

Gustavus/Glacier Bay Spring Bird Sightings
March - May, 2013

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Winter conditions persisted through April causing some species of geese and shorebirds to collect along our beaches in extraordinary numbers. Many songbirds were late in arriving and green up was several weeks behind normal. The highlight of the season was the area's first Ross's Goose. There were many birds, mainly geese and shorebirds, with new record high counts including Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, Marbled Godwit, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Phalarope, Sabine's Gull, and Long-tailed Jaeger. We had the first spring record of Western Grebe and the first documented spring record of California Gull.



The road to Bartlett Cove on 28 April 2013. Photo by Nat Drumheller

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Bruce Paige returned to Gustavus on 30 April. On 4 May, Nat Drumheller began regular trips into Glacier Bay aboard cruise ships for the National Park Service as a marine mammal observer.

Greater White-fronted Goose

Greater White-fronted Geese were seen in record numbers along Gustavus beaches from late April to mid May. Several hundred were seen regularly from 27 April to 13 May. – NKD, BBP

Some high counts (all east of town) were **1,100 on 2 May**, 690 on 5 May, and 780 on 6 May. –BBP

Snow Goose

Three-hundred and fifty on 2 May east of town was the high count. -BBP

Ross's Goose

The area's first Ross's Goose was photographed on 11 May by visiting Juneau birder Bob Armstrong on the golf course with about twelve Snow Geese.

It was seen again on 18 and 19 May near the Salmon River with other geese. –KrisN, BBP, NKD



**The Ross's Goose, front left, with Snow Geese on 11 May 2013 on the golf course.
*Photo by Bob Armstrong***



**The Ross's Goose, left, with Snow Geese on 19 May 2013 near the Salmon River.
*Photo by Nat Drumheller***

Brant

Brant were seen regularly along Gustavus beaches and in Glacier Bay from 21 April, fifty (NKD), through the end of the period. –NKD, BBP, others

High counts were 425 on 5 May and 630 on 6 May east of town and 350 on 30 May near the Salmon River. -BBP

Cackling Goose

Record numbers of Cackling Geese were along Gustavus beaches and on the golf course from 18 April, fifteen (EHJ), to 25 May, five (NKD), with one hundred to two hundred seen regularly from 26 April through 11 May (NKD, BBP).

High counts were 300 on 30 April near the Salmon River (NKD) and 225 on 1 May east of town (BBP).

Eurasian Wigeon

One to three from 21 April to 6 May at rivers along Gustavus beaches. –NKD, BBP

One on 23 April in Bartlett Cove. -NKD

Canvasback

One to two from 17 April to 10 May on ponds near the airport and east of town. –NKD, BBP

Yellow-billed Loon

At least four on 6 May in Icy Strait near the mouth of Glacier Bay. –NKD

One on 9 May off Gustavus. -BBP

One to six from 9 to 27 May in Glacier Bay, usually in the lower west arm with nine there on 24 May. -NKD

Western Grebe

One on 20 April off the Salmon River. –NKD

This is the first spring record for Gustavus/Glacier Bay.

Osprey

One on 27 April near Rink Creek. –NKD

One on 19, 28, and 29 May near town. –JFS, BBP

One on 4 May in Tarr Inlet in Glacier Bay. –NKD

American Kestrel

One on 6 and 10 May near town. –BBP

Peregrine Falcon

One on 27 April and 2 May east of town. –NKD, BBP

One on 28 April and on 5 and 10 May near the Salmon River. –NKD, BBP

One on 4 May at the mouth Tarr Inlet in Glacier Bay. –NKD

A nesting pair in May along Icy Strait between Point Carolus and Dundas Bay. –WH

Shorebirds

A wintering flock of shorebirds was near Rink Creek on 1 March with about 1700 Dunlin, 400 Rock Sandpipers, and 150 Sanderlings. One Rock Sandpiper had been banded in 2007 (44 birds) or 2008 (1 bird) near Tutakoke on the Yukon Kuskokwim delta. Rock Sandpipers from this group have been sighted almost annually at Gustavus since 2008. –NKD

A wintering Dunlin near town on 5 March had been banded near Tutakoke on 9 September 2010 (12 adults). Dunlin from this group have been sighted at Gustavus a handful of times since 7 January 2011. –NKD

Banding information from Dan Ruthrauff, USGS.

Migrating shorebirds became numerous in late April with at least 10,000 near Rink Creek on 30 April. These were mostly Dunlin and Western Sandpipers. –NKD

On 2 May, Bruce Paige estimated there were between 15,000 and 20,000 shorebirds near Rink Creek. Interestingly, only 350 of these were Western Sandpipers.

The next day on 3 May, Nat Drumheller estimated a minimum of 20,000 shorebirds near Rink Creek of which the majority were Western Sandpipers and Dunlin.

Judging by shorebird activity on the beaches closer to Gustavus, shorebird numbers probably peaked around 5 May.

On 7 May, an estimated minimum of 10,000 Western Sandpipers flew east along the beach past the Salmon River in many small flocks. –NKD

Most shorebirds along the beaches were gone by mid May with only small flocks being found then. –BBP, NKD

Black-bellied Plover

Record numbers of Black-bellied Plovers were along Gustavus beaches in late April and early May. Bruce Paige estimated an unbeatable record high count of **five thousand** on 2 May east of town.

The previous high count was eight hundred on 30 April 2011.

Other 2013 high counts were 500 on 30 April (NKD) and 620 on 6 May (BBP), both east of town.

American Golden-Plover

One on 2 May east of town. –BBP

Record numbers arrived on 20 May with 180 on the golf course (BBP, NKD) increasing to **450** there on 23 May (NKD). Numbers then dropped quickly with only thirty-two on 25 May and three on 28 May. –BBP, NKD

Pacific Golden-Plover

One on 27 and 30 April and on 3 May near Rink Creek. –NKD

Nine on 5 May with four on the golf course and five west of town. –NKD

Two on 20 May on the golf course with the American Golden-Plovers. –BBP, NKD

Unidentified Golden-Plover

Eleven on 9 May on the golf course. –NKD

Solitary Sandpiper

Two on 10 May north of town where they have nested in the past. -NKD

Wandering Tattler

One on 5 May at the town dock. -BBP, NKD

Two on 20 May in Bartlett Cove. -NKD

Hudsonian Godwit

Seven on 5 May, five on 6 and 10 May, and one on 8 May near the Salmon River. -NKD, BBP

Marbled Godwit

One to two from 27 April to 24 May on beaches near town. -NKD, BBP

Eight on 5 May east of town (BBP) might have been part of fourteen that same day near the Salmon River (NKD).

The previous high count was nine on 30 April 2011.

Black Turnstone

Over three hundred on 5 May west of town was a large number for beaches near Gustavus. -NKD

Surfbird

Unusually high numbers of Surfbirds were along Gustavus beaches in early May.

Some high counts were three hundred on 3 May (NKD) and 6 May (BBP) near Rink Creek and over two hundred on 5 May west of town (NKD).

Red Knot

Two on 3 May near Rink Creek. -NKD

Three on 5 May west of town. -NKD

One on 6 May east of town. -BBP

One on 23 May near the town dock. -NKD

Semipalmated Sandpiper

Two hundred on 25 May along the Salmon River was a new high count. -NKD

The previous high count was 150 on 28 July 2006.

Baird's Sandpiper

One on 23 May near the Salmon River. -NKD

One on 28 May east of town. -BBP

Rock Sandpiper

Two on 3 May near Rink Creek and one on 5 May west of town were late, with few records in May. -NKD

Short-billed Dowitcher

Bruce Paige estimated **4,200** on 2 May east of town. This is a new high count for the area.

Wilson's Phalarope

Three on 30 May at a pond near the airport. –NKD, BBP

This is the 5th record for the area and the first of more than one bird.



Three Wilson's Phalaropes on Lake Gustavus, 30 May 2013.

Photo by Nat Drumheller

California Gull

One adult on 3 May near the town dock. –NKD

This is the first documented spring record.

Sabine's Gull

Two on 14 May and a minimum of 2 on 27 May in lower Glacier Bay. –NKD

A flock of twenty-nine on 31 May in mid Glacier Bay (NKD) was followed the same day by a flock of **sixty** in lower Glacier Bay (JimV, SFN).

The previous high count was ten on 6 June 2009.

Glaucous Gull

One on 19, 23, and 30 May near town. –BBP

Aleutian Tern

Three on 16 May and two on 18 May in lower Glacier Bay. –NKD



Half of a flock of sixty Sabine's Gulls with a few Black-legged Kittiwakes in lower Glacier Bay on 31 May 2013. Photo by Su Fang Ng

Caspian Tern

One on 27 April at the Salmon River. –NKD

Two to ten were seen regularly from 3 to 19 May along Gustavus beaches. –NKD

One on 12 May in lower Glacier Bay. –NKD

About fourteen on 30 May were acting defensively on Flapjack Island in lower Glacier Bay with nesting Glaucous-winged Gulls and other birds. –TML

One at Gustavus on 11 May was banded as a chick in 2001 or 2003 at Crescent Island on the Columbia River in Washington/Oregon. A number of Caspian Terns banded on the Columbia River have been sighted at Gustavus in recent years.

Banding information from Yasuko Suzuki, OSU.

Long-tailed Jaeger

A flock of **110** on 31 May in lower Glacier Bay was unprecedented. –NKD

Horned Puffin

Two on 29 May below the cliffs at the Margerie Glacier in Glacier Bay. –NKD

One on 31 May in lower Glacier Bay. –NKD

There were several reports of one to two Horned Puffins in late May in other parts of Glacier Bay from miscellaneous observers.

Eurasian Collared-Dove

Two on 24 May flew out to look at a cruise ship in the upper west arm of Glacier Bay where snow still covered much of the landscape. –NKD

At least two in late May were at a home near Rink Creek. –WC

A minimum of three in late May were in a neighborhood near the golf course. –JV

One to two in late May were at a home in west Gustavus. –JJ

(Note: The doves in town represented distinct groups that persisted through June at the locations mentioned.)



This California Gull was near the town dock on 3 May 2013.

Photo by Nat Drumheller

Great Horned Owl

None reported.

Northern Pygmy-Owl

One on 1 and 6 March at the Inner Lagoon of Bartlett Cove. –TDV, JN

One on 7 April near the hydro road east of town. –JHC

Barred Owl

At least one was heard regularly from mid April through May in southwest Gustavus by numerous people. –PB, JD, RFWY, NKD, LS, and others

Short-eared Owl

One on 5 May west of town. –NKD

Northern Saw-whet Owl

One was heard almost nightly from 2 March to 22 May near nest boxes at my cabin in town. No evidence of nesting was found. The owl had a voice problem and sometimes could not produce hoots although it could be heard trying. –NKD

Northern Saw-whet Owls nested in a box at the Sharmans' in the Good River neighborhood. Hooting had been heard there off and on this spring. An owl was not detected in the box until the end of May when there were already five nestlings and an adult in the box. –LS, ES

Vaux's Swift

One to four from 13 to 18 May were over ponds near the airport and the Salmon River in town. –NKD, BBP

Downy Woodpecker

One on 1 March near the airport. –NKD
One on 18 March in town. –NKD

American Three-toed Woodpecker

One on about 20 May at Bartlett Cove. –TDV
Two on 28 May north of town. –BBP

Olive-sided Flycatcher

One on 23 May at Bartlett Cove. –NKD

Western Wood-Pewee

One on 17 and 18 May at a pond near the airport. –NKD, BBP
One on 19 May in town. –NKD

Alder Flycatcher

None reported. (They showed up in above average numbers in June.)

Horned Lark

Five on 29 April and twenty-five on 3 May were near the town dock. –NKD
(Twenty-one were also east of town on 3 May, but may have been the birds from the dock. –NKD)
One on 1 May was near the Salmon River and one on 2 May was east of town. –BBP

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

One on 18 May at a pond near the airport. –BBP

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Several were scattered around town through the period with at least one nesting pair. –NKD, PB, BBP

Bohemian Waxwing

A minimum of twelve on 29 April feeding on blueberry blossoms at Bartlett Cove. –CBR
(One unidentified waxwing on 21 May was at Bartlett Cove. –NKD)

Fox Sparrow

One on 8 March in town likely overwintered. –JFS

Rusty Blackbird

One on 22 May near the airport. –BBP

Brown-headed Cowbird

One on 30 and 31 May at a pond near the airport. –NKD, BBP

Small numbers of **Red Crossbills** were found through the period around Gustavus.

Small numbers of **White-winged Crossbills** were around through the period with small flocks around town in March and April and only a few sightings in May.

Common Redpolls were “common” through March with flocks of one hundred to two hundred being seen regularly. Several people said there were many at their feeders in late March and early April along with Pine Siskins. Numbers gradually declined through April and into early May. A few were still around Gustavus in mid May.

Pine Siskins were common through the period with numbers peaking in late March and the first half of April when people complained that Pine Siskins were eating all their bird seed.