



Above: Common eiders pictured off of Nome's West Beach during the Christmas Bird Count. Photo courtesy of Kate Persons, used with permission.

Dear Friend,

This month Catholics face a seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition as St. Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday fall on the same day. St. Valentine's Day is a day to celebrate love, romance, and indulgence, while Ash Wednesday is a day of penance, reflection, and spiritual renewal.

On a deeper level, though, these two days have more in common than we might think. Ultimately, both St. Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday underscore the importance of devotion, communication, and sacrifice, whether in our relationship with God or with our loved ones here on earth.

Fat Tuesday may be the day for Catholics to celebrate St. Valentine's Day this year, as Ash Wednesday remains a day of fasting and abstinence.

Thank you for your devotion and sacrifice to help KNOM continue serving Western Alaska. We are blessed every day by your kindness, generosity, and most importantly your friendship. If you have prayer intentions, or if you would simply like to say hello, we would love to hear from you.

Counting is for the Birds

On a chilly December day, Kate Persons, the volunteer coordinator for Nome's Christmas Bird Count and a retired Alaska Department of Fish and Game wildlife biologist, led a group of volunteers on a day of bird observation. The day held numerous surprises for the dedicated birdwatchers. Among the notable discoveries was a record-breaking number of common eiders, stealing the spotlight with an impressive count of 186 individuals. This sizable flock surpassed the ravens, which had previously held the title of the most abundant bird in the Nome count in past years. The diversity and abundance of bird species provided a thrilling and unexpected twist to the annual Christmas Bird Count in Nome.

The day prior to the count brought about a significant shift as a robust north wind cleared the shore ice, creating open waters that became a feast for sea birds, seals, and belugas indulging in the abundance of saffron cod. Kate Persons, the volunteer coordinator, expressed her excitement at discovering large flocks of distant common eiders off West Beach.

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Observers diligently combed the landscape, searching along the road system both by vehicles and on foot. Additionally, skiers, walkers, and even a musher with a dog team ventured away from the roads. The collective efforts resulted in a tally of nine different species on the count day, with a remarkable total of 439 individual birds recorded. The day's observations provided a rich and diverse snapshot of Nome's avian population.

Most of the expected species were found this year with the exception of black-capped chickadees that usually spill over from the spruce forests into shrub habitats in winter. This winter they have been notably absent.

Nome's first Christmas Bird Count was in 1975. For decades, relatively few hardy and predictable species that regularly winter in tundra and taiga regions of the far north were found: willow and rock ptarmigan, gyrfalcons, ravens, American dippers, snow and McKay's buntings, sometimes snowy owls, northern shrikes, black-capped chickadees, downy woodpeckers and redpolls. Occasionally seabirds were seen, but only when observers ventured out to leads in the sea ice.

The presence of open water along the coast in mid-December has become increasingly common since 2015, almost reaching the point of being the norm. This recent development allowed observers in Nome to witness seabirds during mid-December, a phenomenon not regularly observed in previous years. These bird species typically winter along the ice edge in the Bering Sea, making their presence in the region during winter not uncommon.

The Christmas Bird Count, which originated 124 years ago, has evolved into the world's longest-running and largest-scale wildlife census.

Observers in Nome actively contribute to this nationwide volunteer effort, participating in the census of birds across the United States and Canada. The data collected from such efforts provide valuable insights into the patterns and dynamics of bird populations, contributing to a broader understanding of avian ecology.



Top: Volunteers deliver fresh baked cookies during the annual Christmas Bird Count. Photo courtesy of Jim Dory, used with permission.

Middle: A long tailed duck swims through the slushy water. Photo courtesy of Kate Persons, used with permission.

Bottom: Kate Persons uses a spotting scope. Photo courtesy of Kate Persons, used with permission.

No Roads Lead to Nome

The recent mishap on an Alaska Airlines flight and the subsequent grounding of aircraft brought national attention to the aviation industry. Fortunately, Alaska Airlines was able to handle the situation without reducing service to rural Alaska.

Like most Alaskan communities, Nome is not connected to the road system, so food, fuel, and other supplies can only arrive by sea or air. Furthermore, sea is not an option when Nome's port freezes over in winter.

Two scheduled Alaska Airlines flights fly between Anchorage and Nome daily. Nomeites commonly take the 1.5 to 2-hour flight to Anchorage for purposes like shopping or medical procedures unavailable at Nome's hospital. Planes arrive in Nome laden with groceries, mail, and Amazon packages, as well as passengers. Small air taxi services such as Bering Air operate small bush planes connecting Nome with smaller communities throughout the region.

If the accident in January had happened in rural Alaska, it would have severed the slender logistical thread that supports the region.

To keep listeners apprised of events like flight delays due to weather (a common occurrence in Western Alaska), KNOM announces Alaska Airlines flight status updates several times each day.



Above: Alaska Airlines parked at the Nome airport to pick up passengers. Photo courtesy of Ava White, used with permission.

Sharing the Word in Western Alaska

Mark 9:2-10

The Gospel of Mark was written to share with others the experience of Jesus by the first followers. The first verse of the Gospel says, "This is the good news about Jesus Christ, Son of God. Near the end of the Gospel, the soldier says, "Surely this was the Son of God."

At times, we are told who Jesus is by the voice of God. This happens at the Baptism of Jesus. Mark's Gospel says, as soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and a spirit coming down on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you."

In today's Gospel, Mark describes the second time the voice of God speaks. Jesus brought his close followers to the mountain to experience something that would help them to accept fully who he was and what he had to do, including his final suffering and death. In the presence of Moses and Elijah, the two great religious leaders of his ancestors, Jesus shows his disciples who he really is, and once again the voice of God speaks: "This is my own dear Son. Listen to him."

In our lives, what will most help us to trust in Jesus, to be strengthened and guided by Jesus, to share Jesus' love and care with others?

And how will you share the Word this week?

— Patrick Tam, Second Sunday of Lent, Feb 25, 2024

Trapper Hats for Troopers

With the Alaska Department of Public Safety searching for a new supply of fur trapper hats for State Troopers, many Troopers are turning to their local communities for help. The Department has allowed Troopers to have their hats custom-made, as long as they meet certain requirements.

Many State Troopers prefer the custom-made option, because a perfect, tight fit is crucial for protection against the harsh Alaskan elements. According to retired Trooper Earl Samuelson, even the tiniest gap can allow cold air in and cause frostbite. During his career, Samuelson, himself Yup'ik, had most of his fur hats made by family.

Furthermore, many Troopers prefer custom-made hats because they value connection with their communities. Last spring, Denakkanaga, a Native organization in Fairbanks, held an event called Caps for Cops, where police officers could make their own fur hats with Native elders coaching them. Several officers brought their children to meet the elders, and by the end of the project even called the elders "Grandma."

Fairbanks Police Officer Clint Brubeck worked with Marie Yaska, an elder in her 80s originally from the interior Athabascan community of Huslia. She nicknamed him "Broken Needles" in her language because he broke two of her sewing machine needles. Brubeck admits his workmanship is far from perfect, but he says every time he puts on his beaver hat he thinks of the stories she shared with him.

For the terminally ill - We pray that those with a terminal illness, and their families, receive the necessary physical and spiritual care and accompaniment.

Pope Francis' prayer intention for February 2024



Top: Alaska State Troopers from Fairbanks visit Allakaket, a community on the Koyukuk River in Interior Alaska.

Middle: Denakkanaga Elders and Fairbanks police officers celebrate end of the "Caps for Cops" project.

Bottom: Elder Marie Yaska working with Fairbanks Police Officer Clint Brubeck in Denakkanaga's Caps for Cops program. Photos courtesy of KNBA, used with permission.

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