

The Beringian

The Commander Islands Reserve ornithological newsletter

№ 6
July
2019

SPRING TRANSIT



A flock of bar-tailed godwits on Bering Island

FEATHERY GUESTS ON THE COMMANDER ISLANDS

From April till June birds fly by the islands to their nesting grounds. Some use the archipelago as a stopover to have a rest and a meal; others prefer to stay here for a longer period of time.

The Commander Islands are situated away from the migration route, because the birds like to stay close to the coastline and not to fly above the sea. Therefore, on the coasts of Kamchatka, which is close, you can see tens of thousands of wild ducks and geese during the whole period of the transit.

There are tens of feathery guests, sometimes hundreds. Well, it means that they are even more interesting to watch, as you can find not numerous transit birds in valleys of local rivers and watch small flocks from sloping mounts.

Evgeny Mamaev

SEAGULLS

In late April the sky of the Commander Islands can be decorated by silhouettes of the East-Siberian seagull and their relative species — the glaucous gull.

The birds fly along Bering Island from their wintering grounds to the North.

It is interesting that the flocks can include just one species or several species at the same time. Usually the most numerous are East-Siberian seagulls, glaucous gulls are rarer.

One of the best birdwatching spots to see them is on the stairs to Nikolskaya Mount.

Here you may meet ornithologist Dmitry Pilipenko, who will never miss an opportunity to count the gulls flying by.



Dmitry Pilipenko

«IN SPRING SOMETIMES I GO TO THE MONITORING SPOT FOUR TIMES A DAY FOR 30-60 MINUTES TO COUNT SEAGULLS.

That is how I can estimate how many birds flew above the Commander Islands in a day. Transit is not necessarily a massive event. Sometimes, for example, due to weather, only several gulls

are seen. Other days, big groups of birds, with tens of individuals each, fly one by one. In such case you have to be really fast to count them all.»

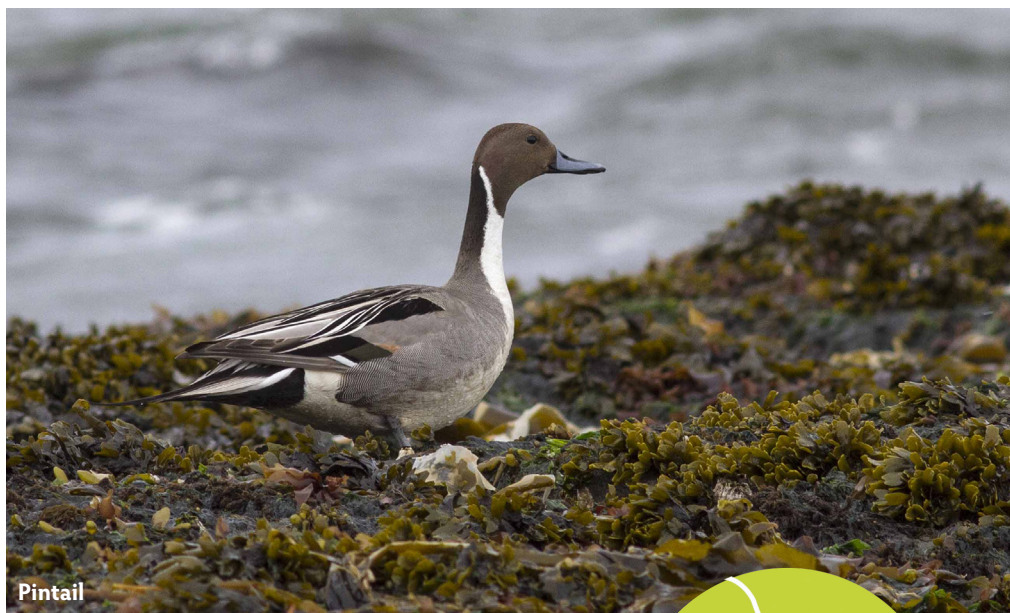
DUCKS

At the same time as seagulls, come pintails and widgeons.

Widgeons stay on the islands only in spring, but the period of stay for pintails is sometimes hard to determine.

The reason is that this species is registered on the islands throughout the year – during transit, wintering and nesting.

Ornithologists are to understand, if these birds are the same resident birds or they are a part of the southern population of the pintail.



Pintail

Dmitry Pilipenko

ADVICE

OTHER BIRDWATCHING SPOTS

Gavanskaya River valley has a comfortable system of creeks, tiny lakes and shallows for waders and ducks.

The birds like to come here for feeding. Their numbers may serve as valuable data for seasonal migration understanding.

Another advantageous watching spot is on Ladyginskoye and Shanginskoye lakes. It is not easy to get there during spring muddy season.

Nevertheless, to get to Gavanskaya River you will need only rain boots and a camera with long-focus lens.

WADERS



Black-tailed godwit

Waders appear on the Commander Islands in the beginning of May. This group is the most numerous among transient birds. Their species composition changes year after year.

Evgeny Mamaev

This time our guests were the black-tailed and bar-tailed godwits, red-necked stints, greenshanks, grey-tailed tattlers, turnstones and others.

To register the coming birds, the watch on Gavanskaya River may occur every day,

naturally, if the changeable weather of the archipelago is favorable. Changes are very fast: today you see only three dunlins and two days later there are 80 of them!

FACT

Cyclones influence routes of the migrating birds.

A slight wind is enough to dislocate their flyway.

In 2017 during a strong cyclone, tens of eye-browed thrushes were blown to the Commander Islands, though usually we see only several individuals.

SPARROWS

On the Commander Islands Passeriformes birds are usually registered as individual birds.

It is a big luck to meet a flock of these birds here. This year, during the fly by, we have registered only several thrushes and swallows.

Swallows are not typical guests of the islands. This time they stayed here for a longer period than previous years. For some time we had a hope that these bright symbols of a country life will build nests under the roofs of local houses, but unfortunately, swallows have not been seen any more.

If you have seen a swallow, please, contact the nature reserve to tell about it.

SWANS & GEESE

The whooping swan and bean goose usually come every year on the way from their wintering grounds. You can see them in early spring.

Their relative species is the white-fronted goose. This bird is seen on the Commander Islands during its spring fly by in late April – beginning of May. Sometimes individual birds stay here for longer. For example, the young geese on the photo stayed in Gavanskaya River valley on Bering Island until early June.



White-fronted geese

Dmitry Pilipenko

BIRDLING OUT OF NEST: WHAT TO DO?



Seagull nestling in Nikolskoye Village

Dmitry Strakhov

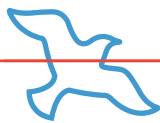
In summer baby glaucous-winged gulls hatch, while their parents protect the nests, situated on the rooftops and canopies of Nikolskoye buildings.

Sometimes the hatchlings fell out of their nests and it may seem that their parents have lost them. In fact, they did not.

Watchful parents are always near the hatchling, even if it is out of the nest. They will show their presence if somebody approaches the baby too close, as they can attack a passer-by by pecking his or her head.

The parents will continue to care for the baby until it takes its first flight. The best thing you can do is to let the nature do its work, as it knows the best solution.

GLOBAL NEWS



GETBOL TIDAL FLATS IN SOUTH KOREA NOMINATED UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

2150 species of flora and fauna live in the diverse ecosystem on the south-western coast of Yellow Sea.

This territory is a temporary home for transient birds, which fly from Australia and New Zealand through Russia and Alaska, wrote The East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership on their web-site.

This high status will help attract attention to protection of 22 endangered species, registered on the tidal flats.

Protection of this valuable stopover will also help those transient birds, who fly by the Commander Islands.

BYCATCH ENDANGERS SEABIRDS

Hundreds of seabirds die trapped in fishing gear every year.

One third of the species in this group are on the brink of extinction. One half has decreasing population. Bycatch is one of the main reasons of this dangerous trend, wrote BirdLife International.

There are several ways to save lives of the birds. One of them is to fish at night.

In this case albatrosses and storm petrels, who like hunting during the day, will not be affected.

Another option is to attach bright straps to the fishing gear to scare the birds off.

Fishers may also attach some weighting to the line for it to drown the hook faster into the water, so that the birds cannot get it accidentally.

RESEARCH HISTORY



FACES of science

Ornithological research on the Commander Islands has long history full of discoveries.



The first to look into bird populations of the islands was Georg Steller as early as in 1741. According to ornithologist Pavel Tomkovich, in the 70s of the XXth century all birds of the islands were classified and thoroughly described.

The history of American ornithological research is covered in the works of the US zoologists Leonard Stejneger, German ornithologist Ernst Hartert, Russian researcher Yuri Artyukhin and many others. In the coming issues we will look into their work.

ISLAND BIRDWATCHER



FEATHERY GUEST OF THE COAST



Whimbrel

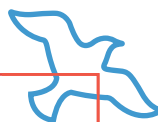
Vitaly Sirota

Whimbrels are one of the transient birds, which stays on the islands in spring to profit from local prolific food sources.

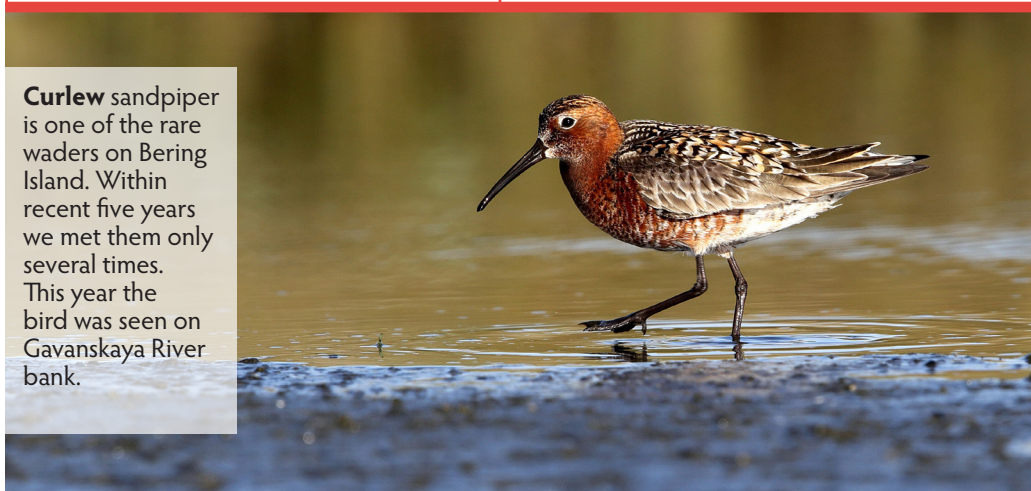
In autumn, on their way back, whimbrels like to stay in tundra, where they find ripe berries. For their love for cloudberry and other barriers the birds are called berry-waders.

In spring whimbrels can be found in Nikolsky Roadstead bay, as did our reader Vitaly Sirota.

RARE SPECIES



Curlew sandpiper is one of the rare waders on Bering Island. Within recent five years we met them only several times. This year the bird was seen on Gavanskaya River bank.



Evgeny Mamaev

IN THE FOLLOWING ISSUES

The next issue of the Beringian will cover summer season in lives of birds on the Commander Islands – the most bountiful time of the year, when new birds hatch and discover the world. We will also delve into autumn migration. The new issue will be available in Nikolskoye village shops, library, school and kindergarten.



Watch the birds with the Commander Islands Nature and Biosphere Reserve. Send us your photos of local birds and guesting species via pr@commanderislands.ru

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Publisher: FGBU the Commander Islands Nature and Biosphere Reserve
Bering Island, Nikolskoye Village, 50-let Oktyabrya street, 31
+7 (415) 472-22-27 / 100 copies.

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