

Fall Birds and Terrestrial Mammals
of Cape Sarichef,
Unimak Island, Alaska

INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 1978 and 1979 observers from the National Marine Mammal Laboratory (National Marine Fisheries Service) were located at Cape Sarichef, Unimak Island, Alaska for the purpose of censusing California gray whales (Eschrichtius robustus) on their migration through Unimak Pass. Unimak Island, a part of the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, is at the western tip of the Alaska Peninsula. Unimak Pass is the easternmost major passage between the Bering Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, and as such is an important migratory corridor for marine birds and mammals. This paper summarizes the observations of the avifauna and terrestrial mammals at Cape Sarichef made during these two field seasons.

METHODS

The observation period was from 7 November-20 December 1978 and from 31 October 1979 - 2 January 1980. Observers (most frequently two at a time, but varying from one to six, were located on a bluff 110 m. west of the U.S. Coast Guard Loran Station at Cape Sarichef ($54^{\circ} 36' N$ $164^{\circ} 56' W$). During the 1978 season observers were situated 31 m. above the water; during the 1979-80 season observers were situated at the top of the bluff, 50 m above the water. The second position provided a wider field of view (approximately 165°) but less proximity to the water surface. As the primary objective of the observers was to obtain an accurate systematic census of gray whales, bird and terrestrial mammal observations were made opportunistically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Birds

Observations of the avifauna during the two seasons are summarized in Table 1. The most commonly seen species were cormorant (Phalacrocorax spp.), harlequin duck (Histrionicus histrionicus), black scoter (Melanitta nigra), glaucous-winged gull (Larus glaucescens), murre (Uria spp.), common raven, (Corvus corax), and gray-crowned rosy finch (Leucosticte tephrocotis), which were seen in over 50% of the observation days during both field seasons.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the bird activity observed was the large southerly migration of murres through Unimak Pass. On several occasions in 1979 population counts were made of flocks of migrating murres. The rate of passing birds often exceeded 500 individuals per minute, a rate which was sometimes maintained for several hours. From these counts we estimate that a minimum of 1.5 million murres migrated along the eastern shore of Unimak Pass in the fall of 1979. This number, considered a conservative estimate, is a significant portion of the estimated 5.1 million murres breeding north of Cape Sarichef in Alaska (Sowls et al. 1978. Catalog of Alaskan Seabird Colonies. U.S. Dept. Interior, Fish and Wildl. Serv., FWS/OBS-78/78.). The murres passing through Unimak Pass were too distant to be identified as to species, but it is assumed that the population consisted of both common murres (Uria aalge) and thick billed murres (U. lomvia). The peak period of migratory activity was mid to late November.

The difference of observation sites between the two field seasons may account for some difference in data. The closer proximity to the water of the 1978 site allowed easier identification of birds on the water. An inherent bias is that birds, both terrestrial and marine, which habitually stayed closer to the shore were more likely to be observed.

Terrestrial Mammals

Terrestrial mammal sightings are summarized in the following species accounts:

Red Fox (Vulpes fulva): This species was recorded on two occasions during the 1978 season - on 13 November near Sarichef Station, and on 15 November in a swampy area near Dublin Bay. During the 1979-80 season foxes were seen on over 29 occasions from 3 November to 1 January, all within 2 miles of Sarichef station. On one day (11 December) 14 foxes were seen playing together outside the Sarichef station building. The greater frequency of occurrence during the 1979-80 season may be partially explained by the absence of Coast Guard activity at the station during the second season.

Shorttail Weasel (Mustela erminea): During 1978 single weasels were seen on two days (7 and 11 November) near the observation site. During the 1979-80 season single weasels were seen on five days (4, 17 and 19 November; 19 and 24 December) in the vicinity of the station. All animals seen were in white winter (ermine) pelage.

Brown Bear (Ursus arctos): During the 1978 season single bears were seen on five days (10, 13, 19, 22, and 23 November). The first three sightings were near the observation site, the last two were at the dump, which was in use only during the first season. During the 1979-80 season single bears were seen on three days (2 November, 4 and 14 December). The first two sightings were on the beach north of Sea Lion Point, approximately one mile from Sarichef station; the last sighting was within one-half mile of the station.

Barren Ground Caribou (Rangifer arcticus): Only sporadic sightings were made of caribou during the two seasons, usually two or more miles away from Sarichef station. On 7 November 1978 seven individuals were seen near the first river northeast of Sarichef station. Records of caribou sightings were not kept in 1979.

Rodents: Rodents were occasionally seen, but were not identified as to species, and were not recorded.

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TABLE 1. Summary of bird sightings at Cape Sarichef, Unimak Island, Alaska from 7 November-20 December 1978 and 31 October 1979-2 January 1980.

	1978		1979-1980		Range of Dates Observed 1978	Range of Dates Observed 1979-80
	# of days observed	% of days observed	# of days observed	% of days observed		
GAVIIFORMES						
Loon (<u>Gavia</u> spp.)	15	34.1	26	40.6	10 Nov-16 Dec	2 Nov-31 Dec
PROCELLARIFORMES						
Northern Fulmar (<u>Fulmarus glacialis</u>)	0	0	3	4.7	-----	2 Nov-23 Dec
PELECANIFORMES						
Cormorant (<u>Phalacrocorax</u> spp.)	41	93.2	64	100.0	7 Nov-20 Dec	31 Oct-2 Jan
ANSERIFORMES						
Black Brant (<u>Branta bernicula</u>)	0	0	3	4.7	-----	11 Nov-18 Nov
Emperor Goose (<u>Philacte canagica</u>)	0	0	14	21.9	-----	11 Dec-31 Dec
Pintail (<u>Anas acuta</u>)	1	2.3	0	0	25 December	-----
Common Eider (<u>Somateria mollissima</u>)	3	6.8	23	35.9	9 Dec-18 Dec	2 Nov-2 Jan
King Eider (<u>Somateria spectabilis</u>)	3	6.8	15	23.4	27 Nov-10 Dec	18 Dec-2 Jan
Steller's Eider (<u>Polysticta stelleri</u>)	4	9.1	23	35.9	19 Nov-18 Dec	11 Nov-2 Jan
Harlequin Duck (<u>Histrionicus histrionicus</u>)	30	68.2	39	60.9	8 Nov-19 Dec	2 Nov-2 Jan
Oldsquaw (<u>Clangula hyemalis</u>)	0	0	21	32.8	-----	7 Nov-30 Dec
Black Scoter (<u>Melanitta nigra</u>)	31	70.5	36	56.3	11 Nov-20 Dec	1 Nov-2 Jan
White-winged Scoter (<u>Melanitta deglandi</u>)	20	45.5	35	54.7	11 Nov-19 Dec	7 Nov-2 Jan
Surf Scoter (<u>Melanitta perspicillata</u>)	2	4.5	1	1.6	19 Nov-8 Dec	7 Nov
Goldeneye (<u>Bucephala</u> spp.)	0	0	1	1.6	-----	18 Dec
Merganser (<u>Mergus</u> spp.)	1	2.3	6	9.4	15 Nov	7 Nov-29 Dec
FALCONIFORMES						
Bald Eagle (<u>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</u>)	7	15.9	23	35.9	10 Nov-15 Dec	31 Oct-2 Jan
Marsh Hawk (<u>Circus cyaneus</u>)	0	0	1	1.6	-----	3 Nov
Gyr Falcon (<u>Falco rusticolus</u>)	4	9.1	18	28.1	17 Nov-17 Dec	3 Nov-28 Dec
Peregrine Falcon (<u>Falco peregrinus</u>)	15	34.1	24	37.5	8 Nov-15 Dec	1 Nov-2 Jan

	1978		1979-1980		Range of Dates Observed 1978	Range of Dates Observed 1979-80
	# of days observed	% of days observed	# of days observed	% of days observed		
CHARADRIIFORMES						
Rock Sandpiper (<u>Calidris ptilocnemis</u>)	1	2.3	6	9.8	23 Nov	10 Nov-2 Jan
Northern Phalarope (<u>Lobipes lobatus</u>)	0	0	1	1.6	-----	7 Nov
Glaucous Gull (<u>Larus hyperboreus</u>)	3	6.8	2	3.1	28 Nov-4 Dec	29 Nov-2 Dec
Glaucous-winged Gull (<u>Larus glaucescens</u>)	42	95.5	64	100.0	7 Nov-20 Dec	31 Oct-2 Jan
Herring Gull (<u>Larus argentatus</u>)	3	6.8	1	1.6	27 Nov-20 Dec	17 Nov
Mew Gull (<u>Larus canus</u>)	1	2.3	0	0	24 Nov	-----
Kittiwake (<u>Rissa spp.</u>)	10	22.7	17	26.6	9 Nov-15 Dec	1 Nov-25 Dec
Murre (<u>Uria spp.</u>)	36	81.8	53	82.8	9 Nov-20 Dec	31 Oct-1 Jan
Pigeon Guillemot (<u>Cepphus columba</u>)	4	9.1	2	3.1	12 Nov-27 Nov	6 Nov-16 Dec
Crested Auklet (<u>Aethia cristatella</u>)	16	36.4	14	21.9	13 Nov-20 Dec	11 Nov-24 Dec
Least Auklet (<u>Aethia pusilla</u>)	0	0	2	3.1	-----	18 Nov-4 Dec
Marbled Murrelet (<u>Brachyramphus marmoratus</u>)	2	4.5	1	1.6	17 Dec-18 Dec	9 Nov
Ancient Murrelet (<u>Synthliboramphus antiquus</u>)	0	0	10	15.6	-----	3 Nov-13 Dec
Parakeet Auklet (<u>Cyclorhynchus psittacula</u>)	0	0	1	1.6	-----	11 Nov
Horned Puffin (<u>Fratercula corniculata</u>)	11	25.0	2	3.1	11 Nov-18 Dec	10 Nov-17 Nov
Tufted Puffin (<u>Lunda cirrhata</u>)	12	27.3	0	0	15 Nov-18 Dec	-----
PASSERIFORMES						
Black-billed Magpie (<u>Pica pica</u>)	0	0	1	1.6	-----	8 Nov
Common Raven (<u>Corvus corax</u>)	39	88.6	48	75.0	8 Nov-20 Dec	31 Oct-1 Jan
Dipper (<u>Cinclus mexicanus</u>)	1	2.3	0	0	16 Nov	-----
Gray-crowned Rosy Finch (<u>Leucosticte tephrocotis</u>)	38	86.4	58	90.6	8 Nov-18 Dec	1 Nov-30 Dec
Dark-eyed Junco (<u>Junco hyemalis</u>)	0	0	2	3.1	-----	2 Nov-1 Jan
Song Sparrow (<u>Zonotrichia melodia</u>)	26	59.1	16	25.0	11 Nov-20 Dec	4 Nov-23 Dec
Lapland Longspur (<u>Calcarius lapponicus</u>)	0	0	1	1.6	-----	20 Nov
Snow Bunting (<u>Plectrophenax nivalis</u>)	15	34.1	23	35.9	8 Nov-15 Dec	4 Nov-1 Jan
TOTAL OBSERVATION PERIOD	44		64		7 Nov-20 Dec	31 Oct-2 Jan