



Rare Bird Sighting at Caines Head State Recreation Area



Luke DeCicco, the lucky birder who spotted and managed to photograph a Willow Flycatcher in Caines Head State Recreation Area.
Photo courtesy of Carol Griswold



The rare Willow Flycatcher spotted near the Callisto Canyon Public-Use Cabin in Caines Head State Recreation Area, near Seward.
Photo courtesy of Luke DeCicco

The adventure started on Sunday for birder Luke DeCicco of Anchorage who was hiking back from a nice weekend at Callisto Canyon Public-Use Cabin in Caines Head State Recreation Area, south of Seward.

Close to the cabin, he spotted a flycatcher actively hawking insects from various perches and got excellent looks at the cooperative bird. Luke identified it as a WILLOW FLYCATCHER, a rare bird listed as “casual” with less than a dozen verified sightings in Alaska. Much to his dismay, he did not have a camera to document the sighting.

Undeterred, Luke drove back to Anchorage, and accompanied by his camera and Scott Schuette, returned to Seward on Monday morning. The public-use cabin is only accessible by water or by an intertidal trail. Once they arrived in Seward, they had to wait for the 12.7-foot high tide to recede and uncover the beach trail.

As the tide began to ebb, Luke and Scott headed for the trailhead at Lowell Point and hiked the 2.1 miles from Lowell Point to the south end of Tonsina Point. By 3 p.m., the tide had receded just enough for them to start hiking along the trail on the slippery beach rocks.

Meanwhile, friends of Seward Area Citizen Advisory Board member Carol Griswold gave her a boat ride to Callisto Canyon. She was dropped off at 3:40 p.m. and started looking for the flycatcher. After about 20 minutes without spotting a single bird, she called Luke. He and Scott were almost there!

Soon, Scott was scouting the stream, while Luke searched

the leafless thickets of salmonberries and elderberries near the beach. After maybe 15 to 20 minutes, Luke spotted the Willow Flycatcher. It flew up a short distance to grab a flying insect, and went immediately back into the brush. He miraculously managed to get some decent photos in the dim light and through obscuring branches.

Scott rushed over, but the bird was not to be found. The group waited, listening and watching as the daylight seeped away. Despite their best efforts, the bird eluded them.

When all hopes were dashed by the deepening dusk, they compiled a list of birds for the Callisto Canyon Cabin journal, which read:

Willow Flycatcher!, Harlequin Ducks, Surf Scoters, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Horned Grebes, Pelagic Cormorants, Bald Eagle, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Glauous-winged Gulls, Common Murres, Belted Kingfisher, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Ravens, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Pacific Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Song Sparrow, Pine Grosbeaks.

It was dark when they spotted the green and red running lights of Carol's friend's boat zooming around the point. The dead low tide of -1.5 feet made for a tricky landing and departure, but after some effort, they were afloat and heading back toward the lights of Seward, quite relieved not to have to hike back 4.6 miles in the dark.

It was quite an exciting day and a wonderful adventure for these birders!

Cleaning up the Site of Pop's Cabin in Wood-Tikchik State Park

Ranger Matt Wedeking traveled to Wood-Tikchik State Park this fall to learn more about park operations and facilities near Dillingham. Manual labor was also on the agenda and Matt assisted ranger Ali Eskelin with a large demolition project. Matt and Ali flew to the Nuyakuk Ranger Station on Nuyakuk Lake and worked for a week to tear down a neighboring dilapidated cabin built in the late 1970s. The A-frame cabin, affectionately known as Pop's cabin, was named for Washington Wilber, an old man who endured several winters alone in the uninsulated structure.

The site is most reasonably accessed by airplane and Pop was well known for greeting his fly-in guests by running to the lake shore with his arms outstretched exclaiming, "Isn't this AWESOME?!" He often referred to the location where the ranger station now stands as his church and would spend every Sunday morning at the site taking in the magnificent views. Pop's cabin was fixed up in the early 1990s, but subsequently bore the brunt of the fierce weather and heavy snow load that is common on Nuyakuk Lake, the largest lake in the park.



Washington Wilber, known to many as Pop, often referred to this location as his church; the Nuyakuk Ranger Station now sits amidst the views that Pop enjoyed every Sunday morning.



Matt Wedeking sneaks a sideways selfie while Ali fills up a sled with debris.



The remains of Pop's cabin



Ali Eskelin tackles the demolition and clean-up of Pop's cabin.

Matt and Ali didn't even need their hard hats for the demo because the cabin was already nearly collapsed when they arrived. The cabin was disassembled piece by piece and rubbish from almost four decades of use was removed from the site. Many spruce poles from the cabin were salvaged and will be used as firewood in the ranger station for years to come. The racket of tearing the cabin apart even enticed a bull moose to pay them a visit, grunting and raking its antlers on the brush nearby.

After many days of hard work and cooperative weather, the cabin site was restored to a near natural state and will no doubt be a field of fireweed next year thanks to Matt's seed scattering efforts. Cleanup tasks still remain, however, as much of the trash from the site is currently stored at the Nuyakuk Ranger Station. Transporting this trash to Aleknagik this winter will be no easy feat; it will entail a few snowmachine expeditions to the ranger station, a more-than-160-mile round trip. All in all, it was a worthy project and a job well done... well, almost done.

Volunteers Help Give Middle Fork Loop Trail a Facelift

Chugach State Park's RTP-Grant-funded trail crew, a Student Conservation Association's trail crew (privately funded by an Anchorage hillside resident) and a "volunteer day" organized by Alaska Trails all contributed to essential maintenance on the Middle Fork Loop Trail from August through the end of September. In September, the group of volunteers organized by Alaska Trails spent National Public Lands Day helping out with the work on this trail. An article was published in the October issue of Alaska Trails Newsletter about this volunteer work. The article, titled "Chugach Park Gets Trail Boost on National Public Lands Day," is featured below.

"Rain didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the 15 volunteers who showed up for a wet but fun time on several projects on the Middle Fork Trail in Chugach State Park. This was one of many trail events taking place around the state for National Public Lands Day, September 26."

"After a safety talk from Joe Hall of Chugach State Park (CSP) and some sustainable trail lessons from Blaine Smith, also with CSP, volunteers were put to work on three separate



The trail crew and volunteers from Alaska Trails work on a section of Middle Fork Loop Trail in August.



Volunteers lift and haul bridge timber on National Public Lands Day in Chugach State Park.

Photo courtesy of Steve Cleary, Alaska Trails Newsletter

projects. A bridge is being replaced, so several volunteers prepared the abutment and readied the ground for the bridge base. Large beams were ferried to the site by eight volunteers at a time, using log haulers and lots of people power. Volunteers also dismantled old and rotting boardwalk, readying it for removal by helicopter another day. The volunteers weighed board pieces to make sure the loads conformed to the allotted weight and then piled them accordingly.

"The final project saw volunteers helping re-route a section of the Middle Fork to a more sustainable area. Volunteers used shovels and pulaskis to remove turf and soil to begin the new portion of the trail.

"Thanks to CSP staff and all the volunteers who made this great work possible. Most of the volunteers came from the Adventure Meet-Up group and gave up their Saturday to help on trails."

The article went on to announce that Alaska Trails is starting an Adopt-A-Trail program and intend do more of these types of projects on a more regular basis. They asked that anyone wanting to get more involved contact them.



A helicopter (pictured at the Upper Huffman Trailhead) was used for logistical support for the trail work, bringing in new materials and removing old material.



Blaine talks to volunteers about sustainable trails as they work on Middle Fork Loop Trail on National Public Lands Day in Chugach State Park.

Design and Construction: 2015 Construction Season Update



Johnson Lake campsite

Johnson Lake State Recreation Area

The Johnson Lake project started with one contractor in 2013, was put on standby for a year with contract issues, and was completed in June. Engineering assistant Kirk Louthan and engineering assistant Loretta Nabong put a lot of effort into making sure the project was completed correctly. The main goal of this project was to establish campsites further back from the lake and allow the lakeshore to be utilized by all park users.

Izaak Walton

Construction at Izaak Walton in the Kenai River Special Management Area was completed in May. In cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Division of Sport Fish, a new boat ramp and boat loading platform were installed. Engineering assistant Rangell Soriano took the design all the way through construction and helped build this project, which was on time and under budget. Great job, Rangell!



Izaak Walton boat launch and loading platform



Knik River Rifle Range

Knik River Rifle Range

Engineering assistant Loretta Nabong has been busy working with the Division of Mining, Land and Water to complete the last phase in a multi-year project out at the end of Maud Road in Butte. The Knik River Rifle Range is a facility that was funded and is run by DMLW. There were many issues with trespass on adjacent private property and overall state land damage and misuse. This project was challenging because the Design and Construction team had never undertaken a project like this. In the end, everyone was pleased.

Kasilof River Boat Takeout

Luke Randall is working with Kenai Superintendent Jack Blackwell to begin development on the Kasilof River boat takeout on newly acquired state property. The first order of business is to get a cleanup contract in place to demo and haul out all existing infrastructure that is not designated to remain. It's anticipated that planning and design will be completed by spring of 2018 and construction will begin shortly thereafter.



Jack Blackwell stands in front of the Trujillo Cabin and Ed's Kasilof Seafood Building at the newly purchased property while taking a call during the design kick-off meeting.

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Hatcher Pass Road MP 18-20

Engineering assistant Loretta Nabong has also been busy working with engineering assistant Rangell Soriano and ACC Intern Scott Browning on road improvements to Hatcher Pass Road, MP 18-20. This work is in cooperation with Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Design and Construction completed the design and is administering the construction contract with DOT oversight. This project will improve drainage and the driving surface for two miles of road up to Summit Lake State Recreation Site. It will also provide better signage and reshape the parking at the facilities along the road. This project is scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2016.



Engineering assistant Rangell Soriano watches as Chief of Design and Construction Rys Miranda takes care of business with DOT staff.

South Denali Visitor Center Complex

Engineering assistant Kirk Louthan and ACC intern Drew Drake spent most of their summer at MP 134.5 of the Parks Highway, working on the South Denali Visitor Center Complex in Denali State Park, specifically, the walk-in campground. The new walk-in campground will have 10 campsites. Construction in South Denali has taken the entire 2015 season and will extend into 2016. Some of this work is in conjunction with the SDVCC ranger contact station that is being concurrently developed with ADOT&PF.

The ranger contact station was completed in mid-November and the local ranger is planning to move in any day. Development of the entire facility will continue this winter with the design of an interpretive center, a trail design, and paving design. Next summer will be a busy construction season with public-use cabins, trails, campsites, and the interpretive center all being constructed.



South Denali ranger contact station

Kayak Trip Introduces Students to Caines Head State Recreation Area

The UAA Beginning Sea Kayaking class completed yet another successful kayak trip to Caines Head State Recreation Area in mid-October. The trip is the culmination of weeks of preparation that included practicing kayaking techniques and the rescue roll in the pool.

The 12 students in this class and two instructors departed Anchorage on a Friday to kayak from Lowell Point State Recreation Site to North Beach at Caines Head SRA where they camped for two nights. On Saturday, they hiked to historic Fort McGilvray and then paddled to South Beach, also in Caines Head SRA. They kayaked back to Lowell Point SRS for the return trip to Anchorage on Sunday.

The UAA Health, Physical Education, and Recreation department has offered the class for over 15 years, and the instructor, T. J. Miller, has taught and guided the class for ten years. Caines Head SRA has always been the first choice for this class's field trip. Judging from the smiles on the students' faces, everyone enjoyed a phenomenal trip to this Seward area state park.



UAA sea kayaking class back from kayak trip to Caines Head State Recreation Area, Seward, Alaska.

Photo courtesy of Carol Griswold