Maritime National Wildlife Refuge; join an organized trip of one to three weeks each spring to Attu; charter a small plane from Anchorage to Attu (about \$13,000 each way); or sail your own ocean-going vessel.

Let's assume you have managed to get to these fascinating and captivating islands during migration. What are your chances of seeing each of these species pictured in the NGS guide? For each, after giving the number of the page on which it is illustrated, I'll categorize your chances and then make some general comments. The categories I've chosen

are based on my own general assessment of the probability of your seeing the species during a visit of a week or two at the best time of year. They are as follows: *Excellent*—better than 80% probability; *Good*—50% to 80%; *Reasonable*—20% to 50%; and *Poor*—less than 20%. I've also used plus and minus signs to indicate the upper and lower ends of these ranges when I felt they added something. Most birders who visit the Aleutians do so on organized trips to Attu each spring, and those trips have provided most of our knowledge about the occurrence of these species in the ABA Area. I have therefore based my judgments of probability primarily on how many Attu trips have recorded each species since the trips began in 1978. Almost all of these trips have been in May

and early June. I have also factored in other experiences and opinions. In my comments, I will note opportunities to see these birds in places other than the Aleutians.

Some of the classifications in the ABA Checklist need to be changed to account for what we've learned since the third edition was published in 1986. I've noted the changes I would recommend for the next edition.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

p. 60 *Poor*

If you visited Adak Island in mid winter you might see this species. More individuals winter on nearby islands, however. On Attu, the latest record is May 5, well before organized trips arrive. Even though it is an annual species in North America, wintering in the Aleutians from December through April, I am afraid that your best hope for seeing this species is to wait for one to appear outside the Aleutians. As I write this, two Whooper Swans are sitting on a pond three miles from my house in the Chicago area. Such captive or escaped individuals occur from time to time and there will inevitably be questions about the origins of any bird seen outside Alaska.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*

p. 62 *Good(-)*

The usual spring occurrence is of a lone bird feeding on the ground, but flocks of up to nine have been seen as fly-bys at Attu. Flying birds can be confused with Greater White-fronted Geese but, fortunately, the latter is much

less likely to occur. This species is currently listed as a Code 3 species in the ABA Checklist; it should be Code 4. It has also been recorded at Gambell on St. Lawrence Island.

Falcated Teal *Anas falcata*

p. 70 *Reasonable(+)*

On average, this bird is found in the western Aleutians every other year. Females can easily be mistaken for wigeons, but most occurrences have involved pairs. Small lakes and the intertidal areas of the seashore—places also favored by wigeons—are where you look for this handsome species. It should be a Code 4 species in the ABA Checklist, not Code 5.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

p. 74 *Reasonable(-)*

The NGS guide calls this a "regular migrant" and Falcated Teal a "rare visitor," but there are more spring records of the latter in the last 10 years in the outer Aleutians. (Garganey is possibly of more regular occurrence there in the fall.) On only one occasion have I seen females without males. Like Green-winged Teal, the species can be found almost anywhere there is water. Garganeys are now appearing annually in Canada and the Lower Forty-eight, primarily during the spring and early summer.

Common Pochard *Aythya jertina*

p. 78 *Good*

Of all the better ducks to be seen in the Aleutians, this and the next species are the best bets.

Flocks of up to seven have been seen. Interestingly, this diving duck has almost always been seen on freshwater lakes. It has been seen in spring on St. Paul in the Pribilofs, and in late winter, even on mainland Alaska and in California.

Smew *Mergellus albellus*

p. 88 *Good(+)*

Although there have been fewer total individual Smews than Pochards at Attu, Smews have been seen on more trips in the last decade. A male is what everyone wants to see, of course, and that has almost always been possible. It is found almost exclusively on freshwater lakes and ponds. Except for Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck, and Garganey, this is the most likely Asian duck to appear as a vagrant in the Lower Forty-eight and Canada, as evidenced by winter records from both coasts.



Mongolian Plover, Attu Island, photo/Bud Needham

Mongolian Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

p. 106 *Excellent(+)*

It is safe to say that this beautiful plover occurs every year in

the western Aleutians. It also is seen fairly regularly on St. Lawrence Island. In the Aleutians the species sometimes occurs in small flocks and is always seen on beaches. There are also a number of records for the Lower Forty-eight and Canada, primarily in the fall.



Black-tailed Godwit, Attu Island, 8 June 1988. photo/Gerald Maisel

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

p. 110 *Excellent*

Although it is recorded almost every year in the Aleutians, it appears only in small numbers. It is rarely recorded elsewhere in Alaska. Never have more than two individuals been seen in a single spring on Attu.

Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*

p. 112 *Reasonable(-)*

Strangely, lone birds have been recorded on Attu in five out of the last six years, but not before that. The species apparently tends to wander east, toward Adak and the Pribilofs, rather than north to Gambell. It should be a Code 4 bird on the ABA Checklist, not Code 5.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

p. 114 **Excellent**

You're scanning the margins of a pond or lake or looking over a wet meadow—just where you'd expect to find a Yellowlegs. If you do, look again, because it's far more likely to be this species (though both yellowlegs have occurred in the Aleutians). I think it is safe to say that Greenshanks occur every year in the Aleutians, even though they have been missed occasionally on Attu. Flocks of up to four have been seen, and when half a dozen individuals are seen in a day's birding, it's possible that fair numbers are migrating through the Aleutians. The species is of casual occurrence on the Pribilofs and Saint Lawrence Island.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

p. 114 **Good(-)**

As a few lucky birders in the Lower Forty-eight and Canada can attest, there are few shorebirds as spectacular as a Spotted Redshank in alternate (breeding) plumage. I can recall tramping through the wet meadows of Attu when this was still a "lust" bird for me and spotting an all-black shorebird with red legs. My excitement was quickly tempered by the realization that I had found "only" a black Ruff. I had to wait another year for a real Spotted Redshank. As with other large *Tringa* species, you are as likely to hear this bird first as to see it. It is neither as frequent nor as numerous as Common Greenshank.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

p. 116 **Excellent(+)**

In many cases, shorebirding in the Aleutians is like shorebirding elsewhere in the ABA Area, except there are different versions of some of the common birds. This Eurasian counterpart of the Spotted Sandpiper is certainly one of the most frequently seen Asiatic shorebirds in the Aleutians—finding a dozen individuals in a day is possible. It should be looked for on rocky shores, sandy beaches, pond margins, and river banks. This species is a reasonable possibility at Gambell, where it is a straggler rather than a regular visitor. If birders went to visit St. Paul during the optimal period for this species, which is about 15 May to 5 June, I think they would have a reasonable chance of seeing it. Few birders get to the Pribilofs, however, before the second week of June.



Terek Sandpiper, Attu Island, 4 June 1986.
photo/Ed Greaves

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

p. 116 **Reasonable(+)**

There are several continental records of this bird, and I predict it will be seen on the east coast of

North America sometime in the next few years. It is another species we would see more frequently if birders were to visit St. Paul earlier in the season. There are also about half a dozen records for Gambell. Still, your best chances are in the Aleutians, where it occasionally occurs in numbers. My very first sighting on Attu, for example, was of a flock of 21 dropping in at the edge of a small pond.



Gray-tailed Tattler, Attu Island, June 1986.
photo/George Jett

Gray-tailed Tattler
Heteroscelus brevipes

p. 118 *Excellent*

The NGS guide summarizes well the places one could see this species. Records are widespread, and although recorded almost annually, numbers fluctuate greatly from year to year in the outer Aleutians, where the bird is most common. I have seen a single flock of 35 on Attu, for example, but at other times the species can be maddeningly frustrating to find, as tattler after tattler turns out to be a Wandering. Because of fall records from Washington and California, birders should be alert to the possibility of this species occurring outside Alaska.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

p. 118 *Poor*

The number of North American records of this species—seven—is greater than one would expect from an examination of its published breeding range in Asia. Perhaps it breeds farther east than is generally known. Although one bird appeared the first week in June at Gambell, five other spring records suggest that the best hope of seeing it is in the far western Aleutians from mid May to mid June.

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*

p. 132 *Excellent(+)*

Even in the poorest of shorebird migrations, one can count on seeing this bird in the outer Aleutians. In fact, its behavior on Attu has occasionally suggested that it could be the next shorebird found breeding in North America. There is a reasonable chance of seeing it on St. Paul, as well as at Gambell from mid May through the first week of June. There are very few records from St. Lawrence Island. Were it not so difficult to separate from Least Sandpiper, there would probably be more scattered fall records from other places in North America besides Oregon and California.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

p. 132 *Poor*

Spring records in the Aleutians are almost nonexistent, with more occurring farther north in Alaska, such as at Gambell. Fall is probably better, but chances of getting to the Aleutians then are



Juvenile Little Stint, Attu Island, 8 September 1983.
photos/Gerald Maisel

poor. You have better chances by listening to Rare Bird Alerts beginning in July, in the hope that one is seen outside of Alaska, as occasionally happens. Fall birds are more fun, too, since the challenge of separating them from Rufous-necked Stints is greater at that time of year.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

p. 132 *Reasonable*(-)

Even though the single location where this bird has been seen most frequently is Attu, it has been recorded on a number of islands. I'm sure that eventually there will be other fall records from the West Coast other than the lone one from British Columbia. The white tail feathers mentioned in the NGS guide are

not really the best field mark. Back pattern, leg color, and extension of the tail beyond the folded wings are best seen when the bird is on the ground, and flight call is useful in the air.



Rufous-necked Stint, Attu Island, 26 June 1973.
photo/Gerald Maisel

Rufous-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

p. 132 *Excellent*(+)

There's no need to go to the Aleutians or any of the Bering Sea islands to add this species to your list—you can probably find one somewhere on the Seward Peninsula, where they have bred. In the Aleutians, spring numbers seen have ranged from none in three weeks to several dozen in a day. Fall birds would undoubtedly be reported more often in the Lower Forty-eight and Canada if they didn't look so much like Semipalmated Sandpipers. The ABA Checklist's Code 4 should be changed to Code 3.

Spoonbill Sandpiper
Eurynorhynchus pygmeus

p. 132 *Poor*(-)

For me, the saying "See Naples and die" is really "See Spoonbill and die." Not even Ross' Gull has the magical appeal of this bird, rare even in Asia. I have been ex-

tremely fortunate to have seen every one of these birds recorded in modern times in the ABA Area except the one collected on Buldir in June 1977. In Vancouver, British Columbia, early one August weekday afternoon, I watched one for two hours all by myself, perplexed that no one else was there, even though the bird had been found two days earlier. Seeing three on Attu in June of 1986 was personally much more exciting, because there were a lot of people with whom to share it. You can dream about seeing this bird, but your chances? Small enough that it will likely remain only a dream.

Broad-billed Sandpiper
Limicola falcinellus

p. 132 *Poor(-)*
Forget this one, too. Three August–September records in the western Aleutians comprise the whole ABA record.



Slaty-backed Gull, Shemya, 13 May 1978.
photo/Davis Finch

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*

p. 154 *Good*
If you want to be as sure as possible of seeing this species, go to Wales, on the western Seward Peninsula, in early June. But you could also see one in Nome on

your way there. Northwestern Alaska, including Gambell, certainly has more of these birds in the spring than do the Aleutians. Most will not be adults. We have, however, seen individuals of every age, from juvenal through adult, on Attu. Records outside Alaska are interesting: there are as many confirmed records for Illinois as for the entire West Coast (two, as compared to single Washington and British Columbia records), and I believe that two other Great Lakes records of dark-backed gulls represented this species. As birders become more aware of how to identify Slaty-backed Gulls in all plumages, I think there will be West Coast records as far south as California.

Whiskered Auklet *Aethia pygmaea*

p. 178 *Excellent*
Get on the three-times-per-summer ferry from Kodiak to Dutch Harbor, a two-and-one-half-day trip. You'll see Whiskered Auklets as you approach Dutch Harbor, near the Baby Islands. You should see hundreds, but it won't be as satisfying as seeing other Alaskan alcids perched on rocks at nesting sites, because the deck is high above the water. Forget about seeing this bird elsewhere, unless you have a good friend stationed on Adak with his or her own boat. I think this should be Code 3 in the ABA Checklist, not Code 4.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

p. 184 *Excellent*
There is only one known place in the ABA Area to see this mag-

nificent bird—Attu. Luck is required unless you hike nine miles to Temnac Valley, most easily done in June when snows have melted sufficiently. There is reason to believe the species has been resident there for at least the last 40 years, and it is known to have nested there as late as 1983. Since then, only one adult has been seen. Neither have there been any sightings of immatures born later than 1983. If the remaining adult should die, and it is certainly very old, the species may disappear from the ABA Area. Its listing in the ABA Checklist as Code 3 is incorrect. At best, it is Code 4, and in view of the age of the only known remaining individual, Code 5 would be more appropriate.

Eurasian Kestrel
tinnunculus

p. 202 *Poor*

In the Aleutians there are only two spring records in the last 10 years. Most records there (as for the east coast of North America) have been in the fall, when it is usually impossible for birders to get to the Aleutians. I think a falcon that is more likely to occur in the Near Islands than this species is Northern Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), which is not illustrated in the NGS guide. One year both a male and a female Eurasian Kestrel were seen on Attu, but unfortunately they did not become the nucleus of a new ABA breeding population.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

p. 234 *Good*

Given recent records, the ABA Checklist designation should be

changed from Accidental to Visitor, and it should be Code 4, not Code 5. The 3rd Edition of the Checklist cites seven Alaskan records, but this number would certainly be considerably larger could all cuckoos be reliably identified. What is clear is that there can be sizeable movements of cuckoos in June in the western



Common Cuckoo, Attu Island, June 1986.
photo/Don Hoehchlin

Aleutians. Since publication of the NGS guide, the calls of *both* cuckoos have now been heard in North America. There have been scattered records of this species on mainland Alaska (2) and the Pribilofs, but none from St. Lawrence Island.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*

p. 234 *Poor(-)*

This species was probably included in the NGS guide because it paired well on its plate with the previous species; there were only four records this century when the guide was published, all prior to 1947. From 1947 to 1987, all cuckoos identified in North America were Common. Finally, in 1987, a calling Oriental Cuckoo

was seen on Attu. I might note that even though it was a gray bird, it was identified with some certainty before the call was heard. Nevertheless, we officially record the species on Attu for gray birds only when their calls are heard. (The NGS guide correctly points out the ease of separating the hepatic morph cuckoos, but there is quite a bit of overlap in the gray morph field marks cited by the field guides. One possibly distinguishing characteristic they do not mention is the existence of an ocher undertone on the lower breast-to-vent area of the Oriental Cuckoo. Unfortunately, we have not seen enough birds to determine how easy this is to see in the field.)

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*

p. 252 *Poor(-)*

The eight Alaska records are evenly divided between spring and fall, with two from the Pribilofs and the others from the western Aleutians. One would have to be *very* lucky to see any swift in these areas.

White-throated Needletail
Hirundapus caudacutus

p. 252 *Poor(-)*

There are half as many records of this species as of the previous one, all from Attu and nearby Shemya in spring. Would you believe you could chase a rare swift in migration? In two of the three cases where these two swift species occurred on Attu, the birds stayed long enough for birders to travel some distance to see them. In fact, they actually did not leave until the next day.

Gray-spotted Flycatcher
Muscicapa griseisticta

p. 320 *Good(+)*

With but one exception (see next account), all records of the four palearctic flycatcher species that have appeared in North America have been from the western Aleutians. Even the Pribilofs lack records of them. This species is almost annual on Attu in early June, with several individuals in a day not uncommon. It usually perches conspicuously on a plant stalk or post, making it generally easier to find than the next species, which often skulks near the ground.

Red-breasted Flycatcher
Ficedula parva

p. 320 *Reasonable*

Except for a wave of over a dozen birds one day on Attu, this early June species has occurred only by ones and twos. Don't count on seeing the handsome male—almost all records have been of females and immature males. There is a lone record of this species from St. Lawrence Island.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

p. 320 *Poor(-)*

Forget it, unless you get to Attu in the fall. Actually, there have been more continental records of this bird. The current score is California 3, Shemya 2, Gambell 2, and Attu 1.

Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler
Locustella ochotensis

p. 320 *Poor(-)*

In 280 days of birding Attu, I have yet to see this species. Most of that time has been in the spring, and six birds on Attu one September indicate one's chances would probably be better in the fall. A late spring Gambell record and a summer occurrence at St. Paul would seem to indicate that Middendorff's is a late vagrant. Its congener, Lanceolated Warbler (*L. lanceolata*), although not illustrated in the NGS guide, is more likely. (Although the ABA Checklist reports up to 25 Lanceolated Warblers on Attu in 1984 as the only record, there have recently been two summer records there. Two unidentified warblers seen before 1984 were probably Lanceolated.)

Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*

p. 328 *Excellent*(+)

Am I the only birder who has had a North American sighting of American Robin rejected? It happened to me. Authorities believed I had actually seen this species! That is not only a measure of a Robin's rarity but also of the likelihood of an Eye-browed Thrush. It would be difficult for anyone to spend the last week of May on Attu without seeing one. Outside the western Aleutians, you could see one on the Pribilofs.

Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni*

p. 328 *Reasonable*(+)

In the ABA Area, the records of this striking thrush tend to be more northerly and westerly than those of Eye-browed Thrush. Although you could be lucky enough to see it at Gambell, and

there is even a mainland record, your best bet is still Attu. It has appeared there about every other year. Some birds are even more handsome than the illustration in the NGS guide, with blacker flanks and very rich chestnut wing panels. I won't forget one such bird that often sang from the top of the official tree of the Aleutians—a phone pole.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

p. 332 *Poor*(-)

Although you can basically forget about seeing this bird in the Aleutians, you have a very good chance of seeing it in migration at Gambell during the last week of May and the first week of June. Should you miss it there, there are several spots where you can search for it along the Kougarok Road out of Nome. Listen for its gorgeous song.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*

p. 332 *Excellent*

I know of people who saw their life Siberian Rubythroat at Gambell, or at St. Paul. However, one is much more likely to see it in the western Aleutians, since it occurs on Attu almost every year. Over a dozen in a day have been seen there. An occasional bird will charm everyone by singing all day long from a favorite perch, but others can be very flighty and very elusive. After all, it is not actually enough to merely identify this bird—to be truly satisfied, you need a good look at the male's gorgeous throat color.

Siberian Accentor *Prunella montanella*

p. 332 *Poor*(-)

One more North American record of this species would be sufficient to change its classification in the ABA Checklist from Accidental to Visitor. It would not surprise me if it came from California or somewhere else on the West Coast, since the pattern of occurrence in the ABA Area is of fall birds moving southeast from Siberia. Don't count on seeing this bird; but if you simply must make an effort, try sitting on the Pribilofs or Attu beginning in mid September.

Olive Tree-Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

p. 340 *Excellent*

Records from Gambell and St. Paul are not nearly as numerous as those from the western Aleutians. The species is not recorded every year but nevertheless is the most common pipit on Attu at times. (At other times, both Water and Red-throated Pipits have been more numerous.)

Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*

p. 340 *Poor*(+)

There are now 11 ABA Area records of this species, so it will be reclassified from Accidental to Visitor and from Code 5 to Code 4 in the next ABA Checklist. Seven records are from Attu, and four are from Gambell. The call note mentioned in the NGS guide and other field guides is rarely heard in our area.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

p. 340 *Excellent*(+)

This species breeds on the Seward Peninsula. It is easy to see right behind the village of Wales, for example. But I venture a guess that more birders have seen their lifer away from the breeding grounds: most commonly at Gambell, or in fall in coastal California, or on Attu, where several dozen have been seen in a day.



Black-backed Wagtail, Attu Island, Spring 1987. photo/David Seay

Black-backed Wagtail *Motacilla lugens*

p. 342 *Excellent*

The classification of this species in the ABA Checklist will be changed from Visitor to Native Breeding Species when the proper documentation is evaluated. That is because it has bred on Attu (to be published) and possibly at Nome. Fall immatures that occur accidentally on the West Coast are difficult to identify, but spring birds in the western Aleutians are usually easy to separate from possible White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*). There is only one Aleutian record of the latter species.

Gray Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

p. 342 *Good*(+)



Gray Wagtail, Attu Island, 18 May 1988.
photo/Shawneen Finnegan

Any long-tailed bird with a yellow belly bounding through the air and giving a quick double-note call is this wagtail, not the more common Yellow Wagtail. Although there are lone records from both Gambell and St. Paul, look for it on the Aleutians from mid May through the first week of June. This should be a Code 4 bird in the ABA Checklist, not Code 5.

Rustic Bunting
rustica

p. 412 *Excellent*(+)

There is only a poor chance to see this species at Gambell in late May. On Attu it is a certainty. I expect there will be additional fall and winter occurrences in the Lower Forty-eight and Canada.

Common Reed-Bunting
Emberiza schoeniclus

p. 414 *Poor*

Pallas' Reed-Bunting
Emberiza pallasi

p. 414 *Poor*(-)

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

p. 414 *Poor*(-)

Gray Bunting
variabilis

p. 414 *Poor*(-)

These four species certainly did not meet the criterion listed on page 6 of the NGS guide of having "been seen at least three times in the past five years or five times in this century." Whoever guessed there was a "strong likelihood that they will be seen again" has had this success: only one individual of all four (Common Reed Bunting) has been positively recorded in the five years since the NGS guide appeared. (There are, as yet, no substantiated records of Pallas' for the Aleutians.) Hoping to see one of these in Alaska, even on the westernmost Aleutian island, is akin to hoping to win the lottery.

Common Rosefinch
Carpodacus erythrinus

p. 440 *Reasonable*

Most records of this species have been in the Aleutians, but it has reached St. Paul, Gambell, and even the mainland. A flock of 18 once appeared at Gambell, but the norm is a lone bird. Males and females seem about equally likely to occur. Of three males that appeared on Attu in 1987, one was quite orange. The ABA Checklist code should be changed from 5 to 4.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

p. 442 *Good*

This species should also be Code 4, not Code 5. After Brambling and Rustic Bunting, it is the

most likely Asian fringillid or emberizid to be seen. Gambell, St. Paul, and the western Aleutians all have records. On Attu, it has a bad reputation—I have seen more of them passing overhead than on the ground. They are very flighty and usually do not stay put. In 1978, one was responsible for the notorious “Hawfinch Death March” on Attu, where a dozen birders hiked five miles to see one, only to hear me tell them “The last time I saw it, it was out of sight.” On the other hand, one that spent several days in the same location, a rocky beach, was very conspicuous.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

p. 442 *Poor*(-)

Since the majority of records of this species are in winter from mainland Alaska, a time and place where there are few birders, this is a Code 5 bird, even though it is classified as a Visitor in the ABA Checklist. Considering how few people saw the only spring birds—one on Attu and two on St. Lawrence Island—your most reasonable hope for this species is that a bird will appear and stay at an Alaskan feeder some winter.

Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*

p. 442 *Reasonable*(-)

I am sure more people saw the bird that wintered in California [The record is still under review by the state records committee,—Ed.] than saw all of the other North American records put together. Those are from three western Aleutian islands. There are four official occurrences on

Attu but at least as many reports of flying birds flashing yellow in the wings. Although such sightings are probably of Oriental Greenfinches, Eurasian Siskins (*C. spinus*) cannot be excluded. Eurasian Siskin is not on the ABA Checklist, but there is a single-observer Attu record.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

p. 442 *Excellent*(+)

Here is an Asian species that most birders can reasonably hope to see eventually in the ABA Area without going to Alaska. There are now winter records spread across almost the entire continent. In the Aleutians sizeable flocks are occasionally seen, with up to 150 birds in a day at Attu. Within five minutes of landing on Attu for the first time, I had seen a beautiful male. I remember getting excited about how easy it was obviously going to be to see good birds on the island. Was I wrong! Not only was it days before I saw another Asian lifer, but it was tough work the whole time.

So dream on about someday getting a chance to tick off each page in the NGS's guide. But if you do manage to make it to the western Aleutians, where most of the species I've discussed are possible, or to Gambell, where some of them can be seen, you will really earn these birds. They are few and far between, and you really have to work to see them. Will it be worth it? Well, if you are like me, you are always thrilled and excited to see a new bird. P.S. I still have 32 pages to tick off completely. Darn those pelagic species!